

Mr. Orichton told Una belonged to the duke, the great man of the country, they turned down the hill and took their way homewards.

## CHAPTER IV.

The Dysarts soon had hosts of visitors. Colonel Dysart was known by name—both as a distinguished officer and through Lady Mary's connections—to many of the families in the county, and they were very glad to welcome both him and his bright, aristocratic-looking daughter to the society of the neighbourhood; amongst others Mr. and Mrs. Northcote called, when both Una and her father happened to be out, so that one of the first places they went to when they got their carriage and horses, was to pay the return visit at Northcote Manor.

Colonel Dysart had limited his stud to riding horses for himself and Una, and the groom who attended them, but he also provided her with a little low carriage and a pair of fast-trotting ponies, which she was to drive herself, for he was much too indolent to give himself even that small amount of trouble, and when they started on a fine afternoon to visit the Northcotes, Una managed the spirited little steeds, while her father leant back on the cushions at her side, and watched the skill with which her light firm hand managed the reins.

They had reached a rather steep ascent on the road, and Una let the ponies walk till they got on more level ground. Just as they gained the summit of the highest part they overtook Richard Orichton, who was walking slowly on, talking to a man following respectfully a step or two behind him.

"Wait a moment, Una," said Colonel Dysart, "I want to ask the rector a question," and she checked the ponies while her father got out and went up to speak to the clergyman. Mr. Orichton joined him at once, and they went on a few steps, while his companion, drawing back, turned slowly round, and standing within a few paces of Una, looked her full in the face. She gave an involuntary start, and an unaccountable fascination seemed to compel her to fix her eyes on the remarkable-looking person before her. It was fascination, but of a very unpleasant description, for the strangest feeling of chill and repulsion thrilled through her whole frame as she looked at him. He was a young man, not more than five-and-twenty years of age; not really tall, but gaining an appearance of height from his extreme slimmness, with a dark olive complexion which spoke unmistakably of Southern blood of some sort; he had thin, finely cut features and sleepy-looking, almond-shaped eyes, that were usually more than half veiled by the lids, but when opened to their full extent were of the most intense black, with a fiery glow in their inmost depths that made them look almost like the gleaming eyes of some savage animal. His thin lips had a snake-like curve, and his hair, cut very short over the whole head, was of a dead coal-black hue, straight and smooth. It was essentially an evil face, subtle and cruel in its expression, notwithstanding that it was, undoubtedly, not without a certain beauty of a peculiar kind. He was respectably dressed, but had not in the least the appearance of a gentleman. He wore gold rings in his ears and on the fingers of his dark lithe hand, and was unquestionably a foreigner, though it would not have been easy to judge by his appearance from what country he came.

As Una met the fixed gaze of this man, the sense of repulsion she felt at first grew into the strangest sort of a superstitious terror she had ever experienced. How it could be she knew not, but she felt an in-

stinctive conviction that this man had some terribly evil power over her destiny, and that she would be quite unable to free herself from his malignant influence. She shuddered, tried to avert her eyes, and found herself irresistibly drawn to look at him again. She felt as if an icy breath were passing over her making the whole air chill, and it was with inexpressible relief that she saw her father returning to her.

"Why, Una, you look quite blue with cold. How does that happen on such a sunny afternoon?"

She grasped hold of his arm and said in a hoarse whisper, "Who is that man?"

"The man Orichton was speaking of? How should I know child? What are you thinking of?"

The foreigner had moved away, and in a moment Una felt restored to herself, the chill of fear passed off, it seemed as if the sunshine had regained its strength, and she could not even understand what it was that had made her shiver and shrink so strangely the instant before.

"I do not know what in the world was the matter with me," she said, her bright smile returning as she made the ponies move on again. "I felt suddenly such a horrible dread and dislike to that man, though he never spoke a word, and seemed inoffensive enough."

"I do not see anything remarkable about him to make you notice him at all," said Colonel Dysart, glancing back at the foreigner, who had rejoined the rector. "He seems to be one of those mongrel fellows, half-African and half-European, of whom we have seen numbers at the Cape."

"Perhaps he reminded me of some I had a bad opinion of there," said Una; "but apparently he must be a meritorious individual, since Mr. Orichton seems to be actually feeling a grim satisfaction in talking to him: the rector's hard, cold face gives one the impression that his natural tendencies, at least, are towards a general condemnation of every one for everything."

