

CHAPTER XXXII.

BY THE FOUNTAIN.

This was Cecily's letter to her sister :
"MY DEAR STELLA.

"I suppose you will be very much shocked and horrified at me when you find out that I have run away from home with Walter Dyson. I think long ago you must have guessed that I had some secret which I was keeping from you, and now the time has come when I must tell you the truth. Last winter, when I stayed with the Halevys, I met Walter Dyson in Paris. We fell in love with each other, and he proposed to me. But Walter is a younger son, and I had nothing. Marriage under such circumstances would have been folly. To be poor, you know, would never have suited me; the most devoted husband would weary me out in six weeks had I to live in a cottage with him. Yet I was fond enough of Walter to be unwilling to give him up. Then it came into my head that I had only to promise to marry Norman in order to get our grandfather's money. I did not much think about the future, nor where it would lead me to; but I proposed to Walter that we should cancel our engagement, and that I should go to Wrexham, and feign to consent to marry our cousin—for I knew that you had refused him, and therefore it would not be taking anything from you. Well, Walter did not like the plan at all, not from any scruples of conscience, but because he is very jealous. The only way in which I could gain his consent was by agreeing secretly to marry him at once, in order that, he said, I might be bound irrevocably to him. We were married at the English Chapel in Paris. I left Madame Halevy's ostensibly to join you on the very day of my wedding.

"Two college friends of Walter's witnessed the ceremony, and one of them gave me away. Afterwards we crossed over to England, and spent three days in London together. Walter and I came down home together, and on the evening of my strange appearance at Wrexham, when you were so startled and puzzled at my unexpected arrival on foot outside your window, my husband had just dropped me, not a hundred yards from the house, from the fly in which he was going on to Barfield.

"Well, now, you can easily guess the rest. I have not had a very happy time of it, as you may imagine. What with working out my plans, and pretending to be fond of Norman, and having to meet Walter at all hours of the day and night, to keep him in good temper; and then having to elude Mrs. Finch, whose keen eyes began to suspect me; you may imagine that I have had my hands pretty full. Do you remember the night we dined at Barfield, when Walter took me in for dinner? You may guess what a good joke the whole thing was to me; and yet, I assure you, I have had many a sleepless night and many an anxious day, especially since that horrible Finch has taken to watch me; for if she had found me out and betrayed me to any of you, all my trouble would have been thrown away.

"Well, now it is all over, and grandpapa's will is signed; and by the time you get this letter, Walter and I will be away on the road to France, and Norman will have learnt that the whole of my engagement to him has been a farce. As he does not care a farthing about me, and is over head and ears in love with—well, I won't say whom!—I don't think it even necessary to apologize to him for taking myself off.

"And now, Stelle, I have only to ask your forgiveness. Don't think worse of me than you can help, and when all this has blown over, I hope some day to come over to England and to have a good laugh with you over the whole story.

"Your affectionate sister,
"CECILY."

The letter fluttered from Norman's hand to the ground, and a strong feeling of disgust took possession of him. Selfish, unprincipled, and shameless—how different was Cecily from Stella! Not a vestige of remorse for her duplicity and her deceit—not a particle of shame for her love of wealth and the greed with which she had grasped at the money of which she was in truth defrauding Stella—only a light wish that they might enjoy a "good laugh" over the discreditable story, and an unseemly reading of the "joke" it had been to outwit and deceive all her relations and friends.

Nothing could exceed the contempt which Norman felt towards her, excepting his own

deep thankfulness for having escaped from such a wife.

Cecily had in a postscript given an address to which she entreated her sister to write, within the next few days, to tell her what had happened at Wrexham after her departure. It was at an hotel at Rouen, and there she stated that she and her husband would remain for a fortnight, and look anxiously for news from home.

In point of fact, the success of Cecily's whole scheme depended upon the news she was to receive from Wrexham; if her grandfather lived, he would certainly alter his will. But if he died—Cecily was ashamed to own even to her own heart, how earnestly she desired that her wicked scheme might have succeeded.

There came a telegram from Stella to the hotel at Rouen on the very day after their arrival there. Oh! how Cecily trembled as she opened it—and how the words danced before her eyes before she could read them!

But there they were, as plain as daylight before her:

"Grandpapa is dead—the news has killed him—the funeral will be on Friday—will you come home?"

"Everything is safe!" said Cecily, white with agitation, to her husband, "but I won't go home for the whole world—I should feel like a murderer!" she added shuddering.

"Nonsense," said her husband "you have nothing to do with his death at all; an old man with heart-disease may drop down dead any day. You must not think of it any longer—the money is all right, they will telegraph to us again, of course, as soon as the will is read."

