Her Great Love;

Or, A Struggle For a Heart

CHAPTER XIII.—(Cont'd).

"It is lunch-time?" said Gaunt, looking at the old clock and speaking in a casual way. "Seeing that I have been—well, particularly good this morning, wouldn't you like to reward me by coming up to the Hall and eating your lunch with me? Do; it's—well, rather solitary up there."

He looked at Bobby, but glanced at Decima.

"All right," said Bobby, promptly.

"Father——" began Decima; but Bobby waved the objection aside.

"Father takes a biscuit and a glass of sherry in his den, you know," he said. "Besides, there are several things at the Hall I want to find fault with," said Gaunt; and he turned in the direction of the house, as if taking her assent for granted.

Decima yielded without another word, and they passed up the avenue—there was a gang of men working on the road—and into the Hall.

Gaunt looked round, and then at Decima.

"The place looks very different to what it did on your first visit," he said, quietly. "There has been some sunshine in it."

"Oh, yes," said Decima, innocently. "That big window wanted cleaning. I was so nervous about it, for I was afraid they might break some of the stained glass; and I knew it couldn't possibly be replaced; but they were very good and did not break even the tiniest pane."

They went into the morning-room, where lunch was laid, and the butler and the footman, promptly set the necessary additions for the three unexpected guests. Then Gaunt placed Decima's chair beside his own, and with a nod dismissed the servants.

"You shall help the potatoes, Deane; and perhaps Miss Deane will cut the bread. We'll wait upon ourselves. That's clared, it you'll open it, Bright, while I carve the fowl. Miss Deane, I hope you are hungry. I have the appetite which I feel I deserve. A thick slice, please. Ah, mind your hand!" he broke off.

Decima laughed.

"I shall not cut myself. You forget that I am used to it now."

She cut herself two mouthings running at the first go off," said Bobby; "and I never see her wield a knife without a shudder, lest the weapon should slip from her hand and dig into some part of my anatomy."

Decima laughed brightly.

"Don't believe him, Lord Gaunt. It was only once, and it was an old knife with a sharp back. Bobby is an exaggerator. I am not so clumsy as he makes me out."

Gaunt looked at the graceful figure, at the white hand so deftly and yet with a certain girlish caution using the big knife and smiled. "Clumsy! The girl every action and movement was grace itself. Then he looked away suddenly and began to talk.

Was this the grim, preoccupied man she had met in the Zoo? Decima thought, as she listened with her eyes fixed on his face, and her eloquent mouth molded to a smile.

As for Bobby and Bright, they were in the seventh heaven of enjoyment; for with the tact and skill of a man of the world, Gaunt was making the meal a delightful one for them. All through all his efforts, so perfectly concealed he glanced now, and again at the beautiful face beside him with a curious expression in his eyes. He did not overwhelm her with attention, rarely addressed her directly, but he got her everything she wanted with his own hands.

"You haven't found any fault yet, Lord Gaunt," said Decima, suddenly.

He looked up and smiled.

"You wait," he said, almost like Bobby. "Wait until you have had your lunch and are strengthened to hear it. I have a great deal to cry, I assure you."

"I'm quite ready," said Decima, leaning back, her eyes smiling into his. "I don't believe you have any fault to find."

"Come with me, then," he said. "You'll find some cigars and cigarettes in the sideboard, you fellows. Smoke where you like. It's Bachelor's—for an instant he hesitated, and the faint smile faded from his eyes, but the hesitation was only momentary and not noticed by the others——Bachelor's Hall, and I smoke everywhere. Come with me, and I'll show you."

They went into the hall, Decima walking beside him, and entered the drawing-room.

"How have you managed to transform the grim old place into a palace of beauty?" he said, looking round the newly decorated and furnished apartment. "It is wonderful, wonderful! And the change, the transformation, runs all through the house. I've sat in this chair who ordered it? They had gone into the library, but Bobby and Bright had remained in the hall.

"Who?" said Decima, unconsciously. "Oh, I did. I wanted an easy-chair. Do you like it? Have you sat in it? Is it really comfortable?"

"It is," he said. "You ordered it? Have you tried it?"

Decima shook her head. "No."

"Try it, and let me see how you like it," he said.

She sat down and leaned back, looking up at him with a smile.

"It is delicious!" she said. "Are you going to find fault with this?"

He did not answer for a moment, but stood looking at her as if lost in thought. Then he said, hastily:

"Yes, it is too comfortable. I sat there last night. I shall sit there every night——" He broke off suddenly. "It will tempt me to be lazy, and I have so much to do."

