

THE Grand Alliance; Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"What!" he said, halting instantly, "do you rate me so poorly? No, indeed, Miss Grey, John Alwyn's memory may rest for all me. Long ago I learned to forgive his luckless advice as freely as he would have forgiven my school-boy rage." She let him go by without another word, her spirit upspringing with great thankfulness. Mr. Babbington sauntered to her over the narrow lawn. His children had come to fetch papa home. Miss Jean had taken them in-doors to clear the desert dishes of sweets, while she mended—"so thoughtfully"—Belle's jacket. Looking at Mr. Hurst in the distance, the clergyman said, gravely, "It is never anything but a pleaser, is he? You must find the hours he exacts of you very trying, Miss Grey."

"No, I do not," said Sydney, quickly. "It is never anything but a pleasure to be useful here at Wynstone."

"Well, Miss Hurst certainly appreciates your—er—unusual capabilities," said Mr. Babbington, most politely. "She has told me so. But that dear lady is eminently conscientious. She sometimes feels a little anxious about you, Miss Grey."

"About me?" Sydney flashed such point-blank interrogation as her companion blinked under. "Anxious? Why? Do I not satisfy her?"

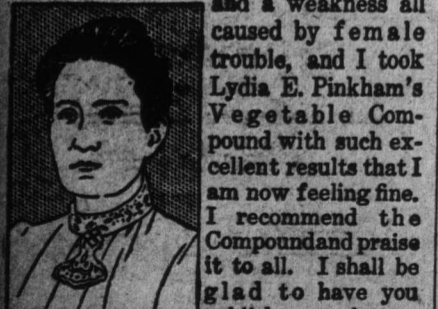
"Amplify, amplify. But thinking of others before herself, as she always did, always does, she fancies her gain may be your loss. She and I are friends of long standing. You will excuse her mentioning any small difficulty to me, Miss Grey. As a clergyman I can perhaps say what she scarcely could. If you have family ties that should supersede these at Wynstone don't disregard them: if, as some young folks have, slight family discords, heal them. Do not spend at Wynstone time you may afterward regret as having withheld from closer duties."

This was all very fine, very grandiloquent, unintelligible, impertinent! Between Miss Jean's surmises and Mr. Babbington's interference Sydney felt bewildered, half insulted. But she curbed herself with remembering that it was not for her to be angry with Miss Hurst. The injured are always armed. "I thank you, Mr. Babbington," she said, self-possessed by some effort. "I am glad to remain here. I think I must try my own judgment as to no higher duty call."

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whole party; "lucky to drop into it! Horace told me it was your own. Pretty piece of property for a maiden lady, or a married one, eh?"

Had "Horace" indiscreetly divulged much more! Miss Hurst colored, fluttered, and sent such timid glances at her impassible-featured brother that the Reverend Horatius hastened to disembarrass her. "Was not this the time for those flowering rushes she had promised his children? And could he get them now?"

So a move was made to the river-side, whereupon Mr. Carle fastened his society on Sydney, remarking,

"You are not a fixture here, Miss Grey, I think? You see, my cousin has told me the ins and outs of everything. Ah!"—twisting round his active figure and ferret face for a good look at the house—"it is a snug little box. Two, four rooms below—five, I suppose, above; servants' offices; bedrooms over them. Nice size for a small family. Pity it should be wasted on two, and one no business to be here, as it were."

Mr. Babbington had indeed disclosed the ins and outs of Wynstone! Sydney caught her very skirts together from contact with this man's coat! Her mouth curved into unconcealable disgust. "I think I can see some of the rushes Miss Hurst wants, if you will excuse me," she said, and all but ran from him to the water-edge, though she regretted freeing him when she saw him pounce on Mr. Hurst, and heard him start off a conversation of which the first words, "Pon my honor, a handsome young lady you've got there!" were all too many for her.

What followed was equally unpalatable. Mr. Carle was great on bladders. "I know a thing or two about that," he boasted, "for I've a dozen young chaps at my place by Pembroke, and none of 'em can see a stroke more than you can. Gentlemen's sons all. It's a speculation of mine. I train 'em and teach 'em, and—jocularly—"make a pretty penny out of it. They don't want things first chop, as if they could see. You understand that. I haven't sunk much in silver spoons and smart carpets, I can tell you. Now, I should say an able-bodied man like you, Mr. Hurst, would do a deal better picking up a living in such a place as mine than hanging on here, making an old maid of your sister, and being waited on by that pretty young party that's picking yellow flowers yonder."

"Miss Grey!" Mr. Hurst interrupted, brusquely, "whereabouts are you?"

"By the last willow; getting lisses," Sydney's clear voice called back.

"Then," peremptorily, "move away. No; stop. Let me come." Moving straight as a dart along the bank he knew every inch of till he reached her; then, "Never lean over for flowers or rushes just here," he ordered. "Half a yard from the edge this is the deepest spot on the bank. A slip would take you into ten feet of water."

"And there'd be no getting out of that, young lady," put in officious Mr. Carle. "So just you mind what Mr. Hurst says; of course he only tells you what's for your good."

He looked very knowingly from one to the other, but neither face betrayed any sentiment, except not one flinching to himself; indeed, Sydney shrank into such frigid irresponsiveness that Mr. Montague Carle was as willing to get away as they to bid him adieu.

Miss Hurst watched her brother furtively when the callers were gone.

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and they three had returned to the drawing room.

"Mr. Carle is an excellent business man, I understand, though he may not be very polished." No reply to this from either listener. "I hoped you would have chatted with him longer. For—moving ornaments restlessly about—"it is too dusk to read. And I am not inclined to walk any more—and—oh, Gilbert, if I find the evenings long, what must you do?"

"Do you feel them long, Jean? You used not."

"Oh"—fretfully—"people are not always alike at all times. How I wish you had taken to music, as poor papa did, though to be sure it made him more intimate with that wretched Mr. Alwyn, and so brought us no good. Don't say 'wretched!' Well, I think he was, Gilbert. I feel it more and more. The 'cello' was papa's instrument, Miss Grey. He played so well. When he was young he was offered two pounds a night to join an orchestra. Two pounds a night! Fancy if my brother could have earned that!"

"Could he have earned! Could he have earned!"

Sydney saw him turn away. The cuckoo cry was too hard to bear. Some one must speak!

"I fancy neither of you cared for music," she said. "I have not once heard your piano," looking at the never-opened instrument.

"Oh, I like it well enough," Miss Hurst returned, indifferently. "And you used to profess to be fond of it, Gilbert. But I fancied you cared nothing for my playing, so I gave it up. Some—people—used to like it, but no doubt it sounded poor to you, Gilbert."

"Jean!"

"So I never even asked Miss Grey for fear she might not be more successful than I was."

The speech ended with a querulous choke.

Sydney moved to the instrument in desperation.

"It is so long since I sung, I may offend you both; but I shall like to touch the keys again," she said, and sat down to the Proadwood, tuneful still, though old.

The room was so still and full of soft twilight. The very birds outside were gone to sleep. Nothing seemed to stir save the ticking of one small time-piece, the throbbing of these troubled human hearts. Unbidden, except by the tense necessity of the moment, unpreluded, except by its few simple chords, Sydney's song broke the silence.

"Oh, rest in the Lord. Wait patiently for Him. Commit thy ways unto Him and trust in Him.

And— He shall give thee thy heart's desire."

She never thought of how to sing it; only put into it the unformulated implore of her own soul, knowing that Gilbert drew nearer and nearer mute, not motionless.

When she ended, poor Miss Jean thanked her volubly, tears dropping freely down—but her brother had left the room without a word.

(To be Continued.)

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