

STELLA: OR, AT CROSS PURPOSES.

CHAPTER XXII. (CONTINUED.)

Walter stood by the billiard-table idly knocking the balls about with his hand, and yawning at intervals as though he was bored beyond description.

"Walter," said his brother, suddenly stopping short before him, "I hope you are going to behave well to that poor little thing."

"What poor little thing, Edgar?" was the listless reply.

"You know very well who I mean—Miss Finch."

"What has Miss Finch to do with me? She is probably going to die—such a nuisance a death in a house is!"

Sir Edgar winced.

"I cannot believe you to be so heartless and so unfeeling as you make yourself out," he said, indignantly. "The very fact of your remaining here proves that you are not insensible to the danger she is in."

"Does it?" he said, carelessly.

"Walter, I do hope and trust if—when she gets well, you mean to marry the poor girl. Do, pray, be open with me about it. I am only anxious that you should do what is right, and I will make you an allowance; it will not be very much, but it will be as much as I can afford, to enable you to marry her and live quietly."

"My dear fellow," said Walter, with a lazy laugh, "you are really very good, but I haven't the slightest intention of marrying the children's governess!"

"You have allowed her to love you; you have caressed her, and you have not offered to marry her!" cried Sir Edgar, hotly and indignantly. "I cannot believe you to be so unmanly."

Walter laughed again.

"Do you suppose I have offered to marry every woman I have kissed in my life? I should have had enough to do if I had!" with a sneer. "Girls should be able to take care of themselves, and not allow themselves to be kissed."

"But she is so young, and timid, and weak!" said Sir Edgar; "she does not understand how to take care of herself; surely Walter, you will not be so base as to take advantage of her youth and inexperience?"

"Really, Edgar, you seem to take a remarkable interest in Miss Finch and her doings. I am sure, my dear fellow, I did not know I was poisoning your preserves."

Sir Edgar colored deeply.

"You know very well that I am engaged to Lady Honoria," he said, gravely.

"Yes, of course, and that being the case, suppose we leave little Lily Finch alone—I'll look after her so if I can. I'm sorry she is ill, and still more so if I should be the cause of her illness; but these sort of girls don't die of a broken heart; and as to marrying her, why, there are many good reasons against it. I dare say the mother will look after her; and if I were you, I wouldn't risk Lady Honoria's displeasure by displaying your interest in her quite so plainly."

He laughed good-naturedly and rather scornfully, and Sir Edgar turned away, feeling that there was little that he could say in answer to him, and hoping in his heart that Walter made himself out to be worse than he really was.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WHITE HYACINTH.

But Lily did not die; she battled through her disease with all the strength of her healthy constitution and her twenty summers, and came back again, poor child, to all the vexed questions and the unspeakable sorrows of her life.

Lady Dyson had made her plans: she had not been idle whilst she had been waiting upon her, and now, when Lily was strong enough to bear it, she proceeded to unfold to her what she had determined upon doing with her.

The first time that Lily sat up, pale, and thin, and weak, in a big arm-chair, drawn up before the fire, Lady Dyson came into her room and took her kindly by the hand.

"Dear me! this is famous to see you up—how do you feel, my dear?"

Lily smiled gently and gratefully.

"Very much better! Oh! Lady Dyson, how can I ever thank you enough for all your goodness to me!" and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh! never mind that, Lily—of course I have done what I could—and now you must be a good girl, and do what I tell you without any fuss."

"I will do anything you wish, Lady Dyson."

"That is right, my dear. Well, Lily, I have determined to send you away to the seaside."

The look of startled dismay in Lily's face told Lady Dyson instantly how distasteful the idea was to her. She went on, hurriedly:

"Yes, I think an immediate change will be a great thing for you. You would not, of course, be able to resume your studies for a long time, probably not for three months, Dr. Graham says; but I have determined that I will engage somebody temporarily to teach the children, so that you may be able to return to me when you are well enough."

"You are very, very kind," murmured Lily.

