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A NOBLE HERITAGE.

CHAPTER XXVII.

VERY well," said Leola, with a sense of relief—might she not, if she went out, miss Cyril?

Breakfast proceeded; neither made a very hearty meal. Mrs. Wetherell seemed very thoughtful, and Leola had risen and walked to the window, when a footman opened the door and announced Lady Vaux.

Her ladyship, clad in sable—the mornings were chilly—came forward with outstretched hands and beaming smile.

"My dear Leola," she murmured, in her soft, even voice, so like her brother's that it always jarred upon Leola, "you are down, then! I dreaded hearing that you were still in bed. It is the middle of the night to most people."

"Not to me," said Leola. "No, I know, dear," murmured Lady Vaux; "you are one of those decidedly strong women who like early rising—you go in for a cold bath every morning—oh! it makes me shudder to think of it—and enjoying getting your feet wet. But there, I could not contain myself an hour when I heard the news."

"Yes?" said Leola, interrogatively. "Will you have a cup of coffee, Lady Vaux?" asked Mrs. Wetherell, and as she brought it to her ladyship, she whispered:

"She does not know; 'Not know!' echoed Lady Vaux, aloud, and with arched and elevated eyebrows; 'why, my maid brought me the news the first thing this morn-

ing, and by this time the village is ringing with it.' Leola, who was standing at the window patting the head of a huge mastiff which she had let in from the terrace, looked up inquiringly.

"News! what news?" she asked, calmly. "Do you really mean to say you haven't heard?" said Lady Vaux, with her dainty Sevres cup half lifted to her lips.

"I have heard no news this morning," said Leola, with a smile. What news could affect her whose life had passed into Cyril's keeping?

"Really," said her ladyship, putting her cup down and swinging round gracefully, "you are the dearest and coolest of creatures imaginable! What is the use of a maid if she does not bring one all the gossip of the place?"

"But I don't care for gossip," said Leola. "My dear," said Lady Vaux, with a little shake of the head, "we all care for gossip we are born so, all of us, and we can never be altered or improved in that respect. The best and worst of us love a little scandal, and especially when scandal is so scarce and rare."

"And what is this—scandal?" asked Leola, almost contemptuously. "Well, my dear Leola, it is not very much, I'll admit, and it may not be true—I hope it isn't. They say that that red-haired girl—what is her name?—Polly, yes, Polly Marsden, has eloped!"

CHAPTER XXVIII. POLLY MARSDEN has eloped," said Lady Vaux, and she sat down her coffee-cup and stretched out her primrose-gloved hands. Leola looked round at her with mild, grave eyes; she scarcely realised the just significance of the information.

"Isn't 'eloped' rather too—too sweeping a word?" said Mrs. Wetherell, in her mild, deprecating way. "Well," said Lady Vaux, shrugging her shoulders, "what would you have me to say, dear Mrs. Wetherell? The girl is missing—"

"She may have gone to pay a visit to some friends," suggested Mrs. Wetherell.

Lady Vaux shook her head with a confident smile of pity for Mrs. Wetherell's simplicity.

"Leola, kneeling beside the mastiff, looked from one to the other in silent attention.

"I am afraid we cannot take so charitable a view of the situation," said Lady Vaux, with a little sigh. "The girl is a vain, flighty creature, and this sudden disappearance is really what was to be expected to her."

"I never heard a word against her," said Mrs. Wetherell, gently. "No!" responded Lady Vaux, with arched eyebrows. "But, you see, you two dear creatures—and she smiled sweetly at Leola—live such retired lives. Now, I can only say I have heard all sorts of gossip about Miss Polly for months past."

"I know she was rather vain," said Mrs. Wetherell, still pleading for charity on behalf of the absent. "She was a good-looking girl, and much admired."

"Very much," put in Lady Vaux, softly. "Much admired by the beaux of the village."

"She had given them the cold shoulder," said Lady Vaux. "Even the most favoured of her sweethearts—poor Edward Young—has been snubbed and dismissed. At first, when her flight was known, it was thought that she had run away with him, and that her coldness and coquetry towards him had been assumed for

himself."

"Indeed, you must find him delightfully useful," said Lady Vaux, in the nicely balanced tone which she would speak of a highly valued servant.

Leola rose and turned to the window to hide the indignation and impatience which flashed from her eyes.

"Lady Vaux's tone jarred on her; her ladyship's cool condescending hauteur sounded insolent, and was almost unendurable."

"You would not so speak of him if he were here," she thought, as she remembered, with a kind of exultation, how cowed Lady Vaux always was in the presence of Cyril Kingsley's great dignity.

"Why does he not come?" thought Leola, impatiently, and she drummed the window-pane with her finger tips.

"And why," she thought, does he wish to keep our engagement a secret? How I wish I could turn round and tell her, as she sits there, so insolently composed, that I am to be his wife!"

His wife! The words, unuttered, brought the warm blood to her face. Leola was proud of her lover, as few women are; proud of his good looks, of his high breeding, of his power over all who came within his reach. She strained her eyes watching for him, while Lady Vaux leaned back and rippled on her words scarcely noticed by Leola.

(To be continued.)

But poor Edward Young is still in the village, drinking at the Lorne Arms, and swearing vengeance against the man! Now, the question is, who is the man?

"If she has run away with anyone at all," said Leola, speaking for the first time, and with heightened colour. "Just so, my dear," murmured Mrs. Wetherell, approvingly.

"My dear!" expostulated Lady Vaux, "do you think young girls like Polly Marsden run off in the dead of the night by themselves? The idea is too—toxic! Of course she has gone with someone! I really ought to know who it is! At least it is your duty, my dear Leola," she added with a smile, "for you are the lady of the manor, and the miserable girl lived on your estate."

"I will ask—Cyril, Leola was going to say, but stopped in time, and went on rather hurriedly; 'I will write and ask Mr. Ford—'"

"Oh! he is of no use," said Lady Vaux, shrugging her shoulder, "dear old man. He would put on his spectacles and take a sheet of parchment and—do nothing. No! There is one person who can help us to discover the rights of the matter, and that is Mr. Kingsley."

Leola bent over the mastiff and pulled his silky ears.

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'He will be here presently,' she said slowly. 'I am glad of that,' said Lady Vaux, rapturously; 'he will be the very person to help us. Do you know Mr. Kingsley—Cyril, as Lord Beaumont calls him—charming name!—is quite a favourite of mine. I say that he is the image of a hero of romance, with that noble head and face of his! and such a gentlemanly man—for his position,' said her ladyship, with splendid condescension.

Leola's face burnt and her eyes flashed—over the mastiff's head.

'Mr. Kingsley is always very kind and considerate,' said Mrs. Wetherell. 'I do not know what we should do without him.'

Leola shot a glance of love and gratitude at the speaker.

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(To be continued.)

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