

Kitty's Class Day And Other Stories

by

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Kitty's Class Day

"A stitch in time saves nine."

"O Pris, Pris, I'm really going! Here's the invitation--rough paper--Chapel--spreads--Lyceum Hall--everything splendid; and Jack to take care of me!"

As Kitty burst into the room and performed a rapturous *pas seul*, waving the cards over her head, sister Priscilla looked up from her work with a smile of satisfaction on her quiet face.

"Who invites you, dear?"

"Why, Jack, of course,--dear old cousin Jack. Nobody else ever thinks of me, or cares whether I have a bit of pleasure now and then. Isn't he kind? Mayn't I go? and, O Pris, what *shall* I wear?"

Kitty paused suddenly, as if the last all-important question had a solemnizing effect upon both mind and body.

"Why, your white muslin, silk sacque, and new hat, of course," began Pris with an air of surprise. But Kitty broke in impetuously,--

"I'll never wear that old muslin again; it's full of darns, up to my knees, and all out of fashion. So is my sacque; and as for my hat, though it does well enough here, it would be absurd for Class Day."

"You don't expect an entirely new suit for this occasion,--do you?" asked Pris, anxiously.

"Yes, I do, and I'll tell you how I mean to get it. I've planned everything; for, though I hardly dreamed of going, I amused myself by thinking how I could manage if I *did* get invited."

"Let us hear." And Pris took up her work with an air of resignation.

"First, my dress," began Kitty, perching herself on the arm of the sofa, and entering into the subject with enthusiasm. "I've got the ten dollars grandpa sent me, and with eight of it I'm going to buy Lizzie King's organdie muslin. She got it in Paris; but her aunt providentially--no, unfortunately--died; so she can't wear it, and wants to get rid of it. She is bigger than I am, you know; so there is enough for a little mantle or sacque, for it isn't made up. The skirt is cut off and gored, with a splendid train--"

"My dear, you don't mean you are going to wear one of those absurd, new-fashioned dresses?" exclaimed Pris, lifting hands and eyes.

"I do! Nothing would induce me to go to Class Day without a train. It's been the desire of my heart to have one, and now I _will_, if I never have another gown to my back!" returned Kitty, with immense decision.

Pris shook her head, and said, "Go on!" as if prepared for any extravagance after that.

"We can make it ourselves," continued Kitty, "and trim it with the same. It's white with blue stripes and daisies in the stripes; the loveliest thing you ever saw, and can't be got here. So simple, yet distingué, I know you'll like it. Next, my bonnet,"--here the solemnity of Kitty's face and manner was charming to behold. "I shall make it out of one of my new illusion undersleeves. I've never worn them; and the puffed part will be a plenty for a little fly-away bonnet of the latest style. I've got blue ribbons to tie it with, and have only to look up some daisies for the inside. With my extra two dollars I shall buy my gloves, and pay my fares,--and there I am, all complete."

She looked so happy, so pretty, and full of girlish satisfaction, that sister Pris couldn't bear to disturb the little plan, much as she disapproved of it. They were poor, and every penny had to be counted. There were plenty of neighbors to gossip and criticise, and plenty of friends to make disagreeable remarks on any unusual extravagance. Pris saw things with the prudent eyes of thirty, but Kitty with the romantic eyes of seventeen; and the elder sister, in the kindness of her heart, had no wish to sadden life to those bright young eyes, or deny the child a harmless pleasure. She sewed thoughtfully for a minute, then looked up, saying, with the smile that always assured Kitty the day was won,--

"Get your things together, and we will see what can be done. But remember, dear, that it is both bad taste and bad economy for poor people to try to ape the rich."

"You're a perfect angel, Pris; so don't moralize. I'll run and get the dress, and we'll begin at once, for there is much to do, and only two days to do it in." And Kitty skipped away, singing "Lauriger Horatius," at the top of her voice.

