

A Foolish Young Man;

Or, the Belle of the Season.

CHAPTER VII.

Stafford slept well, and was awake before Meason came to call him. It was a warm and lovely morning, and Stafford's first thoughts flew to a bath. He got into his flannels, and found his way to the lake, and as he expected, there was an elaborate and picturesque bathing-shed beside the Swiss-looking boat-house, in which were an electric launch and boats of all descriptions. There also was a boatman in attendance, with huge towels on his arm.

"Did you expect me?" asked Stafford, as the man touched his hat and opened the bathing-shed.

"Yes, sir; Sir Stephen sent down last night to say that you might come down."

Stafford nodded. His father forgot nothing! The boatman had a delightful swim. It reminded him of Geneva, for the lake this morning was almost as clear and as vivid in coloring; and that is saying a great deal. The boatman, who watched his young master admiringly—for Stafford was like a fish in the water—formed him that the launch would be ready in a moment's notice, or the sailing boat either, for the matter of that, if he should require them.

"I've another launch, a steamer, and larger than this, coming to-morrow; and Sir Stephen told me to get some Canadian canoes, in case you, or any of the company that's coming, should fancy them, sir."

As Stafford went up to the house in the exquisite "after-bath" frame of mind, he met his father. The expression of Sir Stephen's face, which a moment earlier, before he had turned the corner of the winding path, had been grave and keen, and somewhat hard, softened, and his eyes lit up with a smile which had no little of the boatman's admiration in it.

"Had a swim, my boy? Found everything right, I hope? I was just going down to see."

"Yes, everything," replied Stafford. "I can't think how you have managed to get it done in so short a time," he added, glancing round at the well-grown shrubs, the smooth paths and the plush-like lawns, which all looked as if they had been in cultivation for years. Sir Stephen shrugged his shoulders.

"It is all a question of money—and the right men," he said. "I always wonderment at the settled and established appearance of the grounds and buildings was increased by everything he saw.

"It is extraordinary!" he said. "The place looks as if it had been made and inhabited for years."

Sir Stephen smiled.

"Oh, I stipulated that there shouldn't be any newness—any 'smell of paint,' so to speak. Here are the stables; I had them put as far from the house as possible, and yet get-at-able. Most men like to stroll about them. I hope you'll like them. Mr. Pawson, the trainer, designed them."

Stafford nodded with warm approval. "They seem perfect," he said, as, after surveying the exterior, he entered and looked down the long reach of stalls and loose boxes, many of which were occupied, as he saw at a glance, by valuable animals. "They are a fine lot, sir," he said, gravely, as he went down the line. "A remarkably fine lot. I have never seen a better show. This fellow—why, isn't he Lord Winstay's bay, Adonis?"

"Yes," said Sir Stephen. "I thought you'd like him."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Stafford. "You don't mean that you have bought him for me, sir? I know that Winstay refused eight hundred guineas for him."

"I dare say," replied Sir Stephen. "Why shouldn't I buy him for you, my boy? There's another one in the box next to that one; a little stiffer. I'm told he's up to your weight and—"

Stafford went into the box and looked at the horse. It was a magnificent, light-weight hunter—the kind of horse that makes a riding-man's heart jump.

"I should say that there are not two better horses of their sort in the county," Stafford said, solemnly, and with a flush of his handsome face.

Sir Stephen's eyes gleamed.

"That's all right; they can't be too good, Stafford."

The head groom, Davis by name, stood with Pottinger and some underlings, at a little distance in attendance, and the men exchanged glances and nods.

"Have you seen these, Pottinger?" asked Stafford, turning to him, and speaking in the tone which servants love.

Pottinger touched his forehead.

"Yes, sir; they're first rate, and no mistake. I've just been telling Mr. Davis he's got a splendid lot, sir—splendid!"

"Not but what you own pair 'ud be hard to beat, sir," said Davis, respectfully. "There's a mare here, Sir Stephen, I should like to show Mr. Stafford."

The mare was taken out into the yard, and Stafford examined her and praised her with a judgment and enthusiasm which filled Davis's heart with pride.

