



CHAPTER X—Continued.

The quick, sharp stroke of a kitchen bell—Roderick had started at the long familiar sound, and even changed color a little. But it was no visitors, only the post.

"Just business—Mr. MacLagan, our lawyer. He might have written sooner, if only to apologize for finding us such a wretched flat instead of the furnished house I ordered." And Roderick, looking first disappointed, then vexed, was going apparently to tear up the letter, but meeting Silence's eyes, he stopped, and passed it over to her to read. "It is such a comfort to me that I can tell you everything," he said, tenderly. "You are sure never to be vexed or cross, or hurt—oh, my darling!" If she had been either of the three, that last word, and the tone of it, would have healed all.

Yet the letter, read aloud, was a little hard to bear; for both.

"Dear Sir," (he used to call me dear Mr. Roderick; he has been our man of business these forty years.) "Perhaps you were not aware that the furnished house you wished me to hire would have swallowed up half your income in mere rent, so I took the liberty of getting something more advisable, which I hope will please you, during the time that Blackhall is being finished. I forwarded the address, as desired, to your three sisters here, and to Mrs. Jardine in England. My wife will do herself the honor of calling on young Mrs. Jardine. I wonder how the old lady will approve of that?"

"Of my being called Mrs. Jardine, or of Mrs. MacLagan visiting her, does he mean?" said Silence, with her smile of rare simplicity. "It is a pity for the lady to come, if she fears to displease your mother," added she, with a slight sigh, which went to her husband's very heart.

"The lady, indeed!" said he, bitterly. "Oh, my mother does not know her. She does not belong to our set at all. Her calling upon my wife is quite unnecessary, rather a liberty."

"Had you many friends here? Is it I who have lost you them?" asked Silence, sorrowfully, and then looked sorry she had said it. "My husband, I did not mean to regret; and it is too late to suffer you to regret. We cannot alter anything now."

"We would not if we could," cried Roderick, passionately. "We know, if no other human creature does, how happy we are, how entirely we belong to one another."

"Thank God!"

"I know now, I have found that blessing which my father and I were the greatest any man could get, a sweet-tempered wife," cried Roderick, fondly, as they stood together at the window, watching the rain sweep down.

"Mamma was right. And papa loved her. I loved her exactly as you love me, because he had loved someone else in his youth; she told me that herself, one day. Still, he entirely respected and trusted her; they were very happy in their way. But, oh!" She suddenly turned to her husband with such a look in her eyes—a look that none but he had ever seen or would ever see.

"My first love, my last love! God is good to have let me marry you."

"I am very cross to-day, Silence, and I know it!"

"Yes, so do I," she said and smiled. "But, if you know it, it is half conquered. Go and take a good walk, and walk it off, as in the days when you were in love, you know."

"As if those days had ended, or ever would end!" answered Roderick, parting her hair and looking passionately down into her eyes. "My good angel! But don't you see how much of the devil I have in me still? How do you mean to make me good?"

"I mean us to make one another good, she answered. "My mother used to say—it was strange and touching this way she had not of speaking of her mother, as if not dead, but only absent somewhere, and still mixed up with all their daily life—"my mother said, it is better to use one's feet or hands than one's tongue when one is vexed about anything. Therefore go."

Roderick went, and his wife stood watching him down the rainy street with eyes he saw not, and a heart that in its deepest depths was, even to him, not wholly known—or shown.

"I think, though you had never been mine," she murmured, "so long as you were yourself, I would have loved you just the same. But, since you are mine—oh, my love, my love!"

Roderick came back in quite a cheerful mood. "My walk has done me good, I hope of the rain. And I have actually found a friend—Tom Grierson, lately married too. He and his wife are going to the coast the day after to-morrow, but they insist upon making up a party (that is the phrase, love) for us to-morrow. She will call first, and invite you with due ceremony. And you shall wear your wedding dress, and the diamonds Cousin Silence left to my future wife. Little she thought it would be another Silence Jardine! You will look so charming, and I shall be so proud. We must go."

