

# UNDER THE LILAC TREE.

## CHAPTER VIII.

I had found the generality of guests at Westwood at such a dead level that I thought very little of the coming visitors. It was evident that Lady Yorke was deeply interested in them, but then she had said candidly that it was Lord Severne, rather than his wife, who had pleased her. We had many discussions about them, and it seemed to me that Lady Severne did not stand very high in the estimation of either husband or wife.

"Is Lady Severne very beautiful?" I asked Lady Yorke, on the morning when the guests were expected to arrive.

"Very; she has one of those faces with a roseate bloom, and her complexion is simply incomparable. But beautiful, as she is, I do not like her. You are a good judge of character; you will be able to judge for yourself when they come."

Lord and Lady Severne were to reach Westwood on Tuesday, the twentieth of May. Lady Yorke had ordered a lavish supply of magnificent flowers to be placed in Lady Severne's room.

"That is one point in her character which I like," said Lady Yorke; "she is very fond of flowers. It pleases me always to see a woman fond of flowers." Then she continued, with something of a conscious blush on her face. "Miss Chester I know I shall be very much engaged while the Severnes are here, but I must not neglect my poor. I hope I shall never fall again into that terrible apathetic way of thinking of no one but myself. If it be really impossible for me to leave home you will undertake any little commission for me, will you not?"

Every preparation had been made for our visitors. Lady Mary Avon and her brother, Sir Charles, were two handsome, fashionable persons, rich and popular. Lady Mary had many admirers, but could not tolerate the word "marriage." Sir Charles was looking out for a wife. Captain Forrester was heir-presumptive to an earldom and was consequently much sought after. Sir Harry de Burgh was a young Irish baronet, one of the most popular men in England, and Lady Grey was a young widow with a large fortune.

"A well-assorted party of guests," said Lady Yorke, complacently; "and the great beauty of the arrangement is that they will amuse each other. Lord Severne will generally fall to my lot. If the same thing happens here that took place invariably in Italy, he liked to saunter by my side in his grave melancholy fashion while Lady Severne generally attracted all the men to herself. She will do the same here. I am so glad," continued Lady Yorke, "that you sing so beautifully, Miss Chester. Lord Severne likes music. His wife sings but he does not care for her style, and always discourages her."

Tuesday came, a bright morning, but with the warning of a coming rain-storm on its face. There was a low wail in the wind, a darkening at times of the sky, a strange stillness in the air such as always precedes a storm.

It was midday when a message came from Woodheaton, asking help for a poor family, one of whom—the father—was dangerously ill, the wife had met with a severe accident, and the children were destitute. The poor were beginning to know to whom they should send; they were beginning to love Lady Yorke, for they knew that no one ever asked her help in vain. She came to me and asked me to act for her.

"I must be here to receive our guests," she said. "I give you carte blanche, Miss Chester."

So it was as Lady Yorke's almoner that I went out on that day. Lord Yorke had me beware of the threatening storm, but I told him I did not think it would break until to-morrow. But when I was on the point of returning from Woodheaton, the rain descended in torrents. For an ordinary shower I should not have cared in the least, but this storm was terrible. It seemed as though the heavens were opened, such a tempest raged on that fair, tranquil countryside. The sky was like lead, the wind blew fiercely; and then lightning flashed, and thunder came. The storm lasted some hours, and when the sky cleared and the rain ceased it was night. Lady Yorke, who was always thoughtful, sent a closed carriage after me.

As we drove up the avenue, the carriage stopped suddenly, and the coachman sprang down from the box and came to me.

"Do you see what has happened, Miss Chester?" he asked.

Looking out, I saw by the pale, watery gleam of the moon that a great beech-tree, said to be the largest and finest of its kind in England, and called "The Pride of Westwood," had been blown down.

"Why, his lordship will be more grieved over this tree than if half the house had been blown down!" said the coachman in a grave voice. "I am very sorry, miss, but you see the branches reach all across the drive. I can't take the carriage any further; I must go back to the courtyard."

I saw the honest simple man, a faithful retainer of the House of Yorke, was deeply distressed. He shook his head as he led the frightened horse away. "I never like such great trees to fall, Miss Chester," he said. "They are the glory of a house. I always think bad luck follows."

## CHAPTER IX.

I cannot tell why, but as I went to bed a sense of oppression and

coming sorrow seized me. I could not believe in the superstition that the falling of a great tree must mean evil. That was nonsense. But my heart was heavy, my brain oppressed.

Fortunately for me, I was a great favorite with Mrs. Masham, the housekeeper, and when she heard that I had returned she hastened to my room. Any idea I might have had of going to the drawing room was speedily abandoned. She stood before me, stern as a judge.

