*Amy’s Flirtation*

“Oh, *such* a lovely face!” sighed Miss Amelia Hartwell. “Such eyes—such a moustache—I really couldn’t help it, Kitty. Oh, I really could not.”

“Yes, Amy; but suppose Miss Hess should find it out?” said Kitty.

“Well, what could she do about it?” said Amy. “Tell ma and get me scolded, and lose her situation. I should tell her about the other governess, and I *think* she’d keep quiet. A girl can’t live without any romance in her life.”

“Only nobody introduced you to each other,” said Kitty, “and my ma says that you can’t tell what anyone is, if you haven’t a proper introduction.”

“Yes, and then they introduce you to some stiff old creature, and he pays you a little attention, and you marry. Kitty, I mean to have my fun out. You can tell, if you please, but—”

“Oh, Amy,” cried Kitty, “I’m no tell-tale. It’s only for your good.”

Kitty and Amelia were cousins. Kitty fifteen, Amelia seventeen.

Amelia had not as good a disposition as Kitty, and her mother was a mere fashionable woman, who kept the girl as much in the background as possible lest she should make her seem old. So Amy, as she liked to be called, being really grown, and yet treated like a child at home, took her affairs into her own hands, flirted with all the college boys, wrote notes to them, waved her handkerchief from the upper windows, and behaved disgracefully, without anyone having an inkling of what was going on but serious little Kitty, who was too honorable to betray her cousin, and too young to know how terrible such conduct really was. Schoolboys and college students were bad enough, but now there had come upon the scene quite a new person, a young man of five and twenty, whom no one knew, but who, having managed to scrape acquaintance with Miss Amy, declared himself an English nobleman, and spoke of great estates, of which, in time, he would be master. Amy swallowed the whole story, and for weeks had taken long walks with him, had accepted a ring, which she dared not wear when at home, and considered herself engaged.

All was going on delightfully, in her opinion, and poor Miss Hess, the governess, was quite hoodwinked. Kitty, trembling little confidante as she was, was much interested in the affair, but felt herself guilty in keeping the story from her mother. But Amy had no such compunctions.

Now, a new scheme was on foot. The lover desired to pay Miss Amy an evening visit, and a time had been selected when mamma and papa were to attend a wedding, and Miss Hess away on a dutiful visit to her old German grandparents.

“You can call, but you can’t stay late, Theodore,” Amy had said. “That dragon of a governess will be home by half-past ten.”

And Theodore had protested that he would not stay late.

“I shall bring a friend,” he said, “and he can be company for your cousin, since you insist on having her with you. We’ll have a lovely evening.”

Then he sighed and looked “so lovely,” as Amy declared to Kitty, who, flattered by the idea of the friend who was to “be attentive” to herself, felt it time to preach the little sermon above recorded, but without effect. The visit was to be paid. Miss Amy was to receive her admirer. Kitty was with her. Miss Hess had temporarily departed. The carriage had borne mamma and papa to the scene of the wedding festivities. The servants were having a comfortable supper in the kitchen, and the door-bell rang softly.

“No matter—I’ll go, Bridget,” called Amy over the balustrades, to the waitress, who was delighted to run back to her supper and a few friends and cousins who had just dropped in; and the young lady of the house herself admitted her callers.

They entered rather cautiously, and with many glances up the stairs, which Amy attributed to fear of her cruel parents. The young nobleman was attired in the most fashionable style, and wore a large pin and many rings; but his friend was, it is to be confessed, rather shabby and not over clean.

“Miss Amy,” said Theodore, with an air, “this is my friend Adolphus. A fine fellow, but under a cloud just now. His grandfather, the earl, won’t pay his club debts. However, he’ll come round after a while. This is Miss Kitty, Dolph.”

“Dolph” made a bow, and backed against the wall.

“Come in,” said Amy. “Everyone is out. Oh! isn’t this lovely!”

“Heavenly!” said Theodore, looking at the bronze ornaments on the mantel and letting his gaze rove to smaller ornaments. “So you are all alone, eh? How delicious! I say, this is a fine place. Not so fine as we’re used to at home, but pretty good for America. Your father must be well off, Miss Amy?”

“Yes,” said Amy, “I believe he is.”

“Lots of silver, and all that?” said the nobleman. “You ought to see the place at—at the castle.”

“Yes,” said Amy. “The silver is all up stairs now, though. Ma locks it up when she goes out. There’s a great closet between the rooms above. She keeps her jewelry there. It is quite a nice place, for burglars wouldn’t be apt to find the door if they don’t know it. It slides in, you know. Pa says it is better than a safe.”

“Why, it must be,” said Theodore. “How ingenious! There, sit down, and let us chat; or suppose you play for us.”

“I’d rather talk,” said Amy, sentimentally.

Meanwhile, Kitty was growing very miserable. The person introduced as Adolphus was awkward, and said little. He was not handsome, like Theodore, and he smelt of tobacco and whiskey. His grandfather, the earl, must have been angry with him for some time, she thought. She began to wish that something would happen to break up the party—that they would at least go. Neither of them were gentlemen, she felt assured. They stared around them oddly. Theodore arose and dropped the silk curtains over the windows. The men exchanged glances. Could not Amy see that something was wrong?

At that moment Theodore pushed the door into the hall quite shut, and returned to Amy’s side. As he did so he put his hand into his pocket and took out a sponge.

“Curious, isn’t it?” he said. “I think a sponge is such a curious object. See the little cells.”

“I’ve got one too,” said Adolphus, huskily. “Have you ever seed such a big un?”

“It is large,” said Amy.

Kitty, who had been expecting some love-making, and was disappointed, only curled her lip; but the next moment both girls sat staring speechlessly at each other, each with a great sponge thrust into their mouths.

“Tie her to her chair, Dolph,” cried Theodore, rapidly binding Amy’s arms and ankles with a cord he took from his pocket. “Now, young ladies, you are not going to be hurt. We’ll just help ourselves to the pretty things of value that we can carry off easy, and get the silver out of the sliding closet above, and be off. Don’t try to scream—you can’t. And don’t kick—you’ll only hurt yourselves. Day-day.”

Away they went up the softly-carpeted staircase. Amy heard the sound of opening drawers and doors overhead. Kitty thought she even heard a clink of silver. But they could neither move nor cry out. In a few moments the two thieves accomplished their purpose, and descended the stairs again, each with a bundle on his back.

“Good-evening, young ladies,” said Theodore. “We’re sorry we must go, but *pa* might come home unexpectedly. By-bye.”

They were off. The door clanged shut. The servants at their little supper knew nothing, and the two girls both nearly suffocated. Their slender wrists, cut by the cords that bound them, remained fastened to their chairs.

Glad were they when the good-humored voice of Miss Hess was heard bidding someone goodnight on the doorstep, and when, bustling into the room, she up threw her hands with exclamations of horror, called for help, and as soon as possible dragged the sponges from their mouths, cut the cords that bound them, and asked for the terrible story, which, with many tears and sobs, Amy told truthfully.

There had been a heavy robbery—money, silver and jewelry were gone. Vainly papa strode the floor, scolding his “daughter,” and bewailing his “ducats.”

“I never thought English noblemen could do such things,” sighed Amy. “Nobody could think that, papa.”

“English noblemen!” laughed the detective, who had appeared upon the scene. “They were two English thieves, Miss; and this is their regular dodge—making love to the young ladies and getting let in. It has to be the servants in England, but American young ladies are such flirts, and so easily taken in. They’ve changed their plans.”

“I, at least, will not be easily taken in again, and I shall flirt no more,” said Amy.

She kept her word.  
  
  
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