

THE  
**Alliance Grand**  
OR  
**Love That Kne Now**  
Bounds.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The next morning brought her mother's letter. Chill though it was, refusal of its offer cost Sydney no little pang. The old hungering for affection asserted itself strongly at the first note of favor. But chained afresh, as now she found herself, not a hundred-fold more temptation than Mrs. Alwyn's measured lines held out would have taken her from Wynstone. Definitely her "no" was written and dispatched. The cause of that "no" she dared not add without permission well knowing it would only reopen the old bitter dispute, and as this permission never came, under Mrs. Alwyn's perverse judgment she had to lie till time, the great redresser of many wrongs, removed the unmerited ban.

One confidant she had, Jacob Cheene. To him she wrote what she suspected was no news, and back came the candid admission that he had known throughout who her employers were.

"But while I heard you were peaceful at Capel Moor, with nothing to complain of, I thought my knowledge best kept to myself. The Hursts are kindly by breeding, and come of honorable stock. There were Hursts, gentle folks, at Stillcote, generations before your own name was transplanted there from the Midlands, Miss Sydney. The father of these two was one of that quartet who used to meet at Stuart's every week. I knew that in their home you might be better done by than among richer and prouder people; and I thought that if ever this which you have just heard did reach your ears, you could come straight to me, if that course seemed best to you. It never entered my calculations you should take it so hard."

Thus Jacob answered her, and urged with even-handed shrewdness and liveliest regard for his old master's daughter, that she might with a clear conscience hold herself exonerated as her father's vicar from every vestige of blame in this loss of the Hursts. What Mr. Alwyn failed to foresee for himself, how could he foretell for others? No professional man would dare to give advice if his actions were to be thus after-weighed. Miss Sydney had magnified the imputation—had accepted it too readily. She must let him, who valued his master's honor second to none but herself, arbitrate for her now. She

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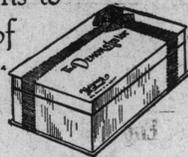
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In the Spring a Young Maid's fancy fondly turns to thoughts of

**Neilson's Chocolates**



"The Chocolates that are different."

must give up Wynstone, since she had learned this, and come to him. He would so gladly have her if his home was not beneath her sharing. But he was getting better off—a little. All she had done last summer had set his narrow income free. For awhile it would be plenty for them both. By and by they would see what was to be done. And when would his dear Miss Sidney come?

"Never, good old Jacob!" was her silent verdict; but there came a haze about her downcast eyes, and a chercherous tremulousness about her soft, flexible lips, while, with words loving and gentle as firm, she penned her answer to the friend her father's brotherly humanity had purchased or her fifty years before.

Miss Hurst was watching her with side-glances. Sydney's reticence on matters personal was rather a sore point. That weekly letter, always scented out whether written "upstairs or down stairs, or in my lady's chamber," was a mystery she was burning to dissect. Now the writer's scarcely concealable emotion suggested its tendency as the one which to Miss Jean's then state of mind appeared likeliest.

"Hm!" she said, stopping to regard Sydney sentimentally, with a knitting pin pressed meditatively to her cheek—"No bad news, I hope, Miss Grey?"

"No—oh! no indeed," said Sydney, betrayed into disclaiming eagerness. "It is only that some one is very good to me."

"I see," returned Miss Jean; "very satisfactory." Then she felt compelled to put forward another modest feeler. "Your friend, or friends, is the same you went last autumn to visit, would be quite free to return the compliment to you here any day, if you wished it, for a few hours, I'm sure."

Sydney, at this, knowing that Jacob by name and person too, would surely be recognized, could only falter thanks, confused and blushing. Herefrom Miss Hurst drew her own inference.

"Ah!" she said, "I shouldn't be surprised if your correspondent would rather entice you away than come here to see you. I suspect that this person, who is so very good to you, is not altogether disinterested." Sydney felt headlong into the neat little pitfall.

"Indeed, he is disinterested," she cried, "though he does want me to go—" then stopped with a sudden consciousness that she was saying far too much, and ended, reddening more much, and ended, reddening more vividly than ever, "but I am not going to be so selfish—I mean it would be wrong to take advantage—oh, I mean, Miss Hurst, I am intending to stay here till—"

"Till circumstances fetch you elsewhere!" finished Miss Jean, dryly; and, never imagining the interpretation put upon this interlude, Sydney finished her letter and hastened off to post it.

"Herself, as usual!" cogitated Miss Hurst, sola, for her brother was out on one of his river-side rambles. "She never trusts any one else to do that. I am confident she has had some difference with her family about marrying. It wouldn't hurt her to be more open with me. I might advise her for her good. But I suppose her good might mean leaving us, so perhaps things are best as they are. I don't know where I should find another like her. She seems to leave nothing undone to please me and Gilbert, though he doesn't notice it as I do.

The last few days she has been more anxious than ever. Now I come to think of it, she really was quite affected by all I told her the other night. Very likely, though she doesn't talk much, she feels for us."

Very likely she did! That missive to Jacob nailed her colors to the mast. Now she turned all her strength, all her invention, into the channel where henceforth it had to flow. Between the bounds of Miss Jean's elaborate domesticity and Mr. Hurst's more cultivated requirements she must mete out what ability she had—spare money for one; translate life into light for the other—and, while ransacking her faculties for means to these ends, fortuitous chance supplied them.

A sunny January morning exhibited with cruel distinctness the faded state of the drawing room curtains. Miss Jean, apologizing for the contrivance (in which Sydney's fingers helped) of turning sides into middle, lamented that the house, to look as it ought, wanted all the surplus of its owner's income; "whereas mine," she sighed, "must go for Gilbert. I shall get shabbier and shabbier, but there is no help for it. Gilbert can do nothing, of course. If there were any gentlemanly work he could learn, and carry on in the back room, to bring

in a pound a week, it would be something. But there isn't, so I give up hoping anything of the sort."

What she gave up, Sydney seized on.

Through an hour of diligent stitching the plan matured; with next day's reading it was initiated, more boldly than it would have been somewhat earlier. For at last some clew seemed to be found to Mr. Hurst's strange manner. His sister expatiated on Mrs. Preece's persisting in shaking hands with him, and "pitying him as if he had been a baby, both of which naturally upset him." Now Sydney remembered sinning in this respect. On a certain September evening she had taken his hand unasked, and, like as not, let her voice tell the pity she was feeling. Since then, assuredly, she had treated her differently, for

which he was not to be judged as more fortunate men. Having erred once in this direction, she would do so no more. Withholding every sign of sympathy, whatever she felt, she would win him back to their old footing, and so set her scheme afloat. The book placed for her next morning she asked leave to change.

"Might they read one they had gone through last autumn?" Mr. Hurst had said it was worth a second study.

Surprised, but shirking discussion, as usual now—though Sydney's voice was wondrous winning as she made the petition—be agreed to her wish. The book was on philology. Presently came the paragraph Sydney had craftily aimed at.

"You said before, Mr. Hurst, you had a paper on this very point among your manuscripts."

"Yes," unwillingly, "I think I have."

"I hoped, perhaps, you would let me see it. This is too specialized for me to understand it."

"My few remarks, Miss Grey, were simply local, and mixed up with other subjects. They would not repay hunting out. Something by Skeat on the shelf there would answer your purpose better."

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