"Your young gov'nor's the right sort, Pottinger," he remarked, as Stafford at last reluctantly tore himself away from the stables. "Give me a master as understands a horse and I don't mind working for him."

Pottinger nodded and turned the straw in his mouth.

"If you're alludin' to Mr. Stafford, then you'll enjoy your work, Mr. Davis; for you've got what you want. What my gov'nor don't know about a 'oss isn't worth knowin'."

"So I should say," assented Davis, emphatically. "I do hate to have a jugs about the place—Barker, is that a spot o' rust on that pillar-chain or is my eyesight deceiving me? No, my men, when Mr. Stafford walks round, I shall break my heart—and sack the man who's responsible for it. Pottinger, if you'd like that pair o' yours moved, if you think they ain't comfortable, you say so, and moved they shall be."

As Sir Stephen and Stafford strolled back to the house the former praised now and again to point out something he wished Stafford to see, always appealing for his approval.

"Everything is perfect, sir," Stafford said at last. "And, above all, the situation," he added as he looked at the magnificent view, the opal lake mirroring the distant mountains, flecked by the sunlight and the drifting clouds.

"Yes, I was fortunate in getting it," remarked Sir Stephen.

Instantly there flashed across Stafford's mind—and not for the first time that morning—the words Ida Heron had spoken respecting the way in which Sir Stephen had obtained the land. Looking straight before him, he asked:

"How did you get it, sir? I have heard that it was difficult to buy land here for building purposes."

"Yes, I fancy it is," replied Sir Stephen, quite easily. "Now you speak of it, I remember my agent said there was some hitch at first; but he must have got over it in some way or other. He bought it of a farmer." Stafford drew a breath of relief. "This is the Italian garden; the tennis and croquet lawns are below this terrace—there's not time to go down. But you haven't seen half of it yet. There's the breakfast-bell of it yet. I'm in a hurry to get to the office to-day. He laid his hand on Stafford's broad, straight shoulder.

"You have the knack of wearing your clothes as if they grew on you, Staf."

Stafford laughed.

"I ought to hand that compliment on to Meason, sir," he said; "he's the responsible person and deserves the credit, if there is any." He looked at his father's upright, well-dressed and graceful figure. "But he would hand it back to you, I think, sir." There was a pause, then Stafford asked: "Do you know any of your neighbors—any of the people round about?"

"No; I was never here until yesterday, excepting for an hour or two. But we shall know them, I suppose; they'll call in a little while, and we will ask them to dinner, and so on. There should be some nice people—Ah, Mr. Howard, we've stolen a march on you."

"I'm not surprised," said Howard, as he came up in his slow and languid way. "I am sorry to say that Stafford has an extremely bad habit of getting up at unreasonable hours. I wait until I am dragged out of bed by a fellow-creature or the pangs of hunger. Of course you have been having Stafford's early rising and an inordinate love of cold water—externally—at all seasons of the year—two of his ineradicable vices. Sir Stephen, I have done my best to cure them, but—alas!"

They went in to breakfast, which was served in a room with bay windows opening on to the terrace overlooking the lake. Exactly opposite Stafford's chair was the little opening on the other side from which he and the girl from Heron Hall had gazed at the villa. He looked at it and grew silent. A large dispatch-box stood beside Sir Stephen's plate. He did not open it, but sent it to his room, remarking:

"I never read my letters before breakfast. They spoil one's digestion. I'm afraid the mail's heavy this morning, judging by the weight of the box; so that I shall be busy. You two gentlemen will, I trust, amuse yourselves in your own way. Mr. Howard, the groom will await your orders."

"Thanks," said Howard; "but I propose to sit quite still on a chair which I have carried out on to the terrace. I have had enough of driving to last me for a week," and he shuddered.

"Howard's easily disposed of, sir," said Stafford, laughing. "Give him a hammock or an easy-chair in the shade, and he can always amuse himself by going to sleep."

"True; and if half the men I know spent their time in a similar fashion this would be a brighter and a better world. What you will do, my dear Stafford, I know by bitter experience. He will go and wade through river or ride at a breakneck pace down some of those hills. Stafford is never happy unless he is trying to lay up rheumatism for his old age, or endeavoring to break his limbs."

