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A CRUEL DECEPTION
OR WHY DID SHE SHUN HIM? BY EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS

(Continued)

"I always thought organists were old and took snuff," she said in her slow way as she put down her cup and rose to approach the fire. "A railway journey always makes one cold," she said, looking at Lord Taunton with her big, rather meaningless blue eyes.

He made some reply to this but his manner was still mechanical, and he was not sorry when his sister proposed to Miss Glenlee that she might like to adjourn to her own room.

"Come and have a look at the horses," Mr. Trevelyan said to his brother-in-law. "I have just to see to a little business with Stewart, who has ridden over. If you go toward the stables, Taunton and I will pick you up."

Lord Taunton assented as he lit a cigar. What man will ever refuse a visit to the horses? He returned through the big old-fashioned hall and made his way to the entrance. There he stood for several moments, looking straight before him with an air of preoccupation and much thought, as indeed was but natural when one recalled all the circumstances of this moment, and remembered how long had been his sojourn from England and home.

He strolled on toward the stables after a moment's pause, enjoying his cigar half unconsciously, and the air of preoccupation clung about him.

Seeing him from a distance one would have thought he was plunged into a deep and perhaps a moody reflection on the subject of time, life, change as brought near to him on this his return home.

As a matter of fact Lord Taunton's thoughts were occupied by a totally different subject altogether, and one having no connection, at least in one sense, with the matter touching the story of his past. He was thinking, as he had been thinking steadily for the past few days, of one subject and one subject alone!

CHAPTER XI

Yes, Lord Taunton was thinking of Wynne Brabante. He wondered vaguely whether he should ever be able to have two consecutive thoughts that had no connection, or did not touch in the very smallest degree, in Wynne.

It was almost incomprehensible to him how quickly this girl had grown so much a part of his quiet, reticent self, yet there was no irritation in the remembrance. Instead it was strangely soothing to him. There was no bitterness in one single recollection of this beautiful girl, with her cold, almost imperiously cold, indifference to him.

He had accepted her dismissal quietly but there was no sense of hopelessness in his heart as he left the ship at Queenstown and traveled on to London by himself. If he felt any anger at all it was against himself. He might have gauged this girl's nature and character better. He had no right to speak of so intimate a subject after so short and unsatisfactory an acquaintance. He had only met with his just deserts.

He frowned now as he strolled on, and with a growing self-reproach he recalled the impatience that had induced him to broach such a serious question as marriage to Wynne.

There was no abatement of the desire within his breast to link her life to his; on the contrary, since their separation his feelings had only deepened and intensified threefold. He told himself he must not allow impatience to come into the matter at all. He must woo and win Wynne in quite another way.

His pulses thrilled as he pictured to himself her gradual surrender. He felt that she did not hate him; in fact, before she had changed to him so strangely, he had imagined without vanity that her sympathy and liking went out toward him spontaneously and without any restraint. She was free to be wooed, too. Did he not know that from her mother, who had conveyed the information in the most delicate tactful yet most decided fashion?

Free therefore he would woo her; and looking into the depths of her pure eyes he would lose the pain and shadow of his former sorrow and live again a man without a sigh or regret in life. The very thought of it brought a look to his face that radiated at least ten years off his age.

The love he had for Wynne was something he had never felt before. His wife had carried his passion, the bucer part of his nature, by storm as it were, blinding his eyes and his judgment by the brilliancy of her personality, keeping the passion at fever heat by all the arts of a practiced and born coquette. When disillusionment had come there had been no sentiment, no noble influences to give even an instant's relief; and the shame that finished the story was one that struck the iron of despair through the pride of his heart, not through the love.

It had been the remembrance of this stained honor and shamed pride that had driven him away, a wanderer in strange lands, and made him grow so old and cynical and bitter toward all men and women save his sister perhaps, and her belongings until the day that he had looked into

"Blanche never used to be so dull!" she thought to herself, "so tiresome. If there is one thing Hugo appreciates more than another it is a touch of humor!" And then the little woman calmed down. "After all, how does one know this unconscious simplicity may not just be the only charm he admires most? He must have had a plethora of sharp-witted women out in that abominable America. There is no doubt he admires her, and she certainly does look splendid in evening dress! I don't know any one with such a neck and arms as Blanche has!"

All the same, Lady Augusta could not help confessing to herself, as she led her guest into the small drawing room again, that so far her matrimonial maneuvers did not show any prospect of being crowned with immediate and glorious success.

CHAPTER XII

The first week of Lord Taunton's return was passed very quietly at Torre Abbey. Acting on his distant wish, Lady Augusta invited no other guests, nor indulged in entertainments of any sort or description.

