

# IN FADED INK.

LEAVES FROM TWO OLD DIARIES.

*His Story.*

Grantham Manor, June 20, 18—.

To-morrow I will speak to her. It should have been to-night, but fate—a two-fold fate in the persons of aunt Harriet and Cecil Gresley—was against me. How interminable old Sir George's hunting stories appeared, told between slow appreciative sips of '34 port, while I sat trying to fix my attention upon them, and longing all the while to know what those two could find to talk about so earnestly, pacing round and round the lawn, her white dress brushing over the dewy grass, and Gresley's cigar glowing like a red moving star in the dusky summer twilight! Just as Sir John arrived at the end of that wonderful account of how Whitepatch landed him in a Lincolnshire bog, and I dreading the commencement of another such reminiscence, pushed back my chair and stepped out through the open French window on to the terrace that stretches along the whole front of Grantham Manor, aunt Harriet's voice, distinct and shrill, called out twice from the brightly-lighted drawing room casement—

"Freda, Freda, my dear child, don't stay out in the damp! Captain Gresley, please bring her in! There is such a heavy dew, and coffee has been waiting for some time!"

After this, there was nothing left for me but to pace slowly backwards and forwards alone on the terrace in the gray twilight smoking a cigar, the odor of which seemed to blend not inharmoniously with the scent of early roses.

Now and then snatches of song and light laughter reached me from the open drawing-room windows. Lingering a moment, I caught a glimpse of Freda—a slim girlish figure—reclining in a fantastic bamboo-chair, her head with its coils of soft fair hair leaning negligently against the silk drapery that adorned the chair-top, a tea-cup in her hand, a bowl of many-colored roses on a little spindle-legged table at her side.

Gresley stood near. He had purloined a red rose as large a peony from the centre of the bowl, and was fastening it with perfect gravity into his button-hole. I could not help wondering if many men felt as I did on the eve of asking a woman to share life with them.

So much depends on age and temperament, while not a little has to do with early associations and surroundings. For instance, a man like Gresley, with half a dozen sisters, married and single, of various ages, must have a knowledge of women, an insight into and experience of their ways that are utterly denied to a solitary individual like myself, whose only home is his club, who spends the best part of his time at the Foreign Office and in the incessant railway-travelling, diplomatic interviewing, and rushing backwards and forwards with despatches from England first to one foreign capital and then to another that constitutes the daily life and duties of a Queen's messenger.

If Freda comes to me, those wearisome journeys must cease. There will be a snug berth or two vacant before long where I can build a pretty enough nest for my little bird.

They offered me the post of *attache* to the Embassy at Vienna the other day—I think I can see Freda muffled up to her blue eyes in furs driving in the Prater! Foley would get me a post at the British Embassy in Rome. Fancy Freda sitting about one of the old-world palaces to be had there for a mere song, herself and the fresh violets I should bring her every morning, the only signs of youth and life among the moth-eaten tapestries, the tarnished gildings, the faded paintings on the ceilings! Rome would not be a bad place for the winter; and in summer we might go off to Switzerland and play at mountain-life for a month or two in a *chalet* I know of, brown and many-gabled, with carved balconies and gingerbread galleries like a child's toy, just overhanging the Lake of Thun, perched upon a grassy knoll, with a cluster of tall dark pine-trees behind it. Dreams—dreams! I wonder who gives plain, cold, self-contained John Evelyn credit for so lively an imagination!

"Mr. Evelyn! That solemn prig! For Heaven's sake, my dear Carrie, don't send me into dinner with him! I am sure he never looked at a woman or enjoyed a joke in his life! Queen's messenger indeed! I always fancied they were so delightfully wicked and mysterious, but he—"

Such was the unflattering comment that I overheard not many months since from the lips of a lively little married woman who was staying in the same house as myself, and who was delivering her sentiments on people and things in general pretty freely to half a dozen kindred spirits assembled in our hostess's sanctum for afternoon-tea.

My vanity did not suffer in the least from this hostile criticism. With the general run of women I have nothing in common. The bad imitation of Americanisms and the blatant independence fashionable amongst the wives and daughters of this generation by no means commend themselves to my taste.

I am not old or even elderly at thirty-four; yet I seem to have been born a century too late so far as my ideas as to what a woman should be are concerned.

But Freda altogether satisfies me. Her one season in town and her one round of visits at smart country-houses have not spoilt her—have not tainted her freshness and purity in the least. As I saw her at her first ball at a grand London house, natural, modest, innocent, reminding one of all that was pure, gentle, and good, so she is now. Sir John will not refuse her to me—of that I feel sure. He and my dead father were friends, he has known something of me from boyhood. Simple country squire as he is, he has no high ambitions for his motherless daughter; he would consent to anything that he thought conducive to her future happiness. If only she is willing!

