

The Adopted Daughter.

CHAPTER III.

JASPER LONGLEY GAINS SOME INFORMATION.

On returning to the drawing-room, after showing Jasper to his apartments, Sir John found Amber awaiting him.

"Well, Amber," he said, lightly, "how do you like your new cousin?"

Amber hesitated, and a shadow passed over her face.

"I hardly know," she said. "I don't know much of the world, father, and I suppose Mr. Longley is good. Of course, he must be good, being your cousin."

"Not necessarily," returned the baronet with a smile. "My relatives are not all perfect, any more than other people's. Jasper's father was a sad scoundrel, and made ducks and drakes of his property notwithstanding that he was my own cousin!"

"How do you like your cousin, papa?" asked the girl, thoughtfully.

"Very well, indeed, Amber. He is intelligent, well educated, and extremely polished. He will be a great addition to our little home-circle; and then he plays so splendidly!"

"Yes, he does play well," said Amber. "Even when I was in London, and went to all those grand concerts and recitals of celebrated artists, I never saw a man who did not bear better music—none with more soul in it. Yes, he must be a good man, or he couldn't play as he does."

"So you have been to the theatre, then? He was good or not, eh?" laughed the baronet. "Well, that is better than falling in love with him. Our bright, frank Ralph will contrast favorably with him."

Amber blushed, and Sir John read her thoughts on the question in her kindling eyes.

"As you think so little of Jasper, my darling," he said, after a pause, "perhaps you would rather not invite his sister to Courtney Hall?"

"Oh, I want her to come!" cried the girl, with enthusiasm. "Did you not see, papa, that Mr. Longley said she was fair-haired? I am sure she is pretty, and I know I shall love her."

"Mr. Longley said she was fair-haired? I am sure she is pretty, and I know I shall love her!"

"You are neither coherent nor logical, my dear," returned Sir John, with a laugh. "But you are warm-hearted and loving, which is all that counts. If she is so beautiful, she must be a good girl."

"I am sure she must be worthy of her name, papa. I hope she is beautiful, for I do love beauty; but, after all, beauty of form and features is compared to beauty of mind and soul."

"Very true, you wise little Solomon!" said Sir John, looking tenderly upon the girl, who, in his eyes, was the most beautiful of his children.

"And so," he added, "you don't object to what I purpose doing for these young cousins of mine?"

"Object? Why what an idea! Why should I object, dear papa?"

"They were in the midst of a pleasant conversation when Jasper Longley entered the drawing-room."

He had dressed himself in the most fashionable style and in the best taste, and looked more handsome than in his traveling suit.

"Dressed so soon, Jasper?" exclaimed Sir John. "You have prompt and punctual habits, I see—like all the Courneys! You are just in time for dinner, I believe."

He was, indeed, for at that moment dinner was announced. The baronet led the way to the dining-room, and Jasper, giving Amber his arm, followed close behind him.

The dining-room was a large and lofty apartment, adorned with paintings from the hands of masters, with deep bay windows at the sides, and with a beautifully frescoed ceiling. The carpet was rich and dark, and the furniture was of massive mahogany.

The table gave a sort of lightness and grace to the room, being liberally spread with sparkling crystal and glittering silver upon a cloth of snowy damask, and the delicate Sevres dishes were heaped with delicate viands.

In one of the bay-windows, looking out upon the splendid garden of Courtney Hall, stood Mrs. George arrayed in rustling black silk.

She came forward on the entrance of the baronet, and was introduced to Jasper as the faithful and honored friend of the family.

After dinner, the party, including Mrs. George, returned to the drawing-room, where a pleasant conversation followed.

"You have a beautiful voice!" exclaimed Longley, when they were seated at the first duet. "It is so sweet and so flexible yet so rich!"

He tried her voice in different styles of singing, and his admiration of it increased until he declared it actually marvellous, with which compliment the baronet was greatly delighted.

"A nice young man—a true gentleman!" whispered Sir John to Mrs. George. "He's a rare Courtney!"