Priscilla soon found that the girl's head was completely turned by the advice and example of certain fashionable young neighbors. It was in vain for Pris to remonstrate and warn.

"Just this once let me do as others do, and thoroughly enjoy myself." pleaded Kitty; and Pris yielded, saying to herself, "She shall have her wish, and if she learns a lesson, neither time nor money will be lost."

So they snipped and sewed, and planned and pieced, going through all the alternations of despair and triumph, worry and satisfaction, which women undergo when a new suit is under way. Company kept coming, for news of Kitty's expedition had flown abroad, and her young friends must just run in to hear about it, and ask what she was going to wear; while Kitty was so glad and proud to tell, and show, and enjoy her little triumph that many half hours were wasted, and the second day found much still to do.

The lovely muslin didn't hold out, and Kitty sacrificed the waist to the train, for a train she must have or the whole thing would be an utter failure. A little sacque was eked out, however, and when the frills were on, it was "ravishing," as Kitty said, with a sigh of mingled delight and fatigue. The gored skirt was a fearful job, as any one who has ever plunged into the mysteries will testify; and before the facing, even experienced Pris quailed.

The bonnet also was a trial, for when the lace was on, it was discovered that the ribbons didn't match the dress. Here was a catastrophe! Kitty frantically rummaged the house, the shops, the stores of her friends, and rummaged in vain. There was no time to send to the city, and despair was about to fall on Kitty, when Pris rescued her by quietly making one of the small sacrifices which were easy to her because her life was spent for others. Some one suggested a strip of blue illusion,--and that could be got; but, alas! Kitty had no money, for the gloves were already bought. Pris heard the lamentations, and giving up fresh ribbons for herself, pulled her sister out of a slough of despond with two yards of "heavenly tulle."

"Now the daisies; and oh, dear me, not one can I find in this poverty-stricken town," sighed Kitty, prinking at the glass, and fervently hoping that nothing would happen to her complexion over night.

"I see plenty just like those on your dress," answered Pris, nodding toward the meadow full of young whiteweed.

"Pris, you're a treasure! I'll wear real ones; they keep well, I know, and are so common I can refresh my bonnet anywhere. It's a splendid idea."

Away rushed Kitty to return with an apron full of American daisies. A pretty cluster was soon fastened just over the left-hand frizzle of bright hair, and the little bonnet was complete.

"Now, Pris, tell me how I look," cried Kitty, as she swept into the room late that afternoon in full gala costume.

It would have been impossible for the primmest, the sourest, or the most sensible creature in the world to say that it wasn't a pretty sight. The long train, the big chignon, the apology for a bonnet, were all ridiculous,--no one could deny that,--but youth, beauty, and a happy heart made even those absurdities charming. The erect young figure gave an air to the crisp folds of the delicate dress; the bright eyes and fresh cheeks under the lace rosette made one forget its size; and the rippling brown hair won admiration in spite of the ugly bunch which disfigured the girl's head. The little jacket set "divinely," the new gloves were as immaculate as white kids could be, and to crown all, Lizzie King, in a burst of generosity, lent Kitty the blue and white Paris sunshade which she couldn't use herself.

"Now I could die content; I'm perfect in all respects, and I know Jack won't be ashamed of me. I really owe it to him to look my best, you know, and that's why I'm so particular," said Kitty, in an apologetic tone, as she began to lay away her finery.

"I hope you will enjoy every minute of the time, deary. Don't forget to finish running up the facing; I've basted it carefully, and would do it if my head didn't ache so, I really can't hold it up any longer," answered Pris, who had worked like a disinterested bee, while Kitty had flown about like a distracted butterfly.

"Go and lie down, you dear, kind soul, and don't think of my nonsense again," said Kitty, feeling remorseful, till Pris was comfortably asleep, when she went to her room and revelled in her finery till bedtime. So absorbed was she in learning to manage her train gracefully, that she forgot the facing till very late. Then, being worn out with work and worry, she did, what girls are too apt to do, stuck a pin here and there, and, trusting to Priscilla's careful bastings, left it as it was, retiring to dream of a certain Horace Fletcher, whose aristocratic elegance had made a deep impression upon her during the few evenings she had seen him.

