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A CRUEL DECEPTION

OR WHY DID SHE SHUN HIM? BY EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS

(Continued)

It seemed to the girl's wounded pride that he must see into her mother's mind—must understand her manoeuvres—must regard her—Alwynne—as what she really was—a slave, put up for sale to the highest bidder.

But now, as he spoke to her so earnestly, with that strange, deep tone thrilling her, and making her tremulous, somehow she knew that she had wronged him. His whole heart was made clear to her, as it were. He was not desirous of amusing himself. He had no thought of her probable fortune. He was innocent of her mother's worldly nature.

He was full of one thought only—break through the ice of her reserve, and win her back to those few happy moments when she had shown herself to him in all the grace and beauty of her sweet, girlish character.

She hesitated. She knew not what to say to him, and when she was about to frame some words, the captain approached.

Lord Taunton attracted his immediate attention; and, murmuring a hurried excuse, Alwynne moved away.

Basil Canning had spoken often of a cousin who would come to meet him at Liverpool, and when the tug came alongside the steamer the boy excitedly pointed out his cousin to Alwynne. They were standing a little apart, she and Basil. Her mother, regal looking in her furs, with her beautiful face colder and harder than usual, was giving her servants a dozen different directions at one and the same time.

Alwynne shivered as she looked at her mother.

"She will never forgive me—never, never!" she said to herself. Out loud she spoke some hurried thoughts. "Basil, you will write to me. You will not forget me?"

"Forget you, forget you!" The boy could hardly utter the words. "As long as I live I shall worship you. If I could only let you know how much; but I am such a poor, humble friend."

"Yet, you are all I have," Alwynne thought to herself, as her hand clung closer to his boyish one.

It was so true. She had no friends. Of all her school companions, not one remained. She had thought they would have clung to her. They seemed to love her, but since her school-days they had all vanished. She had made no new friends, none until she had met Basil; and, somehow, her whole heart had gone out to him suddenly, striking the keynote of a sympathy which would be as lasting as it was mutual.

The boy saw a great change in his beautiful friend this morning. She looked as though she had suffered some great agony of mind or body. And this was what had really happened. Alwynne shivered again and again as she caught the sound of her mother's voice. The remembrance of the scene in her mother's room the evening before, when Mrs. Brabant learned that Lord Taunton had left the boat at Queensdown, and that it was Alwynne who had caused this hurried departure, was one she would never forget. She had never known her mother's real nature until that moment, and the knowledge was fraught with a pain and a suffering not to be gauged at all.

Words had been spoken which widened the gulf between mother and daughter into an absolute abyss. Alwynne's delicacy had been wounded, her modesty offended, her pride and dignity outraged.

"Please don't let us talk about this, mother," she had said at last, with a sort of weary intensity. "Words won't alter the matter. I don't think with you—I can't think with you, as we have to live together, it will be better to forget a subject that cannot mean anything but annoyance to both of us."

"You don't know what you have done, you don't understand!" Mrs. Brabant had answered furiously. "Great heavens! after all I have done for you, after all the trouble and care you have caused me, after all the money you have had lavished upon you, to disappoint me in this way! You will never have such another chance, Alwynne—never, never!"

So the argument had run on, until Mrs. Brabant had fairly worn herself and her temper out for the time being. Alwynne had spent a miserable night. The man's eyes, those dark-blue oceans of passion, entreaty, adoration, reverence, haunted her. The few quick, intense, sincere words in which he had spoken his love rang in her ears. There was a dull, dead pain at her heart, and, with it all, mingling and covering it was the sense of humiliation, of wounded pride, brought by her mother's furious anger. A vague alarm seized her as she went over and over again that interview.

She had never given much thought to her birth, descent, or early childhood, but now something—she hardly knew what—touched her quick, proud heart, and a whisper floated through her brain that there was a mystery attached to her mother and herself a mystery which was in itself an explanation of much that had troubled her of late. A shiver ran through her slender body, drawn to its full height.

Basil Canning felt that shiver; he suddenly bent his head and kissed her hand.

"I will be your friend all my life!" he said; and then there was no more time for further words.

A great bustle and confusion ensued; the boat was hoisted by a few dozen people; some to meet their friends and the voyage was at an end.

Alwynne saw and felt everything as in a dream. She held Basil's hand as long as she could; then Marie came to summon her, and she turned away, with a farewell word, just as a tall young man came up to the boy. She carried away with her a vision of Basil's tearful eyes, and a sort of photograph on her memory of a laughing sunny face that seemed full of happiness, good nature, health and physical perfection.

"Basil will be well taken care of now," she said to herself, as she stood beside her mother, and saw her boy friend in charge affectionately by this cousin.

