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"Flatterers"
—OR—
The Shadow of the Future.

CHAPTER XXIX.

And if so, declared the countess, with scornful emphasis, "that mother of hers of course prefers such action kept in the dark, as she did what led to it. But 'honor where honor is due,' say I. Once let us be sure about this, and then trust me to let people know why Miss Alwyn, at any rate, went away from St. Clair's."

Mary's head was fit for no news after this. From such a source she might carry her tidings to Mr. Vaughan. With him she discussed the right to seek out Sydney's retreat. So luncheon ended, and all offers of being driven back gratefully set aside, she started homeward, Lady Gertrude burdening her with choice flowers, Lady Margaret insisting on lending her an umbrella, the countess conveying her through the park imparting as they went along intelligence of her elder son's approaching marriage to an heiress, of her youngest daughter's equally satisfactory engagement; "so," said the pleased mother, "after the rectory setting the fashion, all the young people intend to follow it! We must see you at one wedding, Miss Dacie, and you shall hear all about the other two, if you care for such things. Good-bye."

After such kind farewells, Mary should have gone away mightily elated. But somehow those anticipated nuptials struck a weak nerve.

For a space they blotted out even the intelligence of Sydney. "If she cared about such things!"

Sooner or later what women does not! It was at a very well, intimacy with these tall, thin, grasses pressed on her, but the attention was akin to offering stones when one badly wants bread! Why she was so foolish as to hanker after the unattainable, and at her discreet age cry like a baby for the moon, our good doctor's daughter knew not, but that was her predicament that afternoon, and before she had pulled through to more sensible regions, to the moon stood before her! Her moon—that is to say, Mr. Drayton.

He was waiting at a branch of the road, and at first sight of her advanced with undisguised pleasure.

"I feared I had missed you, Miss Dacie. Your servant said you were this way. But I have watched an hour for you."

"For me?" stammered Mary, as he took her hand—"I had no idea you were at St. Clair's."

"Nor was I till noon. Then I left my bag, at the rectory, and came on to you, for I wanted to see you."

Mary remembered why he wanted that last Michaelmas. Was she going to hear of more marriages? Of Sydney's at last? She turned her head away and moved forward, Mr. Drayton keeping pace with her.

"In fact," he went on, finding she said nothing, "I came on purpose to see you, and say—something. Won't you put up an umbrella! It's raining."

Thus adjured, Mary unfolded the Oakleigh "bonnet," a small shelter for one, yet Mr. Drayton begged half! "My shoulders are getting wet," said he, "will you let me hold that between

as? And this being recorded, "if you will take my arm," he added, "I think we shall get along better." And in that constant order he continued progress, a sheep looking over the hedge setting Mary blushing.

"Now you have not asked," said her companion, "what my important remark is to be."

"No. I forgot what you came for," she returned. "I suppose, Mr. Drayton, it is about Miss Alwyn."

"It's nothing of the kind. It's about Miss Dacie."

Mary's pulse gave a mighty spring. "I want to tell her—all you—that I have prospered amazingly this last year. I was not sure of my luck last autumn; so I wouldn't talk of it. Now there is no mistake about it."

"I am very glad, Mr. Drayton, to hear of your good fortune."

"Then if you are, will you go shares with it? I'm no hand at fine speeches, but I can't not a fig for property if I can't have you with it. Such as I am, will you take me? Yes or no, Mary?"

To think, oh, to think, here was the inaccessible moon come down and begging to be received!

Mary was for a minute so dizzy she had to hold Mr. Drayton's arm quite tight, which he enjoyed very much indeed. Then she contrived to let him know what she desired, with such true womanly gladness in her nervous sentence, that her escort, assured no one was in sight, was constrained to shut out the landscape with that useful little umbrella, and confirm the contract without loss of time.

The shower came on so smartly then they had to shelter under an elm. Elms were Mary's favorite trees from that day forth. There Mr. Drayton made an extraordinary proposal. "We need not wait as if we were just out of our teens, Mary," said he. "Can you be ready to get married in a fortnight?"

"A fortnight! Oh, no, no."

"Why not?"

"Because there will be so much to do—and things to buy."

"We can buy them in London. If you get your bonnets alone I may not like them."

"Are you so exacting about fashions?"

"I am. For example, you must always have a bonnet like this one," examining so closely Mary had to retreat.

"Oh, foolish man! This is not a bonnet, but a hat, and a very old one!"

"Then keep the pattern, for you never looked better!" Which was true enough. No Kalydor on earth beats the bloom of happiness! "And now, for fear you should forget what you've promised, hadn't I better give you a ring?"

"Richard! Did you make sure, then?"

"No. I did not. But I happen to have one by me that may fit." And out came the identical diamond that Mary had disposed of nine months before, following on which so much before, he said, that when he took out a watch she had also seen before, time had fled so fast they had to get off for the Gate House in good earnest. Then Mary began to get in a tremor. What would her father say? What would her mother do without her? And—with a remorseful shudder—what would Sydney Alwyn think? Would she mind this?

"Mind it! Only to be glad," Mr. Drayton assured her. "Miss Alwyn knew what I was after all through. I'm in hopes what was bringing me good luck

might be doing the same by her. But I was out of my reckoning there. You can't understand me, Mary! And you've something to tell me about her? Well, I must tell a long tale to the doctor to-night, of how I have means enough to come stealing his daughter and make all the amends money can for the theft; so, then, if you sit by me and listen obediently, you'll hear all about everything, Miss Alwyn included, and we'll compare notes, and by and by you and I will go together and find her up." And that wondrous "you and I," the abhorred quality which from Adam and Eve's days is ever making new Eden on this earth, absorbed them both till the doctor and his wife came back to be enlightened, rejoiced, aggrieved, over Mary's confessions and Mr. Drayton's demands.