Decima colored and looked at him timidly.

"Have we Mr. Bright and I asked for too much?" she said. "You will be sorry that you have come. Perhaps you are already?"

His eyes rested on her with a strange smile.

"No, I am not sorry," he said. "I hope you are not will never be."

Decima opened her eyes upon him.

"Oh, why should I be?" she said, innocently.

He looked down at her rather gravely.

"I meant that I hoped you might not be disappointed in me," he said. "I am full of good intentions, aroused by you and Mr. Bright," he added quickly. "But good intentions well, we all know how unreliable they are."

She was silent a moment, then she said:

"You mean that it will be very dull for you, and that you may want to go? But will it be so dull? Bobby says that you will have plenty of visitors, that all the county people will come and see you, and are eager to welcome you."

He took a pace or two across the room.

"I shall see no one," he said, quietly but decidedly. "I hate society. I mean"—for he was conscious that the frank eyes were regarding him with grave surprise—"I like quietude, solitude."

A faint color grew in her cheeks.

"And yet you asked Bobby and me to come here to-day."

"That is different," he said, quickly. "I meant solitude shared by you—and your brother. You do not understand. You could not, unless you knew what my life has been——" He broke off, warned, so to speak, by her wondering eyes. "Society, as it is understood, is hateful to me," he said; "it drives me mad. But if you will let me see you and your brother as often as you can—well, my good intentions might prove more durable than wont. Miss Deane——" He stopped, frowned, then went on, Decima's eyes fixed on him with gentle intentness. "I have taken a liking to your brother. I want to have him for a friend. I haven't another friend in the world. He may not care to have my friendship; I am so much older."

"Are you so very old?" she said, with faint surprise.

He looked at her for an instant with a curious smile.

"Not quite so old as I look, perhaps, but still——Are you looking at that leopard's skin?" for her eyes had dropped to the fur at her feet, one of a score of such furs which had come down from his chambers in London. "I shot him in the Bengalese jungle. He was a man-eater, and I stalked him for a week. It was touch and go between us, a toss-up which should bite the dust. There are two bullet-holes, you see. The first made him angry and thirst for my blood; the second finished him. You are fond of books? Look at this. It is the first edition of Lavater. There are a good many first editions here. My great-grandfather was a bibliomaniac. And there is a collection of miniatures in the cabinet in the gallery." Bobby and Bright were seated in the hall, smoking Gaunt's choice Havanas, and Gaunt said as he passed them: "Going to show Miss Deane the miniatures."

The cabinet was locked, but he burst it open and took out some of the contents. They were exquisite specimens of Hilliard, Cosway, and Lawrence, and as he named them and related their history, Decima stood close beside him. So close that once or twice, as she bent to look at the painting in his hand, the soft tendrils of her brown hair swept his cheek. She was not conscious of her nearness, but as she touched him, and he felt the hair, like thistledown, against his face, Gaunt shivered slightly and his lips came together tightly.

He replaced the miniatures in the cabinet and turned to the pictures. He had said that he did not understand them; but he talked about them eloquently enough now; so eloquently, that Decima listened with her frank eyes fixed on his face so intently that, now and again, he faltered and stopped. Then he caught sight of the tattered flags depending from the vaulted roof, and he told her their history, not boastfully, but simply and carelessly.

"You can see them more plainly—you can see the shot and shell holes in them—if you stand here," he said; and he drew her to a favorable spot.

She stood quite close to him again, all unconscious still that the touch of her sleeve was thrilling through him.

"Oh, how proud you must be of them!" she said, looking up at him with her innocent eyes wide open, her lips apart.

"Proud of them; ashamed of myself—there were giants in those days; we are—what are we now?"

"You can't fight battles and lay down your life for the king's colors, but you—you can rebuild cottages and schools, and make people happy," said the pupil of Lady Pauline Lascelles.

"Make other people happy—yes," he said.

"Are you not happy?" she asked in a low voice, her eyes seeking his face.

"Yes—now," he said.

"Now that you have come back to settle at Lealmore?" she said, with a smile.

"Exactly," he said, quietly, and after a moment, "Decie!" Bobby called from below. "I must go!" she exclaimed.

"So must I," said Gaunt.

She looked at him, then watch.

"It is quite late! Yes, I must go. I have ever so much to do at home. But thank you so much for telling me all those things, Lord Gaunt."

"No; the thanks should come from me."

Bobby sung his praises all the way home. According to him, there never had been a man like Lord Gaunt.