So Mr. and Mrs. Walter Dyson waited at the pleasant city on the Seine, and beguiled the days of waiting by many excursions in the neighborhood, and many rambles through the streets and churches of the interesting old town.

On the Friday, there was, however, no telegram, and Cecily began to feel uneasy.

"You will hear to-morrow morning; they will write," said her husband, consolingly. "Don't fidget yourself about it—it is quite sure to be all right—there is nothing to be anxious about—you are sure to have a letter in the morning."

Saturday morning came, and with it a black edged envelope with the Loughton postmark. Cecily tore it open breathlessly, and remained speechless, staring at it.

"Well, what is it?" said Walter, taking it from her hand.

And then Cecily uttered a wild cry of despair, flung up her arms madly into the air, and then fell down prone and unconscious into a heap at her husband's feet.

This was the letter:—

"MY DEAR MRS. DYSON,
"I have great pleasure in writing to tell you that your dear sister has inherited the whole of your grandfather's fortune, with the exception of the house, furniture, pictures, plate, &c., and twenty thousand pounds which are left Mr. Allingham. The greater portion of his fortune was originally left to you, but by a codicil to the will, it was so left conditionally only upon your marriage with your cousin; failing that, it reverts to your sister; under the circumstances, of course, you are quite unprovided for.

"Your sincere friend,
"BARRIET FINCH."

Two months have passed away since Mr King's death, and Stella King and Mrs Finch now are the only inhabitants of Wrexham Hall.

Directly after the funeral, Norman had gone away. He had expressed a wish that Stella and Mrs. Finch would continue to make Wrexham their home for the present, but had said no further word about his future plans.

Stella remained therefore all alone. She sorrowed at first deeply for her grandfather and for her sister's treachery; but by and by another grief began to settle at her heart.

Why did not Norman come to her—what was there now to keep them apart? Had he forgotten his old love to her, and the passionate words he had spoken to her that day when he had rescued her from the gypsy on Loughton Common? Was all that a dream that is past to him? or had he been so thoroughly disgusted by her sister's conduct, that unconsciously he had recoiled from her also, and had included her in the just blame due only to Cecily?

Stella could not answer these questions to herself; but she was very sad, for Norman remained up in London, and neither wrote or came to her.

By and by an event happened which shed a little brightness and pleasure over her monotonous life. There was a wedding at Barfield, and Lily Finch was the bride; and no one rejoiced more sincerely in her happiness than did Stella, although her deep mourning precluded her from being at the ceremony. Lady Dyson had at last given her willing consent to Sir Edgar's marriage. It had been a great blow to her when his engagement to Lady Honoria had been broken off; but as she never quite understood the rights of it, she believed to her dying day that the Earl's daughter had behaved very badly to her son; and she felt such a sincere compassion for his supposed disappointment, that she was the more ready to listen patiently to him when he spoke to her about Lily.

"I suppose it is fate," said Lady Dyson, resignedly. "It is evident that it is to be, so I had better make the best of it. And after all, Lily is a dear girl, and she behaved wonderfully well during her illness."

So one fine June morning Lily was married to Edgar in Barfield Church, and, amongst the handiwork of her wedding presents, there figured a diamond locket from Lady Honoria Rossett.

Mrs. Finch, of course, was very great on the occasion, and talked so incessantly afterwards of "my daughter Lady Dyson," that Stella got very tired of the subject. Mrs. Finch, of course, forgave her old scores against the Dysons in consequence of her daughter's marriage.

"I never thought he would have married her, you know," she explained to Stella; "and though I could see that Lily was foolish about him, I discouraged it in every way, thinking he meant nothing serious. However, I must say the girl played her game better than I gave her credit for."

"I think her own sweetness and goodness is the only 'game' Lily has ever been guilty of," said Stella, a little indignantly.

Then, when the wedding was over, and the newly married couple gone away, and the neighborhood had settled down again after the commotion, Stella became very lonely and very sad. She received frequent letters from Cecily, but they were very unsatisfactory ones. Mr. and Mrs. Walter Dyson were drifting about from one gambling-place to another upon the Continent. Walter, apparently, had taken to Rouge-et-Noir as a profession—sometimes he won, but oftener he seemed to lose; and then Cecily wrote very despondingly. She was evidently far from happy—the love founded on selfishness and want of principle, which might have flourished and increased in shining and prosperous conditions, was fast perishing utterly under the cold winds of poverty and adversity.