"I suppose," she added, with a sigh that came from her heart, "that it is good-bye, indeed, between us!"

CHAPTER V
IN MATRIMONIAL GROOVES

Lady Augusta Trevelyan was in great delight at the thought of her brother Lord Taunton's return to home and England. She loved him with a more than sisterly affection—it was a species of devotion rarely given between brother and sister.

Her husband, a great big Cornishman, with a hearty laugh, a mischievous face, and a boyish manner, declared pathetically that Gus would turn her back on everybody in the world—himself, and her babies all in a bunch—if Hugo had whistled her to go to him.

"Now, Jack, you know that is most untrue! As if I could go anywhere I liked, and leave my babies behind, indeed! Why, I should like to know what would happen! How could you get on a week without me, you dear, big, old booby?"

And then Lady Gus, as she was generally called, would perch herself on his knee like some dainty bird in her bright-colored draperies and her charming pequinacy, and nestle her small head down on her husband's broad shoulder, and then sigh.

John Trevelyan always translated that sigh aright.

"Dear little woman!" he was wont to answer it, stroking the small, pretty head the while his big brown hand, "don't you fret. Taunton is as right as a trivet; and he will come home one of these days and take us all by surprise when we least expect him. You see if I am not correct!"

"No doubt you are," Lady Augusta would answer, a little tartly, and a good bit sorrowful; "but how will he come home? That is what I want to know? No, don't make your usual joke, if you please, Jack! Of course I know he must come by a boat or a train, but that is not what I mean. I mean—"

At this point, Lady Augusta always stopped, and asked her husband the same question: "Do you think, Jack, he will be dreadfully changed? Sometimes it makes me sick to think of it! He was so handsome, so happy, and I dread to think what he may be like now, all changed, with white hair and a stoop, perhaps. Men break down so often under trouble, you know, Jack," the little, worldly woman would go on. "They are not like us women, made to bear everything, frost and sun just the same. And then—with a pause, and a shadow on her face that Jack Trevelyan could not bear to see—"It was such an awful trouble! Oh, Jack, darling! I hope I am not very wicked, but I don't think I shall ever bring myself to forgive her! She just killed Hugo's young life; she destroyed his youth and happiness as completely as if she had murdered him!"

Jack Trevelyan always had the same answer to this.

"You must try and rid your mind of this enmity to the dead, my bird! He would say, 'Poor frivolous moth, she knew no better! She was not even human, Gus. Hearts were unknown to her; she lived for jewels and the blaze of light! I could never be angry with such a woman. I am only sorry for her—sorry that she should have lived her life so wantonly, and died her death so miserably! Poor thing! Poor Nina!"

"You were not Hugo's sister! You could not be expected to suffer as I did—to see my brother heart-broken, and his name, our honored name, dragged in the dust! Oh, Jack, I do not think I could live through such a time again!"

There was scarcely a moment in those long three years of her brother's absence—and silence, too, for months at a time—when Lady Augusta could forget the story of his sorrow and humiliation. She tried, like the good, sweet, little soul she was, to bring herself to dwell kindly on the memory of the dead woman who had sinned so terribly, and so needlessly, it seemed to her.

"How could she have looked at any other man when she had Hugo? Hugo, who worshipped her, who denied her nothing, who loved her better than himself? It is more than I can understand!"

And honest, simple-minded John Trevelyan always made his wife angry by his answer to this.

"My dear," he would say, smoking his big pipe leisurely, "the real secret of the trouble in that marriage was, there was no true love in it to begin with."

"No love!" Lady Augusta would echo him, indignantly. "You silly old booby, do you mean to tell me that Hugo was not in love with Nina when he married her? Why, he was mad about her, quite mad! Much madder than you ever were about me!"

"Because I loved you with all my heart, my little bird, and Hugo was only infatuated! Nina's beauty bewitched him; her coquetry worked his passions to fever heat; his eyes were blinded to her real character."

"I suppose," Lady Augusta said one day at luncheon, when the conversation had taken a turn in this direction, "I suppose you imagine Hugo impossible of falling in love as you translate love, you stodgy creature you?"

"We all have different ways, no doubt, of showing our feelings," Trevelyan answered quietly; "but there is not very much difference in the feelings, after all; and I think Hugo could love just as deeply and truly as I can. Please God, he will do so one of these days, if he has not already done so!"

To this suggestion Lady Augusta would not listen.

