



CHAPTER III.

Captain Wynyard secured an introduction to Lady Rooden and her daughter, and, remembering what Mr. Ashton had said, that the man who won her ladyship would be the one who flattered her most, he fashioned his conduct on this intimation. He allowed her to see very plainly his admiration of her beauty, his astonishment that she should have a daughter so tall and well grown, and he spoke more freely on the point than most people would. Sir Charles Rooden, in his great love for his wife, had not been able to discern a single fault in her. Captain Wynyard had not talked to her for half an hour before he understood her character perfectly, and knew that selfishness and vanity formed no small part of it. Angela, generally quick in reading character, might have spent a life-time with her mother, and yet never have detected what Captain Wynyard had read in half an hour.

Lady Rooden was distressed that Angela did not like him. She never appeared to enjoy his society, and always seemed anxious to escape from the room. When he tried to draw her into conversation she would make him only the very briefest of replies. Her mother could not understand this method of treating one whom she considered the most charming of men. Her wonder was that Angela was not delighted with him and eager for his society, but then she consoled herself by remembering that her daughter was not like other girls.

Thus matters went on for some time, Angela herself being the last to perceive what was about to happen. It was plain enough to the rest of the world that Vance Wynyard was doing his best to win the rich young widow; but Angela, who always thought of her mother as one with the father she had lost, never for one moment allowed such an idea to enter her head. No one saw or understood less than she whom it was of such vital importance.

Among the invitations which Lady Rooden and her lovely young daughter received was one to a garden party given by Lady Avon at her beautiful villa at Richmond, the grounds of which sloped down to the River Thames. The party was one of the most successful of the season. The guests were the *creme de la creme* of London society, and the weather was most propitious.

Lady Rooden looked more beautiful than ever in a dress of palest blue velvet, elegantly trimmed with white lilac. Angela wore a dress that suited her slender, girlish beauty well—white, with a profusion of rich carnations—a most effective costume.

Wherever between the trees the blue velvet and white lilac gleamed, there was to be seen also a small gathering of ardent worshippers; but Angela's happiness was unclouded until she saw Captain Wynyard, with a smile on his handsome face, take his place by her mother's side, when a feeling of uneasiness possessed her which she could not shake off.

As Lady Avon and her young guest were strolling through the grounds, Angela's eyes were riveted on the face—beautiful, yet with a shadow on it of a young girl coming toward them. "Who is that?" she asked, in a quick, low voice, of Lady Avon.

"That is Gladys Rane," was the reply. "Was she always fancy? She could not tell, but it seemed to Angela that a curious expression passed over Lady Avon's face. It must have been fancy, for, when she looked again, the strange expression was gone.

In a few well-chosen words Lady Avon introduced the two who were to cross each other's lives so strangely. When the dark eyes of Gladys Rane rested on Angela, something flashed into their depths, something that was like hate and despair. Miss Rooden asked herself if this was fancy also. It must have been fancy, for the next time she looked, Gladys Rane was regarding her with these smiling eyes and lips.

Later on in the afternoon Angela found a cool quiet nook where she hoped she would be able to muse alone; it held a small wooden seat and was hidden by a clump of alder-trees. She sat down to rest and to enjoy the quiet her shady retreat offered. Not many minutes had passed before she became conscious that she was not alone—that some one was sobbing in deep distress, and some one else administering consolation.

"You know my heart is not in it," a man's voice said—"you know that I hate it; but what can we do? I cannot help myself."

"I cannot bear it," replied a trembling voice. "She is so beautiful, I am sure that you will love her in time."

"I never shall. I love you, and you only; but in our case love and marriage cannot go together. Marriage would mean the end of us."

Then Angela, unwilling to be even an accidental listener, rose from her seat and hastened away. She had no idea who the speakers were; but half an hour later she saw Gladys Rane with Captain Wynyard, and a sudden suspicion darted through her mind that the conversation she had overheard had taken place between them.

It was but a suspicion; yet it was strange how a root it took at once in her mind. She saw them together again, and, from the expression on Miss Rane's face, she felt sure that, whatever the Captain's sentiments might be, the whole love of the girl's heart was given to him.

Late that evening Lady Rooden and Angela were seated in her ladyship's cozy dressing-room, discussing the events of the day. They had donned their dressing-gowns, and their hair was flowing loosely over their shoulders.

"You have beautiful hair, Angel," she said, caressingly. "I admire its natural ripeness very much; no art could imitate it."

"I saw a girl this afternoon with hair just like mine," Angela remarked.

"Did you?" questioned Lady Rooden.

Angela's face brightened suddenly.

"Mamma," she cried, "you often say that I do not see much of what passes around me, but I did take notes this afternoon. The lady whose hair resembles mine is named Gladys Rane. She is a perfect brunette, surpassingly beautiful,

the ground, and stood before her with flashing eyes and burning face.

"Why should you not marry again?" she cried. "Oh, mamma, how can you ask such a question? You are my father's wife!"

"I am your father's widow, Angel," corrected Lady Rooden.

Withering scorn flashed from the girl's eyes.

"There is no difference!" she cried.

"You told me yourself that my father had but gone before you. You said he would love us just the same. You told me that the boundaries which separated us were very narrow. You told me that love, true love, began in time and lived in eternity. Oh, mother, mother," she continued, wildly, "what will you say to my father when you meet him as another man's wife? It is horrible to think of!"

"You speak too strongly, Angel," said Lady Rooden, in a trembling voice. "You could not expect that I should live all the rest of my life alone."

"You are not alone, mamma; you have me with you."

"But you will marry some day, Angel."

"We need never be parted, mamma, darling."

"That is all nonsense, Angel. You must marry, just as other girls do. Be reasonable, my dear, and we shall all be happy. I am sure that in time you will learn to like Captain Wynyard."

The name gave a new turn to Angela's thoughts. Hitherto she had realized nothing but the horror of the fact that her mother cared for another man; now, she remembered who that man himself was, how from the first she had always mistrusted and disliked him. She sank upon the ground at her mother's feet.

"Oh, mother," she sobbed, "it is like a hideous dream to me that you are going to put the man I dislike above all others in my father's place!"

"Hush, Angel—you are going too far!" said Lady Rooden. "You forgot that I love him."

"Love him! Oh, mother, how can you love one who is ignoble, who has nothing but a harridan face—and even that is spoiled by a scold and cruel expression! Mother!" Angela appealed, "forget him; give up all thoughts of this marriage. Let us leave England and go to the dreamy old Italian cities, and be happy as we were before. I will love you and take care of you—I will live with you always, and never leave you. I will do anything to save you from the hands of a man whom I dread and mistrust!"

Lady Rooden was touched by the passionate appeal, by the misery of the beautiful young face and the pain in the entireing voice.

"My dearest Angela, I do not want to be what you call 'savage.' I love Vance Wynyard, and I wish to marry him."

"Mother," she urged, earnestly, "I am certain that he loves Gladys Rane. I saw love in his face when he looked at her."

"And I, my dear Angel, am equally sure he does not. I asked him, and he told me so. He denied it most positively. He has been the spoiled darling of London society for many years, and I am, he assured me, the first woman he has ever loved. You must not say that Captain Wynyard loves Gladys Rane, and you must not say that he does not love me, or that he is going to marry me for my money. I will not hear of what you call 'savage.' I love Vance Wynyard, and I wish to marry him."

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