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The Heir of Rosedene

The Game-Keeper's Hut

CHAPTER XXV.
EAVESDROPPING.

"Never mind," said the duchess, quietly. "I didn't come to scold you—and, indeed, I've brought a more suitable visitor than an old gossip like me."

"I am quite contented with the old gossip," said Edna, stealing her arm round the homely neck.

"I like to hear you say that, my child!" said her grace, her eyes filling with tears as she drew the beautiful head on to her bosom. "Make haste and get well, my poor darling! You have been too long away from us, too long."

"I am quite well now," laughed Edna, taking up the soft, white handkerchief and kissing Edna's pale face and faying her cheek on it; "quite well. It is only because I am selfish and lazy, and because they humored and spoil me, that I am still supposed to be ill. I was out yesterday, and I am going out this morning."

"That's right," said the duchess, "and here is somebody who will take care of you. She has been as anxious as any of us, my dear. Come in, Grace."

And the door opened and Grace Bromley entered.

Both women stared at each other, and thought how much they had altered.

Grace came forward after that momentary pause, and with a sudden flush bent and kissed Edna's pale face—the next instant her own face was as pale as that she had kissed.

"Have you not been well?" said Edna, with self-reproach. "They did not tell me—"

"I have been well—quite well!" said Grace, quickly, her dark brows coming down in the old imperious way.

"That's what she always says; but I appeal to you, Edna—does she look well?" said the duchess.

"I am quite well," repeated Grace. "I cannot get them to believe it; surely I ought to know. I am quite well."

And the Worst is Yet to Come—



"That is just my case," said Edna, smiling up at the dark, handsome face, and wondering whether it, too, had some secret unhappiness behind it. "The best thing we can do is to astonish the county by some feat of strength."

"Ah!" said the duchess. "Suppose you walk down to the preserves—that will be enough for you."

"I am quite ready," said Edna; and with a smile she rang for her maid. But when that demure and polished demoiselle made her appearance with furs and wraps, the duchess insisted upon muffling the invalid with her own ducal hands, Edna submitting laughingly.

"You make as great a mummy of me as does Aunt Martha," she declared. "Must we go. You will be here when we come back?"

"No," said the duchess, kissing her; "I am going to call on Lady Portfield. You can keep Grace to dinner if you like; she is under my charge, and I dare say will be glad to exchange my company for yours."

The two girls went off laughingly, driven out by the duchess, and anxiously followed by the entreaties of Aunt Martha, that they would not tire themselves.

"You must take my arm," said Grace, looking at the sweet, pale face with a curious mixture of pity and remorse in her dark eyes.

Edna smiled.

"You are as bad as the rest," she said, but she put her arm through Grace's, and they walked on in silence for some time—or talking about the coming Christmas festivities.

"They are all looking forward to your coming out again," said Grace.

"What makes them all so kind?" said Edna, involuntarily. "I feel half-guilty, more than half, when I remember what an insignificant, useless piece of humanity I am to receive so much care and solicitude."

Grace smiled.

"Shall we sit down," she said; "here is a pretty seat here."

Edna looked and gazed around her with an air of surprise. By this time they had reached the second keeper's lodge. Edna had unconsciously led the way to it.

"How strange," she said; "this seat was not here yesterday. Sir Edward More and I walked down here, and one of the keepers brought out a chair."

"No doubt Sir Edward ordered this seat to be put up," said Grace. "It was very thoughtful of him; I should scarcely have given him credit for it."

"It was thoughtful and kind," said Edna, warmly; then she paused and laid her hand on the rug. "But I don't think he did it; their rug is one the keeper brought out yesterday. He must have put this seat up for himself, and has been sitting here, for here is the rug."

Grace smiled.

"Oh, no!" she said, "that cannot be the solution. Whoever heard of a keeper building a rustic seat and covering it with a rug for himself? They are only too glad to lie down on the grass, or the trunk of a felled tree. Did you sit here yesterday?"

"Yes," said Edna, "but you don't think he built it for me?"

"Why not?" said Grace, indifferently.

"It's unlike a keeper; they are generally rough kind of men, are they not?" said Edna, still reluctant to



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make atonement! Oh, Edna, if you knew what I have suffered you would not only forgive, you would pity me!"

Edna was trembling now.

"I don't understand," she said, in a low, troubled voice. "What harm can you have done me—ah, it is a mistake; you have not wronged me!"

"Yes, yes!" reiterated Grace, clasping her hands in her lap and wringing them in her self-abasement and misery. "I tried to wrong you as only one woman can wrong another, and I have been wretched ever since. Edna, will you believe me? How can I ask you to believe me? But it is true that I repented almost the moment after it was done, and I should have come to you and told you all, and prayed you to forgive me, but you were gone—he had gone, and I thought—I allowed the devil to tempt me into the hope that it would all end well, and that I had done all for the best. But I know now how false that subterfuge was! Oh, Edna—you have suffered—you can pity me, for I had the one excuse—a woman's only excuse!"

Edna was about to speak, but Grace stopped her with a gesture half imploring, half defiant.

"Let me tell you all—and yet not all! How can I—how do I know that I have any right to run the chance of making you unhappy. Oh, Edna, if I had known that you cared for him! You kept your secret so well—"

Edna shrank back suddenly, and set her lips tightly.

Her secret! Had this girl, so passionately accusing herself, found out the story of that day at Basle.

"Ah!" breathed Grace, with a quick sigh and lowering of the dark eyes, "you know now what I mean! You cannot forgive! Well, I could scarcely expect you to!" and she dropped her face in her hands with a convulsive sob. Edna sat looking at the graceful, imperial figure drooping so humbly, so piteously, but could not speak.

(To be Continued.)

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GERMANY'S STANDING ARMY

PARIS, March 10.—The Supreme War Council today formally adopted the military terms of German disarmament. These provisions for a volunteer army of 100,000 men lasted for twelve years.

AN AFTER-WAR PROJECT.

LONDON, March 10.—The prospect of a tunnel under the British Channel to France is being considered by the Government as a project for after the war.

The Hon. Law, Government spokesman, in making this announcement, in the House of Commons to-day, was discussing the matter with Premier Lloyd George as a means of finding employment for discharged soldiers.

BOLSHEVIK PROGRESS.

PARIS, March 10.—Typhus is adding to the horrors of the population has christened the "graveyard," according to a business man who has just returned in Paris from Russia.

There are no disinfectants or means with which to fight the epidemic. Soap, hot water is scarce because of the shortage of fuel. The result is that the freezing and heartened public is unable to protect itself.

WILL BEGIN MARCH

BERLIN, March 10.—Preliminary peace negotiations begin at Versailles about