

# Beautiful Cynthia;

## Victory After Many Defeats.

CHAPTER VIII.  
THE GRIFFIN.

Cynthia sat in silence during this formidable inspection and examination. The footman brought in the tea, and she poured out a cup which Darrel carried to her aunt.

"Let me see," said Lady Gwen, as she took it, "your father has the Summerleigh estate, hasn't he? What's the rent roll?"

"I haven't the least idea, Lady Westlake," replied Darrel, a trifle carelessly.

"Then you should have," retorted the Griffin. "It's unnumbered, I suppose?"

"I suppose so; I don't know," said Darrel, with a smile.

"Then you ought to know," retorted her ladyship. "But you're like most young men of the present day. You know nothing and you care nothing for anything but the pleasure of the moment. And small blame to you," she added, with grim candor. "What does your father allow you?"

"A thousand a year," replied Darrel, pleasantly enough, but with rather a heightened color, for he remembered Cynthia's warning, and had resolved not to be offended by her aunt and guardian.

"Too much!" declared her ladyship. "Of course, you spend every penny of it. So should I, if I were in your place. Put the cover on those tea cakes, they're getting cold."

During the call Darrel had few chances of conversation with Cynthia, for Lady Westlake asked innumerable questions and talked incessantly. Toward the close of the regulation twenty minutes Darrel began to get slightly nervous. For he had to propose to this grim and forbidding old lady the projected dinner at the Savoy. After much beating about the bush, he approached it, as he thought, delicately and diplomatically.

"Did you ever dine at the Savoy, Lady Westlake?" he asked.

"Good Lord, no!" snapped her ladyship. "Why should I? I don't approve of this dining at public houses."

"The Savoy is scarcely a public house," he submitted.

"I think it is," she snapped, still more sharply. "I am quite aware

that it's the fashion of the day to dine at these places; but I prefer to eat my dinner in my own house or those of my friends. Why do you ask such a silly question?"

"Oh, well," said poor Darrel, "because some friends of mine asked me and Cyn—Miss Drayle to dine with them at the Savoy next Tuesday."

"Like their impudence!" said the Griffin, showing her teeth. "I would not think of allowing Cynthia. The idea!"

"Lord Northam and Lady Alicia, his sister, will be disappointed," said Darrel, with an air of resignation.

"Lord Northam, did you say?" demanded the Griffin, pricking up her ears. "Do you mean Torbridge's son? Humph! The Duke is an old friend of mine. It's Lord Northam's party, is it? What's the day? And pray, who is going to be chaperone? Lady Alicia? Ahem! Well, I don't know, I suppose you said you'd go?" turning to Cynthia.

"Yes, aunt, if you approved," replied Cynthia.

"Well, if you have accepted, I suppose you must go," said the old lady, with an affectation of reluctance. "Of course, you'll have tinkers and tailors all round you; probably dine at the next table with my bootmaker; but, if you've set your heart upon it, you must have your way, I suppose. Must you really go?" she said, turning to Darrel, who had shown no desire to make his departure.

He got his hat and took the two fingers extended to him. At the door he found an opportunity to whisper to Cynthia:

"She's not so bad as she looks, Tuesday—Cynthia!"

When they were left alone, Lady Westlake mused for a time, then she said, as if to herself:

"Torbridge is one of the oldest and richest of the dukedoms. The duke, I remember him, must be getting on. Humph! Has that new evening dress come home from Madame Cerise's? You'd better wear it on Tuesday. I ought to go with you, I suppose. You're not 'out' yet. You can tell Lord Northam that he can call on me. Good Lord, how times have changed! My people would no more have thought of allowing me to dine at your age at a public restaurant than they would have thought of permitting me to dance on a tight rope." She shrugged her shoulders and snarled. "Society is going to the dogs; and we ourselves are to blame."

Respecting her evening dresses, Cynthia had fought a battle royal with Aunt Gwen, who wanted the bodices cut much lower than Cynthia approved of. This dress, though by no means decollete, was extremely pretty; it had the unmistakable Parisian touch and style, and it became Cynthia very well.

Her aunt had been lavish in the matter of jewelry, and Parsons that night fastened round the white and slim throat of her mistress a pearl necklace, which was costly enough to rouse the envy of most women.

The brougham carried her to the Savoy, in the ante-room of which Alicia, Lord Northam, and Darrel were awaiting her. Cynthia's heart was beating fast with anticipation.

It was her first outing without having the Griffin at her elbow. She was going to spend the evening in an entirely novel manner with young people of her own age. It was a glimpse of a life which she had read of, but had not known.

