

CHAPTER VII.

"I will be decorous, I will be proper, but I must enjoy the good fortune which Providence has sent me," said Mrs. Thorndyke.

She was sitting on the veranda at Acacia Point, in the grateful shade of the red-and-white striped awnings.

Lily and Mrs. Hilton were engaged in their usual occupation of listening to the family oracle.

"What new form will your enjoyment take?" asked Lily. "The place is in good order, you have got the horses you wanted, the family diamonds have been handed over to you. What more do you want?"

"Ah, those diamonds! That was a bold stroke; but they are going to propitiate the enemy."

Jessica smiled complacently down at her own shapely hands, which were ringless, save for one plain gold band.

"How?" asked Lily, with interest.

"Diamonds have conciliating qualities second only to money. I am going to send the biggest pin in the box to—Augusta Westalov!"

"Beauty, you are very deep."

"You are very shallow if you don't see that the poor woman deserves something for having left me in peace."

"That I can't understand," said Mrs. Hilton, "unless some influence has been brought to bear."

"It has. Paul Lorrimer, now my first cousin by marriage, has been persuading her to leave me in the enjoyment of my ill-gotten gains. And now he writes to me asking if he may come to make my acquaintance; and I must say he writes a most fascinating hand. Look here."

Jessica drew a letter from her pocket and showed the envelope to Lily. It was addressed in a very even, angular hand, remarkably clear and legible, and rather feminine in its delicacy.

"Listen to the note," said Jessica, and read as follows:

"MY DEAR MRS. THORNDYKE,—

"You must excuse my boldness in writing to you. My only claim on your attention is the fact that poor Theodore and I grew up together, and that we were deeply attached to each other. As you see, therefore, I am naturally very anxious to make the acquaintance of one who was so dear to my dead cousin. Will you consider it an obtrusive impertinence if I ask permission to call upon you at Acacia Point? I knew the place very well in my boyhood, and should enjoy seeing it again.

"Yours faithfully,

"PAUL LORRIMER."

"There, what do you think of that? Isn't he kind, considering that the 'old place' ought to be his?" asked Jessica.

"So that is how you are going to enjoy yourself, by having Mr. Lorrimer up to stay?" asked Lily.

"What else can I do? Do you suppose that all that love for Theodore was evolved from his inner consciousness to do duty on this melancholy occasion?"

"I dare say," said Mrs. Hilton. "Men are so false."

"I thought it was women who had that reputation, mamma. Well, there can be no harm in asking one's own cousin up to one's own place."

"It will have a giddy look," said Lily, "especially if he should chance to be young and good-looking."

"He is both," said Jessica, "and I shall go at once and write to ask him to spend Sunday here."

By this time the family had established themselves at Acacia Point and felt thoroughly at home. Mrs. Hilton took entire charge of the household and, now that there were sufficient means at her command, her talent for house-keeping came out in its proper light.

The whole place was charming: not large, but extremely fortunate in its situation. The point of land on which the house was built jutted out beyond the railroad, which ran through a cutting behind it, spanned by a bridge which led directly to the place.

In the distance this thickly-wooded bit of the shore lay on the water like a piece of green moss flung out on the river. The lawn sloped down to the water, and at one place there was a huge boulder on which the airiest of summer-houses was built, a slight bridge connecting it with the mainland. The house itself was of granite, with a great many gables and bow-windows and wide verandas. It was covered with wistaria, which in May draped it beautifully with pendent grape-like clusters of lilac blossoms. On one side of the house was an open space of smooth fresh turf, where Mrs. Thorndyke had ordered two tennis-courts marked out, and all around this space grew dark copper beeches, brilliant pinkish-purple Judas-trees, and the stately acacias which had suggested the name of the point.

Well out of sight behind here were the stable, boat-houses, and a good deal of glass for raising grapes and nectarines.

It was altogether a place which no one would be sorry to own, and on the Saturday morning when Paul Lorrimer arrived, after an absence of many years, it looked and smelt like Paradise. He had been met at the station by a low well-appointed victoria, with two men on the box dressed in the deepest mourning livery.

"She knows how to spend money," he reflected, with a comprehensive glance which took in the points of the gray cobs.

He had an odd sort of feeling that this carriage in which he was sitting and this place to which he was going ought to be his.

He was dressed accurately all in black, and he looked distinguished and interesting. As he drove over the bridge, a train thundered beneath it. The gray cobs quivered, but behaved admirably. All along the approach to the house, the grass had been left long, and it was swarded with buttercups and daisy-buds. In a week or two it would be as white as a new fall of snow.

(To be Continued.)

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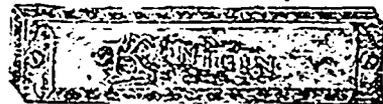
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