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"The All-Purpose Sugar"



## HER HUMBLE LOVER

"And he?" she said, with interest, "does the rule apply to him? And which is he—good or evil?"

He was silent for a moment; then, as he was about to speak, Signa held up her hand.

"Stop!" she said with a smile. "They used to say that I had the gift of reading character in faces; let me see if I can read the present Lord Delamere's in his portrait."

And she went along the line till she came to the end.

With an exclamation of surprise she stopped.

"Why, there was no portrait of him! There is the place left but there is no portrait!"

And she turned and looked at Hector Warren.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Perhaps he has inherited the ugly face, and was too vain to have it painted and placed in the rank and file," he said lightly.

"Perhaps so," said Signa, laughing thoughtfully. "But I feel just a little disappointed."

### CHAPTER VI.

It is the evening of the dinner-party, and Signa sits at ease beside the open window of her little room, putting on her black gloves and listening absently to the hub and buzz of conversation that floats upward from the dining room. From her window she had watched with amused interest the arrival of the guests as the carriages drove round the drive, and deposited their occupants just below where she was sitting.

First came the modest brougham of the doctor and his wife; then the chaise of Captain Jenks and his son; the third to arrive was of a different order; a great brougham, drawn by a pair of huge chestnuts, came thundering over the gravel; and Signa, looking out, could see by the immense coat of arms lozenge on the carriage that it belonged to some one of importance.

Presently she heard a gentleman's voice giving some orders to the powdered footman who had descended to open the door, and the man's respectful "Yes, Sir Frederick" might be she did not know, but she remembered Mr. Podswell's remark that he liked to meet new people, and concluded that he was of some consequence. A few minutes later a pair of dark roans came up the drive, harnessed to a neat brougham of Morgan's build. Altogether a tasteful and fashionable turnout, that attracted Signa's attention and excited her interest, which increased as she caught sight of an elaborate dress inside the carriage.

She heard an old woman's voice, thin, but clear as crystal, and heard the servant answer her as "My lady."

"Lady Rockwell, the terrible!" thought Signa, with a smile. One or two other carriages arrived—heavy, lumbering landaus, smacking a vast respectability and solid wealth; then all was still outside, the servants hurried up and down the hall, and she knew that dinner had commenced.

It was time for her to dress then, and she went to the wardrobe and turned over the few dresses she possessed. They were all black, of course, and some heavy with crapes. She chose one that was composed of a soft grenadine—a grenadine that had been woven in the East, and was as unlike the ordinary grenadine one buys in Oxford street as an Indian shawl is unlike a sack. It had been one of poor Jack Grenville's last presents to her; he had picked it up in

Cairo, and she had kept it by her, little thinking that she should not wear it until the giver was lying asleep in his last slumber. She took it out with a sigh—a gentle sigh that was as full of love as unreasoning grief, and put it on over a soft cashmere, leaving the white neck and arms to gleam like ivory through the filmy, web-like tissue of the dress. There she looked through the modest contents of her jewel-case, but closed it again, and took a white rose from a base, and put it where her brooch would have gone; and so, without any other ornament save a pair of bangles, which had been bought in Cairo with the dress, she had finished her toilet.

The tiny glass gave back only a portion of her tall, supple figure, and she did not study even so much or so little of it carefully. There was not much vanity in Signa, she must have known that she was beautiful, and that in no small degree, but the knowledge did not haunt her as it does smaller minds. She forgot it altogether for the most part, and valued her loveliness as a small matter of accident. Tonight, if she had known it, that loveliness is, as the rector would have termed it, "really extraordinary"; for the keen, sweet air of the sea has brought a touch of color to her oval face, that was so pale and ivory-like when she first came, and the prospect of a little amusement has bestowed a subtle light on the dark eyes that renders them as dangerous as the beacons that shine on the coast outside North-west Bar.

But she is not conscious of, or thinking of coming triumphs; she is simply leaning back with quiet, calm patience, waiting for the maid who is to come and tell her that the ladies have gone into the drawing-room, and smiling with amusement at the reflection that she who, as Jack Grenville's daughter, had been used to the society of the highest in the land, should be scarcely good enough for Aunt Podswell's country guests. Here again a smaller mind would have felt and shown resentment at being excluded from the dining-room, but Signa only felt amused and highly gratified; she could imagine a dinner party at a country rectory quite distinctly enough to prevent her longing to be one of it.

