

UNCLE MAX.

CHAPTE XVII.—Continued.

"And what did he say?" she asked, rather eagerly. "Did he agree with you?" But I was obliged to confess that I had forgotten his answer.

"I know Mr. Cunliffe thinks Gladys is a great deal better than she is," she went on. "He is so kind-hearted to say so; but I know it was a mistake. I am afraid it was a little bit of a mistake."

"You cannot come here too often, Miss Hamilton. It will always be such a pleasure to me to see you."

"Oh, I did not mean that," she returned, nervously. "I may not be able to come here, that is, not alone; there are reasons, and you must not expect me; but I hope you will come to Gladwyn whenever you have an hour to spare."

"What does this mean, Uncle Max?" I asked, gayly, for this sort of oppressive silence did not suit me at all.

"Indeed, I hope you will do nothing of the kind," she said, hurriedly. "Miss Garston will please tell him that there is no need, no need at all; indeed, I would much rather not."

"I think she wanted me to press her; she was arguing against her own wishes; it was easy to see that. By and by she asked me in a low voice if I were sure to be alone, or if I expected my visitors; and when I had assured her decidedly that no one but Uncle Max ever came to see me, and that I knew he was engaged this evening, her last scruple seemed to vanish, and she settled herself quite comfortably for a chat."

"I sang for nearly half an hour, and then I returned to the fire. I saw that Miss Hamilton put up her hand to shield her face from the light; but I took no notice, and after a little while she began to talk."

Her eyes followed my glance, and I saw again that singular motion of her hands. "Yes, indeed," she said, hurriedly; "but her beautiful eyes were full of tears."

"The intense sympathy with which she said these few words seemed to break down my reserve. In a moment I had forgotten that we were strangers, and she had forgotten that she was the dear old life of the past."

"No, you are too real, too much in earnest, to be satisfied with that sort of life. Mr. Cunliffe used to tell us so. And I seemed to understand it all before I saw you. I always felt as though I knew you, even before we met. I hope, hesitating a little, that we shall see a great deal of you. I know—Giles wishes it."

"Why not trust me, Max?" Max looked very discomposed when he saw Miss Hamilton; he shook hands with her gravely, and sat down without saying a word. I wondered if it were my fancy, or if Miss Hamilton had really grown perceptibly paler since his entrance.

"What a headache, Uncle Max!" I cried, "I had a headache, and so I sent an excuse; but, as it got better, I thought I would come up and see how you were getting on."

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"I signed as I looked at Charlie's picture."

"I am so sorry you were hurt with the other night," when Etta spoke about the school. "I am not giving up work for my own pleasure; I loved it far too much; but there are reasons."

"I heard Max give a quick, impatient sigh. 'So you always say, Miss Hamilton; you remember we have talked of this before. I have thought it my duty more than once to remonstrate with you about giving up your work, but one seems to talk in the dark; somehow you have never given me any very definite reasons, headaches, well, as though I did not know you well enough to be sure you are the last person to think of ailments.'

"I must beg your pardon, Miss Hamilton, for having wronged you in my thoughts about something else. I find your brother has for bidden you to attend evening services for the present. And no doubt he is right; but your cousin gave me to understand that you stepped away for a very different reason."

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