

# Stella Mordaunt:

## The Cruise of the "Kingfisher."

CHAPTER XXIV.  
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They had turned the corner of the house, and, just as they did so, a lady rode up on horseback, followed by a groom.

Lady Cecilia shaded her eyes from the sun, then exclaimed:

"Why, it is Mary Hatherley!"

The ladies hurried forward to welcome Mary.

"Why, Molly, dear, what a delightful surprise! How good of you to come over so soon!" exclaimed Lady Cecilia, and as Mary looked from her saddle, she put her arm round her and kissed her affectionately; for the two girls were great friends.

"I heard that you had come back and I rode over directly," said Mary as she shook hands with Lisle. "How well you are both looking! I am dying to hear about your travels! What a long time you have been away!"

"Oh! I've a budget to unfold!" said Cecilia; then she looked round at Stella, who had hung back to allow the two friends to exchange greetings. "Mary, this is a new, but a very dear friend of ours—Miss Mordaunt, Stella, Lady Mary Hatherley is an old school-fellow and neighbour."

Stella came up, and the two regarded each other with the conventional gravity, but each felt somewhat attracted, and Mary held out her hand with the Hatherley smile which so few persons could resist.

They went into the house, and after a minute or two Stella quietly left them and strolled into the garden.

"What a lovely face!" exclaimed Mary, as soon as Stella was out of hearing.

"Isn't she beautiful?" responded Cecilia, "and she is as sweet as she is beautiful. We met her in our travels"—she and Cecil had agreed to tell no one of the way in which they had "met" Stella—"and we have induced her to come to the Abbey. She is supposed to be my companion, but it is a convenient fiction. I am so glad you admire her, and I am sure you will like her when you know her. Life has been a different thing since she came to us, hasn't it, Cecil?"

He assented gravely.

"And now come up to my room and take off your hat! Of course you are going to spend the day with us, and we'll ride part of the way home with you."

The two went up to Lady Cecilia's room, and Cecilia sat by the dressing-table and regarded her old school-fellow and friend lovingly as Mary stood before the glass taking off her

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"The efficiency of any drug," says Dr. C. P. Robbins, "is known to us by the results we obtain from its use. If we are able to control pain and disease by means of any preparation, we certainly are warranted in its use. One of the principal symptoms of all diseases is pain, and this is what the patient most often applies to for relief. It is something to relieve his pain. If we can arrest this promptly, the patient is most likely to trust in us for the other remedies which will effect a permanent cure. One remedy which I have used largely in my practice is Anti-kamnia Tablets. Many and varied are their uses. I have put them to the test on many occasions, and have never been disappointed. I found them especially valuable for headaches of malarial origin, where quinine was being taken. They appear to prevent the bad after-effects of the quinine. Anti-kamnia Tablets are also excellent for the headaches from improper digestion; also for headaches of a neuralgic origin, and especially for women subjected to pains at certain times. Two Anti-kamnia Tablets give prompt relief, and in a short time the patient is able to go about as usual. These tablets may be obtained at all druggists. Ask for A-K Tablets. They are also unexcelled for headaches, neuralgia and all pains."

hat. The excitement of their meeting had brought the colour to Mary's face but it had died away by this time, and Cecilia saw that she was pale and that there was a melancholy look in the beautiful eyes which had not been there when they had parted in the early spring.

"And now tell me all the news, Mary," she said. "Have you been quite well, dear?"

"Oh, yes; quite," said Mary, but rather listlessly.

"But have you? You are looking paler, thinner—but prettier than ever, dear."

Mary looked at her reflection in the mirror absently.

"Am I not looking well? Yes, I am thinner, I think," she said, casually. "News? I don't think there is much."

"How is Lord Hatherley? I hope he hasn't forgotten the girl he used to call the 'second favourite!'"

Mary smiled, but rather sadly.

"He is not likely to forget you, dear; and he would have come over with me, but he has a touch of the gout. He has not been well lately. I think he is worried about something."

Lady Cecilia looked surprised.

"It is strange to hear of your father worrying about anything; he is always so bright and cheerful. What is it, Molly?"

Mary hesitated.

"I scarcely know," she said; "business of some kind, I fancy; but he does not tell me—now; perhaps he thinks I should not understand," she added, as if she should not seem to be complaining. "Women do not understand business, you know, Cis. It is something in which he and—Lord Rattion"—she paused a moment before she spoke his name—"are mutually concerned."

"Lord Rattion, the new earl!" exclaimed Cecilia. "I want to hear all about him, Molly. You know he did not appear—turn up—until after we had gone. We read a short paragraph about his claim and succession to the title, and we are, of course, very curious to hear what he is like. Is he nice, Molly? Do you see much of him?"

Mary answered the last question, evading the first.

"Yes; a great deal. He comes over to us—to see father—nearly every day, and—oh, yes! we see him very often."

"What is he like?" asked Cecilia, with natural curiosity. "He is very young, of course? Is he good-looking and—well, nice in every way? Do you like him, Molly?"

"Lord Rattion is young, and—yes, good-looking," said Mary, very quietly. "Most persons would call him handsome."

"Which means that you don't," commented Cecilia.

"It does not matter very much whether I do or not," responded Mary with a laugh which sounded strange and forced to Cecilia. "He is very popular—extremely so, and with all sorts and conditions of people, for he is very hospitable—there have been a great many entertainments at the Hall since he came—and he is very good to the tenants and the people on the estates."

"Notwithstanding all which, I see you don't like him very much, Molly," remarked Cecilia, with a woman's shrewdness.

Mary flushed for a moment.

"I ought to be very grateful to him, for he saved my life," she said, gravely.

"Saved your life!" exclaimed Cecilia. "Why, how? Tell me, Molly."