At a late hour the party separated, and the Hall was soon afterward wrapped in darkness.

At breakfast the next morning the baronet said: "We must look about the country a little today. Suppose we write to Blanche directly, and after dispatching the letters, have a ride?"

"I would like it very much indeed," declared Jasper.

This decision meeting with favor, the trio adjourned to the library, and proceeded to write the letters to Blanche Longley.

cloth dress. She rode well, too, with a fearless grace.

"This was laid through fields of billowy green, along pleasant roads bordered by spreading hedges, under the shade of spreading trees, until they finally came to the road to Hopewell."

It was a very little village, but the late introduction of a railway station had given it more the air of business than it had ever before enjoyed.

The manners and customs of the people were quite primitive, which perhaps accounted for the fact that of late quite a number of pleasure seekers had come to Hopewell in the summer months.

The village street was quite deserted when the trio rode up to the Crown Inn and dismounted.

"I'll send my maid to my room over the way," said Amber, "while you gentlemen post the letters. I shall be occupied only a few minutes."

She stepped up her dress and fitted across the narrow street, and within the portals of a small, dingy shop.

Sir John then conducted his relative to the post office, and delivered the missives into the hands of the postmistress, saying as they re-entered the street:

"If you've no objection to walking on to the Crown Inn, Jasper, I will step across here to give an order to one of my tradesmen. My doing so will save a journey for some one else."

He asserted that he would as soon go on alone, and the baronet, promising to follow him without delay, departed on his errand.

This was a very opportune time! I wanted to know longly, as he hastened back to the inn. Now, if I manage my cards properly, I may find out something more about this mystery of Amber's."

"If I manage my cards properly, I may find out something more about this mystery of Amber's."

"I dare say the landlord of the Crown knows all about it."

Arrived at the inn, he entered the cool, shaded parlour, and neither he was immediately followed by Mr. Gos.

Jasper recognized him immediately as the baronet's visitor of the previous evening, and as the landlord had now on a big white apron, he was instantly aware of his vocation.

"You are the landlord of the Crown, I suppose?" he said, inquiringly.

"I am, sir," replied Mr. Gos, with a deep bow. "You are Sir John's visitor, sir? Won't you have something, sir?"

"A glass of lemonade," was the reply. Mr. Gos brought it.

"A fine country this," remarked Jasper as he sipped the cooling liquid. Sir John had observed Sir John, "but of course she will come in the afternoon. We will all go over in the carriage to welcome her."

"The baronet gave the brother and sister his embraces, and then came forward with Amber, seating on his arm."

Jasper went through the necessary introductions between his sister and relatives, and the baronet then led the way to the Hall, seating on his arm."

This is a happy surprise, Blanche, said Sir John, in a glow of pleasure. We have but just received your letters, and expected you to-morrow."

I intended to surprise you, said Miss Longley, in a silvery tone. What a lovely place Courtney Hall is!

"I hope you will find it so joyfully that you will stay here a long time," observed Sir John, pleasantly. "My little Amber has been so delighted at the prospect of having you for a friend and companion."

Amber had been gazing at the newcomer in a sort of wondering delight, which was increased as the young lady laid off her bonnet.

Blanche Longley was of medium height, with a slender and well-rounded form, and was as graceful as a swan. Her complexion was delicately fair, and her wealth of golden curls, her soft blue eyes, shadowed by golden lashes, her tiny scarlet lips, and classic features, made up a picture as rare as it was striking.

"And this is Amber—Cousin Amber?" said Blanche, as she in turn regarded the girl, who, in her eyes, was the most beautiful of her kind.

Amber blushed under this address, but felt her heart very warm toward her new friend.

"Shall I show you to your room?" she said. "You would like to change your traveling dress, perhaps?"

"Thank you," said Blanche, "I am taking her bonnet, Blanche took Amber's arm in her own, and they left the room together."

"I was wondering," he said, quietly, "what would keep Sir John so long."

"Here he is, and he is looking as if he had just entered the room. I offer my apologies for having been gone so long. The horses are waiting at the door."

