

TRUE TO HIS WORD.

A NOVEL.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEW BRIDGE.

It was a habit of Walter's—no doubt induced by the practice of his profession—to note the countenances of his fellow-creatures narrowly, but it struck him that that of Lillian, as she greeted him upon the lawn of Willowbank, wore a look that he had not seen upon it before.

"I feel that I ought to apologise," said Walter, "for such an early visitation; but it seems to me there has been a little mistake. Mr. Brown was so good as to tell me to come early—to spend the afternoon, as I understood him."

"Then, how very rude you must have thought us, Mr. Litton!" exclaimed Lillian. "Neither Lotty nor I were ever told a word of that. It is so unlike papa to be so forgetful."

"I am afraid it is I that am the sinner," observed Sir Reginald penitently. "Your father did tell me this morning, Lillian, that Litton would probably drop in soon after luncheon; but I knew that at Lotty had some serious shopping to do, in which she would require your assistance (bonnets, my dear fellow, which with my wife are paramount), and so I kept at home myself—a very bad substitute, I allow—to do the honors in your stead. My conscience nags me, I promise you, when I saw him in his white tie and polished boots (like a fellow who has been up all night at a ball)—there is something so exqu岸tely ridiculous in a man in evening clothes in the daytime—and reflected that he had got himself up so early all for nothing, or at least only for me; but I really did it for the sake of you ladies."

"I beg you will leave me out of the question, Reginald," said Lillian coldly: "if my father himself had so behaved it would have been an act of inhospitality, but in your case it was a rudeness, not only to Mr. Litton, but to me."

"I really cannot admit that, Lillian." "Then we must agree to differ upon that point—at all events, I hope you have done your best, in your self-assumed character of master of the house, to show Mr. Litton the lion's part."

"He has heard them," said Sir Reginald, laughing. His temper, which, as Walter was well aware, was none of the best, seemed imperturbable, and only by a red spot on each cheek, could you perceive that his sister-in-law's reproof had stung him. "He came at three o'clock, you know, as though he had been asked to dine with them."

"Reggie is incorrigible, Lillian," said Lady Selwyn, forcing a little laugh, "and it's no use being angry with him. After all, my dear, remember Mr. Litton and my husband are old friends, and I daresay have got on very well without us."

"Have you seen our new bridge, Mr. Litton?" enquired Lillian, without taking any notice of this attempt at mediation. "No," said Walter. "What bridge?" "Why, the one papa has thrown over the little brook by the rose garden. But you have been shown nothing, of course!"

"There's ingratitude!" exclaimed Sir Reginald. "Why, I left you to exhibit it to him despatched. I knew he would have to see it!"

But Lillian was already leading the way to this new wonder, with Walter by her side, leaving Sir Reginald and his wife to follow them, or not, as they, or rather he, might feel inclined.

"It is positively disgraceful," muttered the baronet, "to see how your sister is throwing herself at that fellow's head."

"Let us hope not that, dear," answered Lotty mildly. "What's the good of hoping when she's doing it, stupid!" returned he angrily. It had begun to strike him that the somewhat high-handed course he had taken to prevent the young people spending the afternoon in each other's company, had not had quite the result he had intended, but, indeed, rather the contrary on—their heads were very close together, and by their eager talk they seemed to be making up for lost time.

"Had we not better go to the bridge too?" said Lotty timidly. "No—yes; that is, you had better go," was the curt reply. "As for me, I can't trust myself to see the girl making such a fool of herself; though this is the last day, thank goodness, that she will have the opportunity of doing it. Follow them up at once, and mind you keep your eyes open and your ears too;" and Sir Reginald turned upon his heel, and, lighting a cigar, strolled away towards the entrance gate.

In the meantime, Lillian's tongue was not idle. "That is only a specimen, Mr. Litton," said she indignantly, and scarce waiting till

they were out of earshot of their late companions, "of Sir Reginald's officiousness, and of how much he takes upon himself of what ought to be my father's province. I am surprised papa has no idea that you have been treated thus."

