



CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

Miss Headworth had only time to make a sign of reluctant acquiescence when the door opened and mother and daughter came in. Nuttie first, eager as usual, and open-mouthed, unaware that any one was there. The mother would have resented but for Miss Headworth's nervous call, "Alice, my dear, here is Lady Kirkaldy."

Very lovely was Lady Kirkaldy's impression as she saw a slender figure in a dark gray linen dress, and a face of refined, though not intellectual, beauty and sweetness, under a large straw hat, with a good deal of white gauze about it, and the courtesy was full of natural grace.

"You do not know me," said Lady Kirkaldy, taking her hand, "but I am aunt to some former pupils of yours, one of whom, Mark Egremont, is very anxious to come and see you."

"Mark! My dear little Mark," and her face lighted up. "How very kind of him. But he is not little Mark now. I should like very much to see him."

Miss Headworth was obliged to say something about her ladyship taking a cup of tea. Lady Kirkaldy, knowing that Mark was on the watch, set off in search of him, and found him, as she expected, pacing the pavement in front of the church. There was no great distance in which to utter her explanations and cautions, and his aunt then took him in with her.

Mark entered, and his exclamation instantly was "Oh, Edda, dear old Edda! You aren't a bit altered!" and he put his hand under Mrs. Egremont's hat and kissed her, adding, as she seemed rather startled, "You are my aunt, you know; and where's my cousin? You are Ursula?"

He advanced upon Nuttie, took her by the hand and kissed her forehead before she was aware, but she flashed at him with her black eyes and looked stiff and defiant. They were all embarrassed, and had reason to be grateful to Lady Kirkaldy's practiced powers as a diplomat's wife. She made the most of Mrs. Egremont's shy, unassuming, ingenuous, and Mark's jerks of information, such as that they were all living at Bridgeland Egremont, now that his sister May was very like his new cousin, that Blanche was come out and was very like his mother. Every one was more at ease when Lady Kirkaldy carried off her conversation off to yesterday's entertainment.

Soon Lady Kirkaldy carried off her nephew, and his first utterance outside the door was, "A woman like that will be the salvation of my uncle."

"Firstly, if you can bring them together," said his aunt, "that's what I want. It's stuff enough in that pretty creature."

Meanwhile Miss Headworth felt it her duty to acquaint Ursula with the facts of her parentage, which until now had been held from her.

"Oh, then," cried Nuttie, when she had heard the whole story from her mother's lips, "like people in a story! I see! But, Aunt Ursel, what do you think will happen?"

"My dear child, I cannot guess in the least. Perhaps the Egremont property will not concern you, and only go to male heirs. That would be the best thing since in any case you cannot be sufficiently provided for. Your father must do that."

"But about mother?"

"A proper provision must be insisted on for her," said Miss Headworth. "It is no use, however, to speculate on the future. We cannot guess how Mr. Mark Egremont's commission will be received, or whether any wish will be expressed for your mother's rejoining your father. In such a case the terms must be distinctly understood, and I have full trust both in Mr. Mark and in Lady Kirkaldy as her champions to see that justice is done to you both."

"If you care he doesn't deserve that mother should go to him."

"Nor do I expect that he will wish it, or that it would be proper; but he is bound to give her a handsome maintenance, and I think most probably you will be asked to stay with your uncle and cousins," said Miss Headworth.

"I shall accept nothing from the family that does not include mother," said Nuttie.

CHAPTER IV.

The following Sunday Nuttie and Mary Nugent, coming home from their Sunday school labors, in the fervent discussion of their scholars, and exchanging remarks and greetings with the other teachers of various callings, the friends reached their own road, and there, to their amazement, beheld Miss Headworth.

"Yes, it really is Miss Nuttie," Aunt Ursel! What has brought you out? What's the matter? Where's mother?"

