

Beautiful Cynthia;

Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER VI
IN SILK ATTIRE.

"He's only a boy," said Cynthia, in common justice.

Her ladyship grinned maliciously. "Villains are made when they're young, my girl; in fact, they are born so." She was silent for a moment. Then she said meditatively:

"His father, Spencer, is the best of a bad lot; for he's an open scoundrel and ruffian, and doesn't wear a mask; perhaps he is too much of a fool to do so."

She mused again, then with a movement of irritation she burst out with: "Goodness, child, don't stand there staring at me like a Gorgon! Here, go and find Parsons and tell her to take you somewhere, to a circus, if there is such a thing; she'll know there. Go, go!"

Later in the afternoon, Percy, having distinguished himself at the Young Men's Philosophical Society went slowly to the parental home.

It was one of the smallest and dingiest of houses in the square; in fact, it was just round the corner of a street leading out of it, but he and his father always gave their address as Eaton Square.

He let himself in with a latchkey went down a narrow passage, and opened the door of a room. The scent of a strong cigar issued out to meet him. Wherever Lord Spencer was

there also were the acrid fumes of a strong cigar, and generally an odor of equally strong whiskey.

His lordship was reclining on an old and battered sofa; he was in his shirt sleeves, he wore breeches and garters, and held a sporting paper in his hand.

He looked across between a respectable groom and a trainer. He had once been handsome and was still good-looking, but a long course of strong cigars and equally strong spirits had told upon the human face divine and bestowed upon it a dissolute appearance.

He turned over on his side as his son entered yawned and said:

"You're back then, Percy. Been to see the old Griffin? All teeth and claws, I suppose, as usual. Had your

lunch, I suppose? By George, and paid for it, I should imagine! I would rather take a meal along with a shrew than with the Griffin."

"Aunt Gwen was not alone," said Percy, going to the window and looking out at the view with a thoughtful and serious air. "There was a young girl there, Cynthia Drayle."

"Cynthia Drayle?" said Lord Spencer, with another yawn. "Drayle! That must be Emily's child. What's she like, Percy?"

"Rather a nice sort of girl," replied Percy, in the tone of one addressing an equal in age. "She's pretty, but—er—er—quite rough and uncouth."

"She would be," commented Lord Spencer musingly. "Emily married beneath her, I believe. She's come on a visit, I suppose?"

"No; she has come to stay," said Percy quietly.

Lord Spencer swung his legs from the sofa and sat bolt upright.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say—you don't mean to tell me that the old Griffin has adopted her? Percy, this is serious! This will put your nose out of joint, my boy. Why, this beastly girl will come between you and the old woman's money! The old harridan! She has done it to spite us. By George, Percy you'll have to look out!"

A faint smile curled the lad's lips and his eyebrows went up.

"Yes, I shall have to look out, sir," he said, with such significance, with such a cold-blooded, evil expression in his light eyes, that his father stared at him and continued to stare until Percy sauntered from the window and out of the room.

CHAPTER VII
AFTER THREE YEARS.

One morning some three years later a young girl ran down the broad stairs of Lady Westlake's house in Belgrave Square.

She wore a perfectly fitting riding habit, a regulation bowler hat, and carried a gold-mounted and jeweled whip in her hand. She looked radiant, and she hummed the air of the latest in drawing-room ballads.

From the corridor above Parsons glanced over and looked at her with a loving air of worship and proprietorship, as if she had made her.

It was difficult to recognize, in this glorious specimen of young womanhood, the Cynthia Drayle who had sobbed her way to London as Lady Westlake's ward.

But Time works wonders, especially when such a person as her ladyship has the control of it. Prompted by a sneaking and reluctant fondness for the girl and pride in her beauty and grace, or by a desire to spite and exasperate the Spencer Standishes, Lady Westlake had certainly carried out the promise she had made to Cynthia's father, and had given to Cynthia all those advantages which fall to the lot of a girl of rank and position.

Cynthia had had rather a strenuous time of it; Lady Westlake did not approve of boarding schools, even of the most aristocratic and exclusive kind and, therefore, masters had been engaged to educate the girl in accordance with her ladyship's views.

To general knowledge the Griffiths attached little or no importance.

