

# EVA HUNTINGDON.\*

BY R. E. M.

## CHAPTER XL

SOME days after, Eva, in passing through the hall, encountered her maid who was at the moment in search of herself, to tell her "that Mr. Arlingford had just arrived in town, and was in the drawing room."

Waiting for no more, she hurried thither radiant with joy. To her great delight she found him alone, but after the first hurried moments of friendly greeting, it struck her that there was something about his manner of the same constrained tone that had pervaded his last letters, and an uneasy suspicion flashed across her mind that the change was connected in some way with Chester Rockingham. If such were even the case, now then, was the time to inform him of every thing. Had she not promised to have no concealments from him? but how was she to commence, how enter on a subject which filled her with an embarrassment very different to the momentary timidity it had inspired a few months before. It had to be done, however, and raising her head, she exclaimed with a desperate effort:

"Mr. Arlingford!"

"Well, Eva," and he turned towards her. His manner was grave, she fancied it stern, and instead of speaking of Chester Rockingham, she merely inquired,

"If it were true that he was going away?"

"Yes, Eva, for a time. I have received a letter from a relative of mine who resides on his estate in Ireland, and I must join him without delay. Owing to his own feeble health and the dishonour of an agent in whom he placed the most implicit confidence, his affairs are greatly involved, and will require much time and labour to extricate them. Independent of the obligations our relationship imposes on me, my own interests also demand my presence there, for my cousin, having no nearer heirs, all his property will eventually devolve on myself. If my absence is not protracted beyond three months, I will have cause to consider myself very fortunate."

"Three months!" echoed Eva with a start.

"Surely, Mr. Arlingford, you will not be three months away. How can we do without you so long?"

"It must be, Eva. Inclination should ever yield to duty. Believe me, the prospect is anything but agreeable to myself, but still my time will be so taken up with active and laborious duties that it will not appear as burdensome as it would otherwise do."

"I hope, it will be the same with me," sighed Eva. "My studies, if I pursue them in a proper spirit, will leave me no time to indulge in ennui or discontent."

"You are right, my dear child, and I hope, nay, I feel assured, that when we do meet again, you will be far advanced on that path of intellectual improvement to which you are now progressing. Remember, your year of probation may glide past even quicker than you desire, for you have yet much to learn. One thing in your favour, however, is, that you will have no other pursuits, amusements or thoughts, to divide your time with your studies."

Again Eva's heart smote her, and in a nervous, hurried tone, she exclaimed:

"Oh! Mr. Arlingford, I had nearly forgotten to mention to you,"—but the remainder of the confession was suspended on her lips by the entrance of lady Huntingdon. Of course all farther opportunity for private conversation was at an end, and one moment filled with regret, the next with relief, Eva subsided at once into her usual rôle of silent listener. Unusually gracious was lady Huntingdon to her guest, and on hearing that he left London in two days, she entreated him earnestly to visit them again before then, expressing at the same time a thousand regrets for his hurried departure.

Sad and dispirited, Eva sought her room, and divided between sorrow for Mr. Arlingford's loss, and remorse for her silence on the subject of her acquaintance with Mr. Rockingham, she passed as lonely and unhappy an evening as had ever yet fallen to her lot. One thought afforded her some slight degree of consolation, and that was the certainty that she would see her friend the following day, and thus obtain an opportunity of atoning for her previous insincerity. Her resolutions, however, were of no avail, for the next morning, when summoned to the drawing room