"Hugo will never look at another woman, worse luck! I only wish I could see him march in here at this moment, and say, 'Gus, I mean to bring my wife home on such and such a day,' and then, if he had any eyes or sense he would marry Blanche Glenlee. She always liked him; and just think how lovely she would look in this old place, Jack? Do you know I would gladly leave dear old Torre tomorrow, and go back to your home in Cornwall, if I thought Hugo would marry Blanche! But, alas!"—Lady Augusta shook her pretty head, and gazed out of the quaint, mullioned windows of Torre Abbey, which she and her husband had made their home at the earl's special request while he was abroad—"alas! it is too beautiful a dream. Hugo will never come home. Beatrice will marry that odious German baron, I suppose, and then—"

And then the most wonderful thing in the world happened, for a footman brought in a telegram, and Lady Augusta first turned crimson, and then white, and finally flung herself into her husband's arms, and broke into a flood of tears, for the telegram was from Lord Taunton, and it announced his immediate departure for England by the Atlantic steamer Neutonic, from New York, and his probable arrival at Torre Abbey in a week or ten days time from that date.

Then followed a period of the wildest excitement. Jack Trevelyan had his work cut out to keep his little wife from working herself into a fever.

"Now, do calm down a bit, my bird! You will kill yourself at this rate! Just think what I shall look like as a widower!" he exclaimed every now and then; "and I am sure black will be most becoming to your swarthy eyes!"

"Swartly! Gypsy! Lady Augusta cried indignantly. "How dare you insult my babies, my treasures, my angels? The most beautiful babies in the world!" she declared, going down on her knees on the nursery floor and bestowing a hundred kisses on the sleeping children, aged respectively, two years and eleven months.

"We will go to Liverpool to meet him," she announced by and by; but this move was prevented a few days later by a second telegram from the earl, saying he had landed at Queensdown, and should come to England via Dublin and Holyhead.

"Blanche is in Scotland," Lady Augusta said reflectively, after she had received this, and sat a long time digesting its contents, and trying to realize the good news that Hugo was so near at last.

"She will go to town for the season, of course?" Trevelyan said dubiously.

"Oh, of course!" Lady Augusta agreed; but it was evident that she was maturing some deep plan in her mind by the wrinkles that gathered and puckered on her pretty forehead. Her husband smiled as he watched her. He thought were transparent enough; they ran in a distinctly matrimonial groove. She had altogether forgotten her horror at the possible thought that Hugo ever could take up to him a second wife; and in her vivid and ready imagination she had already installed the girl friend of her youth as mistress of Torre Abbey and all the other Taunton and Torre possessions.

"Blanche must break her journey south here for a few days," she mused, when her husband had gone out, after luncheon. "She was looking splendid the other day. After seeing nothing but blackamoors and wild women"—Lady Augusta was proverbially conservative—"Hugo must be simply enchanted with Blanche's magnificent blond skin, and all that lovely faxen hair! And then she is such an old friend, it will only be natural if she should be here on a visit with me.

I should be perfectly happy if I could see Hugo well cared for by such a woman as Blanche, and I believe—yes, I believe—I could go back to Cornwall without a sigh if I thought this would ever come about."

Then Lady Augusta woke from her dream, and ordered her dogcart.

"Now I must drive down to the village, there is such a lot to arrange; and, oh, dear me, I was nearly forgetting there is all that music I promised to lend Mr. Hunter—how rude he will have thought me! I suppose it must be quite a week since we had our little organ recital and I offered to send music down. I will take it to him today, and explain to him that my brother's return unexpected has driven everything else out of my mind completely."

Trevelyan came riding along the terrace, and his wife skipped into the cart, like a young girl in her neat, smart tweed suit and starched linen shirt.

"Going to pay your handsome young organist a visit, eh?" he asked laughingly. "Don't flirt with him too much Gus, I am a long-suffering man, but there are limits, you know."

"You are a most impertinent old darling!" Lady Augusta said, frowning on him in her most frigid manner. "Flirt, indeed! Do you happen to know I am an old married woman!" And then she laughed. "Kiss me, Jack!" she said, putting up her prettily childish face, whose only resemblance to her brother's lay in her neat, blue eyes, "and be a good boy. I shan't be long."

"Oh, I know what your 'long' means when you get with Hunter and the organ. I will do you the justice, to say that for all his good looks, I believe Hunter comes second to the organ."

Then, as the ponies began to move: "I say, Gus," he called out, with a mischievous gleam over his ruddy face, "don't forget you have to find Hunter a wife! You will have your hands full with all your matrimonial schemes pretty soon."

Lady Augusta flicked her whip at him, and drove away rapidly. She excited sundry little commissions she had to do in the village, and then turned her horse in the direction of the old ivy-grown church.

She drew rein at the gate of a pretty little cottage, whose walls in summer time must have been clothed with foliage and garlanded with roses.

An oldish woman came running out to take the music, and to apologize to the pretty visitor for her lodger's absence.

