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# HILDA; OR, THE MERCHANT'S SECRET.

BY MRS. J. T. NORL.

Author of the "Abbey of Rathmore," "Passion and Principle," "The Secret of Stanley Hall," "The Cross of Pride," &c.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.—Continued.

That evening Stephen did not come to tea and when seven o'clock struck and he did not make his appearance, Blanche understood that he had no intention of accompanying her to the Crystal Palace. But she was determined not to be deprived of the expected pleasure. Such a collection of flowers as would be exhibited at this Floral Show was not to be seen every day even in Montreal, where so many different sources of amusement exist. So she persuaded Mrs. Osburne to accompany her, urging that if she did not she would be deprived of so much pleasure. Mark Berkeley was waiting near the entrance of the Crystal Palace.

As they were among the first arrivals they had no difficulty in procuring a good seat when they had made the round of the building and seen all that was to be seen. Mrs. Osburne quite enjoyed the scene, which was a novel one to her, for her life for years had been very retired. She seldom went any where but to church. The rare plants and beautiful flowers exhibited in such profusion, the variety in the shades of green displayed by the brilliant gas-light, the gayly-dressed crowds filling the large building, the delightful music of the military bands, made all seem to her a scene ever to be remembered. She did not now wonder at the eagerness of Blanche to go to the exhibition. Her only regret was that Stephen's sullen humour had made him forego such enjoyment.

About ten o'clock the crowd began to thin and it was at this time that Mrs. Osburne's attention was attracted towards a fashionably-dressed party moving towards the entrance near which she was seated.

There were three ladies, one elderly, the others young and beautiful; but it was not these who fixed Mrs. Osburne's eye. It was the gentleman who accompanied them, a fine looking elderly man, the face still handsome though the hair and whiskers were almost grey.

"Who is that gentleman?" she asked eagerly of Mark, who she perceived was also watching the group.

"That is the Governor," he replied. "The Governor of Canada, do you mean?" she asked in the same eager accents.

Mark broke into a laugh at the mistake. "No, my Governor," he said, trying to restrain his merriment.

"His father, Mr. Berkeley he means," remarked Blanche, smiling. "You do not understand slang, aunt, but what is the matter?" she added, wondering. "You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

Mrs. Osburne made no reply, the party had passed on and she sank back in her seat pale and agitated. "It cannot be!" she murmured, "and yet! good Heavens, what a likeness! The face older, the hair grey but yet the expression of the eye so like! And that is Mr Berkeley! What strange resemblance people do often bear to one another!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### AN AGREEABLE SURPRISE.

The twelve p.m. train is due at Lachine and the "Grecian" is impatiently waiting its arrival at the railway wharf. In the distance clouds of black vapour announce its approach. Soon the shriek of the engine is heard, and the train is seen rushing onward with quickened velocity; a few minutes afterwards and it comes thundering up to the station. For the next ten minutes all is bustle as the passengers for the "Grecian" with their luggage are transferred from the cars to her deck, and now the shrill whistle of the steamer penetrates the ear, startling those unaccustomed to the unearthly sound and the "Grecian" puts off from the wharf on her passage across Lake St. Louis.

It is the end of July and the travelling season on the St. Lawrence is at its height. A great many passengers are therefore on board, several of whom are Americans, as may be seen by their different style of dress and the delicate beauty of the young ladies as well as the faded appearance of their mammae—prematurely old at forty. There were also some of the wealthy citizens of Montreal forsaking their homes during the hot season and going to spend it in some charming locality in the more temperate climate of western Canada.

