

Grand Alliance; Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER XXII.

Perhaps this struck Mr. Drayton for he shook hands with her warmly, and then, having picked up her rake and hoe, shook hands again, remarking that he would have come on the night before, but had arrived too late, so he took time by the forelock to-day.

"We—my father will be very pleased to see you," said Mary, leading the way in with another blush. "He was wondering last week, if we should ever see you again."

"See me! Why, of course you would. I wanted very much indeed to get here. For, Miss Dacie, I am hoping you can tell me something of your friends at The Dale—of Miss Alwyn, especially."

The bright color left Mary's cheeks with a chill rush. To hear of Sydney he had come. Only that!

"I can tell no more than that she is gone," she said, thankful that on such a theme she might be pardoned sadness.

"And you can't help grieving over it, can you?"

"Indeed, no," turning her head away.

"And I'm sorry too. On your account—he was staring determinedly at her, but Mary kept her face invisible—"and her's too, and—my own. I'd have given a good deal to have found her here. Can't you possibly do us all a good turn by putting me on the track to see her?"

"If I could I would, Mr. Drayton (it cost something, that assertion)—"but I have no knowledge of where she is."

"Nor her mother?"

"Mrs. Alwyn was at Zurich a month ago."

"Zurich. H'm! It will be a round-about road if I have to trace her from there. But one or the other I must see. Propriety says Mrs. Alwyn. Preference says Miss. The lady mother and I seemed mutually repellent; while Miss Sydney—Mary swallowed a great heartburning during that pause—she would answer the question I have to put in a moment. You'll give me your good wishes to speed me to her, won't you, Miss Dacie?"

By good fortune in came the doctor and Mrs. Dacie just then. With a murmur of affirmation Mary escaped to the other end of the tidy, shabby room, and busied herself with mending, while the father and mother chatted with their caller.

Of course they had presently their say about the Alwyns, and Mrs. Dacie reiterated her belief that it was an affair of the affections which drove Sydney away—"affection on one side, Mr. Drayton, not here! I'm confident our dear Sydney would choose differently. I'm not a conjurer, but I fancy I know where! Though, perhaps, that's hardly fair, is it?"

But the gentleman was deaf to these last words and their innuendo. Mary had just slipped quietly out of the room, and he expressed a hope that he had not interrupted Miss Dacie by coming so early.

"Oh, no! my daughter is not often long with us in the morning, unless," said poor Mrs. Dacie, half humbled, half proud, at the admission—"unless we mean to go without our dinner."

NO ALUM



Don't frown at me, doctor dear! Mr. Drayton knows quite well we are not rich, and that Mary is a daughter of all work."

Possibly the doctor, dreaded more domestic revelations, for hereat, with an apology, he said he must be starting on his round; it was not a long one, but it took him a good while to walk; and he, explained elaborately to the visitor, who volunteered to go with him and lend him an arm, how Punch being defunct they had made up their minds, for various reasons, not to replace him at present. Between the lines of which Mr. Drayton read the truth pretty plainly, and had his deduction confirmed when, the three-mile trudge over, they again neared the Gate House.

For Mary hastened to meet them, exclaiming, "Oh, papa! have you seen the man from Oakleigh Place? No? Ah, then he is gone on to Doctor McAndrew! You were wanted to attend the housekeeper. If only you had had poor Punch, now, you would have been back in time. Isn't it unlucky?"

"As usual," said the poor old supplanter medicus, rather bitterly; and Mr. Drayton left them, to mature a fine design just planted in his brain.

He took another walk by himself that afternoon, and admitted its aim that evening to the rector.

"Your parish spreads so far, sir, you ought to have a good cob for the cutting parts. I looked out such an animal as would suit you to-day at the farm up the road, where you like the people."

"Hammerton's? Ay, they are good folks, and have excellent cattle. But, friend Richard, such a luxury means money; and I've not enough to spare for that. Besides, my exercise would never keep the creature in health."

"Just so, sir. But there's Doctor Dacie killing himself, and losing his patients, for want of a quadruped. Couldn't you and he keep a cob between you? I'll leave you to settle terms (without mentioning me, though, please), but the fact is, I've bought that brown nag of Hammerton's, and I want to get it into the Dacies' stable somehow. I know Miss Alwyn would have managed it. You won't refuse the office in her stead, will you, sir?"

So the upshot of that device was that a few hours after Mr. Drayton left St. Clair's next day ("I'd much rather have stayed longer," he assured Mary; "but I really do so want to find Miss Alwyn. I hope I shall return, with her leave, and tell you what she and I had to talk about before long") a serviceable steed was discovered crunching oats in Punch's manger, and for the present Mr. Vaughan had to carry off his share of the guilty secret as best he could, determining to make a clean breast of the conspiracy the very next time Mr. Drayton came down.

But, they all seemed vaguely to expect him soon, the year wore out without his reappearing. A note reached the Gate House early in October, saying:

"Dear Miss Dacie.—Shortly after leaving St. Clair's I met the Major Villiers whom I had once seen there. By his assistance I was put in the way of obtaining information which I hinted at to you. Unfortunately, I have not had the pleasure of seeing Miss Alwyn at present. I thought you might be expecting to hear this, which is all I feel myself as yet free to communicate. Kindly accept my best regards, and believe me, very faithfully yours,

"RICHARD DRAYTON."

