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CHAPTER XII—(Continued.)

The end of September was approaching, and they were debating in their happy minds whether it would be more delightful to go on to Italy or to return home, a word possessing an equal charm for both now, when their movements were decided by a letter from Mrs. Ellesmere:

"My Dear Tom—I have this morning received news of the death of poor Tom Nevil, of typhoid fever. The shock has been so terrible to poor Sir Thomas that it is feared he will not recover from it. He has fallen into a state of apathy from which nothing can rouse him, and any day he may die. Under the circumstances, you being the next heir, do you not think you ought to return to England? Poor Tom leaves two little girls, and I have ascertained that there is no expectation of an heir. You will, I know, feel very much for poor Mrs. Nevil. I think you should write to her; of course it is rather a delicate position for you, but I am sure you will do the right thing. I shall not be able to receive you on your return unless you particularly desire it, as I think young people are best left to themselves just at first. Give my kindest love to dear June, and believe me

"Your affectionate mother,
"VIOLET ELLESMERE."

This news caused Tom the deepest concern. No thought of the benefit likely to accrue to himself from the misfortune of his kinsfolk entered his brain as he read the letter; all he felt was sheer sorrow. And June, the tenderest hearted creature in the world, cried for pity of the poor bereaved wife—whose anguish she was now fully able to comprehend. What could they do for her? They laid their heads together and made all sorts of plans by which ultimately her grief was to be lightened, and then, between them, they wrote her the kindest letter that two sympathizing young hearts could devise.

And so they retraced their steps slowly homeward. In Paris they received the news of Sir Thomas' death.

The rejoicings and honors that had been planned for the young couple's return were, by Tom's special request, foregone. He departed at once for the North, to attend Sir Thomas Nevil's funeral, and June cried all the evening and half the night, so heart-broken was she at being bereaved of her lord; and, like all tender, foolish women who love, she tormented herself with fears for his safety, and wrote him four sheets of paper covered principally by expressions of endearment which might have seemed monotonous to another person, but were heavenly sweet to the recipient. On Tom's return June quite started at being addressed as "my lady" and hearing him called Sir Thomas.

It was rather bewildering to her to think of herself as Lady Nevil. It is not often that a person bears three names in less than six weeks. In that time she had been Miss Rivers—Mrs. Ellesmere—Lady Nevil.

Tom was tolerably indifferent to social honors himself, but it pleased him hugely to hear his darling called "my lady."

CHAPTER XIII.

The months rolled on and Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil were as happy as united lovers in a story book. June is quite a great lady now, and by no means indifferent to the fact that she is so, although she bears her honors in the most modest and unassuming way. Agnes had gone with a friend to Italy for the winter, extremely thankful to escape from the sight of the happiness which was gall and wormwood to her.

Tom deserved to be happy, and he was happy. When, in September, the bells rang and the announcement was made that there was an heir to the houses of Ellesmere and Nevil, his happiness seemed almost too much for him.

After Christmas they were to have a series of guests at the Hall. Dallas was to come for a couple of days, for Tom would have laughed to scorn the thought of being jealous of any living man now. Mrs. Trevanion and her son, an Eton boy of seventeen, were expected, and two or three other young people for Madge's especial benefit.

Madge adored June more than ever, and June had promised that if they took a house for the season in town, Madge should go to them for a whole month. Tom made a terribly wry face over the house in town, but he had no idea of thwarting June, who was rather bent up on it, and only stipulated that he should be there on and off, and that the baby should not be taken to Pandemonium. Her ladyship wanted the whole family to migrate, and the first time there had ever been the shadow of a tiff between them was when Tom offered serious opposition to her wishes on this score. Tom would not have that precious life endangered by the pestilential atmosphere of London. June was not used to hearing him say would and would not. And, as the young Sir Thomas was as robust as any infant in the world, she was rather incensed at what she chose to consider her husband's foolishness.

So she shed some tears of mixed anger,

pain and humiliation, and said, being "very like a woman," that he did not care whether she was injured by going to London; to which he, after kissing away her tears, replied with sound good sense that it was not by his wish she was going, and he would gladly put down five hundred pounds there and then if she would relinquish the idea.