One other thought she had—it was of Hector Warren; she had not heard or seen him. Had he come or had he resented the cool insolence of the tardy invitation and stopped away?—as they certainly deserved that he should.

A faint thrill of hope—too faint to raise a blush—agitated her as she thought. She would like to see him again, she thought. And why not? It was only natural. Since her father died, and she had come to this place, her, beside Archie, had spoken a kind, sympathetic word to her saving the handsome, distinguished stranger? With a warm gratitude she recalled the scene of yesterday—his close, devoted attention, the respectful tone of his voice, when he addressed her, the kind glow of sympathy in his magnificent eyes; she recalled them all and—yes, she was not so foolish as to be afraid of admitting to herself that she should like to see him again.

A knock sets her thoughts flying like a flock of wood-pigeons, and she opens the door to find—not Mary, but Archie—Archie, with a disappointed face and a lack-lustre eye.

"Isn't it a beastly shame?" he says, frowning at her.

"What's a beastly shame?" asks Signa, "that they give you any more almonds and raisins, Archie?"

"More!" he exclaims, with intense indignation. "I haven't had any. Mamma left word that I was not to go in to dessert, and—and, Signa, I shouldn't have thought Mr. Warren was a story-teller, should you?"

"He did not strike me as being a particularly untruthful person, Archie," said Signa.

"Ah! I'm afraid he is, though," says Archie, with a strong sense of wrong in his voice. "Didn't you tell me, the other day, no lady or gentleman ever broke their promise?"

"I have a faint recollection of expressing such a sentiment," says Signa, with a smile. "Are you going to turn and crush me by proving that the sentiment is false, dear?"

"I don't know. All I can say is, Mr. Warren hasn't kept his promise. I got away from Jane, and crept down the stairs, just as the dessert wine was being taken in, and I passed the door—three times; but he never took any notice. Then I waited and mewed—oh, quite loud! But he never took any notice of that; and when I mewed again, papa said, 'Drive that cat away, Mary!' and I came upstairs. It's a beastly shame— isn't it, Signa? I thought he'd have kept his promise like a gentleman."

"Perhaps he didn't hear you. Did you see him?"

Archie shakes his head, and kneels on the chair at her dressing-table, to ransack her jewel-box.

"No, I couldn't see him. I expect he was behind the door somewhere. I saw Sir Frederick—him that papa says is so rich and so proud."

"So proud, is he?" says Signa, amused; "and what is his other name?"

"By-the-by—Sir Frederick Blyte," replies Archie. "He is—oh, so rich indeed! and that land you see over there"—and he points across the bay—"is his. He's young and fair, with a big yellow mustache. I don't like it so well as Mr. Warren's, but Sir Frederick is very fond of it."

"Oh?" laughingly.

"Yes," says Archie, shrewdly. "He is always pulling it and twisting it up, like this, and he always talks about 'my place, and my land, and my people, like—like one of the kings in the English History.'"

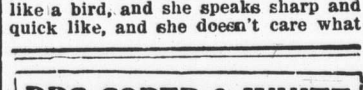
Signa laughs, and Archie, encouraged, goes on.

"Papa says he's the principal person in this part of the county, now that Lord Delamere never comes, and the Grange's shut up. I suppose if Lord Delamere came, Sir Frederick wouldn't like it. Then I saw Lady Rookwell—'old Rook,' papa calls her when she's gone—that's because she's got sharp eyes and a nose like a bird."

"That will do, Archie," says Signa, with a shake of the head.

"But it's true. Well, I don't say it if you don't like. Signa, dear; but she is like a bird, and she speaks sharp and quick like, and she doesn't care what

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Please Mention This Paper.

she says. One day I heard her ask papa why he preached the same sermons year after year, and he didn't know what to say."

"That was decidedly rude," says Signa, repressing a smile.

"Wasn't it? But papa does, you know. Then there was Captain Jenks. I heard him growling because Mary upset some wine on his back. And there was young Mr. Jenks, with such a big bunch of flowers in his coat! and I saw him wink at Mary, Signa dear."

