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HER SECOND LOVE

A STORY OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE

By Bertha M. Clay

CHAPTER XII.

Georgy was soon herself again in Mrs. Erskine's little drawing-room. Mr. Erskine was still there, and a maid who took off her bonnet and brought her some wine.

"Will you rest now?" he said.

"No; I am going; it is so late."

"Where?"

"To Brighton."

"Brighton in general, or some particular place?" he answered, smiling.

"I will tell you," and then, on making a slight movement, she caught sight of her face in the glass, and laughed faintly.

"Oh, what a figure I am! Do wonder if people stared at me."

"It is no wonder. Do not you think me justified in stopping you, Miss Sandon, and taking you anywhere, even to the police office?"

"I don't know," she said, still gazing at herself in astonishment.

"You are much paler than any I met, and there is nothing alive about you but your eyes."

"I expected to find my aunt in London, and she is at Brighton. I must go to her; but I have lost her address," Georgy went on, regardless of his remarks.

"But doesn't she expect you?"

"No! I left Grainthorpe last night; she doesn't know about it."

"Who does?"

"Nobody."

"Miss Sandon, then you mean—"

"—ran away."

"Yes, Mr. Erskine," she answered, her amusement at his curiosity. His set manner had calmed her, and her position seemed more natural.

"Why did you not come here, then? Your mother would have taken care of you. Why did you not tell her?"

"Thank you, you are very kind—will you, then, send a note for me, that I may get my aunt's direction? When I am rested a little, I will write her."

"I will send a note wherever you please; but won't you have some tea?"

"Yes, if you like."

"You shall have some, and then you can start for Brighton immediately. You should not have gone away so quickly this morning. I thought that I should still find you when I came upstairs again."

"Did you?" (simply).

"Yes. Why did you not tell my other all about yourself?"

"I think I should have told her, perhaps, only she was very busy with other things."

"Now, lie down upon the sofa, and rest; you look half dead. You know we are cousins; you can rely on my mother."

"Thank you; but you see there is no aunt."

"Yes, of course, you are going to Brighton directly you have had tea," she laughed about Brighton, she picked up the subject, and laid quietly down upon the sofa. He went away, when he reached the door, came back, and then smoothed her hair with his hand. "You are not angry with me, are you, for ordering you about so unceremoniously?"

"No," she replied, sadly, her face shining momentarily, but she did not meet his eyes. She still felt that she ought not to be there, and must go quickly. The tea came presently, and then Mrs. Erskine, her son had told her all about Georgy, and she said nothing but reproach herself for her morning's heartlessness. Kissed Georgy, and insisted upon her going straightly to bed. It was of no use insisting, for Mrs. Erskine was not easily contradicted.

"I had not drunk the tea, so she would have brandy and water."

Georgy remonstrated. James suggested that if Miss Sandon did not want it, she had better be left alone. It was good for her—James knew nothing about sick young ladies, and was not to interfere." Then the two ladies went upstairs. Mrs. Erskine maintaining "that James would be waiting for dinner if he did not dress immediately." "It was not far from the park where he was going, and he shouldn't." He came, laughing half way up the staircase to inquire "if Miss Sandon would not get for Brighton immediately?"

"Now, do go at once, James," said Mrs. Erskine; and at last, he did go. During their talk and laugh made Georgy feel more at home than any systematic comfort could have been. Mrs. Erskine said that she had not talked; but before she left she had received a whole account of Georgy's departure from Grainthorpe, and the reason for it. She sympathized with Georgy's behavior, and wanted to write to Sandon immediately; taking up the whole affair as heartily as if she

herself had been requested to marry Captain Anstruther.

Nearly all the next day Georgy lay in bed, in a dreamy state of happiness. She could hear the voice of Mrs. Erskine and her son as they talked in the mother's room, and she heard his step on the staircase as he went downstairs again. Then Mrs. Erskine came in and out with various little details of her household doings, and the news of London, which made her gradually realize that this was London, not Grainthorpe. In the evening she came down, and sat alone in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Erskine and James were out again. To go out two evenings running seemed a great stretch of dissipation to Georgy; she wondered if it was very amusing? Wondered what the mental condition of any one who went out two evenings running was? Whether they ever remembered any one particular person long, or cared for them much? She watched the carriages passing, as the fashionable world went to and fro, and then caught glimpses of people in the drawing-room opposite. She hardly dared to touch the pianoforte that first evening, and she sat idly at the window till it grew dark, and she was half asleep; and long before the other two came home, Georgy had gone to her room and was asleep in reality.