"You look ill, Miss Chester. You have taken cold. You must go to bed, and I will send you something warm to drink."

I murmured a few words about the visitors and music, but she was pre-emptory.

"No, miss, not to-night. You must take care of yourself; you have been out in the wet all day among those poor people. I know what it is, you must rest now. Her ladyship would desire it, I am sure."

There was nothing for it but to obey. She contrived to give a fair description of all our visitors and very much to my surprise finished by saying:

"Ah, Miss Chester, you would have been queen of them all if you did not look so sad and would not always wear mourning!"

That night terrible dreams came to me of Mark. Mark was out in the storm, and I could not find him. Mark was struck by the lightning, and lay before me dead. Mark was under the fallen tree, mangled and crushed. My dreams were always of Mark in peril, in danger, and dead.

Wednesday morning, a day never to be forgotten; the twenty-first of May—a date ever to be remembered! I rose with the sun. The morning was so beautiful that one could hardly believe in the clouds and the storm of the day before. The air was sweet and fresh after the rain; the grass was of a brighter green, the leaves had a deeper hue, and the flowers held up their heads with renewed life.

When I opened my window the odor of the lilacs came to me. I could see far away the golden gleam of the laburnum and the tall chestnut trees. The fragrance of the lilacs sent my mind and heart back to Mark.

I went to the lilac trees, fresher and sweeter than ever after the rain, and sat down. The warm May sunshine fell around me, the birds were calling to each other, the dew lay on the grass. I tried to forget the present and live for a short time in the past. I pictured the May morning at Gracedieu on my seventeenth birthday, the pretty old home buried in the trees, the distant gleam of the river, the shade of the deep-green woods, and the lovely group of lilac trees, the topmost bough of which I could not reach. I saw the dark handsome face of my lover, so frank, so brave, so true; his dark eyes smiled into mine; his voice, than which to me earth held no sweeter music, was in my ears.

"Oh, Mark," I cried aloud, "why could not I have died with you?"

Merciful heaven! what was that? I rose to my feet with a cry. What was it? A figure coming slowly toward me, tall and stately, but with a drooping head, walking with slow uncertain step. Oh, heaven, who was it?—what was it? I stood paralyzed. My heart beat so violently that I could almost hear it; my hands shook; all the warmth and color left my face. White, breathless, trembling at the same moment with terror and joy, bewildered and amazed, I stood as though my feet were rooted to the ground. What was it?

Coming slowly toward me, yet not seeing me, buried in thought, the sunshine falling on his bowed head, was Mark. Surely if Mark had ever lived, this was he? If the sun shone in heaven, if I was sane, that was Mark—Mark, for whom I had wept as dead—my handsome, true, dear lover come back to me! I tried to utter his name, but the sound died on my lips. I tried to move toward him; I could not stir. He was coming nearer. Ah, yes, it was Mark! Oh, my heart! I could have cried out in gratitude to heaven, and have died. I saw the strong dear hands that had held my own; I saw the dark face, older and sadder than when we had parted; I saw the loving eyes, full now of wistful sadness.

He was not dead, then, but living and well! He had doubtless been to Gracedieu in search of me, and the recollection with whom I had left my address, had sent him hither. He had been to the house to ask for me; and the servants had told him that I was out in the park.

He would explain his long cruel absence. He had come back to me; he was true and loyal; he had come to make me his wife, and—oh heaven! I should be happy at last! He was nearer to me now. I grasped the low branch of a tree to keep myself from falling. I called to heaven to give me strength. My heart beat wildly, my brain burned my senses seemed almost to have left me. I saw only him, as he came to the trees where I was standing. I cried:

"Mark! Mark!"

I was mad—heaven forgive me!—quite mad. My mother had warned me not to make an idol of any creature, and here I was on my knees before this idol that I had made for myself. I kissed his hands, sobbing the while as though my heart would break, tears raining from my eyes. I could only cry:

"Mark, heaven has sent you back to me! Oh, my love, how I love you!"

He raised me in his arms. Once again the strong clasp held me, once again the arms of my true love were around me. Would to heaven the angel of death had snatched me as I lay here!

I heard him cry, "Nell! Is it you, Nellie?" and the sound of the dearly-loved voice drove me mad again. I clung to him and kissed him with an anguish known only to those who love as I loved.

"You have come back to me from the dead!" I cried. "Oh, my love, welcome!"

I have never doubted you, Mark, through the weeks and months and years. I have loved you just the same. I said always that if you were living you would come; if dead, I would take my love and faith untarnished to you. Speak to me, Mark, I have hungered for the sound of your voice and for the sight of your face. Speak to me!"

