

# A DIFFICULT SITUATION;

OR, THE END CROWNS ALL.

## CHAPTER XV.—(Cont'd)

After Sir Godfrey's departure, although life at Standon Towers dropped back into its old grooves, it seemed to Joy that it flowed on them less smoothly, that, since the accident and the long weeks of anxiety, a subtle sense of restlessness had crept into the atmosphere. To Violet she traced a subtle feeling of change: since her return from London, Violet had not seemed like herself. Of her sojourn with her foster-mother, Mrs. Dawson, she spoke but little, appearing anxious to avoid the subject, and showing signs of irritation when Joy asked her innocent questions about her doings in town.

"I was ever so much too unhappy to do anything," she said crossly, more than once. "What with worrying over Cousin Godfrey, and—and everything, I didn't want to be bothered with going to shops or theatres. I didn't seem to care about things." Perhaps she might with truth have said the same thing about herself, now that she was at home again, for it was very evident, both to Joy and to Lady Martindale, that she did not seem to care about "things" now. Her manner was curiously listless; she moved languidly, she was disinclined for any exertion, and refused either to ride or to walk, whilst she positively declined altogether to pay visits. She shrank, too, from seeing those neighbors who called at the Towers, and even to Joy, with whom she had been wont to chatter gaily and easily, she now scarcely talked at all. Her face had grown very white and wistful, and into her eyes there had crept an expression of nervous shrinking, which made Joy feel sure that she must be afraid of something or of somebody. But of what?—of whom? Why, in her own house, should she start as though she had been shot, when a door was opened, or look up with frightened eyes and flushing face when anyone came unexpectedly into the room? Why did the bare suggestion of a stroll in the lanes and copses make her shrink and shiver, as though a dreadful thing had been proposed to her? And why did the advent of the post sometimes bring a look that was almost one of terror into her lovely face?

Joy discovered by a mere chance, that Violet, who, before her visit to London, had never put in an appearance at breakfast until long past nine o'clock, now stole to the dining-room before Lady Martindale was downstairs, in order to look at the envelopes beside each plate. On two occasions Joy had come upon her in the very act of glancing through the piles of letters, and on each occasion Violet, flushing guiltily, had stammered the same semi-apology—

"Thompson is so stupid; he mixes the letters sometimes, and I was expecting one from Mrs. Dawson."

To distrust a living soul, to feel suspicious or doubtful of another person's good faith, were feelings which to Joy's whole nature, which was of crystalline simplicity and straightforwardness: yet even she found it impossible not to doubt Violet just now. And although she tried to win the other girl's confidence, her efforts were useless. At every turn Violet eluded her kindly intentions, refusing to be drawn into any intimate conversation, or to speak of anything but the most surface subjects. But a crisis came at last, in the sudden way that such crises do come, when they are least looked for or expected.

It was the afternoon of a wet and windy March day, and after luncheon Violet had gone to her own room, saying that she had a headache, and would lie down for a few hours. It so chanced that, on this particular day, the afternoon post arrived just before tea-time, and Joy, seeing two letters on the hall table for Violet, took them with her when she carried a dainty little tea upstairs to the girl's room. She had not been able to avoid noticing that one of the letters was addressed in Sir Godfrey's clear, bold writing; the other in an ill-formed nondescript hand, which she

thought was probably that of Mrs. Dawson; and she hoped that the arrival of this long-looked-for letter might cheer Violet and put an end to her restless unhappiness. But when, having put the tea-tray on the table in Violet's luxurious room, she handed the two letters to the girl, she was startled and amazed at the effect they produced. Violet sprang into a sitting position on the couch, the soft flush of color induced by her late sleep faded out of her face, her eyes grew wide with fear, and she put out her hand and seized Joy's arm with a frightened, tremulous clutch.

"That's—Cousin Godfrey's writing," she gasped out. "I know—I mean, I guess, what he's written—and oh, Joy! whatever am I to do? Whatever am I to do?" Joy looked pityingly down at her, and as Violet sank back amongst the silken cushions, it flashed through the other girl's mind, what an exquisite picture she made, even in this moment of acute distress. She wore her pale blue wrapper with its lavish trimming of filmy lace. Her tumbled golden hair fell in picturesque disorder upon the blue cushion, whose soft coloring enhanced the dainty loveliness of her face, the blueness of her frightened eyes.

