

IN GOLDEN BONDS.

CHAPTER XVI.—(CONTINUED.)

After dinner, when I was in the drawing-room with the ladies, some of them drew me on a sofa and pulled me about and petted me just as if I had been a child, and asked me a number of questions about my life at the Alders and "that handsome Mr. Rayner."

"And is it true that he is such a dreadfully wicked man, Miss Christie?" said one.

"Yes, it is; she is blushing," said another.

But I was not blushing at all; there was nothing to blush about. I said, laughing—"No, he is not wicked. The village people think he is, because he plays the violin and goes to races. He is very kind."

"Oh, we don't doubt that, my dear!" said Mrs. Clowes, in a demure tone.

"You think I like him only just because he is kind to me," said I boldly. "But I shouldn't like him if he were wicked, however kind he might be."

"And Mrs. Rayner—is she kind and good too?"

"Oh, yes, she is just as kind!" said I.

This was not quite true; but I knew already enough of these people to be sure they would laugh if I said "No;" and it was not poor Mrs. Rayner's fault that she was not as nice as her husband. Presently Mrs. Cunningham took me to the other end of the room to look at a portrait of Lady Mills.

"It is no business of mine who gave you that pendant, my dear; but have you any more ornaments of the kind, and, if so, where do you keep them?" she said gravely.

"Oh, I have no more!" I answered, a little surprised at her manner. "And I keep this in an old case in the corner of my desk."

"Ah, I thought so, from the careless way in which you were going to slip it into your pocket when we caught you in the conservatory. Why, my dear child, I have a set that I value very much—no finer than yours, though—diamonds and cat's-eyes—and I sleep with them under my pillow, and even my maid doesn't know where they are."

I showed my astonishment.

"Believe me, when you travel about on a series of visits, as I am doing now, and are obliged to entrust your dressing-case to a careless maid, it is no unnecessary precaution."

"But I shouldn't take so much trouble with my paste pendant," said I.

She shook her head at me, with a laugh, and said dryly—

"I should wish such paste as yours."

And then the gentlemen came in. One of them had brought from town that day a parcel of new waltzes, but the ladies all declined to play them until they had tried them over privately; and the gentlemen seemed so much disappointed that, having turned over the pages and seen that they were perfectly easy, I timidly offered myself.

They were really pretty, and, after the difficult music I had had to read with Mr. Rayner, they were like child's play to me. When I had got to the end of the first, I received an ovation. The owner of the music was in ecstasies, and those who had begun to dance stopped and joined the rest in a chorus of admiration that made me quite ashamed of myself.

"Didn't you know that I am a governess?" said I to one gentleman, laughing and blushing.

"Yes; but we thought you were only for show," said Mrs. Clowes.

And I played the rest of the waltzes, and thought how much nicer it was to play for these people than for those I had met at Mrs. Manners' tea-party. Then the gentleman they called Tom, whose name I had now found out to be Mr. Carruthers, led me away from the piano, saying that I was not to be made a victim all the evening for other people's amusement; and, telling a gentleman who was talking to me that he and I were going to have a serious conversation and were not to be disturbed, he took me to a deep window where there were seats, and gave me one, while he threw himself into another beside me.

"How beautifully you play!" said he, leaning over my chair and looking at me.

"I never knew such a pretty girl as you take the trouble to learn anything properly before."

I had been so much spoiled that day by flattery that I only answered calmly—

"Why shouldn't pretty people learn things as well as ugly people, Mr. Carruthers?"

"Don't call me 'Mr. Carruthers'; nobody calls me 'Mr. Carruthers';—at least, nobody nice. If you don't yet feel equal to 'Tom,' let the matter remain in abeyance for the present. Now, to continue from the point where I lost my temper, ugly people have to be accomplished and good and all sorts of things, to get a little of the attention that a pretty person can get without any trouble at all."

"Ah, but it is different if you have to earn your own living! If you see a governess, for instance, people don't care about what you look like, but about what you know."

He stroked his moustache meditatively, looked at me, and said—

"Of course; I forgot that. I suppose you have to know a lot to teach. I am sure you know more than any woman in this room."

"Oh, no, indeed I don't! They are all a great, great deal cleverer than I am. I couldn't talk as they do."

"Heaven forbid!" muttered he, as if to himself. "They know how to chaff—that's all. Did you ever meet any of them before to-day?"

"Never before to-day."