I heard him whisper words that seemed to me like a prayer.

"My true, loyal Nell!" he said.

"I knew you would come if living, Mark. Of late as you did not come, I felt sure that you were dead. I have never doubted you for one moment, Mark!"

In a passion of joy and gratitude I put my arms around his neck telling him with kisses and tears, how glad and happy I was, how I thanked heaven, how my happiness was all the greater because my anguish had been so keen. He was strangely silent. But I heeded not; when my rapturous words were over, he would talk to me in the old sweet, grave fashion.

"You may kiss my lips, Mark," I said, "for I have kept my promise. The kiss you left on them is there still; no one has touched them. I have never answered, even in my thoughts, for one moment from you. If I had never returned, and I had lived fifty years longer, I should have been just as true. All other men are but shadows. Oh, Mark, teach me—you are wiser and better than I—teach me how to thank heaven that you have come back to me!"

Strangely silent was he, but as I remembered great emotion often causes silence, I could not see him, for he had drawn me to him. I could only stand still, folded in his close embrace, and murmur to him all the loving words that came from my heart—how I yearned for him—how long the days, the weeks, the months and years had been—how I had thought of him unceasingly—how, feeling sure that he was in heaven, I had made heaven the home of my heart—how I had been in many places and had seen many men, but there was none like him, none to be compared with him. All the loving thoughts that had ever passed through my mind were poured out like water beneath his feet. (The wind faintly stirred the green boughs, above our heads, the birds were singing blithely, and I could hear my own voice rippling on, but not his—not his?)

A gust of wind blew a lilac spray right into my face. I seized it and kissed it passionately.

"How strange, Mark, that you should come back to me in the time of the lilacs. They seem almost like living friends. But, Mark, speak to me. I say all; you say nothing. Speak to me."

Still I could not see his face.

"Great sorrow made me dumb, Mark," I said; "great joy gives me words. Tell me that you are pleased to see me, to find me."

Nellie, my true loving Nellie!" he said. And I was content. Oh, wonderful love! I was content and happy. I too, stood for some minutes in silence, the dark, handsome, beloved face bending over mine.

"I believe those happy birds know all about it, Mark," I said. "Hark how they are singing! If I had known what to-day would bring, how I should have longed for it to come. Oh, Mark, what a debt you have to pay me! What hours have I spent in praying for you! What tears I have shed! You must repay me all those prayers and tears. Mark, raise your head and let me look at you. Do you know that I have hardly seen your face yet?"

Add Under the Lilacs

But for all answer he drew me nearer to him and whispered:

"My dear, loving Nell!"

I was quite content, safe in the shelter of his arms, my happy face resting on his breast.

"Do you know, Mark," I said, "I was so sure you would come back to me that I spent the greater part of every day, while the month lasted, under the trees? Since the world began no woman has ever loved more truly than I love you. I am proud of my faith. Mark—proud of my unswerving truth—proud that I knew and understood you so well—proud that no shadow of doubt has ever dimmed the sun of my great love."

Still he was strangely silent, and the fiery passion of my words was wearing away. I wanted to look into the beloved face. I wanted the dear lips to lavish love on me, as had mine on him.

"Mark," I said, "look at me let me see your face. I am beginning to fear that you are ill."

He raised his head, and once more the dark eyes looked into my own. Ah, the face was changed! The youth, this hope, the brightness had gone; it was pale, careworn, wistful. But the eyes had the old power over me.

"Have you been ill, Mark?" I asked anxiously.

"No," he replied, "not in body; I have been in mind."

"I will cheer you and make you better. Was I mistaken, or could it have been a moon that had fallen from his lips?"

"Mark," I cried, "you have been in some trouble, I am afraid; but it is all over now. We shall never be parted again. Why—why do you not speak to me as I speak to you?"

"I have not recovered from my surprise, Nellie," he said.

"Surprise?" I repeated. "Why, Mark, you knew I was here, did you not?"

"No, Nellie, I had not the faintest idea of it," he replied.

"You did not know that I was here? You did not come purposely to find me?" I cried.

"No," he answered sadly, turning his face from me.

"Then," I asked in wonder, "why did you come? What brought you here?"

He looked at me, and I saw how full of agitation and distress his face was.

"Nellie," he said, gently, "will you tell me what brings you here?"

"Do you not know?" I asked.

"I do not. I cannot even imagine," he replied.

"I am living here as companion to Lady Yorke," I said. "I waited in the old home at Gracedieu until the four years were over. I lived alone, longing, hoping against hope, for news of

you every day, afraid to go away lest you should come during my absence."

