

Edith Grantly's Hero.

CONCLUDED.

THERE seemed no valid reason why Miss Edith Grantly should feel annoyed at any questioning one might choose to make concerning the affair hinted at in her soliloquy. Simply told it was as follows: The train upon which she had been a passenger had met with one of those accidents which are of quite common occurrence. Something about one of the wheels gave way, and, as the train chanced to be passing a curve, the cars were thrown from the track, and some of them badly demolished, and a large number of the passengers more or less injured, though none it was thought fatally. The shock had stunned Edith for a moment, and there was now a faint discoloration on her arm and in the edge of her hair just above the temple, and both places were still very tender.

It would seem the most natural thing in the world that she should mention this accident the first thing upon meeting her friends, the more especially as she had been expected the day previous, and one after another had made comments on her disappointing them. She made some careless evasive answer, but was very careful to say nothing of the accident, which had been the real cause of the delay. And because a gentleman sitting opposite her had the misfortune to have his arm broken, by holding it with admirable coolness and presence of mind over her head when the side of the car was steven in, was certainly no reason why she should be so reticent about the matter. It would seem the more reason why she should mention the circumstances, not only as showing her own narrow escape from probable death, but as revealing the bravery and chivalry of this stranger. It seemed almost ungrateful, this strange silence, and was only another proof of what an unsolvable enigma is a woman's heart.

Mrs. Grantly, according to appointment, went to drive with the Mordaunts after tea. The Mordaunts were dandy sort of people, lived luxuriously, dressed in the most elegant manner, and kept up a style quite astonishing to ordinary people, as were a great majority of the dwellers in Carleton. But if the Mordaunts had no peer, they had plenty of imitators in all the different strata of Carleton society; people who with incomes less than one-twentieth of that of the Mordaunts, strove to ape their style and extravagance, weakly fancying people could not see through the shallow device, and that they might thus climb the social ladder. There was another class who were more admirers than imitators, and to this class belonged Mrs. Grantly. Now one may object to being aped and imitated, but who ever heard of one's disliking to be admired? You and I, dear reader, perfect as we are in other respects, have undeniably a spice of this common weakness about us. Don't we feel better and happier to our very marrow when we find that some one likes and admires us? You know we do; and you know also that this liking and admiration kindles a little glow of grateful feeling in our own hearts, and we feel a sort of instinctive tenderness toward them which we do not toward others.

I am at a loss whether to accredit it to art or artlessness on the part of Mrs. Grantly, the way in which she had revealed to the Mordaunts her admiration of them. Enough that it had been revealed most unequivocally, and that in grateful return the Mordaunts patronized the pretty, airy, volatile Anna Grantly, very much to her gratification, and to the envy of her neighbors.

Edith was sitting in the long pleasant drawing room. The faint moonlight, struggling with the crimson tints of sunset, fell through the long window in waves of pale rosy silver light, giving a soft mellow atmosphere to the room, and bringing out in soft relief the finely-cut and daintily-colored faces of Alice and Effie Grantly as they rested, one on either shoulder of their elder sister. Near the window, but with his face in shadow, sat Mr. Grantly. There was a faint air of nervousness about him, though he talked easily and lightly, even gayly at times. Suddenly he sprang away from the window, with a half uttered imprecation on his lips, and strode hastily out at an opposite door.

"It's mamma and the Mordaunts," said Alice, looking out. "Papa dislikes them, I think."

There was the sudden sound of gay voices, interspersed with little ripples of light laughter, and then the whole party came into the house. There as Mr. Mordaunt, a brilliant fascinating man, with easy society manners, and a certain natural gallantry which women instinctively like in men. Mrs. Mordaunt, a little dignified, a little supercilious, and a good deal affected. Mrs. Anger, Mrs. Mordant's sister, a lady of considerable beauty and well educated—and thirty-three. And, in addition to all these, Mr. Dudley Sinclair. Edith greeted them all with quiet self-possession, but with a half-resentful feeling toward them in her heart, for had they not driven her father away? And there were reasons why she wished to keep him home just now.

