

# SIR GUY'S WARD.

A THRILLING STORY OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE.

## CHAPTER IX.—(CONTINUED.)

"There, Guy, don't you envy me, with such a charming time before me?" says Cyril, returning her glance with interest.

"No, indeed," says Lillian, raising her head and gazing full at Chetwoode, who returns her glance steadily, although he is enduring grinding torments all this time, and almost—almost begins to hate his brother. "The last thing Sir Guy would dream of would be to envy you my graceless society. Fancy a guardian finding pleasure in the frivolous conversation of his ward! How could you suspect him of such a weakness?"

Here she lets her small white teeth meet in her fruit with all the airs of a little *gourmande*, and a most evident enjoyment of its flavor.

There is a pause.

Cyril has left the room in search of his cigar-case. Lady Chetwoode has disappeared to explore the library for her everlasting knitting. Sir Guy and Lillian are alone.

"I cannot remember having ever accused you of being frivolous, either in conversation or manner," says Chetwoode, presently, in a low, rather angry tone.

"No," says naughty Lillian, with a shrug "I quite thought you had. But your manner is so expressive at times, it leaves no occasion for mere words. This morning when I made some harmless remark to Cyril you looked as though I had committed murder, or something worthy of transportation for life at the very least."

"I cannot remember that either. I think you purposely misunderstand me."

"What a rude speech! Oh, if I had said that! But see how late it is,"—looking at the clock: "you are wasting all these precious minutes here that might be spent so much more—profitably with your cousin."

"You mean you are in a hurry to be rid of me," disdainfully notices her innuendo: "go, don't let me detain you from Cyril and his cigar."

He turns away abruptly, and gives the bell a rather sharp pull. He is so openly offended that Lillian's heart smites her.

"Who is misunderstanding now?" she says, with a decided change of tone.

"Shall you be long away, Sir Guy?"

"Not very," icily. "Thruston, as you know, is but a short drive from this."

"True." Then with charmingly innocent concern, "Don't you like going out so late?"—you see a little cross.

"Yes. But perhaps I mistake; I am always making mistakes," says Miss Lillian, humbly: "I am very unfortunate. And you know what Onida says, that 'one is so often thought to be sullen when only sad.' Are you sad?"

"No," says Guy, goaded past endurance: "I am not. But I should like to know what I have done that you should make a point at all times of treating me with incivility."

"Are you thinking of me?"—with a fine show of surprise, and widely opened eyes: "what can you mean? Why, I shouldn't dare be uncivil to my guardian. I should be afraid, I should positively die of fright," says Miss Chesney, feeling strongly inclined to laugh, and darting a little wicked gleam at him from her eyes as she speaks.

"Your manner"—bitterly—"fully bears out your words. Still I think—Why doesn't Granger bring round the carriage? Am I to give the same order half a dozen times?"—this to a petrified attendant who has answered the bell, and now vanishes, as though shot, to give it as his opinion downstairs that Sir Guy is in a "horrible way!"

"Poor man, how you have frightened him!" says Lillian, softly. "I am sorry if I have vexed you." Holding out a small hand of amity.—"Shall we make friends before you go?"

"It would be mere waste of time," replies she, ignoring the hand: "and besides, why should you force yourself to be on friendly terms with me?"

"You forget"—begins Lillian, somewhat haughtily, made very indignant by his refusal of her overture; but, Cyril and Lady Chetwoode entering at this moment simultaneously, the conversation dies.

"Now I am ready," Cyril says, cheerfully. "I took some of your cigars, Guy; they are rather better than mine; but the occasion is so felicitous I thought it demanded it. Do you mind?"

"You can have the box," replies Guy, curtly.

To leave a suspected rival in full possession of the field, smoking one's choicest weeds, is not a thing calculated to soothe a ruffled breast.

"Eh, you're not ill, old fellow, are you?" says Cyril, in his laziest, most good-natured tones. "The whole box I, come, my dear Lillian, I pine to finish them."

