

Aunt Diana

The Sunshine
of the Family

CHAPTER XI.

Maplewood owned a garden of very tolerable dimensions, but it was already crowded when the Merles made their appearance at the fête on Thursday afternoon. The lawn was covered by gayly dressed people; tennis had not yet begun, but the band was playing. As soon as Alison had greeted her hostess she looked round anxiously for Anna. She had no desire to linger beside Mrs. Hardwick; the handsome, talkative widow had already excited her aversion. As she turned away in search of her friend, Miss Hardwick came up to them in company with a tall, dark man.

"Mabel, dear," she said, almost ignoring Alison, "I must introduce Tony to you—my cousin, Captain Harper. Tony, this is my special friend, and I shall expect you to pay her a great deal of attention, on peril of my displeasure."

"I am too happy to perform such a pleasing duty, I am sure," lisped Anthony, but his bold black eyes passed over Missie's simpering pretty little face to Alison's.

"Is this another special friend of yours, Eva?" he observed, twisting his mustache and looking full at her as he spoke. Miss Hardwick made the introduction somewhat reluctantly; Alison bowed a little haughtily; she was not prepossessed with Captain Harper's appearance, and she determined to have as little as possible to do with him; he seemed about to speak to her, but she turned suddenly to Miss Hardwick.

"I do not see your sister," she said, in a low voice.

"Oh, I daresay not," she answered, carelessly. "I never knew Anna ever ready for anything; she is not half dressed, I suppose. Now, Tony, you must take Mabel for your partner in the first set, and Edgar Dawson and Miss Freeland will play against you."

"We had better take our places then," drawled Captain Harper; and, left to herself, Alison turned to Roger and asked him to walk with her to the house.

"I am going in search of Anna," she said as she left him, and she asked one of the servants who was just entering the tea room to take her to Anna's bedroom. The maid looked surprised, but she put down her tray at once and preceded Alison upstairs.

"That is Miss Anna's room," she said, pointing to the door; "she is dressing, I believe. A hamper of flowers came, and she has only just finished arranging them."

"I dare say I shall be able to help her," returned Alison, knocking at the door. "My dear child," exclaimed Alison, in a surprised voice, as she entered, "why, you have not begun to dress," for Anna was standing at the window in her gray linen gown, evidently watching the gay scene, but the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Oh, I can not dress now," she sobbed as Alison kissed her, "it is so late, and I am so tired; Eva said the flowers must be done, and I have only just finished them. I saw Mr. Roger and you and Mabel come in, and I did so long to come out, but now I am just tired out, and I can't stop crying."

"Oh, you will cheer up directly, and I am going to stop and help you," returned Alison, brightly. "Bathe your eyes with some eau-de-cologne and water; I will be back in a moment." And running downstairs Alison made her way into the tea room, and after a few words with the good-natured maid she had already accosted, she was soon provided with a cup of coffee and some delicious looking cake.

"Now you are to leave off crying and take these good things I have brought you," coaxed Alison, "and then I will help you to dress. You are tired and worried, but the coffee will refresh you." But Anna's answer was a fresh burst of tears, as she threw her arms round her neck.

"Oh, how kind you are to me. I do love you so; no one ever took such trouble for me before."

"Then you must thank me by enjoying the coffee," laughed Alison, but a sympathizing drop hung on her own lashes. Nevertheless, she talked on cheerfully until Anna had dried her eyes and drunk her coffee, and then she coaxed her to let her brush her hair and arrange it. Anna sat quite patient and docile under Alison's hands; she did not even look at herself till the pretty cream colored dress was fastened, and the flowers arranged, and then Alison led her to the glass.

"Why, I look quite different; what have you done to me?" observed Anna, in a bewildered tone. "I am not like myself at all."

"You have never taken enough pains with your appearance," she replied. They were met in the hall by Roger and Captain Harper; the gentlemen were evidently in search of them.

"I thought you had lost yourself, Allie," observed Roger; and as he turned to her companion a low whistle of astonishment broke from his lips, and was at once promptly suppressed.

"I did not know you, Miss Anna," was all he ventured to say, but both Alison and Anna colored with pleasure under the approving look he bestowed on them.

