

## A DIFFICULT SITUATION;

OR, THE END CROWNS ALL.

### CHAPTER X.—(Cont'd)

To Miss Rachel, her half-sister, Mrs. Moore, had offered a home, and the offer had perforce been accepted, even though to the country-bred woman life in a London street meant something nearly akin to purgatory. But Mrs. Moore had no welcome to extend to the child of Rachel Sterne's adoption. From the very first she had regarded with disfavor Joy's advent into her sister's house, and she resolutely and consistently disliked the girl, who to Miss Rachel and Miss Prudence had been the embodiment of her name.

"Robert and I will be glad to welcome you as a permanent guest in our house," she said to Miss Rachel on the terrible day when she had gone to the old Manor House at Mottesley to discuss the elder woman's financial difficulties. "My house is the proper and fitting place for you to live, and I am sure I will do my best to make you comfortable there. But I believe in plain speaking, and I had better come to the point at once about Joy."

"About Joy?"  
"Yes, about Joy. I need not go over the old ground; you know I never approved of your absurd, quixotic conduct in adopting the girl, and I must tell you frankly that I cannot offer her a home. She will have to find some work as other girls do. She can come to us until she finds it, but she must not look to us for a home."

For one wild moment Miss Rachel very nearly acted on a wild impulse and refused the proffered home which was to exclude Joy. But long years of self-control had taught this strong, yet gentle, woman the folly, and worse than folly, of acting on impulse, and after due thought and conversation with her nephew, Roger, and with Joy, Mrs. Moore's offer had been accepted.

It was in the sitting-room specially set apart for Miss Rachel's use in Mrs. Moore's house that she and Joy sat on the December morning when, by her interview with the Martindales, the girl had taken her first independent plunge in life; and in the same room, late that afternoon, Miss Rachel spoke long and earnestly to her nephew, Roger Hassall, about Joy and Joy's future.

As has been said, Roger's fortune had been swallowed up in the same catastrophe that had swept away his aunt's little all, and during the past few months the man who had looked forward to the peaceful and pleasant existence of an English squire, had found himself obliged to face the necessity of working for bare existence. And work is not easy to find when a man is thirty-five, and untrained for any profession whatever.

"An average brain, a strong body, and a pair of hands—these are my qualifications," Roger said to a friend when, in the early days of his financial disaster, professions and ways and means were under discussion. "I shall have to leave England. No sane man would stay in this over-crowded market looking for work. A colony is my only hope."

And thus resolved, Roger Hassall had, so to speak, squared his shoulders, looked Fate boldly in the eyes and taken up his burden with the quiet endurance that was at the very core of his character. Left an orphan early in life, he had always considered his mother's sister, Rachel, more in the light of a mother than an aunt, and as his

property in Mottesley adjoined the old Manor House in which Rachel and Prudence Sterne lived their lives, he had been as much with them as in his own house, the Hall. During Joy's days of toddling babyhood, Roger was growing from boy to man, and the small child had found in him an untiring playmate, a never-failing friend.

"It's just the same as if I had a real elder brother," she said to him once, looking into his face with her innocent blue eyes. "I am very sorry for girls who haven't got brothers to take care of them and give them good advice."

If Roger had winceed just a little at the lightly spoken words—if Joy's gay acceptance of brother and sisterhood as the relationship between them had seemed to him inadequate, and not really meeting his view of the case, he was wise enough not to divulge his feelings to the innocent girl of sixteen. Deep down in that quiet heart of his he cherished a hope that some day, when she was older, when the woman in her was awake, he should be able to speak to her of a love that was something very different from the brotherly affection she imagined; something which shook his own soul to its depths and would surely shake her soul too, in that some day that was to come. But now—the world had changed for him. With the upheaval of his fortunes had come also the stern necessity for thrusting away all those dreams that had made his life so sweet. It was a Roger grown older, sterner, and sadder, who stood with his back against the mantelpiece in Miss Rachel's sitting-room on the afternoon of that day when Joy had entered into her engagement with the Martindales.

A look of pain crept into his brown eyes as Miss Rachel, somewhat falteringly, told him of Joy's interview with her future employers, and for a moment after her gentle voice had ceased speaking, he was so silent that his aunt glanced up at him nervously.

"You are not vexed at me for allowing the child to do this, are you, Roger?" she said. "I did not see how I could prevent it, for your Aunt Grace does not wish to keep Joy here any longer than can be helped."

