

She Would Be a Lady

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

Conrad, who was watching Eva, and debating mentally whether or not he should bestow his valuable affections upon her, was now pounced upon, and an immediate introduction demanded.

To the surprise of his friends, however, Conrad declined to accede to the request, and while they were still talking they saw Eva rise to her feet, as though in sudden surprise and agitation; then, after a moment's pause, she walked toward a tall, handsome, elderly lady dressed in black lace and diamonds, who had just entered, and was leaning upon the arm of a remarkably handsome young man, who, from his likeness to herself could scarcely be taken for any one but her son.

"Mrs. Westbrook," Eva said, as she reached the lady's side.

The person she addressed looked at her in doubt for a moment. Not so the young man who was with her, however; he recognized her at once, and an expression of pleased surprise came over his face as he said:

"It is Eva Randolph."

Then he and his mother shook hands with the girl warmly; while she could not help blushing at the involuntary admiration with which Mrs. Westbrook regarded her.

"We are only passing through London," said that lady; "and I received your letter a day or two ago. I meant to see you before I left town, but I never expected to meet you here."

Eva replied that the unexpected pleasure was mutual. Then the lady asked the girl who brought her there? And if she knew many of the people present, and a few minutes later Dr. Seherer and Barbara coming to seek her, was introduced to her old friends. Whereupon the professor devoted himself to Mrs. Westbrook, and took her to the various points of interest in the building, and Ernest, with Eva and Barbara, followed.

But Barbara, after a short interval, felt herself to drop and lagged behind, and Ernest Westbrook found himself again by the side of the girl to whom he had once nearly proposed and whom he had carefully avoided ever since. But destiny stronger than his will had thrown them together once more.

But if Eva had been dangerous in the old days, she was ten thousand times more dangerous now. Then she was an unlovely girl who had prematurely escaped from the schoolroom, now she is an accomplished woman, as clever and good as she is beautiful.

His thoughts do not travel quite as far as this, however. He only feels that a subtle attraction, such as he has never before experienced, draws him irresistibly toward her, and he very willingly yields to the delightful sensation.

CHAPTER VII.

The morning after the conversation Eva was in her painting room trying to work, but she made little or no progress. A fever of restlessness was in her veins. She hoped rather than expected that Ernest Westbrook or his mother would call upon her and she was unable to work, and afraid to go out lest she should miss her friends if they did call. In the afternoon, however, her hopes were realized, for Mrs. Westbrook came to Gower street—but she came alone.

She was calmly and quietly kind to the girl; she looked critically at her work and praised it. Then she expressed her desire to have a little private conversation with Mrs. Longford, and Eva left them together.

"Now, Mrs. Longford, about Eva Randolph," began Mrs. Westbrook.

"I am glad to say that everything I can tell you is in her favor," was the reply.

"I am delighted to hear it," was Mrs. Westbrook's rejoinder. "She seems to be a very charming girl, besides being industrious and clever, is she really as good as she seems?"

"Yes, better, if possible," was the warmly generous answer.

"That is very satisfactory; and now there is another subject I want to know something about. Has Eva any admirers—serious admirers, I mean—in plain words, does any man want to marry her?"

"Yes, I think so; but I cannot really say," stammered Mrs. Longford.

"She was so unused to this direct method of catching that, woman of the world as she was, she did not know how to evade or how to resent it with dignity and politeness."

"Don't think me needlessly inquisitive," said Mrs. Westbrook, a trifle more gently, "but I have, as you will perceive, a strong motive for my present questions. I have a son, Mrs. Longford, about whose future I am naturally anxious, and though Eva is a dear good girl, you can understand that I should not invite her to come and see me as I wish to do if I thought there would be any danger to him. Now I am as frank with you as I intend you to be with me."

And so saying Mrs. Westbrook leaned back in her chair, with a self-satisfied smile, and looked and seemed to feel as though her confidence had been a favor conferred upon her companion.

Poor Mrs. Longford at any rate accepted it as such and ignoring a suggestion that was thrown out with regard to Dr. Seherer, she told Mrs. Westbrook, in confidence, that she knew her own son was in love with Eva, and she hoped and believed that Eva had a very warm preference for him.

"But she is so wrapped up in her profession," the artist's wife continued, "that she isn't like other girls; she takes too little notice of men."

"Then you think I am safe?" asked Mrs. Westbrook, blandly.

"Quite safe," was the reply.

Then Mrs. Westbrook was taken to Eva's studio, where Barbara Longford was somewhat excitedly talking to her.

"It's too bad of you, for you did flirt with him, and you know you don't care a pin for the man, while I am ready to die for him," the ladies heard Barbara say as they opened the door.

Mrs. Longford looked vexed and mortified, but Mrs. Westbrook was amused and she looked at the speaker somewhat curiously.

She was not pretty. Her long, abundant, coarse brown hair flew wildly down her back; her face was swarthy in hue, though the dark-red blood glowed brightly on her cheeks, and her brown eyes were half hidden by spectacles which she always wore.

