

Beautiful Cynthia; OR Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER VII.
AFTER THREE YEARS.

"I dare say you might," she replied, but with a little hesitation. "Aunt Gwen is—rather peculiar," she added, by way of warning. "She is sometimes cross and sharp; it's gout and nature combined; and—and—you mayn't like her; some people don't."

"Oh, I don't care, I'm not afraid," he said. "I'd face a griffin."

Cynthia laughed. "That's what they call her; isn't it a shame?"

At this moment a young man with a pretty girl beside him came toward them. The young man was heavily built, with a stolid face and roughly cut features; he wore his straw hat on the back of his head, which was thrust forward giving him a round-shouldered appearance.

He was looking straight before him with an absent air and a somewhat vacuous expression. This peculiar-looking young man—who, by the way, could never be taken for anything but a gentleman—was Lord Northam, the son and heir of his Grace, the Duke of Torbridge, and the girl beside him was his sister, Lady Alicia. He was also in the South Surrey.

"There's Darrel Frayne," said Lady Alicia, in an undertone, and with a slight blush which increased her prettiness, for she was a blonde with china-blue eyes and delicately cut features.

Lord Northam did not hear her, and plodded on with his absent-minded air, and when she gave him a nudge and repeated her information he seemed to awake slowly, and looked round him laboriously.

"There, you stupid!" she said, rather sharply; "talking to that girl on the horse."

"Oh, ah, yes," he said, slowly and heavily. "Duced pretty girl, duced pretty!"

He clutched at his hat and raised it clumsily, and would have passed on, but Lady Alicia laid her hand on his arm and stopped in front of the pair.

Darrel turned and greeted the brother and sister, but with no great heartiness. For, you see, they were interrupting his tete-a-tete with his old pal and playmate.

"How do you do, Lady Alicia; how

"The Only Cure for Piles"

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are you, Northam?" he said, hoping that they would go on their way, but Lady Alicia held out her hand, and looked, with a smile, at Cynthia; and, of course, he had to introduce them to Cynthia, who said, in the sweetest of voices:

"I am so glad to know you, Miss Drayle, for I have been admiring your horse for the last five minutes—and you, if you will allow me to say so."

To this candid avowal Cynthia could only bow and smile. Her gray, and sometimes painfully candid eyes had, with a woman's comprehensive acuteness, scanned Lady Alicia's fair and pretty face; and, somehow or other, she was not at first sight pleasantly impressed by it, notwithstanding that it was indeed a very pretty face and that the eyes were as blue and apparently as innocent as those of a child; perhaps it was a certain downward curve of Lady Alicia's cupidlike lips which failed to gain our fastidious Cynthia's liking.

Lord Northam leaned upon his heavy stick, his prominent blue eyes glued on Cynthia's face; he looked like a waxwork figure waiting for the showman to wind him up and set him going.

"Jolly horse you've got," he said at last slowly, and as if with difficulty.

"Isn't she?" responded Cynthia. "I am very fond of her; but she's rather troublesome sometimes, and is apt to bolt."

"Ride her with an india-rubber bit," he said laconically.

"Lord Northam is great on horses," said Darrel, in an explanatory fashion.

"Most interestin' things they are," remarked Lord Northam, who cut his eye, not because it was the fashion to do so, but because speech was always a trouble to him, and he economized in it as much as possible.

"More than men and women?" asked Cynthia, with a smile.

"You don't know where you are with men and women," replied Lord Northam, "but you do with horses." He called them "osses."

"Where are you staying, Mr. Frayne?" asked Alicia.

"In my old rooms in Duke Street," replied Darrel. "I'm keeping them on. You see, I shall be so much in town."

Lady Alicia nodded, appeared to consider for a moment, then said with a bright smile all round:

"Will you come and dine with us at the Savoy one evening? Say Tuesday. I hope you will join us, Miss Drayle?"

"Thank you very much, but I don't know whether I may," said Cynthia wistfully. "I must ask my aunt, Lady Westlake."

"Well, come if you can," said Lady Alicia, with a laugh. "Tell her I am chaperoning you."

With a nod of farewell she roused her brother, whose eyes had never left Cynthia's face, and they went on.

"What a pretty girl, and what an odd man!" said Cynthia, as she looked after them.