"I beg, Miss Lillian, that you will not distress yourself on my account. That you should do so, does indeed give me pain, whereas, nothing that your brother-in-law can say, or do, can affect me in any way."

"He has been doing his best, then, to annoy you?" said Lillian quickly. "I guessed that by the look of his face."

"He does not trouble himself to be very agreeable to me, certainly," answered Walter, smiling. "And yet, I have done nothing—voluntarily at least—to offend him."

"I think he is jealous of you, Mr. Litton—I mean as respects your position in this house, and my father's liking for you."

"But I am nobody here; scarcely even a guest, since I have been employed by Mr. Brown professionally, while Sir Reginald is his own son-in-law."

"Yes; but his egotism is such that he wishes to be all in all here. As it is, I am sorry to say that he exerts a great influence over my father; this notion of our going abroad, for instance, is certainly his own idea."

"You do not wish to go abroad, then, Miss Lillian?" "Well—no; not for so long, at all events, or rather, not for an indefinite time, such as is proposed. One does not wish to be separated from all one's friends, without some notion of when one will see them again—does one?"

"No, indeed. But is it really decided that you are to winter in Italy?" "Yes; we are to go to Sicily first—in October—in a yacht, which Sir Reginald has secured. The sea voyage has been recommended to me, it seems; though I am sure I don't want a sea voyage."

"Perhaps it will do you good; you are not looking in such good health as when I had first the pleasure of seeing you."

"Is that wonderful to you who knows what ails me? It is this spectacle constantly before me of my sister's unhappiness that wears and worries me so; and her husband, you may depend upon it, will be no kinder at sea than on land. Indeed, when I reflect upon his growing ascendancy over my father, and on the isolation of all our friends that awaits us, it seems almost as though I myself were about to be subjected to his tyranny."

"I have too good an opinion of your sense and spirit to apprehend such a suggestion, Miss Lillian; and, in fact, I think you have declared your independence pretty plainly this very day."

"Well, I was angry at his behavior to you, Mr. Litton, and so spoke up; but I sometimes fear that I affect a courage in contending with him that I do not possess. If I was to be ill—I mean, really ill—for example, I often shudder to think what puppets Lotty and myself would be in his hands, now that he has once gained my father's ear."

"He seems to have gained it very quickly," said Walter musingly. "Yes; it is very strange, but so it is. I am ashamed to say that I think his possessing a title has given him a sort of stand-point; for my part, however, he not only seems no better as Sir Reginald than he was as plain Capt. Selwyn, but twenty times worse! O indeed, indeed, it is no laughing matter—for Walter could not forbear a smile at her womanly vehemence—and when we are far from home and—and—friends, I shall feel so lonely and so helpless to resist his will!"

"If your apprehensions carry you so far as that, Miss Lillian," said Walter gravely, "I would positively decline to leave England. There is Torquay or the Isle of Wight."

She shook her head. "I have tried all that; but, for the first time in my life, my father has over-ruled my wishes. I sometimes think that there is a plot between them; for my own benefit, of course, as respects papa; but in Reginald's case, as certainly for his own advantage."

"I wish to Heaven I could help you, Miss Lillian! There is nothing I would do for you."

"I know it, Mr. Litton," said she earnestly. "You are a true friend to all of us; so different from that smooth-tongued man yonder, who can also be so rough and tyrannous. But hush! here comes poor Lotty; and I had so much to say to you, which I must not speak of now."

"Well, Mr. Litton, what do you think of the new bridge?" asked Lady Selwyn, with that artificial sprightliness which a woman must be crushed indeed not to be able to assume upon occasion. "Papa was his own architect, and is immensely proud of it, so I hope you have been going into raptures."

Walter had been standing by the new bridge for the last five minutes, and not even noticed its existence, but now he hastened to express his approval. "It is Venetian," she went on, "in its style, as papa avers; but Reginald, who, as you know, is so absurd, will call it the Willow Pattern Bridge. No question has been left by consent for us to decide, when we shall have seen Venice with our own eyes."