"In the house, my dear," catching hold of her and speaking breathlessly, "I came out to prepare you. He is come—your father—"

"There!" cried Nuttie, rather wildly. "He is in the drawing room with your mother. I said I would send you." Poor Miss Headworth gasped with agitation. "You hadn't been gone half an hour. Alice was reading to me, and I was just dozing, when in came Louis. 'A gentleman to see Mrs. Egremont,' she said. We rose up—she did not know him at once, but he just said 'Edda, my little Edda, sweetest than ever. I knew you at once,' or something of that sort, and she gave one little cry of 'I know you would come,' and sprung right into his arms. He came at me with his hand outstretched—"

"You didn't take it, aunt, I hope!" cried Nuttie.

"My dear, when you see him, you will know how impossible it is. He has that high-bred manner it is as if he were conferring a favor."

"Then he comes with—with favorable intentions," said Mary.

"Oh, no doubt of that," said Miss Headworth, drawing herself together. "He spoke of the long separation—said he had never been able to find her, till the strange chance of his nephew stumbling on her at Abbotts Norton."

"It can't be," broke in Nuttie. "He never troubled himself about it till his nephew found the papers. You said so, Aunt Ursel! He is a dreadful traitor of a man, just like Marmon, or Theseus, or Lancelot, and now he is telling lies about it! Don't look at me, Aunt Ursel, they are lies, and I will say it, and he took in poor dear mother once, and now he is taking her in again, and I can't bear that he should be my father!"

"You are talking of what you do not understand," remonstrated Miss Headworth. "You must not waste any more time in argument. Your mother has sent

for you, and it is your duty to go and let her introduce you to your father."

Nuttie, in her fresh holland Sunday dress, worked in creases with wild strawberries by her mother's own hands, and with a white trimmed straw hat, was almost shrouded into the little drawing room. Her eyes were in such a daze of tears that she hardly saw more at first than that some one was there with her mother on the sofa. "Ah, there she is!" she heard her mother cry, and both rose. Her mother's arm was round her waist, her hand was put into another. Mrs. Egremont's voice, tremulous with exceeding delight, said, "Our child, our Ursula, our Nuttie! Oh, this is what I have longed for all these years! Oh, thanks, thanks!" and her hands left her daughter to be clasped and uplifted for a moment in fervent thanksgiving, while Nuttie's hand was held, and a strange hairy kiss, reminiscent of tobacco smoking, was on her forehead. It was more strange than delightful, and yet she felt the polish of the tone that said, "We make acquaintance somewhat late, Ursula, but better late than never."

She looked up at this new father, and understood instantly what she had heard of his being a grand gentleman. There was a high-bred look about him, an entire ease and perfect manner that made everything he did or said seem like gracious condescension, and took away the power of questioning it at the moment. She could not help feeling it a favor, almost an undesired favor, that so great a personage should say: "A complete Egremont, I see. She has altogether the family face."

"I am so glad you think so," returned her mother. "I have seen the child," he added, "I will make my way back to the hotel. I will send down Gregorio to-morrow morning, to tell you what I arrange. An afternoon train, probably, as we shall go no further than London. You say Lady Kirkaldy called on you. We might return her visit before starting, but I will let you know when I have looked at the trains. My compliments to Miss Headworth. Good evening, sweetest."

He held his wife in a fond embrace, kissing her brow and cheeks and letting her cling to him, then added: "Good evening, little one," with a good-natured, careless smile, with which Nuttie was quite content, for she had a certain loathing of the crosses that so charmed her mother. And yet the command to make ready had been given with such easy authority that the idea of resisting it had never even entered her mind, though she stood still with him and watched him to the last.

CHAPTER V.

Half-waking, half-dreaming, Nuttie spent the night which seemed long enough, and the light hours of the summer morning seemed still longer, before she could call it a reasonable time for getting up. Her mother lay smiling for a few moments, realizing and giving thanks for her great joy, then bestirred herself with the recollection of all that had to be done on this busy morning before any summons from her husband could arrive.