Mary related the incident of the runaway horse and Ralph's plucky rescue; but though she told the story graphically, and exaggerated rather

than depreciated her danger and Ralph's courage, Cecilia noticed that there was none of the enthusiasm in Mary's voice which might have been expected.

"I can never forget it, and father—" "I know how your father must feel towards him, Molly. He must feel that he owes Lord Rattion a debt he can never repay—your life! Oh, Molly! we are all grateful to him! If he is so popular and hospitable and good to the people on the estate, and possesses such courage, he must be nice. Why, Mary, he is quite a hero."

"Yes," assented Mary, mechanically. "I daresay you will like Lord Rattion."

"I will get Cecil to ride over to call on him to-morrow, and we will ask him to dinner. You and Lord Hatherley will come, Molly?"

A shade passed over Mary's pale face.

"Father does not go out much now, Cis," she replied, in so constrained a fashion that Cecilia tactfully hastened to change the subject.

"And now tell me—some of our other friends, Molly. How are the Bryans, for instance?"

Mary turned aside to put down a hair-brush, so that Cecilia did not see the crimson which flooded her friend's face.

"They are very well," she replied. "I lunched there yesterday. They are delighted at your home-coming."

"And where is Edward?" asked Cecilia, eagerly. "Have they heard from him lately?"

"He is abroad," said Mary, very quietly, her face pale again, and her manner well under control. "They have not heard very lately—he is in the wilds somewhere and cannot write."

"Dear old Ned!" said Cecilia. "I hope he is getting on all right. What a dear fellow he is! Do you remember the happy times we four—you and he, and Cecil and I—used to have in the holidays? There never was anyone so nice as Edward Bryan! What a pity it is that he is not the eldest son. But I ought not to have said that, Molly, and yet one can't help regretting it. You were always his special favourite, you know, and we used to tease him about you."

"I remember," said Molly, in a low voice. "And now tell me about your travels and all that has happened to you, Cis."

Cecilia was silent for a moment. She noticed a change in her once light-hearted school-fellow. Mary who used to be the most frank-hearted of girls, had become reserved, and seemingly cold; and what was the meaning of the subtle air of melancholy in her voice and manner, and the sad expression in the eyes which Cecilia remembered sparkling with innocent, girlish fun? She spoke and looked as if a cloud were hanging over her, as if she had something on her mind.

If Lady Cecilia Lisle and Lady Mary Hatherley had been a couple of factory hands or domestic servants Cecilia would have risen and thrown

her arm round Mary's neck and asked her what was the matter; but they were two ladies of rank, and in their world impulse is held in check, and confidences are waited for, not invited. Besides, Mary's secret sorrow had lent her a new and strange dignity, which alone was sufficient to curb Cecilia's longing to learn Mary's trouble and comfort her. So she gave Mary an account of their travels; and she, on her hand, had something to conceal when she spoke of Stella.

"We—we met her quite by accident," she said, "and I have grown very fond of her. Poor girl! she has no relations, and is quite alone in the world. I hope you will like her, Molly. But, indeed, you won't be able to help it!"

Mary had gone to the window and was gazing out with the far-away look in her eyes which was now their habitual expression; but she was listening to Cecilia with interest.

"I am sure I shall like her," she said, warmly, "and it is just like you to—" She stopped suddenly, as if something in the garden below had attracted her attention. Cecilia went to the window to see what it was.

Stella and Cecil was standing on the lawn, and as Mary had been speaking, he had stopped and picked a flower and offered it to Stella. There was nothing to attract attention in the simple action; but Mary and Cecilia saw the look in his eyes as he gave Stella the flower; and Mary glanced at Cecilia with a startled look, and turned away from the window as if she had seen something that was not intended for her eyes.

Cecilia crimsoned.

"I know dear," she said in a low voice. "Yes, he is in love with her. He has been in love with her ever since—from the first moment—we saw her. It was love at first sight. I know what you think, what everybody will say. They will blame me for having her here, for making so close a friend of her. But, Molly, she is good and true, and though she has no position, and though we know so little of her, I cannot interfere, cannot come between them. And if I wished to do so, I could not. My heart's on her side, Molly. Isn't that strange? It must seem so to you; and you will blame me."

Mary turned, with a sudden colour in her face and a light in her eyes.

"No, I don't blame you," she said with an earnestness, and emotion which almost startled Cecilia. "Why should you come between them? What right have you, has anyone, to wreck Lord Lisle's happiness? If he loves her—and I can see that he does, I saw his face just now—why should anyone interfere? If she is good and pure, what does it matter if she is not of the same rank as ourselves; if she is poor—I suppose she is poor?"

Cecilia inclined her head in silence; she was surprised by Mary's unusual vehemence.

"He is rich enough for both, rich enough to choose. Oh how fortunate he is, how fortunate!" she broke off, with sudden bitterness. "I am sick of the worldliness that separates two persons who love each other because the one is poor or not in 'Society.' Money, rank! We worship them nowadays. As if they were the only things that brought happiness! Happiness! Is there any class so unhappy as ours! Oh, Cis! I never pass the lodge without envying the keeper and his wife; they are just married—they have been in love with each other since they were children; and because they happen to be poor working people they are permitted to be happy. There was a smile on her face to-day, as I stopped and spoke to her—that made me want to kiss her—while we who are supposed to be free and privileged are little better than slaves to Rank and Mammon!"

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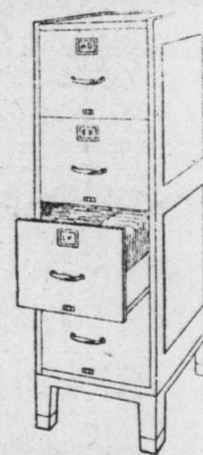
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