Nothing could have been lovelier than the morning, and few hearts happier than Kitty's, as she arrayed herself with the utmost care, and waited in solemn state for the carriage; for muslin trains and dewy roads were incompatible, and one luxury brought another.

"My goodness, where did she get that stylish suit?" whispered Miss Smith to Miss Jones, as Kitty floated into the station with all sail set, finding it impossible to resist the temptation to astonish certain young ladies who had snubbed her in times past, which snubs had rankled, and were now avenged.

"I looked everywhere for a muslin for to-day and couldn't find any I liked, so I was forced to wear my mauve silk," observed Miss Smith, complacently settling the silvery folds of her dress.

"It's very pretty, but one ruins a silk at Class Day, you know. I thought this organdie would be more comfortable and appropriate this warm day. A friend brought it from Paris, and it's like one the Princess of Wales wore at the great flower-show this year," returned Kitty, with the air of a young lady who had all her dresses from Paris, and was intimately acquainted with the royal family.

"Those girls" were entirely extinguished by this stroke, and hadn't a word to say for themselves, while Kitty casually mentioned Horace Fletcher, Lyceum Hall, and Cousin Jack, for they had only a little Freshman brother to boast of, and were not going to Lyceum Hall.

As she stepped out of the cars at Cambridge, Jack opened his honest blue eyes and indulged in a low whistle of astonishment: for if there was anything he especially hated, it was the trains, chignons and tiny bonnets then in fashion. He was very fond of Kitty, and

prided himself on being able to show his friends a girl who was charming, and yet not over-dressed.

"She has made a regular guy of herself; I won't tell her so, and the dear little soul shall have a jolly time in spite of her fuss and feathers. But I do wish she had let her hair alone and worn that pretty hat of hers."

As this thought passed through Jack's mind he smiled and bowed and made his way among the crowd, whispering as he drew his cousin's arm through his own,--

"Why, Kitty, you're got up regardless of expense, aren't you? I'm so glad you came, we'll have a rousing good time, and you shall see all the fun."

"Oh, thank you, Jack! Do I look nice, really? I tried to be a credit to you and Pris, and I did have such a job of it. I'll make you laugh over it some time. A carriage for me? Bless us, how fine we are!" and Kitty stepped in, feeling that only one thing more was needed to make her cup overflow. That one thing was speedily vouchsafed, for before her skirts were smoothly settled, Jack called out, in his hearty way,--

"How are you, Fletcher? If you are bound for Chapel I'll take you up."

"Thanks; good-morning, Miss Heath."

It was all done in an instant, and the next thing Kitty knew she was rolling away with the elegant Horace sitting opposite. How little it takes to make a young girl happy! A pretty dress, sunshine, and somebody opposite, and they are blest. Kitty's face glowed and dimpled with pleasure as she glanced about her, especially when she, sitting in state with two gentlemen all to herself, passed "those girls" walking in the dust with a beardless boy; she felt that she could forgive past slights, and did so with a magnanimous smile and bow.

Both Jack and Fletcher had graduated the year before, but still took an interest in their old haunts, and patronized the fellows who were not yet through the mill, at least the Seniors and Juniors; of Sophs and Freshs they were sublimely unconscious. Greeted by frequent slaps on the shoulder, and hearty "How are you, old fellows," they piloted Kitty to a seat in the chapel. An excellent place, but the girl's satisfaction was marred by Fletcher's desertion, and she could not see anything attractive about the dashing young lady in the pink bonnet to whom he devoted himself, "because she was a stranger," Kitty said.

Everybody knows what goes on in the Chapel, after the fight and scramble are over. The rustle and buzz, the music, the oratory and the poem, during which the men cheer and the girls simper; the professors yawn, and the poet's friends pronounce him a second Longfellow. Then the closing flourishes, the grand crush, and general scattering.