Miss Chesney finishes her peach in a hurry and prepares to follow him.

"Lillian, you are like a baby with a sweet tooth," says Lady Chetwoode. "Take some of those peaches out on the balcony with you, child; you seem to enjoy them. And come to me to the drawing-room when you tire of Cyril."

So the last thing Guy sees as he leaves the room is Lillian and his brother armed with peaches and cigars on their way to the balcony; the last thing he hears is a clear, sweet, ringing laugh that echoes through the house and falls like molten lead upon his heart.

He bangs the hall-door with much unnecessary violence, steps into the carriage, and goes to meet his cousin in about the worst temper he has given way to for years.

Half-past ten has struck. The drawing-room is ablaze with light. Lady Chetwoode, contrary to custom, is wide awake, the gray sock lying almost completed upon her lap. Lillian has been singing, but is now sitting silent with her idle little hands before her, while Cyril reads aloud to them decent extracts from the celebrated divorce case, now drawing to its unpleasant close.

"They ought to be here now," says Lady Chetwoode, suddenly, alluding not so much to the plaintiff, or the defendant, or the respondents, as to her eldest son and Miss Beauchamp. "The time is up."

Almost as she says the words the sound of carriage-wheels strikes upon the ear, and a few minutes later the door is thrown wide open and Miss Beauchamp enters.

Lillian starts at her with a good deal of

pardonable curiosity. Yes in spite of all that Cyril said, she is very nearly handsome. She is tall, *posee*, large and somewhat full, with rather prominent eyes. Her mouth is a little thin, but well shaped; her nose is perfect; her figure faultless. She is quite twenty-six (in spite of artificial aid), a fact that Lillian perceived with secret gratification.

She walks slowly up the room, a small Maltese terrier clasped in her arms, and presents a cool fresh cheek to Lady Chetwoode, as though she had parted from her but a few hours ago. All the worry and fatigue of travel have not told upon her: perhaps her maid and that mysterious closely-locked little morocco bag in the hall could tell upon her; but she looks as undisturbed in appearance and dress as though she had but just descended from her room, ready for a morning's walk.

"My dear Florence, I am glad to welcome you home," says Lady Chetwoode, affectionately, returning her chaste salute.

"Thank you, Aunt Anne," says Miss Beauchamp, in carefully modulated tones. "I, too, am glad to get home. It was quite delightful to find Guy waiting for me at the station."

She smiles a pretty ladylike smile upon Sir Guy as she speaks, he having followed her into the room. "How d'ye do, Cyril?" Cyril returns her greeting with due propriety, but expresses no hilarious joy at her return.

"This is Lillian Chesney whom I wrote to you about," Lady Chetwoode says, putting out one hand to Lillian. "Lillian, my dear, this is Florence."

The girls shake hands. Miss Beauchamp treats Lillian to a cold though perfectly polite stare, and then turns back to her aunt.

"It was a long journey, dear," sympathetically says "Aunt Anne."

"Very. I felt quite exhausted when I reached Trustron, and so did Fanchette; did you not, *ma bibiche*, my treasure?"—this to the little white stuffy ball of wool in her arms, which instantly opens two pink-lidded eyes, and puts out a crimson tongue, by way of answer. "If you don't mind, aunt, I think I should like to go to my room."

"Certainly, dear. And what shall I send you up?"

"A cup of tea, please, and—er—anything else there is. Elise will know what I fancy; I dined before I left. Good-night, Miss Chesney. Good-night, Guy; and thank you again very much for meeting me"—this very sweetly.

And then Lady Chetwoode accompanies her upstairs, and the first wonderful interview is at an end.

"Well?" says Cyril.

"I think her quite handsome," says Lillian, enthusiastically, for Guy's special benefit, who is sitting at a little distance glowering upon space. "Cyril, you are wanting in taste."

