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"Flatterers"
—OR—
The Shadow of the Future.

CHAPTER XX.
LADY COMYNGHAM AND MRS. ALWYN UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.

She descended, her still handsome countenance gone into visiting of grave composure; her costume of rich steel satin; ostrich-tips the same hue about her head-gear; a slightly superabundant figure rounded down by a costly Spanish mantle. With perfect gloves, a card case and a silver, her eyeglasses peeped from her bodice, no ornaments save a necklace of superb onyx. Mrs. Alwyn might have passed for a press going to patronize the theatre. Her mirror said as much, and furnished her with self-possession for the expedition. One glance she cast at the liveried groom—at the little carriage—at the pony, and the neatly mounted harness. These passing impressions irrefragably, she took her seat, and her sunshade, with hope beating in her heart, she gave the order. "To Oakleigh."

At that very hour Lady Comyngham was studying a letter received some morning from Lady Avena. It was not the countess's address "at home," so in the absence of well-worn morning costume her dress was deposited on her own small drawing-room sofa, her daughter Margaret and Gertrude posed at the table as she read scraps of their mother's missive.

"Ornamenting-day so fine! Baby looked like a little angel. The girls—Ah! that I read at breakfast. I skipped a piece because of your letter. He's disposed to limit our visit."

ing circle in a way that I tell him can't be done in the country. But he nearly rebelled at our omnium gatharium last summer, and would joke me forever if he found I had taken people up whom now I wanted to drop. He stopped at this bit about Mrs. Alwyn. Here it is, listen, my dear. "One singular thing happened on the christening-day. When I went up from dinner, I had to go for a peep at my boy. As a great treat I gave my maid Lewis leave to go to the nursery and assist in putting him into his bassinet. Imagine my vexation when I saw his beautiful robe, which Mrs. Alwyn sent him, scorching in front of the fire in the night nursery! The lace was ruined. It was Lewis's fault, it appears, and when I reproved her for her carelessness, she broke forth crying violently, and sobbed out that the lace was horrid stuff still through, and she wished it might bring the dear baby ill-luck. Of course I insisted on this being explained, and then she told me that her father had lost all his savings through this Mrs. Alwyn's husband, and that when she had been at St. Clair's with me and seen the style of living at the Dale, she wrote in her mother's name, begging a trifle for the old couple, and got an angry letter back and the noble sum of two-and-sixpence!"

"The cold-blooded creature!" cried Lady Margaret. "Mamma, I never liked that woman! But is Avena sure it's true?"

"Well, hark. 'I quieted Lewis, and I made an opportunity of asking old Lady Wynne about these Alwyns. It seems that years ago they lived near each other, and Mrs. Alwyn, according to Lady Wynne, was a handsome, pushing person, who forced her way into society where she was not so welcome as her husband would have been if he had cared to enter it. He was a lawyer and immensely respected. He was rich too, but after he married his wife gave him no opportunity of saving. And when he failed through some mining catastrophe, Mrs. Alwyn gathered all the valuable together that she could, and decamped with them, and refused to spare one penny of her handsome settlements to save her husband's unlucky creditors from any misery whatever!"


"Horrible woman!" chorused the countess's daughters.

"The Wynnes and every one at Stillcote considered her conduct most grasping, and I assure you, dearest mamma, the notion of being under no obligation to such a person is most painful to me. I felt relieved that the robe was destroyed. I shall let Lewis sell that Machin she gave me and pass the price on to her poor father. I need not say, pray don't let the girls get intimate at the Dale! And, in future, Edward—'Oh! that's all.'"

"And quite enough too, mamma!"

"Yes, annoying, is it not? But it's quite impossible to enter a new neighborhood without making a blunder. We must get over this as civilly as possible, but let Mrs. Alwyn distinctly see we intend no visiting in future."

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which owes a call, my dear—Mrs. Alwyn or myself?"

"You do, mamma. She came a day or two after lunching here."

"Obtrusive, very. However, we go to Scotland in August. Till then we'll take care to see nothing of her—"

The door opened and a footman appeared. "Mrs. Alwyn, my lady."

"Not at—" began the countess. But too late. The soft sweep of the visitor's skirt was on the steps. Mesdames Gertrude and Margaret vanished into an adjacent conservatory. Mrs. Alwyn sailed gracefully into the room, and Lady Comyngham lurched inelegantly from her sofa to receive this undesired guest.