Whatever did it mean? Had he, through her former guardian, offered himself to Sydney and been rejected? Impossible! Was there to be a private engagement? Why, what for? And yet what else could this semi-confidence betoken? Mary read her note fifty times, surreptitiously cried over it; then, in a rage at her weakness, nearly burned it. Relented, hid it in an innermost drawer, took it out and looked at it at night; and continually, with some reason may be called herself for her pains the very biggest goose, or any other emblem of absurdity, that ever stepped!

CHAPTER XXIII.

That September evening when Sydney went back from Stillcote-Upton to Capel Moor, so grateful had she felt at the manifest desire for her return that she would willingly have taken double duties on herself for Jean Hurst or for her brother. But in one direction this impulse had not only met no response, but was steadily repelled. A curious change came over Mr. Hurst's bearing toward her. He had been always grave, reserved, save when he warmed up to some subject under study, or on those notable occasions when he talked with Sydney on their early morning and homeward walks together. Still, there had been a brightening in all his aspects as the hours he evidently enjoyed came round, and Sydney's apt questionings and pertinent calls upon the wealth his splendid memory held roused him unfailingly to cheerful activity, if not positively active cheerfulness.

Now this was altered. As unobtrusively but completely as when between eve and dawn myriads of silent snow-flakes spread a white shroud over the living earth, so some spell was cast over these signs of reawakening interest in existence. The books began before were finished, certainly, and not a shade of his usual attention of thanks did Mr. Hurst remit. A chair would be always placed for his interpreter of pages, in warmth and light between fire and window, though he, no longer seated near, would listen, shoulder up against the book-case, as far off as the room permitted. The volumes needed would be relayed for Sydney, he trained his touch to that task without taxing Jean's assistance. Punctilious he grew that Miss Grey should not read on into the hour allotted to her midday walk. But the zest their occupation had seemed acquiring had somehow died down. When Sydney had tried to win it back, reading her very best, her mind set keenly on her work, her reward was curious. Mr. Hurst would for two or even three days break through the routine, and betake himself to the river-side, leaving her mornings purposeless and void. And if she halted to have knotty points disentangled, she was not answered at once by a clear *viva voce* explanation, but referred, more politely but coldly, to some authority among the tomes hard by.

Herein was something amiss, Sydney divined. The fervor of her helpfulness was damped. Wistfully she waited, hoping every day the cloud would go by. Forbidden by instinct as by position to seek the cause of the change, never had she felt so much the stranger in the strange land as now, and she was even thankful when Miss Hurst volunteered her private opinion on the matter, wide of the mark though it might be. They were sitting, one October afternoon, in the drawing-room that looked east up the long room. Sydney had used her undusted leisure, to write a letter, which was to reach Mary Dacie via Paris, where Mrs. Alwyn sojourned; and she now assisted Miss Jean to wind off links

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of Welsh wool, casting from time to time a glance through the opposite west window toward the orchard, where Mr. Hurst's tall form passed and repassed on the nearer side of the fruit-bereft boughs.

Miss Hurst followed one glance, and smiled sagaciously.

"My brother is not quite so wedded to his beloved 'ologies' as he was," observed, mild exultation in her tone. "I thought it was a wonder is that incessant listening did not wear itself out soon. I must say I am glad it has."

"Oh, why?" Sydney could not forbear asking—"You seemed so gratified that Mr. Hurst should get back to his old pursuits."

"So I was. I thought it a very good thing, in moderation. But lately, Miss Grey, I was getting jealous. Not of you—oh, no, no!" laughing, for Sydney opened such an astonished pair of eyes—"not that, the least; but jealous of all those clever things I can't enter into. I was afraid he would get wrapped up in them, and presently grudge such a dunce as me any of his company. You see, Miss Grey, I have no one but him, now, to lean to. The more dependent on me he is, the more I feel him my very own. Whatever came between us, whether it was a person or a thing, I couldn't help hating!"—stopping to wipe away a tear.

"I don't think," said Sydney, comfortingly, "you need fear anything at all of that sort."

"No? Well, I flatter myself you are right, Miss Grey. You see how ready he is to get off his reading now, and you must be so glad of the rest, so—not heeding a negative shake of the head—"we are all satisfied. For," moralized Miss Hurst, sagely, "the very best of books can not completely satisfy a man's wants. No books, for instance, can talk to Gilbert as I can! And it's a great comfort to me to find he realizes this. Have you not noticed lately how much less he seems to care for 'remains,' and 'roofs,' and goodness knows what stuff? And how often he'll turn the conversation to the apples or the weather, or something he knows I feel an interest in? And have you observed how often he says, now, 'Are you not coming to sit down, Jean? Don't be long away. Science and art are all very well, but they're not a man's sister, Miss Grey. Honestly, I rejoice at poor dear Gilbert's finding out it is me he wants most of all!'"

(To be continued.)

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