"Not when I admire you," replies Cyril, promptly. "Will you pardon me, Lillian, if I go to see to see if your cousin's comfort and substantial supper to my cousin? Her appetite is all that her best friend could wish."

So saying, he quits the room bent on some business of his own, that has very little to do, I think, with the refreshment of Miss Beauchamp's body.

When he has gone, Lillian takes up Lady Chetwoode's knitting and examines it critically. For the first time in her life she regrets not having given up some of her early years to the mastering of fancy work; then she lays it down again, and sighs heavily. The sigh says quite distinctly how tedious a thing it is being alone in the room with a man who will not speak to one. Better, far better, be with a dummy, from whom nothing could be expected.

Sir Guy, roused to activity by this dolorous sound, crosses the room and stands directly before her, a contrite expression upon his face.

"I have behaved badly," he says. "I confess my fault. Will you not speak to me, Lillian? His tone is half laughing, half penitent.

"Not"—smiling—"until you assure me you have left all your ill temper behind you at Trustron."

"I have. I wear it."

"You are sure?"

"Positive."

"I do hope you did not bestow it upon poor Miss Beauchamp?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I hope not," says Guy, lightly; and there is something both in his tone and words that restores Miss Chesney to amiability. She looks at him steadily for a moment, and then she smiles.

"I am forgiven?" says Guy, eagerly, taking courage from her smile.

"Yes."

"Shake hands with me, then," says he, holding out his own.

"You expect too much," returns Lillian, recoiling. "Only an hour ago, you refused to take my hand; how then can I now accept yours?"

"I was a brute, nothing less!" declares he, emphatically. "Yet do accept it, I implore you."

There is a good deal more meaning in his tone than even he himself is quite aware of. Miss Chesney either does not or will not see it. Raising her head, she laughs out loud, a low but thoroughly amused laugh.

"Any one listening would say you were proposing to me," she says, mischievously; whereupon he laughs too, and seats himself upon the low ottoman beside her.

"I shouldn't mind," he says; "should you?"

"Not much. I suppose one must go through it some time or other."

"Have you ever had a proposal?"

"Why do you compel me to give you an answer that must be humiliating? No; I have never had a proposal. But I dare say I shall have one or two before I die."

"I dare say. Unless you will now accept mine"—jestingly—"and make me the happiest of men."

"No thank you. You make me such an admirable guardian that I could not bear to depose you. You are now in a proud position (considering the ward you have); do not rashly seek to better it."

"Your words are golden. But all this time you are keeping me in terrible suspense. You have not yet quite made friends with me."

Then Lillian places her hand in his.

"Though you don't deserve it," she says, severely, "still—"

"Still you do accept me—it, I mean," interrupts Guy, purposely, closing his fingers warmly over hers. "I shall never forget that fact. Dear little hand!" softly caressing it, "did I really scorn it an hour ago? I beg its pardon very humbly."

"It is granted," answers Lillian gayly. But to herself she says, "I wonder how often he has gone through all this before?"

Nevertheless, in spite of doubts on both sides, the truce is signed for the present.

## CHAPTER X.

"How beautiful is the rain! After the dust and heat. To the dry grass and the drier grain. How welcome is the rain!"

—LONGFELLOW.

Miss Chesney, who, had she been born a man and a gardener, could have commanded any wages, is on her knees beside some green plants, busily hunting for slugs. The ravishers of baby flowers and innocent seedlings are Miss Chesney's especial abhorrence. It is in vain to tell her that they must be fed,—that they, as well as the leviathans, must have their daily food; she declines to look upon their frequent depredations in any other light than as wanton mischief.

Upon their destruction she wastes so much of her valuable time that, could there be a thought in their small, slimy, gelatinous bodies, they must look upon her as the fell destroyer of their race,—a sort of natural enemy.