Stella at last determined to do something substantial for her sister and her husband. Out of her own abundance she would provide for them. It was however, impossible to do this without consulting Norman; and so, after a great deal of hesitation, one day she wrote to him to his club in London, propounding her scheme of making to Cecily an annual allowance out of her own ample fortune, that might enable her to live in comfort if not in luxury, and she begged him to come down and see her, that she might consult with him about it.

The letter was sent, and two days went and no answer came. Stella was very unhappy.

One afternoon she sat alone on the edge of the stone basin in the garden. The fountain was still, and the clear pool shone in the sunshine—every little gold-fish looked like a jewel as it darted across the transparent water.

Stella looked down lazily at them, and dipped her white fingers into the basin. She did not hear the approaching footsteps across the lawn behind her, only all at once a shadow was thrown across the fountain, and looking up quickly, she found Norman standing by her side.

"Oh! Stella, what a long time you have been in sending for me!" he said reproachfully, as he took her hands in his; but his face was beaming with delight and happiness.

"In sending for you, Norman!" she repeated, wonderingly. "Did you expect me to do that?"

"Of course I did. Do you think I would have obtruded my own selfish hopes into your days of mourning for the old man you

loved so well? I waited for you to write to me. Besides, you are a rich woman now."

"Oh, hush!" she interrupted, quickly. "Do not pain me by saying that!" and then, with a deep blush, she added, slowly, "Norman, I would like to share all that money with you!"

"I only know of one way in which you can do that, my darling!" he said, with all the glow of his love in his eyes; and then he knelt down beside her, and put his arms around her. "Stella, will you not give me that long waited for kiss now, and with it your dear self?"

She bent her face, rosy as any flower, towards him in silence, and their lips met in a happiness too deep for words.

"Oh! Stella," he said, presently, "how much of our lives you and I have wasted! We might have been happy long ago!"

"Yes," said Stella, smiling out of the fullness of her content. "But then, we were playing in the dark, for we have all been at 'Cross Purposes!'"

[THE END.]

Volcano of Krakatoa.

Before the last fatal eruption of the volcano of Krakatoa it would seem that the mountain for some time past had been in a state of violent activity. The following graphic account of its appearance was supplied by an officer of the *Almora* to the *Brisbane Courier*:—

"The volcano was on the island of Krakatoa, at the entrance of the Strait of Sunda, and one magnificent blaze of light was proceeding from its height. Higher and higher the blaze seemed to mount as we drew closer to its base, while the sound had now become one continuous roar, like hundreds of blasts from some mighty furnace, and a volume of black smoke extended for miles from it, like a funeral pile. As we passed through, some of the fine dust and strong sulphurous fumes of the subterranean upheavals got into our eyes and filled our throats, causing us to keep under the awnings till we passed—glad to leave the island on our lee. We could then admire its splendid upheaval and listen to its mighty roar without fear. There seemed to be a strange vibration in the water and ship while we were passing. The flames looked grand, as, leaping high into the heavens with a mighty roar, they sent their sulphurous fumes apparently miles upward, and then, dying out till they seemed expended, would leap upward with renewed force and fury. This continued till the ship took us further and further away, the sound got weaker, and the light soon appeared like a lighthouse on the shore. We passed about three or four miles from it, and had the wind been blowing from the southward, I dare say we should have felt considerable annoyance from it. As it was it only gave us a grand volcanic spectacle that will never be forgotten."

Invention of an Electric Gun.

One of the most interesting novelties at the Vienna International Exhibition is an electric gun. The powder is fired by means of a piece of platinum in the cartridge, and the electric current necessary for heating the platinum is obtained from a little accumulator, which must be worn in a belt especially devised for the purpose. Besides the accumulator and the belt, a glove and a shoulder strap are necessary. The glove is worn on the left hand, and is connected with one pole of the accumulator, the strap with the other. All this would, it must be confessed, be a rather formidable addition to a soldier's accoutrements, and one is hardly surprised to hear that the inventors do not expect their patent to be immediately adopted in all the European armies.

Meanwhile they point out that the electric gun affords several advantages besides the charm of novelty, which ought to commend it to the sportsman. In the first place, it is said to be very economical; and what new application of electricity is ever said to be anything else—at first? There is no great saving on the gun or the cartridges, but then only a quarter of the ordinary charge of powder is necessary. Moreover, the gun is economical of time and trouble. The cartridges serve many times over, and there is none of the bother of taking off the old caps. But the crowning merit which is claimed for the electric gun is that it is warranted never to "kick." If this warranty be really true, the application of electricity to sport ought not to be long delayed.—*Pall Mall Gazette*.