"I think not. You must be mistaken," says Signa.

"Then I must have got a crumb in my eye," suggests Archie.

"That is more likely," assents Signa. "Then there was Dr. Plumble and Mrs. Plumble, with a big cap on—like Mary's, only with more lace on it. Dr. Plumble has got a red face, and he drinks a good deal of wine with papa after the ladies have gone—"

"Upon consideration, Archie, I rather think your mamma is wise in declining to permit you to join in dessert," says Signa, significantly.

"But I didn't see Mr. Warren," Archie sums up, with a sigh, "and when I do I shall tell him that he hasn't kept his promise."

"Will you come down now, if you please, miss?" says Mary, appearing at the open door.

"Good-night, Archie," says Signa, stooping and kissing him. "Perhaps you will sleep better for your abstinence from the deleterious sweets of dessert."

"What big words you use!" he says, laughing. "You think I don't understand 'em, but I do. Kiss me again, Signa. I say, how beautiful you look to-night! More like a princess than ever!" and he regards her with wide open eyes of childish awe and admiration. "Signa, don't let young Mr. Jenks wink at you, will you?"

"Not if I can prevent him, certainly not," says Signa, going to the door.

"And Signa, promise me you will come in and kiss me, as usual. I shall keep awake for you."

"I promise—and, unlike Mr. Warren, I will keep it," she says, with a smile. "Good-night, and be a good boy."

"Good-night," he says, and he follows her to the top of the staircase, looking after her over the banisters, wistfully.

Signa descends the stairs slowly, and Mary, waiting to open the drawing-room door, looks at her with a woman's critical appreciation, and wonders how they will "take" this beautiful young creature who is about to swim into their midst, the picture of youthful loveliness.

"Your flower is falling, miss," she whispers, earnestly, and she whips a

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pin from some mysterious hiding-place, to readjust the blossoms—a thing she would not dream of doing for her mistress; but Signa's beauty and loveliness, and loving care of Archie, have won Mary's heart long ago.

"Thank you, Mary," says Signa, in her sweet voice, never sweeter or gentler than when she speaks to her inferiors, and Mary is fully repaid; she is also encouraged to add, hurriedly: "What a lovely dress, miss! Lor!"—touching it reverently—"it is like a colubet!"

"I am glad you like it," says Signa, smiling, and not by any means offended. "I am fond of it, too."

Mary courteously and opens the door, and Signa enters.

So calmly and quietly that for a moment the three ladies: scarcely notice her entrance. Signa looks round. Mrs. Podswell is at the tea-table, an old lady with palpable paint and powder, and a very nice but also palpable front, is seated, half asleep, in a chair by the window. Signa guesses that it is the terrible Lady Rookwell, and the doctor's wife is talking to Mrs. Podswell, and smiling with all her teeth, like the good-natured soul she is. Signa looks around, standing motionless for a moment, then she goes up to the tea-table.

"Shall I help you?" she says.

Her voice, low as it is, rouses the sleeper, and her ladyship swings round with a start and a stare.

"Hem!" she says. "Who's this?"

"Aunt Podswell coughs and signs as usual."

"My niece—Miss Grenville—Lady Rookwell. If you remember, I told you—"

"Yes, I know," cuts in her ladyship, abruptly, still staring at Signa, who seems totally unconscious of her gaze, and is apparently absorbed with the tea things. "I know, but you didn't say them!—we didn't expect—is the child deaf?"

"Deaf?" echoes Aunt Podswell, nervously. "No, dear Lady Rookwell."

"No? Then I'd better not finish what I was going to say. I hate vain people too much to help to make one. Send her to me."

Aunt Podswell nods and smiles in a weak, feeble kind of way at Signa.

"Lady Rookwell wishes to speak to you, my dear."

Signa, with a mischievous impulse, looks round from Mrs. Plumble to her old ladyship as if she did not know where to go to.

Her ladyship chuckles.

"Vry nice—very nicely done; and serves me right. Quite serves me right, my dear! I am an awfully proud old thing, but, like most butties, I know when I have met my master. Amelia, introduce me to the young lady in proper form, since that is what she wants."