She is guiltless of gloves, and, being heated in the chase, has flung her hat upon the velvet sward beside her. Whereupon the ardent sun, availing of the chance, is making desperate love to her, and is kissing with all its might her priceless complexion. It is a sight to make a town-bred damsel weep aloud!

Miss Beauchamp, sailing majestically towards this foolish maiden, with her diaphanous skirts trailing behind her, a huge hat upon her carefully arranged braids, and an enormous garden umbrella over all, looks with surprise, largely mingled with contempt, upon the kneeling figure. She marks the soft beauty of the skin, the exquisite penciling of the eye-brows, the rich color of the laughing lips, and, marking, feels some faint anger at the reckless extravagance of the owner of these unpurchasable charms.

To one long aware of the many advantages to be derived from such precious unguents as *creme d'ispan*, velvetine, and Chinese rouge, is known also all the fear of detection arising from the daily use of them. And to see another richly and freely endowed by Nature with all the most coveted tints, making light of the gift, seems to such a one a gross impertinence, a miserable want of gratitude, too deep for comprehension.

Pausing near Lillian, with the over-fed Maltese panting and puffing beside her, Miss Beauchamp looks down upon her curiously, upon the ruffled head, the little soiled hands, the ruffled golden hair, and calculates to a fraction the exact amount of mischief that may be done by the possession of so much youth and beauty.

The girl is too pretty. There is really no knowing what irremediable harm she may not have done already!

"What a man you are making of yourself!" says Florence, in a tone replete with ladylike disgust.

"I am, rather," says Lillian, holding aloft the small hand, on which five dusty fingers sport themselves, while she regards them contemplatively: "but I love it, gardening. I mean, I would have made a small fortune at flower-shows, had I given my mind to it earlier; not a prize would have escaped me."

"Every one with an acre of garden thinks that," says Miss Beauchamp, "Do they?" smiling up at the white goddess beside her. "Well, perhaps so. 'Hope springs eternal in the human breast,' and a good thing, too."

"Don't you think you will be likely to get a sunstroke?" remarks Florence, with indifferent concern.

"No; I am accustomed to go about without my hat," answered Lillian: "Of course as a rule I wear it, but it always gives me a feeling of suffocation; and as for a veil, I simply couldn't bear one."

Miss Beauchamp, glancing curiously at the peach-like complexion beneath her, wonders enviously how she does it, and then reflects with a certain sense of satisfaction that a very little more of this mad tampering with Nature's gifts will create such havoc as must call for the immediate aid of the inestimable Rimmel and his fellows.

The small terrier, awaking from the tenebrous snooze that always accompanies her moments of inactivity, whether she be standing or lying, now rolls over to Lillian and makes a fat effort to lick her dear little Grecian nose. At which let no one wonder, as a prettier little nose was never seen. But is Lillian so far unsympathetic that she strongly objects to the caress.

"Poor Fanchette!" she says, kindly recoiling a little, "you must forgive me, but the fact is I can't bear having my face licked. It is bad taste on my part. I know, and I hope you will grant me pardon. No, I cannot pet you either, because I think my earthy fingers would not improve your snowy coat."

"Come away, Fanchette, come away, petite, directly; do you hear?" cries Miss Beauchamp, in an agony lest the "scattered fleece of her" curled darling "should be defiled." "Come to its own mistress, then. Don't you see you are disturbing Lillian?" this last as a mild apology for the unaffected horror of her former tone.

So saying, she gathers up Fanchette, and retires into the shaded shrubberies beyond her.

Almost as she disappears from view, Guy comes upon the scene.

"Why, what are you doing?" he calls out while yet a few yards from her.

"I have been shocking your cousin," returns Lillian, laughing. "I doubt she thinks me a horrible, unladylike young woman. But I can't help that. See how I have soiled my hands!" holding up for his inspection her ten little grimy fingers.

"And done your utmost to ruin your complexion, all for the sake of a few pool slugs. What a bloodthirsty little thing you are!"

