



CHAPTER VII. The canon and Mrs. Egremont were getting on pretty well together, but there was much more stiffness and less cordiality between the two cousins, although Mark got the window open into the conservatory, and showed Nuttie the way in to the garden, advising her to ask Ronaldson, the gardener, to fill the conservatory with flowers.

Presently his father went off to storm the den of the master of the house, and there was a pleasant quarter of an hour, during which the three went through the conservatory, and Mark showed the in-and-outs of the garden, foisted out Ronaldson, and congratulated him on having some one at last to appreciate his flowers, begging him to make the conservatory beautiful. And Mrs. Egremont's smile was so effective that the Scot forthwith took out his knife and presented her with the most precious of the roses within his reach.

Here a gong, a perfectly unknown sound to Nuttie, made itself heard, and rather astonished her by the concluding roar. The two ladies came out into the hall as Mr. Egremont was crossing it. He made an inclination of the head and uttered a sort of good morning to his daughter, but she was perfectly content to have no closer salutation.

"So his reverence has been to see you," observed Mr. Egremont. "William, if you like it better."

"Oh, yes, and he was kindness itself!" "And how did Master Mark look at finding I could dispense with his assistance?" "I think he is very glad."

Mr. Egremont laughed. "You are a simple woman, Edda! The pose of virtuosity here was to have been full compensation for all that it cost him! And no doubt he looks for the reward of virtue likewise."

Wherewith he looked full at Ursula, who, to her extreme vexation, felt herself blushing up to the ears. She fidgeted on her chair, and began a most untrue "I'm sure—" for, indeed, she was not sure of anything, but that her father's manner was most uncomfortable to her. His laugh choked whatever she might have said, which perhaps was well, and her mother's cheeks glowed as much as hers did.

"Did the canoness—Jane, I mean—come up?" Mr. Egremont went on. "Mrs. Egremont? No; she sent word that she is coming after luncheon."

"H'm! Then I shall ride out and leave you to her majesty. Now look you, Alice, you are to be very careful with William's wife. She is a delicate, you know, and thinks no one of her kind. Be sure of nothing, but that her father's manner was most uncomfortable to her. His laugh choked whatever she might have said, which perhaps was well, and her mother's cheeks glowed as much as hers did.

"Oh! you stay and help me receive her!" exclaimed the poor lady, utterly confused by these contrary directions. "Not I! I can't abide the woman! nor she me!" He added, after a moment, "You will do better without me."

So he went out for his ride, and Ursula said, "Oh, mother, what will you do?" "The best I can, my dear. They are good people, and are sure to be kinder than I deserve."

Mrs. Egremont turned the conversation to the establishing themselves in the pavilion, whither she proceeded to import some fancy work that she had bought in London, and sent Nuttie to Ronaldson, who was arranging calceolarias, begonias and geraniums in the conservatory, to beg for some cut flowers for a great dusty looking vase in the center of the table.

These were being arranged when Mrs. William Egremont and Miss Blanche Egremont were ushered in, and there Mrs. the regular kindred embraces, after which Alice and Nuttie were aware of a very handsome, dignified looking lady, well though simply dressed in what was evidently her home costume, her whole air curiously fitting the imposing nickname of the Canoness. Blanche was a slight, delicate looking, rather pretty girl in a lawn-tennis dress. The visitor took the part of treating the newcomers as well-established relations.

"We would not inundate you all at once," she said, "but the children are all very eager to see their cousin. I wish you would come down to the rectory with me. My ponies are at the door. I would drive you, and Ursula might walk with Blanche." And, as Alice hesitated for a moment, considering how this might agree with the complicated instructions that she had received, she added, "Never mind, always. I saw him going off just before I came up, and he told William he was going to look at some horses at Hale's, so he is disposed of for a good many hours."

Alice decided that her husband would probably wish her to comply, and she rejoiced to turn her daughter in among the cousins, so hats, gloves and parasols were fetched, and the two mothers drove away with the two sleek little toy ponies. By which it may be perceived that Mrs. William Egremont's first impressions were favorable.

The drive was on the whole a success, and so was the tea drinking in the veranda, where Aunt Alice and little five-year-old Basil became fast friends and mutual admirers; the canon strolled out and was installed in the big, cushioned basket-chair, that cracked under his weight; Blanche recounted Nuttie's successes, and her own tennis engagements for the week; Mark lay on a rug and teased her and her duchess; Nuttie listened to the family chatter as if it were a play, and May dispensed the cups, and looked grave and severe.

"Well?" said the canon anxiously, when Mark, Blanche and little Basil had insisted on escorting the guests home, and he and his wife were for a few minutes telegraphic. "It might have been much worse," said the lady. "She is a good little innocent thing, and has more good sense than I expected. Governess, that's all, but she will shake out of that."

hardly reckoned as "come out" till they had appeared there. Mrs. Egremont's position would hardly be established till she had been presented to the notabilities who lived beyond calling intercourse, and her husband prepared himself to be victimized with an amount of scrambling that was intended to impress her with the magnitude of the sacrifice, but which only made her offer to forego the gaiety, and be told that she would never have any common sense.

So their carriage led the way, and was followed by the rectory wagonette containing the ladies and Mark, as his father was not to be detached from his fireside. And in a group near the door, got up as elaborately as his powers could accomplish, stood Gerard Godfrey. He knew nobody there except a family in his sister's parish, who had good-naturedly given him a seat in their fly, and having fulfilled his duty by asking the daughter to dance, he had nothing to disturb him in watching for the cynosure whose attraction had led him to these unknown regions.