He laid his hand caressingly on my head, and the horrible chill that had begun to creep through my veins ceased.

"My sweet, loyal Nellie!" he said; but in some vague way the words seemed forced from him.

"Then you see, Mark," I went on, happy from the caress of his dear hand, "my money was gone, and I was obliged to seek a home. I have been as happy here as I could be anywhere in the world without you."

"You are Lady Yorke's companion?" he said, as though he could not recover from his surprise.

"Have you been to Gracedieu?" I asked.

"No," he answered in a low tone. "Ah, well, he was here! Why he had come mattered little. He would tell me all when he recovered from his surprise. There would be no secrets, no mysteries between us. I unclosed his hands and held them in mine."

"You are tired, Mark, and not well, I am sure," I said; "let us sit down and talk quietly."

"Oh, Nellie, you are killing me with every word!" he cried.

"Killing you, Mark? Why, I would die a hundred times over for you! I have done so. Every day of your absence has been like a day of death to me."

"Hush, my darling!" he cried. "For Heaven's sake, hush!"

"But why, Mark? Why must I not speak to you? Why are you so strange? Why are you distant and silent?"

"But for all answer he held up his hand and repeated:

"Hush, my darling!"

Why should that deadly chill come over me? Why should my limbs tremble? There could be nothing to fear. Mark was living, and he was with me. I beat down the horrible rising doubt. I would not listen to it. What could there be wrong between Mark and me? I sat down upon the grass and said:

"Sit here with me, Mark, and we can talk at our ease."

But he did not sit down, and the terrible fear grew. I could feel the warm color leave my face, and the blood in my veins grew chill. I could have cried aloud in my agony. But I must know what it all meant. The change in my face startled him.

"Nellie," he cried, "for Heaven's sake do not look like that; I cannot bear it! Do not let the joy and love die from your face yet, my darling—not just yet!"

"Why must they die at all? Now that you have come back, why can we not be as happy as we were? There is no reason, Mark, is there?"

Paler, graver, sadder than ever, he took my hand in his.

"I have not the courage to speak!" he cried. "Heaven forgive me, I cannot speak!"

"Is it that you have no money, Mark?" I asked, with a sudden sense of relief. "Oh, my darling, I do not care in the least about that! Money is nothing when we have love. Ah, I see now, Mark! You failed in that Indian undertaking, and you do not like to tell me so. Why, my love, I would sooner have one lock of your hair than all the wealth of the world! If any one had left me the largest fortune you could imagine what would it avail me without you? Ah, Mark, you should know me better!"

"I wish to Heaven it was so! I wish I stood before you a penniless beggar. It is not that. I am a rich man now, Nellie, and my riches are as ashes to me."

Why, Mark? I asked.

Oh, why did he not love me with the frank, caressing love of old? My heart hungered and thirsted for it.

"I am a coward," he said. "Oh, Nellie, loyal, sweet, true Nellie, can you not guess?"

"I can guess nothing," I replied, pitiously. "Tell me what is wrong, Mark?"

I began to see that something was terribly amiss, my faith in him was still unshaken.

"Tell me, Mark. No matter what it may be, you can trust me. You know there is no end to my love. If you are in any trouble or distress, I shall only love you the more. You have come back to me, darling, and your sorrows, as are your pleasures, are mine! Perhaps I can help you—the mouse helped the lion once. I have a little money; my money, my love, my life are all yours."

The dark handsome face grew paler, the firm lip trembled; I saw great drops on the broad forehead, I saw mortal agony in the dark eyes.

"Mark," I cried, pitiously, "there is something wrong!"

"Yes," he replied, slowly; "there is, as you say something wrong."

"You will tell me what it is?" I asked.

"I must; but when I do so you will hate me. You will hate me, and send me from your presence, never to see you again."

All the love, the generosity, the passion of my heart was aroused. I fate him! Rather could the sun bring darkness!

"I could never hate you, Mark, my dear love, never even dislike you. You do not know me; you have forgotten in all these years how I love you. I gave you my love forever and forever. I cannot take it away. Mine was never 'love for a day,' Mark, it was 'forever.' I love you so well and so truly that nothing can part us. If these hands I kiss now had committed the most grievous crimes, I would kiss them still. You could never kill my love, Mark. I would go with you into exile; I would stand by your side on the scaffold and suffer for you."

"Hush, Nellie!" he said, laying his hand on my lips. "Every word you say is as a sword in my heart."

"But it is true, Mark—it is all true. I could not love you more if I tried."