A sudden idea struck Mrs. Westbrook. This girl, though plain, was, no doubt, clever; her people were friends of Mr. Carlyon, the rector, and it would not be a bad idea to invite her down to the Grange with Eva. It would keep the latter from being left alone with Ernest, and as for Barbara herself, even Mrs. Westbrook could not regard her as dangerous. So the invitation was given and accepted, and Mrs. Westbrook took her leave.

About a fortnight later the two girls arrived at Westbrook Grange.

Eva had not seen Ernest since the night of the conversation, and she felt hurt and disappointed to find that he was not at home to greet her.

Not that she had any right to expect such an attention, she admitted to herself, for she was a mere nobody, a poor girl rescued from poverty by his mother's bounty, and some little talent and energy of her own, and she tried to crush down the feelings that rose in her heart, and to wish that, after all, she had not come here.

Her visit was not to be simply one of pleasure, however, she was to paint Mrs. Westbrook's portrait, and she told herself that she would be able to drive away unpleasant thoughts when she was at work.

But evening came, and with it her spirits brightened. Ernest had returned in time for dinner, and had brought the rector with him.

Mr. Carlyon was not an old man. He was pleased to meet Eva again and to congratulate her upon the wonderful improvement which time had made in her, but he was more especially delighted to renew his acquaintance with Barbara, whom he had not seen since she was quite a little girl.

So dinner passed over cheerfully and pleasantly, and later in the evening Barbara played and Eva and Ernest sang, and Mr. Carlyon played the flute, while Mrs. Westbrook pretended to be listening, when, in fact, she had fallen quietly asleep.

After this evening scarcely a day passed without the rector managing to make one of the party, on some pretext or other, and it soon became evident that Barbara had forgotten the German professor, and that she thought no position in life more desirable than that of the wife of a country clergyman.

Mrs. Westbrook saw what was going on, and smiled. She had often wondered that the rector did not marry, and as often wished he would. One thing Mrs. Westbrook did not see, however, and that was her son Ernest was falling irretrievably in love with Eva.

This clever lady had been, and still was, so very careful of the girl that she believed such a catastrophe to be well-nigh impossible.

Seldom did she suffer Eva to leave her sight. On the plea of hastening on the completion of her portrait, Mrs. Westbrook kept the girl for some hours of each day closely at her elbow. Then she claimed her help and advice concerning quantities of old lace which she possessed, and when the girl looked pale and fagged, she would insist that she should go to a drive, or a walk, and would herself, if possible, accompany her.

And if she did by chance lose sight of Eva for a time, she usually managed to secure the companionship of her son, so that he should be out of danger.

And yet love that laughs at locksmen indulged in many a malicious game at Mrs. Westbrook's expense.

Ernest Westbrook found Eva none the less dangerous because she was kept so much out of his way, while the difficulty he constantly experienced in even speaking to her, except in his mother's presence, gave a certain amount of piquancy to the pursuit, for Hitherto he had drifted with the stream, but now he was prepared to strike out and swim against adverse currents.

Meanwhile the visit which was to extend over two or three weeks was drawing to a close, and the young squire was only waiting for an opportunity to tell Eva that he loved her.

Mr. Carlyon, however, did not find his wooing so difficult.

Barbara did not profess to do anything more than amuse herself and her hostess and be amused, and though Mrs. Westbrook was always sweetly amiable to her, she soon wearied of the chatterer whom she had no motive for keeping by her side, and consequently the rector seldom failed to find her alone and glad of his company and attentions.

It seemed a very hasty kind of love making on the part of a man who had drifted into middle age without a serious thought of matrimony, but Mr. Carlyon, like many men who put off a momentous step for a long time, no sooner decided to take it than he set about doing so in a hurry.

The consequence was that the day before the girls were to return to town, and three weeks after he had met her, the rector proposed to Barbara Longford and was accepted.

By this time Barbara had quite forgotten the German professor. Indeed, she was so delighted that she forgot everything but her own good fortune and great happiness, and poor Eva had

to listen to long rhapsodies of which the rector was the subject, while her own heart ached with the conviction that such tremulous bliss would never be hers.

She offered her congratulations, however, and tried to feel happy in the happiness of her friend, and then she stole away to her own room to lock herself in and weep at her own isolation.

But when she had thrown herself down upon the bed preparatory to indulging in a flood of tears, she found that the tears would not come.

The room was close and suffocating, she could not breathe, the air seemed to be charged with electricity, a thunderstorm was evidently not far distant, and the atmosphere of the bedroom was intolerable.

In any less agitated frame of mind, Eva would have hesitated to leave the house, and she would certainly have avoided the trees.

But now the tearless storm in her heart was far more agitating than any conflict of the elements could be; she forgot her fear of thunder and lightning, she never gave a thought to any possible downpour of rain, she only knew that she was intensely miserable, that she was suffocating for want of cooler air, and without a thought of consequences she caught up a hat and went downstairs, making her way by a side path unobserved into the park.