She saw him every day. Sometimes he came up to The Woodbines. He would sit in the ivy-grown porch or walk about the old-fashioned garden with Decima beside him. Sometimes they would meet in the village, and she would go round and look on at the demolition of the picturesque and unhealthy cottages, with Decima beside him, and they would talk over the architect's plans. He left everything to her and Bright, which meant her alone, for Bright was simply guided and directed by her.

Sometimes she and Bobby went to the Hall; and then Gaunt was at his best. No more delightful host could be imagined. There was a charm about the man which, alas! many women had felt and yielded to; and all that charm was exerted for Decima, for the innocent girl who never suspected for a moment the feeling that was growing up within the man's heart.

When she woke in the morning her first thought was of him—of the plans for the cottages, of the new schools, of the proposed restoration of the dear old church. When she met him—and every day it seemed that she was fated to meet him—something, a sudden well of pleasure, gushed up in her heart. She thought of everything he said, remembered every story of his solitary hunting days; she led him on to childish cunning, to talk of himself, to recount some of his wonderful adventures. This man, against whom she had been warned, had entered into her life. To her he gradually became the noblest, the most unselfish of men. Why there was nothing she could ask him that he would not do. He spent money on the village like water. It had been a Heaven-forsaken place before he came; it was now growing prosperous and flourishing, with new cottages, new schools in hand, and the church being rapidly restored.

And it seemed that he cared for her society and Bobby's only. The country people had come down, its cohorts all glittering with gold, to meet with a decided rebuke: The Cuttermoles, and the Pettergrilles, the Sir William this, and Sir George that, had called, but failed to see Lord Gaunt. He had returned their cards—but that was all. The county was nonplussed and dissatisfied; but Lord Gaunt did not seem to care. He lived a solitary life at the Hall, and saw no one but Bright and the Deanes.

One day he rode up to The Woodbines on Nero, leading a handsome half-thoroughbred. There was a lady's saddle on her, and when Decima came down to the gate and stared at him with wide-open eyes, Gaunt said, quietly:

"Just bought her. Do you like her? Get your habit on."

"But——" said Decima, eyeing the horse wistfully.

"But me no buts," he said, with a smile. "I've been looking out for a horse for you for weeks past. This one is all right, as I think you will say. Don't be longer than you can help."

She had learned to obey him, and she hesitated only a moment; then she ran without a word. It had come to this. In a very few minutes she reappeared in her habit, and he lifted her into the saddle. The color bloomed in her cheeks; her pure eyes grew dark and brilliant; joy welled up in her heart.

"Yes," she said, after they had gone half a mile or so and he had kept close watch over her, "you can ride."

"Oh, yes," said Decima, and Aunt Pauline had me taught. She said that every lady should know how to ride, just as she should know how to play the piano and dance. What a beautiful creature it is! Why did you take the trouble to get it for me? Why are you always so kind to me?"

He looked at her, then turned his eyes away from her. Her very unconsciousness hurt him.

"You merit some amusement," he said. "What with architect's plans, and builder's estimates, you were in danger of being overworked. Are you happy?" he asked, suddenly.

She looked at him, and her eyes—I let now—met his innocently.

"Quite—quite happy," she said.

They rode through the village and over the moor beyond, and Gaunt still kept a watchful eye upon the mare.

He glanced at her lovely face, with the color of a blush-rose on her cheeks, the light of joy and happiness in her eyes, and his lips grew tight and compressed.

Or their way homeward they came to a field with a thornhedge, and Decima looked at the latter wistfully.

"Can she jump?" she asked. "Aunt Pauline would never let me jump; but I have always longed to do it. May I try?"

"She can jump," he said. "Try her, but be careful."

He led the way over a lot of timber in the hedge, and Decima followed. It is very likely that she pulled the young mare; anyway, she made a false step, and Decima would have fallen; but Gaunt was close beside her and caught her.

He held her in his arms for a second; it was scarcely longer that her head rested against his heart.

It was but a moment of time, but her heart had beaten against his, his lips had almost touched her cheek.

He went very white, and his face grew stern and set while the moment lasted; but Decima recovered her seat with a laugh, with the unconscious laugh of a child. She had not seen his face, had never known how near his lips had been to her.

"Nearly off?" she exclaimed. "But it was my fault. Let me try her again?"

"No, no!" he said, almost fiercely. "I will ride her for a day or two first—I will show you." He could scarcely speak, and he turned his head away.

He was almost silent on the way home. A groom was waiting at The Woodbines, and took the mare from her; and Gaunt rode home slowly. He went straight to his study and lighted a cigar. He could feel the lithe, graceful figure still in his arms, still feel her breath on his cheek.

