AN AMERICAN GIRL.

She walked very fast, after she left the house. She wanted to reach Oldclough before one whit of her anger cooled down, though, somehow, she felt quite sure that, even when her anger died out, her courage would not take flight with it. Mr. Dugald Binnie had not proved to be a very fascinating person. He was an acrid, dictatorial old man; he contradicted Lady Theobald flatly every five minutes, and bullied his man-servant; but it was not against him Lucia was aroused. She felt that Lady Theobald was quite capable of suggesting to him that Francis Barold would be a good match for her, and if she had done so, it was scarcely his fault if he had accepted the idea. She understood now why she had been allowed to visit Octavia, and why divers other things had happened. She had been sent to walk with Francis Barold; he had been almost reproached when he had not called; perhaps her ladyship had been good enough to suggest to him that it was his duty to further her plans. She was as capable of that as of anything else which would assist her to gain her point. The girl's cheeks grew hotter and hotter, her eyes brighter at every step, because every step bought some new thought; her hands trembled, and her heart beat.

"I shall never be afraid of her again," she said, as she turned the corner into the road. "Never! never!"

At that very moment a gentleman stepped out of the wood at her right, and stopped before her.

She started back, with a cry.

"Mr. Burmistone!" she said; "Mr. Burmistone!"

She wondered if he had heard her last words; she fancied he had. Her took hold of her shaking little hand, and looked down at her excited face.

"I am glad I waited for you," he said in the quietest possible tone. "Something is the matter."

She knew their was no use in trying to conceal the truth, and she was not in the mood to make the effort. She scarcely knew herself.

She gave quite a fierce little laugh.

"I am angry!" she said. "You have never seen me angry before. I am on my way to my—to Lady Theobald."

He held her hand as calmly as before. He understood a great deal more than she could have imagined.

"What are you going to say to her?" he asked.

She laughed again.

"I am going to ask her what she means. I am going to tell her she has made a a mistake. I am going to prove to her that I am not such a coward, after all. I am going to tell her that I dare disobey her—that is what I am going to say to her," she concluded, decisively.

He held her hand rather closer.

"Let us take a stroll in the copse and talk it over," he said. "It is deliciously cool there.'

"I don't want to be cool," she said. But he drew her gently with him, and a few steps took them into the shade of the young oaks and pines, and there paused.

"She has made you very angry," he said.

And then, almost before she knew what she was doing, she was pouring forth the whole of her story—even more of it than she had told Octavia. She had not at all intended to do it, but she did it, nevertheless.

"I am to marry Mr. Francis Barold, if he will take me," she said, with a bitter little smile,—"Mr. Francis Barold, who is so much in love with me—as you know. His mother approves of the match, and sent him here to make love to me—which he has done, as you have seen. I have no money of my own, but if I make a marriage which pleases him, Dugald Binnie will probably leave me his—which it is thought will be an inducement to my cousin—who needs one. If I marry him, or rather he marries me, Lady Theobald thinks Mr. Binnie will be pleased. It does not even matter whether Francis is pleased or not—and, of course, I am out of the question—but it is hoped that it will please Mr. Binnie. The two ladies have talked it over, and decided the matter. I dare say they have offered me to Francis, who has very likely refused me, though perhaps he may be persuaded to relent in time—if I am very humble, and he is shown the advantage of having Mr. Binnie's money added to his own—but I have no doubt I shall have to be very humble indeed. That is what I learned from Lady Theobald, last night, and it is what I am going to talk to her about. Is it enough to make one angry, do you think—is it enough?"

He did not tell her whether he thought it enough or not. Her looked at her with steady eyes.

"Lucia," he said, "I wish you would let me go and talk to Lady Theobald."

"You!" she said, with a little start.

"Yes," he answered. "Let me go to her. Let me tell her that, instead of marrying Francis Barold, you will marry me. If you will say yes to that, I think I can promise that you need never be afraid of her any more.

The fierce color died out of her cheeks, and the tears rushed to her eyes. She raised her face with a pathetic look.

"Oh," she whispered, "you must be very sorry for me. I think you have been sorry for me from the first."

"I am desperately in love with you," he answered, in his quietest way. "I have been desperately in love with you from the first. May I go?"

She looked at him, for a moment, incredulously. Then she faltered:

"Yes."