Combining packing and dressing, like the essentially unmethodical little woman she was, Mrs. Egremont still had all her beautiful gray hair about her shoulders when the bell of St. Ambrose's was heard giving its thin tinkling summons to matins at half-past seven. She was disappointed; she meant to have gone for this last time, but there was no help for it, and Nuttie set off by herself.

Gerard Godfrey was at his own door. He was not one of the regular attendants at the short service, but on this morning he hastened up to her with outstretched hand.

"And are you going away?" he said.

"I hope to get leave to stay a few days after mother," she said.

"To wish everybody good-by. It is a great piece of my life that is come to an end, and I can't bear to break it off so short."

"And if you feel so, who are going to wealth and pleasure, what must it be to those who are left behind?"

"Oh!" said Nuttie, "some one will be raised up. That's what they always say."

"I shall go into a brotherhood," said Gerard, desperately.

"Oh, don't," began Nuttie, much gratified, but at that moment Miss Nugent came out at her door, and Mr. Egremont, round and waited for them to come up. He held out his hands to her and said: "Well, Nuttie, my child, you are going to begin a new life."

"If his place was only Monks Horton. What will Aunt Ursel do?"

"Perhaps she may be induced to join us," said Mary. "We mean to do our best to persuade her."

"And there's the choir! And my class, and the harmonium," went on Nuttie, while Gerard walked on disconsolately.

"Mickethway has existed without you, Nuttie," said Mr. Egremont, taking her by the hand. "Perhaps it will be able to do so again. My dear, you had better look on. There will be plenty for you to learn and to do where you are going, and you will be sure to find much to enjoy, and also something to bear. I should like to remind you that the best means of getting on well in this new world will be to keep self down and to have the strong desire that only love can give to be submissive, and to do what is right both to God and your father and mother. May I give you a text to take with you? 'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.'"

They were at the door and there was no time for an answer, but Nuttie, as she took her place, was partly touched and partly fretted at the admonition.

The question as to her remaining a day or two after her mother was soon disposed of. Mrs. Egremont sent a pretty little note to make the request, but the elegant valet who appeared at ten o'clock brought a verbal message that his master wished Mrs. and Miss Egremont to be ready by two o'clock to join him in calling on Lady Kirkaldy at Monks Horton, and that, if their luggage was ready by four o'clock, he, Gregorio, would take charge of it, as they were all to go up to town by the 4:40 train.

All through the farewells that almost rent the gentle Alice's heart in two, she was haunted by the terror that she or her daughter should have red eyes to vex her husband. As to Mr. Dutton, he had only come in with Gerard in a great hurry just

after breakfast, said there was much to do to-day at the office, as they were going to take stock, and they should neither of them have time to come home to luncheon. He shook the hands of mother and daughter heartily, promised to "look after" Miss Headworth, and bore off in his train young Gerard, looking the picture of woe.

CHAPTER VI.

"Mother, mother!" cried two young people, bursting open the door of the pretty dining room of Bridgeland Rectory, where the grown-up part of the family were lingering over a late breakfast.

"Gently, gently, children," said the dignified lady at the head of the table. "Don't disturb papa."

"But we really have something to say, mother," said the elder girl, "and Francis ought to know. Uncle Alwyn is come home, and Mrs. Egremont. And please, are we to call her Aunt Egremont, or Aunt Alwyn, or what?"

The desired sensation was produced. Canon Egremont put down his newspaper. The two elder sisters looked from one to the other in unmitigated astonishment. Mark briefly made answer to the final question, "Aunt Alice."

"Well," said Mrs. Egremont, "this has come very suddenly upon us. It would have been more for her own dignity if she had held out a little before coming so easily to terms, after the way in which she has been treated."

"When you see her, mother, you will understand," said Mark.

"Shall we have to be intimate with her?" asked May.