She was so like a child, with those tear-dimmed eyes and quivering lips, that, like Godfrey, Joy felt an overwhelming desire to take her in her arms and administer the same comfort one administers to children.

"Whatever am I to do?" Violet repeated. "I have been a silly—and—and—" she held both letters tightly clasped in one hand, whilst the other clutched Joy's arm, and it seemed as though a paralysis of fear hindered her from opening either letter.

"Why are you so unhappy?" Joy asked quietly. "If that is a letter from Sir Godfrey, it can only be a kind one. You and he are such friends—"

"That's just it," Violet drew herself again into a sitting position—"him and me have been such friends—and whatever can I do now that I—that I—oh! whatever shall I do?—whatever shall I do?"—and with a burst of hysterical sobs she flung herself against Joy, crying as if her heart would break.

"Tell me what is the matter," Joy said, when the first paroxysm of sobs was over, "perhaps I can help you, only tell me what is wrong, and why you are so unhappy."

"Oh! I can't—I can't!" Violet cried passionately, with a fresh outburst of sobs. "I daren't say anything—just leave me alone—let me fight out my own misery as best I can—I—I shall worry through somehow. Don't you worry about me," she ended, her tones strangely bitter and hard. She drew herself away from Joy with a violence that nearly upset the other girl, and by that violent movement she loosened the dressing-gown which was only lightly folded about her.

Something that must have been about her neck flew out, and fell at Joy's feet with a little ringing metallic sound, and as Joy stooped to pick it up, Violet pushed her aside with a sharp cry of dismay, almost flinging herself to the floor beside the small shining object. Quick though her movement was, Joy's eyes had been quicker: she had seen plainly what Violet had so hastily picked up from the floor: and as the meaning of what she saw rushed into her mind she put her hand on the other's arm, exclaiming quickly, in accents of startled horror—

"Violet! Violet! what does it mean? Oh, Violet! what does it mean?"

## CHAPTER XVI.

"The child's name was to be Joy—I am as sure of it as I am that you sit here beside me. If the child was a girl, the name was to be Joy, and somehow poor Marjory seems to have made up her mind it would be a girl. Poor little Marjory!"

"It is an uncommon name"—another voice answered the first—"and it's curious you should have mentioned it to me—a curious co-

incidence that I should happen to be the person to come your way now—when you are wanting to make these enquiries."

"My experience of the world—and I have had a tolerably large and varied one—is that coincidences in real life are much more common than they ever are in fiction, or than any writer would dare to make them in fiction. We call them coincidences, perhaps—the old man looked earnestly into the younger man's face—"perhaps 'The Moving Finger' writes the coincidences, as it writes all the rest," he repeated slowly, his eyes turning towards the open doorway and the creeper-covered verandah; "when I was young I loved my Omar—you see I haven't forgotten it; only I don't call 'The Moving Finger,' Fate, but God!"

"I also," came the brief reply from the man who sat beside the arm-chair, where the other speaker lay back, propped up with pillows. "Possibly if we analysed what we all mean, we should find that our apparently diverse meanings are identical. But tell me," he went on, after a pause, "tell me about your sister and her child; tell me exactly what it is you want me to do for you."

They were a curiously contrasted couple, these two men who sat side by side in the barely-furnished sitting-room of the low wooden house. The old man propped up in the arm-chair was obviously hastening fast towards the Valley of Shadows, and the greyness of his rugged face, the dark shadows under his sunken eyes; his thin, blue-veined hands that shook when he even tried to draw his blanket closer round him, all told of far-advanced disease—of fast approaching death.

The younger man, whose years could not have numbered more than thirty-five, showed all the superb vigor and strength of a healthy, clean-living Englishman, and the glance of his companion dwelt with an affection that had in it something of tender admiration, on the other's bronzed face and clear grey eyes.

Coincidence? Fate? Which was it that had brought Roger Hassall apparently by chance far up the country to Dambawallah, the sheep-run of Thomas Falkner? Or was it neither of the two, but a higher Power than both, which had ordained that at the very moment when old Mr. Falkner most longed for a reliable Englishman to whom he could commit an important trust, that Englishman should be sent to him. Yes, actually sent to him—or so it seemed, for neither man had sought the other. Roger tramping the country in search of work, had lighted upon this particular run, had thought it might be advisable to call upon the owner in case a possible job should offer itself, and had at once won the heart of the old sheep owner.