Among these was a group in whom the reader may easily recognize Mrs. Berkeley,

her daughter Thérèse, Miss Tremayne and Lieutenant Berkeley. They were on their way to Niagara, intending afterwards to visit the upper lakes whose scenery is so justly celebrated. Mrs. Berkeley's nerves had, she said, received such a shock on the elopement of her daughter-in-law, that change of scene was absolutely necessary or her health must suffer. Besides every body had gone out of town and she must follow the example of her fashionable acquaintances. For the last three or four summers she had visited Cacouna and Rimouski for the benefit of the sea air, but this year, as change of scene was what she most required, she would travel in Western Canada. As the escort of a gentleman was required to look after the tickets and luggage, Mark had been pressed into the service of the ladies, an arrangement which would necessarily for a few weeks interrupt his frequent meetings and charming *à tête à tête* with Blanche Osburne. But there was no help for it, the ladies could not travel without a gentleman and there was no one else to attend them. Mr. Berkeley would not leave the country-house and Grant had gone off on a wild goose chase after his wife and that rascal Castonell. So Mark informed Blanche when he went to bid her adieu the evening before they left Montreal.

This was Thérèse Berkeley's first trip up the St. Lawrence and its magnificent scenery had the charm of novelty for her. The foaming rapids surging and dashing their white-crested wavelets over the hidden obstructing rocks seemed very formidable and she declared nothing would induce her to descend them when they were returning to Montreal. She would take the train at Prescott and avoid such a dangerous passage. It really was awful to think of risking one's life among such an angry boiling mass of waters! Why could not people go through the canals on their downwards as well as upward trip? It surely was the safest route.

"But not the quickest, simpleton!" observed Mark—and speed is the first thing to be considered! If you are so timid you ought to have stayed at home. It is not among the rapids alone there is danger in travelling! Only think if a squall were to come up when we are on Lake Ontario, which is a miniature ocean, what would you do! You would lose your senses with terror, I suppose."

"Perhaps I would be as brave as yourself, Mark," retorted Thérèse, sarcastically. "Don't imagine yourself a hero because you wear the Queen's uniform, every heart that beats under a scarlet or a dark-green coat is not a brave one."

Mark, who always had the worst of it in these contests with Thérèse, walked away indignant.

About noon the next day the "Grecian" entered the Lake of the Thousand Islands, and the scenery of this part of the majestic river Thérèse declared was the most charming. The water flowed on so calmly, the wide expanse sprinkled over with wooded islands of every shape and size, with here and there the white turret-like lighthouse placed on some bare rocky islet so picturesque.

This trip up the St. Lawrence awakened many sorrowful reminiscences in the mind of Hilda Tremayne. Three years before—a short period to look back on—she had travelled the same route accompanied by her mother. Then she, like Thérèse, had enjoyed the scenery new to her and so beautiful! What changes had that brief period produced! What a storm-cloud of sorrow had passed over her since that time! Then it must be confessed she was not quite happy, her marriage with Dudley prevented that, but she had the comfort of her mother's presence. Now that beloved mother was gone and she was alone in the world to bear her secret sorrow unsustained by human sympathy. When they were approaching Kingston these bitter memories became yet more painful. Hilda and the other passengers were on deck as the "Grecian" steamed into the beautiful bay with its romantic shores—its entrance being defended by Martello towers. While others were admiring the city with its public buildings looking so well from the harbour—the picturesque shore of fortified deposits, with Fort Henry crowning a green slope descending to the waters—she was lost in painful thought, the agony of her bereavement seemed to come back suddenly with the sight of Kingston and unable to restrain her tears she hastily retreated to her state-room there to indulge them unobserved. A little while afterwards Thérèse knocked at the door exclaiming,

"Come Hilda! the 'Grecian' stops here two hours, and Mark says we shall have time to do Kingston before we leave for Toronto!"

"I would prefer remaining on board, Thérèse. You know I have seen Kingston before and after Montreal you will find nothing to admire in the city. It looks best from the water!"

The bell of St. Mary's Cathedral was ringing the hour of six when the "Grecian" was getting up her steam preparatory to leaving for Toronto, and the passengers who had gone on shore were seen hurrying to the wharf summoned by the prolonged whistle of the steamer. Hilda was still in her state room when Thérèse hastily entered.

"Oh, I am tired to death!" she exclaimed throwing herself down on a chair heated and quite out of breath. "Mark hurried me along saying we would be left behind and after all we are in time enough for the steamer is still at the wharf taking in freight."

"But we must leave soon for the whistle has twice sounded and it is past the usual time for starting."

