

WANTED—A COMPANION.

(Continued.)

That was all I did hear, for I at once rose proudly from my seat and walked over to Ellen Travers, the cure and the children. Whether the cure disliked chaperons, or whether he never saw me at all, I know not; at any rate, he moved away when I was half way across the garden and entered some private room. No doubt he was friend as well as customer of the host of Le Lion d'Or. So angry was I that I never said a decent word to the little French children who were playing with Ellen, but in rapid English, which, of course, they could not understand, told of the insult done to me.

I infected Ellen. She too colored with anger—righteous anger; but she could not say anything, because I was talking so hotly. She must have a calmer nature than mine is, for she soon paled again, and even looked sad and sorry.

"Dear Miss Scott," she said, when at last I gave her space, "it is me they attack, not you. My unlucky face! People are always saying I am like some friend or other; but this is dreadful! To be like a girl the police are seeking. These must be police in disguise. You will befriend me? Oh, say anything, only do not let them think I am like anyone of that sort!"

"Of course I shall befriend you."

She began to cry.

"Nonsense! Don't do that. Ah, there's the dinner-bell. You are tired, you want some wine. You shall drink some wine at once. I hope they give us something better than vinegar."

"Might I go to my room? Dinner would choke me, indeed it would. And those men——"

"Those men dine with us!"

"Perhaps, too, I was wrong to leave home? Shall I go back? Does this come often? Have you ever had it happen before? They might mistake me for some other dreadful person and put me in a foreign prison."

"Nonsense! Don't talk. You are growing hysterical. You want food."

"Oh no."

"Oh yes, I say. Why, child, if they do no worse they would laugh at us for a brace of cowards. Face the dinner and face everything, and after dinner I will talk to the cure and ask him to advise. I shall put myself under French law."

Ellen shuddered.

"Oh, please not! I am not brave. I seem to wish to go away. Do not speak to the people about it. Perhaps I am too cowardly to travel." Her tears fell fast.

"Do I not tell you that in all the course of my experience I have never met with aught but politeness. And such an insult as this!"

Of course the creatures were not at our table, and they must have left the town the same night, for I saw no more of them.

Ellen and I walked about and looked at the shops, and I made light of the adventure for her sake. She was not a strong girl. I was in a rage myself, and doubly so feeling that the insult involved a sort of disloyalty on my part to the girl I was taking away from her home.

I told Ellen to write home, but she said:

"No, I should be sorry afterwards. I should say too much; I should—should," here she seemed almost to toss her head with scorn, but why I could not guess, "should hurt them, father and mother and all!"

From which I gathered that all things at home could not be sweet for her. Probably poverty alone was not the reason for her coming away. Her dress did not show poverty; there was the London aunt who arranged for her; no, there was something at home. I watched the letter-writing, but no letter went for a week.

By that time we were in Paris, though, by a sort of bravado of my own, I stayed in Amiens for three days. Ellen saw not only the cathedral, but a good deal of the country round. Should I seem to fly from the police?

CHAPTER IV. THE LAST NOTE.

We were in Paris. On the morning following our arrival we went to the Poste Restante for letters. Ellen was captivated with the shops naturally. We gave our names at the Poste Restante on a slip of paper; officials are such idiots over English surnames; but again Ellen's charm of speech showed itself in the musical parody she made to me of our names Frenchified.

"Who taught you French?" I asked.

"An old French lady," she laughed; "a funny, wiry old French lady. Madam Sautin—dear old thing! Aunt knew her and befriended her, and then she came down to Derby and gave lessons all round."

"She is dead?"

"Yes. She got toothache and had chloroform to cure it. She was found dead in her bed one morning. She left her savings to aunt. Aunt was in Derby then."

"Staying with you?"

"Staying with us! In Derby! No. Oh, I see what you mean." Ellen must have been wool-gathering to be so dense over my quite transparent deduction. "We lived then at St. Monan's Well, a long way from Derby. Father has not been at Chillingford always."

"The clergy list put him there for nine years," I bluntly corrected her. We were talking as we drove along, for I found the Poste Restante was further than I liked to walk. I had a good deal to do that morning.

Ellen knitted her brows. She seemed to be considering.

"Nine years—well, then, of course we have been there nine years, but it does not seem so long. But," she mused, "I have been away four years. I always am away now—always shall be, I suppose."

Here the cloud and the sadness touched her face. We arrived at the post-office.