She was never dull herself, and when she was not seated on her own floor playing and prattling with her two babies, she was either driving Miss Glenlee briskly through the avenues of budding trees, or riding early in the morning with Hugo and her husband while Miss Glenlee still slumbered peacefully on her pillow, or dashing wildly around to some one or another of her many proteges, or sitting at the piano, filling the drawing room with the sound of her sweet, pathetic little voice. Lady Augusta was never still for long together.

"An absolute impossibility to make her sit in one place for more than ten minutes!" declared Trevelyan. "I give you my word, Hugo, I had to strap her down when she had that nasty cropper off Dandy a year ago. Old Fergusson declared she must lie in bed for at least a week."

"And I was up riding Dandy again in three days!" cried Lady Augusta triumphantly. "As for you"—turning to her husband and snapping her small fingers—"and old Fergusson, and all the doctors rolled into one, that—that—that!"

"Now I ask you Hugo what am I to do with such a desperate wife?"

Hugo laughed suddenly, seized the small, birdlike form launched it into the air, and planted it on his stalwart shoulder.

"Any more insubordination?" he observed, as his sister clung to his neck, laughing "and you will see what a brother's wrath is like, my lady?"

"Do you think I am frightened of you?" cried the little individual contentiously. "Why, I am most comfortable up here! What a lovely broad shoulder you have, to be sure, Hugo! No don't trouble to put me down! I assure you I quite enjoy being so high in the world!"

"Jack, you are a much to be pitied man!"

Lord Taunton's face conveyed the most supreme commiseration. He however, made no effort to dislodge his pretty burden, but strolled leisurely about the hall with it, whistling softly.

Lady Augusta despite her brave indifference, was none too comfortable; she had to cling desperately to her brother's neck. She was conscious that she was exhibiting a good quarter of a yard of most shapely leg and ankle, that her husband was enjoying a hearty laugh at her expense, and the grave-faced butler was trying in vain to maintain his composure in the distance. But all the same, she did not mean to acknowledge herself discomfited just yet. In all fun and merriment there ran mingling with it a deeper feeling—a feeling of intense gladness at the daily convincing evidence of the great change in her brother's mental condition. He no longer haunted her dreams at night with visions of his dark face—sombre and sorrowful—the brand of a shroud shame not his upon his brow; no longer did his gloomy manner and quiet voice rack her tender heart with pity and pain. It was all the most Hugo of bygone childhood days who lived with her now, romping and teasing and playing with her as with some kitten.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" thought little Lady Augusta, as she bent her head, not without some difficulty, to drop a kiss on the dark head, around which her arm was clinging. "I never thought to see a smile again and now he is grown the same as of old. Only it seems to me as though there were the gleam of something even happier possible to him now than there was ten. Does he love Blanche already? It must be that. Oh, she must be good to him! She must not throw away one grain of his precious love or do anything. But what am I thinking of! As if Blanche could do such a thing! I can give her no higher praise than when I say I find her worthy to be Hugo's wife." And then Lady Augusta gave a tiny squeal. "Oh, darling, let me down—let me down! Look, there is some one coming up the avenue. Oh, Hugo, dear dear sweet darling! I will adore you forever if only you will put me down my dear! Just look at my leg!"

"It is an admirable leg!" Lord Taunton quoth quietly glancing at the tiny foot in its exquisite silk casings. "Yes, I admire it very much!"

"Jack—Jack, you wretch! You infinitely monster! Will you see your wife, the mother of your children, treated in this infamous way? Jack, how dare you laugh like that? Oh if only I were down on the ground! Hu-

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Alwynne's flowerlike face, and had stood silent and reverent before the unspeakable purity of her young soul, revealed to him so unexpectedly, yet so surely.

It was as though the sun had suddenly broken through some great heavy cloud, and, fired by all its powers, had bent its golden warm on some great block of ice before it moving it gently but surely, and softening it until it fell apart and murmured away in tiny rivulets. So melted the bitterness, the skepticism, out of Taunton's heart as he stood bathed in the warmth and glory of Alwynne's beautiful, innocent, soulful eyes! She had changed him back to the man he had been before the great blow of his life had fallen—the same man, and yet to a better.

His whole mind was impregnated with the girl's individuality. He yearned for her all at once, as he walked through the grounds of this one of his most noble possessions.

"My wife! my heart!" he said to himself suddenly. "An imagination he pictured her coming toward him beneath the famous old trees that were just beginning to break into green once more. Every grace of her beautiful person was remembered, and in his face he could read the pleasure his presence called up, radiating her lovely face. The visions were so complete, so absolute Hugo's heartbeat quickened and a flush dawned on his dark skin.