"Oh! Hilda, what a fool you were to remain here moping by yourself instead of going on shore, like the rest of the passengers."

"I do not think I missed anything by doing so."

"Oh! but you did! The band of the Canadian Rifles was playing in the Park and the fashionable world of Kingston was congregated there strolling about—I was going to say under the shade of the trees, but there are no trees of any growth yet. Mark and I had a good laugh, criticising everything and every body."

"Then you do not think much of the beauty or fashion of Kingston, Thérèse? but there is no place like Montreal in your opinion."

"Certainly not Kingston!" said Thérèse laughing. "Mark declares there were several beautiful girls," but I do not agree with him; and then they were so plainly dressed! Really some of their costumes must have been worn in the year one!"

"But many of the ladies in Kingston do dress very fashionably, Thérèse."

"They have not the latest fashions, I assure you, Hilda," persisted Thérèse. "Altogether they are wanting in style. They do not look like us Montreals," she added with a look of haughty superiority.

"And you think yourself a judge in such matters, quite a connoisseur in dress! There was a gleam of mockery in Hilda's eyes."

"Yes, I do!" replied Thérèse decidedly.

"The milliners say my taste is perfect, that I have a critical eye. You know I study the fashions and dress according to the latest Parisian mode."

"Yes," remarked Hilda gravely, "you are one of those shallow-minded girls who worship Fashion and are willing to adopt whatever style of dress she may impose, no matter how absurd or unbecoming it may be."

"Really you are complimentary!" said Thérèse, a little piqued. "Now I have a mind to punish you for that flattering speech by not telling you whom I saw in the Park."

"You saw no person there in whom I feel interested," said Hilda rather doubtfully, for the thought of Sir Gervase Montague suddenly presented itself to her imagination.

"There you are mistaken!" said Thérèse, with an arch glitter in her fine eyes. "I saw a gentleman in whom you do feel too small interest. Can you not guess who it was?"

"Sir Gervase Montague, probably! but I thought he was in Quebec." There was a tremor in Hilda's voice and a sudden colour in her face which did not escape Thérèse's observation.

"Yes, it was Sir Gervase, looking much altered, I assure you, Hilda. Why did you refuse him?" asked Thérèse eagerly. "I know you like him! you needn't deny that!"

"Did he know?—did he inquire?" and Hilda hesitated. She did not wish her cousin to know how great the interest was which she did feel in Sir Gervase Montague.

"Yes, he did enquire very particularly about you and heard you were at the wharf on board the 'Grecian.' A look of disappointment clouded Hilda's face. He knew she was so near, and did not try to see her."

Thérèse understood the changed expression.

"We only met the Baronet as we were leaving the Park," she said and as he knew the "Grecian" was about to leave for Toronto he did not come on board, but he said he would see us soon again. He is on his way to Niagara and only stopped at Kingston to visit a friend of his, an officer in the Artillery stationed there at present."

This was startling news to Hilda. She would then soon see him again, who in spite of all her efforts to forget still possessed an inextinguishable interest in her heart. What a sudden joy thrilled her at the very thought.

The motion of the steamer now gave warning that they were putting off from the wharf and Thérèse and her cousin hurried on deck to see the scenery as they steamed out of the harbour.

The evening was beautiful, the waters of the blue Ontario in their deepest calm were mirroring the cerulean tints and white fleecy clouds above. An hour afterwards and sunset gave its gorgeous splendors to the scene, edging the magnificent masses of pearly clouds in the west with crimson and golden hues, flinging a flood of dazzling light across the broad waters and glittering on the foaming wake which the steamer left behind as it sped proudly onward.