"Miss Merle, I hope, now I have taken all this trouble to find you, that you will not refuse to be my partner in this set," asked Captain Harper, so eagerly that he had almost forgotten his usual drawl.

Alison assented rather coldly, but her reluctance vanished when she found Roger and Anna meant to oppose them. She almost forgot her dislike to her partner during the long, well contested game, which soon drew a crowd of spectators round them; her skill and animation delighted Captain Harper. Missie was watching them rather curiously.

"I did not know Alison was such a good player," she said at last, when Eva joined her. "Captain Harper did not exert himself quite so much when he played with me," with a displeased toss of her head.

"He knows we are watching him, darling, and that puts him on his mettle," returned her friend, soothingly.

"Really, Eva," Mabel said presently, "I never saw Anna look so well."

Miss Hardwick turned her long neck superciliously, and regarded her sister with surprise.

"That must be Alison's doing," she said with evident pleasure. "Anna never did her own hair, I am sure of that." But her handsome face clouded still more when Missie proceeded to take her to task.

"You ought to look after her a little more, Eva," said Missie. "You have so much taste yourself you ought to help her choose her dresses. I should be ashamed if my sister looked as dowdy as Anna generally does."

The rest of the afternoon passed like a happy dream to Anna. She played another game with Roger, who seemed bent on having her for a partner; and afterward, when Alison had succeeded in shaking off Captain Harper by infusing into her manner a fine degree of girlish hauteur and coolness not easily to be mistaken, the three sat together, passing kindly remarks on the rest of the company.

But the crowning happiness of the afternoon to Anna was when Missie addressed her in the condescending manner of one who confers a benefit.

"You have not been to see us lately," she said, quite graciously. "I have told Eva that she must bring you sometimes to talk to Alison." And after this Anna's cup of joy seemed overflowing.

CHAPTER XII.

"Thank you, Mabel dear, for what you have said to Anna," said Alison, gratefully, as they left the grounds of Maplewood.

"Oh, of course, I gave Eva a piece of my mind. She is always so reasonable and sweet-tempered that I never have any difficulty. Anna may come to The Holmes as often as she likes." Then, with a perceptible effort to seem at her ease, she continued hurriedly: "Eva is going to bring her cousin to afternoon tea tomorrow. I hope it will be fine, and then we can set the table under the lime trees; our drawing room is such an ugly room."

"Do you mean Captain Harper is coming?" returned Alison. "Oh, Mabel! how could you ask him? I am sure papa will not be pleased. I do not like him at all; his manners are so artificial and disagreeable."

"It is a pity you did not stop at Riverston," she returned, in an injured voice, "for none of our Chesterton folk, with the exception of that stupid Anna, seem good enough for you. I think Captain Harper charming, and I am sure papa will be pleased with him unless you set him against the poor fellow." And here Missie looked decidedly cross.

"You may be sure that I shall say nothing to papa," replied Alison, with so much dignity that Missie was silenced. But she was terribly annoyed all the same, and took Roger into her confidence, exacting from him a promise that he would be present at all risks.

"Perhaps I am wrong," she remarked, candidly; "I am always so ready with my likes and dislikes. But I can not bear Captain Harper, and it is odious to me to pour out his tea for him."

Alison's anxiety was soon set at rest. The party from Maplewood, including Anna, had not long been gathered under the lime trees before Mr. Merle made his appearance, greatly to her delight and Missie's discomfiture. Alison never found out if Roger had betrayed her trust and given his father warning of the expected guest. But there was no mistaking the coolness of his manner to Captain Harper. That unlucky individual was clearly not at his ease, and certainly no inducement was held out to him to repeat his visit.

As soon as the unwelcome visitor had departed Mr. Merle expressed himself as much displeased to find Captain Harper there; indeed, his severity quite overwhelmed Missie, and she retired in floods of tears.

"Papa is never angry with me," she sobbed; "this must be your fault, Alison. You have come home to stir up strife and turn papa against me."

"Don't be absurd, Mabel," returned Alison, a little crossly; "you have brought it all on yourself. Papa seems angry with me, too, and yet you know I am not at all in fault. If you do wrong you must bear to be scolded. Papa says he is quite shocked at our forwardness. You see, he blames me, too. He says no one but himself or Roger ought to invite gentlemen to the house, and Miss Leigh says the same. He told me after you left the room that he would take care that Captain Harper should not repeat his visit, as he was not the sort of man whose acquaintance he could approve for his daughters."