"What I have settled to do is to send you to an old nurse of mine, who is married and settled at Sandport in Essex—she keeps lodgings—it is a quiet little place, but very healthy, and I hope you will soon pick up your health and strength there. I shall send Barnes down with you, and shall pay for you all the time you are there; you shall have no expenses and no worries—nothing, in fact, to do but to get strong."

"How very good you are," said Lily, and yet the poor child looked up at her wistfully and longingly; there was something terrible to her in this sentence of exile from Barfield. "And you will let me come back here afterwards, Lady Dyson?" she asked, timidly.

Lady Dyson smiled, and smoothed down the folds of her rich silk dress.

"Well," she answered, "not exactly here, my dear, because there are to be some changes in the family. I and the children are going to live at a smaller house in the neighboring county, Sutley Manor—you must have heard us mention it; it belongs to me, but it has been let of late years, but

now I am going to live there; it is there you will come back to us."

Lily, pale and weak as she was, sat up in her arm-chair, clasping her hands nervously together.

"What?" she cried, tremblingly, and her eyes were full of startled dismay. "Oh! what do you mean, Lady Dyson?"

"My dear, do not be excited," answered the elder lady, laying her hand gently upon her shoulder; "it is nothing to make you look so frightened, child. You must be told sooner or later, my dear—Sir Edgar is going to be married," and in spite of herself, Lady Dyson felt that her heart filled with pity and compassion as she spoke the fatal words.

Lily sank back, white and trembling, among her pillows; for an instant Lady Dyson thought she was going to faint, and she reached out her hand for the salt-bottle, but Lily pushed back her hand gently, and a sudden crimson glow flooded her thin face.

"No, thank you, I don't feel ill—I hope I will be very happy, Lady Dyson."

"Yes, my dear, I hope so too," she answered, infinitely relieved by the girl's quiet voice and manner. She had dreaded a scene, but evidently Lily was going to take the news well and bravely.

"Is it Lady Honoria?" said Lily presently.

"Yes, it is Lady Honoria; I think she will make him a good wife, and it is a most suitable marriage in every way."

"I think she loves him," said Lily, slowly, "and I am very glad it is her."

Then there was a long silence. Lily rested her cheek upon her hand, and gazed long and abstractedly into the fire; Lady Dyson sat by her, watching her somewhat apprehensively. It was strange how much her heart had become drawn towards the poor, little despised governess whom she had nursed through her illness, and how sorry she felt for her. Lady Dyson could not help acknowledging to herself that Lily was behaving wonderfully well, and she felt so grateful to her for not fainting or going into hysterics, or behaving generally like a love-sick maiden, that she even leaned forward and kissed her.

Lily drew a long shivering sigh, and turned to her.

"And he will be married when I come back to you, Lady Dyson?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear. It is better so, don't you think so?"

"Very likely—oh! yes; it is far better, Lady Dyson," with a slight flush—"may I see him once before I go?"

"No, my dear, I think not."

"There is something I would like to say—only a few words."

"I don't think it would be wise, Lily; I am afraid I cannot allow it."

Her head sank back with a little sigh, and her eyes closed. She said nothing more, and Lady Dyson, after sitting quietly by her side for some minutes, fancied she must have dropped off to sleep. So she crept slowly away on tiptoe out of the room, and left her alone.

When she was gone Lily eyes opened once more, and fixed themselves again with a cold, miserable stare upon the flames.

"Never to see him again," she murmured, "never to tell him that he was mistaken—that I was not false or untrue to him. Oh! it is hard! but perhaps it is better for me; I must learn to live without him—it will be better to begin at once."

Meanwhile, Lady Dyson had found her son below in his library; an open letter was in his hand. He turned quickly to his mother as she entered.

"How is she—how has she borne the move to the armchair?" he asked, eagerly.

"Oh! very well, indeed; I think she is in a fair way to get well now. Dr. Graham recommends her going to the seaside."

"Of course, that will be the best thing for her. I have had a letter from Lord Alchester, mother, and one from Honoria, too, they want me to go over for a few days; I suppose I had better go."

"Certainly, you had better go. You ought to have gone before, Edgar."