"Yes; she is rather pretty," asserted Darrel. "And Northam is all right. He's a decent chap, but he's always got his head in the clouds; it takes a charge of dynamite to move him. He takes after his father, the Duke. They call him—the duke, I mean—the Sheep, because he's—well, just like Northam. But Northam is not such a fool as he looks. He's a rattling good soldier in a stodgy kind of way—he's in my regiment you know; captain. I say," he went on eagerly, "do you think Lady Westlake will let you dine at the Savoy, Cynthia?"

"I don't know," replied Cynthia doubtfully. "You'd better ask her—that is," with a blush, "if you want—I mean—"

"I'll ask her right enough," he said promptly. "Oh, Cynthia, I hope we shall see a great deal of each other. I can't tell you how glad I am to have met you! It sort of brings back old times and all that. Do you remember the day you climbed the beech



tree by the river and nearly fell off into the water?"

Cynthia laughed, and her eyes rested on him a trifle shyly; for those days were long ago, and a great change had taken place since then.

"I must be going," she said. "Aunt does not like my being in late for lunch; besides, Polly won't stand another minute; she'll bolt, and I shall have the policeman after me."

"I shall call this afternoon," he said, holding her hand and pressing it.

"Oh—well!" she responded, with the shrug of the shoulders he remembered so well.

He stood and looked after her until she had turned a bend in the road.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GRIFFIN.

Cynthia fortunately arrived in time for lunch, though not in time to change her habit. She waited until Lady Westlake had got through a couple of plover's eggs and a sole—or she knew that the Griffin was not approached until she was fed—before he said:

"I met an old friend in the Park, Aunt Gwen—Darrel Frayne. Perhaps you may remember him, he was with me the day you drove to Summerleigh in the Dursley fly."

"I remember him very well," said the Griffin sharply; "but that's no reason why you should dock him of his 'Mr.'"

"I've known him ever since I was a child," pleaded Cynthia.

"You're no longer a child, but a young woman," retorted her ladyship; therefore be good enough to give him his prefix. I hate this modern habit of calling every man by his simple name; it's vulgar and bad form, and only permitted to the lower orders. Remember that for the future, please, Frayne? I suppose he's the son of Mr. Anson Frayne, of Summerleigh Court?"

"Yes," said Cynthia. "He's going to all on you this afternoon, Aunt Gwen."

"Oh, is he," grimly. "Frayne. It used to be a good property. This young man is the only child, is he? Well, I'll see him."

Cynthia went upstairs after lunch, her heart beating gayly. It was nice to have met Darrel again; how handsome he looked. How well his light suit became him; and he was just like his old self; and he was a soldier. She had always admired soldiers. And he was pleased to see her; oh, yes, he was just the same.

"I will wear my prettiest frock, Parsons," she said brightly. "An old friend is going to call this afternoon; an old friend I haven't seen for some time. My hair is full of dust; would you mind brushing it out for me?"

Parsons did not mind in the least; indeed, was delighted to do so.

Cynthia hummed during the operation, and went down to the drawing-room, perhaps a little conscious that she was looking her best.

It seemed a long while till four o'clock, and though she tried to occupy the time with a book, it is to be feared that the unfortunate author received but little attention. Fortunately for himself, Darrel did not arrive until the Griffin had had her afternoon slumber.

He had been wise enough to come in full fig; frock coat, patent boots, a dazzling shining hat, the whole afternoon kit complete. Lady Gwen received him in an attitude of armed neutrality, and extended two fingers as she surveyed him from top to toe with an unmasked scrutiny.

"Oh, so you're Darrel Frayne, are you?"—it appeared that she considered herself privileged to drop the prefix. "I met your father some years ago, when I was a girl. I've an idea that he was one of the men who proposed to me; but I am not sure; there were so many. And pray, what are you doing?"

"I'm in the service," replied Darrel, with a touch of pride, which caused the Griffin to show her teeth in an ironical smile.

"What do you mean—army, navy, or just a clerk in the civil service?"

"I'm in the army," replied Darrel; "in the South Surrey."

"A walking regiment," commented her ladyship, with a sniff. "Well, it will keep you out of mischief, I hope. And your family was always fond of mischief, if I remember rightly."

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