"Must we?"

With the quick intuition, the instinctive thought-reading, learned by those who deeply love, and only those, Roderick detected at once the slight hesitation.

"Is it this?" he said, with a glance at her black dress. "Do you very much dislike going?"

"I dislike nothing if you like it, and it seems pleasant and good to you."

"Thank you, my darling. Yes, this will be pleasant, I think, and good also. The Griersons are among what my family—'he rarely named his mother now—'call the best people in the place. Excellent people, too; intelligent, cultivated. I like them, and so will you; old Mrs. Grierson especially."

"Do they know anything? About me, I mean."

"I cannot tell; I did not ask. You see, I could not ask," added Roderick, clenching his fist. "But immediately he drew his wife close and kissed her fondly. 'It does not matter either way. Never mind, love. We will go—and for the rest take our chance. We have done the deed, we are married. No human being can ever part us more.'"

Still, with a curious foreboding of what might come, after the note of invitation and apology which, to Silence's evident relief, arrived next day, instead of Mrs. Grierson herself, Roderick helped his wife to choose her "braves" for this first appearance in the world—such a different world from the innocent monde of Neuchâtel! then he left her to her toilet, and sat reading, or trying to read, till she appeared.

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Not exactly the angelic vision of her marriage morning, "a spirit, yet a woman too." Very womanly, if not very fashionable, for the white dress was high round her throat, and the round soft arms gleamed under a semi-transparent cloud instead of being obscuringly bare.

She belonged to that class of beauties who, owing all their charm to expression, only look well when they are happy. A disappointed life might have made her quite an ordinary girl all her days; but now, when leaning on her young husband's arm, she entered the Griersons' drawing-room, there was such a light in her eyes, such a tender glow in her cheeks, and about her whole bearing that quiet dignity, ease, grace which, to nature like hers, only come with the consciousness of being loved, that very few, regarding her, would have hesitated to exclaim, "What a sweet-looking woman!"

Roderick saw the impression she made, saw indeed, for the first few delightful minutes, nothing else; until turning suddenly he perceived sitting close by, splendidly dressed and surrounded by quite a little court, his sister Bella, Mrs. Alexander Thomson.

With a bow to his sister, a mere formal bow, as to any other lady, he drew his wife's arm through his, and they passed on to the other end of the room.

It was a regular Richerden dinner, such as both had been familiar with from their youth upward, but Roderick felt like a ghost revisiting the well-known scenes. A not unhappy ghost certainly, in spite of Bella sitting there. Through all the dazzle of lights and clatter of voices (how loud everybody talked, and how sharp and shrill the Richerden accent sounded!) his eager ear listened for the occasional low-toned words spoken with a slight foreign intonation, and his eye rested tenderly on the fair, calm face of his wife. She was evidently neither shy nor strange, but perfectly dignified and self-possessed. He wondered if Bella saw her.

"My husband seems charmed with your wife; I shall be quite jealous directly," said his hostess. "Where did you find her? She looks different from our Richerden girls. Is she Scotch?"

"Of a Scotch family, but Swiss born. We were married in Switzerland. Her father was my father's second cousin, and her name was Silence Jardine. You must have heard of it before, Mrs. Grierson?"

And Roderick turned to a gentle-looking old lady on his other hand, aunt to the young people, whom he had told Silence she would be sure to like.

"I remember your father's cousin, Miss Jardine. And your wife is her namesake? What a curious coincidence! But, I understood—However, one never hears quite the truth about love affairs; so, no matter," added the old lady, stopping herself. "All's well that ends well. Happy's the wedding that's not long a-doling."

"Ours was fully six months a-doling," said Roderick, smiling. "We waited as long as possible; on account of her mother's death, and for other reasons; and then we married. A right and wise and prudent marriage, as I think a true love marriage always is," he added, pointedly, for he felt his sister was listening to every word he said. And he knew that old Mrs. Grierson was one to whom everybody told everything, though even scandal, passing through the alembic of her sweet nature, came out harmless; she was not an ill word of anybody.