But this aer ladyship was not disposed to do. Her mother-in-law had told her that this step was due to her position, and June, being young and keenly disposed for pleasure and enjoyment, had rather set her heart on a London season.

Tom gave in to everything she wished, except about the baby. If she had known that Tom's obstinacy was being fostered by Agnes, she would probably have set very vigorously to work to counterbalance that amiable young lady's influence.

Agnes affected an unbounded devotion to Tom's son and heir; perhaps she felt it. She ingratiated herself with the nurse, waylaid her when she walked abroad, paid constant visits to the nursery at such times as June was likely to be out driving. This brought her into frequent contact with Sir Thomas, and he became quite grateful for her devotion to his child and entirely forgave and forgot the bad turn she had done him in trying to delay his marriage. She made little innuendoes, accentuated by sighs or notes of exclamation. How could June leave that darling? How could anyone, surrounded by such blessings, with such a child, such a husband, want to quit them for a life such as people led in London—heartless, selfish, unsatisfying? What could compensate for home joys. For her part, it was utterly incomprehensible to her. Tom defended his wife—said she was young and beautiful and fond of pleasure; what more natural than that she should like to go into society? Besides, it was chiefly his mother's doing, who had persuaded her. But Agnes' words certainly stung him in a tender spot.

"But for both of you to go away, and leave that darling!" cried Agnes, with a tear in her eye. "Suppose he should be seized with convulsions, or something were to happen to him? Servants are never of any use in an emergency."

"Oh," said Tom, not without a sense of alarm at her words, "I shall be here most of the time."

"June will not let you. She will not stay in London without you. I wonder it does not occur to her how dreadful it is to leave that angel to hirelings!"

"June wants to take him with us; she is most anxious not to be parted from him."

"But it would be madness to take him to London. Here, you know, he has the purest milk from your own cows, and I have heard that hundreds and thousands of babies die in London of typhoid fever from impure milk."

Tom, only too ready to take alarm, vowed to himself that, whatever happened, that precious life should not be endangered by a visit to the metropolis.

"One thing," said Agnes, with fervor, "I shall go up to the Hall every day to see the darling, and I don't think anything will escape my eye. I suppose," hesitating, "June will not consider me too officious, will she?"

"Officious!" replied Tom, heartily; "she will be tremendously grateful to you."

"And—when you are in town, shall I write you about him? I could tell you a thousand particulars about your darling that servants would not think of writing. And writing is naturally a great effort to them."

"Will you?" cried Tom. "That will be awfully good of you."

"I shall write to you," proceeded Agnes, in a low voice. "I suppose June will not mind. We are cousins, you know."

CHAPTER XIV.

June had got her own way in coming to London, but it did not make her very happy. She felt a sense of secret irritation against Tom for not being happy too, and she was vexed because he had been so obstinate about the baby. Until now she had not believed him capable of offering persistent opposition to any wish of hers. And his scruples were absurd! The house was large and airy; it looked on green trees; they were near both the parks. London was healthy, the child was thoroughly robust; if he were here Tom would never be able to tear himself away from the pair of them, and she would not have the irritation of seeing Agnes' daily bulletins, which frequently were not bulletins, but epistles. If the nurse, if her aunt had written, she would have been delighted; but she had that instinct of dislike and distrust toward her cousin which, after all, was a perfectly true and correct one. Just as, in their younger days, Agnes had always tried to appear additionally amiable by the hateful knack of showing sister and cousin to disadvantage, so now June felt that all this effusiveness over the baby was put on to make her seem wanting in a mother's devotion.

Sir Thomas and Lady Nevil had been in town five days; this evening they were tiring at home alone. An unusually

gushing letter had arrived that morning, which had given the most evident pleasure to Tom and had roused June's ire. All day long it had been smoldering; she had made up her mind to assert herself that night. She would conquer. Her mind was master of Tom's, even though she could no longer quite turn him round her finger by a frown or a tear as in olden days. She was not quite sure what would be the best way to take him, but she would certainly begin by coaxing, even though it had failed once or twice before when tried on that particular subject.