"I wonder if you know any of the people I know? Do you know the Temples of Crawley Hall?"

"No."

"Have you ever been farther west than this—Staffordshire—Derbyshire?"

"No, never."

He was looking on the ground; he raised and fixed his eyes suddenly on my face as he said—

"Do you know the Daltons?"

"No-o," said I, rather hesitatingly.

"Not Lord Dalton, with his different crazes? You speak as if you were not sure."

"I am sure I don't know him," said I.

"But I was trying to remember what I have heard about him, for I seem to know the name quite well."

In the most gravely persistent manner Mr. Carruthers went on probing my memory about Lord Dalton; but I could not

even remember where I had heard the name mentioned before. He had to give it up at last; I believe however that he thought it was obstinacy that prevented my telling him.

When, at last, long past the hour when the household at the Alders retired to rest, we dispersed to our rooms, I made a mistake in my corridor, and found myself in one which led to the servant's wing; and I heard a man's voice that I knew saying persuasively—

"Don't be in such a hurry! She won't be up for half an hour yet, nor my man either. I never get a word with you now."

Suddenly it flashed upon me whose the voice was. It was the voice I had heard talking to Sarah in the plantation, the voice of Mr. Rayner's mysterious friend. And the person he was talking to, and with whom he proceeded to exchange a kiss, was Lady Mills' maid! It was a strange thing, but one about which I could no longer have a doubt. The respectful man-servant I had met before dinner in the corridor and the visitor who was shown into the study at the Alders as a gentleman, and who was yet on familiar terms with Tom Parkes and Sarah, were one and the same person!

I was very sleepy and very much preoccupied with this curious discovery when I got to my room; but, before I went to bed, I put, as I thought, my beautiful but unfortunate pendant safely inside my desk, resolved not to wear it again.

CHAPTER XVII.

I got up next morning directly I was called, and was down stairs long before anybody else—but I was glad that, for I wanted to explore the garden. It was a beautiful, warm, bright morning, and I rejoiced, for it would bring the people to Geddham Church for the harvest-thanksgiving. I went over the lawn, and down the alleys, and round and round the flower-beds, and peeped into the green-houses, and tried to see through the steaming glass of the hot-houses, which were locked, when, suddenly, turning round one of them, I came face to face with Tom Parkes in his Sunday clothes, with a key in one hand and a basket of eggs in the other. He was evidently disconcerted, and tried by turning to the door of the hot-house to avoid me. But I accosted him at once.

"Tom—Tom Parkes, don't you know me—Miss Christie?" I said.

"Er, yes, miss, to be sure, so it is! Who'd 'a' thought o' seeing you here?" said he, touching his hat with rather awkward surprise.

"Why, you must have known me, Tom! You looked as if you had seen a ghost?"

"Well, the truth is, miss, asking your pardon," said Tom sheepishly, "that I didn't want you to see me. You see, I've been took on here as extra under-gardener and help, and the head-gardener he don't like Londoners, and I don't want him to know as I'm a London chap. So, if you would be so good, miss, as not to mention as you've seen me before, I should take it kind."

"Very well, Tom, I won't betray you," I replied, laughing.

And he said, "Thank you, miss," and touched his hat again, and went off with his eggs. I was very much amused by this encounter and the important secret I had to keep. As if my mentioning that I had seen Tom at the Alders would necessarily entail the awful discovery that he was a Londoner!

By this time I thought I had better go in and see if any of the other people had come down to breakfast: and I was sauntering along, when, as I got near the house, I heard two men's voices.

"Bella is getting jealous, Tom."

A grunt in the other voice.

"I say, ain't it rough on the little one?"

Then I heard Lady Mills's voice, and when I got to the door there were eight or ten people already assembled. But the two nearest the door, whom I had overheard, were a gentleman named Cole and Mr. Carruthers. It was Mr. Carruthers who had grunted. Who was "Bella"? And who was "the little one"? And what did "rough on" mean?

The bells of Denham Church, which was close, had begun to ring before breakfast was over, and Lady Mills wanted to know who was going.

"I am going, for one," said Mrs. Clowes, and she looked across at Mr. Carruthers, who was helping himself to a great deal of marmalade.

"Do try to make up a respectable number," said Lady Mills. "You can do just what you like, you know, as soon as it is over; and people in the country think so much of it. We scandalise the neighborhood quite enough, as it is, by not going to bed at ten o'clock, and other wicked practices. And last week we were only three at church out of a party of seventeen."