Suddenly he flung the cigar in the fireplace, and threw his hand above his head with a wild, despairing gesture.

"Oh, my God!" he cried. "Not that—not that!" But the prayer came too late, and he knew it. "I love her!" he cried, as the sweat of his anguish broke upon his brow. "I love her—I love her!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"I love her! I love her!"

The words rang low through the room with a note of infinite pain and despair; and Gaunt sunk into a chair and hid his face in his hands.

Now, there has been no attempt in this history to whitewash Lord Gaunt, or even to make excuses for him. He was not a good man; he had been guilty of excesses which no good man ever commits; but he was not bad at heart. Until the great mistake of his life, he had steered the straight course of Virtue on life's rough way; and he had been driven to the wide road which leadeth to destruction by misery and despair.

But since he had come to Leafmore a change had taken place in the man. The old life of dissipation had suddenly grown hideous to him; at no time, even when in the very midst of it, had it been particularly enjoyable. He had played high, and cared little whether he won or lost; he had moved in a fast set whose motto is "Love and Laughter;" but love had not enticed him, and laughter—well, few men had seen Lord Gaunt laugh of late years. Then he came to Leafmore, weary of everything, of the foolish talk, the hollow laughter of the fast set, of life itself. And he had met a young girl—a girl as innocent as a child—and everything had become changed to him.

Life had regained its savor; something like peace—and yet a peace full of wistfulness—had fallen upon him, and he had begun to forget—actually to forget—the past made so bitter by the great mistake. He had been changing unconsciously; had not known, realized, what it was that was working the transformation.

But he knew now. And he sat with his head bent and his eyes covered, and faced the thing. For Gaunt, though not a good man, was no fool and no coward. He had got to face it.

He placed the whole case before him, so to speak, and tried to regard it calmly and judicially.

He was in love with Decima Deane. He, years older than she—and a married man!

He wiped the sweat from his face with an unsteady hand. It seemed ridiculous and absurd; but there it was, and all the ridicule he could pour on it would not quench or down the truth. He tried to laugh as he thought of the difference in age, of the bond that held and galled him; but the laugh rang hollow and unsatisfactory.

He loved her. And he knew it was the first real love of his life. The fancy for the woman who bore his name had been a fancy only, and had died; changed, rather, to contempt and loathing. He had never really loved until he had met Decima. And the girl was everything in the world to him. Life, hope, joy.

Her face rose before him as he sat and thought. The sweet, girlish face with its blue and ever-changing eyes, its mobile mouth and its bright and innocent smile, the soft brown hair clustering in tendrils on her white brow. Her voice with its innocent tone—

Innocent! Yes, she was innocent; so child-like, that she did not guess how it was with him. He was not a good man; but he thanked God that she did not know that; she must never know.

He must go away, go away at once! He rose; stung to movement by the resolve, and almost groaned. A shudder ran through him as he thought of returning to the world, of going away from the sight of her face, the sound of her voice. They were life to him, and his days without them would be shadowed by the darkness of a death in life.

Need he go? She did not know, guess, of his love for her. He would keep a close watch and guard over every look and word. Why should he not have the consolation of being near her? She had been like a guardian angel to him; had, all innocently and unconsciously led him out of the dark forest of despair and gloom to higher and brighter lands. She had been his saving angel. If he left her he would slip back into the old life he hated and loathed.

As he paced up and down with bent head and hands tightly clinched, he tried to persuade himself that she should be content to be near her, to see her occasionally; that he would hope for, think of, nothing more. Yes, that was how he would work it. She should be just an angel of light to him. He would go on loving her, but as the sailor loves the beacon star that lights him home through the storm; as the light that burns in the shrine of a saint. Inspired by that love, he would keep his life clean and sweet; he would devote it to her. He would be her slave, would do everything she wanted done for the place and the people.

"Yes, that is how it must be," he said, with a deep breath. "There is no hope for me. The child would never love me, even if I were only her age and free. Very good. Let me accept that, let me remember it always, when I am with her or away from her. She is not for me. She can never be mine, but I can go on loving her. I will never let her suspect; I will keep a close guard on my secret, and she shall never know. It would only pain her; and, God knows, I would rather die a thousand deaths than she should suffer a moment's pain."

He laughed discordantly.

"What a pity one can not die when one likes," he said bitterly. "It would be so easy a way out of it. But I've got to live—and I can not live without her!"

