

A BUNCH OF VIOLETS.

(Continued.)

I remember quite well hearing of his going out to India, with very little interest and no capital, nearly twelve years ago, and what a struggle it would be to him to get his foot even on the lowest rung of the ladder. Even then I had wondered if he wished there were no such person in existence as the little wild girl at Yattendon Vicarage. It seemed hard that he should have inherited nothing but the empty title—sometimes I wished my father had not left Woodhay to me, but to him. But Woodhay was not entailed, and my father cared for no one but me. Nevertheless, as a child, I had often thought of my cousin, Sir Ronald Scott—wondered what he was like—and even made up my mind to marry him some day, and so repair the injury I had unconsciously done him. Now, as I lie among my velvet cushions soberly regarding him, I bethink me of the resolution I have come to lately, of leaving Woodhay to him when I die. His yearly income in India promises soon to be equal to my own; but that makes no difference. Woodhay ought to go with the Scott title, as it has gone for the last four or five hundred years. This magnanimous arrangement fills me with no sorrow for myself as I lie among my cushions studying his worn profile as it appears against the sunny square of open window beyond.

"You are awake, Rosalie?" Some occult influence has drawn his look toward me, or perhaps the magnetism of my own steadfast gaze. He throws down the newspaper and comes across the room. "I hope you feel rested, cousin?"

"Oh, yes, thanks! Have I been long asleep?"

"I do not know—you were asleep when I came in half an hour ago—at least, I suppose so, for you were so quiet that I never knew you were in the room till Miss Dean came to the window to warn me in a whisper not to wake you."

"I thought you were playing tennis?"

"I was playing; but I wanted to read that article about Indian affairs in to-day's 'Times.'"

"Has Olive finished her game yet?"

"Not yet, I think."

I glance at the table where Digges has just deposited our afternoon tea-tray.

"I wish she would come in and give us some tea."

"Shall I go for her?"

"Oh, no; she will come when she is ready?"

"You will feel lonely without your friend," he says, as Olive's merry laugh comes in through the open window. Olive is going away to-morrow; Elinor is not strong, and wants her at home.

"Yes," I answer, tears coming into my eyes—I must be weak yet, or I should not cry so readily. "They have written for her; I shall miss her very much."

"You are going away yourself very soon, are you not?"

"They want me to go to Monte Carlo; but I don't care about it."

"Yet I am afraid you will find this place dull in winter."

"I never found Woodhay dull," I answer, looking out of the window.

"I never lived here, to be sure—that I can remember; but then, even as a child, I was constantly coming and going, and loved it better than any other place in the world."

"It is a fine old place," he says, following my look; "any one might well be fond of it."

I glance at his face; but it is perfectly unconscious—entirely free from hatred, envy, or any uncharitableness. He speaks of Woodhay just as he might of any of the neighboring places—the Towers of Dunsandle.

"I think one always cares for one's own property; very few people hate the place where they were born."

"Very few," he agrees readily. "No matter how well people get on in India or the colonies, they always intend sooner or later, to 'go home.' Not one man in a hundred would be satisfied to die in a foreign country."

"Not even a Chinaman?" I laugh.

"Not even a Chinaman or a coolie who has lost caste. But they never do go home; if a Chinaman by any chance loses his pig-tail, he never goes home again."

"Doesn't he?" I say, with much interest.

I have risen from my sofa, and am standing in the window, my hands clasped at the back of my neck, my eyes on the distant blue hill melting hazily into the bluer sky. Ronald is standing in the window beside me, his hands in the pockets of his gray tweed coat.

"I feel as if something were going to happen," I remark dreamingly. "I should say it was a thunderstorm, if that sky did not look so much more like wind. Have you ever had previsions, Cousin Ronald?"

"Not such as you mean," he answers, with his grave smile.

"Have you never felt that something was going to happen?"

"Often. But it was not from any premonitory mental depression."

"Lowness of spirits is not a sure sign of impending misfortune. Don't you know what Shakespeare says—'Against ill-fortune men were ever merry.'"

"Or when old women tell children they will soon cry, because they are laughing so much?" he adds, shrugging his shoulders.

"That is another case in point."

"I don't think you are merry enough now to dread any misfortune following on the skirts of your merriment?"

I glance at him, displeased. This brown-eyed cousin of mine laughs at me, and I do not like it.