"I desire that she should be treated as a relation," said the canon decidedly. "There is nothing against her character, and, as his wife was about to interrupt, 'nothing but an indiscretion to which she was almost driven many years ago. She was earnestly treated, and I for one am heartily sorry for having let myself be guided by others.'

Mrs. William Egremont felt somewhat complacent for she knew he meant Lady de Lyonnais, and there certainly had been no love lost between her and her stepchildren's grandmother; but she was a sensible woman, and forebore to speak. Blanche cried out that it was a perfect romance, and May gravely said, "But is she a lady?"

"A perfect lady," said Mark. "Aunt Margaret says so."

"What did you tell me, Mark?" asked Mrs. Egremont. "She has been living with an aunt, keeping a school at Mickelthway."

"Not quite," said Mark. "She has been acting as a daily governess. She seemed to be on friendly terms with the clerical folk. I came across the name at a school feast, or something of the kind, which came off in the Kirkaldy's party. I wonder what my uncle thinks of his daughter."

"What! You don't mean to say there is a daughter?" cried May.

"Even so. And exactly like you, too, Miss May."

"Then you are cut out, Mark!"

"You are cut out, I think, May. You'll have to give her all your Miss Egremont curls."

"How old is she?" asked Blanche.

"About a year younger than you."

"I think it is very interesting," said Blanche. "How wonderful it must all be to her! I will go up with you, Mark, as soon as I can get ready."

"You had better wait till later in the day, Blanche," said the mother. She knew the meeting was inevitable, but she preferred having it under her own eye, if she could not reconnoiter.

She was a just and sensible woman, who felt repatriation due to the newly discovered sister-in-law, and that her money, or at least the appearance of it, must be preserved; but she was also exclusive and fastidious by nature, and did not look forward to the needful intercourse with much satisfaction either on her own account or that of her family.

She told Mark to say that she should come to see Mrs. Egremont after luncheon, since he was determined to go at once, and, moreover, to drag his father with him.

Alice knew Canon Egremont at once, and thought eighteen years had made little change in the features of the man she looked from the window and saw the handsome, dignified, gray-haired, close-shaven, rosy face, and the clerical garb unchanged in favor of long coats and high waistcoats.

With crimson cheeks and a throbbing heart, Alice was only just at the foot of the stairs when she saw him, and made their way in, and the kind canon, ignoring all that was past, held out his hands, saying, "Well, my dear, I am glad to see you here. Kissing Mrs. Egremont on each cheek. 'And so this is your daughter. How do you do, my dear Ursula? Isn't that your name?' And Ursula had again to submit to a kiss, very much more savory and kindly than her father's, though very stubby.

As to Mark, he only kissed his aunt, and shook hands with her, while his father ran on with an unusual loquacity that was a proof of nervousness in him, and said, "Mrs. Egremont—Jane, I mean—will be here after luncheon. She thought you would like to get settled first. How is Alwyn? Is he down yet?"

"I will see," in a trembling voice.

"Oh, no, never mind, Alwyn hates to be disturbed till he has done himself up in the morning. My call is on you, you know. Where are you sitting?"

"I don't quite know. In the drawing room, I suppose."

The canon, knowing the house much better than she did, opened a door into a third drawing room she had not yet seen, a pretty little room, fitted up with green silk, like a tent, somewhat faded, but not much the worse for that, and opening into a conservatory, which seemed to have little in it but some veteran orange trees. Nuttie, however, exclaimed with pleasure at the nicest room she had seen, and Mark began unfastening the glass door that led into it. Meaning Alice, who had burning cheeks and liquid eyes, nerved her voice to say, "Oh, sir—Mr. Egremont—please forgive me! I know now how wrong I was."

"Nonsense, my dear. By-gones are by-gones. You were far more sinned against than sinning, and have much to forgive me. There, my dear, we will say no more about it, nor think of it, either. I am only too thankful that poor Alwyn should have some one to look after him."

(To be continued.)

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