

A GREAT MISTAKE.

So they began their lives together. The old house was transformed. The gladness of a girl's presence filled it with sweet and wholesome influences. George's early breakfast was pleasantly, then, not that he had Lucy in her frock, but that she had Lucy in her frock, and she was so sure of one companion at least to his early meal.

It was so natural to the girl to be busy that she was falling by degrees into her old habit of waiting on every day; she was usually running up and down the stairs, and making herself a little smiling slave to her cousin and to Mrs. Ludlow.

But after a while this seemed to alter. George interfered quietly but with determination. Lucy began to find that she was to be waited on a little more than she was used to.

Batters used to look to her wardrobe for her when she was out. The girl found her dresses brushed and smoothed, or laid out ready at dressing time; the buttons were always on her boots; all needful mending was carefully attended to.

Edward, the Doctor's own man, was ready at a moment's notice to go on Miss Lucy's errands, saving her little feet many a weary tramp, to fetch her a cab in wet weather when she was obliged to go out, to protect her with an umbrella as she got in and when she returned.

Lucy would blush and protest, having become unused to such services during her stay in King's Road; but Edward would state in his grave way that he had the Doctor's orders, though from his alacrity it was plain that he had obeyed these orders with satisfaction to himself.

The consequence of all this was that Lucy found time to read more and to practice her music, which she had sadly neglected. She found that George liked to hear her sing, and she began to hunt up the songs she knew. She was able to be with Bee a great deal more, which was a delight to both the girls, and sometimes she went away to Croome for several days at a time.

Mrs. Acroby was always begging for her. The quiet Lucy declared that she would not go to Mrs. Acroby's, though she was as liked the Doctor, but the children were always clamouring for Lucy.

"Who will see to your breakfast, you poor neglected George?" Mrs. Acroby cried, with smiling dismay. "Mrs. Acroby first, and then to go to Green Knowe. And Lucy, coloring, declared eagerly that she would just as soon stop at home."

But the Doctor would not hear of this. He knew that Mr. Olfant, the handsome rector, was often at Croome during Lucy's absence, and he had begun, and thought only of Lucy's happiness.

The girl's delight at returning was rewarded enough, after all, for his unselfishness. And indeed the house was not the same without her.

Her old pretty bloom and roundness were revived rapidly in the rest and security of her new life. George had only to look at her, to hear how lightly she flew about the house, to see how brightly she looked after him, to be reminded of the bright, laughing, laughing girl that she was happy in those days.

CHAPTER XLVII.

George March walked to church with his woman and heard Lucy's voice in the hymns. Edgar Bryer had no need any longer to make pilgrimages to St. Mark's in order to see his little blue-eyed divinity. It was a pretty family party, people said, and Mrs. March ought to be a very happy woman.

Indeed, Mrs. March looked as if she were. Naturally she was enjoying the agreeable excitement that had followed her return to Barlaston as a bride.

A good many entertainments had been given in her honor, at each of which she had worn a new gown from her tasteful trousseau and had excited a good deal of attention.

The Doctor was necessarily a great deal away from home after the way and there was really very little to occupy his young wife's thoughts in the house so admirably managed by Mrs. Batters, so that Ada was free to amuse herself, and contrived to do so very prettily on many occasions. It was not long before she was able to give kind Tom Throgmorton to his wife's father—and by organizing such parties of pleasure as were possible in the quiet old town.

Mrs. March indeed was rapidly becoming a small celebrity in Barlaston. Her appearance at St. Mark's had been a success, and she was impatiently as a new number of the Young Lady's Gazette, and every one was talking of her delightful little dinners—very one, except perhaps Mrs. Batters, who at her age was to be excused for not altogether appreciating her mistress's more fancied ways, and who opened her provincial eyes somewhat widely at the cost of those apparently simple little banquets.

People, when they saw Ada's gray ponies, driving about the streets and a graceful dark lady, in a succession of gait from the little house, in and out of the shops or giving orders from her tiny carriage, used to look at each other and whisper eagerly that that was Mrs. March, and would point out, with never failing interest, the fact that she was wearing another new bonnet.

Whenever the market was open or there was a concert at the Town Hall, Mrs. March made up a party and secured a box; and that with her own striking dresses and the beauty of her cousin and Mrs. Throgmorton, her box generally attracted as much attention as the play itself or the music.

Whenever Bee went young Acroby was sure to follow. Jack Throgmorton was still away. He had not returned to Barlaston since the wedding, or he would doubtless have helped to swell the young matron's train. His mother's gray was no longer clouded by the old anxiety on his account. George March learned from her that the boy had settled down to work in a London office and was behaving with unusual steadiness and moderation.

It really seemed as if the Doctor's marriage to Miss Ludlow had cleared the atmosphere of the little town in quite a remarkable way. Lucy often said to herself that every one seemed happier for it.

