



CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Trevanion and Dallas had lunched and were sitting in the pretty, shady drawing room in London. Dallas had unbosomed himself entirely to his dear friend—had told her all his story, some parts of it twice over.

"Have you told me all?" says Mrs. Trevanion, presently.

"All."

He had not said anything about having kissed June; but, after all, that was a mere detail.

"And you did not tell her that you loved her or hint a word about marriage?"

"No. Of course, she could see by my manner that—"

"Of course," smiles Mrs. Trevanion, thinking how very unmistakable Dal's manner is when he is in love. "And you think that she—"

Dallas nods, and looks the least bit shy. "Does it sound very conceited to say so?"

"It is just possible," observes Mrs. Trevanion, with a lurking smile, "that she may have taken a fancy to you. But if you have given your word to your cousin—"

Dallas frowns and opens and shuts his cigarette case with a snap, which is a trick of his when worried and perplexed.

"But she assured me positively that she never, never would marry Tom."

"What made her tell you that?"

"Oh, something I said about hoping she would let me come when she was mistress at the Hall."

"And, after that your cousin went away, and you two were thrown together, and—by the way, Dal, what was his another thinking about?"

"She doesn't want Tom to marry Miss Rivers."

"Oh!" Mrs. Trevanion sees at once how the land lies. "Why not?"

"My aunt is a very ambitious woman, you know; she wants Tom to marry what she calls well! Tom has lots of money, and this girl is the sweetest, most charming creature in all the world, and a perfect lady, and yet his mother don't think her good enough."

"Then what would your mother think?" asks Mrs. Trevanion, quietly.

"She would be dead against it, of course. But one doesn't marry to please one's mother."

"Well, dear boy, your mother would only think what was perfectly right and true. You cannot marry her." And Mrs. Trevanion looks Dallas straight in the face.

"Oh, my dearest friend, don't you say that!" he cries, his blue eyes growing dim. "If you only knew what I feel for that girl! she would make a different man of me. I could give up the life I am leading now like a shot for her sake, if I could only hope things would come right some day."

"But things could not come right, short of your father dying, and he is not the least likely to do that. Let us look matters in the face," urges Mrs. Trevanion. "Could you keep a wife on seven hundred a year? You know you cannot live on that alone now."

"She has been brought up very quietly, and I could give up anything for her."

Mrs. Trevanion feels she has made a mistake. What man in love is not ready to give up everything (in theory) for the sake of the woman he is dying to possess?

"Then I must put it to your honor, you promised your cousin not to stand in his way."

"But," cried Dallas, getting up and walking excitedly about, "she says she never will marry him."

"But she will," remarked Mrs. Trevanion, calmly, "as soon as she has forgotten you."

"You may be right," says Dallas, pulling up suddenly in front of her, "but I don't think so."

"She was fond of him before she saw you, and when she has got over her passing fancy for you she will be fond of him again; it will be an excellent match for her; your cousin is a good creature, and you will have forgotten her existence by the time he marries her."

"What a bad opinion you have of me!" exclaims Dallas, dejectedly.

"Do you think so?" And she smiles and holds out her hand, which he clasps warmly. "My dear, you are young; you have been a little bit spoiled; you have an affectionate nature; you cannot exist without loving some one."

"That's quite true," assents Dallas, gravely. "But what will she think of me?"

"Very badly, I hope. Because then she will soon get over her heartache."

"But you surely wouldn't have her think me a blackguard! I must write to her and explain."

"You must not do anything of the sort," rejoins Mrs. Trevanion, quickly. "You must on no account write her one line."

Dallas looked aghast.

"You are not serious?"

"I am; most serious. If you write to her, she will cling to a hope of seeing you again and that something may come of

it; but, if you are silent, her pride will rise up in arms; she will be miserable at first, then she will hate you, and your cousin will catch her at the rebound."

Dallas sits down and buries his face in his hands.

"You are awfully hard on me," he says, presently—"on me and her, too."

"You used to have faith in me," observes Mrs. Trevanion, quietly.

"So I have now, implicit faith. But I cannot see that I ought not to write to her."

"Yet you have given your word to Mr. Ellesmere. And, if I tell you that it is for her good, cannot you make a little sacrifice for once?"