Amber led her guest upstairs to the east wing, and ushered her into a splendid set of rooms.

"These are your rooms, Miss—"

"Not Miss," interrupted Blanche, "but cousin. I am your cousin, you know, and I shall be glad to call you by that name."

Blanche glided through the rooms, scanning everything, noticing that her luggage was in her dressing room, and she finally said:

responded the baronet. "It is time the lad had returned. Ah! there he comes now."

The next moment a horseman rode up to the porch, dismounted, and handed the letter-bag to the baronet, and then went off with the postman.

Amber lifted her head, opened the bag with busy fingers, and drew out a couple of letters and several papers. One of these letters was addressed to the baronet the other to Longley.

"There is none for me!" she said, in a disappointed tone, peering into the bag. "Maybe they're mine, and I'll open them."

A glance at the delicate style of Italian chirography and the Paris postmark showed Jasper that the letters were from his sister.

"You shall read mine, darling," said Sir John, cutting it open with his pocket-knife. "See! it is to us both. Let us see what they say."

The letter did not prove very satisfactory to his kindness, declaring herself tired of Paris, and longing for the society of Amber, but not appearing to have any arrival at Courtney Hall.

"Your sister leaves it quite uncertain, in her letter to us, when we may expect her to return, and she has enclosed the letter to Amber's keeping. 'Is she more definite with you, Jasper?'"

"Yes, sir—she says she hopes to be here to-morrow night, and she has the prospect of her visit here. Would you like to see the letter?"

He handed it to her, and she read it with a look of interest. It was a very sweetly written letter, but Sir John, who had written her very confidentially of his plans for her and himself, had instructed her how to comport herself toward the baronet on her return, and she had accordingly, and a pair of eyes slippers replaced the boots, and Blanche said:

"You may go now, Lozon. I am going to sit up a while, and will ring when I want you."

The maid bowed and withdrew. Blanche then nestled her feet upon a foot stool, leaned back in her chair, and appeared to be awaiting a visitor.

She had not long to wait, a knock sound upon her door.

In answer to her invitation to enter, Jasper walked into the room.

"You haven't replied yet, I see?" he observed, closing the door behind him. "I came up for a little chat with you, Blanche. Did you get my letter?"

"Yes," replied Blanche, "I got it, and fortunately for you I did. Suppose any one else had got it? Just think how imprudent you were to trust such secrets to the post."

"But I had to be done, sister mine, or how could I have lasted ten days from your stay in Paris? I am a human, existence here! No plain invitation would have brought you."

"Yes, a plain invitation would," returned Blanche. "I was tired of Paris, and longing for a change. I shall like it here, I dare say."

"Tired of Paris?" repeated Jasper. "I am sure you are tired of being tired of Paris. You are a human, existence here! No plain invitation would have brought you."

"Yes, a plain invitation would," returned Blanche. "I was tired of Paris, and longing for a change. I shall like it here, I dare say."

"Well, I suppose it's a woman's capriciousness," remarked Jasper, quite convinced that there was a reason for his sister's conduct. "By the way, you've written me nothing lately about your sister, Lady Glenville. Did she propose?"

Blanche's face grew deathly pale, and she shaded it with her hand, lest Jasper should discover its pallor.

"Nonsense," she said, her voice somewhat husky. "I but filled out my letters with idle gossip."

"But you," persisted her brother, "are convinced that something was wrong in his sister's manner, 'this Lord Glenville pretended to be an English nobleman, did he not? There is no name like his in the English peerage.'"

"I never said that," she replied. "You said he was an English nobleman, who was in ill-health, and did not frequent society. Those were your words."

"Well, those were his words to me. I see nothing in them to talk about. No doubt the fellow is an impostor. In fact, he was proved so, and was shut out of the very little society he was fortunate enough to get into."

Blanche's voice was quite faint as she spoke, and she kept her face concealed from view.

"Blanche," said her brother, persuasively, "I am sure you have a secret. Confide in me. Tell me all that has occupied you during the last four years."