"I will not be impatient, but I cannot wait too long. In a few days, a week perhaps I will go up to town again. By that time they will have returned to their hotel from the country. They will not stay away very long, for Mrs. Brabante was quite decided on remaining in town till the end of the season. I will be so careful when I see her."

Taunton had flung away his cigar, and was walking on only mechanically, his thoughts were so busy a id so beautiful in their hopefulness.

"We have at least one subject of mutual interest in Basil Canning. I feel she will be glad to think I have already helped the boy so much. Poor little chap! How surprised he was to see me turn up so soon after his arrival in the great city! His gratitude was sincere, at all events; and how touched he was to think I should have busied myself about his small affairs before looking to my own!"

Hugo turned to look back for the stalwart figure of his brother-in-law. He smiled a little at his next thoughts "If I were always as honest with the world as one is with oneself!" he mused. "If I had been truthful with that boy and had told him my real reason for being in London so soon after my arrival. Well, he laughed softly, "it was a very harmless reason, and one that Basil would have appreciated most fully, for I think his adoration for her exceeds even mine!"

The visit to the horses was prolonged until there was only a very little time to rush into his clothes for dinner. Lady Augusta almost murdered, and she flashed her pretty eyes ominously at her husband's handsome, amused face.

"Wait until I get a good chance and I will pinch you!" she whispered maliciously, in his ear. "Out loud she discussed the horses.

"I wonder you men don't have your homes built in the stables altogether!" she declared. "Really, how any woman can be so foolish as to imagine herself attractive or fascinating in the very least degree is something I am beginning not to understand. Give a man a scrappy, knock-kneed, bay mare, or a roan or chestnut or what not and he will turn his back on the most beautiful woman in the world!"

Hugo laughed outright.

"The same spiritfire as of yore, Gus! Jack, why don't you muzzle this little person?"

Lady Augusta managed to convey her homicide in all its horrors at her not in the least dismayed better half, while Lord Taunton turned to Miss Glenlee.

"I hope you are not going to be ungenerous enough to back Gussie up in this most outrageous speech?" he said lightly.

Miss Glenlee smiled. She was lying back in her chair, looking singularly attractive in her black velvet dinner dress, which displayed big white neck and arms to their fullest advantage. Her hair by candlelight was perhaps too pale; it lost the warmth that the sun's rays discovered and her face perhaps without a hat was too round and not so handsome; still she was undeniably a beautiful woman for those who admired large proportions and a preponderance of delicate coloring over intellectual qualities.

Hugo had always been impressed with Blanche Glenlee's large, languid beauty; but beyond admiring her, as he always admired all that was satisfaction in either nature or art, she did not in the least appeal to him. He did not like so-called smart women, who thought it their duty to rub the edges off every one they met by the pungency of their wit, but he also abominated fools, and had nothing in common with dull brains.

Blanche Glenlee was certainly not a fool but she was certainly by no

means an intellectual woman. Her very anguor, which at some times had acted such a soothing influence upon him, at others irritated him almost to a verge of nervousness. He had a distinct longing to take her by her two shapely shoulders and shake the sleepy look from her whole individuality and the apathetic indifference out of her big blue eyes.

Lady Augusta was distinctly out of her reckoning when she let her fertile little brain plan and maneuver on a matrimonial alliance between her friend and her brother. Womanlike, however, she allowed herself to fall into the error that was satisfactory to her rather difficult fancy must naturally be satisfactory to Hugo.

Miss Glenlee smiled at Lord Taunton's speech.

"Gus knows more about horses than I do. I think I am a little afraid of them, perhaps; that is why I don't care about them."

Lady Augusta drew her brows into a line, the nearest approach to a frown which she ever permitted herself. This last remark of Blanche's was distinctly not successful. To tell Hugo or any other Englishman she did not care about horses was—well, it was not a remark calculated to encourage much sympathy.

Taunton, however, was impressed neither one way or the other by Miss Glenlee's frank confession. He felt he must do his duty and talk to her, though he would infinitely have preferred a continuation of his long chat with Jack Trevelyan on all matters of sport, foreign and otherwise, or to have ensconced himself in one of the easy chairs and dived into The Field and other masculine papers whose appearance had been very infrequent and very stale during his varied travels. If he had confessed the absolute truth of his heart, he would have said that he would have been just as pleased if there had been no stranger sojourning within his gates on this his first appearance at his old abode; but he kept this feeling so well hidden that Lady Augusta had no intimation of the fact that Hugo could have dispensed most willingly and easily with Miss Glenlee's presence, despite her beautiful complexion and yellow hair.

Dinner passed over merrily, thanks to the charming little hostess.

The conversation turned on Blair Hunter and his extraordinary handsome face.