Here she felt a little better. She took off her hat and sat down on the soft grass, and tried to think calmly of herself and of her future. Slowly but surely she was coming to a definite resolution. If she yielded to this love that had taken such a terrible hold upon her, it would ruin her life, unfit her for earnest work, and make noble endeavors almost impossible. Also, if she weakly gave her love unsought to a man who might disdain it, she would despise herself far more bitterly than any one else could despise her.

So she felt and she resolved that this weakness should end. This should be her last visit to Westbrook Grange, her very last. Nothing should ever tempt her to come to this dearly-loved spot again. To-morrow she would go away for good, and now she would look her last upon, and say farewell, to each well-remembered spot.

So she thought, and she wandered about until she came to a wide-spreading tree, which seemed, from the memories she associated with it, like an old friend, and she rested her hand on the gnarled trunk as though uttering a mute farewell.

At that moment a dreadful peal of thunder broke the oppressive silence, and seemed to shake the very ground, while a blaze of lurid lightning appeared to envelope the tree and the fallen insensible at its foot.

And now the rain came down in torrents, and the thunder pealed and the lightning flashed almost incessantly, while Eva lay under the tree quite motionless.

Barbara Longford, about this time, with a pale face, and her long hair streaming down her back, came into the room where Mrs. Westbrook and her son sat watching the storm and said, with evident terror:

"I am dreadfully frightened of thunder and lightning, and so is Eva—worse than I am. Do you know if she has come in from the grounds? I saw her going out half an hour ago."

"Eva out in this storm, and alone!" exclaimed Ernest Westbrook, starting to his feet in such sudden alarm that his mother, looking at him, felt her own heart sink within her.

There was more than kindly anxiety here. No man would be so agitated as this about any woman if he did not love her.

This sudden revelation so upset Mrs. Westbrook for the moment that she could do nothing.

"She must be out under the trees, and afraid to come through the rain," said the young man, with a troubled face. "I shall go and look for her."

His mother entreated him not to go himself, but to send some of the servants, but he paid no heed to her, and went out in the storm, followed by a couple of men.

"He cares for her more than he does for me," moaned Mrs. Westbrook, despondently, when she saw her son go.

And Barbara, whose presence she had forgotten, replied, promptly:

"Yes, every one can see that the loves her."

And meanwhile the storm raged on with unabated fury, and the two ladies, watching through the windows, saw what seemed like a lifeless body between them.

"Oh, she is dead, she is dead!" cried Barbara, despairingly.

Mrs. Westbrook uttered never a word, but in her heart she hoped that Barbara's exclamation was well founded.

To be Continued.

THE RETIRED BURGLAR.

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"As a rule," said the retired burglar, "I did not pause to look at pictures in the houses I visited; there wasn't time even if I had had the inclination; but sometimes one's attention would be fixed on a picture by circumstances. For instance, as I was passing my lamp one night along a parlor shelf to see if there was anything there, the light fell, at the same moment, on a silver snuff box and a dagger-type of a man in uniform that stood right beside it, and as I dropped the snuff box in my pocket I held the light on the picture for a minute and inspected it a little bit more closely. It interested me, somehow, though there wasn't anything very remarkable about it one way or the other; just the picture of a youngish, self-satisfied looking man in a military uniform.

"When I turned away from the shelf I walked across the parlor to the hall of the house and out into the hall to go upstairs, but just as I put my foot on the bottom step I heard what sounded like.

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Doctor's Wife—Why don't you go to that patient in the waiting-room? He has been there ever so long.

Doctor, looking up from his paper—If I don't keep him waiting for an hour or so, he'll think my charges are high.

SHE FORGAVE HIM.

Wife—You've been drinking again. Husband—Can't help it, m' dear—make me sho' happy, m' dear.

Hush—Makes you happy, eh? I'd like to know why? Be, hic, cause I s'hee two of you, m' dear.

SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

Boeshyshell is a bright fellow, eh? Very. He is known as a satirist? So I have heard. Is he really a satirist? Well, I don't know. From what I have heard of his jokes I would call him a flatterer.

A YOUTHFUL VERSION.

Bobby, who has tripped and fallen on a comb—Oh, mamma, look at the cut on my head. The teeth in the comb bit me.

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WHEN LOVE IS KING!

Love's youthfu' years are swift an' sweet

An' fu' o' hope sae cheerie, O!

When heart w' heart in union meet

O' love they never wearie, O!

This life to them is naught but bliss,

To each they're a'that's dearie, O!

When vows are answer'd w' a kiss

How can this life be drearie, O?

Chorus:

Noo, dinna fash yer head ava'

Wi' cares an' worries drearie, O!

When Love is king just mind his law,

O' that you'll never mearie, O!

Bind hearts w' Love sae firm an' fast,

Nae bands will his can tether, O!

Love's sunnie smiles through life

Should last, an' never be a' gait,

And brave life's wintry weather, O!

Our ripper years shal' fruitful be,

An' happy a'thegither, O!

It's time eno'gh to wish to dee

When over us grows the heather, O!

Chorus:

Toronto, JOHN IMRIE.