The last words were uttered almost savagely. We all know how, some time or other, we stand at bay with Fate and fight him tooth and nail. Gaunt was fighting Fate for all he knew.

The dinner-bell rang, and he went and dressed. Hobson looked at the haggard face anxiously and wondered what was amiss. He knew nothing of the great mistake, but he suspected the existence of some hidden sorrow in his master's life, and he wondered whether it had crowned up again, for he had noticed the change of late for the better in Lord Gaunt's manner and appearance.

Gaunt went down to the elaborate dinner, but he could not eat, and presently he rose and went out into the air.

There was a faint moonlight; a nightingale was singing on one of the trees on the lawn. He saw Decima's face in the soft light, he heard her voice speaking through the bird's. Presently he got his hat, and, half mechanically, went up the avenue and along the road to The Woodbines.

As he reached the house and stood in the shadow of the trees on either side of the road, he heard the piano, and then her voice—the clear, sweet, girlish voice which echoed in his heart all day. She was singing one of the simple songs she used to sing to Lady Pauline, and every note, as it floated out to him, struck upon a chord in his heart and filled him with the pain of intense longing.

He went home again, with the sweet, girlish voice ringing in his ears. But he would not go into the house, and he paced under the firs in the plantation until the dawn began to gleam beyond the hills.

"I love her!" was the thought that ached in his heart. "I love her; but she shall never know. She shall never know."

In the morning some plans came down by post. He had promised to take them to her. Should he do so? He prayed, thirsted for a sight of her. Why should he not go? He would begin the watch over himself.

After breakfast he went, with the plans in his hand, up to The Woodbines. As he reached the gate he heard voices—Decima's and a man's—and then he saw her and Mr. Mershon in the garden. He had met the young man once or twice, and exchanged greetings with him; but it had so chanced that he had not seen him and Decima together. He looked over the gate, and there was Mr. Mershon holding a chrysanthemum while Decima tied it to a stick. Decima wore a sunbonnet like—and yet how unlike—Mrs. Topper's, and, as she bent over the plant, she was laughing, evidently at Mr. Mershon's awkwardness. And the young man, with his hat on one side, was looking up at her with an intent expression in his small, sharp eyes.

A pang shot through Gaunt's heart.

"My God! I am jealous!" he said, between his clinched teeth, and his face grew set and stern.

He tried to soften it as he pushed the gate open and entered, but Decima, as she looked up and uttered a faint cry of welcome, saw the look and opened her innocent eyes upon him.

"Oh, Lord Gaunt, is it you? And have you brought the plans—is that them in your hand?"

"Yes, I've brought them," he said, trying to smile. "But it doesn't matter. Don't let me interrupt you."

She looked at him with a faint reproach in her lovely eyes.

"Why, we are only tying up some of the chrysanthemums. As if they were of any consequence! Let me see them! I do so want to see them. But what is the matter?" she broke off, as she looked up at him with a sudden grave questioning.

"Nothing—nothing," he said, hastily, for he felt Mr. Mershon's sharp eyes upon him.

That gentleman dropped the string and glanced at his watch. He disliked, and was a little afraid of Lord Gaunt of Leafmore.

"I—I think I'll be going," he said, looking at Decima.

She had opened the plans and seemed quite absorbed in them.

"Oh, will you not stay? Well, good-bye, and thank you. We have tied up ever so many, haven't we?"

"Yes," said Mr. Mershon. "Good morning, Lord Gaunt." As he went out of the gate, Gaunt looked after him.

"Do you see much of Mr. Mershon?" he asked, and cursed himself for asking.

Decima looked up from the plans absently.

"Yes, oh, yes. He is here nearly every day. He has business with father, I don't understand what it is; it is all a mystery to me—and to father also. I expect. But what is the matter? You—you look so pale and tired."

She drew nearer to him, with child-like affection and confidence, and laid her hand upon his arm.

And the strong arm, lean and muscular, the arm which had known no quiver nor uncertainty even when it had been raised in the face of death itself, had hard work to keep itself steady under the fingers which touched him so innocently.

"I've—I've had a bad night," he said, forcing a smile. "I used to suffer from insomnia, and I got an attack of it last night."

"Oh, I am so sorry," she said. "Come and sit in my arbor and rest for a little while." Her hand closed on his arm, and she led him gently to a rustic summer-house in the worst state of repair. "Sit there and rest," she said. "You shall not talk, or even think. And I will look at the plans. Say!" she ran to one of the garden borders and picked some sprigs of lavender, "smell those! Are they not sweet?"

