

WHEN A MAN'S FORTY

[BY MATHA PIERCE.]  
For The Courier

II.

"I am glad you came today, Mr. Vandervert," said Kitty. "I was just wishing to see you."

"You flatter me Miss Kitty. To what kind deity am I to give thanks for this sudden accession of interest?"

"Sit down," said Kitty, shoving a chair toward me, and as far from her as she could without seriously disturbing her pose. She was looking particularly well, against a pile of cushions on the divan.

"With pleasure," I said, pushing the chair as near her as I could and sitting as close as possible. (Mrs. George was embroidering near the window).

"You are not so industrious as your sister," I remarked.

"Upon what data do you base your rather broad, and, permit me to remark in passing, intentionally uncomplimentary statement?" Kitty inquired, glancing lazily at her hands. They were shamelessly empty of occupation but very pretty and apparently not unwilling to be admired.

"Your sentences are so long and involved," I remarked, "that I sometimes fail to follow you; but I think you accused me of a failure to appreciate the beauty of your hands. You misunderstood me totally. I think them—"

"You are perfectly disgusting, Mr. Vandervert," said Kitty, putting her hands behind her. (But it was then, you will observe everlastingly too late).

"You accused me of not being industrious."

"Absurd! You cannot accuse any one of not being anything."

"You did," she asserted, "and without ground. It does not follow that because I am not forever embroidering pillows, no sane person would ever attempt to rest upon, that I am idle. I am quite as industrious as Mrs. George. It chances to be in a different way, that is all. What good do you suppose she expects to accomplish by the industry of which you are a witness? She is embroidering a sofa pillow, gold dragons on black satin for Sam's smoking room. Sam will never put his head on those fiery animals. We all know perfectly well, that his heart is ever true to a certain old, disreputable, red velvet cushion, and he refuses to let his head rest on another. Yet there sits Sue, absorbed in the dragons, and of no use to anybody. While I, the idler, entertain you, and amuse myself, and all the time am sweetly engaged in doing nothing."

Behold her strain, her eyes!

"I much prefer that she would strain her eyes rather than her ears," I said, taking Kitty's hand.

"I don't see what difference it makes," said Kitty, taking it away. "If I had the choice given me, I should strain my ears."

"I do not doubt it," I said promptly.

"Because," pursued Kitty, "my eyes are precious to me. They are to everybody."

"I fear they are," I said despondently.

"You have not asked me, Mr. Vandervert," remarked Kitty, after a silence—not too short, not too long, but just right. "You have not asked me."

"But I will," I said promptly.

"When," said Kitty, "and what?"

"Now," said I, "and any thing. Everything!"

"You talk in riddles, Mr. Vandervert," said Kitty, "and I hate riddles. And conundrums. I never guessed one in my life. Besides you don't in the least know what you are talking about. I was about to remark when you interrupted me, (she looked at me severely) that you have not yet asked me what it was I wanted to see you about—what

I wanted your advice about, you know." "True," I assented. "The request had for the moment escaped me. You so often pretend to want advice, you know—"

"Pretend!" said Kitty, pensively.

"And ignore it when in receipt of the best the market affords," I pursued, scorning the interruption, "that I perhaps am to be excused if a request for advice, does not strike me as a distinctly novel form of entertainment."

"Oh, well! if you want to be cross and hateful!" said Kitty.

"I admit the force of your argument," I said humbly. "I am an ungrateful wretch. What else should you like me to say?"

"Nothing!" said Kitty.

But the advice.

"Well," began Kitty, fingering her handkerchief, "this time it is a very serious matter. Its—its—about—its about a man."

"Ah! Indeed! a man! Am I to infer that you have discovered a new species in the corner of your handkerchief?"

Kitty promptly threw the handkerchief on the floor, and while I was picking it up from among a lot of fluff fluff she calls her skirts I found trailing around down there, she went on talking so very fast, that she had quite finished before I returned.

"It's about that horrid Mr. McWilliams and of course I suppose you will say 'I told you so' and all that, but if you do I think it will be mean and hateful of you, though I know you did and 'twas awfully kind of you. But I really never thought he really meant it, you know. And papa scolded awfully, and threatened to send me away to school again. And he says he's going to jump into the river."

When I laid the handkerchief in Kitty's lap, a sofa pillow about six feet by four, cut off my view of the upper part of her body including her head, but from her voice I concluded that she had her face toward the wall.

After a silence, I ventured an observation.

"He is a good swimmer."

The sofa pillow very suddenly and sociably came over to me, and Kitty sat up, dabbed at her eyes with that ridiculous bit of lace I had rescued for the occasion, looked side-wise at me, and laughed.

I laughed too—shamelessly.

Mrs. George looked up inquiringly.

"Mrs. George," said Kitty impressively, "if you knew how perfectly beautiful you look reaching after the last spark of daylight, you would never ring for the lights. You're getting a yearning expression which is lovely to behold. I was just calling Mr. Vandervert's attention to it."

"You are excessively kind, I am sure Kitty," said Mrs. George. "The pleasure of existing for the diversion of Mr. Vandervert is one which I believe I have the honor to share with others of his friends. Shall we have the lights?"

"By all means," I cried. "Calcium if you say so. But let me make my exit quickly. This siren has caused me to forget a dinner engagement. I shall have to charter an express train to reach them in time for the soup."

"I am sorry," said Kitty, "but I'm ever so much obliged to you for—the advice, you know."

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