It was a weak vanity that assured Edith Grantly of Dudley Sinclair's interest in her. Once she was rather favorably inclined to accept the attentions he offered, but now she shrank from them, and was so cold and distant that her mother scolded and cried, and came near being ill over it, after he had gone.

"You are the most stubborn, heartless girl I ever saw," she said, between her sobs. "Your father is in some sort of trouble, I know, or Vancouver, who is a regular vulture, would not be hovering about the place as he is. Now here is Sinclair, handsome, wealthy, of a good family, and in love with your very shadow, as any one can see, and you are as short and as cold as if you were a princess, with a half a dozen of kingdoms at your command.—You've no feeling for your father, as much as you pretend to care for him, or you would see how easy it would be for you to help him. It's easy enough to make professions, but that won't save the farm. I never could hold up my head again in society if this place had to be sold for debt. What would such people as the Mordaunts care for us then?"

"As much as they do now," Edith answered, quietly.

"And all our furniture and clothing," she went on, weakly; "people would talk if I dressed half decent, though I don't know why I should give up my clothes; it's about all the comfort I have now. And that reminds me, Mrs. Mordaunt says I can have my pearl silk made with an accommodation train—to loop up, you know—and then it will do for the street as well as for an evening dress. Laura Swift has got one made so. It is wine-color velours, and is very stylish looking. You may be sure she will dress now."

In this way she ran on until Edith could endure it no longer, and throwing a scarf over her head, went out and paced up and down the piazza till she heard her go to her room. Then she paused and listened, the anxious beating of her heart sounding like the tramp, tramp of an army in her ears.

How hushed and still everything seemed! The moon, just slipping behind the pines, cast a ghostly line of shadows over the upland and the river, and a faint pale mist hovered and trembled over the meadows, and faded away in vague purple glooms where it touched the forest. Edith shivered nervously, though ordinarily she was a stranger to nerves. I have a theory that no one but a woman really knows the depth—the terrible depth—of meaning there is in that one word—waiting! To sit through long—O Heaven, how long!—hours of silence, with terror and pain, and nameless foreboding pulling fiercely at the heart; to start and listen—to fancy all dreadful things—and still to sit and wait!

By-and-by Edith heard a faint uncertain step—then a voice—then more steps, and then, as, springing to the window, she leaned forward and listened, to these words, slowly and fearfully distinct:

"Curse you, Rick Saunders! It is you who have wrought my ruin—I see it now. With your assumption of friendliness, with your assumed pretence of innocence, and ignorance, and honesty, you led me on where a confessed villain would have had no chance. And now it's all gone the last chance lost!"

"Well, yes, squire, I calculate Anna Stanley aint a great sight better off to-night than if she'd married your father's hired man, instead of his son. I don't mind telling you since we're on the subject, that I have been a looking forward to this time something over twenty years. Not that she is of much account, anyway; but when Rick Saunders is alighted or trod on, he never forgets it. Good-night, and pleasant dreams."

A muttered oath and a mocking laugh broke through the stillness, blending together in strange accord. Another moment and Edith was at her father's side, and Rick Saunders was slouching off through the darkness, saying over and over to himself:

"There's no chance—no chance! Vancouver won't take it now, and it'll have to be sold for debt—sold—sold!"

In her daintily furnished bed chamber, Anna Grantly slept in unbroken repose, the faint stain of tears on her soft pink and white cheeks, which still retained the freshness and fairness of youth. In another chamber still, Effie and Alice, their dimpled arms over their heads, and a tangle of chestnut curls shading the snow of the delicate ruffled pillows, slept the sweet undisturbed sleep of careless childhood.

But of the two who sat through the weary night in the long drawing-room below, what shall I say? In few lives does there ever come such hours of hopelessness and suffering as came to Charles Grantly that May night. By degrees he told Edith all the story. Her mother had been first engaged to this Saunders. She came to Carleton with him, with the understanding that she would be his wife when he got employment. Instead, she had left him almost before he got employment. Some time afterwards he met and married her, not knowing until a week before his marriage that she had ever been engaged to Saunders. It struck him rather unpleasantly, and he was not very careful perhaps of the words he used to his father's laborer. At

any rate, Saunders had remembered them twenty-two years. It had been ten years since he had first sat at the gaming-table with Rick Saunders. At first he was indifferent; gradually he got quietly interested, then absorbingly so, and from that it rapidly developed into the passion which had ruined him. For it was ruin hopeless, unavoidable ruin. This last night's work had sealed it, and Rick Saunders had urged him to the venture against his own better judgment. Meadow Farm, sold at that hour, could not begin to pay his indebtedness, and there was no hope or chance left for its redemption.