After dinner, when they went upstairs, she pushed him gently into a chair, sat on his knee, laced her arms round his neck and laid her cheek against his. He received her attentions with the complacent calm of a two-year husband who loves his wife, the complacent calm that is so eminently provoking and unsatisfactory to wives of June's temperament.

"Tom," she says, ceasing to embrace him, and laying her head against the back of his chair, while an involuntary mist comes across her brown eyes, "Tom, I don't feel happy."

Tom heaves a deep, deep sigh. "No, my dear," he replies. "I don't see how any one can be happy in this stifling hole."

But this answer is by no means what June desires, or what she has wished to lead up to.

"It isn't that," she says, feeling much depressed. "I like London, and should enjoy myself amazingly if I didn't see that you are not happy."

Tom heaves a still deeper sigh. "I must bear it as best I can," he utters, in a doleful tone.

"It makes me feel selfish," says June. "To think I have dragged you here and that you are so wretched." Secretly she thinks he is a little bit selfish not to try to seem happier. "It takes away all my enjoyment."

Thereupon Tom kisses her kindly. "Never mind, dear," he remarks. "I must manage as best I can. And," brightening, "I shall run down and see the boy for a couple of days shortly."

"My darling!" cries June; "do, do let us have him up here! Do get over your ridiculous ideas about London hurting him, and then we should all be quite happy. There was a time," jealously, "when I could make you happy, but now it seems I am not enough."

"Don't say that, child," exclaims Tom, giving her slim waist a squeeze. "Why, you surely wouldn't have me not love our boy?"

"Not more than me," says June, rebelliously.

"No fear," he answers, heartily. "But it's a different sort of feeling. Why," with an accent of reproach which June feels keenly, "do you think that if you had him in your arms all day, and had hardly even a kiss or a look for me, I should feel a bit jealous? Why, I should know it was the right and natural thing."

Tom is not the least aware that he is planting a dagger in his wife's heart. She does love her child dearly, but he cannot be all in all to her. She can spare his presence a great deal better than she can Tom's; he would be an utterly inadequate consolation to her if anything happened to her husband.

"As if," she pleads, "there were not hundreds and thousands of healthy children in London, and here it is so airy and nice."

"Airy!" echoes Tom; "why, I feel fit to be stifled myself; and think how much more his tender lungs would suffer."

"That is mere prejudice," answers June, a trifle shortly.

"But, my dear," says Tom, "only think how well the little chap is at home, and how rosy he looks. And there is Agnes always looking after him."

June vacates her position on Tom's knee and walks to the window, on which she drums with her fingers. An angry swelling rises in her throat; it is a full minute before she can speak.

"I do not know what business it is of Agnes'," she observes, presently. "And, as she has never had any experience with children, her looking after him can hardly be of much value."

"I think that is rather ungrateful of you," says Tom, with more warmth than is usual to him, especially when addressing his wife.

This was too much for June. She flings herself into a chair and gives vent to a passion of sobs and tears. For a wonder, Tom does not fly at once to stanch her tears, but sits looking a shade sulky and perturbed. This, naturally, makes June worse.

"I wish we had never come to London at all!" she sobs.

Tom echoes that wish most sincerely. He, however, has the wisdom to remain silent. But silence is always exasperating to a vexed woman.

"Let us give up the house and go back home!" sobs her ladyship, who is in a considerable temper. "If I am only to be made miserable here, I wish I had never come!"

He does not speak, and June's wrath increases. She pulls her handkerchief from her face, and, looking at him with eyes flashing through her tears, she cries: "The child is as much mine as yours!—much more mine! What right have you to separate him from me or to decide what he shall do or not do?"

This is the first time that Tom has ever seen June in a passion; he is a good deal shocked and a little frightened.

He rises from his chair and comes toward her. But she starts up to evade him and cries:

"Do not come near me! do not touch me! You do not love me! Oh, my darling mother! if you were only alive now!"

And June, having worked herself up into a paroxysm of anguish, flings herself down and buries her head in the sofa cushions and sobs as if her heart would break.

(To be continued.)

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