"I don't believe there is any blood in them," says Lillian.

"Do come away. One would think there wasn't a gardener about the place. You will make yourself ill, kneeling there in the sun; and look how warm you are: it's a positive shame."

But I have preserved the lives and the beauty of all these little plants."

"Never mind the plants. Think of your own beauty. I came here to ask you if you will come for a walk in the woods. I have just been there, and it is absolutely cool."

"I should like to immensely," springing to her feet; "but my hands,—hesitating,—"what am I to do with them? Shall I run in and wash them? I shan't be one minute."

"Oh, no!"—hastily, having a wholesome horror of women's minutes; "come down to the stream, and we will wash them there."

This suggestion, savoring of unconventionalality, finds favor in Miss Chesney's eyes, and they start going through the lawn, for the tiny rivulet that runs between it and the longed-for woods.

Kneeling beside it, Lillian lets the fresh gurgling waters trail through her fingers, until all the dust falls from them and floats away on its bosom; then reluctantly she withdraws her hands and, rising looks at them somewhat ruefully.

"Now, how shall I dry them?" asks she glancing at the drops of water that fall from her fingers and glint and glisten like diamonds in the sun's rays.

"In your handkerchief," suggests Guy. "But then it will be wet, and I should hate that. Give me yours," says Miss Chesney, with calm selfishness.

Guy laughs and produces an unopened handkerchief in which he carefully, and it must be confessed, very tardily, dries her fingers one by one.

"Do you always take as long as that to dry your own hands?" asks Lillian, gravely, when he has arrived at the third finger of the second hand.

"Always!" without a blush.

"Your dressing, altogether, must take a long time?"

"Not so long as you imagine. It is only on my hands I expend so much care."

"And on mine," suggestively.

"Exactly so. Do you never wear rings?"

"Never. And for the best reason."

"And that?"

"Is because I haven't any to wear. I have a few of my mother's but they are old-fashioned and heavy, and look very silly on my hands. I must get them reset."

"I like rings on pretty hands, such as yours."

"And Florence's. Yes, she has pretty hands, and pretty rings also."

"Has she?"

"What! Would you have me believe you never noticed them? Oh, Sir Guy, how deceitful you can be!"

"Now, that is just the very one vice of which I am entirely innocent. You wrong me. I can't be deceitful to save my life. I always think it must be so fatiguing. Most young ladies have pretty hands, I suppose; but I never noticed those of Miss Beauchamp, or her rings either, in particular. Are you fond of rings?"

"Passionately fond," laughing. "I should like to have every finger and both my thumbs covered with them up to the first knuckle."

"And nobody ever gave you one?"

"Nobody," shaking her head emphatically. "Wasn't it unkind of them?"

With this remark Sir Guy does not condescend to see her, and they walk on some yards without speaking. Presently Lillian, whose thoughts are rapid, finding the stillness irksome, breaks it.

"Sir Guy—"

"Miss Chesney."

As they all call her "Lillian," she glances up at him in some surprise at the strangeness of his address.

"Well, and why not," says he, answering the unmistakable question in her eyes, "when you call me 'Sir Guy' I wish you would not."

"Why? Is it not your name?"

"Yes, but it is so formal. You call Cyril by his name, and even with my mother you have dropped all formality. Why are you different with me? Can you not call me 'Guy'?"

"Guy! Oh, I couldn't. Every time the name passed my lips I should faint with horror at my own temerity. What! call my guardian by his Christian name? How can you even suggest the idea? Consider your age and bearing."

"One would think I was ninety," says he rather piqued.

"Well, you are not far from it," teasingly. "However, I don't object to a compromise. I will call you Uncle Guy, if you wish it."

"Nonsense!" indignantly. "I don't want to be your uncle."

"No! Then Brother Guy."

"That would be equally foolish."