There at length he beheld the entrance. There was the ogre himself, high-bred, almost handsome, as long as he was not too closely scrutinized, and on his arm the well-known figure, metamorphosed by delicately tinted satin sheen and pearls, and still more by the gentle blushing gladness on the fair cheeks and the soft eyes that used to droop. Then followed a stately form in mulberry moire and point lace, leaning on Gerard's more especial abhorrence—"that puppy," who had been the author of all the mischief; and behind them three girls, one in black, the other two in white, cheeks what was provoking, he really could not decide which was Ursula.

When the pause came and people walked about, the black lady stood talking so near him that he ventured at last on a step forward and an eager "Miss Egremont," but, as she turned, he found himself obliged to say, "I beg your pardon."

"Did you mean my cousin? We often get mistaken for each other," said May civilly. He brightened. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I knew her at Mickelthwaite. I am here—quite by accident. Mrs. Egremont was so good as to bring me."

May was rather entertained. "There's my cousin," she said, "Lord Philip Molyneux is asking her to dance." He left him most unnecessarily infuriated with Lord Philip Molyneux; but later fortune favored him, for he did catch the real Nuttie's eye, and all herself, as soon as the dance was over, she came up with outstretched hands, "Oh, Gerard! to think of your being here. Come to mother!"

And, beautiful and radiant, Mrs. Egremont was greeting him, and there were ten minutes of delicious exchange of news. But Nuttie had no dance to spare, her card was full, and she had not learned fashionable enough to play tricks with engagements, and just when Mr. Egremont descended on them—"I wish to introduce you to the duchess," he said to his wife; and on the way he demanded—"Who is that young cub?"

"Gerard Godfrey—an old neighbor." "I thought I had seen him racketing about there with Ursula. I'll have those umbrella fellows coming about!" "Does he really make umbrellas, Nuttie?" asked Blanche, catching her hand. "No such thing," said Nuttie hotly, "he is in the office. His father was a surgeon; his sisters married—oh, yes!"

"And he came here to meet you," said Annaple Ruthven. "Poor fellow, what a shame it is! Can't you give him one turn?" "Oh, dear! I'm engaged all through! To Mark this time."

"Give him one of the extras! Throw Mark over to me! No!" she looked at the faces of the two girls. "I suppose that wouldn't do, but I'm free this time—I'm not the fashion. Introduce me; I'll do my best as consolation."

Nuttie had just performed the feat, with great shyness, when Mark appeared, having been sent in quest of his cousin when her father perceived that she had hung back. Poor Gerard led off Miss Ruthven the more gloomily, and could not help sighing out, "I suppose that is an engagement!"

"Oh, you believe some impertinent gossip you may have read in the paper," returned Annaple. "I wonder they don't contradict it; but perhaps they treat it with magnificent scorn."

"No doubt they know that it is only premature." "If they mean the elders, I dare say they wish it, but we aren't in France or Italy."

"Then you don't think, Miss Ruthven, that it will come off?" "I don't see the slightest present prospect," said Annaple, unable to resist the kindly impulse of giving a little pleasure, even though she knew the prospect might be even slighter for her partner.

However, he "footed it" all the more lightly and joyously for the assurance, and the good-natured maiden afterward made him conduct her to the tea room, as they could, and Nuttie was also tending, and there all four contrived to get mixed up together. Mr. Egremont, who had been at the far end of the room, suddenly heard her laugh, stepped up, and, with a look of thunder toward her, observed in a low voice, "Mark, you will oblige me by taking your cousin back to her mother."

"The gray tyrant father," murmured Annaple in sympathy. CHAPTER X. "What's the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Egremont, waking from a doze—"that bridge?" "Bridge! Don't be such a fool! We aren't near it yet."

The servant, his face looking blurred through the window, came to explain that the delay was caused by an agricultural engine, which had chosen this unucky night, or morning, to break down. There was a long delay, while the monster could be heard coughing frantically before it could be backed with its spiky companion into a field so as to let the carriages pass by; and meantime Mr. Egremont was betrayed into uttering imprecations which made poor Nuttie round her eyes in the dark, she was by his feet on the back seat, and Alice try to bury her ears in her hood in the corner.

On they went at last for about a mile, and then came another sudden stop—another fierce groan from Mr. Egremont, another apparition of his alert, deferential manner. "Sir, the bridge has broken under a carriage in front, Lady Delmar's, sir. The horse is plunging terrible."

The moon was up, and they saw the rectory carriage set on the road before them, but on the bridge beyond was a struggling mass, dimly illuminated by single ground lamp. Mr. Egremont and the groom hurried forward where Mark and the rectory coachman were already rendering what help they could, May standing at the horses' heads, and her mother trying to wrap everybody up, since stay in their carriage they could not. Transferring the horses to Nuttie, the two sisters hurried on toward the scene of action, but Blanche's white satin boots did not carry her far, and she turned on meeting her uncle. He spoke with briskness and alacrity that made him like another man in this emergency, as she assured the anxious ladies that their friends were safe, but that they could not be extricated till the carriage was lifted from the hole into which it had sunk amid bricks, stones and broken timbers.



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