

LILIAN, THE HEIRLESS.

"No, his death had nothing to do with the trouble of which I am thinking," replies Mrs. Arlington, with curious haste, a quick frown overshadowing her brow. Her fingers meet and clasp each other closely.

Cyril is silent, being oppressed with another growing conviction which completely routes the first and leads him to believe the dead and gone Arlington a miserable brute, deserving of hanging at the very least. This conviction, unlike the first, carries consolation with it.

"I am sorry you would not let my mother call on you," he says, presently. "Did Sir Guy say I would not see her?" asks she, with some anxiety. "I hope he did not represent me as having received her kind message with ingratitude."

"No, he merely said you wished to see no one."

"He said the truth. But then there are ways of saying things, and I should not like to appear rude. I certainly do not wish to see any one, but for all that I should not like to offend your mother."

There is not the very smallest emphasis on the word "your," yet somehow Cyril feels flattered.

"She is not offended," he says, against his conscience, and is glad to see his words please her. After a slight pause he goes on: "Although I am only a stranger to you, I cannot help feeling how bad it is for you to be so much alone. You are too young to be so isolated."

"I am happier so."

"What! you would care to see no one?"

"I would care to see no one," emphatically, but with a sigh.

"How dreadfully in the way you must have found me!" says Cyril, straightening himself preparatory to departure. "The rain, I see, is over."

"It has been for the last ten minutes," Cyril replies. "I shall therefore return you to happiness by taking myself away."

Mrs. Arlington smiles faintly.

"I don't seem to mind you much," she says, kindly, but with a certain amount of coldness. "Pray, do not think I have wished you away."

"That is the first kind thing you have ever said to me," says Cyril earnestly.

"Is it? I think I have forgotten how to make pretty speeches," replies she calmly. "See, the sun is coming out again. I do not think, Mr. Chetwood, you need be afraid any longer of getting wet."

"I am afraid, I mean—I am sure not," says Cyril, absently. "Thank you very much for the shelter you have afforded me. Would you think me very exigent if I asked you to give me that hat you have been ill-treating for the last half hour?"

"Certainly not," says Mrs. Arlington, hospitably; "you shall have it if you care for it; but this one is damaged; let me get you a few others, fresher and sweeter."

"No, thank you. I do not think you could give me one either fresher or sweeter. Good evening."

"Good bye," returns she, extending her hand, and, with the gallant Marchesa firmly clasped in his hand, Cyril makes a triumphant exit.

He has hardly gone three yards beyond the gate that guards the widow's bower when he finds himself face to face with Florence Beauchamp rather wet, and decidedly out of temper. She glances at him curiously, but makes no remark, that Cyril hopes devoutly she may not have noticed where he has just come from.

"What a shower we have had!" he says, with a great assumption of geniality and much politeness.

"You do not seem to have got much of it," replies she, with lady-like irascibility, looking with open disfavor upon the astonishing dryness of his clothes.

"No," amiably—"I have escaped pretty well. I never knew any cloth resist rain like this—doesn't even show a mark of it. I am sorry I cannot say the same for you. Your gown has lost a good deal of its pristine freshness, while as for your feather, it is, to say the least of it, dejected."

No one likes to feel oneself looking a guy. Cyril's tender solicitude for her clothes has the effect of rendering Miss Beauchamp angrier than she was before.

"Oh, pray don't try to make me more uncomfortable than I am," she says, sharply. "I can imagine how unlovely I am looking. I detest the country; it means simply destruction to one's clothes and manners," pointedly. "It has been raining ever since I came back from Shropshire."

"What a pity you did come back just yet!" says Cyril, with quite sufficient pause to throw an unpleasant meaning into his words. "As to the country, I entirely agree with you; give me the town; it never rains in the town."

"If it does, one has a carriage at hand. How did you manage to keep yourself so dry, Cyril?"

"There is plenty of good shelter round here, if one chooses to look for it."

"Evidently; very good shelter, I should say. One would almost think you had taken refuge in a house."

"Then one would think wrong. Appearances, you know, are often deceitful."

"They are indeed. What a beautiful rose that is!"

"Was, you mean. It has seen its best days. By the bye, when you were so near the Cottage why didn't you go in and stay there until the rain was over?"

"I shouldn't dream of asking hospitality from such a very suspicious sort of person

as this Mrs. Arlington seems to be," Miss Beauchamp replies, with much affection and more spitefulness.

"You are right—you always are," says Cyril, calmly. "One should shun the very idea of evil. Extreme youth can never be too careful. Good bye for the present, Florence; I fear I must tear myself away from you, as duty calls me in this direction." So saying, he turns into another path, preferring a long round to his home to a further *tete-a-tete* with the charming Florence.

But Florence has not yet quite done with him. His supercilious manner and that last harmless remark about "extreme youth" rankles in her breast, so that she carries back to Chetwood with her a small stone carefully hidden in sleeve wherewith to slay him at a convenient opportunity.

The same shower that reduces Miss Beauchamp to sullen discontent behaves with equal severity to Lilian, who reaches home flushed and laughing, drenched and out of breath, with the tail of her gown over her shoulders and a handkerchief round her neck. Guy is with her; and it seems to Lady Chetwood (who is much concerned about them) as though they had rather enjoyed than otherwise their enforced run.

Florence, who arrives some time after them, retires to her room, where she spends the two hours that must elapse before dinner in repairing all dilapidations in face and figure. At seven o'clock precisely she descends and gains the drawing-room as admirably dressed as usual, but with her good-humor still conspicuous by its absence.

She inveighs mildly against the evening's rain, as though it had been specially sent for the ruin of her clothes and complexion, and says a good deal about the advantages to be derived from a town life, which is decidedly gracious, considering how glad she has been all these past years to make her home at Chetwood.

When dinner is almost over, she turns to Cyril and says, with deliberate distinctness:

"Until to-day I had no idea you were acquainted with—the widow."

There is no mistaking whom she means. The shot is well fired, and goes straight home. Cyril changes color perceptibly, and does not reply instantly. Lady Chetwood looks at him with marked surprise. So does Lilian. So does Sir Guy.

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"I hardly think I see it in that light," draws Florence, affectionately. "I confess I don't feel exactly ambitious about making the acquaintance of this Mrs.—"

"Arlington is her name," suggests Cyril, quietly. "Have you forgotten it? My dear Florence, you really should see some one about your memory; it is failing every day."

"I can still remember some things," retorts Miss Beauchamp, blandly.

By this time it has occurred to Lady Chetwood that matters are not going exactly smoothly; whereupon she glances at Miss Beauchamp, then at Lilian, and finally carries them both off with her to the drawing-room.

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