Sir Stephen looked across the table at the stalwart, graceful frame, but he said nothing; there was no need, for his eyes were eloquent of love and admiration. Stafford chucked into riding things soon after breakfast, went down to the stables and had Adonis saddled. "Davis superintended the operation and the stablemen edged round to watch. Davis expressed his approval as Stafford mounted and went off on Adonis, remarking as he started:

"Beautiful mouth, Davis!"

"Yes, Pottinger," said Davis, succinctly. "he's worthy of him. That's what I call hands' now. Dash my aunt if you'd find it easy to match the pair of 'em! There's a class about both that side my little place. Mr. Pottinger, we'll drink your gov'nor's health. I like his shape and I like his style; and I'm counted a bit of a judge. He's a gentleman, and a high-bred 'n' at that."

Stafford rode over the hill and along the road by the stream, and as he rode he looked round him eagerly and keenly. In fact, as if he were scouting. But that for which he was looking did not appear; his spirits fell—though the sun was still shining—and he sighed impatiently, and putting Adonis through the stream, cantered over the moor at the foot of the hills. Suddenly he heard the bark of a dog, and looking in the direction of the sound, he saw Ida Heron walking quickly round the hill, with Donald and Bess scampering in front of her. The gloom vanished from Stafford's face, and he checked Adonis into a walk. The dogs were the first to see him, and they tore towards him barking a welcome. Ida looked up—she had been walking with her eyes bent on the ground—the color rose to her face, and she stopped for an instant. Then she came on slowly, and by the time they had met there was no trace of the transitory blush.

Stafford raised his hat and dismounted.

"I begin to count myself a very lucky man, Miss Heron," he said.

"Why?" she asked, her grave eyes resting on him calmly.

"Because I have chanced to meet you again."

"It is not strange," she said. "I am nearly always out-of-doors. What a beautiful horse!"

"Isn't it!" he said, grateful for her praise. "It is a new one—a present from my father this morning."

"A very valuable present! It ought to be able to jump."

"It is. I put it at a bank just now, and it cleared it like a bird. I am very glad I have met you. I wanted to tell you something."

She raised her eyes from the horse and waited, with the quietude, the self-possession and dignity which seemed so strange in one so young, and which, by its strangeness, fascinated him.

"I spoke to my father about the land; he is innocent in the matter. It was bought through his agent, and my father knows nothing of anything—underhand. I can't tell you how glad I am that this is so. So glad that—I'll make a clean breast of it—I rode over this morning in the hope of meeting you and telling you."

She made a little gesture of acceptance of his statement.

"I am glad, too. Though it does not matter—"

"Ah, but it does!" he broke in. "I should have been wretched if you had been right, and my father had been

guilty of anything of the kind. But, as a matter of fact, he isn't capable of it—so you'd say if you knew him. Now, there's no reason why we shouldn't be friends, is there?" he added, with a suppressed eagerness.

"Oh, no," she responded. She glanced up at the sky. Unnoticed by him a cloud had drifted over the Landale Pike, as the range of high mountains is called. "It is going to rain, and heavily."

"And you have no umbrella, waterproof!" exclaimed Stafford.

She laughed with girlish amusement. "Umbrella? I don't think I have such a thing; and this cloth is nearly waterproof besides; I never notice the rain. Here it comes!"

It came with a vengeance; it was as if the heavens had opened and let down the bottom of a reservoir. Stafford mechanically took off his coat.

"Put this on," he said. That jacket is quite light; you'll get wet through. Her face crimsoned, and she laughed a little constrainedly.

"Please put your coat on!" she said, gravely and earnestly. "You will be wet through, and you are not used to it. There's a shed round the corner; ride there as quickly as you can."

Stafford stared at her, then burst into a laugh which echoed hers.

"And leave you here! Is it likely?"

"Well, let us both go," she said, as if amused by his obstinacy.

"Is it far?" he asked. "See if you can manage to balance on the saddle—I would run beside you. It's all very well to talk of not minding the rain, but this is a deluge."