She still looked up at him, and then, in spite of her happiness, or perhaps because of it, she suddenly began to cry softly, and forgot she had been angry at all, as he took her into his strong, kind arms.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GARDEN-PARTY.

The morning of the garden-party arose bright and clear, and Slowbridge awakened in a great state of excitement. Miss Chickie, having worked until midnight, that all her orders might be completed, was so overpowered by her labors as to have to take her tea and toast in bed.

At Oldclough, varied sentiments prevailed. Lady Theobald's manner was chiefly distinguished by implacable rigidity. She had chosen, as an appropriate festal costume, a funeral-black *moire antique*, enlivened by massive fringes and ornaments of jet—her jewelry being chains and manacles of the latter, which rattled as she moved, with a sound somewhat suggestive of bones.

Mr. Dugald Binnie, who had received an invitation, has as yet amiably forborne to say whether he would accept it or not. He had been out when Mr. Burmistone called, a d had not seen him.

When Lady Theobald descended to breakfast, she found him growling over his newspaper, and he glanced up at her with a polite scowl.

"Going to a funeral?" he demanded.

"I accompany my granddaughter to this—this entertainment,' her ladyship responded. "It is scarcely a joyous occasion, to my mind."

"No need to dress yourself like that, if it isn't," ejaculated Mr. Binnie. "Why don't you stay at home, if you don't want to go? Man's all right, isn't he? Once knew a man of the name of Burmistone, myself. One of the few decent fellows I've met. If I was sure this was the same man, I'd go myself. When I find a fellow who's neither knave nor fool, I stick to him. Believe I'll send to find out. Where's Lucia?"

What his opinion of Lucia was, it was difficult to discover. He had an agreeable habit of staring at her over the top of his paper, and over his dinner. The only time he had made any comment upon her, was the first time he saw her in the dress she had copied from Octavia's.

"Nice gown that," he blurted out. "Didn't get it here, I'll wager."

"It is an old dress I remodeled," answered Lucia, somewhat alarmed. "I made it myself."

"Doesn't look like it," he said, gruffly.

Lucia had touched up another dress, and was very happy in the prospect of wearing it at the garden-party.

"Don't call on grandmamma until after Wednesday," she had said to Mr. Burmitone. "Perhaps she wouldn't let me go. She will be very angry, I am sure."

"And you are not afraid?"

"No," she answered, "I am not afraid at all. I shall not be afraid again."

In fact, she had perfectly confounded her ladyship by her demeanor. She bore her fiercest glance without quailing in the least, or making any effort to evade it; under her most scathing comments she was composed and unmoved. On the first occasion of my lady's referring to her plans for her future, she received a blow which fairly stunned her. The girl rose from her chair, and looked her straight in the face, unflinchingly, and with a suggestion of *hauteur* not easy to confront.

"I beg you will not speak to me of that again," she said. "I will not listen." And turning about, she walked out of the room.

"This," her ladyship had said, in sepulchral tones, when she recovered her breath—"this is one of the results of Miss Octavia Bassett.' And nothing more had been said on the subject since.

No one in Slowbridge was in more brilliant spirits than Octavia herself on the morning of the *fete*. Before breakfast, Miss Belinda was startled by the arrival of another telegram, which ran as follows:

> Arrived to-day, per Russia. Be with you to-morrow evening. Friend with me.
>
> MARTIN BASSETT.

On reading this communication, Miss Belinda burst into floods of tears.

"Dear, dear Martin!" she wept. "To think that we should meet again! Why didn't he let us know he was on the way? I should have been so anxious that I should not have slept at all."

"Well," remarked Octavia, "I suppose that would have been an advantage."

Suddenly, she approached Miss Belinda, kissed her, and disappeared out of the room, as if by magic, not returning for a quarter of an hour, looking rather soft, and moist, and brilliant about the eyes, when she did return.

Octavia was a marked figure upon the grounds at that garden-party.

"Another dress, my dear," remarked Mrs. Burnham. "And what a charming color she has, I declare! She is usually paler. Perhaps we owe this to Lord Lansdowne."

"Her dress is becoming, at all events," privately remarked Miss Lydia Burnham, whose taste had not been consulted about her own.

