

JUNE DAISIES.

It was only a London garden, but it was so walled in from intrusive eyes, was so judiciously planted with flowers that could stand the air of cities and the neighborhood of smoke, was so surrounded by trees, and the walls that encircled it were so covered with creepers, that it was difficult to realize that it was actually a part of that "Old Court Suburb" which is now a part of London itself.

There was an old bowling green that made the smoothest and greenest of tennis lawns; there were stately alleys, planted with quaint shapes of box and yew; an ancient sundial and a moss-grown fountain; trim walks through trellised doorways, that led to conservatories gorgeous with tropical flowers; and shady corners, much appreciated by the young people who came to Lady Mary Hazlewood's garden parties, and that at other times were Meta Hazlewood's favorite retreat.

Lady Mary was the widow of a general officer, and Meta was her only daughter, a tall and rather stately brunette of twenty-two, who had been out two or three seasons, and had refused several eligible offers without any apparent reason.

Meta's indifference to suitors was the only point of difference between her mother and herself. Lady Mary would gladly have seen her daughter suitably settled, as, indeed, what mother would not?—but in the long run the girl always had her way.

"Do you want to get rid of me, mamma?" she would ask, with one of the smiles that were half saucy and wholly sweet; and there could be but one answer to such a question.

"I can't understand it, my dear," said Lady Mary plaintively, "what was there in Sir John Hope that any girl need have objected to?"

"He was not to my taste," said Meta, for the hundredth time.

"Or in Captain Shaw? And I am sure they both worshipped the ground you trod on."

"They would have been welcome to do that if they only would have abstained from worshipping me," said Meta lightly.

"My dear, don't be fippant; when you really fall in love yourself you will know it is not a joking matter."

"Ah! yes—when I do!" said Meta. "And now there is Lord Castleman, and you don't seem any more favorably inclined to him."

"I can't help it, mamma," said Meta, rather wearily.

She rose and gathered her work together and left the field to Lady Mary. She was so tired of these endless lamentations, and she knew enough of her mother to know that she had thoroughly exhausted both her and her daughter's patience.

So Meta put on her hat and strolled into the garden, the shady old-world garden that always seemed such a haven of peace and solitude amid the whirl and din of the great city.

It was here that Meta generally came when her mother's mood was too plaintive or too loquacious, not railing against the kindly, unwise woman, even in her heart, but feeling the need for a little quiet and solitude, a little time in which to gather her thoughts, and perhaps live over again the one little month in which the garden had seemed greener and fairer and sweeter than it had ever seemed since.

That was five years ago now—that one month of Meta's life that had seemed to Lady Mary so much like any other June, but that had made the very name of June musical for ever in her daughter's ears.

It was June again now, and even in London there was a sense of summer in the air. The garden was at its best, with roses just unfolding, and creepers greenly untwining and putting forth delicate tendrils, as yet untouched by dust or soot.

The great June daisies that that grew wild in such abundance in southern pastures and on breezy cliffs by the sea, but that needed much care and pains to induce them to grow here at all, were opening their yellow discs and spreading their white fringes in the sun.

Meta gathered one and put it softly to her lips.

"The one flower in the world!" whispered the girl, and then she blushed at her own thoughts, and fastened the flower in her girdle, and told herself it was folly, and worse than folly, to let any man's words dwell in her heart like this, and come back to her across the years whenever the daisies bloomed.

It was five years now, but every June, as the great white daisies opened to the summer sun, it seemed to Meta that she stood once more by Robin Lindsay's

side, and heard him tell her that he should never see their blossoms again without thinking of this garden and of his cousin Meta.

"Because they are Marguerites, and I am Margaret?" she asked.

"If you like. Or because they are fair and white, and tall and stately beautiful," said Mr. Lindsay. "Shall I find them and you still here when I come back, I wonder? Will the daisies bloom year after year in spite of fog and smoke? And you, Margaret, will you be here, in spite of all the suitors who will try to win and wear the Marguerite that is the one flower in the world for me?"

She did not answer for a moment. She was only seventeen, and with Robin Lindsay, at least, was curiously shy. And then before she could speak, he caught her hands in his.

"Don't answer, dear," he said; "I had no right to ask. I will not bind you by a single word. Only give me a flower for old time's sake. It pleases you to nothing, but I may be glad to have it if I come back some day and find no daisies here."

"One daisy will be there," said Meta softly—so softly that perhaps he did not hear.

Robin Lindsay had no fortune but his profession, but he was a Scotchman, and as proud as he was poor. It seemed to him a baseness to try to win a pledge from this fair young cousin of his, whose mother naturally looked so much higher for her, and to whom an engagement to himself could only bring years of indefinite waiting.

The waiting and the burden of separation and doubt and anxiety should be his, and not hers, he told himself; and so he went away and left her free, notwithstanding that her freedom was a heavier burden than his.

