

GRANTLEY MANOR

A TALE

LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON, Author of "Lady Bird," "Ellen Middleton," &c

CHAPTER IX.

"Oh no, to be sure, Miss, it is all custom; and many foreign customs we shall have to put up with here, no doubt perhaps we may all have to walk out without our bonnet soon, for they say the Colonel is so partial to Miss Ginevra, that she will have every thing her own way before long."

Margaret's cheek was very much flushed at that moment whether it was that she was stooping over the fire lacking a very tight boot, or that her pride was stung to the quick at finding that her father's preference for her sister was noticed and commented upon even by the household. In a voice that betrayed irritation, she replied—

"I really must request, Grace, that you do not make remarks of that sort in future. They are unbecoming in you, and very disagreeable to me."

Grace, who was about the same age as her mistress, and nearly as much spoiled had no notion of being snubbed in this manner, and began to justify herself in a tone of mingled anger and plaintiveness.

"Indeed, Miss, as to making any disagreeable remarks, it is the last thing I ever think of doing; but I am much attached to you, and I have been many years in the family, and I cannot bear to think of your being put upon or cut out in any way; and when I heard it said you would be put on the shelf, and your youngest sister, a foreigner and a Papist, too, be set up above us all; it went hard with me."

"You really forget yourself, Grace," interrupted Margaret, indignantly. "I cannot suffer such things to be said to me."

"Very well, Miss—very well," murmured Grace, with a look of much resignation. "I will not say another word; no, not if the grass was to be cut from under your feet, or the very bed taken from under you; no not if Miss Ginevra was to set her cap at Mr. Neville, which she is very likely to do—for Mrs. Henderson says there never was a gentleman yet she did not make fall in love with her; and she was walking home with him yesterday; when they passed before the woodman's cottage, and when they came near to the park gate, she turned one way, and he another. But I don't care; it does not signify."

"I won't say another word, though she were to be married before you, and you had to be her bridesmaid."

At this climax Grace burst into tears, and Margaret desired her to leave the room.

Like a flash of summer lightning on a cloudy sky, that last idea crossed the gloomy forebodings of the anxious girl, and a train of joyful anticipation followed in its track. The more she dwelt upon it, the more probable it appeared.

Guileless as a child, and open as the day, she could with difficulty attribute evil motives to others, and in the warmth of her own affection, she reckoned on theirs, and was now ready to fly to her sister's feet, confess her suspicions, and implore her forgiveness for having in her secret thoughts unjustly accused her.

Under this impression her manner to Ginevra was still more affectionate than usual, and she endeavored to find her alone, and to enter into conversation with her, or to talk to her, it so happened that her sister was almost always engaged in some other manner when she proposed it, and seldom left the drawing room, where the continued snow kept most of the party prisoners. Edmund Neville proposed one morning to read out loud, and the offer was joyfully accepted by Margaret.

"Shall it be in English or in Italian," he inquired, glancing at Ginevra, who smiled and said—

"You will make too many mistakes," "O no," he replied, "I am a tolerable Italian scholar, and your sister wishes, I know, to hear the 'Promessi Sposi.' Don't you, Margaret?"

"She said 'Yes' rather coldly, for he had opened the book, and changing his place beside her for one on the sofa where Ginevra was sitting, he turned to her with that peculiar expression which now and then gave softness to his piercing eyes, and said—

"Stop me when I make some great fault, but do not be too severe."

CHAPTER X.

Margaret started from her chair, and rushed to meet her visitors. She scarcely knew whether their arrival gave her pain or pleasure; but she was glad of any thing that changed for the moment a state of feeling that was becoming too acutely painful. Maud kissed her affectionately, and then her eyes wandered in search of Ginevra, who was at that moment advancing towards them. She coldly offered her hand to her, and Margaret perceived, with astonishment, that a crimson blush had crossed her sisters face, and that she seemed to shrink from the piercing glance that Maud turned upon her. Her embarrassment was so visible, that Margaret felt its influence, and also colored. Maud seemed to enjoy the evident confusion which her presence occasioned, and said a few words about renewing her acquaintance with Miss Leslie, and the manner in which it brought back to her mind their meetings at Genoa. Lady Donington was so engaged at first in inquiries after every member of Edmund Neville's family, (for she was civil, as other people are literary, or professional, or scientific—it was the business—the enjoyment—the sum total of her existence,) that she had no time to bestow on Ginevra; but in the midst of her concern for a second cousin of Mrs. Warren's, who had had the scarlatina, she suddenly recollected her Italian acquaintance—and shook hands with her repeatedly—but at the same time, with a sort of deprecating sigh, and smothered ejaculation, which seemed to apologize at once for not having seen her before, and for being glad to see her then.

A few words of general conversation passed, and then luncheon was announced, and the whole party moved to the dining-room. Maud watched like a lynx, every turn of Margaret's countenance, and soon perceived that she was ill at ease, and that her efforts at conversation were not successful. She directed her glances alternately on her sister Ginevra, and on Edmund; and an expression of awakened interest, like

that of a dog who has just caught the scent, seemed to sharpen her features and brighten her eyes. As soon as she could escape from the dining-room, she seized Margaret's arm, and led her gently, but forcibly, across the drawing-room into the library, and then into the corner of the remotest couch. When she had fixed her there, she said, in a low, impressive, and inquiring tone—

"Well?" "Well, I am very glad to see you, Maud; I was afraid the weather was so bad you would not come."

"Are you going to talk to me of the weather?" Maud answered, in a tone that was half playful and half impatient "have you nothing more interesting to tell me?"

(To be continued.)

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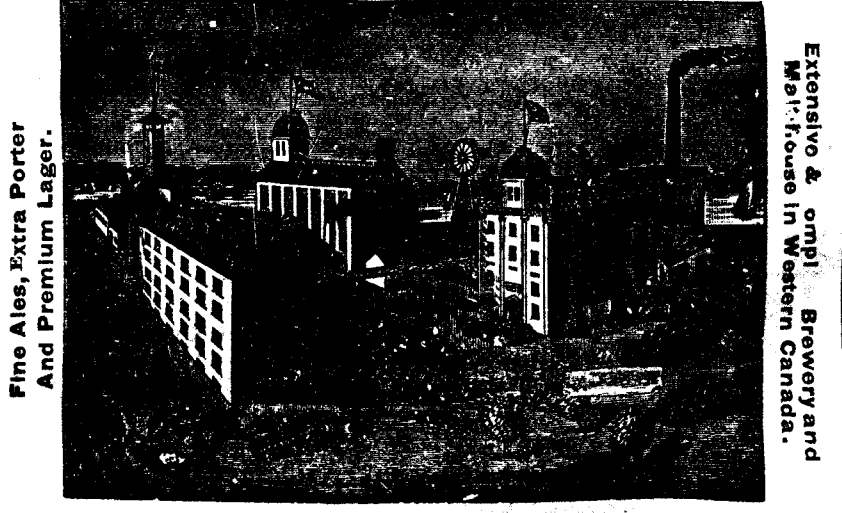
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