Aunt Podswell snorts indignant anger at Signa—Signa standing with a tea-cup in her hand, as calm and serene as a queen.

"Signa—Lady Rookwell," she stammers, awkwardly. "Lady Rookwell, this is my—my husband's niece."

"You have no cause to be ashamed of her, my dear Amelia," says the awful old lady. "Now, come and sit by me, my dear; your aunt can pour out the tea. And so your name is Grenville, is it?"

Signa seats herself beside the fire-looking old countess, and inclines her head.

"Gren—why you must be Jack Grenville's daughter!" exclaims Lady Rookwell. "Handsome Jack! yes, yes, I know, my dear; forgive me," she adds, quietly, as Signa's face pales; and the old lady puts her hand on the gauze-covered arm affectionately. "I know my stupid tongue always runs away with me. But I didn't mean to

hurt you or awake sad thoughts. And you are Signa Grenville! I should have known it if I had met you anywhere. Why didn't you dine with us, eh?" and the sharp eyes seem to cleave through Signa's innocent bosom.

"Will you have cream in your tea, dear Lady Rookwell?" murmurs Mrs. Podswell, hurriedly.

"Oh, my dear?" reiterates the terrible old lady, taking no more notice of poor Mrs. Podswell than if she had not spoken. "Hem! I understand, Strange! Some people have no gumption. If you had been amongst us, the meal would have been a little lighter—and more cheerful. Good heavens! Some people would give anything to have you sit at their dinner-table."

"I did not care to come," said Signa, taking pity on poor Mrs. Podswell, now crimson and half choking with mortification.

"Hem! Ah! Very nicely put. Bring me a cup of tea, my dear. I want to talk to you."

Signa rose to fetch the tea, which Aunt Podswell hands her with a glance of mingled dislike and deference. If she could but have guessed that Lady Rookwell would have taken to the girl as she has done, she would have had her to dinner; but there was no counting on the terrible old woman. Signa carried the cup of tea to her ladyship.

"Sit down," she says. "How long have you been here? I wish I'd known it, I'd have called. You can't talk about your father just now. No—no; I know. But you will be able some day, and then I'll tell you about him. The most charming and wonderful man I ever met; I'd have run away with him if he'd asked me; so would have the girls I know."

He (reading the paper)—There's a big flareback coming. She—Dear me! And I was sure I saw where all the new skirts were to hang straight—Baltimore American.

It is interesting to note that the centenarian Mrs. Arthur Mozley, who so recently celebrated her hundred and first birthday, spent her venerable birthday under felicitous circumstances—in fairly good health, and in the society of her friends, by all of whom she was warmly congratulated, and was made happy by many gifts and congratulations.

It seems that Mrs. Mozley's grandmother was also a centenarian, she being the widow of the late Rev. Arthur Mozley, who, as will be remembered by many of our readers, held livings in London and Devonshire, and who died some twenty-three years ago at Cheltenham.

The fact that two almost direct descendants of the same family have reached a centenarian age would seem to point to the inference that centenarianism is hereditary.

Certainly observation favors the idea that ordinarily longevity is hereditary.

What a comforting thought for those who are able to trace their ancestors back through long years!

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Aunt Podswell opens her eyes and ears.

"But there, I won't talk about him. Poor Jack!" and the old lady sighs and dabs a lace pocket-handkerchief against her eyes almost fiercely. "Never mind. But, great heavens! how like you are to him! And you have buried yourself here!"

Signa glances at her aunt, who has turned almost livid with vexation.

"Hem!" says her ladyship. "Ah, I see! Never mind. Bless my soul, what fools people are!" she continues, in a voice which she flattered herself was quite inaudible, but which Aunt Podswell could hear with awful distinctness. "Talked to me about the girl as if she was a commonplace sort of governess! And here she is like a pearl or a princess!"

"Will you take some more tea?" says Signa, feeling for her aunt, and wishing to stop her ladyship's soliloquy.

"No," says her ladyship, brusquely. "The men will be here presently, and I like a cup then. You must come over and see me. I live at the great, gaunt house across the bay. You will be bored to death and glad to get away again, but come all the same. Great heavens! Jack Grenville's daughter! In this hole!"

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