

LADY MARY--CONTINUED  
FROM PAGE 17.

an unusual-looking, if not a very handsome man. His skin was as dark as a gipsy's, and he had great black eyes with heavy lids and dark circles underneath, which showed blue under the deep olive of his complexion. His lips were full and red, the upper one being so short, that when his mouth was in repose it showed a gleaming white line of teeth, and his figure would have done more credit to a prize-fighter than to a solicitor of refined ambitions.

As he was the first man, save the few masters in the school, with whom I had ever so much as shaken hands, I was inclined to feel an interest in him and congratulate myself on at least one of my traveling companions. Still, as he pressed my small fingers with his big ones, looking full into my eyes, I found myself shrinking from him a little. He might be interesting as a specimen of that (to me) unknown quantity, man, but I could not fancy myself ever wishing to claim Mr. Valentine Graeme for a friend.

"I am sorry that our acquaintance should have to begin at what must be a sad time for you, Miss Rutland," he said in a deep voice that had yet, oddly enough, an almost effeminate suspicion of a lisp in it whenever he came to a word with an "R." He spoke, also, rather as if he were repenting a lesson well conned. "However, I mustn't forget that you never knew Lord Rutland as many girls know their fathers, and I hope for that reason your life will not be so darkened by his loss."

It was true that my love for my father had been a mere romantic sentiment—a feeling which I expected myself not to fail in—rather an emotion which ran with my blood and beat with every heart throb. It was true that it would be impossible for me to miss him, because he had never been mine to miss; and yet I somehow resented Mr. Graeme's assumption that this must be the case.

There was no real sympathy in his words, and his big black eyes expressed curiosity as to my personal "points," rather than the vague something which I knew I needed and wanted in my new life, yet could not have defined.

I did not know what to say to him, but I murmured something under the criticism of Mrs. Goring-Anderson's eyes; and having evidently done all that was required of me in the direction of Mr. Graeme, Miss Cade, my stepmother's companion, was brought up to be introduced.

She was of that indescribable age when it is charitable to say of a woman that she is fifty, though so unattractive did the strange-looking being appear to be both in mind and body that it could not have personally mattered to a soul on earth if she had been seventy.

As Mrs. Goring-Anderson, aided and abetted by Valentine Graeme, made us known to each other I gazed up and up until my head almost lay back on my spine, so remarkably tall was Miss Cade. My eyes traveled from a pair of large, flat feet, along considerable plains of short, dark cloth skirt, thus reaching still higher altitudes of bodice and cape, until at length they attained the rarefied region of face, under the unbecoming shadow of a pork-pie hat. Miss Cade must have been fully six feet in height, and as I was not quite five feet four she appeared to be a giantess, recalling tales of ogresses who fattened on plump infants, which had horrified me in my childhood. Her arms were abnormally long, her hands huge and ungainly; and when she sat down she had an unpleasant habit of crossing one leg over the other, shaking the foot which was off the ground, and cracking the joints of her fingers with a secret, surreptitious air.

The long, oval face was noticeably large, shaped like an egg, with the yellow skin drawn so tightly over it that it shone on every eminence, of which, counting the nose, there were several of conspicuous proportions. In the centre of her forehead was a curious prominence of bony formation, which made her narrow eyes appear to slope away underneath like

those of a rabbit. As she smiled at me her upper lip protruded, seemingly to swallow up and completely obscure the insignificant lower one; and so hateful was the effect, that I felt a babyish desire to cry out, cover my eyes with my hands, and run away.

I controlled myself, however, and under the compulsion of the moment was able to answer such questions regarding my health and my readiness to start for Cumberland as Miss Cade chose to ask me.

Mr. Graeme had business which would keep him from leaving on that day; but on the next he would be at my service, he said, and meanwhile Miss Cade would be glad to occupy herself in sight-seeing, as she seldom had an opportunity of coming to London.

Rose Lorimer was far more interested in my account of Mr. Graeme than in that of my stepmother's companion. But Mrs. Rayne, I could not help noticing, listened with a certain well-nigh shuddering intentness to the description I gave her of Miss Cade.

That night I could not sleep. Strange visions of the future were in my mind, and whenever I closed my eyes the black ones of Valentine Graeme, the grey-green ones of the ugly old woman who lived with my stepmother, seemed peering at me out of the darkness.

Despite my bitter complaints to Rose, I would now have stayed at Wellington House if I could, and I wondered at my old self (already it appeared my old self) for my ingratitude and dissatisfaction. I was up early, and Rose and I had half an hour in the garden together before she was obliged to say good-bye and go to her school duties. Of course, we promised to write each other once a week at least; but I may as well say here that many strange and unforeseen circumstances were to prevent me from keeping my part of the bond.

It was the first time since I (a sedate child of nine) had been taken from my old home in Surrey to Wellington House, Hampstead, London, that I had traveled, save in a carriage or district railway train. The sensation of having broken old ties, and of venturing into an unknown world, had at least the charm of novelty, if no other. Mrs. Goring-Anderson had relaxed something of her cold stateliness in bidding me farewell. The teachers had been decorously sorry to see the last of me, and never before had I realized how well I liked some of the girls, or how well they liked me.

At length it was all over—the packing and the good-byes, and the last looks at well-remembered rooms—and, gowned in the deepest mourning, I sat in a first-class carriage steaming out of Euston Station. Opposite me was my stepmother's nephew and man of business, Valentine Graeme. By my side, though with a bag and a book or two between us, sat Miss Cade, expecting evidently to be treated as an equal by me as well as Mr. Graeme. It had not taken me long to decide that she was unenduring—a woman whose very presence affected one like the clammy touch of a snake.

It did not augur well, in my opinion, that my stepmother could tolerate her, much less have placed her in a position of trust.

Both Mr. Valentine Graeme and Miss Cade endeavored to be agreeable, and each had something pleasant to say about Lady Mary and the welcome I would receive at my new home. But I was shy and nervous, and not able to respond in as unconstrained a manner as perhaps I ought to have done. And besides, I felt uncomfortable to think of poor Mrs. Rayne, who, in the character of Nichols, my maid, had been relegated to a second-class compartment to herself.

I knew that I was expected to talk, yet I had nothing to say, and it was a relief to me when Willesden, the first stopping place, was reached. How glad, how inexpressibly glad, I should be, I told myself, if only someone else would come into our carriage!

Such a contingency had evidently entered Miss Cade's mind as well, for she had said, rather sharply, as the crowd hurried to and fro on the platform outside our window: