

GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE BY LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON.

CHAPTER VII.

A few days after the conversation that closed the last chapter, Colonel Leslie and Margaret were engaged to dinner at Lord Donnington's, whose house was about twelve miles distant from Grantley. Walter and Edmund were to dine there also, and Margaret looked forward with great pleasure to this rather unusual occurrence; as, since her father's arrival, there had been very little intercourse between her and her neighbors.

Lord Donnington's daughters were her only friends, and there was between them that sort of intimacy which usually takes place when girls of the same age have been in the habit during their schoolroom years of looking forward to spending the day, or drinking tea together, as to the dissipation and excitement of their otherwise monotonous existence. Maud and Lucy Vincent had been absent for some months from Donnington Castle, and had only returned a week ago from a tour in Italy. Margaret, who had not seen them yet, was very impatient to renew an intercourse which had hitherto been her greatest pleasure in life; and in her present state of uncertainty with regard to Edmund Neville's feelings regarding herself, she was not sorry to have an opportunity of observing him in more general society than her own home ever afforded.

Frederic Vincent, Lord Donnington's eldest son, had been as well as his sisters, a favorite companion in all her childish amusements, and she had always met him with pleasure in his successive holidays, even when, as an Etonian of fourteen, he was reckoned by his sisters the torment of the house and the plague of their lives. He had maintained his place in her good graces chiefly by his praises of her horse-manship, and his instructions in the management of the numberless pets to which she afforded her protection. This Frederic Vincent, now a young man of twenty-four, was at home again, after an absence of three years. He had joined his family in Italy, and returned to England with them; Margaret had not, as far as she knew herself or as it would be fair to suppose, any deliberate intention of exciting Edmund's jealousy, but that some idea of the sort had floated vaguely in her mind, it would perhaps be safe positively to deny. As she finished dressing on that day, and looked at herself in the glass with some degree of complacency, a smile struggled out of the corners of her forcibly-compressed lips, which told of pleasant thoughts and agreeable anticipations.

When she found herself in the carriage, and by the faint light reflected from the lamps outside, glanced at the faces of her three companions, she was struck by the contrast that their expression presented to her own radiant state of mind. Walter, who sat opposite to her, looked the picture of meek resignation. "Dear Walter," she thought to herself, "does not look to advance tonight," and so she certainly did not. He was much more smartly dressed than usual; and that sort of smartness which the unpretending are apt to fall into at the suggestion of others, was borne by the unconscious victim without any sense of the extremity of fashion imposed upon him. Then it was also intensely cold. Walter's eyes were red and his nose blue; and, above all, he was resigning himself to his unwanted dissipation with a meek endurance, which would have provoked Margaret's laughter, if her eyes had not at that moment rested on Edmund's countenance. The carriage was dark, but the outside lamps cast an uncertain light within, which revealed such an expression of gloom and ill-temper as she had never before observed on his features. His lips were moving rapidly as if he was speaking to himself, and in a moment he drew from his pocket a thin and crumpled letter, and seemed to strain his eyes to read it by the fitting rays of light behind him. Twice he bit his lips, as if he would have drawn blood from them, and then thrust his head back into the corner with a jerk which indicated anything but repose of mind, whatever ease of body that position might give; and when Colonel Leslie, as a violent storm set in, and the snow began to fall under the horses' feet, muttered a curse on the English habit of dining out in the depth of winter, and wished himself and others in no measured terms, anywhere but where they actually were, Margaret felt her joyous excitement flag, and looked with an anxious eye at the dark sky and the whitening appearance of the road.

An impatient feeling crossed her mind as she looked at her companions. "Now if they would but be pleased!" she mentally exclaimed, "all would be right. What a pity people have not good tempers! How disagreeable they all are!" With this charitable thought, and the self-approbation which accompanied it, she also resigned herself to meditation in the corner of the carriage. After a weary drive of an hour and three-quarters, the lights of Donnington Castle became visible, and Margaret's joyous "Here we are arrived" roused her apathetic companions. In a few moments more the steps were let down, and the hall door thrown open, and it took about five minutes for everybody to shake hands with everybody, and for the new-comers to settle into the tacit discomfort which precedes the announcement of dinner.

Margaret's two friends were as different from her and from one another as girls of about the same age could easily be. The eldest was pretty, and so small, that a few days before she had been so anxious to consider herself tall; her eyes were black and very large, while her mouth was so small that it seemed as if it could scarcely open wide enough to admit a common-sized cherry. She was indisputably pretty; but yet there was something sharp and resolute in her features, which had her figure been less diminutive, would have given her an unfeminine appearance. The other was tall, slight, high-shouldered, and red-haired; you would have said she was exceedingly plain; if it had not occurred to you to remark that it was impossible to see a sweeter countenance. This one was Lucy, and the short one was Maud. Both received Margaret in the most affectionate manner, and Frederic Vincent, who was like his sister Lucy, but only much better-looking, seemed overjoyed at meeting her again; and in her happiness at finding herself with her earliest friends, for one short instant she asked herself if the new feeling that had taken such tyrannical possession of her heart, might not, after all, be a mere dream which an act of volition could dispel.

She found herself sitting at dinner by Frederic Vincent, and she immediately entered into an animated conversation with him, having first, by a rapid glance, ascertained that Edmund was exactly opposite to her, and was seated between Maud and Lucy. She had that peculiar talent which some people possess, of appearing wholly absorbed in conversation with one person, while they can watch the proceedings of half a dozen others; and while she was questioning her neighbor about his travels, and laughing at his view of the hardships of family-travelling with four carriages and a fourgon—far more severe, he said, than she had heard of.

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Seventh Half-Yearly Literary Competition of The Canadian Agriculturist.
In accordance with their usual custom for some years past, the publishers of that old and reliable publication, The Canadian Agriculturist, now present to the readers of the Half-Yearly Literary Competition for the winter of 1883, to the people of the United States and Canada. This competition will close May 31, 1883, and the number of entries allowed for letters to reach us from distant points.

The following is the prize list:
1st Grand Prize.....\$2,500 in Gold
2nd ".....1,000 in Gold
3rd ".....500 in Gold
4th ".....250 in Gold
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Author of "Lady Bird," "Ellen Middleton," &c.

CHAPTER VI. (Continued.)
"You are wrong; you can neither trust me in this matter, nor can I trust myself to speak upon it. Put whatever construction you choose on my words. I care not what you infer from them, but I will not listen to one word on a subject on which I am not able to do justice to you, to myself, or to others."

As he said this, he snatched the book from the table, and hurried into the flower-garden, where, on her knees on the mould, Margaret was tying up some China-asters, which had hitherto braved the nightly frosts, but whose drooping heads hung down as if foreboding their approaching fate.

"Walter," she cried, "help me to fasten these supports into the ground."
"It is of no use; you will catch cold: come in: leave those dying flowers alone."
"Poor thing!" she said, lifting up their heads once more, and then letting them fall again: "They were looking so bright and so strong when I planted them three months ago. Walter, I wish they would stand still or go back, or do anything but go on."

"I thought I heard you wish exactly the contrary yesterday; you said, it never seemed to you to go fast enough."
"Don't quote me against myself, Walter, there is nothing so annoying. You said the other day! and 'Did I not tell you so?' are the most evoking sentences in the world, and you are always using them."

As Walter looked grave and did not answer, she continued with increasing irritation. "Nobody can be expected to be always in the same mind, and to weigh every one of their words before speaking, unless they are very old, and methodical, and precise, and tire-some too."

As she spoke she sat down on the stone steps, and began twitching off the heads of the unfortunate asters which a moment before she had so much pitied and tended.

"You will make yourself ill, Margaret, if you stay here any longer. Pray come in."
"I am not cold, thank you. Pray don't stay with me if you find it cold."

Her flushed cheeks did not belie her assertion. After a pause, Walter said—
"I pity your friends, Margaret, if they are to share the fate of those flowers. So much kindness at one moment, and such harshness the next."
"I have behaved ill to you, Walter, have I not? Oh, now I am quite miserable. I hate myself, and only wish that everybody would hate me too."

"That is still more unkind to me, Margaret, for you know that is the only thing I cannot do."
The tears sprang into Margaret's eyes; she held out her hand to Walter, and turned her head away. When he again pressed her to come home, she answered gently,—"No, dear, dear Walter, let me sit here a little while. The house is stifling—my head aches, and the air does me good." In a moment Walter had brought from the house a large fur cloak, and wrapped her up in it, with the same care as he had been dressing a baby; tying the strings under her chin, and clasping the collar so tight, that she cried for mercy, and then laughed; and then, when Walter said—"Well, it is pleasant to see you laugh again, she burst into tears, and all was right again between Walter and herself. As those bright tears fell fast on the dark fur of the cloak, the cloud seemed to pass away from her fair brow, and after a pause, during which he held her hand in his, he asked her in so gentle a manner what had disturbed and vexed her, that she longed to tell him—that she tried to tell him—but the words stuck in her throat. It seemed so very childish, so very foolish, she said; and there came another half-smile across her face, and a few more big tears rolled down her cheek. At last, with her eyes on the ground, and drawing patterns on the gravel with his stick, she murmured, "It is only that Mr. Neville said to Mrs. Dalton, before me, that she never would marry a short woman, and—and—I suppose I am short." When she had said this, the color rushed into her cheeks, and she exclaimed with impetuosity, "Do not laugh, Walter, do not laugh. I cannot bear it. I know how ridiculous it must seem to you. I suppose you think it is all childish nonsense. Sometimes I hope so myself," she added, with a sigh, "but it makes my heart ache very much, whatever it is." Had she looked into Walter's face, she would have seen that it was unnecessary to warn him against laughing. She continued in a moment with increasing emotion, "It is wrong, perhaps, to acknowledge this sort of feeling—to let you see my folly, my weakness. I do not know how I can dare to speak so openly to you, but you know, Walter, how used I have been to tell you every thing and when you ask me in that kind manner what vexes me, I feel obliged to speak the truth."

"Always do, my own Margaret. It is acting kindly by me, as well as justly by yourself. And may God give me strength always to deal kindly and truly by you!"
"How could you do otherwise?" she exclaimed. "What interest could you have in all this, but my happiness?"
"None, I trust," replied Walter, solemnly, "and, as long as you consider me as a friend, and a—"
"Father," she cried, and pressed his hand to her heart. It was the word he was about to use; but the readiness with which she suggested it, caused him a pang; but that pang was conquered, and he continued—
"I shall not complain of my little Margaret, or scold her for wishing herself as tall as even her favorite maid, Marian."

The gayer with which this was said, was the most complete victory over self which Walter Sydney had yet achieved; and the triumph was entire when he looked kindly at the little beauty, as standing on tiptoe on the highest step of the flight, and dragging down to her level the coral-studded branch of a tall

her earliest friends, for one short instant she asked herself if the new feeling that had taken such tyrannical possession of her heart, might not, after all, be a mere dream which an act of volition could dispel.

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