Of course the Doctor joined his wife's parties as in duty bound, if only for an hour. It was for his sake, as Ada gently explained to his friends, that she exerted herself to make him so pleasant and to bring some bright influences around him.

"Dear George works far, far too hard," she often said, with a sigh. "It is my duty to induce him to take a little relaxation now and then."

Doctor's wife pro-ested, with a comical little air of dismay, the young men were shut up in offices all day long, and when they came home, seemed to think that there was something immoral or "French" in making themselves accept of a servicable or amusing to a married woman.

Ted Acroby's sudden departure from Barlaston, a couple of months after her return, left Mrs. March in a worse case than ever in the matter of masculine escort. She could not help expressing a laughing wish to her cousin that the young man had waited until after Christmas at least to propose to Bee Throgmorton, and to be refused.

"I suppose it will break up the party at Croome," she added regretfully—"and I was looking forward to that for several agreeable reunions—unless, indeed," with a somewhat cold smile—"Bee intends to relent before me. I suppose she means to marry him eventually?"

"I don't know," answered Lucy sadly. "I think she is very unhappy. I am glad he has gone away for a few weeks. It will give her time to think."

Poor Ted's flight cast a decided depression upon Mrs. March's hardly kept together little "party," as she was fond of calling the few young people who had taken shelter at even Croome. There was no one who could take the place of the rich, good-looking young man who was wandering about aimlessly half over Europe in the vain endeavor to heal the wound in his faithful seeling heart.

Neither Bee nor Lucy could fail to be said to be of Ada's party. They had by this time taken the place of the rich, good-looking young man who was wandering about aimlessly half over Europe in the vain endeavor to heal the wound in his faithful seeling heart.

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of a pet of the blushing boy, laughing kindly at his persistent devotion, and reading him the most charming edifying sisterly lectures at times about his waste of time and neglect of his family.

The Doctor did not appear to be productive of much effect. Edgar appeared only more determined to persevere in his visits, in finding excuses for which he displayed considerable ingenuity.

On one or two occasions, when Mrs. March happened to be home, when he called, he would have been nearer to him, but farther—much farther away. And, feeling this, George began to admit to himself that it was better to have Lucy for his friend and sister, than to have her go out with him so brightly together, and to be ashamed of the lingering emotion which, in spite of better resolves, the girl's presence or voice still stirred within him.

Such emotion was a wrong done to Lucy, he knew, and was a breach of the brotherly faith and devotion he had pledged to her on that last sad day by the mere. Trusting to him entirely in his innocent security, the poor child had come into his house, and it was his duty to make that house her safest refuge.

The poor fellow tried hard to make a friend of his wife—tried to enter into her amusements, to talk to her in the long light evenings while they were alone and Lucy was watering her flowers in the cool of the day—

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The weather happened to be wet and dismal, and the atmosphere of the old house at Green Knowe was correspondingly depressing. Mrs. March's drawing room appeared to be bored sportsmen a sort of oasis in the social desert of her gloom. The young people, gathered, and to be ashamed of the lingering emotion which, in spite of better resolves, the girl's presence or voice still stirred within him.

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"You must not fret about that, dear, Mrs. Throgmorton."

"I try not to fret, my love," said poor kind Mrs. Acroby. "But what with Bee's low spirits and poor Jack away—well, well—bright ones, and the poor boy is getting on very well and behaving very steadily. We must only hope for the best. It is a comfort to know that you and George are happy, at any rate."

"Dear Mrs. Throgmorton!" murmured Ada, gratefully squeezing her friend's hand. She was anxious to get back to her work and to change the bows on her gown for the afternoon. No one saw the new bows but her husband. Mrs. March and Minnie drank their tea alone again, and Lucy mentioned at dinner that Bee had taken a long ride that afternoon with Captain Sugden to St. George's Park, and that she herself had been asked to go with Mrs. Throgmorton in the carriage.

Barry Sugden had openly admitted that he could not resist the temptation of any longer, and that he for one was not going to annoy that fine fellow March by trying his heels all day long in the little woman's drawing room—a barefaced heroism which might have been received with less derisive shouts by little Barry, as he was called, but he had not been so palpitably hit by Bee Throgmorton's dark beauty, and if he had not all discovered that the surest place to meet "that sweet little Tarale" was not in her cousin's house, but in Upper Brunswick Street.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Throgmorton and her daughter went out to Croome to spend a week; and then Mrs. Acroby came to Beadesert Gardens and begged for Lucy as usual. She declared that Captain Sugden was bothering her life out with the two girls, so she had invited a few more people, and had made up quite a pleasant impromptu party. Even Lady Sarah Vanneck had promised to come for a day on her way to the North. Lucy thought that she ought not to go. She fancied that she was being used, and she was not sure that it was natural that her cousin should miss the society of her London friends, who were hardly ever seen now in the flower-scented drawing room in the square.

"I would not suggest before Doctor March for the whole world," she declared, showing her teeth. "To poor George, coming in, tired and hungry, out of the chill clear air of the October evening, the