Missie dissolved into fresh tears on hearing this. "I am sure it is not papa's real opinion," she persisted in saying. Roger had put him up to it to spite her and Eva. What would Eva say if she were forbidden to bring her cousin to The Holmes? She wished Alison would go back to Aunt Diana, and not stop here to make her so wretched. She did not see the use of having a sister who hated and thwarted her.

"Oh, you silly child!" exclaimed Alison, kissing the wet, ill-tempered little face that still looked so pretty. "What a storm in a teacup! I don't hate you a

bit. I am very fond of you, though you will quarrel with me about every trifle; but it takes two to quarrel properly, and I do not mean to take up the cudgels to please you!" And here she gave her a playful shake, that so astonished Missie that she speedily grew more amiable, for her temper had never been so set aside before.

Roger had been looking very worried and careworn for some days, and Alison was afraid, from her father's grave face and silence with his son, that things had gone wrong again at the mill, and that, as usual, the blame had been laid on Roger. She was waiting for an opportunity to speak to him, for his engagements had taken him out several nights, when one evening she met him as she was returning from the town.

He was walking along rather moodily, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and did not see Alison until she called him by name; and then he looked up and his face brightened in a moment.

"Where have you been, Allie?" he asked, smiling at her; and Roger's smile was very pleasant. "The house felt dull without you, so I came out for a solitary stroll."

"Very well, you shall have your stroll; only it will not be solitary any longer, for I am not tired in the least, and mean to come, too."

"Very well, then," he said, leading the way toward a quiet, shady road. "I am just in the right mood for a talk, and you are the right sort of company."

"I am so glad I satisfy you, Roger," she said, looking at him affectionately. "I wish all brothers were like you, and cared as much for their sisters."

"So they would, if all sisters were your sort," was his flustering answer; only Roger meant what he said. "Allie, of course I know you will go back to Aunt Diana one day, but you must promise me not to leave us just yet."

"Oh, Roger, of course not. How could I go while you wanted me?"

"My dear, in that case you would never leave us at all. No, no, I am not quite so selfish as that. One day you shall go, Allie, but not just yet, not till things are more settled, and we are all happier. Do you know, dear, I wonder sometimes how I held on those two years without you; your absence made me miss mother more." And Roger's lip trembled a little. Alison pressed his arm without speaking; there was no need for other words between them, they were so sure of each other's sympathy.

"Roger, I wish you would tell me what has been troubling you for the last few days," she said. "Something has gone very wrong; you have been terribly grave all the week, and yesterday you were too worried to eat properly. I hope you mean to take me into your confidence, dear; perhaps I could find some way of helping you."

"I wish you could, Allie," he returned, sadly; "I wish I could see a way out of our terrible difficulties. Promise me you will be as secret as a statue, and I will tell you a little of what has happened."

"Oh, you may trust me," she replied, lifting her honest brown eyes to his face. "I believe I may, and it will be a relief to speak. Allie, Ferguson is going too far; I am convinced in my own mind that he has tampered with the accounts; we shall come to a crash directly."

"What do you mean?" turning a little pale. Roger spoke so vehemently.

"It would take too long to tell you all but something very unpleasant has happened this week. You know my father went to Lancaster the other day. Well, I check in payment for a consignment of timber was unexpectedly paid in during his absence. Of course I indorsed this check, wrote out a receipt, inclosed it in an envelope and put it in the usual rack for postage. I then made an entry in the ledger, and was just going to lock up the ledger and the check in the safe, as it was nearly time for closing, when the sudden cessation of the machinery told me some accident had happened, and of course I ran out of the office, and so did Ferguson, our manager."

"Oh, I know! when poor Mitchell was hurt," returned Alison, with a shudder. "I remember seeing both you and Mr. Ferguson standing bare headed among the men in the yard; you were sending Timothy for a doctor."