"n.e," exclaimed Walter. "I am glad to hear it, however, for it shows that your father has now forgiven everybody who had a hand in making his daughter Lady Selwyn."

"O yes, he has quite forgiven her, and, indeed, likes her very much."

"Then this is not the first time he has seen her?" "Oh, dear no," answered Lotty gaily; while Lillian leant over the Venetian bridge, and shredded a plucked flower into the water with impatient fingers. "She came to call—let me see—the very day after you were here last, and she stayed to dinner, and has been here since very often."

"I don't like Mrs. Sheldon," observed Lillian quietly. "Well, my dear, we have seen so little of her, that is, comparatively," replied Lotty nervously. "Reginald, who has known her all his life, has a very high opinion of her, you know."

"Yes, I know that," said Lillian. "And papa is certainly pleased with her."

"I know that too," repeated Lillian, and this time with even more marked significance. "O Lillian, for shame!" exclaimed Lotty. "What must Mr. Litton think?"

"Mr. Litton is old friend enough, or, at all events, has shown himself friendly enough to both of us, Lotty, to be told. If we had any friend of our own sex"—and here Lillian's voice was lost in a great sob—"with whom to take counsel, it would be different, but, as you know, we have none. We see no one, now, but Sir Reginald's friends."

"O Lillian, Lillian!" cried Lotty, looking round about her apprehensively; "for my sake, for my sake, say no more; I am sure you will be sorry for it. It is not fair, either to me or my husband, or to papa himself."

"Very well; then I will say nothing."

"I hope you have not already said too much," sighed Lotty. "Nay, indeed, Lady Selwyn," observed Walter, "I have gathered nothing of this forbidden fruit. I have no idea at present as to what it is that Miss Lillian wishes you to withhold from me; and I shall make it a point of honor not to guess at it."

"You are very good, I am sure," said Lotty nervously, and speaking like one who repeats a lesson learned by rote. "I think I heard the front gate click, and it is just the time for papa to be home. Had we not better go and meet him?"

"By all means," cried Walter, manifesting an extraordinary interest in Mr. Brown's return from the city, but, in reality, desirous to relieve the young ladies from the embarrassment of his presence; and he moved away accordingly. Lady Selwyn, however, hastened to accompany him; while her sister remained behind, perhaps to remove the traces of her tears. The former made no attempt at conversation with him, and Walter found it no easy matter to keep his thoughts from speculating upon the cause of the strange scene he had just witnessed. That something had occurred with respect to Mrs. Sheldon, which had roused Lillian's extreme indignation against her, was evident; and also that she suspected Sir Reginald of designs of which Walter himself, who had such good reason to distrust him, could hardly believe him capable. It really seemed that the reconquering of the little household at Willowbank had brought with it, at least, as much of evil as of good.

As they left the shrubbery for the lawn, he saw his host walking rapidly towards them, having apparently just left his son-in-law, who was standing on the carriage-sweep; his brow was knit, and his face wore an angry flush; but as he drew nearer, these symptoms of wrath seemed to evaporate, and Walter shrewdly set down to the circumstance that Lady Selwyn was his companion, instead of Lillian, for whom the old gentleman had probably taken her.

"Good-day, Mr. Litton, good-day," said he; "I am afraid I must plead guilty to having forgotten that I had asked you to look in upon us early, until it was too late to alter the ladies' plans; but I hope Sir Reginald made himself agreeable.—Lotty, my dear, if you will go and dress for dinner, and then come down and do the honors to Mr. Litton, I will do my best to amuse him in the meantime.—By Jove! what a lucky fellow you are to be dressed, man. It's not often they get me to do it; but we have got another guest to dinner to-day, and, unfortunately, it's a lady."

"I am sure the lady would feel herself greatly complimented, if she heard you say so, papa."

