SIR WILLIAM'S WILL

CHAPTER XVII.

One afternoon, a few weeks after Hesketh Carton had locked up the vial in his safe, Clytie rode down the winding road to Withycombe. She had started by herself—quite by herself, for she had sent the groom back with a message to Mollie not to wait tea; and it was rather singular that she had not taken this way to Withycombe until after some consideration and hesitation at the crossroads.

And now, as the sure footed mare, with graceful and confident steps, wound her way down the steep and uneven road, she was wondering whether she was acting wisely in going; for she was conscious, painfully conscious, that her object in visiting Withycombe was to see Jack Douglas.

He had scarcely been out of her mind since the eventful day when she had lain fainting in his arms. She had tried to forget him, had told herself a thousand times that it was almost her duty to blot him from her memory; but it is easier for the leopard to change his spots than for a girl to forget such an incident in her life as that which had accompanied the storm in the bay.

And she knew that she wanted to see him; she had waited, with more or less patience, for him to avail himself of her offer and visit the Hall; but day after day passed, and he had not come. It was possible that he had not cared to come, that he had forgotten her—and yet something far back in her heart whispered that he had not done so. Was it pride that was keeping him away? She knew that he was proud, as proud as he was fearless; and if it were pride then— Ah! well, he was right; but still she wanted to see him, to hear the deep, musical voice, now grave and almost stern, now gentle and almost tender.

A faint blush stained the ivory of her cheek as she looked dreamily at the now leafless trees, the beech and pine towering above the road and casting sombre shadows in the mellow glow of the winter sunlight.

How happy she had been in those weeks which seemed so long ago! She had almost forgotten the miserable problem of the will, and her own responsibility and cares in connection with it; and felt almost as free as the fisher-girls who laughed and played on the jetty, the girls she was inclined to envy; for they were free to live and marry whom they would, and were the mistresses of their own lives.

Presently she came to the bend of the road, and a child ran out from among the trees calling joyously to her. It was Polly, and Clytie pulled up with an answering note of welcome in her voice.

"Why, Polly, is it you? How lucky to have met you; for I was coming to see you?"

"Was 'oo?" said Polly, her rosebud mouth stretched in a delighted grin. "What a boo'ful horse!"

"Isn't it?" said Clytie. "Would you like to come up? There is plenty of room for you. See, now, put your foot in the stirrup—come to the bank where you can reach it—and give me your hand. That's it!"

"Do you think he'll bear me?" asked Polly, gravely, as she nestled down with Clytie's arm protectingly round her.

"Yes, I think so," said Clytie, pressing the curly head to her bosom. "And how is mother?"

"Velly well," replied Polly, as t matter of course. "An' I'm velly well; it's only Mr. Jack what's bad."

"Oh, is he bad?" asked Clytie, the smile vanishing from her face and her voice lowered.

Polly nodded solemnly. "Yes, he's been velly bad; so muvver says, but he says no, not at all, that there's nuvving the matter wi' him. But muvver knows, cos he don't eat like what he did. She says he pretends to, but he don't really."

"So he hasn't seen a doctor?" said Clytie, in the same low voice.

Polly shook her head. "He got kite angry when muvver said he should, and 'clared that it was only a cold. A cold does make 'oo miserable, doesn't it?"

"It does," assented Clytie. "And you think that it is only a cold that is the matter with—Mr. Jack?"

"I don't think so," said Polly, shrewdly, "'cos he don't cough or blow his nose; but he's miser'ble'nuff; and he doesn't come home till late, an' walks about by hisself when it's too wet to work, an' he don't laugh no more when he carries me about."

"Oh, he still carries you, Polly?" said Clytie.

"Yes; he isn't too bad for that," said Polly, in a tone of thankfulness; "though muvver often tells him to put the brat down—I'm the brat. I think he's going to leave Withycombe; I hope he won't, don't you, Miss Clytie?"

Clytie felt as if a weight had suddenly fallen on her heart.