"It is she who is becoming," said her sister. "It is not the dress so much, though her clothes always have a look, some way. She's prettier than ever to-day, and is enjoying herself."

She was enjoying herself. Mr. Francis Barold observed it rather gloomily as he stood apart. She was enjoying herself so much that she did not seem to notice that he had avoided her, instead of going up to claim her attention. Half a dozen men were standing about her and making themselves agreeable; and she was apparently quite equal to the emergencies of the occasion. The young men from Broadoaks had at once attached themselves to her train.

"I say, Barold," they had said to him, "why didn't you tell us about this? Jolly good fellow you are, to come mooning here for a couple of months and keep it all to yourself."

And then had come Lord Lansdowne, who, in crossing the lawn to shake hands with his host, had been observed to keep his eye fixed upon one particular point.

"Burmistone," he said, after having spoken his first words, "who is that tall girl in white?"

And in ten minutes, Lady Theobald, Mrs. Burnham, Mr. Barold, and divers others too numerous to mention, saw him standing at Octavia's side, evidently with no intention of leaving it.

Not long after this, Francis Barold found his way to Miss Belinda, who was very busy and rather nervous.

"Your niece is evidently enjoying herself," he remarked.

"Octavia is most happy to-day," answered Miss Belinda. "Her father will reach Slowbridge this evening. She has been looking forward to his coming with great anxiety."

"Ah!" commented Barold.

"Very few people understand Octavia," said Miss Belinda. "I'm not sure that I follow all her moods myself. She is more affectionate than people fancy. She—she has very pretty ways. I am very fond of her. She is not as frivolous as she appears to those who don't know her well."

Barold stood gnawing his mustache and made no reply. He was not very comfortable. He felt himself ill-used by Fate, and rather wished he had returned to London from Broadoaks, instead of loitering in Slowbridge. He had amused himself at first, but in time he had been surprised to find his amusement lose something of its zest. He glowered across the lawn at the group under a certain beech-tree, and as he did so, Octavia turned her face a little and saw him. She stood waving her fan slowly and smiling at him in a calm way, which reminded him very much of the time he had first caught sight of her at Lady Theobald's high tea.

He condescended to saunter over the grass to where she stood. Once there, he proceeded to make himself as disagreeable as possible, in a silent and lofty way. He felt it only due to himself that he should. He did not approve at all of the manner in which Lansdowne kept by her.

"It's deucedly bad form on his part," he said, mentally. "What does he mean by it?"

Octavia, on the contary, did not ask what he meant by it. She chose to seem rather well entertained, and did not notice that she was being frowned down. There was no reason why she should not find Lord Lansdowne entertaning; he was an agreeable young fellow, with an inexhaustible fund of good spirits, and no nonsense about him. He was fond of all pleasant novelty, and Octavia was a pleasant novelty. He had been thinking of paying a visit to America, and he asked innumerable questions concering that country, all of which Octavia answered.

"I know half a dozen fellows who have been there," he said. "And they all enjoyed it tremendously."

"If you go to Nevada, you must visit the mines at Bloody Gulch," she said.

"Where?" he ejaculated. "I say, what a name! Don't deride my youth and ignorance, Miss Bassett."

"You can call it L'Argentville if you would rather," she replied.

"I would rather try the other, thank you," he laughed. "It has a more hilarious sound. Will they despise me at Bloody Gulch, Miss Bassett? I never killed a man in my life."

Barold turned and walked away, angry, and more melancholy than he could have believed.

"It is time I went back to London," he chose to put it. "The place begins to be deucedly dull."

"Mr. Francis Barold seems rather out spirits," said Mrs. Burnham to Lady Theobald, "Lord Lansdowne interferes with his pleasure."

"I had not observed it," answered her ladyship. "And it is scarcely likely that Mr. Francis Barold would permit his pleasure to be interfered with, even by the son of the Marquis of Lauderdale."

But she glared at Barold, as he passed, and beckoned to him

"Where is Lucia?" she demanded.

"I saw her with Burmistone, half an hour ago," he answered coldly. "Have you any message for my mother? I shall return to London to-morrow,—leaving here early."

She turned quite pale. She had not counted upon this at all, and it was extremely inopportune.

"What has happened?" she asked, rigidly.

He looked slightly surprised.