She held them up to him, and, unseen by her, he touched them with his lips. Then, with the innocence of a child, she sat close beside him and unfolded the plans again.

Her arm touched his—the summer-house was a very small affair—he could almost hear the beating of her heart; and his own heart throbbed in harmony.

"They are beautiful!" she said, nodding at the plans, as a child nods at a picture-book. "How clever a man must be to draw them like this! Look at that tower!" She opened out the plans so that they rested on her knees and his. "There's a bell in that tower, of course. Will it run, as Bobby would say, to a bell, Lord Gaunt?"

"Oh, yes; it will run to a bell," he said, mechanically, for her hand was touching his arm, and all his senses were throbbing.

"Will it? I am so glad! And that is the big school-room. What is the size? But I am worrying you, and I meant you to rest!" she exclaimed, remorsefully.

"It is not worrying me," he said. "There are the plans. If you like them, we'll pass them."

"Oh, I think they are beautiful!" she said. "And the school-house is too sweet for words! I should like to be schoolmistress!"

"Yes?" he said; then the green jealousy gnawing at his heart forced him on. "Do you like Mr. Mershon?"

Decima opened her eyes upon him innocently.

"What has Mr. Mershon to do with the schools?" she said. "Like him? Oh, yes, I suppose so. I never thought, never asked myself the question. But now I come to do so, yes, I think I do. How foolish that sounds! Aunt Pauline used to say that I should never master syntax. He is very good-natured, you know; only this morning he promised me fifty pounds toward the boys' play-ground and gymnasium."

"Why did you ask him?" he said, almost roughly. "I would have given you all you wanted."

"I know you would," she said, simply; "and that is why I didn't ask you. You have done so much. Besides, it is only fair that Mr. Mershon should spend some of his money for the benefit of the people among whom he lives? He is very rich, you know."

"Is he?" he said. "I don't know anything about him." Then he got ashamed of his petulance, of his jealousy for her eyes were seeking his with a rather injured surprise. She had never before heard him speak in this tone. "Oh, I dare say he is a very nice young fellow. I'm—I'm rather hoarse and ill-natured this morning. I always am when I don't sleep."

In an instant her face melted, so to speak, with a tender sympathy which smote him to the heart.

"I know. You could not be really unkind or unjust to any one, I think, Lord Gaunt."

"Oh, couldn't I?" he said, grimly.

"No. It was only because you are tired that you were hard upon Mr. Mershon—if you were hard. For, after all, what have you said? Lean back—see, you can just lean back—and rest, quite restful."

She leaned back to show him the way, and the branches of the ivy and clematis caught in her hair. She laughed as she tried to disentangle them.

"I forgot my hair; but you need not be afraid, yours is too short."

"Can't you get it undone?" he said.

"Let me try, will you?"

"Thanks," she said at once. "And you do not bring it all down; it is not to come down at a touch. You see, I've not had it up very long."

His hand shook as he attempted to free the soft, silky coil from the branch that clung to it lovingly. His breath came fast, and he brought about the catastrophe against which she had warned him.

"There, it is done!" she said, with a laugh. She shook her hair loose, and smiled up at him as one school-girl smiles at another. "That is how I looked a few months before you saw me at the Zoo," she said.

He looked at her, and then suddenly away from her, lest she should read his secret in his eyes.

"You must have been rather a nice-looking little girl," he remarked, with an effort at careless badinage.

"I wasn't, really. I was a very ugly child," she said. "I remember Bobby used to call me 'the plain bun.' I've told you about his expecting to see a long-legged, ugly little girl at the railway station, haven't I?"

While she was speaking, she was doing up her hair rapidly and carelessly. He stooped to pick up some of the hair-pins which had fallen, and saw a piece of brown ribbon which had either fallen from her hair or some part of her dress. He waited until she had finished, then he picked up the ribbon.

"Do you want this?" he said.

"What is it? Oh, thanks!"

He held it in his hand.

"If you don't particularly want it, I'll tie up the plans with it," he said, with an air of indifference.

"No, I don't want it. Is it long enough?"

"Quite," he said, as he rolled up the plans and wound the ribbon round them. "I'm going down to the village to see Cobbet. Could you—will it be convenient for you to meet me there this afternoon? There are some things Bright wants to ask you about. You and Bobby might come up to tea afterward, if you'd be so gracious."

"Very well," she said at once and brightly. "I am learning to cook, you know. Bobby says I always forget the principal ingredient—generally the sugar—but he always has two serves, and the proof of the pudding is the eating thereof."

