



Beautiful Cynthia;

Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER XII. A LOVER SPEAKS.

Like Northam, Darrel attached no importance to Sampson Burridge's threats. They did recur to Darrel's mind the next morning, in his first waking moments, but he put them down to drunken vaporing and dismissed them and Sampson from his mind.

All that day he devoted to his military duties, of course thinking of Cynthia at intervals; and his men, who were attached to him—for your Tommy is a keen judge of character, and can prophesy the future of any young subaltern with almost unerring accuracy—reflected his cheerful countenance and exchanged approving remarks about him when they went off parade and drill.

"He's the best of our lot," said Sergeant Crowe, in the confidence of the sergeant's mess. "I mean of the young 'uns. He's as keen as mustard, is Mr. Frayne, and he's got the men body and soul. He don't spare 'em, and he's down on the slouchers and the slackers, but he don't spare himself. He works like a nigger, and yet if you meet him when he's off duty swinging along in his careless, who-cares-for-anybody kind of way, you'd think he was just one of the ornamental brigade."

"I know that sort, too," remarked another sergeant. "I've fought beside 'em against the 'Fridis, and out in Egypt, when it's been as hot as

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Hades, all give and take, and no quarter; and the young gentleman who went about at home here in pretty clothes, flowers in their buttonholes, and voices as soft as gals, fought like tigers, worse than tigers, because they know when they've had enough, and slink off when their stomach is full."

Sergeant Crowe nodded comprehendingly. "Yes, our Mr. Frayne is one of that kind," he said. "He don't know what fear is. I was sittin' on a style smoking a pipe the other morning, when he come across the meadow, riding that black horse of Capt. Northam's. Now, if ever there was a fend on four legs, he's one of them—the horse, I mean, stupid!—and I knew by the way his eyes rolled that he was up to mischief; he come along mincing, like the cove in the bible, tryin' to persuade Mr. Frayne that he was a lamb; but Mr. Frayne was ready for him, I could see, by the way he kept his knees in; and presently when the Sultan began to play his usual tricks Mr. Frayne had got him well in hand, sticking to him like a leech and talkin' to him chaffing-like. Presently I see him put the horse at a bank; horse refuses with a swerve that would have checked nine men out of ten, and old hands, too. Mr. Frayne got 'im up to it three times, sent him over, turned him sharp, and brought him back at it full pelt. That horse can jump like a frog; he went over clean as a whistle; then he stopped, gives that twist of his, and off goes Mr. Frayne."

"I know that twist," said Sergeant Pole.

"Yes; it would throw a circus rider. I got off the stile, thinking to run him, but before I could start he was on Sultan's back again. He wasn't a bit out of temper; he laughed so that I could hear him where I stood. 'That's one to you, old man!' he said, quite cheerfullike; you know his way of speakin' with a laugh in it? It makes you want to laugh yourself, though you don't know why. Then ensued a regular barney. He rode that horse round and round that blessed field till I was almost-giddy watchin' 'em. He pulled 'im up on his haunches, turned him round half a dozen times, then swung him about sharp and put him at the bank."

"I'd 'a' given a pound to see it," mused Sergeant Pole wistfully.

"Well, it would 'a' been worth it. There wasn't any sense left in that horse; though, mind you, Mr. Frayne never struck him once, and never used the spurs. The Sultan was what he looked like at first, a lamb; and when I stood up and saluted as they passed, Mr. Frayne said, laughin' like a schoolboy, 'Capital horse sergeant!' 'Yes, sir,' says I, 'when you know how to manage him, which you do, sir.' 'Oh,' says he, with another laugh, 'he's not half so bad as an Exmoor pony when he's got his monkey up.'"

"Yes, he comes from Devonshire," commented Sergeant Pole; "they breed a fine lot there, 'osses and men; and our Mr. Frayne's one of the best."

"Our Mr. Frayne" was a trifle restless and impatient the next morning, for was he not going to see Cynthia in the afternoon, and was it not only natural that, notwithstanding the

work which his soul loved, the hours should drag, and that he should find it difficult to fix his mind on anything but the beautiful vision which came between him and his men as they manoeuvred before him. The men were patient and bore him willingly; it is more than possible that, as they would have put it, they guessed he "had a girl on his mind."

At last he was free, and he changed into muffi, deliberating over his choice of a suit, and a necktie, as if the fate of an empire depended on the right decision, and sped up to town. His heart beat apprehensively as he rang the bell, and fell to bottomless depths as the stately porter, with what seemed brutal indifference to Darrel, said:

"Her ladyship is not at home, sir."

Darrel turned away, feeling that all the brightness of the world had suddenly become clouded; then, as a man faces a forlorn hope, he inquired, in a voice which he strove to keep steady, if Miss Drayle were in, and his heart gave a bound as the porter replied in the affirmative, and, with the same brutal indifference, led him to the drawing-room.

There was no one there, but in the anteroom, partially disclosed by the open curtains, he saw a long lace veil—he concluded it was a veil—and other articles of millinery, lying on a chair and on the ground, as if they had been dropped from the hand of some one who had hastily fled from the room.

He ventured to approach, and looked at them with a sudden keen interest, for might they not be Cynthia's? To the man in love there is a subtle charm, an indescribable fascination in everything his mistress wears, and Darrel was gazing at them—he would not have dared to touch them—with a tender and an envious smile—for were they not going to be near her to touch her, to be touched by her?—when the door opened and Cynthia ran in. He turned quickly and caught her hand.

Her face was wreathed in smiles, or eyes were dancing, her sweet lips were apart with pleasant emotion.

"Oh, you've come!" she said innocently, giving herself away; "I thought you were coming quite early; and it's nearly tea time, and Aunt Gwen will be back. And you mustn't stay, because she's in an awful temper, and she'll snap your head off, 'try likely turn you out.'"

"What's the trouble?" he asked, still holding her hand, as if he had forgotten he had got it.

"Oh, I'm going to be presented next week," said Cynthia, laughing and blushing and nodding at him joyously, as a child nods at the prospect of a new doll. "Yes! she made up her mind all in a hurry—she, generally does. She told me when I came home the other night. Oh, how I enjoyed

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myself! She said I had better be presented at once, because I am one of those girls who go off very quickly."

"So you will, I'm afraid," said Darrel, rather glumly.

Cynthia stared at him perplexedly; then her blush grew deeper.

"Oh, she didn't mean that; she meant that I should go off in looks; grow old and plain quickly."

"Amiable old lady!" remarked Darrel. "But I don't think much of her judgment. So you are going to court and going to be a great swell, Cynthia," he said, stifling a sigh. "You'll have a busy time of it then. Dinners, dances, receptions. There won't be much chance of a fellow getting near you."

"Don't be foolish, Darrel!" she said. "I shall only be one of scores, and you—I mean, any one—Oh, I'll show you my veil, now you are here. Isn't it altogether too lovely? It's Brussels; it's the one Aunt Gwen was presented in. Isn't it beautiful?"

She had twisted round to see herself in the glass, and she did not see the ardent look in his eyes as they rested on her face.

"Very lovely!" he assented, as if he had suddenly lost his breath. "But I should like to see you in all your war paint, Cynthia," he added wistfully.

"Should you really?" she asked, turning to him with open eagerness. "Why, so you can! Aunt Gwen is going to give a ball on the night of the court. Ever so many of the debutantes are coming. You must come, Darrel. Oh, I should like you to!"

"What about an invitation?" asked Darrel anxiously. "Lady Westlake doesn't know me very well; it is not at all likely that she will ask me."

Cynthia looked down, and the color stole to her face.

(To be continued.)

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