"Yes, perhaps. Mother, when will Miss Finch go to the sea, do you think?"

"Oh! not before Saturday. To-day is Monday. She will not be strong enough to move till the end of the week."

"Very well, then, I will go to Alchester Towers to-morrow, and be back on Friday. The fact is, I want to see Miss Finch before she goes away."

"My dear boy, you cannot possibly do her any good. I do not see the object of it."

"I mean to see her," he answered so decidedly that Lady Dyson knew he was determined to have his own way. She was dreadfully afraid of that interview. Good and docile as Lily was, who could tell what she might not say or do to upset Sir Edgar's engagement were she to be alone with him?

"I do not see what good you can do her," she repeated. "It will only be making her ill again for nothing. She is very weak still."

"She will be stronger by Friday," answered Sir Edgar quietly.

And Lady Dyson was clever enough to raise no further objection.

Sir Edgar went away on the morrow. What he intended to have said to Lily on his return he probably hardly knew himself. Before he went away he was weak enough to go into the empty school-room, where he had so often spoken words of love to her, and where his last sight of her had been, alas! encircled by the arms of his own brother.

His heart smote him as he stood once more in the dingy, deserted little room. All the children had been sent away, as a matter of precaution, directly their governess had been taken ill. The chairs were ranged against the wall, the books were all packed away upon the shelves; there was no pleasant litter of copy-books and slates upon the table.

Edward Dyson turned away sadly and mournfully from the familiar room. Would he ever see her again, he wondered, the poor little girl whom he had loved so fatally, and whose weakness and frivolity had prevented her from being true to him? Poor little thing! she loved him, doubtless a little. She was sorry, very likely, by this time for what she had done; but it was too late now.

He sighed deeply. The brougham stood at the door to take him to the station; his mother was in the hall to wish him good-bye. He kissed her, and listened to her parting words absent and not very attentively,

and stood for a minute at the open door putting on his gloves.

It was a balmy April day. Outside along the house wall was a long, close-set row of white hyacinths just in bloom. The warm, heavy scent came up in a delicious whiff of fragrance to where he stood. He glanced up at a certain closed window at the farther corner of the house. Did any breath of spring flowers creep into that sick room he wondered?

"You will be late, Edgar," said his mother.

He stooped down suddenly, and gathered one of the delicate waxen blossoms, and stepped back hurriedly into the house.

"Mother," he said, in a low voice, so that the servants might not hear them, "give her this, and tell her that I shall see her when I come home."

He thrust the flower into her hand, and turning hastily ran away, sprang into the carriage, and in another instant was gone.

As to Lady Dyson, she stood for some minutes alone in the hall, contemplating the white blossom in her hand. She turned it slowly over and over, as though she expected to find out some hidden meaning in its pure and stainless petals.

"The height of folly!" she said to herself, at last. "But I don't suppose it can do much harm."

And then she took the hyacinth up-stairs, and laid it upon Lily's lap.

"Sir Edgar has gone away, and he has sent you this," she said to her.

But she spoke no words about his intending to see her when he came back. That was not at all in the programme that Lady Dyson had laid out for the disposal of Lily Finch and her love troubles.

After she had given her the flower she was charitable enough to leave her alone; and when she was gone, Lily lifted the little peace-offering to her lips, and burst into a flood of tears as she pressed it to her face.

"It was to wish me good-bye," she said to herself, brokenly. "And he had forgiven me; but he will never see me again!"

And, like a tired child, poor Lily sobbed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN EVENING MEETING.

There was a ferment of unwonted excitement at Wrexham Hall. There were people coming and going, boxes and parcels arriving from London, a perpetual chattering amongst the women-folk of the establishment, for the wedding preparations for the 1st of May were in full swing. Mr. King had been liberal to his granddaughter in the matter of trousseau, and there came down from London many beautiful and costly garments for the bride-elect.

Cecily was not at all above being genuinely delighted and interested by this part of the proceedings.

