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**A KISS IN THE DARK.**

The first error was a distinctly human one, feminine, particularly—that of not being satisfied with a good thing and letting well enough alone, "well enough" being in this case a first lieutenant of more than ordinary attractions. There are very few women who are satisfied when only one man is the captive of their charms; they prefer a dozen aspirants to one, even if they are themselves enamored of the one. The name of the gallant soldier whose good fortune it was to have obtained for his promised own the winsome daughter of Captain Foster, was Appleton, his fortune was his own good name, and his pay of \$125 a month; his character the full ideal of an officer and a gentleman; as for his appearance, it was all that even Miss Foster, who might have had the pick of seven or eight others, could desire. The only excuse to be found for the first error is that Miss Foster was very young, rather spoiled, and not in the habit of being denied anything upon which she set her rather uncertain little heart. Therefore, when a very stubborn second lieutenant by the name of Saxe let her distinctly see that he was not to be captivated by charms that had allured every one else, she determined that his pride should be humbled in the dust, even in the alkali dust of the plains. This was the said first error. What she should have done, as seen in the light of future events, was to have been happy in the complete possession of such a man as Appleton, and have let all others drift with their own particular current of life. But then—she was just 18, and the regiment had made much of her.

The second error was unconscious. The commanding officer committed it when he sent Appleton off on a month's special duty, and thereby left Kitty, like a kite without a string, very likely to spring out of its proper course and land on some unexpected obstruction. Kitty cried a little and was dreadfully sorry when Appleton left. She watched the ambulance with tearful eyes until it was almost out of sight, but as soon as it began to grow smaller, she turned about, as it would be had luck to look until the last. Her eyes were very dewy and were exactly the kind that look well in that state. When she wheeled around she came almost face to face with Saxe, and only raised her lashes long enough to give him a glance of such delightfully bewitching sorrow that any other man would have tried to console her then and there, and ran as fast as she could into the house. Saxe went on his way with a new admiration for Kitty, whom he had always considered a very heartless child. He was glad to see that she was capable of loving someone to the extent of crying over his departure. He did not wish he were the lucky man, however; that stage was yet to come.

The third error was very serious, and it was the usually unerring Saxe who committed it. He deluded himself with the fallacy that fire will not burn if you put on the asbestos gloves of indifference when you handle it. He felt sorry for poor bereaved little Kitty, and conceived it to be his duty to go over and console her. If it had been a disagreeable duty he would not have shunned it, but it was not a disagreeable duty. In the moonlight before a tattoo, he went to sympathize with Miss Foster. That was the error. When he left he was glad that he had listened to the promptings of conscience—it had seemed to do the girl so much good. She was really a far more earnest and womanly little person than he had supposed; not as shallow as one would imagine. She was bearing up against her troubles bravely, and he admired her for it. After he had left, Kitty went up to her room and sat in her window, looking out upon the parade ground, and smiled and counted one point, very much as if she had been playing whist. She did not forget Appleton; she cried again when she went to bed, and took his picture to put under her pillow and lay awake for half an hour thinking about him, but when she dropped off to sleep it was with a distinct unconsciousness of triumph instead of loss. She went at her part in perfect cold blood and played it well. Seeing that Saxe was greatly impressed by the constancy and affection, she determined to act that role for a time at least. Her natural paleness was increased the next morning by a black frock, usually despised for its simplicity, and which made her blonde hair, drawn back in loose coils, full of a golden light. She looked at herself and was pleased. Several of her hopeless ad-

mirers came to her porch during guard-mounting with the hope that they might see her, but she kept within doors until her watchful eyes descried the approaching form of Lieut. Saxe. With a weary and listless air she went out on the porch and sat on the steps with her chin in her hand and a pensive look that was not unbecoming. The bait caught the fish. Saxe had not come past with the intention of being again a consoler of distressed beauty, but—well, he stepped, just for a moment, and spent the morning with Kitty in sweet and low converse. She grew a little more cheerful at about the third hour, but not to an unseemly degree. Of course she had not the bad taste to mourn the loss of one man to the very face of another; it was only in her manner that her sorrows were observable. She spoke of books, and chapel, and sewing, was very domestic in a mild way, and never became so interested in her game as to forget her lines. It was a master stroke for her to decline Saxe's invitation to go to the hop with him that night, and she realized. At 12 o'clock it she excused herself to write a letter to catch the afternoon stage, and the man went away with the firm conviction that there was at least one faithful woman. He thought Appleton a lucky dog, but went no further.