"What if I have or have not a secret?" interrupted Blanche, ignoring his last sentence. "You are everything but a confidant. Mine are my own, and if I have any I shall keep them to myself."

"Very well, then, let the past go. Let us talk of the present. How did your life like your new friends at Courtney Hall?"

"I don't like that Amber a bit," was the reply. "I honestly, childish thing."

"John intends her to marry my son," remarked Jasper. "He is educating her to become mistress of the Hall, and the bride of Ralph. As Ralph hasn't seen her for four years, I thought you might captivate him. You must secure either the father or the son."

"I don't know," said Blanche, "but his talk was all of Ralph and Amber. He praised her until I was sick of hearing her name. He kept talking about her under the pretense of making me love her."

"But you were very affectionate to her."

"Very likely. I don't mean all I say any more than you do."

"You have made a fast friend of Amber by your caresses. Keep it, Blanche—win all hearts here by your gentleness and sweetness, and be the next Mrs. Longley to us."

Mrs. George, having a headache, withdrew to her own apartment when the repast was finished, and the others returned to the drawing-room, where Blanche managed to monopolize the baronet's attention throughout the evening, while Jasper devoted himself to Amber.

At a moderately late hour the party broke up, each member retiring to his or her own rooms.

On entering her sitting-room, Blanche glanced at her pocket, which she had just opened, and she found her summons.

"She was a prim, quiet-looking woman, rarely moved except when spoken to. 'Help me out with my dress, Lozon,' exclaimed Blanche, with petty imperiousness. 'How clumsy you are! I shall wait a long time to get used to my ways.'"

"My lady forgets that I have only been in her service two days," meekly replied the maid.

"Very true; but it isn't necessary to mention the fact," said Blanche. "The dress is off," said Blanche. "There was a time when you longed to get used to my ways."

"The delicate silk dress, with its azure trimmings, was removed and tucked carelessly upon a sofa, and Blanche donned a plain, blue merino dressing-gown handed her by her maid, and then seated herself while Lozon struggled to get off the tight-fitting boots from her feet. The task was at length accomplished, and a pair of eyes slippers replaced the boots, and Blanche said:

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"You have made a fast friend of Amber by your caresses. Keep it, Blanche—win all hearts here by your gentleness and sweetness, and be the next Mrs. Longley to us."

"I will," declared Blanche, compressing her lips. "In fact, I must do something, Jasper. I have about run through with what money I had, and I must recruit my fortunes here. By the way, who is Amber? Is she a Courtney?"

Jasper replied by telling his sister she had gathered from Mr. George's story he had gathered from Mr. George, and carefully omitting all mention of the clew he believed himself to have attained to her history and the secret of her birth.

"A founding!" then ejaculated Blanche. "A nameless nobody? When I am mistress here, she will have to go. 'I have taken a fancy to the girl, Blanche,' said her brother, with assumed carelessness. 'She will be a beauty one of these days, and I would be happy to make her Mrs. Jasper Longley. I want you to raise me to her—in the most delicate manner, you know.'"

"Five hundred! That is good. When I am Lady Courtney you shall have a handsome sum yearly, Jasper, particularly if you aid me in becoming so."

"Is it? You are to gain and keep the money, I suppose, a fashionable and handsome wardrobe?" inquired Jasper, smiling at his sister's promise.

"Yes. I wanted a week to get some of the latest styles. And so it is settled that we are to help each other to the best of our abilities?"

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NEW BRUNSWICK RAILWAY.

(Operating 443 miles.)

WINTER TIME TABLE.

All trains are run on Eastern standard time, which is 30 minutes slower than Saint John actual time.

COMMENCING DECEMBER 9th, 1883, Trains will run as follows:

St. John Division.

DEPARTURES.

8 00 A. M.—From Water Street, St. John—Passenger and Mail Express for points West, and for St. Stephen, St. Andrew, Woodstock, and all points North of the mouth of the Bay.

11 00 A. M.—From Carleton, with local and through freight.