"I—I don't know, Polly," she said, speaking rather to herself than the child. "If it is better for him to go—"

Mrs. Westaway came out of the cottage at this moment and eyed the pair with a mixture of pleasure and reproach.

"Lor' bless the child! if she ain't allus in mischief, and makin' a noosense of herself! Give her to me, Miss Clytie, and do 'ee come in and have a cup of tea."

She took the child, giving at a loving shake, and called to a boy to take the horse to the stable, and Clytie followed her into the cottage.

"The kettle's boiling, miss. I put it on, thinking that Mr. Jack might drop in for a cup; but there's no dependin' on him these days. The best o' men are a worry an' a fret, and he's no better than the rest at botherin'. They're a trying lot, miss."

"Polly tells me that Mr. Douglas has been ill," said Clytie, as she cut the bread and butter, and surreptitiously covered a slice with sugar for Polly. But Mrs. Westaway's eyes were sharp.

"You'll spoil that child, miss, same as Mr. Jack does," she said, with mock severity. "Yes; he's been ill, leastways, I think so, or I don't know what's the matter with him. Sometimes I've thought it was the complaint most young men get."

"What's that, Mrs. Westaway?"

"Love," responded Mrs. Westaway sententiously. Clytie bent over her teacup and stirred the tea carefully. "An' so I kep' a watch on the young hussies. There's many of 'em as have set their cap at him, and little wonder, for he's well favored and more—more of a gentleman than the Withycombe lads; but I've seen that he don't take no notice of 'em. P'r'aps it's some gal in furrin parts."

"Perhaps it is," assented Clytie.

"Well, be it as it may, he's changed a deal lately," said Mrs. Westaway with a sigh. "He's lost his hearty ways an' his laugh an' his spirits, for we scarcely ever hear him laugh now; and he seems like a man in a dream. And he's more careless than ever; gets wet through and don't come home to change; and no bullying as I can give him have any effect on him, as it used to do."

"And the jetty at Pethwick?" asked Clytie.

"That goes on amain, miss," replied Mrs. Westway, with a shrug of impatience. "He seemed wrapped up in it. I don't see the sense of givin' your soul to a thing and letting your body go starve, Miss Clytie; and that's what Mr. Jack is doing."

"I am sorry to hear such a bad account of him," said Clytie, after a pause, and as casually as she could. "He was very kind to us—when we were staying here, you know."

Mrs. Westaway nodded. "He's kind to everybody miss, 'ceptin' himself," she said laconically.

"How beautiful the sea looks. I think I will stroll down to the beach," Clytie said, after another pause.

Polly would have followed, but Mrs. Westaway called her back, and Clytie went on alone. The beach was deserted, for the men had not come back from fishing; and she stood and looked at the sea pensively and sadly. There seemed to be something missing in the beauty of the scene. Presently she looked toward the wooded cliff, and saw a figure seated at the foot of a tree, its face turned from her.

She knew it at once. It was Jack Douglas. He was sitting with his chin in his hands, his pipe in the corner of his mouth; and there was something so solitary, so melancholy in his attitude, that it appealed to her heart.

Well, she had seen him, heard of him; and now she could go back—to think of him, to dwell upon that motionless figure gazing out to sea. That was the worst of it; her visit had done her no good, had only increased the restlessness, wistfulness, which had entered into her life.

She climbed the beach, looking straight up the road before her; then she hesitated, and, with a consciousness of weakness, turned to the left and entered the wood. Her step was so light on the dead bracken and pine-needles that he, lost in thought, did not hear her until she was close upon him; and he turned quickly, as she spoke his name, and, springing to his feet, stood and looked at her as if she were a vision rather than a reality.

"Miss Cly—— Bramley!" he said. The color had started to his tanned face, and he gazed at her with a sudden light in his eyes, as if he half-doubted the fact of her presence.

"How do you do?" she said as calmly, as conventionally as she could, and she fought with and mastered the blush that responded to his sudden flush. "I saw you from the beach down there; and I came—I thought I would come to ask you if you caught cold that—in the storm."