"Aunt Grace be—" Roger pulled himself up and laughed confusedly. "I was going to say something rather rude about Aunt Grace," he went on, his eyes twinkling for an instant; "but—in the first place, it is bad manners to swear at one's aunt; and, in the second, it is useless. Uncle Robert cannot be moved to see reason."

"You uncle never sees anything that your aunt does not wish him to see," Miss Rachel answered shrewdly; "she has him very well in hand," the old lady added with a smile.

"He always was as weak as water," Roger said shortly; "but now, Aunt Rachel—about Joy—You are sure these people she is going to be with are all right? I will find out what I can about them. We can't let the child go just anywhere."

"I fancy there is no doubt that Lady Martindale is the kind of person we should like Joy to live with."

The step-daughter, to whom our little girl is to be companion, is, I imagine, suffering from some deficiencies in her education. But both ladies were most kind and pleasant to Joy. She has made up her mind she will be happy with them."

"She would make up her mind to be happy in a cave-dweller's hut, if it was her lot to live there. She is true to her name through and through. Aunt Rachel—" he paused, a long, long pause, and the gentle, keen old eyes watched his troubled face anxiously.

"I think you must have known, must have guessed," he stammered on, "what I should have liked about Joy. Ever since she was a tiny thing—oh! before you put up her hair—I made up my mind that some day—"

His voice faltered and failed: he turned and looked down into the fire, as though he found the scrutiny of Miss Rachel's eyes unbearable.

"Yes, dear boy. I knew, I have always known. We old maids are not blind. Sometimes I even think

we see more than other people do—and—if you and Joy—nothing would have made me happier—if only—" she broke off incoherently, and Roger turned back again, straightening himself determinedly.

"One can't go through life saying 'if only!'" he exclaimed. "I like you to know what my dream was, Aunt Rachel, but—as things are, the dream cannot be fulfilled. If I make a fortune in Australia—well and good: perhaps there may still be some day for me. But meanwhile, Joy will see plenty of other men. She will probably marry—one might almost say she will certainly marry. In any case, under present circumstances, I could not speak to her of what is in my heart. I could not attempt to bind her."

"Oh, Roger!" Miss Rachel exclaimed, "would it be wrong just to tell her how much she is to you?"

"You dear, little, sentimental auntie, yes, it would be wrong. She thinks of me now merely as a nice, comfortable elder brother. She has no notion that my feelings for her are more than brotherly. And being the pauper I am, I have no right to open her eyes."

"I know you are right," the old lady said quietly, "of course you are right—but it seems hard. And—sometimes—Roger, it is fairer to a woman to tell her that you love, even if it may involve long waiting for her. She would rather know of the love, than have to eat her heart out, wondering whether it exists."

Roger stooped and tenderly patted Aunt Rachel's hands, laughing a little ruefully.

"Joy won't eat her heart out for me," he said. "I quite agree with you about the fairness of telling a woman you love her if there is a fraction of a chance that she cares for you in the same way. But Joy's heart, as far as I am concerned, is untouched—entirely untouched. To tell her the truth—to try to bind her to a beggar like myself—would be grossly unfair. And she is made of the stuff to give herself and her life to a man out of pity, just to make him happy, without any thought of her own happiness. No, Aunt Rachel, if the someday ever comes, it must come when I have something more to offer to Joy than just six foot one of me that stands in these shoes. Meanwhile, I'll find out about these Martindales, and arrange for the child's journey to Standon. I don't sail myself for another fortnight."

A week later, Roger, having discovered that the Martindale ménage was in every respect unimpeachable and all that could be desired, stood upon the platform at Waterloo, beside the train that was to carry Joy to her new surroundings. The girl leant from the carriage window, her bright face a little dimmed because of her recent parting with Miss Rachel, and the coming parting with Roger; but she was speaking eagerly.

"And oh, please, you will write ever so often, won't you? I shall want to hear everything about Australia, and about what you are doing—and—everything."

Roger nodded and smiled. He was doing his best to make the parting brotherly and commonplace, and if his eyes looked into the girl's grey ones with a light that was not entirely brotherly, he was quite unaware of all his glance expressed.

"Her heart is not touched—her heart is not touched." His own words to Aunt Rachel raced to and fro in his mind whilst he talked of mails and steamers, of sheep-runs and the Bush, and of Joy's own new

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life, in a random, headlong fashion, quite unlike his usually quiet manner.