"A little sacrifice?" groans Dallas. "To act in a way to make the dearest, sweetest girl in the world, whom I love with all my heart, think me a mean hound!"

"My dear, she will only think of you as a gay young Guardsman, given to the pastime of breaking hearts. She will probably be much more angry with herself for having been deceived by your seductive ways than with you. I expect she has heard your character before this. Indeed, if, as you say, you devoted yourself at first to Mrs. Fetherston, she would probably have a pretty good idea of your capacity for flirtation."

Dallas throws her a glance of deepest reproach.

"As if my feelings for those two could be named in the same breath!"

"To return to this poor girl, for whom I am dreadfully sorry," said Mrs. Trevanion. "You must promise me not to write one word to her."

It, however, took at least another half-hour, during which she brought over possible argument to bear, before he could be persuaded; but ultimately, Mrs. Trevanion got her own way, and Dallas, looking very mournful and with something like tears in his blue eyes, gave her his word of honor and his hand on it not to write to June.

Once he had made up his mind that the case was hopeless, and talked it over again and again with his friend, he began gradually to recover his spirits, and was able to re-embark on his flirtation with Lady Dangerfield. At the end of a fortnight, having been much in her ladyship's society at Goodwood and Cowes, he had come to the conclusion that to marry, at his age and under his circumstances would be to tie a millstone round his neck and drown himself in the depths of the social sea. But he still thought that, if he did marry, he would like to marry June.

Meantime, Mrs. Trevanion's prophecy with regard to June had been absolutely verified. Her despair had given way to a sense of stinging shame and anger. Pride, of which she had no small share, came to her rescue; she resolved to pluck Dallas from her bleeding heart, ay, though it bled to death.

Although June smiled and dissembled before others, the anguish she suffered in secret told upon her, and, with a mother's quick instinct, Mrs. Rivers saw that something was not well with her darling. She never dreamed of Dallas being the cause of June's altered looks; she was convinced that Tom was responsible for the change. Did June really care for him, and was she piqued because he had suddenly gone off on a yachting trip, or had they quarreled, and was that the reason of Tom's abrupt departure?

She could not bear the thought of her child having a secret from her; she could not even realize such a possibility.

As for June, what would she not have given to fling her arms round her mother's neck and sob out all the agony of her wounded spirit on that dear breast? If it had been anything but shame—deadly, disgraceful shame, as she, poor child, regarded it—the task would have been easy enough. But this dreadful secret she could never, never confide.

Mrs. Rivers turned over in her head fifty ways of broaching to June the subject of her altered looks. She had so delicate and sensitive a mind that she could not ask a blunt question even of her own child. At last she summoned up resolution to say one evening, as she and June sat in the twilight:

"My darling, I do not think you are looking quite yourself. Does anything vex or trouble you?"

The dim light kindly hid the burning blush which covered June's face.

"No, mamma, dear," she answered, trying to speak naturally.

"You and Tom have not been quarreling, have you?"

"Oh, no; indeed we have not."

"Are you vexed with him for going away?"

"Not in the least."

Then silence fell on the pair. Mrs. Rivers was conscious of a sense of disappointment. She felt certain that something was amiss with her child, and it was bitter to know that June was concealing it from her.

CHAPTER X.

A month passed. Tom was home again; things were going on much in the usual

groove. June smiled at and was kind to him, yet all the time longer Christmas, when she would tell him definitely that she could never be more than a friend, and, after that, they would be no more talk of love making marrying.

In November, Mrs. Rivers caught a severe cold, which settled on her lungs. She was obliged to remain in a room, and suffered from a harassing cough. Tom came each day to inquire after the invalid, and to bring her ever delicacy that was procurable, and the finest flowers. One day Mrs. Rivers felt so alarmed about herself that she resented to speak. She wrote and fixed a tin for Tom to come to her, and made an excuse to send June out. And, when he came, she said all to him that was in her art—between tears and sighs and gasping sobs arising from her by the thought of her darling's sufferings and of the future which she would not be there to know or guide.