"It doesn't matter how badly a lady spells," she had informed Cynthia, "so that she can say what she wants to say, and say it like a lady. History and geography and all the other kinds of things they teach the lower classes in the board schools are of no earthly consequence to you. What does it matter what happened hundreds of years ago? It's what is taking place to-day concerns us. And as to geography, who cares where a place is? you go to those absurd people, Cooks, they find out the place, and give you a ticket. I know nothing of these things; but I have been able to hold my own in the world, and so will you. As a rule, men hate



clever, well-educated girls. They are afraid of them, and small blame to 'em. No; what they want for a wife is a girl who can play the piano, talk French, sit a horse as a lady should, preside at the dinner table, and talk commonplace. An intellectual woman is out of it. Men, who are mostly fools, don't want to spend their lives in the company of a superior mind. The maternal woman is out of it, too, though two or three foolish mothers have tried to set the fashion of babies, and brought them into evidence. You can hire a superior nurse, who has gone through a proper training and knows all about children, and you leave them to her, and don't neglect your husband and your friends, and get dowdy and slipshod as the old-fashioned, early Victorian and extremely stupid wife used to do."

So, as Cynthia had no choice in the matter, she devoted herself to music, dancing, French, and riding; and strange to say, she did very well. For she had inherited her father's intelligence, and was suddenly awakened to an eagerness to take advantage of the opportunities offered her; she was

also quick to take the tone of her surroundings. And half unconsciously she caught the intonation of voice, the little mannerisms of the aristocratic set to which Lady Westlake belonged.

For instance, she, who was one of the most restless of girls by nature, had acquired the art of standing and sitting still; an art which sounds easy enough unless you have achieved it by practice, or it has come to you by birth and breeding.

During the three years Cynthia had seen her father two or three times. She had paid one visit to Summerleigh, and it must be confessed that she would have found it dull but for her father. Darrel was away.

The place seemed half asleep compared with the rush and ceaseless stir of London; there was nothing to do and she missed the visits of her various professors.

Once or twice her father had come up to see her in Belgrave Square, but his visits had been short—ones of a few hours only. He had borne himself with the ease and self-possession which never deserted him, and Lady Westlake had treated him with a kind of amused and tolerant respect; but he hated the life of Belgrave Square and soon set off on his roamings again.

However, he approved of all that had been done for Cynthia, and was grateful.

"It's all going smoothly, my dear Cynthia," he told her. "They are making a young lady of you, and I rather fancy they will turn out quite a superior article. They are doing what I should never have been able to do, and what it is only right I should have done for you; for, after all, you are your mother's child and belong to these people. But, look here, Cynthia, don't let them polish and polish away until there's no heart in you; there's

nothing to be something behind a fine lady, and that's the woman."

At this, Cynthia had thrown her arms round her father's neck and hugged him in the old fashion, so that Bradley Drayle had gone away satisfied.

Of Darrel Frayne, her old comrade and playmate, Cynthia had seen and heard nothing—he had been at Sandhurst when she went down to Summerleigh—but she thought of him often. Indeed, the old times she had spent with him were still vivid and precious in her memory.

The other youth, Percy Standish, she saw frequently; he was at Oxford now, quite a promising light there, and paid frequent visits to Belgrave Square during the vacations. He had grown into a handsome and striking looking young man, his voice was softer, and, if anything, more musical, and his manner as polished and ingratiating as ever.

Though Lady Westlake treated him with sarcastic tolerance and spared him no gibe or taunt, she allowed him the run of the house, and Percy met her insolence with his old bland equanimity, and was careful not to forfeit his privileges.

He expressed a profound admiration for Cynthia and paid her devoted attention, and the old Griffin looked on him with an amused grin, which she did not take the trouble to conceal.

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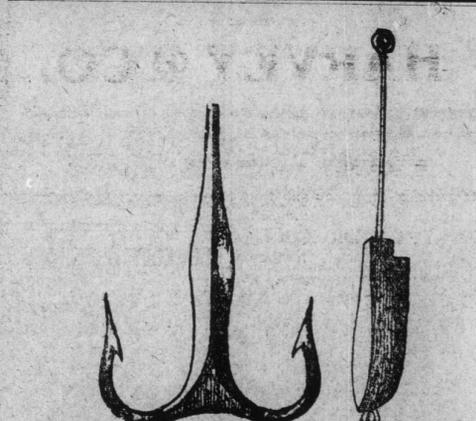
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