"Her heart is not touched," he said to himself again, when, having wrung her hand with a grip that almost hurt her, he stood back from the moving train and watched the face he loved so swiftly out of his sight. "Her heart is not touched," he said to himself yet once more, as he made his way out of the station, and down into the busy roadway below, "I was right about that!"

And at the same moment Joy, watching the receding roofs of London through a burst of tears, felt her heart beating with strange, unaccustomed beats, because of the close pressure of Roger's hand—felt her pulses quicken oddly because of the remembrance of that look of Roger's eyes—the look which seemed to say so much, and yet to leave so much unsaid.

### CHAPTER XI.

"I suppose you've had a lot of fellows after you?"

"A lot of—?"  
"A lot of fellows—chaps—well, you must be a silly if you don't understand. I mean you've had a goodish bit of attention, haven't you?"

Violet Martindale's rather high-pitched voice became quite querulous, as she saw the effect of her remarks upon her new companion, who stared at her with heightened color, and with a curious look of dismay in her eyes.

"I—didn't understand," Joy answered, the color deepening on her face. "Oh, no! I certainly didn't have any fellows, or attention. I mean, one doesn't care to talk about things like that, does one?" she added, with a touch of girlish dignity that gave new charm to her face.

"My goodness, you are funny!" Violet, who had been lying back on a couch in front of the drawing-room, drew herself into a sitting position, and stared at the other girl as though Joy were a strange creature, new to her experience. "Why, anybody would certainly call you pretty, even in the simple clothes you wear, and I should have thought you would have had fellows round you all the time."

Joy swallowed her disgust with the best grace she could muster, trying to remember, as she had to try many times a day, that Violet Martindale's points of view on almost every subject were diametrically opposed to any she had ever conceived possible. During all her sheltered girlhood at Mottesley she had never come across a type of young woman who even remotely resembled the mistress of Standon Towers—the small vulgarities, the cockney accent, and the extraordinary lack of reserve in the girl to whom she was companion, filled Joy with a never-ending amazement.

"She is learning how to behave on the surface," was Joy's shrewd reflection, "but underneath the surface she has an innately vulgar way of looking at everything; and, though she is so ready to talk about the most intimate things in the most unreserved way, her mind has some corners into which nobody is admitted." This thought, which had passed through the girl's brain more than once before, recurred to her now, on the January afternoon, when persistent torrents of rain having made outdoor pursuits im-

possible, Violet and her companion were driven to the big couch by the drawing-room fire.

(To be continued.)

### SHE IS A GREAT MUSICIAN.

Queen Alexandra Is An Expert Mandolinist.

Few people outside her family and her most intimate friends knew until the other day that Queen Alexandra is an expert mandolinist. Her tutor, Signor Leopold Francia, has now told how he first met his royal pupil in 1895, when he was appointed director of the Ladies' Mandolin and Guitar Band Orchestra.

This organization consisted of sixty of the most highly born women in England, including Queen Alexandra, then of course Princess of Wales. For three or four generations in succession Signor Francia used to go every summer to Kensington Palace or to Bridgewater House, Lady Ellesmere's house in St. James's. Queen Margherita of Italy, an expert mandolinist, had set the fashion for this instrument and from Rome, Naples and Milan the fashion spread to England.

"Queen Alexandra," says Signor Francia, "had rare musical attainments. She played both piano and guitar with great skill and feeling and her knowledge of harmony and counterpoint was remarkable. She has written several compositions of real beauty. One of these, 'A Wedding March,' for piano and mandolin, was played at the marriage of Lady Beatrice Egerton and Mr. Kemp."

"She appeared several times on the concert platform with mandolin or guitar. Only a few ladies of the court and her tutor were in the secret. When she appeared on the platform she dressed like the other members of the Ladies' Orchestra, in a black costume relieved by a sash of red, black and yellow if she played the guitar. No one could detect her identity, as she always appeared in the programme under the name of Countess Gage."

Anxious Parent—"Doctor, my daughter appears to be going blind, and she is about to be married." Doctor—"Let her go right on with the wedding. If anything can open her eyes, marriage will."

Few of us become round shouldered from carrying other people's burdens.



The Hunter—Oh! I beg your pardon. I mistook you for a deer.

The Native—No harm done, mister. I reckon I'd a bin safe enough if ye'd mistook me fer a barn door.—Life.