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**Grand Alliance,**  
OR  
**Love That Knew No Bounds.**

CHAPTER XXIII.

Not a syllable of this was Sydney able to gainsay, however intuition might question the self-satisfied ultimatum. So, closer and closer did the spinster lady hug her happy idea, and never hesitated to strain the dependency of kinship to its very utmost. To wit: An open letter lay on the breakfast-table one morning when Sydney came down. Miss Hurst had just ended reading it aloud. Her brother, with the unusual relaxation of anticipated pleasure on his features, was saying:

"It would be capital to have him here, Jean. You don't recollect much of his stay at our old home, but if you had seen him with me at Pritchard's when the verdict went against me, you'd like him as I do. And I promise you, he won't expect to be treated with ceremony. He will suit himself to our accommodation in a moment."

Something unprecedented—a visitor—seemed impending. Less to Miss Hurst's satisfaction than her brother's, though. The lady, with an air of being much put upon, clattered the breakfast equipage, sighed noticeably, and then said, slowly:

"Oh, if you wish it so very, very much, Gilbert, pray have your friend. You ought not to put it off out of consideration for me."

"Why, Jean, a night's lodging to my old chum won't put you out, will it?"

Another sigh, with a dejected smile at Sydney, that said, "Oh, the denseness of male creatures!" Then an evasive "Oh! never mind; when do you want him to come, Gilbert?"

"Why, next Monday, according to what he says, is it not?"

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"And this is Thursday. Then I'll go into the attic to-night, and give time for my room to be got ready."

"Jean, you shall do nothing of the sort. I could change, or anything will do for—"

Miss Hurst interrupted with sad severity. "No, Gilbert, you know I should never suffer you to move. And 'Anything' will not do for a guest. But leave it to me. As you are so anxious to have him, make your mind easy. Everything shall be ready."

Another mournful inspiration temporarily closed the topic. But at the dinner-table it was revived.

"On your visitor's account we dine later on Monday, Gilbert."

"There's no necessity, Jean."

"Oh, but there is! We dined at half-past six when he was with us at the dear old rectory. I shouldn't like him to consider that we've, as it were, gone down; though—to Sydney—as I told you before, late dinners, as a rule, require more experienced servants than I can afford. But I can help all the morning, and we'll make the effort for once. Oh! and should you consider, Gilbert, my orchard-trees want pruning this month, or could I put it off till January?"

"I'm not wise on such matters," confessed Mr. Hurst. "Suppose you ask Davis?"

"Oh, he's certain to say, 'Do it directly,' because he likes getting here to work. But, you see, if we are to have this Mr.—"

"Now, Jean," protested her brother, with wonderful good-nature, "don't try to make me believe a solitary man stopping here a single night can possibly interfere with your tree-pruning!"

"But, Gilbert, it does!" cried Miss Hurst, sharply, "and I'll show you how. You are as imaginative as Rebecca. She was telling me this morning we had mice, and that we must have a cat to kill them. 'A cat,' said I, 'Rebecca! a trap, you mean. They're the things for mice. A trap doesn't break plates; a trap doesn't jump on the ladder shelf and steal the fish; a trap doesn't run away with one's young chickens, nor require a pennyworth of milk to drink every day. A penny a day comes to thirty shillings and five-pence in a year. Rebecca,' I said, 'and if I waste it so, I shall not have it to spare for other objects. We'll have no cat!' And just the same, Gilbert, with receiving company. I can't do that and prune the orchard. For before I have a stranger here I must get—docketing each article off on her fingers—a new door scraper; fresh carpet on the landing; a new lid to the soup tureen—I shouldn't cut off a friend who was such a friend that he could even go through that trying work at the oculist's with my poor brother, without soup—and to get these things I must journey to Hereford. Also, we should be compelled to have the front garden done up. All of which would take more than—"

Mr. Hurst just lifted his hand as if deprecating this torrent of items.

"I understand," he said; "we'll settle this presently, Jean. I am apt to forget how much you have to think of."

Something in his manner silenced Miss Hurst's loquacious outpour. She looked at him askance.

"You will have some more beans, Gilbert?"

"No more, thanks, Jean."

"Oh, but they are the last this season. I have not touched them myself on purpose that you should have them."

"Good Jean," he answered, but pushed aside his plate, and Miss Hurst eat up what he refused, with the air of a victim to masculine caprice.

It was dusk that afternoon when Sydney, lamp in hand, came down from her own room, and heard herself softly called from the door of the study. Mr. Hurst had been there alone for the last hour. Now she found out what for.