"I wonder whether any woman ever got a trousseau for her marriage in such a queer way before?" she said to herself more than once, with a keen sense of the ludicrous, which no stings from her slumbering conscience could serve to stifle, as she bent over the rich satin which Stella was unpacking, and echoed her own warm admiration of its delicate beauties.

Poor Stella! she tried hard to be pleased and happy, but it was dreadful work going about with a smiling face with that never-ceasing pain at her heart.

"I shall get used to it in time," she would say to herself, "and dearly as I love them both, it ought to be easy enough. I must be very wicked not to rejoice more in my only sister's happiness!"

And then, with a pang, she remembered that, but for that foolish, childish freak long ago at Valency, when she had deceived her mother for the sake of an hour of stolen and doubtful pleasure, she, Stella, might have been in Cecily's place to-day.

"He took a disgust to me then, and no wonder; and then my dreadful temper did the rest. But for that, he might have cared for me."

And the sting of it all was the knowledge that her own folly had cost her her life's happiness.

Surely no silly, unreasoning escapade of early girlhood had ever been more dearly paid for!

During these days Norman went and came between London and Wrexham, and saw but little of the two sisters; for when he was at home he was closeted chiefly in Mr. King's library, where there was a great overhauling of family deeds and papers, and where the great question of settlements was supposed to be under discussion.

How painfully and terribly anxious Cecily felt during these conferences, and how intensely she longed to know how things were being arranged, no one could ever say. So great was her anxiety, indeed upon the subject, that, clever actress as she was, she could not quite succeed in hiding it from Stella's notice.

"I would not think about it, Cecily, if I were you," her sister could not help saying to her once, after Cecily's impatience concerning the settlements had betrayed itself almost too plainly. "I don't think it looks very well for a girl to think so much about the money when she is just going to be married."

"Do you suppose he is making his will?" was Cecily's only rejoinder.

"I dare say, dear. But what does it matter? You know very well that grandpa will behave well to you. You and Norman will be very well off. I don't think the details can matter very much."

"You know nothing about it!" she cried, impatiently; and then, with a nervous laugh, she added: "He might leave everything to Norman and nothing to me!"

"Well," replied Stella, smiling, "since Norman is to be your husband, that would not matter much. Of course everything that is his is yours also."

"That might not always be the case. Suppose we were to separate?"

"To separate! Good heavens! Cecily," cried Stella, aghast. "Fancy talking about separation, when you are only to be married in a week!"

"Oh! I was only joking, of course."

But she sighed, and looked so thoroughly worried, that Stella felt quite uneasy about her, not knowing what to make of her.

Far away, among the green slopes of the park, was an ancient and ruined tower. No one quite knew what had been its original purpose, nor who, in the generations that were passed away, had built it there. It was just a round stone tower, with a low doorway, and no remains of windows. The roof had long fallen in, but thick bushes and

a young mountain-ash had planted their roots in the scanty dust of the crumbling walls, and had roofed it in with greenery from the rain and the sun. A small coppice surrounded it, and there was no pathway through the tangled nettles and briars that had grown up in wild disorder on every side of it.

It was within the shelter of this desolate building that a man stood waiting one evening, just after dusk, with his hands in his pockets, and a short black pipe in his mouth.

Every now and then he stooped down and looked out of the low doorway, and then he knocked out the ashes of his pipe against the rough stone wall, and replaced it between his lips.

"She can't even be punctual now," he muttered, angrily, to himself; "it's too bad having to hang about in a damp, beastly hole like this, in the dark. I shan't stand over of it, so I can tell her. Hallo! here you are at last! I'm so sick of waiting for you!"

The tall dark figure of a woman, wrapped in a long cloak, came towards him, brushing through the undergrowth of the wood.

"I am sorry, Walter, I could not get away!" Norman—

"Yes—yes; always the cousin, I know," he interrupted roughly. "I'll tell you what, I am dead sick of the whole thing! I hate all this maneuvering and plotting, and I am bored to death with hanging about this country doing nothing. Money or no money, I shall cut it and go back to Paris; if you don't like to come, you may stop here by yourself."

