

The Lost Inheritance

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CHAPTER XIV.

Of a charming personality, graceful and accomplished, it was no wonder, that in the beau monde of society, Beatrice Staunton was a reigning favorite. Few there were who could compare with the dusky loveliness which she had inherited from her Southern mother, but without her mother's haughtiness, and to which she united those other admirable qualities, one might scarcely expect to find in one so petted and indulged. She was neither selfish nor overbearing, but generous and gracious to everyone, irrespective of class, and the humblest servant in her father's house was not beneath her kind notice. She was neither flippant nor affected, and the fact of her being heiress to millions and one of the finest old homes in the State, had, instead of spoiling her, given her that charming unconsciousness of self, that so few in a like position could possess or, possibly, have. The same quiet dignity and good sense that marked her in her private life, she carried abroad with her, and which contrasted so forcibly with the superficialness and affection practiced by some of her friends, and many other butterflies who flit through the social world of modern society. Deeply religious and firm in her Presbyterian convictions, she was attentive to her church and its rules without any parade or show, and, like her mother, who was naturally so inclined, and her father, made so by the great change that had come over him in late years, with regards to his disinherited daughter, Millicent, liberal toward all other creeds. Her personal charities were many and great, and hospital wards with their sick poor were especial objects of her bounty. "Beatrice's hobby" her mother was wont to call her daughter's exceeding generosity, whenever her friends, as they sometimes did, commented on the heiress' praiseworthy works. The lady's own character was formed on totally different lines, and she took but a passing interest in her daughter's philanthropy, because her worldly heart and mind were bent only in the one way. She dispensed to the

poor, of course, because to a certain extent she pitied them, and being the president of an exclusive charitable club, it behooved her well to set a good example to her wealthy sisters, but she usually intrusted its giving to the other members of the club, or to her daughter, rather than having anything to do in common with her less fortunate brethren or their sufferings. Vain of her own great beauty, that was rivalled only by the more youthful loveliness of her daughter, she was well aware that in her adopted city, she had "come, seen and conquered," and held a sway in the social kingdom that was second to none. In the art of entertaining, she was pre-eminent, and she made her husband's name more famous for its hospitality than any mistress, if we except what the gentle Millicent had done before her. Her aged husband, and her beautiful daughter were the two loves of her rose-bright existence, and her affections, for the latter especially, bordered on idolatry, so much so that even with Bruce Everett as a prospective son-in-law, and the pride she felt in being able to claim him as such, she dreaded her daughter's marriage. Critical to an extreme, she ruled her household with the strictest discipline, but justly and kindly, and if her servants did not love her, they respected her. She believed it a woman's right, no matter what her station in life was, to understand the care of a house in every detail, and had she ten housekeepers, instead of only two and an assistant, she would have still held herself the responsible head, and they only the helpers, in the management of her extensive establishment. Proud of her blue blood and Southern ancestry, she had a horror of the common people, and the ever increasing admittance northern society seemed willing to give to those who had no family nor social prestige, but only their acquired wealth to recommend them, filled her at times with repugnance. Her daughter had no such notions, and all men, if they were good, had a right to aspire to the highest circles if they so desired.