"Are you going, Miss Christie? Yes, of course you are. I'll go, if you will find all the places for me," said Mr. Carruthers.

And when we got to church—we mustered eight altogether—he sat by me, and picked out from among the books the biggest church-service he could find, which he put in front of me when the collect was given out, whispering—

"Find it for me, please."

At first I would not take any notice, for it was just like playing in church; but he began making such a disturbance, rustling the leaves of his book, looking over those of his neighbors, and dropping with a crash all those within reach of the ledge before him, that I was obliged to find it for him, and all the other places too during the service, just as if he had been a little boy. But I was very angry all the time, and when we came out I would not speak to him. He came however and walked by my side, while I talked to somebody else, and at last he said meekly—

"Have I offended you?"

"Yes," I said; "I think you are very irreverent."

"I didn't mean to be irreverent," he said, in a still meeker tone. "But it is so dull to sit in church and not be able to follow the service, and it looks so bad to be fumbling in one's book all the time and find the place only when the parson is a long way ahead. And you can always find it in a minute."

"You should go to church oftener, and then you could find the places as well as I," rejoined I severely.

"Yes, but I always have such a lot to do on Sunday mornings in town," said he mournfully—"pipes to smoke, and—other things. But I'll try to go oftener; I dare say it will do me good."

"I don't believe going to church does people like you any good at all," remarked I gravely.

And Mr. Carruthers burst out laughing, and said it was very wrong of me to discourage him just when he wanted to try to be good.

At luncheon I sat between him and clever Mrs. Clowes, who described the sermon in a way that made everybody laugh, and said a lot of amusing and sometimes unkind things, as she always did. Presently, in a rather low voice, she addressed Mr. Carruthers across me.

"Shall I pass the sherry; or is it true that you have taken to milk and water?" she asked meaningly.

"Quite true," said he. "And you can't think how nice it is—not half so insipid as you would expect, and a pleasant change after too many stimulants. Let me give you some grapes, Miss Christie."

And Mrs. Clowes turned away her head, as if there had been something that hurt her in his answer.

Most of the people spent Sunday afternoon just as if it had not been Sunday at all, except that nobody rode or drove. But some went on the river, and some played lawn-tennis, and some lounged about and read novels; and others, of whom I was one, sat under the trees on the lawn and drank iced champagne, which is quite the nicest thing I ever tasted. I heard the mysterious man-servant give an order to Tom Parkes, calling him, "Here, you gardener, what's your name?" as if he had never seen him before, and walked up and down Mr. Rayner's garden, and gone into Mr. Rayner's stable with him only two nights before. What a silly fellow Tom was with his little mystery! I pointed out the other man to Mr. Carruthers, and asked if he knew whose servant he was.

"He is mine, and the best I ever had. I've had him six months now, and of late I've given up thinking altogether; he does it for me so much better."

I began to wonder whether this mysterious man-servant was some poor relation of Mr. Rayner's, who had taken to this way of earning his living, but was ashamed of it, and who came privately to see his richer connections, to spare them the talk of the neighbors about what people like the Reads, for instance, would certainly consider a great disgrace. So I said nothing more about him to Mr. Carruthers, who was sitting near me, smoking, and teasing me to read a Sunday newspaper, which I did not think right. So at last he began reading it aloud to me, and then I got up and ran away with Mr. Cole to the fruit-garden, where he gathered plums for me; and we looked at the chickens, and watched the fish in the pond, and threw crumbs to them, which they would not take any notice of, until dinner-time.

Mr. Cole cut me some beautiful flowers to wear in the front of my frock, for I had resolved not to wear my pendant again; but my muslin gown did not look nearly so well without it, and I thought I would just take it out and see the effect of it at my throat close to the flowers, and then put it away again. But, when I unlocked my desk and opened the shabby case in which Mr. Rayner had given it to me, the pendant was gone. Nothing else had been disturbed; the sovereign my uncle had given me lay untouched in its little leather bag close by; the notes I had had from Laurence, tied up with pink ribbon, were just as I had left them. I searched my desk, my pockets, every corner of the room, though I knew it would be of no use. For I remembered quite well, sleepy as I had been the night before, that I had shut it up in the case carefully, turning it about for a few moments in my hand to watch it flashing in the candle-light.