"Mr. Hunter went to Liverpool today, my lady. He expects a young cousin to arrive from America, and has gone to meet him. Mr. Hunter said I was to expect him home tomorrow night."

"America! How strange!" Lady Augusta exclaimed. "Perhaps this young cousin has come on the same ship as my brother! How funny if it should be so. Please give Mr. Hunter the music with my compliments."

Then Lady Augusta added the apology she had intended to speak herself, and touching up her horse, drove rapidly back to the Abbey.

Mr. Hunter was organist to the old Torre church, some distance out of the village, and a good three miles from Torre Abbey. Lady Augusta thought a little about him as she drove homeward. She had wondered a good deal now and then, at odd moments, as to how it came that such a man as Blair Hunter should have found his way to an almost forsaken corner of the world, and that, having arrived there, he should be content with the absolute stagnation of life as life was represented in and about Torre village.

"There is a mystery about him!" Lady Augusta determined today for the hundredth time, as she held the reins firmly in her hands. "I wonder who and what he really is? His name is uncommon, and his appearance extraordinarily so. I never knew any one quite so handsome in his own style."

Blair Hunter had confided to her pretty little ladyship that he had accepted the post of organist to the old church simply and solely because of the money it brought him. It was a friend who had obtained him the offer, he said, and he had been more than grateful to his friend—for his mother was an invalid of many years' standing, and by this salary Hunter could help her materially.

This handsome young organist had been at Torre only a very few months at yet. He lodged at the sexton's house, but he did not reside in Torre altogether, being absent sometimes for three days at a time, when it was generally believed in the village that he went up to Westchester, the large cathedral town distant about a dozen miles or so from Torre, and was occupied here by giving music and organ lessons.

He lived in semi-retirement and was not to be noticed in the various mild dissipations that occurred in the neighborhood, though sometimes the ears of the rector's four plain girls were set in a flutter of excitement by the news that Mr. Hunter's handsome face and presence was to grace their father's dinner table.

Lady Augusta, too, sent down every now and then a little note by a groom in the Taunton livery, begging the pleasure of Mr. Hunter's company either to a small dinner of one or two, gathered from the best houses scattered about, or to a cozy dinner of three, composed of herself, her husband and the guest.

These evenings were, perhaps, the most enjoyable, for Lady Augusta could indulge in her passion for music

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without the restraint of other guests, and there were better opportunities for becoming acquainted, not only with many organ and piano selections but with the nature and character of this young Adonis, whose presence at Torre had caused, and was still causing, so much comment and inquiry.

John Trevelyan's mischievous eyes twinkled when his wife informed him of Mr. Hunter's journey to Liverpool, and of the arrival of his cousin from America.

"A boy accomplish, I suppose?" he said. He loved to tease his pretty little wife and incite her to fury.

Lady Augusta rose to the bait in the most delightful fashion.

"Really, Jack, you are too horrid!" she declared. "Accomplish! What on earth do you suppose Mr. Hunter wants to steal in this benighted part of the world?"

"The treasures of Torre are proverbial," Mr. Trevelyan answered, with mock solemnity. "Putting aside the pictures, the jewels, and the plate is there not a certain entrancing little individual with black hair and blue eyes, and—"

His wife closed his mouth in a fashion that was singularly pleasing to him.

"If you go on much more in this way," she said threateningly, "I shall give you cause for these remarks by beginning a flirtation immediately with Mr. Hunter. Do you hear, sir?"

Then Lady Augusta dropped a kiss on the top of her huge lord's thick brown curls, and leaned her cheek against them.

"I think, Jack," she said ruminatingly, "that really the rector would be very willing for Mr. Hunter to take a fancy to either Ethel or Gwen. It would be a very suitable match. How dare you laugh, sir? You are very rude—very."

But Jack laughed on.

"What a woman you are!" he cried. "I verily believe after we are dead and gone, you will try to negotiate matrimonial relations between the two angels nearest to you! Kiss me, you little schemer!"

Lady Augusta laughed a little disappointedly. "Well, they say marriages are made in heaven! Then who makes them, I should like to know? But don't you think, Jack, joking apart, it would be a very good arrangement if Mr. Hunter was to marry one of the rector's girls?"

Mr. Trevelyan lit his cigar, and put his heel on the match. He did not answer quickly, but his voice was not hesitating when he did speak.

"No, Gus," he said lifting his frank, honest eyes to her pretty, questioning ones. "No—joking apart—I don't think so. I have a certain weakness for the rector's girls, plain as they are, and I should not care to see any one I liked married to Blair Hunter."

"Jack!" Lady Augusta's voice was full of surprise and some indignation; then she looked at him sharply. "You don't surely think he is a thief, or anything horrid like that?"

(To be Continued)

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