With silent satisfaction Mrs. Alwyn perceived her hostess at a disadvantage. Gauging other person's feelings by her own she attributed to her deshabille the annoyance that swept over the countess's features and proceeded to offer apologies, which she half considered her own due. To be found not bien arrangee after luncheon struck Mrs. Alwyn almost as a sin!

"How exceedingly kind of you, dear Lady Comyngham, to admit me on one of your off-days! I felt sure you would." ("Why?" the countess suddenly stiffened figure seemed to ask.) "Or rather, I hoped you would. I so much wanted to see you."

Then Lady Comyngham, smoothing her crumpled frills, replied, unsmilingly, "that Mrs. Alwyn was very—kind."

"I had been thinking of leaving St. Clair's for a few weeks. The Dale is so relaxing. My daughter requires a more bracing air, but—"

"Ah!" interrupted the countess, with real interest, "one daughter is gone out, I hear." (Mrs. Alwyn flinched. What was coming?) "But not, I think, as you expected when you last spoke of her. Not as a bride?"

"No—oh, dear, no! She is merely away—boldly—on a long visit."

"Not a rupture, engagement, then, I hope," returned the countess, civilly. ("For," as she said to her daughter afterward, "that younger girl was a gentlewoman. I am not ashamed to admit that I liked her.") "I should be sorry to hear of any disappointment to Miss Alwyn. She seemed so radiant when we last met."

"And might have remained so had she taken my advice," replied Mrs. Alwyn, vastly relieved to find no idea of the truth concerning Sydney existed at Oakleigh; "but," going on more confidently, "my younger child is not like my elder, and she must abide by her own independence. Some day, dear Lady Comyngham—but not now—I do so wish to tell you part, at least, of my last month's vexations!" (the countess just bowed, without any appearance of being charmed at the prospect). "To-day it is pleasanter to dwell on my Leonora's trust in her mother. She, dear girl, leaves all things, her closest hopes, in my hands."

"Very becoming," said the countess, dryly.

"And to be very, very frank, it is this confidence my child puts in me which brings me here now."

"Indeed!"

The ejaculation was cold. Mrs. Alwyn felt the ground terribly delicate, the sympathetic atmosphere not exhilarating. She endeavored to impart warmth into the situation by a touch of sentiment, and with her diaphanous square of lawn at her eyes, murmured:

"Mothers will do anything for their children, dear Lady Comyngham."

"Of course they will," answered her ladyship, wondering why in the name of fortune such a truism was launched at her just now.

"And—I was most unfortunately prevented seeing Mr. Duvesne when he called at the Dale." (Her hearers' eyes suddenly shot forth apprehension, then contracted with a dangerous sparkle.) "So when I saw my dear girl anxious, distraite, reluctant to leave St. Clair's, though her health is suffering, I took my resolve for her sake. I said to myself, 'Don't let false delicacy stop you. Elders may set everything right easily.' So I came straight to you."

(To be continued)

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How High Do Birds Fly?

Flocks Seen Two Miles Up.

Some birds, such as larks, finches, buntings, starlings, and thrushes, fly in flocks from one part of the country to another in their partial migrations, and one sometimes sees a great crowd crossing the sea no higher above the level of the water than the rigging of a ship, and looking like a cloud of smoke.

But this is not the way with the majority of migratory birds; most of them fly fairly high. Even wild geese, whose flying phalanx we see so plainly, and hear as well, go north-

ward at a considerable height. Some astronomers have seen birds at night crossing between their telescopes and the moon's disc, and have estimated their elevation at nearly two miles.

The best observations in the past have pointed to the conclusion that it is very unusual for birds to migrate at altitudes greater than 3,000ft., and that they tend to keep below the lowest clouds.

Kestrels in East Africa.

It is not obvious why they should seek to go higher, into levels where it is colder and where it is more difficult to breathe.

Some new evidence has been sub-

mitted by Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, D.S.O., as to the altitude of migratory night. He obtained much information from pilots of aircraft.

On one occasion, when he was himself flying over the southern slopes of Kilimanjaro, in East Africa, he encountered a large, scattered flock of lesser kestrels and bee-eaters making their way north 6,200ft. above the slopes of the hill.

The most striking general result of observation both in the air and from the ground is that flight at anything like 5,000ft. is very unusual, and that the bulk of migratory birds fly below 5,000ft. by day and by night.

There are high-fliers, like lapwings,

geese, cranes, and rooks, and there are low fliers, like swallows and wag-tails, but when the weather is bad, especially when it is cloudy, all birds fly low.

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