It had been stolen—by whom I could not guess. I sat down after my fruitless search, trembling and too much frightened to cry. For there is something alarming in a mysterious loss like that, an uncomfortable sense of being at the mercy of some unknown power, apart from the certainty that one of the people about you is a thief. At first I thought I would go to Lady Mills and tell her privately all about it; but my courage failed me; for if my loss got known there would be an unpleasant scene for all the servants and a sense of discomfort in the entire household; besides, several of the servants in the house were those of the guests, and not under Lady Mills's authority. It was just as likely that my pendant had been taken by one of them; and everybody would be indignant at the idea of his or her servant being suspected of the theft. So I resolved to say nothing about it, but to bear my loss, which I felt more than I should have thought possible, in silence. After all, if I could never wear it without exciting more attention than I cared for, and surprising people by my possession of an ornament which they persisted in thinking extremely valuable, it was better that it should have disappeared. I began to think it had already had an unwholesome effect upon me, by my secret wish to wear it again.

So I went down-stairs to dinner with a piece of plain black velvet round my throat, told Mrs. Cunningham, who asked why I did not wear my pendant, that I had come to the conclusion that it was too handsome an ornament for a girl in my position, and heard Mr. Carruthers say that the same remark would apply to my eyes.

It was a fine night, not cold, though there was a slight breeze; and after dinner some of us went into the garden, and I among them, for I was afraid they would make me play the waltzes again, although it was Sunday. One of the gentlemen did say—

"Let us ask Miss Christie to play for us."

But the lady he spoke to replied, in a rather offended tone—

"We need not always trouble Miss Christie; and I am sure she would rather not be disturbed. I just tried the waltzes over this morning, and they are quite easy."

"Just tried 'em over!" muttered Mr. Cole, who was standing by me in the conservatory. "She was hard at it hammering at the piano all churchtime."

It was late in the evening when Mr. Carruthers, who had been in the billiard-room with some of the others, came out and sauntered, with a cigar in his mouth, up to the grape-house, where I was standing with Sir Jonas, who had taken a fancy to me and insisted on cutting me some grapes straight from the vine.

"Lady Mills wishes me to say that Miss Christie will get her death of cold if she comes out of the hot-house into the cold air with nothing round her shoulders," said Mr. Carruthers, when we were at the door.

"Bless me—so she will! Fetch her a shawl, Tom."

"I have anticipated the lady's wants; I always do," said Mr. Carruthers; and he wrapped round my head and shoulders a beautiful Indian shawl belonging to Lady Mills.

"Take her in quickly, Tom. I should never forgive myself if she caught cold," said kind old Sir Jonas anxiously, standing at the door of the grape-house with his knife still in his hand.

"Nor should I," muttered Mr. Carruthers. "Now run, Miss Christie."

I was not a bit cold, and told him so; but he said, "Never mind—won't do to run risks," and put his arm in mine, and made me run as fast as I could until we were round the corner of a wall, out of Sir Jonas's sight.

"And now," said he, "we'll run another way."

And he took me down a long path between apple and pear trees until we got to a side-gate that I had not seen before.

"I am going to take you for a walk," said he.

"But it is so late, and I am dressed so queerly."

"Never mind. You are not sleepy, are you?"—and he looked down into my face. "No, your eyes are quite bright and—wide awake. And nobody goes to bed here till they are sleepy, which is a very good plan. As for your dress, I think it is very becoming—very becoming—quite Oriental. And as it is so late for anybody else to be about, and too dark for them to see you if they were, I am the only person you need consult."

So we went through the gate and by a narrow foot-path over the grass down to the river. We stopped when we got there, by the bath-house, and Mr. Carruthers said it would be a lovely night for a sail.

"Just down there to the broad," said he, "and along that path of moonlight, up to those trees and back again. Wouldn't it be jolly?"

"Yes, if it were not Sunday," I said timidly.

No other objections occurred to me. He looked down at me, as if hesitating about something, and then said—

"You are right. You see I respect your scruples, if I do not share them," and he took out his watch. "It is just a quarter to twelve. By the time I have got the boat ready it will be Monday morning, and then there will be nothing against it."

He had one foot in the boat before I could do more than say—

"But, Mr. Carruthers, it is so late. What would Lady Mills say?"

"I'll make it all right with Lady Mills; and you are such a good little girl that nobody will think anything of what you do."

