

Beautiful Cynthia; OR Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER V.
A SCHOOL-GIRL TRANSLATED.

"Certainly, miss," said Parsons, in a matter-of-fact but pleasant way, "and do your hair, and keep your clothes neat, and bring you tea in the morning, and wait on you generally." She put a chair in front of the glass, and Cynthia, still too amazed to re-monstrate, sank into it. Parsons deftly threw a wrap round her and proceeded to brush her hair with the ivory brush with a silver coronet on the back; there was a coronet marked or stamped on everything in the room, or so it appeared to Cynthia.

"You've lovely hair, miss," said Parsons, as she drew the brush through it and handled it admiringly. "Have I?" said Cynthia. "I've never noticed it; it's very troublesome; it will get into my eyes."

"I think I had better do it up into a pigtail, miss," said Parsons; "with a scarlet bow. You'll soon be having it up, miss, and very pretty it will look. Now we put on the dress."

Cynthia submitted in a kind of terror, and presently Parsons exclaimed:

"There! Shall I put a little scent on your handkerchief, miss?" she asked, as she unfolded one of the useful but coarse squares purchased at the village shop for the modest sum of sixpence halfpenny.

"I don't know," said Cynthia; "if you like."

Parsons did like; she handed Cynthia the perfumed handkerchief, with as much deference as if it were of cobweb lawn and Brussels lace; then she opened the door of the adjoining room.

"You'd like to wait in your sitting room, miss, until the bell rings?" She shook up a down cushion on a sofa. "Perhaps you'd like to lie down, miss, and rest."

"But I'm not tired," said Cynthia. "I'm never tired; besides, I've been sitting all day. Is—is this my room, too?" she asked, looking round her with astonishment, for the sitting room was as luxurious as the bedroom.

"Certainly, miss," replied Parsons; "you want your own room. You want a room to read and write in, to

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sit in when you want to be alone."

Cynthia shrugged her shoulders and gave it up as a bad job. She went to the window. It looked onto the square. Many carriages, all of them handsome, but none of them quite so grand as Lady Westlake's, were rolling by, taking people home or out to dinner; beautifully dressed men and women walked slowly along the pavement, as if they had all the time in the world. The height and size of the houses, their imposing porticoes, the richly liveried servants, the general air of wealth and grandeur, stole upon the girl's senses and impressed her with the vastness of the change which had come into her life.

Summerleigh, the schoolhouse, the bridge over the stream, the cottage, even her father and Darrel Frayne seemed to have receded miles away, as if she had parted from them months, years ago, instead of a few hours.

The tears began to well up in her eyes, a lump rose in her throat; but she checked the tears and the sob, for she knew that, as Parsons had said, Lady Westlake did not like persons about her to cry; she succeeded in checking the outward manifestation of her grief, but it was only by promising herself that she could cry as much as she wanted to do when she got to bed.

Presently Parsons knocked at the door, opened it, and with a smile and nod of encouragement, said:

"Will you come down now, please Miss Cynthia?"

They went down to the drawing-room. Parsons on the way giving a touch to Cynthia's hair and dress. The drawing-room was a large one furnished very richly and opening into a spacious, semicircular conservatory, in which palms and tropical plants were flourishing and sending out a faint, heavy perfume; it was all very grand, but the room and its appointments seemed to Cynthia, as she was, old and shabby.

She seated herself on an amber satin chair, and presently Lady Westlake entered she was in evening dress of an old-fashioned style, and plentifully bediamonded. At sight of the girl's plain and obviously short frock her ladyship raised her thick eyebrows and stretched her lips.

"Humph!" she said to herself. "To-morrow morning, the first thing." Then, to Cynthia, "Are you hungry, child?"

"No," said Cynthia, in her direct fashion. She looked at the old lady gravely. "Am I to say Lady Westlake, when I speak to you please?" she asked. "I don't know."

Her ladyship grunted. "You can call me Aunt Gwen," she said. "My name is Gwendoline; but my friends mostly call me 'Lady Gwen'; my enemies, and I have plenty of them, thank goodness, call me Lady Grim, behind my back, I believe."