"No," he said almost calmly, for he also was fighting. "No." He laughed grimly. "I never catch cold. And you? Were you not—hurt?"

She smiled. "No; oh, no. There was a tiny bruise on my forehead where I struck it; but it has gone; at least, I think so."

She brushed the hair from her brow lightly, as if to show him; and he nodded, his eyes fixed on the spot.

"I'm glad," he said.

She seated herself on the bank, and motioned to the spot from which he had risen.

"Won't you sit down again? And please smoke, or I shall think I've disturbed you at your rest."

He put his pipe in his mouth, and sat down. Every moment was precious, and he feared to cut it short; and yet he was almost sorry she had come; for, quite erroneously, he had been telling himself, even as he sat there, that he was getting used to her absence, that he should in time come to forget her.

"And how does the jetty get on?" she asked, clasping her hands round her knees and looking down at him with a half-smile of interest in her eyes, which were, he told himself, violet now.

"Oh, very well," he said. "No doubt Lord Stanton has told you that we're waiting for stone. That's why I'm mooching here. There'll soon be nothing much to do till the early spring; so I can go away with a clear conscience."

He spoke in a careless tone, and even smiled; and Clytie nodded assentingly.

"You have earned a holiday, I know," she said. As she spoke, her eyes wandered dreamily to the sea; she was wandering vaguely why she should suddenly feel as if the spirit of rest and contentment, of a happiness too nebulous to be called happiness, had fallen lightly, soothingly, upon her like the descent of a wood-dove with outstretched wings.

"Holiday? Oh, I shall find some work," he said absently.

"And will you be long away?" she asked.

He turned his face from her as he replied.

"I—don't know. I'm half inclined to leave for good."

She did not start; but her hands gripped each other, and her lids drooped so that her eyes were hidden if he should chance to turn.

"What would Lord Stanton do?" she asked lightly.

"Engage a better man," he replied. "Of course, I know that it is his kindness that keeps me on. He could get a dozen men to-morrow who know the business better than I do."

"He doesn't think so," she said, in a low voice. "He is always talking of you—he appreciates you, Mr. Douglas. But perhaps you are tired of this quiet place, of the people."

He half-rose, then fell back, and smoked furiously.

"No; I'm not tired of the place or the people," he said almost fiercely.

"Ah! well; then there must be some other reason, no doubt," she said, with a smile.

The smile, the words spoken with a lightness, through which he could not see the genuine distress, stung him. He bit hard on his pipe to keep the retort back; but it forced itself from his lips.

"Yes; there is always some other reason," he said, in a low, stern voice, "and I've got mine; and it's best for me to go."

"You are unhappy here?" she said, not quickly but in a tone he was compelled to answer.

"Yes, I'm unhappy," he admitted, as if the words were wrung from him. "Most men are when they want something they can't get."

She smiled. "I should have thought you were one of those men who always got what they wanted," she said, with the same deceptive, misleading lightness.

He was silent; and she went on, quite calmly, though her heart was beating fast.

"I mean that I should think you are a very ambitious man."

He stared at her.

"I! Ambitious! Well, perhaps you're right, Miss Bramley. But it's only been lately. Yes, I see now! I'm ambitious, that's what I am: but worse luck for me, I've set my mind, my heart, on something beyond me, something as far away as that streak of light in the sky there." He pointed with his pipe, and then stuck it fiercely in his mouth again.

"Then you will get it," she said almost unconsciously.

He looked at her, and his face paled under its tan as he shook his head.

"I think not," he said curtly.

She was silent a moment; then she said, as if with a polite interest in the man, the fisherman, who had been so kind and attentive to her:

"Can no one help you? Lord Stanton—he is your friend, I know, and he would help you."

He sprang to his feet and stood almost with his back to her.

"No one can help me," he said, grimly. "Luck is against me; I have cut the ground from under my feet; there is a barrier—"

She raised her brows and took hold of her habit-skirt as if she were going.