She talked on—the talk of a happy, heart-free girl—and he listened with a mingling of pleasure and pain. Her innocence and unconsciousness hurt him that morning. He got up almost suddenly.

"I must go," he said, abruptly, and left her.

They met in the village in the afternoon, interviewed Mr. Bright, and then met Bobby, and went up to the Hall to tea. It was served on the terrace, and she presided, as she had done on several previous occasions. Gaunt watched her. Never had she seemed more perfect in every tone and movement. Looking at her was like listening to an exquisite piece of music which makes the heart ache with an infinite longing.

"Show Bobby the plans, Lord Gaunt," she said, presently.

Gaunt went into the library and brought them. They were untied and in confusion.

"Why, what a jumble you have got them in! Where is the ribbon you tied them up with?" she asked.

He colored for an instant and looked with the awkwardness of a man.

"I—I must have dropped it," he said.

It was folded neatly in his waistcoat pocket over his heart.

"Ah!" said Bobby, "want my opinion? Well, my opinion is that you are hampering the whole place between you; and I'm rather glad that I'm going out of it, and so can chuck what little of the responsibility that has fallen to my share."

"Going out of it!" said Decima.

He nodded as he lighted a cigarette.

"Yes, old Brown"—Brown was his coach—"thinks that I ought to go up to London to polish up my French and German; so I'm going right away; that is, in a week or two."

"Oh, Bobby!" said Decima, aghast.

"Don't cry. Is its brother going to leave it for a few weeks? Never mind! He'll come back soon and bring his ickle sister a nice ickle doll."

"Going up to London," said Gaunt. His heart sunk, for he knew that, Bobby away, he should not be able to see so much of Decima, for Bobby had played the useful part of chaperon. "You'll go into diggings, I suppose? See here, I've some chambers in town—you go up to them. You'll be doing me a service if you will."

Bobby stared.

"You—you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it," said Gaunt, rather curtly. "It's better for the rooms to be occupied." He gave Bobby the address. "And I'll put up for the—what club would you like, I wonder? What do you say to the Orient?"

Bobby flushed with pride and pleasure.

"Will you really? How awfully good of you! The Orient!"

He had heard and read of the club—one of the best—but had never hoped, never dreamed of becoming a member.

"Not at all," said Gaunt, briskly. "I'll write to-night."

Bobby was so moved and excited that he jumped up and paced away. Decima looked at Gaunt with a sudden moisture in her eyes.

"I wonder why you are so kind to me?" she said, with a little catch in her voice. He could not have found a quicker road to her heart.

He raised his eyes to her face for a moment.

"Nonsense!" he said, almost roughly. "What is there especially kind in that? I should do it for any one."

"Yes," she said; "I think you would. There is no one so kind, so thoughtful, so generous." Bobby can't thank you. I can't. Oh, I wish I could tell you just what I think!" She leaned forward and touched his hand.

(To be continued.)

ALFRED WALDRON SMITHERS.

Important Western Division Point Named After G.T.R. Official.

Right in the heart of the great fruit orchard of British Columbia—that picturesque spot known as the Bulkley Valley—surveyors and engineers and all such are busy on a new town.

That town has a reason. So has its name.

The first is the fact that it is the only general freight and passenger division point between Prince Rupert and Fort George. The second is—Smithers.

And a very good reason the town has for calling itself by the name of its godfather. Not only because Mr. Alfred Waldron Smithers is chairman of the Board of Directors of the Grand Trunk, although that alone would seem sufficient reason. Not only because, as the officer of the Grand Trunk he is called the counsellor of the Grand Trunk official family.

Still, that is not the only reason why the first general freight and passenger division point east of the western terminus of the new railway should be called after the good counsellor of the official family.

He was asked to be the godfather of many western towns—towns which look calmly on huge glaciers and rushing torrents, on mighty

A. W. Smithers.

cascades and forests of cedar; towns which are springing gradually from canvas and tent prosperity into the more substantial forms in lumber and brick.

And now comes the reason why the last town—and most decidedly not the least—came to be named after the great man who is quick to recognize good work, and quick to clothe criticism in silence. Edson, as his motto.

"Serve the others first," Wainwright, not to forget Melville, named after the great man, Charles Melville Hays, in whose brain the whole Western scheme originated. It was all so characteristic of Alfred Waldron Smithers to wish to be the last godfather on the Western line.