"Yes; I was detained for nearly half an hour. Ferguson must have gone back to the office—at least I missed him after the first few minutes. When they had taken Mitchell off to the hospital I went back to lock up things for the night. Ferguson was just coming out of the office and handed me the keys. Everything was locked up, he said, and the messenger had fetched the letters. I had put the check into my father's private drawer and had locked the drawer, but the ledger had been left open on the table, with my entry written on the top of a blank page. I had noticed the page was a little loose, as though the corresponding one had been cut out some time previously, but I was in a hurry, and I thought it did not matter. When Ferguson told me everything was locked up for the night and handed me the office keys, of course there was nothing for me but to take them. Allie, what do you suppose were my feelings when we opened the private drawer the next morning and there was no check there? Neither was my entry in the ledger; the loose page was gone, and, to add to my perplexity, the firm who had paid in the check wrote to complain that there had been no acknowledgment or receipt; and yet I had written both myself and placed the stamped envelope among the other letters for postage."

(To be continued.)

An Indignity.

"I tell you, sir, kissing the hand that smites you is nothing to what I saw in the hotel this morning."

"What was that?"

"The porter blacking the boots that had kicked him last night."



Chestnuts and Prunes.

Do many housewives realize what a delicious sweet results when Spanish chestnuts are added to the homely breakfast dish of stewed prunes? This is a foreign confection worthy the attention of Yankee cooks. We use it as a dessert when other ideas fail, rather than matutinally, as prunes are served. Wash and soak prunes over night as usual. Boil chestnuts twenty minutes after cutting a slit in each shell. Peel, removing shell and the disagreeable inner skin. Then stew with the prunes. Serve cold, or at least cool, with plain cake.

Maple Chop Suey.

Chop and mix one-half pound of seeded raisins, one-quarter pound of seeded currants, one-eighth pound shredded coconut, one-quarter pound of red cherries, one-quarter pound sliced pineapple, one-quarter pound dates and one-eighth pound citron. Place the above chop-suey mixture in a glass bowl and sufficient maple syrup to enable you to pour some of this over the cone of ice cream.

Creole Sweet Potatoes.

Boil three or four medium-sized sweet potatoes, pare and cut in pieces the size of a nutmeg. Put into a frying pan one-half cup brown sugar and one-quarter cup butter. Cook the potatoes in this mixture on the back of the stove till the whole is soft. Cook very slowly, shaking the spider occasionally to keep from burning. These potatoes are rich, but delicious, especially with game or poultry.

Sour Milk Cake.

One cup sugar, half cup butter, one cup sour milk, two eggs, one teaspoon soda and three cups flour. Cream butter and sugar; add beaten yolks of eggs and sour milk. Then the flour, the soda dissolved in a little water, and the beaten whites. This cake is delicious if split and buttered while hot and filled with fresh fruit covered with sugar as strawberry shortcakes are made.

Chile Con Carne.

Seed six red chilies and cover with boiling water. Soak until tender and then scrape the pulp into water. Cut 2 pounds steak into small pieces and fry brown in dripping pan, add flour and brown it. Cover with the chili water, add a little garlic and thyme and two cloves. Simmer until the meat is tender and the gravy of good consistency.

Cranberry Pudding.

Cream one cup of sugar with three teaspoons of butter. Add slowly one cup of sweet milk, two cups of flour sifted with two teaspoons of cream of tartar and one teaspoon of soda. Add one and one-half cups of cranberries and bake one-half hour in a moderate oven. Serve with any sauce.

Escalloped Ham.

Two cups of finely chopped boiled ham, one cup of nicely chopped hard boiled eggs, one teaspoon of mustard, pepper to taste. Mix the above together with a white sauce (of boiled milk and flour), cover top with bread crumbs and small pieces of butter, and bake one-half hour.

How to Use Sage.

When preparing dressing for poultry sage is generally used and the stems and leaves are found so disagreeable in the dressing. A good way of preventing this is to steep a tablespoon of sage in half cup of boiling water. This can be strained right into the dressing.

Rice Puffs.

One cup of cold boiled rice put through potato ricer, and two well-beaten eggs, salt to taste; drop by spoonfuls into hot fat, fry a light brown; serve with maple syrup for breakfast or as a garnish for the roast or steak for dinner.

Roast Veal.

Take the cold roast veal chopped fine and stir into a well seasoned white cream sauce. When all is hot put little pyramids on triangles of bread toasted brown and well buttered; strew a little chopped parsley over each and serve.