"Push, tush! I was only speaking generally. It is deuced hard on a man to my time of life to have to change his clothes because a woman is asked to dine. With you young fellows, it is doubtless different; though, when I was your age, Mr. Litton, I had never had a pair of polished leather shoes on my feet, nor so much as a tail-coat on my back. The only evening-parties I ever attended were those at the Mechanics' Institute."

"Indeed," said Walter, not knowing what else to say, though he was well aware that a more rapacious appreciation of the difference between Mr. Brown's now and then was expected of him. "Such a mode of life must have been very unconventional and independent."

"Gad, I don't know about the independence, sir; I had but a pound a week, except a few shillings that I made by working after hours, and which I had by to marry upon. People said it was rash in me to think of a wife; but it is my opinion, that when a young fellow gets to be three-and-twenty it is high time for him to think of such things—that is," added Mr. Brown, with sudden gravity, "if he chooses, as I did; one who is accustomed, like himself, to economizing and simple fare; for to drag a girl down from competence and opulence to what seems to her like beggary by contrast to it, is a very shameful action.—Hello! Lillian, my dear, where did you spring from?"

"I have only been as far as the new bridge and back, papa."

"Well, you'd better go in and dress for dinner, my dear. Your sister has been gone these five minutes."

"But my toilet does not take quite so long as her ladyship's," returned Lillian, smiling. "Well, well; rank has its duties, no doubt, as well as its privileges," observed Mr. Brown complacently. "Perhaps you will marry a baronet, or maybe a lord, yourself, Lillian, some day, and then, I daresay, you will take as long to dress as Lotty."

"Why should I only marry a lord, papa?" said Lillian complainingly. "Can't you look a little higher for me? Why should I not be a duchess, for instance?"

"Go along with you and dress for dinner," laughed her father, pinching her cheek; but when she left to do his bidding his countenance grew grave.

"Lillian is far from well," said he; "I don't think the English climate agrees with her."

"She looked very well when I first had the pleasure of seeing her," observed Walter. "I would fain hope that her indisposition is but temporary; the heat has been exceptionally great this summer."

"No, no; it's not that; but something more serious, though we don't know exactly what. Dr. Agnew has prescribed change of climate. You are doubtless aware that we are going abroad next month?"

"I have heard so, sir," said Walter quietly. "Of course I regret it, for my own sake, but still more for the cause that takes you away."

Common politeness would almost have dictated as much as this, yet Mr. Brown was obviously displeased with the remark, and in his reply to it, ignored the sentence that referred to his daughter altogether.

"Well, yes, of course it will separate you from us completely; but a young man like yourself is always making new friends; for my part, I shall be most pleased to forward your interests, if it should ever lie in my power to do so. But I hope, when we come home, we shall hear of you as having made your own way in the world. After all, that is the only satisfactory method of doing it. Look at me: I had no patrons; I did not lay myself out to conciliate society."

"That is very true," mused Walter: his thoughts were far away, dwelling upon the time when the house before him, now so full of light and life, should, with its shuttered windows and tenantless rooms, strike desolation to his soul. Whether Mr. Brown fancied that his guest's attention was wandering, or, on the other hand, deemed his reply too apologetic, he was manifestly unenjoyed. "Come," said he; "though you are

ressed fine enough, you will like to wash your hands before dinner, I daresay; let's step inside." And they went in accordingly. (To be Continued.)

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G-gu-gu got any geese, to-day? Oh, yes, said the poultryer. A fine lot. How ma-ma ny have you got? A dozen—nice ones, The customer turned them over, and then added—

N-now, you see, I've got a pe-pe-sky set o' fellows at my house, an' they eat a great deal of poultry. Hain't you gu-gu got any tu-tu tough ones?

Wal-yaas, said the poultryer, picking them over. There's one—two—here! four, five o' 'em. Is them all the tough ones you've got? Yes—yes; that's all, said the seller, separating them.

We-we-well, then, I reck reck'n, on the whole, concluded the buyer, with a leer, I'll ta-ta-take the other lot! The feelings of the poultryer, at this unexpected reply, may be more easily imagined than described.

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