"Nothing whatever," he replied. "I have remained here longer than I intended."

She began to move the manacles on her right wrist. He made not the smallest profession of reluctance to go. She said, at last:

"If you will find Lucia, you will oblige me."

She was almost uncivil to Miss Pilcher, who chanced to join her after he was gone. She had not the slightest intention of allowing her plans to be frustrated, and was only roused to fresh obstinacy by encountering indifference on one side and rebellion on the other. She had not brought up Lucia under her own eye for nothing. She had been disturbed of late, but by no means considered herself baffled. With the assistance of Mr. Dugald Binnie, she could certainly subdue Lucia, though Mr. Dugald Binnie had been of no great help, so far. She would do her duty unflinchingly. In fact she chose to persuade herself that, if Lucia was brought to a proper frame of mind, there could be no real trouble with Francis Barold.

CHAPTER XXV.

"SOMEBODY ELSE."

But Barold did not make any very ardent search for Lucia. He stopped to watch a game of lawn tennis, in which Octavia and Lord Lansdowne had joined, and finally forgot Lady Theobald's errand altogether.

For some time, Octavia did not see him. She was playing with great spirit, and Lord Lansdowne was following her delightedly.

Finally a chance of the game bringing her to him, she turned suddenly and found Barold's eyes fixed upon her.

"How long have you been there?" she asked.

"Some time," he answered. "When you are at liberty, I wish to speak to you."

"Do you?" she said.

She seemed a little unprepared for the repressed energy of his manner, which he strove to cover by a greater amount of coldness than usual.

"Well," she said, after thinking a moment, "the game will soon be ended. I am going through the conservatories with Lord Lansdowne, in course of time; but I dare say he can wait."

She went back, and finished the game, apparently enjoying it as much as ever. When it was over, Barold made his way to her.

He had resented her remaining oblivious of his presence when he stood near her, and he had resented her enjoyment of her surroundings, and now, as he led her away, leaving Lord Lansdowne rather disconsolate, he resented the fact that she did not seem nervous, or at all impressed by his silence.

"What do you want to say to me?" she asked. "Let us go and sit down on one of the arbors. I believe I am a little tired—not that I mind it, though. I've been having a lovely time."

Then she began to talk about Lord Lansdowne.

"I like him ever so much," she said. "Do you think he will really go to America? I wish he would—but if he does, I hope it won't be for a year or so—I mean, until we go back from Europe. Still, it's rather uncertain when we shall go back. Did I tell you I had persuaded Aunt Belinda to travel with us? She's horribly frightened, but I mean to make her go. She'll get over being frightened after a little while."

Suddenly she turned and looked at him.

"Why don't you say something?" she demanded. "What's the matter?"

"It is not necessary for me to say anything."

She laughed.

"Do you mean because I am saying everything myself? Well, I suppose I am. I am—awfully happy to-day, and can't help talking. It seems to make the time go."

Her face had lighted up curiously. There was a delighted excitement in her eyes, puzzling him.

"Are you so fond of your father as all that?"

She laughed again—a clear, exultant laugh.

"Yes," she answered, "of course I am as fond of him as all that. It's quite natural, isn't it?"

"I haven't observed the same degree of enthusiasm in all the young ladies of my acquaintance," he returned, dryly.

He thought such rapture disproportionate to the cause, and regarded it grudgingly.

They turned into an arbor, and Octavia sat down and leaned forward on the rustic table. Then she turned her face up to look at the vines covering the roof.

"It looks rather spidery, doesn't it?" she remarked. "I hope it isn't; don't you?"

The light fell bewitchingly on her round little chin and white throat; and a bar of sunlight struck on her upturned eyes, and the blonde rings on her forehead.

"There is nothing I hate more than spiders," she said, with a little shiver, "unless," seriously, "it's caterpillars—caterpillars I loathe!"

Then she lowered her gaze, and gave her hat—a large, white Rubens, all soft curling feathers and satin bows—a charming tip over her eyes.

"The brim is broad," she said. "If anything drops, I hope it will drop on it, instead of on me. Now, what did you want to say?"

He had not sat down, but stood leaning against the rustic wood-work. He looked pale, and was evidently trying to be cooler than usual.

"I brought you here to ask you a question."

"Well," she remarked, "I hope it's an important one. You look serious enough."