Potato Pancake.

Grate six raw potatoes; when grated add one egg, tablespoon of flour, and salt and pepper. Fry the same as any pancake. These are fine with fried ham.

Short Suggestions.

Roasted chestnuts are said to be very delicious when salted the same as peanuts.

Never add salt to cooked pork until it is almost done, since it tends to extract the juice.

"BAD MEN" OF SOUTHWEST.

One Was Easily Startled and Blood Made Frank James Faint.

The world is not very small after all. The other day I glanced casually over the register of a hotel and read the name "Kinch West Johnson." It may be that I was the only man in New York outside the person who signed the register that would have taken an interest in the signature, and yet Kinch West was on the point of putting my light out once, says a writer in the New York Telegraph. He was an Indian Territory character in the early '70s and stopped a night with me when I was a boy and living under the parental roof, and he interested me greatly by telling me of his adventures in the Southwest.

Five years later I was riding on a railway train approaching Denison, Tex., and I saw him. Being young and foolish, I hit him on the back and said: "Hello, Mr. West! I'm glad to see you." Say, Kinch's smoke wagons were all over me in a minute. Until he recognized me he scowled, and after that he laughed heartily. At Denison he wrung my hand and said: "Good-by, boy, and don't say anything about my being here."

Naturally, I hunted up Kinch West Johnson, and what do you suppose he was? A drummer. A mild-mannered boy, who was glad to acknowledge that the redoubtable Kinch West was his grandfather. And he confessed to me that he had never owned a gun in his life.

One story of this kind leads to another. I recalled Frank James almost as soon as I had listened to young Johnson's story of how little use he had for a gun. About fourteen years ago I happened to be present at the fair grounds in St. Louis when Frank James, along with a number of others, was vaccinated in obedience to the law. Frank fainted as soon as the knife went into his flesh.

"I ought not to have looked," he explained to me. "I never could bear the sight of blood."



Soandso-Barker knows his own business. Humphreys—Yes; but he doesn't mind a little thing like that.—Puck.

"Why on earth did you ever marry me?" "Oh, don't be so bromidic! That's what everybody asks."—Cleveland Leader.

(At the club)—"Oh, I say, who'd you think I met this morning?" "Do you mind guessing for me, old man? I'm rather tired."—Punch.

Mrs. Hicks—My husband has been just lovely to me all day. Mrs. Wicks—H'm! What was it you caught him doing?—Boston Transcript.

Many a man who boasts that he is the architect of his own house must have stood in with the building inspectors.—Philadelphia Record.

Mr. Rich—I suppose you find that a baby brightens up the house? Mr. Benedict—Yes; we burn nightly twice the gas we used to.—Answers.

"Speakin' of de law of compensation," said Uncle Eben, "an automobile goes faster dan a mule, but at de same time it hits harder and bulks longer."—Washington Star.

Pa—You know, Willie, this thrashing is going to hurt me more than you. Willie (sympathetically)—well, don't be too rough on yourself, dad. 'Taint worth it.—Chicago Daily News.

Wife—Did you get the seats for that play I'm so anxious to see? Husband—Yes, I was very fortunate. I got two orchestra chairs for three years from to-night.—Life.

The Sultor—Johnny, your parlor clock is an hour fast. The Kid Brother—I know it. But don't tell sister so. The Sultor—Why not? The Kid Brother—Because she thinks you don't know it.—Cleveland Leader.

Mrs. Shellpod—Hiram, some o' them there hoboes hev stole ther wash offen the line agin! Farmer Shellpod—Haow dew you know they wuz hoboes? Mrs. Shellpod—Becuz they tuk everything but th' towels.—Chicago News.

Lola—Last night young Boren declared he would willingly go to the end of the earth for me. Grace—And what did you say? Lola—I finally got him to make a start for home, and let it go at that!—Boston Transcript.

Cobbie—You certainly have a good cook. By the way, where do you get your servants? Stone—From our neighbors. When we hear of a good one among them, we offer her more money to come with us. Cobbie—But, my dear fellow, is that honorable? Stone—Why not? Can you develop a sense of honor with a poor digestion?—Life.