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Grand Alliance;

Love That Knew No Bounds.

CHAPTER VII.

"I do get so beside myself, so weary of it all; for this morning is only just like most mornings. I am always clumsy, always unlucky—at home. Whatever I arrange interferes with something. Not a single taste have I that mamma approves of. Where she is lavish, I should never spend. Where she is careful, I am not. If I could ever please her really, ever make her fond of me, I would try and try and never tire. But I can't, so I suppose I seem to give up, though I don't intend to do so. But please—lifting a sad pair of eyes so appealingly, the poor major felt quite a sympathetic haze over his own—"will you forgive me for saying all this? I now it's wrong to have complained, it's horribly bad taste and very idiotic of me, for it can't improve matters. But I never said one syllable about it before to anyone—not even Mary Dacie—and I will never again. If you can forget my grumbling I shall be most grateful. It's eased me ever so much, and perhaps—straightening herself with rather a poor attempt at a smile—"perhaps I shall behave better after it."

The major took her hand, and, with a kindly little pressure, drew it within his arm.
"I am sure you will, if there's need of it," he said, soothingly. "I dare say there are awkwardnesses for you all. But do your best, my dear, and you'll get into smoother waters before long. You'll not be always here, you know. It's not to be expected you should." (The nearest hint of married freedom he dared permit himself.) "But as long as you live together sail as close to your mother's wishes as you can. If you have to vex her with one thing, why, please her with another. Now, that letter business, I don't want to know whom it was from, of course; but couldn't you give in to her there?"

"No!" cried Sydney, with a jerk of the major's gouty arm that made him jump. "I do want you to know who wrote it. It was Jacob Cheene. My father—my father's one old true friend,

The only person here at St. Clair's I ever knew or ever saw who spoke kindly of my father to me. He came here eight years ago, just before—before—that June. And his coming was such a pleasure to papa! He was only a clerk, but they had known

and trusted, and cared for each other for years and years. He asked me when he went home to write to him, and I said I would. I told papa I was going to write, and it pleased him, I know," cried Sydney, gazing with strangely flashing eyes into the blue sky far away, as if somewhere there a visible presence were animating her—"I know papa would never have me give up Jacob, so I won't! I know he would always have me keep true to his old companion, so I will! Please, Major Villiers," with a swift turn, and sudden pleading, "don't be angry with me, but papa and I must have our way in this!"
Then she picked up her trailing coil of wire, smiled a half-defiant, half-beseeching April smile, and ran of without bidding response or remonstrance, leaving her would-be mentor rather inclined to put his sympathies in the same scale with her rebellious decision, and meditating, as he strolled some half hour among espaliers and raspberry-canoe, how this high much-hampered spirit could be toned down admirably under tender influence, and make a wife out of a thousand and for his son Rupert.

CHAPTER VIII.

That morning's storm seemed to clear the sky. Possibly suspecting, and desiring no repetition of it, Mrs. Alwyn avoided dangerous topics; while amply contented with the opinion that he had formed, Major Villiers attempted no more interference between his sister-in-law and her daughters. By and by, when the girls were married and away, the frets and jars of daily contact all removed, the mother would perchance deal out more kindly justice to her younger child. If not—well, Sydney would be out of the way of any carping criticism, summing herself in more congenial atmosphere.

So, on the principle of by all means letting the sleeping dog lie, the major shirked any more *tete-a-tetes* for the remainder of his visit; steered clear of aught but very general conversation; led warily from the heat in India to the heat in town, and the advisability of his son getting out of it, and inhaling the cool breezes of St. Clair's; now and again, so the days went smoothly enough till the

last of the major's visit was reached. Then the calm which Sydney, from a certain proud penitence at having opened her heart to a stranger, and Mrs. Alwyn, from a politic desire to preserve appearances, had set themselves to keep, was threatened with another upset.

It was the morning of a grand gathering at Oakleigh Place, for which the major had been especially persuaded to prolong his visit. An officer, pronouncedly a gentleman, and a good-looking man, was a most desirable escort. So his journey to town was postponed till the evening train, and arrangements made to suit his departure then.

"If you will excuse it," said his hostess, "you shall have a sort of cold dinner, that can be ready the moment we are back from Oakleigh. You will be sure, Sydney, to see that we are not kept waiting. A new parlour-maid is a great worry, major, which you are fortunate not to realize.

Sydney looked up perplexed and edging.
"I am to see about the servants, mamma?"
"Yes, if you've no objection."
"But—I thought I was going to Oakleigh?"

"And I thought," returned Mrs. Alwyn, "that as you generally care a little for these afternoon parties, and always prefer getting off them, you would be positively glad to stay a while."

"So I should," answered the girl frankly, "if it were anywhere else."

But the Dacies say the gardens here are glorious in July, and I had been looking forward to seeing them, mamma, as they invited me, too, that day."