"A sweeping conclusion, which certainly would leave no loophole of escape for any of us; but he is a thoroughly upright man, Una, you may be sure of that, he only unfortunately mars his goodness, as many do, by a want of geniality and courtesy," replied her father.

They were soon at the gates of Northcote Manor, and drove up a long avenue, through park-like grounds, to the door of the large substantial-looking house which, with no pretensions to architectural beauty, seemed thoroughly commodious and comfortable. A tall distinguished-looking young man with a rather languid air was lounging on a terrace at one side of the house, smoking a cigar, and he watched Una critically as she jumped out of the carriage and gave the reins to the servant, but he did not come forward, and she passed on with her father and entered the house.

They were ushered into a large pleasant drawing-room, which had only two occupants, a ponderous lady of decidedly formidable aspect, attired in the stiffest and most rustling of silks, who sat on a sofa reading the *Times*, and at once recalled to Una Hervey Orichton's description of Mrs. Northcote as a British matron, and a young girl who was crouching down on the floor beside a large Newfoundland dog, whom she seemed to be tormenting with all sorts of malicious tricks. She started to her feet as the visitors came in, and showed a light elegant figure, small but in perfect proportion, and a strikingly piquante face, with sparkling dark eyes, a mutinous little mouth, and a quantity of black hair, cut short and brushed off her forehead, in a state of wild confusion, which was rather increased than diminished by the knots of

scarlet velvet that were supposed to restrain it.

"I shall like 'Will,'" thought Una as she glanced at her, but she was obliged to give her undivided attention to Mrs. Northcote, who now came forward, wearing a look of stern benevolence, and welcomed the new-comers with deep solemnity. All this lady's movements, even on the most trivial occasions, seemed designed to show that she was engaged in a very self-conscious performance of duty, and that she wished it to be understood her every action, even when it consisted in nothing more virtuous than the depositing of her formidable frame in a comfortable arm-chair, was conducted on the strictest principle. It would probably be a very complete explanation of the eccentricities of Miss Wilhelmina Northcote, to say, that they were simply the result of a strong reaction from the too severe training she had received.

The visit commenced with a most rigid observance of the laws of etiquette. Miss Northcote was introduced, Mr. Northcote was sent for, and Mr. Rupert Northcote, who sauntered in at the open French window, was named with a state of ceremonial which would not have been out of place in presenting the heir to the throne. The gentleman who for thirty years had had the overpowering felicity of enjoying life in company with Mrs. Northcote was a stout, good-humoured looking individual, who had forgotten his spectacles on the top of his bald forehead where he had pushed them up from his eyes, and who glanced perpetually at the mistress of his affections (and everything else) with a bland, weak expression, which seemed to show that, having resigned his purse and his conscience into her careful keeping, he was now enabled to take life very easily, secure that all his affairs, including his duties, would be carefully managed. He was, however, a thorough gentleman, and talked pleasantly and kindly to his new acquaintances in the general conversation which followed his entrance; Mrs. Northcote's share in it was chiefly addressed to Una, who was painfully conscious that she was becoming exceedingly drowsy under a course of that lady's remarks, and she welcomed the appearance of afternoon tea with great satisfaction, as an event which might possibly cause a change in her position. Miss Northcote took care that it should; she had been openly manifesting no small impatience at the formal nature of the visit, and had already visited it on her own behalf by rushing herself out at the window to order Colonel Dysart's carriage to be sent round to the stables, when her father proposed it, and returning back again into the room before Mrs. Northcote had finished the speech in which she was requesting Rupert to ring the bell, that she might give the necessary orders. The young lady's next proceeding was to place Mrs. Dysart's cup of tea on a little table in the window which opened on the lawn, where they were out of hearing of the rest of the company, and Una gladly rose at her invitation and joined her there; Rupert followed, and Mrs. Northcote was soon laughing and talking as if she had known her visitor all her life. Presently she began to question her as to the acquaintances she had already made in the neighborhood, and when Una mentioned the Orichtons, she perpetrated a frightful grimace at the rector's name.

(To be Continued.)

No true work since the world began was ever wasted; no true life since the world began has ever failed.

Never let the machinery of your mind turn rusty. The way to keep it sweet is to keep it going.—William Arnot.