"You won't, then, claim relationship with me" in a surprised tone. "I fear you look upon me as a *mauvais sujet*. Well, then,"—with sudden inspiration,—"I know what I shall do. Like Esther Summerson, in 'Blak House,' I shall call you 'Guardian.' There!" clapping her hands, "is not that the very thing? Guardian you shall be, and it will remind me of my duty to you every time I mention your name. Or perhaps,—hesitating—"Guardy" will be prettier."

"I wish I wasn't your guardian," Guy says, somewhat sadly.

"Don't be unkind than you can help, reproachfully. "You won't be my brother, or my guardian? What is it, then, that you would be?"

To this question he could give a very concise answer, but does not dare do so. He therefore maintains a discreet silence, and relieves his feelings by taking the heads of three dandelions that chance to come in his path.

"Does it give you so very much trouble, the guardianship of poor little me," she asks, with a mischievous though charming smile, "that you so much regret it?"

"It isn't that," he answers, slowly, "but I fear you look coldly on me in consequence of it. You do not make me your friend, and that's unjust, because it was not my fault. I did not ask to be your guardian; it was your father's wish entirely. You should not blame me for what he insisted on."

"I don't,"—gayly,—and I forgive you for having acceded to poor papa's proposal: so don't fret about it. After all,"—naughtily,—"I dare say I might have got worse; you aren't half bad so far, which is why of you, because I warn you I am an *enfant gâté*; and should you dare to thwart me I should lead you such a life as would make you rue the day you were born."

"You speak as though it were my desire to thwart you."

"Well, perhaps it is. At all events,—with a relieved sigh,—"I have warned you and now it is off my mind. By the by, I was going to say something to you a few minutes ago when you interrupted me."

"What was it?"

"I want you"—coaxingly—"to take me round by the Cottage, so that I may get a glimpse at this wonderful widow."

"It would be no use; you would not see her."

"But I might?"

"And if so what would you gain by it? She is very much like other women; she has only one nose, and not more than two eyes."

"Nevertheless she rouses my curiosity. Why have you such a dislike to the poor woman?"

"Oh, no dislike," says Guy, the more hastily in that he feels there is some truth in the accusation. "I don't quite trust her: that is all."

"Still, take me near the Cottage; do, now, Guardy," says Miss Chesney, softly, turning two exquisite appealing blue eyes upon him, which of course settles the question. They instantly turn and take the direction that leads to the Cottage.

But their effort to see the mysterious widow is not crowned with success. To Miss Chesney's sorrow and Sir Guy's secret joy, the house appears as silent and devoid of life as though, indeed, it had never been inhabited. With many a backward glance and many a wistful look Lillian goes by while Guy carefully suppresses all expressions of satisfaction and trudges on silently beside her.

"She must be out," says Lillian, after a lengthened pause.

"She must be always out so," says Guy, "because she is never to be seen."

"You must have come here a great many times to find that out," says Miss Chesney, captiously; which remark puts a stop to all conversation for some time.

And indeed luck is dead against Lillian, for no sooner has she passed out of sight than Mrs. Arlington steps from her door, and, armed with a book and a parasol, makes for the small and shady arbor situated at the end of the garden.

But if Lillian's luck has deserted her, Cyril's has not. He has walked down here this evening in a rather desponding mood, having made the same journey vainly for the last three days, and now—just as he has reached despair—finds himself in Mrs. Arlington's presence.

"Good-evening," he says, gayly, feeling rather elated at his good fortune, raising his hat.

"Good-evening," returns she, with a faint blush born of a vivid recollection of all that passed at their last meeting.

"I had no idea I should see you to-day," says Cyril; which is the exact truth,—for a wonder.

"Why? You always see me when you come round here, don't you?" says Mrs. Arlington; which is not the truth, she having been the secret witness of his coming many times, when she has purposely abstained from being seen.

"I hope," says Cyril, gently, "you have forgiven me for having inadvertently offended you last month."

"Last week, you mean?" in a surprised tone.