"I have imagined all sorts of romances about him!" Lady Augusta cried. "The first day I saw him playing the organ in the old church I assure you, Hugo, he seemed to me like some spirit from another world. Blanche didn't you feel inclined to fall in love with him on the spot?"

"No, I don't think so," Miss Glenlee said stolidly surveying the fruit on the plate with a ruminating air, as though the question put to her was something that required her minute attention.

"Well, and have your romances any good foundation?" Lord Taunton inquired.

Mr. Trevelyan made a face at his wife.

"Gus wants to believe he is some prince in disguise; whereas, if the truth were known, I fully expect he will turn out to be a pork butcher!"

"Oh how nasty!" ejaculated Miss Glenlee, and her shapely hand paused as she was about to convey a grape to her lips. "Just fancy, and we traveled from town with him!"

Lord Taunton could not resist smiling at her sister's prosaic exclamation at her husband's prosaic theory was not so amusing to him as the absolute faith with which Miss Glenlee accepted any statement and the mere possibility of having been brought into the same atmospheric space with a plebeian, if only for a short period.

Rushing about the globe had certainly rubbed off the corners of Hugo's class prejudices, if ever they had been strongly planted in his mind. Having hobnobbed with all sorts of conditions of men, this expression of the old-fashioned, narrow-minded British traditions that were so fast dying it was refreshing in one sense, while it roused his contempt in another.

"Don't listen to Jack, Miss Glenlee," he said while he gave his brother-in-law a glance from his wonderful eyes. "He is simply jealous of this very uncommon-looking young man, that is all. For my part Gus' idea is the right one, and our musical Adonis must be some princely person in disguise."

"He certainly was most distinguished, and had charming manners," Miss Glenlee confessed not entering in the least into the very small joke of the moment. "But then," she continued, looking up at him again with her sleepy stupid eyes, "then some one would be sure to know something about him; and then why should he choose such a place to live in, and why—"

Lady Augusta frowned almost entirely this time. A glance at her husband's gravely amused face, and a knowledge that her brother was intent on cutting his pear into a multitude of shavings he would never sat, made her annoyance at her friend's almost incomprehensible stupidity amount to a moment to anger.

go, sweet dear brother, I beg—I beseech—I entreat! I can hear some one's footsteps crunching on the gravel! Oh, do!"

Mr. Trevelyan stood in the entrance. "It is your Adonis, the princely pork butcher!"

Lady Augusta managed to smother a scream and pinched her brother's ear, who, laughing heartily allowed her to slip to the ground just as Sir Blair Hunter appeared in the big doorway.

Taunton looked casually enough at his sister's latest admirations at first but as the young man came into the hall he found himself scrutinizing the extraordinary handsome face and bearing very closely. Two things at once impressed themselves upon his mind, vaguely enough, but to the effect, that depending on his thought's progress. One of these things was the fact, a little surprising when Hugo realized that it's young man, with his sunny hair and goodlike face was not, after all, so young. In years perhaps, he might not have so great a count to make; but in wisdom of the world, in knowledge of the world's ways, Lord Taunton suddenly felt as though he stood in the presence of a centenarian. The other fact—and this was more definite, and less pleasant was the determination—that Lady Augusta's musical Adonis was by no means a sympathetic individual to her brother.

"Not a fellow I would trust a yard," Hugh thought and abruptly to himself. He could not have defined whence or why this feeling should have come. He only knew it had come, and would remain. He felt at once that his brother-in-law, if not wholly objectionable to him, was not altogether pleased with his wife's protegee.

Both men were however needless to say, most courteous in their greeting of the young man, and Lord Taunton was not a little surprised when after a few moments desultory conversation dealing with the purpose of his visit to the Abbey, Blair Hunter turned to him and said:

"I wonder if I may venture to express some gratitude to you, Lord Taunton—gratitude which, I assure you is most sincere?"

Taunton bowed assent, of course, though much mystified; and his eyes opened for an instant as Hunter went on.

"I allude to your great kindness on behalf of my young kinsman, Basil Canning. He has told me of your goodness to him; and I, knowing how sorely he had need of assistance, felt perhaps you would not object to allow me to add my grateful thanks to his."

"I need no thanks whatever," Lord Taunton answered at once; and indeed he endeavored not to show it, a certain restraint came into his voice. "I am only too glad to give a helping hand to any one; and I thought, and still think, this little chap deserves it. He told me he had some kin in England, but did not mention your name, or of course—"

"Oh of course," said Blair Hunter airily.

Lady Augusta was intensely interested.

"But do tell me all about it," she cried. "Just fancy! How small a world is Hugo! I suppose you never dreamed of having met a connection of Mr. Hunter's anywhere?"

(To be continued)

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