Unseen in the darkness, Cecily's eyes filled with tears. She had no great power of loving anybody, but such heart as she had to give, certainly belonged to this man who, alas! for her, had neither truth nor honor, nor any single high principle in his worthless character.

"I don't think you are very kind," she said, reproachfully, "when you know how hard I am working for your future welfare and benefit."

He laughed roughly.

"Yes, you are getting a fine trousseau for yourself, and a handsome lover into the bargain!"

"Why, I do believe you are jealous, Walter!"

"Not I; but the farce is a little too good. How long, pray, is it going to last?"

"Only a few days longer."

"And how, pray, are you going to end it?"

"I will tell you," she said; "listen."

She drew his face down to hers, and whispered something in his ear.

Walter Dyson stepped back a pace or two.

"Upon my word, you are a bold woman!" he said, and there was a tone of startled and not very flattering admiration in his voice.

"I suppose you know you might deserve some very ugly names if any one knew—"

"No one is ever likely to know but you; and you are not likely to betray me."

"And if it fails?"

"I don't think it will; if it does, of course I must come to you all the same, and the game will be lost."

"And the will?"

"The will is all right; the money is left to me in my own name absolutely; the house to Norman. I have only found out it to-night—Norman has just told me; it is all drawn up ready: it is only waiting to be signed."

"It is not signed, then? Why not?"

"It is a fancy of the old man's; he will not sign it till the evening before the wedding. There is an old cousin coming down from town, and Norman tells me he has a fancy that he should witness the will, so it will not be signed till then; that is why I can do nothing till the very day. But it will only make the shock the greater. Whatever happens, do not forget; eight o'clock in the morning with your dog-cart in the road behind the wall of the orchard; wet or fine, I will be there."

"And glad enough I shall be to be off," said the young man.

He was slightly mollified by this time, and had passed his arm round her waist; he bent down and kissed her carelessly. He was selfish and heartless and unprincipled, but after all he admired her, and her pluck and daring filled him with a certain amount of respect for her cleverness and cunning.

Cecily went home with a heightened color and a beating heart.

Meanwhile, all unknown to her, within this very hour the fates had already decided against her. Whilst she had been speeding noiselessly and swiftly to her tryst with Walter Dyson in the deserted tower, Dr. Graham's gig had almost by accident turned in at the Wrexham Gates.

The doctor was a privileged and valued friend. As he entered unannounced into Mr. King's private room, Stella rose from her knees by the old man's side, and slipped quietly from the room.

"That is my granddaughter, doctor," said Mr. King, in explanation.

"She is very pretty—prettier than her sister, I think. Is she the one who is going to be married next week?"

"No, it is the younger one."

"Ah! yes," said Dr. Graham, almost involuntarily; "the one who called upon me, I remember now."

Mr. King looked at him in surprise.

"Called upon you, did she? What was that for? Was she ill?"

"No; she was not ill; she called to ask me about you—about your health. I thought she seemed very fond of you, and very anxious—affectionate sort of girl, I should say. It was one evening late, about a month ago she came. I could not think who she was at first. I suppose the girl is very fond of you, Mr. King?"

"Umph!" said Mr. King, and looked straight in front of him for some minutes without speaking; then he roused himself with an effort, and spoke to the doctor about some change in his medicine. There were a few commonplace words between them, and then Dr. Graham rose to go.

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. King?" he inquired, cheerily, as he stood buttoning up his coat.

"You are going back to Loughton, Graham?"

"Yes, instantly."

"Then would you please tell Norris, as you go by, to jump on his horse and come over here to me at once; he is to come instantly, remember—not to lose a moment's time."

Now, Mr. Norris was the solicitor who had drawn up Mr. King's will.

He sat for some time after the doctor's departure plunged in thought.

"I will make things safe," he said to himself. "The money shall be all left to Stella in trust, until Cecily has been married to Norman three months; to revert to Stella entirely if Cecily does not revert to her engagement, the little bit! She has been fretting about to find out how long I will likely to live! but I'll be even with her yet." And the old man chuckled maliciously to himself.

