



CHAPTER V.

It had been arranged that Agnes, Madge and June were to go up to the Hall for tea and lawn tennis the next afternoon, and that her cousins were to call for June in the pony carriage. She came tripping out of the door as they drove up.

Arrived at the Hall, the cousins were requested to join the party in the garden, and found Mrs. Ellemere and her guests sitting under the trees. Tom's big form loomed in the distance; he was doing something to one of the nets. Dallas sat on a garden seat beside Mrs. Fetherston, a guest from London, talking to her in an engrossed manner. The moment, however, that he became aware of the new arrivals, he left her and went forward to greet them. He looked handsome than ever to-day, in his whiteannels, with the pale-blue Eton sash and tie, straw hat and Brigade ribbon.

"I will start the first party," whispered Tom to June. "You will play with me, won't you?"

"Of course I will," answered June, who had recommenced her tactics of last night, and was speaking to and looking at her lover in her softest manner.

So Tom flew off and paired the two young ladies staying in the house with the son of a neighboring rector, and a man who was of the Hall party, and returned in triumph.

"Now," he said to June, "you and I will play Dal and Madge; then we shall be about equal."

"Cannot we do without Mr. Broke?" asked June. "Because, he is so much engaged, it would be a pity to disturb him."

"Oh, he wants to play, and we must have him."

"Does not Mrs. Fetherston play?"

"No; she says she hates romping. Dal!" shouted Tom.

Dallas looked up, but did not move for a moment. It was evident his companion was urging him not to play.

"Let him off for half an hour, Mrs. Fetherston, won't you?" said Tom, going up to her, and she, raising her eye-brows, answered stily.

"Certainly; altogether, if he likes."

Lawn tennis may be played gracefully or ungracefully—nine times out of ten it is certainly the latter. In the set now made up, the spectators had an opportunity of seeing both styles of performance. Dallas and June were graceful in the extreme, moving with the utmost rapidity, yet never looking awkward; their eyes sparkled with excitement, there was a bright color in their faces. A man standing near Mrs. Ellemere and watching the game whispered to her that he had rarely seen so handsome or so well matched a couple. She assented to his remark with a smile.

June was quite ready to depart when Agnes proposed it, in spite of Tom's earnest entreaties.

"I'm going to get up a bit of a dance to-morrow," he whispered, as he was escorting her to the pony carriage. "We can make up about six couples."

June's eyes glistened.

"But you don't dance, Tom?" she said.

"Well," he answered, his honest face illumined by a broad smile, "I'm not such a dog in the manger that, because I can't do a thing myself, I won't let anybody else."

"But," said June, fearful of counting in vain upon such an immense pleasure, "perhaps your mother won't invite me."

"Won't she?" said Tom, significantly.

"Look out for a note at ten sharp to-morrow morning."

"You really are an angel," observed June, affectionately, and Tom was, happily for himself, unconscious that this sudden warmth on her part arose from joy at the anticipation of a pleasure in which he could not take part.

June could scarcely sleep that night for the delicious anticipation of the morrow. She woke early, and, unable to rest, rose, dressed herself, and went out into the garden. It was only seven o'clock then. June has been twice round the garden, has gathered a bunch of roses and a dozen big strawberries in a cabbage leaf for her mother's breakfast, and, having carried them indoors, has come out again and strolled a little away down the lane. And, behold! there is Tom on his big bay horse riding toward her.

"Why, June! you are up betimes!" he cried, in his cheery voice, all his face aglow with smiles.

She went up to him, put her slim fingers in his, and stroked the glossy neck of King Charlie.

"I could not sleep," she said, with radiant eyes. "I could not sleep for thinking of the dance to-night. Oh, Tom! have you brought my invitation?"

"My mother is in bed and asleep as yet," laughed Tom, "but, my darling, what doubt can you have about it, when I got it up on purpose for you?"

"Oh, Tom," cried the girl, suddenly thinking of Madge, "is Madge to be invited, too? Oh, do try to get her asked. It would be such a treat for her!"

"Of course she shall," he answered, good-naturedly.

"Thank you, Tom. You are a dear, good Tom."

And June gave him such a smile that it sent ideas to his brain which she was far from intending it to do. He laid his big brown hand on her little white one that lay like a lily on King Charlie's neck.

"You are beginning to care a little bit more for me, aren't you?" he said, dropping his voice.