Edith heard all the bitter painful story almost in silence, save for the few words of pity and sympathy spoken in low gentle tones in the ear of the despairing man. By-and-by, when the first agony of the thought had exhausted itself, she said, quietly, in a decided voice:

"I am going to see Ross Atherton. He is your own cousin, and able to buy twenty Meadow Farms if he pleases. He can buy the place and not feel it, and thus secure mother and the children from being turned into the street. It will not be like a stranger's owning it, for he must let us remain here. I shall tell him all this, and—"

"Be laughed at for your pains," interrupted Grantly, shortly. "I tell you, Edith, it will do no good, and only subject you to humiliation. I've not seen Ross since he was a boy, and what do you suppose he cares for our troubles and disgraces? He is very rigid in his principles, too, I have heard, and will have little sympathy for the weakness through which I have been ruined."

"One may have sympathy for the sinner while hating the sin," she returned, gently; and at least it will do no hurt to ask him. It is not charity, only a very great favor, and with all his wealth, Ross Atherton may need favors from his fellows some day. At least, I shall be in Dudley before another night, and I do not mean to fail. A shelter and a home must first be secured for them; after that you and I will go to work and pay what other debts the sale of the farm does not. Of course, we shall pay him rent while it is in his hands."

It was a dull lowering day, with slight dashes of rain at intervals, and when Edith Grantly stepped into the station at Dudley, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, it was raining hard. She was weary with her one hundred and thirty miles of travel, but she felt that she could not afford the dollar a hackman asked to take her to Mr. Atherton's, a mile and a half away. So she sat and waited for it to slack raining, looking out through the dingy pane at the dripping eaves, and reading, absently, the names of some score or so of ambitious travellers who had scratched their names on the sashes. By-and-by the rain suddenly ceased, and the sun shone out through a rift in the clouds. She had already obtained the necessary directions, and now she lost no time in setting out on her walk. She was conscious of a vague unreal feeling as if she were walking in a dream. The strange town, and the stranger errand upon which she had come, filled her with a sense of bewilderment. She half paused at the corner of the street, trying to recall the direction the station master had given her. A carriage was coming, and she resolved to ask the way, for she was too tired to afford to make a mistake. The gentleman was driving slowly, and she turned to speak to him, but a sudden surprise chained her tongue, and sent the red blood to her face in a torrent. And so the gentleman spoke first.

"My travelling companion, I believe," he said, with easy cordiality.

She recovered herself instantly, bowed, and looking at the arm in the sling, said:

"And you are able to be out so soon?"

"I am just going in," he replied, smiling. "Or rather, I have just reached town; my home is in Dudley."

"Doubtless, then, you can inform me if I should go this way to reach Mr. Ross Atherton's?"

"Yes, and I can do better still. I go that way, and can take you along, if you will honor me."

Edith half hesitated, but another shower was already beginning to fall, which aided her at once in her decision. A small boy who was driving, sprang out at a word from the gentleman, who took the reins in his left hand.

"The horse is very gentle, and will go home without guiding," he replied to Edith's remonstrances against depriving him of a driver.

"Were you ever at Dudley before, Miss Grantly?—you see I have learned your name," he added, smiling.

"I never was; I do not even know Mr. Atherton, although he is my cousin."

"Your cousin?" he asked, facing around abruptly.

"Certainly—or rather my father's cousin. Why, is there anything about him wrong—or disagreeable? Do not be afraid to tell me. I should consider it a favor if you would just tell me what sort of a man he is, and if you think I shall be apt to like him."

"I hope so," he replied with a curious look in his face.

"How does he look?" she asked, her heart sinking a little at the way her companion spoke of her cousin.