Sometimes I have fancied that there has been a slight consciousness, a shade of shyness, in her manner towards me—that she is not ignorant of what I feel for her—that perhaps she has some idea of what her mere presence is to me. Ah, she cannot imagine the depths of a man's passion, growing hourly greater because of its enforced self-restraint!

If I lose her—which Heaven in mercy forbid!—I trust her choice may not fall on Gresley. I love her well and unselfishly enough to wish her the happiest and sunniest of lives, even if her life should not be passed with me, and, in spite of his handsome face, his gentlemanly bearing, his undeniably winning ways, there is something about Gresley that I distrust instinctively. He has, if I mistake not, one or two propensities not calculated to make a woman happy.

Certainly he is more a match for her in age than I am. He is five-and-twenty at most, while I, at thirty-four, am fourteen years older than she. Probably Freda looks upon me as quite a fatherly person, which would account for the occasional glimpses of something more than friendliness with which she favors me now and then, and which set my pulses beating at an alarming rate.

If she could but know it! If I could have had her to myself for five minutes on the terrace to-night! But to-morrow I will make an opportunity. With such a calling as mine, with such uncertainty as to whether the next twenty-four hours would find me here or at the other end of Europe, it is foolish to delay.

Even as I sit here, writing near the open window long after all the other inmates of the Manor have retired to rest, a sound of a horse's hoofs drawing nearer and nearer and audible for a long distance in the silence of the summer night may portend a summons for me—a telegram from the Foreign Office received at Grantham and sent over by the post-office authorities to the Manor House.

By George, I am not far wrong—the sound of the pony's trot is certainly coming from the avenue! Now the animal pauses under my window, which looks to the front, while its rider, a country boy, hitches the bridle on to a bush laden with pale dew-drenched roses and peers about in the gray starlit obscurity for the front-door bell. I must speak to him; there is no need to knock up the house.

As I thought! Perish the Russians, the Czar, the Foreign Office, the Ministers, and all the diplomatic hotch-potch, say I! The earliest dawn to-morrow must find me on my road to town; by to-morrow night I shall have exchanged the roses and nightingales of Grantham for the stuffy night-express from London to Dover *en route* for St. Petersburg—and that with the dearest wish of my heart untold, with the words that might make Freda mine unspeakable!

I must write; there is no help for it! A thousand changes and chances may befall before we meet again; I dare not risk delay. Such a letter should be short and to the point—a few words breathing truth and earnestness. How paltry one's thoughts appear when set down in writing! Yet, if she cares for me as I care for her, how she will treasure this one frail sheet of white paper!

It is written, fastened down, and directed. How shall I send it to her? Her own maid is not likely to be astir when I start, and I do not like to leave it upon the hall table, where all the letters for the household are usually laid out.

I might post it; but it would not reach her so soon. Stay—I have it! The groom who drives me to the station in the morning can deliver the letter on his return. After all, I am but a coward. I have told her not to answer me unless she can do so favorably. It seems actually as though I were afraid to face her refusal in black and white—of reading hungrily word after word, and then finding that, however kindly and gently expressed, it meant nothing but "No." How badly I have taken the complaint to be sure! This comes of never having entertained the slightest fancy for a woman before. Well, I shall understand her silence. I have given her a week to think over the matter in case of having taken her by surprise. People sometimes refuse a request on the spur of the moment which on consideration they feel disposed to grant.

If I hear nothing from her by this day week, I shall know that it is impossible—that I must be a lonely man the remainder of my life.

I shall cease writing my diary here. If I can reopen it to record my success—the winning of the only prize in this world's lottery, which I care to obtain—well and good, if not, the rest of this little book will remain a blank. Who cares to make a note of a failure?

*Her Story.*

Hotel Brighton, January 12, 18—.

I have been married a week. Eight days since I stood in my own room at Grantham in my bridal dress, with the vows I had spoken as Cecil Gresley's wife still ringing in my ears, and John Evelyn's letter just delivered into my hands. Too late! No one knows it.

No one will ever know it. I shall never dare to look back—to think of what might have been if I had only been patient, if I had waited a little longer, and not allowed myself to be persuaded against my will. Surely there can be no harm in noting down what happened in my diary—what a terrible blow fell upon me on my wedding-morning!

It was when we had returned from church and I was alone up-stairs for a few minutes that the note I ought to have received six months before was brought to me. My maid Sophy knocked at my door with it and came in smiling, with a great white satin favor pinned on the breast of her smart new crimson gown.

"If you please, miss—I mean, ma'am," she said—"I'm so sorry to disturb you, but Fielding wouldn't let me rest till I brought you this! He doesn't know how he came to be so careless as to forget it; but he won't