But we must speak of Smithers, the man. His modesty has been hinted at above. Forty years ago, when he was a youth of 23, he joined the London Stock Exchange, and remained a member until four years ago, when he resigned, to devote his energies to the development of railroads in Canada. Being the son of the late William Henry Smithers of the Bank of England, it seems natural that he should be recognized as a financial authority throughout the British Empire. In 1895 he became a director of the Grand Trunk, later being elected vice-president and chairman.

England still claims much of his attention, he being a director of the South Eastern and Chatham Railway, and chairman of the English Association of American Share and Bondholders.

And apart from all this, from his interest in things of national import, he is possibly the most interesting in his private life. Children are his weakness; and wherever he is, he is seen surrounded by laughing tots, all delighted to be entertained by the "big man of finance."

A Stylish Wedding.—"They say her wedding beggared description." "Oh, more than that?" "Indeed?" "Yes, it beggared her father."

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HOME

Jams, Jellies and Pickles.

Gooseberry Jam.—Top and tail the gooseberries and boil one hour, stirring constantly. To each pound of the uncooked fruit you should have allowed three-quarters of a pound of sugar. After the hour's boiling is ended dip out any superfluous juice—which will make delicious jelly—put in your sugar, and cook an hour longer. Turn the jam into glasses or small jars and seal. When this is served with cottage cheese or cream cheese it is a fair equivalent for the imported bar- due.

Plum or Damson Jam.—Stone your damsons or plums, and after this weigh them. Be careful to save any juice that comes from the fruit while stoning it. Allow half a pound of sugar to each pound of fruit, unless it is exceptionally sweet, in which case decrease the proportion to three-quarters of a pound of sugar to a pound of fruit. Put the fruit for half an hour in the sugar, and simmer gently for an hour. By this time the jam will have cooked down until it is fairly thick, and may be put into glasses or jars and sealed. Small plums may be used for this jam.

Peach Marmalade.—Peel and stone peaches of the smaller and cheaper varieties will serve. Weigh the peaches, and allowing to every pound of fruit three-quarters of a pound of sugar, and cook the fruit by itself for three-quarters of an hour, stirring it frequently. At the end of this time turn in the sugar and cook for ten or fifteen minutes, taking off any scum which may rise to the top. You may either put it up at this stage, or you may add to the kernels of a dozen or so of the peach stones, crushed fine, and allow the juice of a lemon for every three pounds of fruit. If you may put in a tablespoonful of preserving brandy for every pound of fruit. With any of these additions the marmalade is delicious. There is also a good deal of extra juice, even if this is dipped out after the addition of the sugar, and if any is boiling and sealed in bottles it makes delicious sauce for puddings.

Apple or Crabapple Jelly.—Quarter and core ripe crabapples or any well flavored, tart apples, and put them slowly in a preserving kettle with as little water as will be necessary to protect them from scorching, and cook at a gentle simmer until the apples are broken to pieces. Put the pulp into a flannel bag and let it drip. If you squeeze the pulp the jelly is likely to be cloudy. Measure your juice, and to each pint of juice allow a pound of granulated sugar. Put the juice and sugar on the fire in a clean kettle, cook it for twenty minutes after it comes to a boil, skimming carefully, and add the sugar. Let the jelly return to the boil, and cook for one minute and take from the fire. Have your glasses ready and fill immediately, but do not close or attempt to cover with paraffin until the jelly is entirely cold.

Peach Jelly.—Make by the preceding recipe, but add a tablespoonful of lemon juice to each pint of the peach juice, and put this in after straining the juice from the fruit.

Small Cucumber Pickles.—Select firm, small cucumbers of uniform size, none of them more than three inches long, and in a large earthen crock, with a layer of salt upon every layer of cucumbers. Pour in enough cold water to cover them, placing a heavy weighted plate on top to prevent floating. Every other day stir the pickles up from the bottom, and leave them in the brine for ten days. At the end of this time pour off and pick over the pickles, throwing out those that are soft. Put those which are left in fresh water and leave them in this twenty-four hours, change again to fresh water, and let them lie in this another day. Line your kettle with grape leaves and place the cucumbers in these, sprinkling each layer of them with a little powdered alum, pour in cold water, lay several thicknesses of the grape leaves over the top, cover the kettle closely, and simmer slowly for six hours. Don't let the kettle boil. Take out the cucumbers, which by now should be well greened, throw them in cold water and leave them in this for a couple of hours. Prepare a thick pickle of vinegar of the cup of sugar, a dozen blades of mace, a dozen and a half whole allspice, three dozen each of whole black peppers and cloves, and four quarts of vinegar. Boil all these together for five minutes after the boil begins, and pour over the drained cucumbers, which you

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