The marrying in a fortnight could by no means be agreed to, but the tutor, backed by the rector, pleaded, so well, a month's delay only was at last commanded for.

"And some of these days I shall use for an odd purpose," said Richard Drayton, when he and Mary next day went to stroll in the garden for ten minutes and stayed three hours, "for, to be honest with you, I have to clear my character before you marry me. A rascal whom I worked with in a Brazilian mine decamped and left me under a cloud with the owners. It cost heaps of time and half my earnings to set myself straight with them; but I did it. Still this scamp is at large, and might turn up when least expected, to blacken me again. I've got a hold on him now by accident, and I mean to track him and make him recant. You'll let me stay here a week? Then I'll start after this; and then come back for you as long before the twenty-seventh as the rector will have me. Oh, and do you mind where we go after we've bought bonnets for a week in London? Mary, with very pretty blushing, hadn't a wish on the subject. "Then you shall come and see some one I will tell you of between now and then. I'll send him a line beforehand, but you shall not be announced till I take you with me and say, 'Here, Hurst, old fellow, I've brought my wife to call upon you!'"

CHAPTER XXX.

For a few days after the uneasy evening last recorded at Wynstone, the small household fell into what was less a calm than a lull, too full of watchfulness to be real rest.

The ending of his book maybe released Mr. Hurst's attention for another subject, maturing under his sister's roof. Her rapid flights from downright credulity to unexpected complaisance, from spasmodic garrulity to silence, maintained to the verge of gloom, filled him with strange thoughts, fears, perhaps, but such as, side by side with others in his breast, drove him into reserved yet most expressive anxiety of waiting.

Waiting. And that was precisely the spirit that possessed Sydney too. A mental uneasiness, such as matches the physical disturbance, which in the heavy haze of sultry noon prophesies "there must be tempest before night." An expectancy, whether of hope or dread, she knew not. She, too, waited, and like Mr. Hurst, turned intuitively to Miss Jean as the mainspring of the next move, he it that might.

For nine ten days this lady was, as we have said, pronouncedly odd and out of sorts. Her clerical friend during that time gave him less of his company than heretofore. When he did appear there was a hesitancy in his manner of approaching his hostess, a studied effort to propitiate her brother, which Sydney would have preferred to his former demeanor, had it not roused suspicion of something it made her angry with Miss Jean to think of.

But then she, last of any, had "right to be angry on that score. Sydney's learned her temper with that reflection pretty constantly, and exercised fault-finding by setting herself to maul about the house neglected by Miss Hurst in this disorganized interval.

She put the study-shelves in order, among other things rearranging the volumes more by sequence of subject than by size and shape, so that Miss Hurst could more readily have the limited pleasure of handling the companions of his happier years. While at this one morning, and having heard what she was doing, and thanked her only by a smile, he asked, "would she undertake something else for him—not very troublesome, he hoped, but he was afraid his sister might find it puzzling."

"Then puzzled she need not be, for I shall so gladly do it!" said Sydney, coming down from her steps. "What is it, Mr. Hurst?"

"To sort my manuscripts, such as they are, foreign and home. You will find a set of loose notes on Gothic buildings and pencil-sketches belonging to them. If you will place these in order they may be worth a trifle."

"You have changed your mind!" Sydney exclaimed. "I have seen the drawings. I am almost certain I can catch them. You will begin another book?"

"Not at any price!" he answered, brusquely, backing toward the door as Sydney joyfully advanced. "I merely want to sell these things as they are. A magazine writer might give a pound or two for them. I—was though driven to say so—would not have asked your help, Miss Grey, if any one else could have done it for me."

(To be continued.)

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DO YOU RIP THE BUTTONS OFF.

Do you rip the buttons off when you give things away?

After reading my little talk on the duty of trying to pick out the people who will be most benefited by the gift of garments, you want to pass on a Letter-Friend suggests I put the above question.

How She Knew the Buttons Were Beautiful.

"When I was a girl," she said, "we were not very well off and several people used to give my mother old clothes to make over for us, and almost always the buttons and any trimmings were carefully ripped off. I shall never forget one dress that was very plain, but had evidently been trimmed wholly with beautiful buttons. I knew they were beautiful because the lady who gave it to us had carelessly overlooked one button. How I did wish I could have the rest of those buttons. When I give things away now I make it a rule to leave the buttons on, and if there is a dainty collar or cuffs that could go with another dress I often stretch a point and leave them. Of course even if you do strip a dress down to skin and bones and give just that that's something, but I think it comes a good deal nearer being a real gift if you leave on the trimmings."

I certainly agree with my Letter-Friend.

In fact, I do not see how one has a right to feel the glow of generosity unless the thing one gives away does represent some element of sacrifice. Perhaps the sacrifice of a possible chance to have worn it a few times again in favor of the more thorough use the recipient will get out of it by having it given to her now instead of after it has gone out of style, or the sacrifice of some pretty trimming or other accessory that one might have used some way again, or the sacrifice of time one would have liked to use for some other purpose in getting the things together, and seeing that they reach the person who can make the best use of them.

Just think, she mended them! I once knew a woman who made

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