

Red Rose Tea

"Is Good Tea"

Do You Use It?

CYNTHIA WAKEHAM'S
TEA MONEY
BY ANNA K. GREEN.

CHAPTER XIV.
In the Night Watches.
Meantime in the old house Hermione sat watching Emma as she combed out her long hair before the tiny mirror in their bedroom. Her face, relieved now from all effort at self-control, betrayed a deep discouragement, which deepened its tragic lines and seemed to fill the room with gloom. Yet she said nothing till Emma had finished her task and looked around; then she exclaimed:
"Another curse has fallen upon us; we might have been rich, but we must remain poor. Do you think we can bear any more disappointments, Emma?"
"I do not think that I can," murmured Emma, with a pitiful smile. "But what do you mean by riches? Gaining our ease would not have made us rich."
"No."
"Has — has Mr. Etheridge offered himself? Have you had a chance of that happiness, and refused it?"
Hermione, who had been gazing almost sadly at her sister as she spoke the foregoing words, flushed, half angrily, half disdainfully, and answered with sufficient bitterness in her voice:
"Could I accept any man's devotion now? Could I accept even his if it were offered to me? Emma, your memory seems very short, or you have not realized the position in which I stand."
Emma, who had cringed as pathetically as her sister at that emphasis upon her word, which suggested so much to both sisters, but did not answer for a moment; but when she did her words came with startling distinctness.
"You do me wrong; I not only have

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realized, to the core of my heart, your position, and what it demands, but I have shared it, as you know, and never more than when the question came up as to whether we girls could marry with such a shadow hanging over us."

"Emma, what do you mean?" asked Hermione, rising and confronting her sister, with wide open, astonished eyes. For Emma's appearance was startling, and might well thrill an observer who had never before seen her gentleness disturbed by a passion as great as she herself might feel.

But Emma, at the first sight of this reflection of her own emotions, calmed her manner and put a check upon her expression.

"If you do not know," said she, "I had rather not be the one to tell you. But never say again that I do not realize your position."

"Emma, Emma," pursued Hermione, without a change of tone or any diminution in the agitation of her manner to show that she had heard these words, "have you had a lover and I do not know it? Did you give up that when?" The elder sister choked; the younger smiled with an infinite sadness.

"I should not have spoken of it," she said; "I would not have done so, but I hoped to influence you to look over this affair with different eyes. I believe you ought to embrace this new hope, Hermione. Do but tell him—"

"Tell him! That would be a way to gain him, surely!"

"I do not think it would cause you to lose him; that is, if you could make him that you are free to love him as such a man ought to be loved."

The question in these words made Hermione blush and turn away; but her emotion was nothing to that of the quieter sister, who after she had made this suggestion, stood watching its effect with eyes in which the pain and despair of a year seemed at once to flash forth to light.

"Do not speak his name," flashed out Emma. "He—you—do not care for each other, or—"

"I am sure you have forgotten him, Hermione, for all your hesitations and efforts to be faithful. I have heard it in your eyes for weeks. I have heard it in your voice when you have spoken to this new friend. Why, then, deceive yourself? Why let a worn-out memory stand in the way of a new joy, a real joy, an unsullied and wholly inspiring happiness?"

"Emma! Emma! what has come to you? You never talked to me like this before. Is the memory of this folly only that stands in the way of what you so astonishingly advocate? Can a woman situated as I am, give herself up to any hope, any joy?"

"Yes, for the situation will change when you yield yourself once again to the natural pleasures of life. I do not believe in the attitude you take, Hermione; I have never believed in it, and I have cheerfully shared it, because, because—you know why; do not let us talk of those days."

"You do not know all my provocation," quoth Hermione.

"Perhaps not, but nothing can excuse the sacrifice you are making."

"You are making no sacrifice. Why should you? Have you not duties to the present, as well as to the past? Should you not think of the long years that may lie between this hour and a possible old age, years which might be filled with beneficence and love, but which now—"

"Emma, Emma, what are you saying? Are you so tired of sharing my fate that you would try to make me traitor to my word, traitor to my love?"

"Hush," whispered Emma again, "you do not love him. Answer me if you do. Plunge yourself into your heart, and say if you feel as you once did; I want to hear the words from your lips, but be honest."

"Would it be any credit to me if I did not? Would you think more of me if I acknowledged the past was a mistake and that I wrecked my life for a passion which a year's absence could annul?"

But the sister Emma was inexorable and held her tender by the hands while she repeated:

"Answer, answer; or I shall take your very refusal for a reply."

But Hermione only dropped her head and finally drew away her hands.

"You seem to prefer the cause of this new man," she murmured, ironically. "Perhaps you think he will make the better brother-in-law."

The flush on Emma's cheek spread, till it dyed her whole neck.

"I think," she observed gravely, "that Mr. Etheridge is more devoted to you, Hermione. Dr. Etheridge, why did that name cost her?"

Hermione's eye flashed, and she bounded imperiously to her feet.

"And that is why I think that he still remembers. And shall I forget?" she murmured more softly, "while he

cherishes one thought of grief or chagrin over the past?"

Emma, whose head had fallen on her breast, played idly with her long hair, and softly drew it across her face.

"If you knew," she murmured, "that he did not cherish one thought such as you imagine, would you then open your heart to this new love, and all the brightness in the world, and all the hopes which belong to our time of life?"

"If," repeated Hermione, starting at the half-hidden face of her sister as at some stranger whom she had found persistent and incomprehensible. "I don't know what you mean by your 'ifs.' Do you think it would add to my content and self-satisfaction to hear that he had rested this ghastly prison which I inhabit on a foundation of sand, and that the walls in toppling would crash about my ears, and destroy me? You must have a strange idea of a woman's heart, if you thought it would make me any readier to face life if I knew I had sacrificed my all to a chimera."

Emma sighed. "Not if it gave you a new hope," she whispered.

"Ah," murmured Emma, and her face softened for the first time. "I dare not think of that," she murmured. "I dare not, Emma, I dare not!"

The younger sister, if answered, threw back her hair and looked at Hermione quite brightly.

"You will come to dare in time," she said, and fled from the room like a spirit.

When she was gone, Hermione stood still for many minutes, and then she

gazed quietly at her own hair. As the long locks fell curling and dark about her shoulders, a dreamer and dreamer spirit came upon her, and

lowering the light in her half-closed eyes and bringing such a sweet, half-timid, half-longing smile to her lips that she looked the embodiment of virginal joy.

But the mood did not last long, and ere the thick curls were duly parted, and arranged for the night, the tears had begun to fall, and the sobs to come, till she was fain to put out her light and hide behind the curtains of her bed the grief and remorse which were pressing upon her.

Meanwhile, Emma had stolen to her aunt's room, and was kneeling down beside her peaceful figure, and her

"Aunt, dear aunt," she cried, "tell me what my duty is. Help me to decide if Hermione should be told the truth which we have so long kept from her."

She knew the old lady could not hear, but she knew this one thing, speaking to her just as if she could, and often through some subtle sympathy between them, the sense of her words was understood, and answered in a way to surprise her.

And in this case Mrs. Lovell seemed to understand, for she kissed Emma with great fondness, and then, taking the sweet, troubled, passionate face between her two palms, looked at her with such love and sympathy that her tears filled Emma's eyes, for all her efforts at self-control.

"Tell her," came forth, at last, in the strange, sad tones of the period, "I have never believed in it, and I have cheerfully shared it, because, because—you know why; do not let us talk of those days."

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