And Tom, his manly breast rent with sighs and groans, promised all and more than fondest mother could ask, if—only June would let him be her shield and buckler of her life. Alas! what more on earth did he ask than to do everything for, be everything to, sacrifice all he had in the world for her?

"My darling," Mrs. Rivers said to June that night, "come and stay with me; I want to talk to you. And try not to cry and agitate yourself, because it will make it so hard for me, and I ought to keep as quiet as possible. Tom is so good, so true, so devoted to you—oh, my darling, I think I could die happy if I knew he was going to care for your future, that you were going to be his wife."

In June's heart for the last month all thoughts of love, of passion, of romance, have slumbered—slumbered as though they were dead. She has no passion for Dallas, no repentance for Tom; nay, to him all her feelings are chained; she feels a trust in, an affection for him that makes him dearer to her than any one but that adored mother. Why put them in a breath? She feels comparatively nothing for any other being than her mother.

"I will marry Tom, if you wish it, darling mother."

Mrs. Rivers died on Christmas morning—the morning of the day when June was to have given her answer to Tom.

That evening Tom spoke to his mother on a subject which had occupied him for several days past.

"Mother," he abruptly began, "I have a favor to ask of you."

Mrs. Ellesmere knitted a little faster, kept her eyes on her work and did not reply. She was waiting, of course, for her son to make his request known.

"I want you," Tom proceeded, having given his mother an opportunity, of which she did not avail herself, to express her readiness to serve him. "I want to ask June to come here after the funeral. They wish her to go to the rectory; but—but—in her dreadful affliction I think Jack and Madge would be too much for her, however kindly they meant; and here—here—she could have her own rooms and do just as she liked."

And Tom looked eagerly at his mother, hanging upon her answer with the deepest anxiety.

Mrs. Ellesmere was a woman who, in society, had immense tact, and generally said and did the right thing by instinct. She was in reality thoroughly selfish, abhorred being put out of her way, and had very little sympathy to bestow even on those who stood most in need of it.

"I do not quite see how such an arrangement is possible," she answered in a cold, strained manner.

Tom's heart, so ready to expand, froze up and contracted. He felt bitter against his mother.

"Why not?" he asked, in so altered a voice that it ought to have warned her.

"Because" (still speaking in the same collected, un sympathetic voice) "if she were to come here now it would be tantamount to publishing to the world that you are going to marry her."

"And I am going to marry her," returned Tom, stung out of his resolution, not to say a word to any one which could commit June's future. "It was Mrs. Rivers' dying wish, and June promised her. Though," already repenting his rash confession, "I do not wish it to be known yet, for her sake."

And so, on the afternoon of the funeral, Mrs. Ellesmere came down to the cottage in her brougham and fetched June. She kissed the girl with great kindness, held her hand in silence all the way home, and led her at once to the rooms which had been prepared for her, and which were as pretty and cheerful as good taste could make them.

It was infinitely to June's benefit that she took up her abode for the time at the Hall; here there was nothing to jar upon her sensitive feelings. Her aunt and cousins came to see her, she could be with Mrs. Ellesmere when she pleased, and, best of all, she could be alone when she desired the solitude which grieved hearts always court. But, strange to say (and yet not strange, for, in trouble, he who sorrows with us comforts us most), it was in Tom's company that she took the most pleasure—Tom who used to bore her, whom she used to find so dull! In the evening, while Mrs. Ellesmere dozed or worked, June would sit with her hand in Tom's and they would whisper together about that dear one who was gone, or sit quite, quite silent.

Tom's delicacy toward her was perfect; never once did he enter the precincts of her sitting room; never once, whatever he may have felt, did he offer in those first weeks of grief to kiss her; never, by so much as one word, did he remind her that he had any claim upon her, any hopes for the future; she was free as air, free to do what she would, except to suffer.

And so June grew to love him. Had he been Macchiavelli, backed by a woman of the world, he could not have adopted better tactics to win her; but there was no scheming or plotting in Tom; he was only acting from the dictates of his own heart with the instincts of a true and chivalrous gentleman.

(To be continued.)

A Phonetic Similarity.

"So you are going to take your airship and go home?"

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Mr. Timmins—Better look to home. Were you ever willing to admit that anybody was right who differed from you?

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