"Let me do all for you?" Ellen said brightly. "It is a pity you should descend." She caught herself up. "I am talking Frenchified English, like old Madam Sautin, I declare. I mean it is a pity you should get out of the carriage."

"No; I will come in and show you what to do—afterwards you will know."

"Yes. That is kind. I will remember."

She made me not the least sign that she wished to be alone? Still now I look back to that day I can see that she did wish to be alone.

We went in together, and I went straight to the desk where it was notified that the letters bearing names beginning with "S" were given out. There was a packet for me. My nieces are very good girls and write fairly often; always at the outset of one of my journeys I receive budgets of letters. My impulsive mind was at once hungering for home news.

How selfish! I tightened my grasp of the letters and turned to see that my companion was getting hers. I heard her say "Travers," then spell it. In all she spoke easy French, and no Frenchman could pretend to misunderstand her clear spelling.

There was one letter for a Mrs. Charles Travers. The postmark was "Leeds."

"It is not for me," Ellen said. She looked pale and disappointed.

"No, the writing I do not know."

"Ah well!" I said cheerily; "we have perhaps not given time; we will come again to-morrow. It is no use waiting now."

"No," she said obediently, but sighingly.

We got into the fiacre and drove off. We had not gone half-a-dozen yards when the girl's face was crimson, and with an exclamation:

"I have left my sunshade in the post-office!" she stopped the coachman, sprang out, and was running up the grimy office steps before I had taken in the circumstance.

There was no deference, no "May I," nothing whatever of the minute attention which she had all along shown me.

I felt nettled, and when the coachman said he would turn to the office door, I—I am weak and impulsive—said:

"No, Mademoiselle will run back. She ran away."

And the man laughed as if it were quite a natural thing to see any vagary committed by people seeking letters.

A gentleman passed at the moment—a young, brown-haired Englishman. He had evidently seen all, and he too was smiling.

Great impertinence! Certainly I gave him no smile in return.

Then he disappeared within the post-office—Why did not Ellen return? She had only to fetch her sunshade.

She was out very soon, and as she ran down the steps her hand was in her pocket. The gentleman came out immediately after, and was by the side of the carriage as Ellen stepped in.

He lifted his hat. He arranged her dress as she seated herself. He then said with a reserved—nay, a rather cold manner—to me:

"I have to thank this lady for a sentence or two of kind interpretation. My French is too barbaric."

I looked amazed. Then I too bowed and said:

"We are pleased to render you any service." I leaned back in my seat as much as to say: "Begone, young sir!"

"Your letter—your own letter is safe?" he asked of Ellen.

She had no letter in her hand. But her face was alight and bright, and in a moment she said "Yes," and tapped her hand upon her pocket. A very pretty hand she had, and she wore spotless tin gloves one degree more yellow than the brown of her trim travelling costume. With her brown hat and her holland sunshade she was as dainty and as correctly dressed as any lady need be.

Again the gentleman lifted his hat and we drove off. Scarcely a minute had passed in this encounter.

"Then you have a letter?" I said coolly.

"Yes; and I am glad I asked again. I made my tongue pronounce better; I prayed them to let me see what letters they had. I was anxious to get one from my dear friend—a girl friend. Her mother is ill." This was all said with heightened color, with her pretty, quiet manner quickened, and with a light quite vivid in her eyes. Suddenly she changed. She had been absorbed in herself; she must have unexpectedly understood my cool expression. "Ah!" she cried, "what is wrong? Have I been rude? Was it rude to fly as I did from you? No, it cannot be that."

"It was not very polite." I certainly would not allow either her bright manner, or her repentant manner, to captivate me out of my first offence.

"And to be rude is the last thing I would dream of!" Ellen exclaimed intensely. "You are so kind, so good too! Will you forgive me? Repress me, scold me, snub me—oh, anything to prevent my ever forgetting myself so again! To be rude! What would they say? What would aunt say?"

"Oh, I quite forgive you," I said. "I see now exactly how it was; you were carried out of yourself by the pleasure of your letter. There, open it at once; I have mine to read, and you can read too. Drive to the Bois, coachman."

"No," she said, "I will punish myself; I will not read Mary's letter till I get home."

We had our drive. I did not enjoy it, though Ellen did, and somewhat amused me by her delight. That wore off, and I fell back on my crooked humor. I do not say ill-humor; I did not feel cross. But does not