The color stole to June's cheek, and an uneasy sensation to her heart.

"Good-by," she said, "I must be going."

Tom rode away with a blithe heart; he would not have changed places with any

other man on earth. She had not answered him, but "silence gives consent."

Evening came. Half-past nine saw June and Madge in the rector's brougham driving up to the Hall, the gladdest, merriest, most excited maidens possible to behold.

"Oh, you darling, darling June!" cried Madge, "if it were not for spoiling your frock and your flowers and mine too, I would give you such a hug. Tom told me it was all your doing. Agnes did all she could to prevent my going, but Tom got hold of mamma on the quiet and made her promise."

Tom is waiting at the door to receive them. Dancing is to take place in the hall, which is lofty and spacious and has a polished oak floor of glassy smoothness. Already there is a squeak of a fiddle getting into tune, and the two girls' hearts throb responsive.

As June was standing beside Tom, flushed and lovely with excitement, Dallas Broke came up to her.

"You will give me a waltz, won't you?" he said, persuasively; and June, who was too happy to be cold or disdainful to any one to-night, replied that she would be very happy.

"The second?"

And she assented.

"Ah, my dear old chap," said Dallas, laying a friendly hand on Tom's arm, "I have one pull over you, Miss Rivers, why don't you make him learn to dance?"

Happy as she was, June felt a slight sense of vexation at Mr. Broke's manner. She wished he would not always look and speak as though she were Tom's property.

The quadrille was over, the music of the first waltz had commenced. June's partner this time was the son of a neighboring rector. He was a little rough in his paces, but June had an extraordinary facility for adapting herself to almost any step and any partner. When they made their first pause, Dallas and Mrs. Fetherston had the floor to themselves. Everyone was watching them. Their movements were the perfection of ease and grace; such a lover of dancing as June could not look at them without admiration, even though it occurred to her that there was rather more abandon in Mrs. Fetherston's style than was quite decorous. They stopped. Dallas looked down into his partner's eyes and whispered something; she answered him in kind. June felt a sudden spasm of anger flit through her heart; she told herself that it was due to a sense of outraged propriety. Exquisitely as Dallas danced, she decided with a sudden impulse that she did not want to dance with him. He was not nice; she would rather not dance, talk, or have anything else to do with him.

Tom came to her when the waltz was over; the rector's son made way for him.

"Tom," she whispered, "take me into the conservatory. I want to get another flower. These are crushed."

"All right, come along," said Tom, giving her his arm.

He gathered her a rich cluster of crimson geraniums, and she fastened it in her dress.

"How are you enjoying yourself?" he asked, and June replied:

"Immensely."

"You are going to dance the next with Dal?" he said. "I shall come and have a look at you. I hear the music beginning."

"I don't particularly care about dancing with Mr. Broke," uttered June, lowering.

At this moment he came to look for her. Seeing Tom, he half paused, and again that smile hovered in his eyes and mouth.

"Would you rather dance another one instead of this?" he said, and June answered coldly, putting her hand on his arm:

"No; I think this is ours."

"Was I wrong to come for you?" he whispered as they passed out of the conservatory, and she replied, more coldly still:

"Certainly not."

A minute later his arm is round her. Is it possible that erewhile she was angry with him? Now one soul seems to animate them; together they fulfill the perfect poetry of motion; never in her eighteen summers has June been conscious of such ecstasy as this.

When at last they pause, he looks down at her with a glance which she no longer resents.

"Was not that perfect?" he whispers. She answers him by a look.

"Let us go on. It is a sin to lose a moment of this!" Dallas says, and again they float along the polished floor.

"Alas! alas! it is over! the piano has banged the final chord; perforce they stop."

Mrs. Rivers was sitting up for her darling, anxious to hear all the events of the evening, and, as June made her recital, a sudden consciousness came to the girl that, instead of pouring all her heart out to her mother as was her wont, she was talking almost as insincerely as though she had been speaking to a stranger. It was a relief to her when her story was finished and she had kissed her mother fondly and bidden her good-night. The maid who acted as parlor maid, house maid and lady's maid at the Rose Cottage unfastened her dress and lingered a little deeply interested in the doings at the Hall.

When at last she went, June stood immovable for a moment. Then she flung herself down by her bedside and cried as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER VI.