I did not understand this speech so well then as I did later; but it gave me a sense of uneasiness, which however was but momentary, for he talked and made me laugh until he had the boat ready, and we heard the big church-bell strike out twelve.

"Now, unless that clock is fast, our consciences are free. Give me your hand. Step carefully. There you are."

I was in the boat, smiling with pleasure, yet ready to cry out at every movement, for I had never been on the water before.

"There isn't much wind; but I think there is enough to bring us back, so I'll just scull down the stream to the broad. Take the lines—so—and pull whichever one I tell you."

I disengaged my hands from the shawl I was shrugged in, and, overwhelmed by a sense of my new responsibilities, did as I was told without a word. And, as there was not much steering required, I fell to thinking of Laurence. I had had to talk a great deal during the last two days; but whenever I was not talking my thoughts flew back at once to him, as they did now.

"You are not thinking of me," said Mr. Carruthers quietly.

I started, blushed, and pulled my wrong line at once.

"Never mind," said he meekly—"only it's ungrateful. He isn't half so much absorbed in you as I am."

"Absorbed in me! I was thinking of—Mrs. Manners."

"Happy Mrs. Manners to be able to call up such a smile of beauty on the face of a beautiful girl!"

"Who did you think it was, Mr. Carruthers?"

"If I tell you, you will upset me, or command me to land you at once."

"No I won't. And you wouldn't pay any attention if I did."

"Let me come and sit by you, and I'll tell you. We can drift."

So he came and sat by my side, and directed our course by splashing in one of the sculls, first on one side and then on the other, as we went on talking.

"Why is it," he asked suddenly, "that a woman never cares for the man who loves her best?"

The question, which was quite new to me, startled me.

"Doesn't she—ever?" I asked anxiously.

"I—I am afraid not," said, in a very low voice, bending his face to mine with a sad look in his eyes that troubled me.

"But how is she to tell?" I asked tremulously.

"I think she can tell best by the look in his eyes when they are bent on her," he whispered, with a long steady gaze which disconcerted me.

I turned away my head.

"If," he went on, still in the same voice quite soft close to my ear, "she raises her lips to his and then tries to read in his eyes the emotion he feels for her—"

"But I did," said I quickly, turning to him with my heart beating fast at the remembrance of Laurence's first kiss.

Mr. Carruthers drew back, stroked his moustache, and looked at me in quite a different manner.

"You have not lived all your life in the country, Miss Christie, I think," said he drily.

And I saw in a moment, by the change in his look and voice, what I had done. He had been making love to me, while I was thinking of nothing but Laurence. I put out my hand to his very gently, and said—

"Don't be offended with me, Mr. Carruthers. I dare say all you say is true; but I am so fond of him that I cannot help thinking he does love me best."

I said this just to comfort him, for I could not really have doubted Laurence for the world. He took my hand and kissed it, but not, I thought, as if he cared about it very much, and then he said he had better think

about getting back; so he turned the boat round and put up the sail, and the wind having freshened a little, we got back in a very short time, not talking much; but we were quite good friends again, for my mingled delight and fear amused Mr. Carruthers.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Cold Day for the Geese.

Yesterday morning Hy Downs, the tunnel tender of the Virginia and Truckee railroad near Washoe Lake, went out about 5 o'clock to shoot geese. He soon discovered a flock on the ice in the lake, and crawled on his hands and knees on the ice, through the tules, to get a shot. Downs is a thorough sportsman, and never takes the advantage of a goose that is not on the wing. Coming within shooting distance he rose up and expected to see the birds fly, but they did not. Then he waved his hat, and a few of the geese flapped their wings, but did not budge an inch. He then walked up, and there, to his astonishment, found 128 birds frozen fast to the ice and helpless. It appeared they had surrounded an air hole for water the night before, and had been wading about in the overflow and slush until the cold wave came up toward evening, and before they knew it their feet had become fast in the ice. Some were dead, but the majority were living. Later in the day he went down with a cart and bagged the entire lot.

A Splendid Speculation.

Mr. Dumley was making an evening call, and Bobby, who was allowed to sit up a little later than usual, put to him the following question: "Mr. Dumley, do you want to make \$5 in ten minutes?" "Do I want to make \$5 in ten minutes?" laughed the young man. "Certainly I do. But how can I make \$5 in ten minutes, Bobby?" "Mamma will give it to you. She told papa she would give \$5 to see you hold your tongue for ten minutes."

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