Nearly a month was passed by her with the Erskines; they would not let her go to Brighton; and when her aunt, or rather great-aunt, returned to London, Mrs. Erskine had decided upon taking Georgy with her to Millthorpe Grange, and from thence attempting, or rather insisting upon a reconciliation with her Uncle Robert. Georgy sincerely wished to go to Miss Sparrow's; but Mrs. Erskine so resolutely urged upon her the duty of attempting to make peace with Grainthorpe, that she consented to remain with them. Mrs. Erskine rather romantically adopted Georgy's declaration that she would begin to teach music. "Certainly, it was what she would do in Georgy's place." And she began to talk of her having a few lessons, and beginning to work at music.

Mr. Erskine treated all this as romance, and said that she had not expected his mother would push such wild ideas into Georgy's head.

"But what is she to do, my dear?"

"Oh! something will turn up something will be settled soon, I dare say."

"But if nothing is. One could not advise it; that would go against one's conscience; but if she would only sober down sufficiently to marry this good, excellent man, it would perhaps be the best thing."

"Good, excellent man."

"Good, excellent idiot! She was quite right to refuse him, poor child."

"I wish she would go back to Grainthorpe; it will never do for her to break with Mr. Sandon."

"Horrid people she is much better away."

"Don't be foolish; what is she to do, James?"

"Well, marry that insane idiot, or—somebody else. I dare say you are right, mother; women will marry anybody," he uttered this comprehensive action with philosophic bitterness. "Only, indeed, it is utter nonsense to talk of little Georgy's getting those silly ideas about music into her head; it is like yourself, dear mother, who take up things so warmly, to encourage her; besides, she would not be able yet to play in public."

"I never thought that she would; but she might certainly give lessons."

"That would not suit her; she could not, poor child; she is too excited for such grinding work; it would wear her to death."

"How you do talk! Georgy is particularly sensible and calm; not in the very least excitable. I should say; and all the happier for it, no doubt; besides is nobody ever to do what they don't like in this world?" And then the conversation dropped.

Julia had gone to Edinburgh, where Mrs. Erskine proposed soon to follow her; and it was settled that she should take Georgy to Millthorpe Grange, whence she had decided, in her own mind, that the reconciliation should take place with Mr. Sandon, who was very angry, and refused to be reconciled to Georgy, unless she could give him some satisfactory reason for her conduct.

Georgy's life in the meantime, was the most eventful she had ever passed. She spent early mornings playing or reading in the drawing-room; then people came to call, and James always wanted to know why she would not talk more? she answered, that people who lived at Grainthorpe could not be expected to talk, and that listening was sufficient occupation. She drove out with Mrs. Erskine, and the ladies' drives were very pleasant; Mrs. Erskine paid visits, whilst Georgy sat in the carriage.

Sometimes they drove into the country; the London country among dusty lilacs, elm and clipped hedges. The elder lady talked sometimes about her children, sometime perhaps about other things, Georgy was a good listener; she certainly possessed that requisite for agreeability. Again and again, Mrs. Erskine spoke of James; she dreaded her son's marriage with anybody, and yet, was always anxious that it should take place. The more she disliked it the more she desired that it should be over. That he should make himself a name, a house, and a position, was the wish that lay nearest all others to her heart; as she might to disguise it to herself, by talking of the worthlessness of this world's goods. She was not always ready to talk of Mrs. Everett; not, of course, as if she could take any vital interest in her, but indifferently, as she might mention any of the little idiosyncrasies of an Empress of China. She hoped that her son's wife would never stand between them, "else what good would her life do her?" and then she came out frankly with the wish that her son would marry soon.

"There is no one at Iderton, where he goes often; the girls are perfect misses; I do not count them, consequently there is no one."

"Mr. Erskine seems to enjoy himself tolerably at Iderton, I think," answered Georgy; "he often used to talk about it."