"You will believe me when we hear some bad news perhaps?"

"I thought we were to have ridden to-day, Rosalie. A gallop across the moors would do away with a great many of your previsions."

"I felt so tired, I did not care to ride."

I look out into the garden again indifferently. I wonder what Ronald Scott thinks of me? I know my want of interest in everything puzzles him a little—he cannot imagine why I do not take any pleasures in my woods, my meadows, my horses, my dogs, and my beautiful old house. Certainly I have been ill, but I am well now—so well that I have been on horseback several times, and have driven Olive and myself all about Yattendon in my basket-phaeton. But people say my illness has changed me very much; my face looks haggard, there are dark shadows under my eyes. Nobody knows what I suffer; through all my wanderings I have never mentioned Gerard Baxter's name. I am surprised that I did not, he is never out of my thoughts. I have never heard of him since that day when we said good-by to each other in my leafy comb—not one single word! I do not know whether he is dead or alive—Olive does not know. She has never spoken of him since that morning she told me all she knew about him as we came through my wood. I do not think she suspects anything—she never thought I cared for him; but, if she had heard anything about him, she would have been sure to tell me.

Ronald Scott has been very good to me in a brotherly kind of way—and Olive treat me very much like a spoiled child—sometimes I suspect he thinks me anything but an agreeable kind of person. I wonder if he ever cared for anybody himself—if he cares for anybody now. It would be impossible to tell from that grave stern face—I often fancy he is a man who would have—

"Two soul-sides, one to face the world with

And one to show a woman when he loved her."

"Cousin Ronald," I ask suddenly, without turning my head, "have you any sweetheart in England?"

"Why do you ask, Cousin Rosalie?"

"Because I want to know, I suppose."

"But I may not care to have you know that I am sweetheartless."

"Then you have none?"

"Have you one in your eye for me?"

"I suppose you came back for a wife, cousin?"

"Why do you suppose so?"

"You are a Yankee for answering questions with questions! Because, when an Indian judge comes back to England, everybody knows he comes back to look for a wife."

"Then everybody is wrong, as far as I am concerned."

"Because you know where to find her?"

"Because I did not come home on any such quest, Cousin Rosalie."

"Upon your word?"

"Upon my honor!" he laughs, looking around at me. "Why, cousin, I never thought you had a turn for match-making!"

"I never thought so either. But I know plenty of nice girls—Elinor Deane and Ada Rolleston and Katie."

"Why do you leave out your own particular friend?"

"Do you like Olive?" I ask quickly, glancing round at him.

"Or do you like her too well to wish to see her married to me?"

"I think you are too late to try for Olive," I say, shaking my head.

"You would not advise me to enter the lists against Lockhart?" he asks, smiling.

"Well, I think Olive likes him—a little. But she is such a mad-cap—what she likes one day she hates the next."

"Then, if she likes Lockhart to-day, there may be some chance for me to-morrow."

"I should like you and Olive to care for each other," I say dreamily.

"I like her better than any other girl in the world."

"Then you must like me a little, to wish to bestow her upon me."

"I like you very much, cousin. You have been very kind to me."

"Rosalie, do you like me well enough to care what becomes of me?"

"How can you ask such a foolish question?"

"As you said just now—because I want to know."

"Of course I care. You are the only cousin I have—it is not as if I had half a dozen, or half a score, like most people."

"And you care for me with all the caring that you might have divided among half a dozen, or, perhaps, half a score?"

I do not answer.

"Rosalie, I did not come back to England to look for a sweetheart—or a wife. But do you think you could ever care enough for me—at any future time—to give me both?"

I turn my head now to look at him. His grave eyes meet mine unwaveringly; his head is a little bent as he looks intently into my face.

"No," I answer, in the same grave matter-of-fact tone in which he has spoken, without any change of color or added pulsation of the heart. "I shall never care for any one, Ronald—I do not intend to marry any one. This place ought to have been yours—at my death, it will belong to you."

"At your death?" he repeats, with a shocked look. "Why child, I am ever so many years older than you are!"

"Only ten. And, when one does not care to live, it makes a great difference—"

"But you care to live! It is only some morbid fancy you have taken into your head—people often take such fancies into their heads when they have been ill."

"This is no fancy of mine—the stronger I get, the more I seem to see how little life is worth living!"