

Aware that she would not be able to secure many sittings, Celia rose early the following morning, and worked hard at her sketch till the bell in the turret above the porch summoned her to the breakfast-table.

She had to take that meal alone, Lady Mary's maid appearing with an apology.

Her mistress had spent the greater part of the night in attendance upon her daughter, who had been seized with one of the nervous attacks to which she was unfortunately subject.

Celia expressed the proper amount of regret, but in her heart she was not sorry to be spared the necessity of sitting stiffly upright and saying "yes" and "no" to Lady Mary's few remarks. Left alone, she was free to lounge over her coffee, reading Hartley's letter, or pressing it to her lips, or lingering with tender smiles and blushes over some passionate expression of vexation that the affairs of other men should keep him away from her.

But the weather forecasts presaged a change. She must make the most of this sunny morning if she would finish her sketch of granny Werner; and away she went in haste, to find, as before, Rose Raymer in the cottage with the old woman.

Again the girl fled at her approach, but not quickly enough to prevent Celia descrying that her pale, sad, but very beautiful face, was bathed in tears.

She was evidently in great trouble. Might it not be possible to befriend her? Hartley More was rich and generous, and though this cottage was not on his estate, his betrothed felt certain that he would readily listen to her entreaties and assist its inmates.

As soon, therefore, as an opportunity presented, she laid down her brushes, and leaning over the old woman, asked her the cause of Rose Raymer's distress.

Granny was more deaf than usual this morning, and it was some time before she could be made to understand the drift of these questions. When she did, she began to eye the young lady suspiciously.

"Who be you that asks me about Rose's trouble? Be you that proud sister of his that bid me mind" (remember) "who she was, and that I was little better than a pauper?"

"My name is Anstey," Celia told her, "and I am staying at Morewood Hall."

"Then you're in a bad place, and along wi' a bad lot!" was the astounding response. "Don't tell me that because the squire's a gentleman and Rose only a poor man's lass, he ain't bound by he promises he's made her! She's a good girl, and a modest one, and he's no right to break her heart that he may marry some one else!"

"Hartley More has not done this!" cried Celia, indignantly. "He is incapable of such baseness!"

"But he has done it," retorted the old woman, striking the ground with her crutch-stick. "Every one in and about the place knows how he has come, night after night, courting Rose Raymer, and promising to make her his wedded wife. The more shame to him for deserting her as soon as another as was prettier and better off came in his way."

Celia clasped her hands across her brow, bewildered and horrified. Could there be any truth in this story? Was it his dread lest it should reach her ears that made Hartley object to her visiting the cottage? Was it this same reason that prompted the housekeeper to throw obstacles in the way?

Again she bent over the old woman, who was was crossly muttering to herself.

"Is this true that you are telling me?—true that Hartley More has led Rose Raymer to believe that she should be his wife?"

"True as gospel!" replied the old woman emphatically; and Celia waited to hear no more.

Haunted, goaded by the woeful looks of the unhappy girl, whose history she had just heard, she fled the cottage.

But where should she go? Not back to the Hall. Never more would she cross its threshold. To her aunt's? Ah, what a tale to pour into their ears! Hartley false—false!—a traitor! a deceiver!

She shrieked; for here he came, his eyes sparkling with joy, his arms extended to clasp her, his loved voice breathing her name.

What followed Celia never could remember distinctly. She knew she wildly repulsed him, taxed him with his cruelty to Rose, and tried to snatch off her engagement-ring as she bade him farewell for ever.

There was a blank, and then she found herself on a couch in the library at the Hall, with Lady Mary beside her.

"Lie still, my love," said her ladyship, tenderly. "Hartley, who brought you here, tells me granny Werner has shocked you with one of her gossiping revelations, and forgotten to warn you that this sad story happened fifty years ago. The heroine of it drowned herself in her despair. I am sorry to say that the hero of it was my Hartley's grandfather."

"But I saw Rose Raymer at the cottage!"

Lady Mary smiled.

"Yes, there are half-a-dozen families of Raymers in this neighborhood, and Rose is a favorite name with them. The girl you saw used to be one of my housemaids, and left to be married, but so irritated her intended with her coquetry, that he enlisted, and has just gone with his regiment to Bombay. Now he is lost to her she is broken-hearted, and as Granny's mind is weakened by age, she confuses this Rose with the one who used to be her schoolfellow and friend. And now I suppose I may admit Hartley, who is pacing the hall almost distracted at the length of your swoon, and the terrible charges you have brought against him."

So saying, Lady Mary discreetly retired, and the next moment Celia—all her faith in him restored—was weeping joyful tears on her lover's breast.

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