"Yes; married people are pleasant than girls. Mrs. Edgar Everett is a very agreeable person I am told; besides poor young Mrs. Francis; but you can't marry a married person, you know."

Georgy laughed at this defiant truism, and did not refute it by suggesting that Mrs. Francis Everett was a widow now. "Girls are not generally very amusing," she said; "I should not care very much for their society myself, if I were a man."

"My dear I must tell you one thing—never be sarcastic, with men, especially; they will not like you for it; and the older you grow, the more you will feel how really unwomanly it is."

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Erskine, I dislike sarcasm very much in theory, so I hope I do not practise it much."

"Well now, remember, James, he is one of ourselves but other people you should take a little more care to please; you are shorter than sarcasm to them. James you know, does not signify," and he likes you so much as you are."

She smiled, and laughed out, quietly: "No, he does not signify," and now their drive ended.

An irresistible fit of inward hilarity had seized Georgy, and she momentarily enjoyed a joke against herself.

"He did not signify!" and what else on earth did? Were there many other people in the world living such a passive life as herself? for she might never own that he "signified." And something whispered that it was, perhaps, a misfortune, her having ever come to that house.

Her infatuation might have passed more quickly—passed as many others do, so ardent and absorbing, raised upon slender grounds than this one was. So frail, so almost laughable is the foundation of our youth's great reality, that many a love will not bear to be chronicled; it must go, and we shall laugh ourselves some day.

Georgy saw other people besides these two, whilst she was in London. In spite of Mrs. Erskine's professions that she was too old to lead other than a hermit's life, she went out pretty often, and once or twice took Georgy. James was always out, or else hard at work, excepting when his mother received in the evening. Her eldest daughter Alice was in town now, after having been for many years abroad; and her two daughters were grown up; so a great deal of work fell upon the grandmother, who took them out; and asked people to her house for their sakes. Georgy thought that for a hermitage, this was not a lonely house; though Mr. Erskine, too, said that he had almost given up the world and become a solitary.

Mrs. Erskine knew many artists and literary people; indeed she was no mean artist herself; and Georgy saw all these people, who spoke a language and lived a life that was utterly beyond her. To grow clever—to grow clever—that was her desire; and it seemed as if the desperation of her position must effect that change. It was a confused desire that animated her. The abstract love of books she had lost; she looked upon them only as a means of living up to and participating in the life of those around her. How utterly shut out from them she felt, and how jealous she was of their powers! It was not vanity which gave birth to this; but the sense of what her own nothingness must be in James Erskine's eyes, as she listened to the well-trained sparkling talk-

ers who were of this world. She saw directly, and felt keenly the difference that lay between them; to talk amongst these people, would have been to do violence to herself, and perfect silence fell upon her.

No one, perhaps, can feel intellectual abasement more than a woman who loves a man far superior to herself, and may never hope to approach him but through the life of intelligence. In the wife of such a man it is not so. She has more, far more, and can abandon that cold, restless strife after intelligence commune; she has him in the hours of grief and sickness, trouble and annoyance; when he is genuinely himself. It is through other than cleverness that she must keep him, and then she lives her own, her natural life.

Everything for the moment sank in importance with Georgy beside this vicarious love of knowledge. These feelings were not always upon her, however; often she seemed to have changed places with James, who was much graver than he used to be. Georgy had fallen into the habit of laughing at nothing, he said, and then often ended by following her example. Now and then her vanity was gratified amongst the people whom she stood so much in awe of. She was asked to play, and did so; there were not many people there, but they all listened, and all praised her. That was nothing to her; she only cared that James should be there, and know that she could do something.

The next night there were some people again at the "hermitage."

"You look as if those people inspired you with a good deal of veneration, Miss Sandon."

"Well, they do; your people," she answered, dubiously, as if afraid of owning to her weakness. "All those who come here are so—clever, and talk so well, I do envy them a little, and wish—"

"To do clever talk likewise? Well, keep your illusion, as you have not yet discovered its vanity. You bestow a vast depth of admiration on these people, I see."

"It is pleasant to hear them."