Thomas Falkner was accustomed to gauge men quickly, to divide the sheep from the goats with no uncertain hand. Roger had attracted him directly. Indeed, the two men had been attracted to one another, and Roger's first liking for the rugged, kindly old man, deepened into a genuine love and respect, as the passing days revealed to him all the quiet and abiding goodness of Falkner's character. A simple faith in God: a straightforward striving after right; a hatred of all that was impure and false—these were the essence of the old sheep farmer's nature. They found responding chords in Roger's own soul.

For more than a month now the two had lived together in the simple wooden house which was the sole dwelling-place of one of the richest sheep owners in the district; but only this evening, for the first time, had Falkner broached the subject of his relations and friends in England.

(To be continued.)

## WHERE PROTECTION HELPS THE FARMER.

Keeps Out Meats and Butter From the Antipodes.

An instance of how a Protective Tariff protects the farmer of Canada is seen now and then, when the Customs Officers hold up for duty some shipment from far-off Australia or China.

On March 18th last, 750 carcasses of frozen lamb from Australia were landed at St. John, N. B. 250 carcasses were sent to the William Davies Co., Limited, Toronto. The greater part of the remainder were shipped to Montreal. This lamb was purchased at nine cents per

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pound delivered in bond at Toronto.

Under existing conditions the duty was three cents per pound. This made the lamb cost twelve cents per pound laid down in Toronto.

Fresh dressed lambs were selling in Toronto at that time at 12½c. to 13c. per pound.

Hence, after paying this duty there was not much difference between the prices of the Australian and Canadian lamb.

The duty protected the Canadian farmer against the Australian product.

But under Reciprocity the duty on this frozen lamb will be only 1½c. per pound, so that similar shipments could be laid down in Toronto at 10½c. per pound, two or three cents per pound cheaper than the price for the home raised products.

Referring to the lambs which were sent to Montreal. When they reached Montreal. Canadian lamb was selling at 10½c. The Australian lambs were sold at 9½c. delivered ex cars Montreal duty paid, the owners apparently being contented to undersell the Canadian market by one cent per pound.

Now, if you wish to see the effect upon the live stock market of the receipt of this Australian lamb in Montreal, turn up the Montreal papers of March 20th, in one of which, for example, the heading was, "Sheep Sold Lower in Local Markets."

If, with the three cent duty on every pound, frozen lamb can be profitably imported from Australia, it seems almost conclusive that reducing the duty will also reduce the price of Canadian lamb accordingly.

And not only does Australia export frozen meat, but it exports butter as well. It exports annually between fifty and seventy-five million pounds of butter.

Australian butter can be laid down now in bond at Montreal at 23c. per pound. A duty of four cents per pound keeps it out of competition with the Canadian butter now selling at 26c. per pound.

Under Reciprocity, which would do away with the duty of four cents per pound, the Eastern Townships butter would have to compete during the winter months with Australian butter which cost only 23c. per pound in Montreal.

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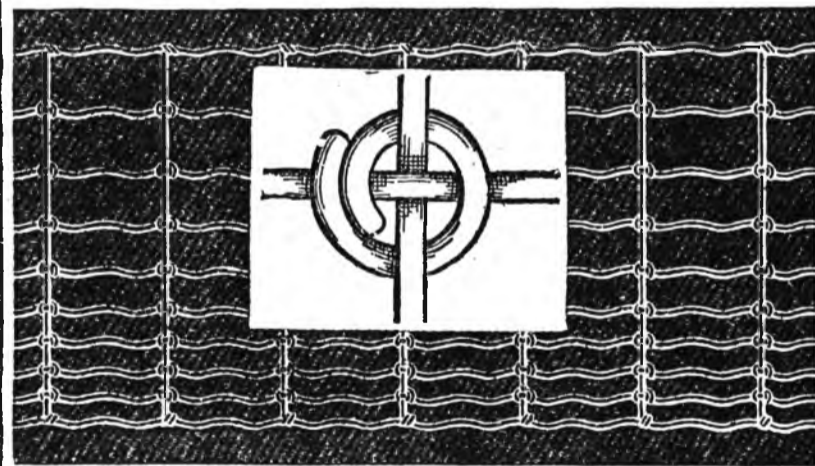
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