Darrel came forward to her eagerly.

"Oh, here you are!" he exclaimed. "Come on!"

Lady Alicia greeted her warmly, not to say affectionately. Lord Northam, in a wooden, vacant kind of fashion, led the way to the table which he, or, rather, Lady Alicia, had engaged.

The dining room was full. The band was playing softly. All the tables were occupied, the women were resplendent in exquisite frocks; dis-

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monds, rubies, and sapphires flashed in the subdued light.

Cynthia looked round her with a mild excitement, a sensation of strangeness, of novel enjoyment. Two obsequious waiters attended on them. Darrel, who had manoeuvred to get a seat next her, pointed out to Cynthia the various celebrities seated near them.

Lady Alicia talked incessantly, and gradually, with woman's cunning, engrossed Darrel's attention. Lord Northam ate his way through the meal with the stolid air of a man who had a duty to perform and intended to do it. But between the courses he fixed his absent-minded gaze on Cynthia and regarded her as if she were an entree of which he was especially fond.

He addressed scarcely a word to her. But once, when a waiter brought a dish which Cynthia had refused, Northam said, in a sleepy, absent-minded way:

"I should take this, if I were you; it's good, stunnin'."

It has been said that the room was full, but, as a matter of fact, a table at a little distance from them was vacant. And presently two gentlemen took their seats at it.

They were Percy and his father, Lord Spencer. Percy, with a glance, had seen Cynthia, but he let the soup pass before he rose and went up to greet her. Introductions were made, and after a little conventional chat, Percy returned to his father.

"Who are your friends, Percy?" asked his father, drinking off a glass of champagne.

"Lord Northam and his sister, a man I don't know, and Cynthia Drayle," said Percy.

"Pshaw!" emitted his father, with a quizzical glance at Percy's countenance. "So that's it, is it? Northam; Torbridge's son! And the little Cynthia, aye? The odds are against you, my boy?"

Percy leaned back; there was a gleam in his eye, which he hid instantly concealed.

"I rather like the odds against me,

sir," he said. "It makes the race worth winning."

"And you mean to win, Percy?" asked Lord Spencer, eyeing the impassive countenance of his son curiously.

Percy raised his eyes for a moment; they looked like those of a wessel in pursuit of a rabbit.

"Yes, I mean winning, sir," he said.

His father bestowed an approving and an admiring glance on Cynthia.

"By gad!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "She's worth trying for!"

Percy opened his lips as if to correct a misapprehension of his father's; but he checked himself and merely smiled with a kind of contemptuous tolerance of his parent's obtuseness and elementary cunning.

As Percy watched Cynthia out of the corners of his eyes, he reflected that there were several ways of snaring a bird.

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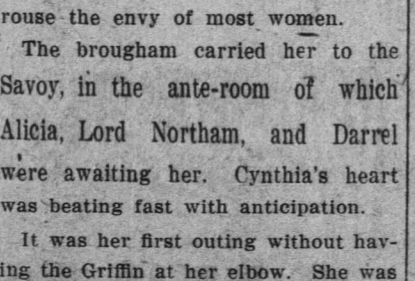
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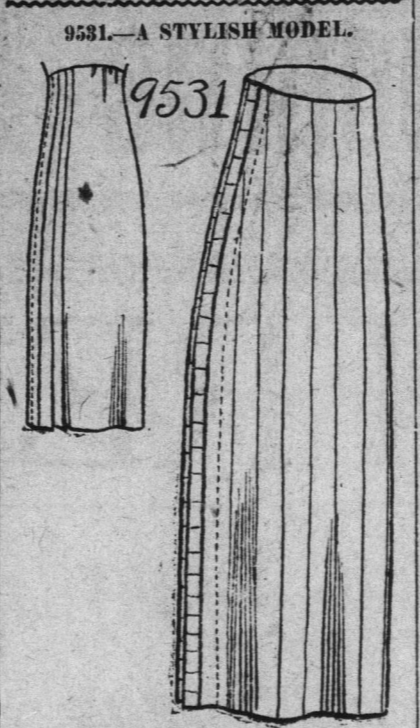
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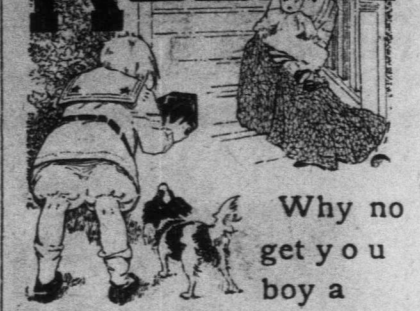
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