And then came Mr. Norris, the attorney turning to him as he entered. "A little matter of business, I won't detain you long. I am going to add a codicil to my will."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Cholera in Egypt.

A letter from Cairo to the London Standard says: Dr. Schaffey Bay, who was dispatched by the Egyptian government to report on the origin of the outbreak of cholera at Damietta, has issued his report. It gives an account of the almost insupportable sanitary state of the town and of the mode of life of the inhabitants. Schaffey Bay finally concludes that the theory of the transportation of the disease from India is altogether untenable, and he draws up his conclusions as follows:

"We find that, besides the points already noted, which stamp Damietta as the type of an unclean town, there are the following circumstances to be considered:

"1. The mouth of a river dried up by prolonged drought, with its banks and part of its muddy bed fermented under the sun's action, exposed.

"2. The river carrying along with it the depositing them at the bend formed at Damietta) thousands of carcasses of animals which it throws up at its edges, to be carried back by the waves of the sea.

"3. It is at this place that the river receives the outcome of the drains, animal and vegetable refuse, and all sorts of filth which the current can not carry off, being blown back by the waves of the sea.

"4. The miasmata generated by all the putrefying matter here mixes with the vegetable effluvia rising from the masses from a soil full of organisms, and from the wide rice-fields which surround the town.

"5. It is the water of this river which supplied all the needs of most of the inhabitants and of more than fifteen thousand persons from various parts of Egypt: assembled at Damietta for eight consecutive days at the fair of Sheikh Abu el Mar. An analysis of this water by the government expert proves it to teem with impurities.

"6. During the eight days of the regular orgies were held, exclusively of the flesh of animals who died of bovine typhus and whose skins now fill the store-houses of the town.

"7. It was immediately after the outbreak of the disease broke out.

"8. The 19th, 20th, and 21st of July were marked here by a sudden rise of temperature.

"9. The epidemic broke out chiefly in the most unhealthy and thickly populated quarter, inhabited by the poor, who drank only the water of the river and canal.

"10. The disease remained for some time localized at Damietta before spreading further, and its spread was invariably limited to towns on the river, or carried by sick emigrants from Damietta, as proved by the towns of Port Said, Alexandria, Ismailia, and Suez.

"These facts seem to prove that the conditions, cosmic and hydroclimatic, which are present at the genesis of cholera in the Indian delta and on the banks of the Ganges, were accidentally observable one year in the Egyptian delta and on the banks of the Nile."

There is much more of interest in the report, but the above extracts give the point of it. From personal knowledge of the town of Damietta I am able to vouch for the accuracy of the description of it. As to the remarks on the water supply, they hold good more or less in regard to any town in Egypt. It is probable that Dr. Hunter, on his return from the inspection he is now making, will be able to add further to our knowledge of the cradle from which cholera sprang this year.

A parliamentary paper had been issued containing a report from Surgeon-General Hunter to Sir Edward Malet on the cholera epidemic in Egypt. The report, which is dated Cairo, Aug. 6, states that "it is simply an abuse of words to talk of sanitation in connection with Cairo. Every sanitary law being grossly set at defiance; and that 'conditions for the development and spread of disease in almost every form, epidemic or otherwise, abound. They are here, there, and everywhere present to the sight, smell, and taste.' After expressing the opinion that in all essential features the type of the epidemic does not differ from cholera as it is experienced in India, Surgeon-General Hunter proceeds:

"It is gratifying to be able to state that the epidemic is on the wane, although still widespread over the country; and the type is usual in declining epidemics, is much less severe. The number of deaths from the disease reported up to the 31st of July is said to be 12,600. Registration is, however, so defective that this statement must be taken with much reservation. I am inclined to think that it is nearly double this total. The organization of the medical department is in a most primitive condition, and many of its officers are quite incompetent. The latter are broadly accused of being ignorant and neglecting their duty through personal fear. That there are many honorable exceptions to this rule I believe; nevertheless, the allegations preferred have come to my personal knowledge. In pleasant contrast to this I would observe that the Egyptian soldiers