He only wrote once, a formal letter to Lady Mary, acknowledging her hospitality, that somehow found its way among Meta's treasures; but every year there came a Christmas card adorned with white Marguerite daisies, and bearing an Indian postmark and the initials R. L.

That was all; just such Christmas cards as anyone might have sent, pretty tokens of cousinly remembrance, that might be the emptiest of compliments; but Meta flushed into trembling delight over them, and hid them away as a miser hides his gold.

And Lady Mary, looking kindly at her daughter, with the unexpected acumen which otherwise foolish women sometimes display in matters of the heart, thought to herself that if Meta had not been such a child when Robert Lindsay went away, she might have fancied there had been some "nonsense" between the cousins, as they wandered so long in the garden those soft June evenings five long years ago.

It was only a passing thought, dismissed the next instant as too unlikely for serious reflection, but it came back to Lady Mary with startling vividness this fair June morning, as she went out in the garden in search of Meta, and found her standing by the daisies, with eyes that were luminous and tender, and a fullness of conviction that Meta herself would probably never attain to.

She turned for a moment, and looked at the girl's white-clad figure with tender maternal pride, and then she went on to the house and into the drawing-room, glowing with satisfaction and goodwill.

Lord Castleman was standing by the table with a face that was becomingly anxious and grave, but he flushed into eager anticipation as Lady Mary came into the room.

"You bring me good tidings," he cried, joyfully. "I see it in your eyes."

"She will see you," said Lady Mary, beaming with smiles. "You will find her in her favourite corner by the conservatories."

He pressed her hand and went, and seeing everything a little mistily through the sudden dazzle of new hope, but plauding his cause with as much humility as though he had not just seen Lady Mary, and drawn his own deductions from the encouraging interview.

And Meta sat with downcast eyes, and listened to his tale in a silence he felt to be still more encouraging; but when he would have taken her hand, she drew it back.

"Wait," she said; "there is something I should like to show you first."

She took from her pocket a faded leather case, and opened it with fingers that trembled a little in spite of her efforts to keep them still. Inside were the Christmas cards with the pretty frosted daisies and the robins that used to be so seldom absent from Christmas cards, but that had perhaps a special reference in these and with them a letter that was a little frayed about the edges now.

Lord Castleman stared, as he might perhaps be excused for doing.

"What are these?" he said. "Pardon me—I don't understand."

"It was very foolish—and it was all five years ago," faltered Meta; "but I thought you ought to know."

He understood now, and his brow lowered ominously. He was all Lady Mary had called him—he was well-born and distinguished, a polished gentleman and an upright man. What fault can you find in him?"

None," said Meta, wearily. She

thought that life would have been easier to her if her suitor had been a little less unexceptionable.

"Then, my dear, why do you not accept him? Do you know, Meta, what is the natural conclusion when a girl behaves as you do?"

"Yes," said Meta, hastily. "The natural conclusion—the only conclusion—is, that she likes her home and her mother too well to wish to leave them."

Lady Mary put aside the fattery with lofty indifference.

"The natural conclusion is that there is some one she likes better—or fancier she does," said the mother, considerably changing the form of expression as she saw the sudden flame in Meta's cheeks.

It faded as quickly as it had come, and Meta said, steadily:

"That is not the case with me, mamma."

It was not a wilful untruth. Her morning's communings with the daisies had brought home the conviction that Robin Lindsay had forgotten her, or thought of her only as a cousin, and nothing could, therefore, be more evident to Margaret Hazlewood than that her own feelings must have undergone a similar change.

"I am relieved to hear it," said Lady Mary. "I had really begun to wonder—absurd as it seems—if there could have been anything between you and Robin."

"No! oh, no!" cried Meta, vehemently. "How could you think so, mamma, when he has never—"

She stopped, afraid of her own voice. What was she going to do? To falter and break down before her mother—to betray the weakness that had robbed her girlhood of its brightness, and that, instead of being conquered, as she had believed, seemed ready to overwhelm her now with a sudden despairing shame?

She paused a moment, steadying herself against the garden seat, and then she said, with a nervous little laugh:

"How could you be so absurd, mamma? I should have thought that you knew me better than that."

The two women were both too much excited to notice outside things. It came upon them both with a little shock when a page appeared before them and announced that Lord Castleman was in the drawing-room.

"I will come," said Lady Mary, nervously, and then she looked at her daughter.

"My dear, what shall I say? You will not sacrifice your prospects—your happiness—"

"My happiness is not in question, mamma," said Meta, proudly. "You can send Lord Castleman to me."

"Lady Mary did not venture to ask any more. She kissed her daughter, and went off to her guest rejoicing. Meta would not have sent for him only to reject him, she felt sure. And as for the doubts which the daisies had suggested, if Lady Mary did not believe her daughter's protestations as entirely as Meta would have wished, she believed in the healing powers of time and the evanescent nature of human emotions, with a fullness of conviction that Meta herself would probably never attain to.

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