"It sounds so strange to hear you talk like this," she said, with a smile; "in these democratic days when men have cast down nearly all the barriers between them and wealth and fame. Why, one hears, reads, of men rising from the lowest rungs of the ladder to the highest positions, to all kinds of honors."

He looked at her.

"Wealth, fame, position?" he repeated, as if he were puzzled, bewildered. "Who cares for them? I mean—no, no; that's not what I want." He made a gesture with his hand, a movement of impatient contempt; then his face changed, and his eyes grew wistful. "I wish I could tell you," he said, in a low voice.

She did not blush, but something like fear came into he reyes, the fear which thrills every pure maiden when love's lips, the lips which have hitherto been silent, threaten to unlock.

"No, no!" she said. "I mean," and she blushed now. "I am not anxious—that is, I— Oh, I seem to have been trying to force your confidence!" She broke off in distress.

CHAPTER XVIII.

He took a step toward her, then stopped and gripped his hands behind him.

"No; I can't tell you, Miss Bramley," he said, hoarsely. "It—it wouldn't be right, honest, fair. I should be a mean hound! I've cut the ground from under me; I told you so. I've forfeited the right to speak; have closed my own lips. And I'd give"—his voice broke, with a laugh—"half my life to be able to tell you."

She had risen, and had half-turned away from him, her face pale, her eyes downcast, as if his only partially restrained violence frightened her—as, indeed, it did; and yet it was not all fear that made her heart throb with an exquisite pain.

"But I can't," he went on, desperately. "Not now, at any rate. Perhaps some day—" He was silent a moment; then, in a quieter, calmer tone, he continued; "Some day, if—if luck changes, if"—he laughed with self-mockery—"if it is not too late." He thought for an instant swiftly, and added: "Yes, that's it. I must wait! If—if, when the proper time comes, will you care—will you be so gracious as to hear what I shall have to say to say?"

She was silent; and his mood changed, as if he had suddenly remembeerd that he, Jack Douglas, Lord Stanton's man of all work, was addressing Miss Bramley, of the Hall.

"I beg your pardon," he said, humbly. "I've no right to speak to you like this, to ask you to—take an interest—" Then his voice grew deeper and seemed to ring with the assertion of a right. "But let that pass, if you will, and tell me"—he made a rapid calculation—"if I ask you to hear my story in some months—in the spring—will you care to hear it, Miss Bramley?"

(To Be Continued).

EUROPEAN ARMY UNIFORMS

Until the great war broke out France had never adopted any official field uniform for its army as a whole. Troops on duty in Africa had been supplied with khaki, while several experimental uniforms had been tried in sections of the home army. When the war broke out in 1914 the troops went into service in their historic red and blue. The impracticability of this uniform was soon discovered, and a colored cloth of light grayish blue was adopted. This was said to blend better with the sourroundings in the field in Northern France than the khaki worn by the British.

The British army was first entirely equipped with a field service uniform in the South African War of 1899-1902. The color adopted was the same as the khaki-colored uniforms which had been used in India and the same uniform is still used. Though varying in color and details this type of uniform has been practically copied by all nations.

The uniforms of the Italians haye been rather French in character, particularly since the Napoleonic conquest of Italy, but an endless variety of colors. Previous to the unity of the country in 1861 each separate kingdom and state maintained and dressed its army as it saw fit. It was not until 1870 that the entire Italian army came under one dress regulation. These regulations were changed in 1890, at which time the present uniform was adopted. The field uniform is brownish gray in color.

In Germany experiments with a field service uniform were begun immediately after Britain's war with the Boers, but is was not until 1908 that a definate uniform was decided upon. The army since that time has been equipped with field uniforms of brownish gray. Military critics of the war of the nations agreed that it was the most practical of the uniforms now in the field as far as adaptability for concealment is concerned, though the tight-fitting tunics and heavy helmets are unsuited for modern warfare.

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