As for Kitty's letter, it was quite a model of frankness so far as the telling of facts was concerned. A woman can write a letter or tell a story, all the truth in which no fact or phrase may be omitted, but with the position of a word, or the changing of a punctuation mark, or even with telling the whole thing too openly, she can convey an impression very different from the real matter; nor does this count as dishonesty, either. Kitty was not given to analyzing her sentiment aloud, she considered it destructive of the feminine charm of inconsequence. Nothing had happened that Appleton was not made acquainted with, and yet he was entirely ignorant of all he should have known. Saxe persisted in his error, making it many fold, and in time Miss Foster came to the conclusion that the mantle of fortune was threadbare and would soon become transparent, so she threw it away altogether. Saxe asked her to go to the next fortnightly hop, but she told him, with only a due amount of regret in her tones, that he had been forestalled. It could not possibly have been jealousy which made Saxe gloomy for the rest of the day, but Kitty was pleased to put that construction upon it, and chuckled.

One day she told him that he was very like Appleton in appearance. "Do you know if it were a dark night I couldn't tell you apart," she said, and Saxe was undecided whether to be charmed with the comparison or otherwise.

But he seemed to go just so far and no further. Kitty could not understand this and was restive. She began to fear it was becoming a sort of platonic friendship, and that was a thing she scorned, being convinced that only strong-minded and unattractive women could indulge in them. As the time of Appleton's return drew near, she strained every nerve—without apparent anxiety, however—to make Saxe commit himself. He would not, and she marvelled. It was quite beyond her conception of human motives that one man should be so loyal to another as to hesitate to make love to a friend's promised wife. She feared that she was losing his allegiance and in her fear took several false steps. In fact, she began making love to Saxe when Saxe would not make love to her. Under ordinary circumstances he would have drawn off at this, but he was past seeing any fault in the girl whom he had censured so severely once. It was quite too soon for Kitty that Appleton came back, but she did not let him guess this from her manner.

"Aren't you in love, Kitty?" he asked. He had never called her by that name before.

Another uncertain "Yes."

"Besides I can't see that you are under any restraint."

"You don't know."

"It seems to me that Appleton gives you a great deal of freedom."

"Oh, he tells me I may do as I like; he means to be generous, but—I don't know. Now, for instance, I told him I wanted to walk back from the hop with you. You hadn't asked me, but I meant to ask you. He looked hurt, and said something about his having just come home. He gave me permission, however, of course."

"Then may I take you back?" Saxe was beside himself.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"I fancy I understand; you don't want to hurt him."

"Yes."

"But if he didn't know?"

"How could it be helped?"

"I'm officer of the day to-night." Then he stopped himself.

"Well?"

"That's all."

"What had that to do with the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Yes it had," and Kitty raised her dark-blue eyes to his with more in their passionate look than a hundred words could have said.

Saxe forgot his determination and plunged on. "May I meet you at 1 o'clock, then, after I've visited the guard?" Kitty nodded and hung her head. "But

this is not fair to Appleton. If we are to do this you must end everything with him and marry me. Will you?" A long pause; Kitty seemed to be thinking.

The waltz was nearly ended; yes, the last notes were wailing now—if she could put off the answer for a moment! "Will you?" insisted Saxe. Another pause. Appleton was making his way toward them; he did not like the looks of things. "Kitty, will you?" repeated Saxe.