"You are right," she answered; and her eyes, placid with long and patient borne sorrow—she was a childless widow—rested kindly on the young bride. "By her face I should say that Mrs. Jardine was one of those rare women who are in the world but not of it."

"How well you read her. I thought you would," cried Roderick, warmly. "If ever there was a saintly creature born—But I am her husband, and ought not to speak."

"Who is to speak for us if not our husbands, I should like to know?" said young Mrs. Grierson. "And when there are actually three brides present. By the bye, Mrs. Thomson, I did not know till a few minutes ago that it was your own sister-in-law I was inviting you to meet; but I shall learn the ins and outs of Richerden people in time. You and your brother must have married within a few weeks of one another."

"No, some months," said Roderick, with his eyes firmly fixed on his plate. Bella, with some smiling word or two, turned back again to her next neighbor, with whom she had been gayly conversing all dinner-time. So the difficulty passed, seemingly unnoticed by everybody.

When the ladies rose, and he was forced to let Silence pass him without a warning or explanatory word, catching only the bright smile which showed she was at ease and happy, because she saw that this outside show was the sweet inner reality that they two were everything to one another, Roderick vexed himself with conjectures as to what was happening in the drawing-room, and blamed himself for what now seemed the moral cowardice of

letting his young wife drop ignorantly into the very midst of her foes. So absorbed was he with these thoughts that he quite started when a slap on the back roused him to the consciousness of his new brother-in-law, Mr. Alexander Thomson.

"Didn't you tell this minute. Very odd—my wife never told me we should meet you here. And was that your wife?—the uncommon Alice girl that sat beside Grierson? Pshaw! with a slight whistle; then confidentially, 'the women are all fools, we know. Old lady cuts up rough still? Never mind; what's the odds, so long as you're happy? Glad to meet you again, my boy. When are you coming to see us?'"

Had it been possible to frame a speech more calculated than another to set every nerve tingling in Roderick's frame, or touch to the quick his pride, his sensitiveness, his strong family feeling, these words of Mr. Thomson would have accomplished it. He had forcibly to say to himself that they were well meant, and to shut his eyes in an agony of brotherly pity to the rapidly reddening face, thickening speech, and adverse coarse manners of the person—you could not say gentleman—who Bella had chosen to marry before he could bring himself to reply. Even then it was as briefly as possible.

"Thank you. We have only just arrived at Richerden, and are going to Blackhall as soon as possible."

"But we shall see you before we go. Bella will be delighted, and if she isn't I shall; and I hope I'm master in my own house. Depend upon it," dropping his hand heavily upon the table, and looking round with a triumphant gleam in his fishy eyes, "the one thing a husband should try for from the very first is to be master in his own house."

"If he can be he will be without need to say a word about it; and if he can't be, why, it's no good trying."

The laugh went round at this naïve reply of young Grierson, but Roderick never said a word. And when the gentlemen fell into gentlemen's talk, politics and so on, though he liked it, having been long enough absent from England to feel an interest in all that was going on there, his mind continually wandered not only to his wife, whose happiness he knew he made, and felt it was in his power to make, but to the sister who had thrown away her own happiness, and over whose lot, he it good or ill, he had no longer the smallest influence.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

POOR MARKSMANSHIP.

Firing in Both Army and Navy Less Accurate Than Formerly.

The training of naval artillerymen has, in recent years, been given a good deal of attention, and no end of powder and shot has been expended in target practice designed to serve a more telling purpose in actual warfare than the occasional present itself. It would seem, therefore, that the floating equipments of naval powers of today ought to give good accounts of themselves in point of marksmanship if called into action. In fact, according to Cassell's Magazine, it would be presumptuous to undertake to forecast possible results. If, on the other hand, past experiences counts for anything, the results would seem to have been a notable decline in accuracy in naval gunnery, growing with successive improvements in naval architecture and naval armament. It was estimated some years ago, from data furnished by target practice, that a heavy gun must be discharged fifty times to make one effective hit. 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