

"Fearful," answered her cousin, "and loathsome; brought up as I have been, Mary at college, among learned and holy men, it revolts me to hear the coarse and ribald talk that met my ear last night."

"And can you not avoid it in any way?"

"Yes, in one, pluming myself on my birth, I can show that I condescend not to mingle with those a step below me; but then, Mary it will be solitude, entire and unbroken."

"Come, come, Walter," said Mary, "be like a brave knight and good Christian, and fight manfully. You want not me to preach to you, after all the lore you heard at Rheims; but I heard it once said, that when God sends trials thick on us, He treats us as a general does his most trusty soldiers,—he puts them in the dangerous parts."

"You say truly, Mary," exclaimed Walter, with brightening tone and manner, "and I will fight my best and not be a coward in the battle. This is the last complaint I will make, and as you are going away, Mary, I shall have no opportunity."

"So you only desired my stay, that you might grumble to me, most noble baron"; and both the cousins laughed merrily.

In the very midst of their mirth, turning round a corner in the walk, came upon them the Lady Constance, fresh and beautiful as the roses she carried in her hand. She blushed, and curtsying with grace, almost stateliness, said "she was sorry to interrupt them," and would have passed on, but Mary prevented her.

"I depart to-morrow, Lady Constance," said she pleasantly, "and I shall feel as if I knew nothing of one who is to be my cousin's friend."

Constance was nothing loath, and the three continued their walk together, and blithely ran their tongues, as they discussed the various amusements of the day, keeping carefully away from the dangerous topics of religion or court news.

"I fear you will find Apswell Court a very dull residence," said Lady Constance to Walter, "for since my brother went abroad, and my father was so much at court, it has grown quite different from what it used to be. We had merry days when Regnier was at home."

Viscount Regnier is your only brother, I think," said Mary.

"My half-brother," replied Constance. "We are both our mothers' only children"; and then, quickly, as if anxious to change the subject, she exclaimed, "Mistress Thoresby, I do so envy you one thing."

"What is that?" inquired Mary, with a smile.

"That sweet-looking serving-maiden of yours, I have never been able to get one I liked."

"I should be truly glad if you would have this one, then," replied Mary, and she hastened to explain that Rose did not belong to her. "I travelled without an attendant," she said, "to De Lisle Castle; and as for Rose, I believe this very day Lady Anne will be besought to find a service for her, for Rachel, the elderly one, is to attend upon my cousin."

"Then it is settled at once," said Constance, eagerly. "I am so glad; will you send her to me presently, Mistress Thoresby, and I will arrange the wage with her, and other matters, and (as soon as suits Mistress de Lisle's convenience) she can enter on her attendance? But I hear sounds that announce the dinner-hour; is it indeed ten of the clock? I thought it not so late."

Lady Constance departed. Mary gazed after her for a moment, and exclaimed, "How very lovely she is!" She turned to her cousin again, but Walter's eyes were fixed on the path Constance had taken, with so riveted a gaze as startled Mary.

"Lovely!" he said; "methinks I never saw aught so fair on earth."

Mary sighed to herself as she left him, and went towards the house. "Is this to be his trial, poor boy? It is most cruel if Lord Beauville keeps him here in inaction, with nothing to think of but that witching face."

Mary informed Isabel of the good prospect which had offered itself for Rose. To her astonishment her cousin was mightily displeased.

"I would have spoken about her myself to Lady Anne, had I been allowed the time."

"But Isabel," said Mary, "what could Lady Anne procure for her better than to wait on Lady Constance, and to stay in the same castle with you and Rachel, too?"

"Well, well," said Isabel, "it is arranged now, of course; I would not so have chosen, as I said, and there has been too much hurry."

When Rose heard what her future destination was to be, she was delighted. "Not to have to leave the house you are in, Mistress Isabel," said she, "and to wait on that lovely Lady Constance, who looks so meek and gentle, I am happy, indeed."

Isabel's face clouded over, and she expressed no opinion either of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

When Mary took leave, Isabel melted for the moment, and held her fast in her embrace.

"Forgive me, Mary," she whispered, "I have tried your patience sorely, I know."

Mary kissed her fondly, as she assured her of her love and sympathy, and with fervent hopes that they should meet again ere long, they parted.

Walter put her on her horse.

"Farewell, dear cousin," said he, "Heaven bless you for all your goodness and comfort."

"You must come to Thoresby, Walter. Now promise me you will."

"Yes, I promise," said Walter. His last words were, "I will come to Thoresby."

Mary rode out of Apswell Court, Walter stood on the steps watching her, and Isabel from her window followed her with wistful eyes. So they parted. When and how shall they meet again?

The time passed heavily after the departure of the cheerful and peace-making Mary. Isabel, true to her resolution, confined herself entirely to her own apartments, and only appeared at dinner and supper, and then studiously avoided joining in the merriment that generally went on. Very often she took her meals in her own rooms. Lady Anne considered her conduct insulting and showed it by taking no further notice of her than a slight and stiff bend of her head, morning and evening, which was as stiffly responded to on Isabel's part. Constance, kept at a stately distance by Isabel, naturally grew cold in her manner, though her kind heart felt for and made excuses for Isabel, from her loneliness, and the heavy afflictions she had gone through. Constance had never known her own mother, for she had died in giving her birth, and one of the strongest feelings of her nature was her love for the mother she had never seen; and many were the tears she shed over the beautiful but sad looking portrait of the Lady Constance Courtenay, Countess of Beauville, which hung in the long gallery. She could the better pity Isabel, who had known the sweetness of a mother's love, and lost it forever. Lord Beauville treated Isabel with studied indifference, and this galled her. She would rather have met with resistance, and would willingly have measured her strength of will with that of her guardian. She was never required as she had expected, to attend the prayers and sermons in the chapel; neither did Master Gregory Oldeastle ever approach to entertain her with Godly discourse on the errors of papacy; in truth, the haughty bearing of Mistress de Lisle kept the Chaplain in too great awe of her to make such an attempt.

(To be continued.)

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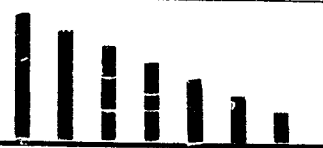
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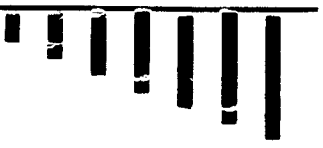
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