"To hear intellectual slang? Oh! you would soon find that good lady out, who is holding forth upon the sofa. When she had used the tremendous phrase, 'A glorious intelligence,' for the fourth time (having applied it to three directly opposite people), I made my escape. She imagined that the words implied a most searching analysis of something or somebody; and really she is a fair type of so many, nowadays."

"I like intellectual mimicry better than nothing," Georgy answered, with imploring obstinacy; "but I understand what you mean, and I dare say in a little while I should feel it."

"I do not disparage brilliant conversation; I love it myself only too well; it is the most enjoyable of all luxuries. But the greatest people are not always the most lavish of it. Every day the quantity of intellectual slang increases, assisted by Germanically-turned phrases. It spoils some people so, who would know about a few things, if they would not embrace everything. All the world has opinions."

"Cheap books bring them about."

"Yes; and all honor to cheap books; but they have given the world a sort of fictitious development, which occasionally rouses one's organ of combativeness. Everybody judges of everything now."

"And you call all that 'intellectual slang.'"

"I do; an old Frenchman said, 'I'll est, si difficile de parler de quoi que ce soit, avec qui que ce soit.' The parrot-like bits of eclecticism that are the fashion make that truer than ever."

"All that edifies me, I believe; but I am not sure," she replied.

"Perhaps, then, you respect any person who has ever written a book, irrespective of what its contents may be."

"How did you know that?"

"I guessed it after considerable reflection."

"Well, I do, or rather I used to do so. But do you pretend that literature is all vanity? If you lived without it, I think you would soon change your mind."

"Well, and what are Miss Sandon's views respecting it?" he returned, amused at her vehemence.

"That it is something very grand and satisfactory to write a good book."

"Yes, to pour out your whole soul, express your life in one ardent burst of passion and pathos (he was not laughing). Yes, you think so, and many others have thought that, too, but you cannot do it."

"No?"

"No, my lady, that is a dream. Writing is very pleasant, but no one can say all they think and feel, through it. Words are more finite than our nature."

"I had some sort of an indefinite notion that great people could—"

"Not even in that wondrous bit of aspiring egotism—a first book."

"Well, it is a comfort to those who cannot write, to think that the completeness of the satisfaction is not so great," and taking up a new novel, that lay there, she added, "the writer of this is very clever, surely."

"Yes; but judge of no one quite by a first book. We do not know the exact proportions of what goes to the making of it; the vast expenditure of self, perhaps; some violent feeling may do a great deal, some excitement fed by the mere strength of youth."

"What! Then they write on the strength of that, and afterwards can do no more?"

"Never so much again—their best is over."

"The feeling must have been a true one, at any rate."

"Yes, if we knew everything, we should see, I dare say, that some books are costly to their writers. But you do not believe in all this, and in what Michelet calls 'Les miseres du monde parleur et du monde scribe.'"

"You have taken refuge with me, being cynical to-night, because I can talk of nothing, and there is no fear of my writing, thank you."

He did not answer her taunt in the laughing tone in which it was made; but said, in a quiet, reverential way, as if he were talking to himself, "You!—I wish all the world were like you."

That checked her. If he ever approved seriously of anything she said or did, she was always embarrassed. She knew he liked her sayings and doings, and she would repay any laughing compliments or comments upon her behavior with an usury of gibes. And yet she was often indefinitely afraid of him; and a dry word, or even a serious one from him, could make her shy. One of these women so; they talk nonsense to a man of whom they are afraid.

One evening Mrs. Erskine was out, and James, too. Georgy was sitting alone in the drawing-room when he returned. "She had fancied that he was dining out."

"No; he had dined at his club, and was not going anywhere that evening. Was his mother out?"

"He knew that she was, else, perhaps he would not have returned."

"He was in Miss Sandon's way, and would go down to his own room."

"Not at all."

So that evening they spent together; talked and laughed, then grew serious and moralized. It was almost the counterpart of one day which she had spent at Monklands nearly two years ago.

It was the next week that a great ball was to take place, the largest and prettiest of the season, given by Mrs. Evelyn Lorraine, who would spend some seven hundred pounds or so, upon her evening's entertainment. The world was all going, and those who did not go, were manoeuvring to manage it. Mrs. Erskine's granddaughters had come one morning with the freshness of their joy; for they were going and an animated conversation about dress was in progress.