"Let Sydney go instead of me," interrupted the major; "I don't care to draw for the gardens. That's an excellent amendment."
"Not to be thought of for a moment," said his hostess, peremptorily. "If Sydney cannot possibly attend to my wish and your comfort, of course, he goes with us." But baffled in her project of letting Leonora shine undivided at Oakleigh, and warding off comparison between the ripeness of her elder child and the fresher attractiveness of the younger, Mrs. Alwyn assumed the heavy air of chronic dissatisfaction Sydney knew so well and ached under.

"Indeed, mamma," she said now leperately anxious their kind guesses should not think her always an evil-dispositioned marplot, "I will show Phillips anything I can before we go and help her if you will tell me how may. But I was wanting to say that almost must go to Oakleigh, for I met Lady Comyngham yesterday, and she stopped her ponies and said she hoped I would certainly be there. And I said, 'Oh, yes, for I never imagine you didn't want me to—'"
"I must beg of you, Sydney, not to misinterpret me in that manner?" put in Mrs. Alwyn, irritably, more out of sorts than ever at this pointed politeness from the countess; "go, by all means! Pray go! I'm only afraid Major Villiers, you will find it awkward driving with four in the carriage."

"Not the least in the world," protested the gentleman, very willingly. "I prefer the quartet, I assure you shouldn't half enjoy myself if one were left out in the cold, you know," with a good-humored smile at Sydney, who, on the verge of answering, was stopped by Leonora, her mouth slightly sullen, her cheeks tinged with vexation.
"Mamma, we shall be intolerably crushed, two on the back seat. My skirt certainly won't look fit to be seen. I think I had better stay at home."
"My dearest—" began Mrs. Alwyn, but for once Sydney broke in vehemently.
"No, no, no, Norah; you know that couldn't be anyhow. And there is no need, for, mamma—I wanted to tell you last night, only Leonora was singing, and I couldn't speak—Dr. Dacie is not able to go, he doesn't get a bit better, and his wife will not leave him, of course; but they both so wish poor Mary to have the pleasure, for she has not been out all the summer. So I said I would ask if you would let her drive me, and then she could go in with our party. And may she?"

"Just another of those frequent cases where I do wish you would think before you speak, Sydney," answered

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Mrs. Alwyn, slowly, for she was mentally balancing pros and cons. Chaperoning Mary Dacie, in a well-worn Sunday gown, was repugnant to her, but the plan would give Leonora space. Best agree to it, then, so she ended, "You have made it impossible for me to say 'no,' however much I may dislike your arrangement."

"Then I may say 'yes,' mamma, and go and tell Mary?"

"If you think she requires any telling," said Mrs. Alwyn, rather sarcastically, and with a sigh indicating she had much to put up with. Which reluctant affirmative gained, Sydney escaped to the Dacies; and later in the day, from the doctor's house and from The Dale, their respective vehicles set forth to traverse the three miles of lane and road that led to Oakleigh Place.

Thither on that afternoon converged such a stream of equipages as had not waked up the rustics thereabout to watching wonder for many a long year. For, as Mrs. Alwyn had explained to her guest, this earl and this countess were new to titles and possessions, and over and above a natural desire to shine in these strange parts, they just now had double reason for desiring good opinions in the expected candidature of their elder son for the southern division of the county.

Except as a name of long nobility and ownership, the present generation of Comyngham was little known near St. Clair's. The late earl had hated the tame scenery of East Anglia, had shut up Oakleigh Place for years, living mostly abroad, or when in England on a more favorite estate in Hampshire, and had scarcely been seen personally by either tenants or neighbors.

But the in-comers meant to reverse all this. With a large family, and the prudence engendered of long-limited means, they elected to keep up but one country house. Their choice fell upon Oakleigh, and here they determined upon making in this first festive meeting a thoroughly favorite debut in rural society.

So the gardens kept up through all vicissitudes, were now set forth in fully perfection. The house, a stiff Georgian building, with suites of stately paneled apartments, painted, mirrored, portrait-hung, after the varying fashions of two centuries, was open from end to end. Every possible preparation was made to insure the day passing off well.

(To be Continued.)

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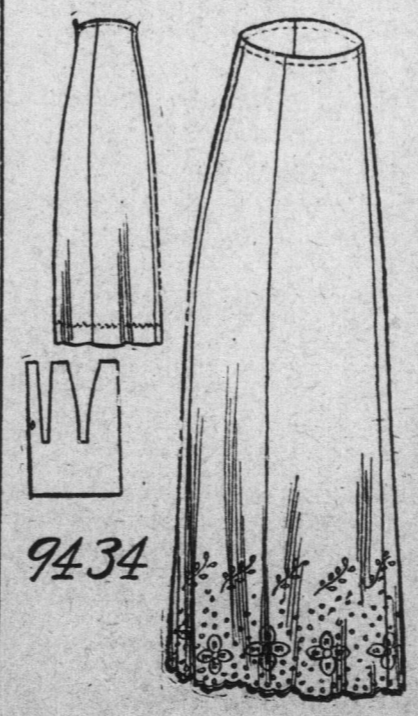
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