

CHAPTER 8

A GAY CALL

I tell you what Ethel said Bernard Clark about a week later we might go and pay a call on my pal the Earl of Clincham.

Oh do lets cried Ethel who was game for any new adventure I would dearly love to meet his lordship.

Bernard gave a frown of jellousy at her rrather mere words.

Well dress in your best he muttered.

Ethel skipped into her bedroom and arrayd herself in a grass green muslin of decent cut a lace scarf long faun colored kid gloves and a muslin hat to correspond. She carried a parasole in one hand also a green silk bag containing a few stray hair pins a clean handkerchief five shillings and a pot of ruge in case. She looked a dainty vishen with her fair hair waving in the breeze and Bernard bit his lips rrather hard for he could hardly contain himself and felt he must marry Ethel soon. He looked a handsome sight himself in some exquisite white trousers with a silk shirt and a pale blue blazer belt and cap. He wore this in honour of the earl who had been to Cambridge in his youth and so had Bernard Clark.

At last they found themselves in the entrance hall of the Crystale palace and speedily made their way to the private compartments. Edward Procurio was walking up and down the passage looking dark and mysterious as usual.

Is His Lordship at home cried Bernard Clark cheerily.

Which one asked Procurio many lords live here he said scornfully.

Well I mean the Earl of Clincham said Bernard.

Oh yes he is in responded Procurio and to the best of my belief giving a party.

Indeed ejaculated Bernard we have come in the nick of time Ethel he added. Yes said Ethel in an excited tone.

Then they pealed on the bell and the door flew open. Sounds of laughter and comic songs issued from the abode and in a second they were in the crowded drawing room. It was packed with all the Elite and a stout duchess with a good natured face was singing a lively song and causing much merriment. The earl strode forward at sight of two new comers. Hullo Bernard old boy he cried this is a pleasure and who have you got with you he added glancing at Ethel.

Oh this is Miss Monticue said Bernard shall I introduce you----

If you will be so good said the Earl in an affable tone and Bernard hastily performed the rite. Ethel began a bright conversation while Bernard strode off to see if he could find any friends amid the throng.

What pleasant compartments you have cried Ethel in rather a society tone.

Fairly so so responded the Earl do you live in London he added in a loud tone as someone was playing a very difficult piece on the piano.

Well no I don't said Ethel my home is really in Northumberland but I am at present stopping with Mr Clark at the Gaiety Hotel she continued in a somewhat showing off tone.

Oh I see said the Earl well shall I introduce you to a few of my friends.

Of please do said Ethel with a dainty blow at her nose.

The Earl disappeared into the maddening crowd and presently came back with a middle aged gentleman. This is Lord Hyssops he said my friend Miss Monticue he added genially.

Ethel turned a dull yellow. Lord Hyssops she said in a faint voice why it is Mr Salteena I know him well.

Hush cried the Earl it is a title bestowd recently by my friend the Prince ofWales.

Yes indeed murmured Mr Salteena deeply flabbergasted by the ready wit of the earl.

Oh indeed said Ethel in a peevish tone well how do you come to be here.

I am stopping with his Lordship said Mr Salteena and have a set of compartments in the basement so there.

I dont care said huffy Ethel I am in handsome rooms at the Gaierty.

Nothing could be nicer I am sure struck in the earl what do you say Hyssops eh.

Doubtless it is charming said Mr Salteena who was wanting peace tell me Ethel how did you leave Bernard.

I have not left him said Ethel in an annoying voice I am stopping with him at the gaierty and we have been to lots of theaters and dances.

Well I am glad you are enjoying yourself said Mr Salteena kindly you had been looking pale of late.

No wonder in your stuffy domain cried Ethel well have you got any more friends she added turning to the earl.

Well I will see said the obliging earl and he once more disappeared.

I dont know why you should turn against me Ethel said Mr Salteena in a low tone.

Ethel patted her hair and looked very sneery. Well I call it very mystearious you going off and getting a title said Ethel and I think our friendship had better stop as no doubt you will soon be marrying a duchess or something.

Not at all said Mr Salteena you must know Ethel he said blushing a deep red I always wished to marry you some fine day.

This is news to me cried Ethel still peevish.

But not to me murmured Mr Salteena and his voice trembled in his chest. I may add that I have always loved you and now I seem to do so madly he added passionately.

But I dont love you responded Ethel.

But if you married me you might get to said Mr Salteena.

I think not replied Ethel and all the same it is very kind of you to ask me and she smiled more nicely at him.

This is agony cried Mr Salteena clutching hold of a table my life will be sour grapes and ashes without you.

Be a man said Ethel in a gentle whisper and I shall always think of you in a warm manner.

Well half a loaf is better than no bread responded Mr Salteena in a gloomy voice and just then the earl reappeared with a very brisk lady in a tight silk dress whose name was called Lady Gay Finchling and her husband was a General but had been dead a few years. So this is Miss Monticue she began in a rather high voice. Oh yes said Ethel and Mr Salteena wiped the foaming dew from his forehead. Little did Lady Gay Finchling guess she had just disturbed a proposal of marriage.

The Earl chimed into the conversation now and again and Lady Gay Finchling told several rather witty stories to enliven the party.

Then Bernard Clark came up and said they had better be going.

Well goodbye Clincham he said I must say I have enjoyed this party most rechauffie I call it dont you Ethel.

Most cried Ethel I suppose you often come she added in a tone of envy to Lady Gay Finchling.

Pretty often said Lady G. F. well goodbye as I see you are in a hurry to be off and she dashed off towards the refreshment place.

Goodbye Ethel said poor Mr Salteena in a spasam and he seized hold of her hand you will one day rue your wicked words farewell he repeated emphatically.

Oh well goodbye said Ethel in a vage tone and then turning to the earl she said I have enjoyed myself very much thankyou.

Please dont mention it cried the earl well goodbye Bernard he added I shall look you up some day at your hotel.

Yes do muttered Bernard always welcome Clincham old boy he added placing his blue crickit cap on his head and so saying he and Ethel left the gay scene and once more oozed fourth into the streets of London.

CHAPTER 9

A PROPOSAL