Then the fun really begins, as far as the young folks are concerned. They don't mind swarming up and down stairs in a solid phalanx; they can enjoy half a dozen courses of

salad, ice and strawberries, with stout gentlemen crushing their feet, anxious mammas sticking sharp elbows into their sides, and absent-minded tutors walking over them. They can flirt vigorously in a torrid atmosphere of dinner, dust, and din; can smile with hot coffee running down their backs, small avalanches of ice-cream descending upon their best bonnets, and sandwiches, butter-side down, reposing on their delicate silks. They know that it is a costly rapture, but they carefully refrain from thinking of the morrow, and energetically illustrate the Yankee maxim which bids us enjoy ourselves in our early bloom.

Kitty did have "a rousing good time;" for Jack was devoted, taking her everywhere, showing her everything, feeding and fanning her, and festooning her train with untiring patience. How many forcible expressions he mentally indulged in as he walked on that unlucky train we will not record; he smiled and skipped and talked of treading on flowers in a way that would have charmed Kitty, if some one else had not been hovering about "The Daisy," as Fletcher called her.

After he returned, she neglected Jack, who took it coolly, and was never in the way unless she wanted him. For the first time in her life, Kitty deliberately flirted. The little coquetries, which are as natural to a gay young girl as her laughter, were all in full play, and had she gone no further no harm would have been done. But, excited by the example of those about her, Kitty tried to enact the fashionable young lady, and, like most novices, she overdid the part. Quite forgetting her cousin, she tossed her head, twirled her fan, gave affected little shrieks at college jokes, and talked college slang in a way that convulsed Fletcher, who enjoyed the fun immensely.

Jack saw it all, shook his head and said nothing; but his face grew rather sober as he watched Kitty, flushed, dishevelled, and breathless, whirling round Lyceum Hall, on the arm of Fletcher, who danced divinely, as all the girls agreed. Jack had proposed going, but Kitty had frowned, so he fell back, leaving her to listen and laugh, blush and shrink a little at her partner's flowery compliments and admiring glances.

"If she stands that long she's not the girl I took her for," thought Jack, beginning to lose patience. "She doesn't look like my little Kitty, and somehow I don't feel half so fond and proud of her as usual. I know one thing, my daughters shall never be seen knocking about in that style."

As if the thought suggested the act, Jack suddenly assumed an air of paternal authority, and, arresting his cousin as she was about to begin again, he said, in a tone she had never heard before,--

"I promised Pris to take care of you, so I shall carry you off to rest, and put yourself to rights after this game of romps. I advise you to do the same, Fletcher, or give your friend in the pink bonnet a turn."

Kitty took Jack's arm pettishly, but glanced over her shoulder with such an inviting smile that Fletcher followed, feeling very much like a top, in danger of tumbling down the

instant he stopped spinning. As she came out Kitty's face cleared, and, assuming her sprightliest air, she spread her plumage and prepared to descend with effect, for a party of uninvited _peris_ stood at the gate of this Paradise casting longing glances at the forbidden splendors within. Slowly, that all might see her, Kitty sailed down, with Horace, the debonair, in her wake, and was just thinking to herself, "Those girls won't get over this very soon, I fancy," when all in one moment she heard Fletcher exclaim, wrathfully, "Hang the flounces!" she saw a very glossy black hat come skipping down the steps, felt a violent twitch backward, and, to save herself from a fall, sat down on the lower step with most undignified haste.

It was impossible for the bystanders to help laughing, for there was Fletcher hopping wildly about, with one foot nicely caught in a muslin loop, and there sat Kitty longing to run away and hide herself, yet perfectly helpless, while every one tittered. Miss Jones and Miss Smith laughed shrilly, and the despised little Freshman completed her mortification, by a feeble joke about Kitty Heath's new man-trap. It was only an instant, but it seemed an hour before Fletcher freed her, and snatching up the dusty beaver, left her with a flushed countenance and an abrupt bow.