"Why?" asked Cynthia, with interest.

Lady Westlake grinned at her. "You'll soon find out, I dare say," she said. "Do you like your rooms, do you like Parsons? I'll discharge her if you don't. The world is full of ladies' maids."

"Oh, no, no!" said Cynthia eagerly, earnestly. "I like her very much; she is a very kind."

Lady Westlake gave a little snort. "Oh, kind, eh? Of course, she is; she is paid for being so."

Mr. Supley, the butler, entered, stood by the door in the attitude and with the expression of a person about to perform a religious ceremony, and said in subdued tones:

"Dinner is served, my lady."

Cynthia followed her ladyship into the dining-room on the other side of the hall; it was a large apartment, very handsome, but dull and gloomy.

The furniture was of the awful, early Victorian period, massive, heavy, lumbering; the sideboard looked like a mahogany tomb; the table was large enough to dine twenty persons; the chairs required a man to lift

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them; the mantlepiece was of carved cedar, and on its shelf were bronzes which looked as if they weighed a ton; most of the pictures on the walls were portraits of dead-and-gone Westlakes, persons with plain and forbidding countenances which frowned upon the table as if their owners were predicting indigestion.

Notwithstanding that daylight was still bright, the heavy curtains were drawn, and the darkened room was lighted by wax candles in brackets round the walls and in ponderous silver candelabra on the table, which was heavy weighted by other exceedingly ugly and massive articles in the same precious metal.

There were two footmen in attendance, in addition to Mr. Supley. And if three moved about noiselessly and with faces so impassive that they might have been carved out of wood, Lady Westlake sat at the head of the table, one of the footmen had inducted Cynthia to the chair at the end. The candelabra and an enormous pergne cut off Lady Gwen from her; so that Cynthia had a sense of dining alone in the vast and gloomy apartment.

She looked at the number of knives and forks and spoons neatly arranged before her and at the array of wine-glasses on her side, with a kind of wonder and dismay, which increased as dish after dish was brought to her by the footman, who got them from Mr. Supley, who was carving at the massive side table; and she got quite tired of saying, "No, thank you," or, "I don't want any, thank you."

Lady Westlake plodded through the elaborate dinner, occasionally grumbling at one of the dishes, and apparently oblivious of the girl in her solitude at the end of the table. After a time Cynthia simply shook her head when a dish was brought to her, and leaned back in the chair, which was rather too vast for her slight figure, her downcast thoughts wandering to the cottage on the hill. Her father would have his tea long before this; would Betsy Jane, who had been engaged to take her, Cynthia's place

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get him a nice supper? Her heart ached, a tear forced itself between her lids and hung on an eyelash, from whence it rolled slowly down her cheeks.

After what seemed an age, Lady Westlake rose, a footman opened the door, the other crossed the hall to open the door of the drawing room; slowly and with due state, Lady Gwen repaired thither, followed by Cynthia, like a little forlorn lamb.

Her ladyship pointed to an easy chair big enough for two Cynthias, and the unhappy girl sank into it. "Do you play the piano?" asked Lady Gwen.

"No," replied Cynthia. "We haven't got a piano."

"I suppose you can read?" said her ladyship. "Very well; then amuse yourself by looking at some of the books, but don't make a noise, because I am going to sleep."

Cynthia took up a book from the table beside her. It was a history of the county families of Wiltshire, with illustrations of their various seats. She turned over the pages listlessly; but presently her eyelids got heavy, closed altogether, her grasp of the huge book relaxed, and the heavy volume, heavy in more senses than one, slipped to the ground. Lady Westlake awoke, stretched herself, and stared at the sleeping girl. Then she raised her gold eyeglasses and surveyed the pale, tear-stained face minutely.

"Yes," she said to herself, "she's pretty already; she's going to be a beauty. What am I going to do with her, I wonder? Well, I've got her on my hands. I was a fool, I suppose, to hamper myself with her. One has to pay for one's whims."

Cynthia slept with the soundness of a healthy girl, absolutely tired out; she looked as if she were going to sleep forever. Lady Westlake rang the bell.

"Send Parsons," she said. (To be continued.)

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