

EVA HUNTINGDON.

BY R. E. M.

CHAPTER VII.

We left Eva rejoicing in the prospect of Mr. Arlingford's speedy arrival, nor were her expectations unfounded; for about two hours after her brother's departure, she received a summons to the drawing-room. Joyfully she bounded down the stairs, but the sudden recollection that her mother would probably be also there, checked her rapid pace. As she entered, she timidly glanced around, but Mr. Arlingford was standing alone beside the window. That was enough, and with her first joyful eagerness she sprang towards him. He welcomed her with a cordiality equalling her own, and after she had replied to his enquiries concerning her health, and that of the other members of the family, she earnestly exclaimed:

"You cannot imagine, Mr. Arlingford, how happy I am to see you again. Oh! how long the time has appeared since your departure. How I have counted each day, each hour, to the present moment."

"Have you, indeed, my gentle child?" he returned, still retaining the two hands she had placed in his. "Well; I too have often thought of you since."

"Often than you have thought of any one else?" she asked.

"Yes, indeed; but why do you ask that?" and he smiled at the expression of childish anxiety that passed over her features as she spoke.

"Because I am vain and selfish," she sighed.

"Because I would feel the weight of my own inferiority, my own deficiencies, less overwhelming, were I assured that one single individual overlooked them. Here, every one looks down on me. My parents, my brother, Mrs. Wentworth—even the very servants. Judge, then, what happiness it would afford me, to think that you, who are looked up to, respected by all, should bestow even a second thought on me; but, hush! here is mamma," and Eva sprang to a seat, her countenance, her whole frame, immediately regaining the inanimate rigidity she had already insensibly learned to assume in the presence of her mother.

With a slight nod to her daughter, lady Huntingdon turned to Mr. Arlingford, and welcomed him with all the cordiality the benefactor of her son deserved, whilst Eva, no longer finding any enjoyment in the society of her friend, left the room under the plea of returning to her tasks. That day, lord and lady Huntingdon were seated together in the small apartment adjoining the library; and Eva's evil star prompted Mrs. Wentworth to send her pupil to devote an hour to the study of a couple of ponderous historical tomes, whose unwieldiness rendered their frequent removal from the library very inconvenient. Whilst she was pondering over the book, her clear, active spirit, seizing with wonderful fidelity, every incident, every circumstance, of which her lecture treated, her attention was attracted by hearing her own name pronounced by her father, in tones of unusual energy.

"I tell you, Isabel, I neither can nor will be bored with Eva, this winter, in London. Of course we shall have that young puppy Augustus and his dogs, which are as ill bred and unmannerly as himself, quartered upon us, turning the whole establishment into a perpetual scene of confusion and uproar; and he pestering me continually, with daily applications for money. That will be about as much annoyance as any man can be reasonably expected to bear."

"It seems to me, my lord, that you are over bitter against your son," rejoined lady Huntingdon, who, as well as her husband, was totally unconscious of their daughter's close proximity. "Reckless, extravagant, he may be; but he has gifts that doubly, trebly redeem such boyish follies. If he is occasionally a source of anxiety, is he not at all times a source of pride? I speak not of his faultless face and figure, but of his noble, manly spirit, of the high bred, aristocratic manners, that have already stamped him as one of the most elegant young men of our London coteries."

"Very fine; but permit me to remind your ladyship, that the manners you have just so highly eulogized, are something like your own oft acknowledged powers of fascination, reserved entirely for