If it hadn't been for Jack, Kitty would have burst into tears then and there, so terrible was the sense of humiliation which oppressed her. For his sake she controlled herself, and, bundling up her torn train, set her teeth, stared straight before her, and let him lead her in dead silence to a friend's room near by. There he locked the door, and began to comfort her by making light of the little mishap. But Kitty cried so tragically, that he was at his wit's end, till the ludicrous side of the affair struck her, and she began to laugh hysterically. With a vague idea that vigorous treatment was best for that feminine ailment, Jack was about to empty the contents of an ice-pitcher over her, when she arrested him, by exclaiming, incoherently,--

"Oh, don't!--it was so funny!--how can you laugh, you cruel boy?--I'm disgraced, forever--take me home to Pris, oh, take me home to Pris!"

"I will, my dear, I will; but first let me right you up a bit; you look as if you had been hazed, upon my life you do;" and Jack laughed in spite of himself at the wretched little object before him, for dust, dancing, and the downfall produced a ruinous spectacle.

That broke Kitty's heart; and, spreading her hands before her face, she was about to cry again, when the sad sight which met her eyes dispelled the gathering tears. The new gloves were both split up the middle and very dirty with clutching at the steps as she went down.

"Never mind, you can wash them," said Jack, soothingly.

"I paid a dollar and a half for them, and they can't be washed," groaned Kitty.

"Oh, hang the gloves! I meant your hands," cried Jack, trying to keep sober.

"No matter for my hands, I mourn my gloves. But I won't cry any more, for my head aches now so I can hardly see." And Kitty threw off her bonnet, as if even that airy trifle hurt her.

Seeing how pale she looked, Jack tenderly suggested a rest on the old sofa, and a wet handkerchief on her hot forehead, while he got the good landlady to send her up a cup of tea. As Kitty rose to comply she glanced at her dress, and, clasping her hands, exclaimed, tragically,--"The facing, the fatal facing! That made all the mischief, for if I'd sewed it last night it wouldn't have ripped to-day; if it hadn't ripped Fletcher wouldn't have got his foot in it, I shouldn't have made an object of myself, he wouldn't have gone off in a rage, and--who knows what might have happened?"

"Bless the what's-its-name if it has settled him," cried Jack. "He is a contemptible fellow not to stay and help you out of the scrape he got you into. Follow his lead and don't trouble yourself about him."

"Well, he was rather absurd to-day, I allow; but he has got handsome eyes and hands, and he does dance like an angel," sighed Kitty, as she pinned up the treacherous loop which had brought destruction to her little castle in the air.

"Handsome eyes, white hands, and angelic feet don't make a man. Wait till you can do better, Kit."

With an odd, grave look, that rather startled Kitty, Jack vanished, to return presently with a comfortable cup of tea and a motherly old lady to help repair damages and soothe her by the foolish little purrings and parrings so grateful to female nerves after a flurry.

"I'll come back and take you out to see the dance round the tree when you've had a bit of a rest," said Jack, vibrating between door and sofa as if it wasn't easy to get away.

"Oh, I couldn't," cried Kitty, with a shudder at the bare idea of meeting any one. "I can't be seen again to-night; let me stay here till my train goes."

"I thought it had gone, already," said Jack, with an irrepressible twinkle of the eye that glanced at the draggled dress sweeping the floor.

"How can you joke about it!" and the girl's reproachful eyes filled with tears of shame. "I know I've been very silly, Jack, but I've had my punishment, and I don't need any more. To feel that you despise me is worse than all the rest."

She ended with a little sob, and turned her face away to hide the trembling of her lips. At that, Jack flushed up, his eyes shone, and he stooped suddenly as if to make some impetuous reply. But, remembering the old lady (who, by the by, was discreetly looking out of the window), he put his hands in his pockets and strolled out of the room.

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