"Have you a light?" he asked ("those every-day admissions of his loss always smote her afresh with pain.) "Then will you come here? Have I not been doing mischief? I caught my arm on the inkstand, and I expect I have undone my afternoon's labor." True enough, "an inky pool was spreading rapidly over the blotting-pad, but as yet, it was a good inch off the written page lying thereon. Sydney moved this hastily.

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"Your letter is safe. The envelope—Oh! that you are holding. I can soon put the things straight and rub the ink-marks off the table."

"Higs it hurt the carpet, or spoiled anything?" he asked, anxiously.

"Clumsy, that I am! I don't want to damage the least of my poor sister's household goods."

"You have done no harm, and there is not a speck on your letter. Here it is."

But he drew back as she approached with it, asking, with a hesitation that struck her as most sad, "Will you look it through for me? I am forced to come—you. It is my first production without help. Is it legible?"

"Perfectly." But the penmanship of such elaborate pains was so different in its careful distances, and angles, from the freely written manuscripts of his days of light, that her one word betrayed commiseration. Mr. Hurst mistrusted her.

"If readable," he said, "will you let me hear it, please? There is no secret in it."

So bidden, she read:

"Dear old Fellow,—Best thanks for your note. As for the inquiry therein, you informant was right. We long ago parted with all interest in the concern you name. Unlucky for us we ever had any in it. Whatever you are after, I wish you prosperity. I am not such a curmudgeon as to grudge my old college-mate good luck, though I seem out of the running. I should hugely enjoy a chat with you, but just now a visit would not suit my excellent powers 'that be. Therefore I cannot say 'Come.' That I will do so, as soon as ever I can you very well know. Till then, or till I manage my pen better in the dark, fare you well. Always, dear Drayton—"

"Drayton!" exclaimed Sydney, with a great start.

"Yes, Drayton. Have I not put it plain? Richard Drayton he is; the fellow who chummed with me at Wellborough and Oxford, and won many a rebuke, and, for all that, the hearty good-liking of our dear old tutor Vaughan—Ah, me! but those were good times. Is the name right?"

"Yes. I—see it now. Shall I fold it for you?"

She put the missive in its cover read the superscription to her last year's acquaintance, now no further away than Worcester, checked all thanks, kept mute watch over Mr. Hurst till very quietly out by the side entrance he went off with his letter—all this she did as if awake, she was fulfilling a dream, completely for a space overcome by this strange coincidence of being sent by fate to minister to that saddened life she had felt so drawn toward, because described as "well-nigh helpless, well-nigh hopeless."

Pondering this added perplexity to her situation, mechanically she cleared away all signs of Mr. Hurst's disaster, replaced the blotting-paper from her store (she would not have him worried over that!) and then went out into the soft twilight, to let a blustering south wind aid in clearing away the new complication.

At first it seemed great. Must she leave Wynstone, for fear of Mr.

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Drayton's coming? Did her promise to her mother exact such extreme caution? Oh, surely not! Surely, as she was doing no harm she might stay. She ought. She would! A pain seemed lifted off her heart when she decided thus. For awhile, at any rate, she need not go. With a long tremulous breath of relief she looked up and smiled at the stars peeping down from behind the scurrying clouds, and then went back, gravely but gladly, into the house she was trying herself to by bonds beyond her present comprehension.

Mr. Hurst was at home, too, and in the firelit drawing-room, leaning on the back of his sister's chair.

"Where have you been?" Miss Hurst was saying. "Out? Oh, Gilbert! you know it fidgets me to have you on the road after dark."

"Why, Jean, it's the same as day to me."

"But not to other people. You might be hurt, or run over. Don't you remember Cousin Priscilla's terrier got under a cart-wheel in the dusk, and had to be chloroformed and put out of the way, and how she fretted over it? I should fret a deal more over you, so don't go out in the gloaming, please."

"I'm a deal of trouble to you, Jean"—letting his hand fall on her shoulder.

"Well, well! Who minds? I don't. You can't help it."

A few seconds' silence. Then, "What I can help I will. You won't be put out by Drayton, Jean. I have stopped his coming."

"You have?" with animated relief.

"But," compunctiously sliding her fingers into his, "it vexes you to give him up? You are so dull here."

"No, Jean. Not dull, with you—and—"

The gratified sister broke in with a purr of contentment: "It is the greatest mercy left us, Gilbert, to think we are all in all to each other."

And, in her unbounded satisfaction at this view, Miss Hurst was for weeks more tryingly demonstrative than ever, as caretaker, or indeed proprietor, of her disabled brother, vaunting their unanimity down to life's most minor details.

(To be Continued.)

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The Maritime Telegraph & Telephone Company, Ltd., had AN INCREASE of subscribers in

1912	..	of	..	2153
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The president in the fourth annual report states that from present indications THIS GROWTH WILL BE CONTINUED for some time to come.

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