"I believe it," he said. "My beautiful Nellie! My true Nellie! Oh, how can I ask pardon of Heaven?" He knelt by my side and drew my head upon his breast, and smoothed the ripples of my hair with the old familiar gesture I had loved so well. "Poor Nellie! True

loving Nellie! How can Heaven pardon me?"

I had ceased to weep, ceased to wail. Mark had come back to me, but there was something wrong. I felt that he was hushing me to rest in his arms for a few minutes before he told me, and I was content. What Mark did was best always.

"Nellie," he said at last—and his voice trembled with emotion—"seeing how well you love me. I could almost wish that you were dying now. If the light of the sun could but strike us both dead! You tremble, Nellie. Love, be still; rest for one moment; I will tell you all then."

And I clung the more closely to him. Should ruin, sorrow, death come, what mattered it while those arms sheltered me? A mother soothing her child in the delirium of fever could not have been more tender than Mark was in that hour to me.

"You will hate me, Nellie, when you hear all; you will send me from you, and I shall never see you again."

"Does it look like it, love?" I whispered. "There is little fear of that."

Still he rocked me in his arms, calling: "Nellie, Nellie, each moment makes it worse, makes it harder! Ah, Nellie, why have you been so true to me?"

"Why?" I replied, with a glad little laugh. "I could not help it; I was true to you naturally. I turned to you, Mark as the sunflower turns to the sun."

"Oh, my darling, my beautiful love," he said, "you are so much better than I am! You are noble and loyal; I am—oh, Heaven that I should have to say words of myself—I am a coward and a renegade."

"You shall not say such things of yourself!" I cried. "You are Mark Upton, and that in my eyes means all that is most noble."

"Hush, Nellie!" There was pain in his face, anguish in his eyes. "Nellie, I must tell you. Oh, my dear, do not look at me with those loving eyes. Would that I had died before this! My arms must not hold you more, Nellie. My dear, lost love, I am married! Heaven help me, I am married more than a year ago!"

(To Be Continued.)

## THE FOODS WE EAT.

Various Kinds and What They Are Severally Good For.

Nature supplies us with two complete foods, milk and eggs, which contain in the proper proportions all the necessary elements for the sustenance of our bodies. As these are the only complete foods, it is necessary in the absence to have mixed foods, and it is in the mixing that mistakes occur, because the fat forming, muscle forming and other parts are taken in wrong proportions, some in excess and others the reverse. Left to his own taste primitive man invariably selects the best food. This instinct, however, is defective at the present day. For children, food rich in bone forming substances is necessary. Among muscle forming foods the following are the best and most common: Oatmeal porridge, with rich milk and whole-milk bread buttered; meat is a highly condensed food of this class. To men of sedentary occupation a free use of meat is injurious. For men engaged at hard manual labor a generous meat diet is admirable.

Vegetables contain but little nourishment, but are useful as blood purifiers, and also supply bulk to the food which is necessary to give the consumer satisfaction. Milk should never be taken with meat, because they are both rich in substance. Tea should not be taken with meat either, because it renders the meat tough and indigestible. Beef ranks first as a muscle former, and mutton next. Pork makes a very digestible dish, and fowl and bacon are a very useful and palatable dish. Cereals enter largely into our diet, and are of much value, because they supply food or starch as well as muscle food. Potatoes provide little nutriment, but with plenty of milk, which supplies the precise ingredients they lack, a good diet is formed.

Sugar is well worthy of notice, and the child's love of it is a perfectly healthy instinct, and should always be gratified in reason. Fruits are good blood purifiers, and should be considered as essentials rather than luxuries. Beef tea contains scarcely any nutriment whatever, and is almost purely a stimulant. A dog fed on beef tea starved to death, while another fed on refuse meat thrived. Tea, injurious if taken in excess, provides, if taken in moderation, a most refreshing drink. Many scientists recommend its use about two hours before our principal meal, and without food. Coffee is a stimulant, unlike all others, in fact, that it is followed by no reaction. It stimulates the brain, and is called an intellectual drink. Cocoa deserves to be classed as a food.

## CHANGED CONDITIONS.

Is it so that the Truers belong to one of the oldest and best families in the country?

I believe that they have some such pretensions, but the old gentleman got on the wrong side of the wheat market last fall.

## ALL OVER.

Farmer Cornfed—Wa-al, Jesh, is th' milkin' all over?

Josh Cornfed—Reckon it is, doat. Th' ol' cow kicked th' pail 'bout 40 feet. Jest as I'd finished.

## TRUSTING SOUL.

Henry, said the anxious young wife, I heard you muttering in your sleep that you had lost five bones. If you feel that way, dear, why don't you go and see some good osteopath?