"That is a genuine woman's question," he answered, evasively, coloring slightly. "By the way, there is Ross Atherton's house now?" pointing with his whip to a pretty stone-colored villa, half hidden in the greenery that surrounded it.

"It's charming, isn't it?" Edith cried, with kindling eyes.

"Perhaps I should be considered a prejudiced judge, though I am very glad you like it. There is a good deal in first impressions; don't you think so?"

Something in her companion's look and tone brought the color to Edith's cheek, but she did not look up again, for she felt his eyes on her face. So, to relieve her own embarrassment, she said:

"Do not go out of your way for me pray."

"O no, I am going to Atherton's myself," he replied, carelessly.

"Are you?" she asked, with such evident gladness, that he leaned over and looked in her face, his own a little triumphant.

"Why, do you think you can manage to like your cousin Ross just a little?" A sudden suspicion shot through her brain.

"You—you are not he!" she cried, breathlessly.

"I am Ross, and I can safely say I never was ashamed to acknowledge the fact before. And now permit me to bid you a hundred welcomes to my home." And he assisted her out, despite her remonstrances.

"I'm only sorry I cannot give you the right hand of welcome," he said.

"You gave that in my behalf the other day," she answered, quickly, a sudden tremulousness in her voice.

"And I'd give them both to-day. Come, come into the house," he added, turning quickly and almost abruptly. And so she followed him in.

Three days afterward, Edith Grantly alighted again from the train at Carleton station. John Irvin and Bess did not await her coming this time, but I do not think she noticed it. The gentleman who accompanied her evidently engrossed her attention largely. He was pale, and looked as if he had much better been at home, but he was very self-willed, and would come.

"I'll stay at Meadow Farm until I get well, and you shall nurse me," he said, laughing, when Edith tried to dissuade him from the journey, fearing it would make him ill.

That night Rick Saunders suffered the greatest disappointment of his life. Charles Grantly paid every dollar he owed in Carleton, and Meadow Farm was not to be sold for debt. After more than twenty years of waiting and plotting, to be cheated out of his revenge in this cavalier manner, was enough to make one angry, certainly, and was, at least, some slight excuse for the hard words he indulged in so unstintedly. But his power to harm Charles Grantly was lost forever, both by word and deed.

Mrs. Grantly never knew how near she had come to being homeless, now how it happened that Edith took that sudden journey to Dudley. She was so wholly absorbed those three days she was absent in the "pearl-colored silk" and "accommodation train," that she had little leisure for other thoughts. But she did learn of the railway romance, and knew that in some way her husband's cousin had assisted him, though to what extent she did not even guess. But Charles Grantly knew and appreciated his cousin's generosity with painful keenness.

"I never expect to be able to repay you, Ross," he said, with emotion; "leastwise the kindness of the deed."

"Nonsense! There was no generosity about it; I was the most thoroughly selfish fellow in existence," Ross returned, laughing and coloring. "Of course I'd like to stand well before her, and that is why I did it, depend upon it!"

But the warm grasp he gave his cousin's hand, and the misty look in his eyes, belied the lightness of his words.

"God bless you, Ross Atherton!" Mr. Grantly said, brokenly.

"He has blessed me a thousand times more than I deserve, already, in giving me her love—my sweet Edith."

"Did you want me, Ross?" asked Edith, coming into the room just then, and catching the sound of her name.

"Want you, my darling! Haven't I been telling you every day for a month how much I wanted you?" he asked, gayly; "and now I must tell it all over again?" Which, though apparently unnecessary, he straightway proceeded to do.

Rather Remarkable.

The Tennessee papers record the following: About three weeks ago a lady 66 years of age, and living near Zion's Church, on White's creek, gave birth to a child.—Both mother and child are doing well, the child, a girl, being the very picture of health. The lady in question is the mother of several daughters, all of whom were married several years ago; and before this new departure, had the happy privilege of paying her attentions to numerous grandchildren. This is certainly a very remarkable case, and we doubt if the medical records show a similar one anywhere. The fortunate father is about the same age as his wife. All we have to say, is bully for Zion's Church and White's creek, and may the mother and father live long and prosper, and enjoy many such blessings.

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