The next morning the "Grecian" reached Toronto, but the Berkeleys did not go into the city, intending to stop there some days on their return. They crossed the Lake to Niagara, and proceeded by the afternoon train to the Falls.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Two days after the arrival of the Berkeleys at the Clifton House, Sir Gervase Montague reached the Falls, and Mrs. Berkeley, desirous of having such a fashionable escort, asked him to join her party, which invitation he gladly accepted. With him, therefore, Hilda explored the various places of interest in the vicinity of this world-renowned work of Nature. With him she stood on the deck of the *Maid of the Mist*, as it nobly stemmed the white, curling, foaming waters, and viewed, with feelings of awe and delight, the mighty cataract, looking so dense, so restless, so overwhelming in its sublimity! Accompanied by the Baronet and Thérèse, she visited Goat Island—crossing the frail bridge so near the brow of the cataract—and passed hours on its picturesque heights watching the Horse Shoe Fall descend in one mighty column, sending up, from the foaming abyss below, its clouds of rainbow-tinted mist.

This was a time of intense enjoyment to Hilda. The presence of Sir Gervase was in itself happiness such as she had not felt since their separation; and how did his presence enhance the pleasure she experienced visiting scenes of such sublimity and beauty as the Falls of Niagara present! Still no impassioned words were uttered by Sir Gervase in the ears of Hilda. The mournful fact which her letter had communicated almost two years before, seemed ever present with him, he never forgot that a gulf divided them. Yet Hilda knew that she was passionately loved. Words were not necessary to reveal that. Love has a language of its own, which, though often silent, is easily understood. During the quiet hours of the night, thoughts troubled Hilda which, in the happy excitement of the day, were readily dismissed. Was this renewed intimacy with Sir Gervase right? Was this delightful companionship calculated to enable her to conquer her attachment to one so fascinating? Was the line of conduct she was now pursuing exactly in accordance with her previous resolution of remembering her duty to the absent Dudley? Yet how could it now be avoided? Mrs. Berkeley had asked the Baronet to join their party while they were travelling. During their trip this intimacy could not be avoided. After they returned to Montreal it must cease. Sir Gervase would, of course, join his regiment in Quebec, and they might never meet again, as he would probably before long return to England. Thus the reproaches of the silent monitor were hushed, and Hilda gave herself up to the intense enjoyment of her present happiness.

One month has passed, and the Berkeleys have reached Toronto on their return to Montreal, having visited every scene of interest on the Canada shores of the chain of lakes separating that country from the United States.

It was the evening of their arrival, and Mark Berkeley, having heard that a Stereoptical Exhibition was to be seen at the St. Lawrence Hall, proposed they should go, as the papers praised it extravagantly. It was late when Mrs. Berkeley's party arrived; the Hall was very much crowded, and all the reserved seats occupied. This was very annoying to Thérèse, and she proposed returning to the hotel; she would have foregone the pleasure of seeing the exhibition rather than be mixed up with people whom she scarcely knew. But this was overruled by Sir Gervase Montague remarking that they would be able to see the pictures to greater advantage by not sitting too near, pointing out some ladies and officers who had probably for this reason seated themselves among the vulgar throng, as the supercilious Thérèse called the respectable people around her.

While they were waiting for the exhibition to begin Hilda, who was not much in the habit of going to such public scenes, cast her eyes around the Hall thoughtfully, observing the mass of strange faces, each one differing from the other, but all wearing an expression of pleased anticipation and enjoyment. But soon her attention was fixed by a person sitting on one of the benches just in front of Mrs. Berkeley's party. The face was turned away, but the profile seemed strangely familiar, and Hilda's pulses throbbed as the thought of Dudley flashed through her mind. Suddenly the man turned round, and their eyes met. Hilda did suppress the cry that rose to her lips, but she could not prevent the sudden start and the death-like pallor that overspread her face. Fortunately her emotion passed unnoticed, for at this moment the gas was suddenly turned off, and the Hall left in darkness as the exhibition commenced.

How beautiful they were those exquisite groups of statuary! those scenes in other lands, those ivy-covered ruins and dim cathedral aisles, those palace homes and magnificent piles of architecture—all appearing so natural, so real, that the mind could hardly realize they were only representational. But Hilda saw nothing of the beauty or grandeur of the varied scenes passing before her. Her eye could take in no other object but that well-known face that had such a startling effect, coming so unexpectedly before her. Could she be mistaken? Was it indeed Dudley who was sitting there within a few paces! Might it not be a face resembling his?

To be continued.