The two girls were very fond and proud of their young uncle, who rode with them, took an interest in all their troubles, and was deep in the confidences of their toilet. He assisted for some time at the dress council, and then left the three young ladies together, and went to his mother, who was writing in the drawing-room.

"Do you mean to take Miss Sandon, mother?"

"Where?"

"To Mrs. Evelyn Lorraine."

"My dear, what would be the use? She does not know a human creature besides I must ask to take her, which I should not like to do; it is out of the question."

"Why, poor child?"

"She must have a new dress, which would be foolish for her."

"When is a new dress ever foolish for a woman, pray?"

"James, I really think she would not care about it enough to make it worth the trouble; besides, I must ask, you know."

"Oh, I'll do that!" he said carelessly.

"Will you? then, indeed, you might do me a good turn, and get an invitation for Mrs. Alvany and her girl; they would give anything to go."

"Thank you," said James, desperately, moving back a few steps from the writing-table. "Any more people to ask for? If Mrs. Lorraine does not forbid me her house for evermore, I should not receive my deserts; she has too many people already. Indeed, I could not, mother."

"Then what will she say to your putting a Miss Sandon upon her?"

"She is very good-natured, and I'll manage it, if you will only take Georgy."

"Very well," said Mrs. Erskine, laughing at her eagerness, and perfectly ready to consent to anything.

James went back to Miss Sandon, to ask her if she would not like to go to Mrs. Lorraine's ball; he knew that moderation would be but affection. She had been wondering vaguely what it would be like, rather than wishing to go; but his words aroused a more active desire and she looked up, saying, "I should like it very much."

"Then you have as great an appetite for gaiety, as the rest of woman-kind;" and it was all settled.

CHAPTER XIII.

On Miss Sparrow's return from Brighton, she behaved most kindly to her niece, but fully concurred with Mrs. Erskine in thinking it best that she should go back to Millthorpe Grange, and from there, if possible, to Grainthorpe. It was more cheerful to Georgy to spend her few remaining days with the Erskines, and she would not hear of her niece's removing to her own dull house. Miss Sparrow had a habit of talking to herself occasionally, and went on; "Yes, dear, yes; it would be a very nice thing; only, of course, you are too reasonable."

"What!" exclaimed Georgy, whose thoughts were running upon the expense of journeys, and thinking how, if she went to Millthorpe Grange, and a reconciliation took place, she must return to Grainthorpe. Journeying back to her aunt's would be so expensive.

"I could not help the other day wishing that you should marry James Erskine; Mr. Erskine, I suppose I ought to say; more unlikely things have happened," she said, knowingly; "I think he likes you very much; though perhaps I am foolish for telling you so. I wish people did not always think so much about money."

"Why should they not?" returned Georgy, laughing constrainedly. "I do not know that Mr. Erskine has any intentions of marrying any one at present, either rich or poor."

"My dear, you are not vexed, are you?"

"No; of course not, aunt," she replied, regaining her old manner.

"Ah, Georgy, little girls sometimes think of such things, though they will not own it."

And when Georgy left her aunt, she did think about it, though not of it; that was an impossibility. Her aunt's words went for nothing; but they had tortured her. Oh! she was poor; yet in her own heart she boldly compared herself to Gertrude Stanley, of whom she knew that it was Mrs. Erskine's darling dream that she should marry her son. Miss Stanley was rich and beautiful, but take away the money, and Georgy could hold her ground against Miss Stanley; but for herself to marry James, would, in a worldly point of view for him, be folly. Just then poverty seemed to her to express annihilation, and she thought of the words of Faust's Margaret:

"Nach Golde drangt
Am Golde hangt
Doch Alles! Ach wir Armen!"

Many a one has thought that; and not always in direct selfishness. Mothers fancy that money will smooth the evils of life for their children. Money, money! will buy love even, think some, who are cold to their inmost hearts for lack of it.

It is a sad, sordid calculation; and a very cowardly one, no doubt. But forgive it, you who estimate money more truly—you who prize more highly the free gift of your love. So much magnanimity is not always wisdom acquired, but immunity from the need of wisdom.

(Continued next week)

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