"It is important—rather," he responded, with a tone of sarcasm. "You will probably go away soon?"

"That isn't exactly a question," she commented. "And it's not as important to you as to me."

He paused a moment, annoyed because he found it difficult to go on; annoyed because she waited with such undisturbed serenity. But at length he managed to begin again.

"I do not think you are expecting the question I am going to ask," he said. "I—do not think I expected to ask it myself—until to-day. I do not know why—why I should ask it so awkwardly, and feel—at such a disadvantage. I brought you here to ask you—to marry me."

He had scarcely spoken four words before all her airy manner had taken flight, and she had settled herself down to listen. He had noticed this, and had felt it quite natural. When he stopped, she was looking straight into his face. Her eyes were singularly large and bright and clear.

"You did not expect to ask me to marry you," she said. "Why didn't you?"

It was not at all what he had expected. He did not understand her manner at all.

"I—must confess," he said, stiffly, "that I felt at first that there were—obstacles in the way of my doing so."

"What were the obstacles?"

He flushed and drew himself up.

"I have been very unfortunate in my mode of expressing myself," he said. "I told you I was conscious of my own awkwardness"

"Yes," she said, quietly, "you have been unfortuate. That is a good way of putting it."

Then she let her eyes rest on the table a few seconds, and thought a little.

"After all," she said, "I have the consolation of knowing that you must have been very much in love with me. If you had not been very much in love with me, you would never have asked me to marry you. You would have considered the obstacles."

"I am very much in love with you," he said, vehemently, his feelings getting the better of his pride, for once. "However badly I may have expressed myself, I am very much in love with you. I have been wretched for days."

"Was it because you felt obliged to ask me to marry you?" she inquired.

The delicate touch of spirit in her tone and words fired his to fresh admiration, strange to say. It suggested to him possibilites he had not suspected hitherto. He drew nearer to her.

"Don't be too severe on me," he said—quite humbly, considering all things.

And he stretched out his hand, as if to take hers.

But she drew it back, smiling ever so faintly.

"Do you think I don't know what the obstacles are?" she said. "I will tell you."

"My affection was strong enough to sweep them away," he said, "or I should not be here."

She smiled slightly again.

"I know all about them, as well as you do," she said. "I rather laughed at them, at first, but I don't now. I suppose I'm 'impressed by their seriousness,' as Aunt Belinda says. I suppose they are pretty serious—to you."

"Nothing would be so serious to me as that you should let them interfere with my happiness," he answered, thrown back upon himself, and bewildered by her logical manner. "Let us forget them. I was a fool to speak as I did. Won't you answer my question?"

She paused a second, and then answered.

"You didn't expect to ask me to marry you," she said. "And I didn't expect you to——."

"But now——," he broke in, impatiently.

"Now—I wish you hadn't done it."

"You wish——."

"You don't want me," she said. "You want somebody meeker—somebody who would respect you very much, and obey you. I'm not used to obeying people."

"Do you mean also that you would not respect me?" he inquired, bitterly.

"Oh," she replied, "you haven't respected me much!"

"Excuse me——" he began, in his loftiest manner.

"You didn't respect me enough to think me worth marrying," she said. "I was not the kind of girl you would have chosen of your own will."

"You are treating me unfairly!" he cried.

"You are going to give me a great deal, I suppose—looking at it in your way," she went on; "but if I wasn't exactly what you wanted, I had something to give, too. I'm young enough to have a good many years to live, and I should have to live them with you, if I married you. That's something, you know."

He rose from his seat, pale with wrath and wounded feeling.

"Does this mean that you refuse me," he demanded,—"that your answer is no?"

She rose, too—not exultant, nor confused, neither pale nor flushed. He had never seen her prettier, more charming, or more natural.

"It would have been 'no,' even if there had n't been any obstacle," she answered.

"Then," he said, "I need say no more. I see that I have—humiliated myself in vain, and it is rather bitter, I must confess."

"It wasn't my fault," she remarked.

He stepped back, with a haughty wave of the hand, signifying that she should pass out of the arbor before him.

She did so, but just as she reached the entrance, she turned, and stood for a second, framed in by the swinging vines and their blossoms.

"There's another reason why it should be 'no,'" she said. "I suppose I may as well tell you of it. I'm engaged to somebody else."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"JACK."

