

**A PERENNIAL
COURTSHIP;
AND OTHER TALES**

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A Perennial Courtship; And Other Tales by Ephron

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EPHRON

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A PERENNIAL COURTSHIP.

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A PERENNIAL COURTSHIP.

EDITH LENNOX loved Anselm Hiram Waveney. He was good-looking enough, but moral beauty was what she went in for; his eyes, so gentle and pure, diffused a glamour not to be withstood, and all unasked she gave her heart away. There are a few—a very few—amongst men who can look on women without the soul's mirror being thumbed by any fleshly thought. These are of the free, concerning whom there is no let or hindrance that the natural tendencies should not have play; consequently they generally regard the other sex with respectful affection, and are wont to pay its representatives, young and old, unstinted homage in all kinds of chivalrous attentions.

Anselm, as one of the free spirits in question, was a staunch upholder of gynocracy, and the girls of Malham considered him to be a very useful young man indeed. Nevertheless to Edith Lennox his manner was cold and reserved; his arm, so readily proffered to others, was at her command only in cases of obvious necessity; and, altogether, he showed a marked disinclination to being alone in her company.

Now Edith, with her rich golden hair, dark blue eyes, and exquisitely shaped features, ranked as the acknowledged most beautiful maiden in Malham; male adorers by the dozen were at her beck, but she wanted what it appeared she could not have. Not being of the unfeminine kind that woos if not wooed, she endured the pangs of heart-hunger in modest silence; and the only outward evidence of interior suffering was a continuing increase of loveliness.

Matters thus rested when one evening Anselm and Edith met at a social gathering. It was necessary she should be seen home by some one; and all the gentlemen present, save the apparently unloving loved one, having partners, upon him fell the office of cavalier. Edith felt full of distressful happiness while leaning upon the arm which she knew supported her so unwillingly. Their road lay across a railway, and, each being absorbed in thought, neither paid much attention to external objects. Presently Edith received an extremely violent shove, which sent her staggering down the embankment. Turning with surprised indignation to ask the meaning of such rudeness, a blood-freezing sight met her eyes. An express train rushed by, knocked her companion over, and disappeared. Anselm rolled down the bank, and then lay motionless. Could it be that her heart's desire—No; a little hand placed against his heart found proof of life. Blushing with shame and fear, though no one was there to see, Edith pressed a kiss upon the young man's lips, and then felt like a guilty thing. What had she done?—this man who was not her property,

and, for aught she knew, belonged to some one else! Anselm opened his eyes, and gazed up at the bending kisser. A strange look it was; for intense tenderness was mixed with deepest sorrow.

"Are you much hurt, Mr. Waveney?" inquired Edith, hoping that he knew nothing of her unmaidenly act.

"No," he replied. "I had just about cleared the train. But my ankle is sprained, and I am afraid—" here the red corpuscles ran hastily back to the deserted cheeks—"that I must ask you to help me home. Hope you have sustained no injury? I had no time to be very careful."

"Oh no; I am not hurt at all. You saved my life, and nearly lost your own through it."

Again that very tender expression, as if he had saved something to him extremely precious; but very strange the murmured words, uttered apparently for his own behoof, "My life—ah! if it were my own!"

Edith had to be cavalier now: her companion's weight, for all his efforts to the contrary, was exceedingly heavy; but the supporter did not mind that at all. Nor, though their progress was slow, would she have found the business at all tedious but for the pain Anselm endured. Every step was evidently agony to him, but he displayed great patience. Ashton Villa, where he lived, was at length reached; and Mrs. Waveney, who saw them through the window, rushed out in great alarm; but she was reassured on finding there was nothing worse than a