She glanced at the horse.

"I couldn't get up—I could if he were barebacked, or if it were a lady's saddle, but it doesn't matter. Look, Donald and Bess are laughing at you for making a fuss about a shower."

"Will you try—let me help you?" he pleaded. "I could lift you quite easily."

"Oh, forgive me, but I'm not used to standing by and seeing a girl get soaked."

"You are walking—not standing," she reminded him, smilingly.

Perhaps her smile gave him courage; he just took her below the shoulders and lifted her on to the saddle, saying as he did so, and in a matter-of-fact voice as he could:

"You just put your hand on my shoulder, you'll find that you can ride quite safely—though I expect you could do it without that—I've seen you ride, you know."

He kept his eyes from her, so that he did not see the hot blush which mantled in the clear ivory of her face, or the sudden tightening of the lips, as if she were struggling against some feeling, and fighting for her usual self-possession. She succeeded in a moment or two, and when he looked up the blush had gone and something like a sweet girlish confusion in her grey eyes.

"This is absurd!" she said. "It is to be hoped Jason or none of the men will see me; they would think I had gone mad; and I should never hear the last of it. The shed is just across the road. Please keep a tight hold of my shoulder; I should never forgive myself if you slipped."

"I am not in the least likely to slip," she said.

Then suddenly, just as they were on the edge of the road, she uttered an exclamation of surprise rather than embarrassment, for a carriage and pair came round the corner and almost upon them.

Stafford stopped Adonis to let the carriage pass, but the coachman pulled up in response to a signal from someone inside and a man thrust his head out of the window and regarded them at first with surprise and then with keen scrutiny.

He was an elderly man, with a face which would have been coarse but for its expression of acuteness, and a certain strength which revealed itself in the heavy features.

"Can you tell me the way to Sir Stephen Orme's place?" he asked in a rough, harsh voice.

Ida was about to slip down, but she reflected that as now, and to Stafford's admiration, she sat quite still under the gaze of the man's keen, sarcastic eyes.

"Yes; keep straight on and round by 'The Woodman'; you will see the house by that time," said Stafford.

"Thanks!—Drive on, coachman," said the man; and he drew in his head with a grim smile, and something like a sneer on his thick lips that made Stafford's eyes flash.

(To be continued.)

In Her New Place.

"How are you getting on at your new place?" asked a lady of a girl whom she had recommended for a situation. "Very well, thank you," answered the girl. "I am glad to hear it," said the lady. "Your employer is a very nice person and you cannot do too much for her." "I don't mean to, ma'am," was the innocent reply.

The most successful men are said to be those who can sell what they do not possess to others who have no wish to purchase.

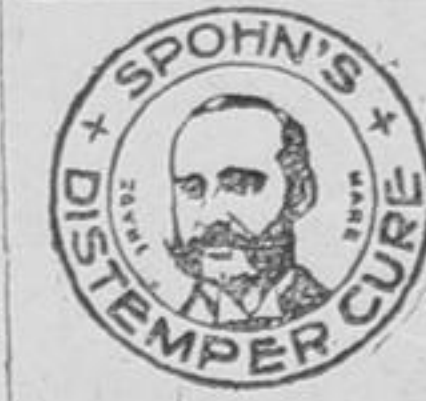
WHAT IS A KISS!

German Legal Definition of Assault and Battery.

What constitutes a kiss has just been defined by a decision of the Imperial German Supreme Court at Leipsiz, reading as follows:

"A kiss is a reaction upon the body of another and always requires the permission of a kissed person. Without such permission one may only kiss if one is certain of the other's tacit consent—that is to say, in the case of relatives, parents, and children or lovers. If the other is not only coy but also gravely objects to being kissed, it is to be assumed that such a person considers the kiss an illegal interference with his or her personal freedom and a violation of his or her honor.

"Anyone who inflicts a kiss upon another under such circumstances is guilty of assault and battery. A misdemeanor is therefore committed if the kiss simply takes place against the other's will. It is not necessary that the latter should consider the kiss an insult."



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