"I must think," she answered. "I'll tell you at 1 o'clock." The smile she gave him as she muttered this below her breath was assurance enough. Both were victoriously happy. Kitty told Appleton that she feared Saxe was badly in love with her, and chatted on so happily that he regained his wavering faith.

Kitty went home and waited until 1 o'clock. She planned her revenge with delight. Saxe should be thrown over so calmly that his stiff pride would never recover. He could not resent it; it was he who had been treacherous, not she. At 1 o'clock she threw a shawl over her light gown and crept downstairs. She was a little inclined to turn back. Things were assuming a serious aspect. If she should be caught it would be bad. Outside she waited in the corner of the house and heard approaching footsteps and the clanking of the saber of the officer of the day. His figure loomed up out of the darkness quite close to her; he hesitated and looked up at her window; then, as his glance fell, he seemed to see the muffled figure in the corner. He stole toward it. "Harry," she whispered.

A pause. "Yes," was answered, also in a whisper. He came to her and took her in his arms without a word. He was too uncertain to speak.

Kitty whispered again. "I thought you mightn't come after all."

"But I did."

"Yes," Kitty, with her head resting on his shoulder, waited for him to ask for his answer, but he said nothing. This was awkward. Saxe could not begin herself. You look enough like Fred in the dark to be his brother."

"Yes?"

"If your voice were not so unlike his, I should say it was he."

"Really?"

"Good gracious! Can't you say anything except in monosyllables?"

"What is there to say?"

"You might kiss me at least, I think."

"Shall I?"

"Shall you? What a question," and she turned her face to him.

"And now I must go, Kitty, dear. Oh, Kitty, Kitty," he whispered, huskily.

She drew back. "What is the matter?"

But he was walking away. "Don't you want your answer?" she ran after him, saying.

"Not now. Not to-night."

She turned and crept into the house. Then she knew what she had done. Chilled by the night air and trembling with fright she stood in the middle of the floor and looked straight ahead, seeing all her mistake and the shamefulness of it as she had not before. To accomplish a revenge she had come to this; she had thrown herself into a man's arms almost unasked. And the man had acted curiously. Small wonder. She sank upon the floor and sat for hours with her head hanging down. Then she undressed and went to bed, but lay awake until morning. She thought of Appleton now, and how she had betrayed him, and she loved him more than she had before. It was a hard struggle between shame and inborn frankness, but she determined at last to tell him the truth in the morning and let him do as he liked; throw her over, if he wished; but then he would not; she was sure of that. Only her old role of dispenser of favors and privileges would be ended; it would be he who would play the magnanimous henceforth.

If only she could have back the crimson rose she had pinned on Saxe's coat. If he were to wear it the next day, Appleton would recognize it as one of the bunch he had given her and remember that he had told her that red roses meant love. She worried and marvelled that she would have rushed headlong into such disgrace. She was one of those women whose tears come easily, but she had been too frightened and ashamed to cry; at last, at reveille, she sobbed away her griefs and slept.

After guard mounting she went into the garden with a scarlet face. She saw Appleton coming up the walk, and paled with fear at what she had to tell him. She dropped her eyes and fingered a flower nervously until he stood beside her. "Oh good morning, Fred," she said cheerily.

"Good morning, Kitty."

A silence; Kitty bit her lip and pulled at the flower. "Well, why don't you say something?" she inquired petulantly.

"I've nothing to say."

She glanced up and saw a red rose pinned to his coat—a crushed and wilted red rose. She caught hold of his arm and steady herself. He let her hand lie on his sleeve.

"I only came to ask you if you had any message for Saxe. He fell into a post hole that was in the wrong place just as he was starting to visit the guard. The fall broke his leg, and I took his sword to make his rounds for him. He seemed worried about something as I left; but I didn't understand at the time. I do now. So do you, I fancy. Shall I give him the rose that was meant for him, or do you

(Continued on Page 5.)



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