June, scarcely knowing how it happened, found herself in the boat in the garden lake, while Mr. Broke was leisurely dipping the sculls into the water and rowing her away to the furthest point from the

house. And when he came to the big elm, whose branches overhung the water and made a canopy above their heads, he quietly shipped his oars, and, bending a little forward, said, quite simply and frankly:

"I am going to take the liberty of asking you a question. May I?"

A little nervous flutter crept from June's heart to her throat; a shade of lovely color, that could scarcely be called a blush, came into her face, and she answered with a slightly embarrassed air:

"Oh, certainly."

"Why won't you, who are so charming to everyone else, be a little bit kind to me?"

His tone was so deferential, and his blue eyes looked so humble and pleading, that June felt all her coldness and displeasure melt away to nothing.

"Am I not kind to you?" she said, dipping her white fingers into the water and apparently intent on watching them.

"What have I done?"

"You have hardly looked at or spoken to me since I came; indeed, I have fancied that you purposely avoided me."

To utter a polite disclaimer was June's first instinct; but a second coming swiftly on its heels, she followed that instead.

"You have taken his mother's love from Tom," she said. "And, whenever you are together, you always stand in his light and make him seem—seem—"

But June cannot find the words she wants.

"At all events, there is one brilliant exception to the rule," answered Dallas, in a piqued tone, losing for a moment his almost imperturbable good temper. Then, with a flash in his blue eyes eminently becoming to them, "I assure you, you are completely mistaken about my aunt's feeling for me. She likes me, and I am sure her; but it is hardly probable that a woman would care more for her nephew than her own son."

June is more attracted to Mr. Broke in this mood than in any in which she has yet seen him. It is her turn to assume that charming tone and manner which she possesses in almost as great a degree as Dallas himself.

"I did not mean to say anything unkind," and she looked at him so softly that his momentary wrath melted away. "But it is a little hard on Tom."

"Tom is the best fellow living," cried Dallas, "and no one knows it better than Aunt Vi. She is a woman of the world, and would like him to have a little more—"

"Polish?" suggested June.

"That is hardly the word; something of that sort, I suppose. But she knows his sterling worth as well as anyone."

"Sterling worth!" yes, how appropriate those two words are! Yet they have a dull sound in June's ears this summer afternoon whilst young Apollo's eyes are meeting hers.

"I imagine," he said, "that you will very soon have all the say here."

The swift blood flew to June's cheeks.

"You are mistaken, then," cried June, hotly. "I am not going to marry him. I am not engaged to him. I love him as my dearest friend, as my brother, and nothing, nothing more."

Then she sank back in her seat, and a cold, shamed feeling crept over her that she had betrayed Tom, and, more cruelly than mother or any other living being had power to do. Dallas was so astonished at this confession that he let go the bank, and the boat drifted out into the sunshine. He had to rise, take a scull and punt back to the shore.

"Had we not better be going in?" suggested June, coldly.

"No, not just yet," he answered. "Do you know you have positively taken my breath away?"

"Have I?" said June, with averted eyes, remorseful and ashamed, and yet feeling a sort of satisfaction that she had struck off her chains and declared her freedom.

"I do not know why you should have thought I was going to marry Tom. I do not suppose that he told you that I was."

"Most certainly not."

Since she was not going to marry Tom, and it was not therefore high treason, he allowed a tender infection to steal into his voice. Dallas could not help it; it was born in him; if he was with a pretty woman, he must make love to her, unless a sense of honor to some friends who had positive claims deterred him.

"Let us be friends!" he whispered, bending forward and stretching out his hand; and she let him take hers. There was a magnetism in his touch that was utterly wanting in Tom's; involuntarily her eyes met his and stayed a moment longer than was wise, and straightway, June knew that imagination may forestall reality, and that the dreams she had cherished in summer starlit nights with longing eyes strained heavenward were not only dreams, but that this gross material earth holds raptures as great as the promise of the skies.

Tom, all unsuspecting, was awaiting them at the landing place, and, as he put both his hands out to help June from the boat, he said, with a cheery laugh:

"Well, have you two made up?"

June could not answer, but Dallas replied gayly:

"Yes, I think Miss Rivers has forgiven me."

Then he walked up the slope to join Mrs. Fetherston, who was coming to meet them, her face wearing anything but a pleased expression. A pang of jealousy shot through June's heart. Tom was hurrying her toward a sequestered part of the garden, and she felt as though he were taking her away from the flowers and the sunshine.

(To be continued.)

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