They first person they saw, when they reached the lawn, was Mr. Dugald Binnie, who had deigned to present himse f, and was talking to Mr. Burmistone, Lucia, and Miss Belinda.

"I'll go to them," said Octavia. "Aunt Belinda will wonder where I have been."

But, before they reached the group, they were intercepted by Lord Lansdowne; and Barold had the pleasure of surrendering his charge, and watching her, with some rather sharp pangs, as she was borne off to the conservatories.

"What is the matter with Mr. Barold?" exclaimed Miss Pilcher. "Pray, look at him."

"He has been talking to Miss Octavia Bassett, in one of the arbors," put in Miss Lydia Burnham. "Emily and I passed them a few minutes ago, and they were so absorbed that they did not see us. There it no knowing what has happened."

"Lydia!" exclaimed Mrs. Burnham, in stern reproof of such flippancy.

But, the next moment, she exchanged a glance with Miss Pilcher.

"Do you think——" she suggested. "Is it possible——."

"It really looks very like it," said Miss Pilcher; "though it is scarcely to be credited. See how pale and angry he looks."

Mrs. Burnham glanced towards him, and then a slight smile illuminated her countenance.

"How furious," she remarked, cheerfully, "how furious Lady Theobald will be."

Naturally, it was not very long before the attention of numerous other ladies was directed to Mr. Francis Barold. It was observed that he took no share in the festivities, that he did not regain his natural air of enviable indifference to his surroundings—that he did not approach Octavia Bassett until all was over and she was on the point of going home. What he said to her then, no one heard.

"I am going to London to-morrow. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," she answered, holding out her hand to him. Then she added, quickly, in an under-tone "You oughtn't to think badly of me. You won't after a while."

As they drove homeward, she was rather silent, and Miss Belinda remarked it.

"I am afraid you are tired, Octavia," she said. "It is a pity that Martin should come, and find you tired."

"Oh, I'm not tired. I was only—thinking. It has been a queer day!"

"A queer day, my dear!" ejaculated Miss Belinda. "I thought it a charming day."

"So it has been," said Octavia—which Miss Belinda thought rather inconsistent.

Both of them grew rather restless as they neared the house.

"To think," said Miss Belinda, "of my seeing poor Martin again."

"Suppose," said Octavia, nervously, as they drew up, "suppose they are here—already!"

"They!" exclaimed Miss Belinda. "Who——."

But she got no further. A cry burst from Octavia—a queer, soft little cry.

"They are here!" she said; "they are! Jack—Jack!"

And she was out of the carriage, and Miss Belinda, following her closely, was horrified to see her caught at once in the embrace of a tall, bronzed young man, who, a moment after, drew her into the little parlor, and shut the door.

Mr. Martin Bassett, who was big, and sunburned, and prosperous-looking, stood in the passage, smiling triumphantly.

"M—M—Martin!" gasped Miss Belinda. "What—oh, what does this mean?"

Martin Bassett led her to a seat, and smiled more triumphantly still.

"Never mind, Belinda," he said "Do n' be frightened. It's Jack Belasys, and he's the finest fellow in the West. And she hasn't seen him for two years."

"Martin," Miss Belinda fluttered, "it is not proper— it really isn't."

"Yes, it is," answered Mr. Bassett; "for he's going to marry her, before we go abroad."

It was an eventful day for all parties concered. At its close, Lady Theobald found herself in an utterly bewilderd and thunderstruck condition. As to Mr. Dugald Binnie, more than to any one else, her demoralization was due. That gentleman got into the carriage in rather a better humor than usual.

"Same man I used to know," he remarked. "Glad to see him. I knew him as soon as I set eyes on him."

"Do you allude to Mr. Burmistone?"

"Yes. Had a long talk with him. He's coming to see you, to-morrow. Told him he might come myself. Appears he's taken a fancy to Lucia. Wants to talk it over. Suits me exactly, and suppose it suits her. Looks as if it does. Glad she hasn't taken a fancy to some haw-haw fellow, like that fool, Barold. Girls generally do. Burmistone's worth ten of him."

Lucia, who had been looking steadily out of the carriage-window, turned, with an amazed expression. Lady Theobald had received a shock which made all her man-