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EVA HUNTINGDON.*

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CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER the first brief words of startled recognition that had passed between Eva and Mr. Arlingford, the latter silently approached an open window, pausing a while beside it, probably to give Eva time to recover herself; or, it may have been, that his agitation equalled her own. At length, however, he approached her, and as he leaned beside her with folded arms, he asked:

"Who is this Chester, Eva, and where would you have gone with him?"

The girl hushed her sobs, but she could not speak. Arlingford continued:

"You need not tell me—I know all. The man to whom your solemn vows would have been plighted in another hour, whose wife you would have been, beyond the power of recall, is a profligate gambler, and worse than that, a cold and heartless villain, who has sought and won you, not for yourself alone, but for the wealth he imagines you possess. Oh! Eva, Eva! you have erred for one who would have ill repaid your blind devotion!"

Maddened by this new and torturing pang, the terrible doubt of Rockingham's truth, Eva replied with a passionate vehemence, the offspring of her agonized despair:

"Yes, Mr. Arlingford, I have fearfully erred, but 'tis not for you—you, whose silence and neglect, united with the cruelty of others, have driven me to it, to reproach me with my fault. In the hour of my bitter, desolate need, you failed me; why wonder then, that I turned to Chester

Rockingham for the help and solace I had sought in vain elsewhere."

"Then, Eva, you turned to a frail and false support, indeed; but listen to me—I came not here to taunt or reproach, but to save you. You blame me for indifference, neglect. Your accusation is unjust, cruelly unjust. When your letter arrived at Arlingford Lodge I was absent, but on my return, the instant I had perused it, even though grave and weighty business rendered my stay imperatively necessary, though my relative lay on a sick, I might say, a dying bed, I delayed not a moment, but unrested and unrefreshed, set out at once for Huntingdon Hall. I might speak here of the want of frankness, the half-confidence displayed in a letter, that long, voluminous as it was, contained no mention whatever of your friend and lover, Chester Rockingham; but much and deeply as it has wounded me, 'tis a thing with which I have really no right to reproach you. Your secrets are your own. As I told you, I set out at once, travelling night and day, and harassed unceasingly by fears lest I should arrive too late. The second night of the journey, which was rainy and dark, I was alone in the stage, when it stopped about midnight, and two young men, whose voice and language bespoke them of the better class, entered. Either fancying me asleep, or not perceiving me, as I sat enveloped in my cloak in a dark corner, they continued conversing together with perfect freedom and unconcern. The name of 'Chester Rockingham' was mentioned, but I heeded it not. I know him, indeed, by report, as a worthless, contemptible character—one, tolerated

* Continued from page 296.