

THE THREE SISTERS.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALAN FAIRFAX.

On a bright cold day in March, Olive was driving her pretty pony towards Lendal, the neighboring town. Sir George sat by her side, giving her a few finishing instructions in the management of her steeds, although he declared, fondly, she was almost perfect. Olive was delighted—her husband had been out hunting so much since his return, that she had seen very little of him, and it was with a sense of acute relief that she saw him safe by her side, instead of feeling a prey to nervous torments about his safety.

"Do you particularly want to go into Lendal to-day darling?" asked Sir George presently. "I did, rather; but if you have anything else to do, it does not matter."

"I hear Fairfax came home last night, and I want to speak to him about some land he has to sell. Very likely he will go over to call to-day, and I should not like to miss him."

"We'll go back then," said Olive. "Is there room to turn here, George?" "Yes; take the first turning on the left."

Just as they drew up at the lodge gates Mr. Fairfax came out on horseback. "I was just going over to Gabriel's Wood, he said, smiling and taking off his hat.

"This is my wife," said Sir George, "Olive, Mr. Fairfax," and then they bowed and smiled again. "She ought to have waited until you called on her," went on Sir George, "but we do not think it necessary to treat bachelors with so much ceremony."

"Now you have come so far," exclaimed Mr. Fairfax, addressing Olive, "you must come a little further and see the Abbey. I have not much to show you, but your presence will brighten up the old place. It is many a long day since it has had a visit from a lady."

"I should like so much to see it," answered Olive, with a pretty, appealing look at her husband, while Mr. Fairfax watched her and thought what a graceful young creature she was, and what a fortune choice his friend had made. He was not given to taking strong fancies, but he felt it would be a long time before he tired of looking at the bright, frank face, with its eyes, sincere eyes.

"That mouth and nose would never lie or deceive a man," was his mental register in the moment that he waited for Sir George's acquiescence. "I am so glad we met you," said Olive, turning her bright eyes on Mr. Fairfax, and speaking with the newly acquired confidence of matrimony. "I wanted so much to see you—George is always speaking of you."

"That is a very trying test for me," smiled Mr. Fairfax. "Assuming George has spoken freely of me, and what a fortune inclined to think too well of me, and are able to suffer proportionate disappointment."

"Oh, no," cried Olive quickly. "I shall like you very much."

"Ah, Alan," laughed Sir George—"you see I shall have to take her to London for a season, to make a woman of the world of her."

"I hate women of the world," exclaimed Mr. Fairfax quickly, while Olive looked uneasily at her husband, as if she feared to have said something wrong. But he returned her glance with such a fond smile, that she was reassured, and said brightly—

idence to his wife. "You ought to feel flattered for it is not many women who have had his good opinion."

"I should not have thought he disliked women," answered Olive. "His manner is always so courteous, and I am sure he is more thoughtful—even than you."

"He is very kind to me," said Olive, "but I know he is very hard on women in his heart. I believe he was engaged once when quite a young man, and the girl he loved was his friend's sister; but I never heard the rights of the story. She had a weak mind."

"How could anyone behave badly to such a man as that?" said Olive, thoughtfully. "One would think any woman would be only too proud to be cared for by him."

"My pet," said experience teaches us that it is not always the good fellows who are loved the best—many a scamp gets the devotion of a good woman's life, and breaks her heart into the bargain."

"And sometimes the nice men throw themselves away on silly little creatures, who are not half good enough for them," whispered Olive, putting her arms round her handsome husband's neck.

"I would not change you for a duchess, my darling," he answered, fondly. "Lady Vibart came very often to see Olive. She had grown quite fond of the child as she called her, and in return Olive felt a profound admiration for the stately beauty. She was delighted with her home, but Sir George insisted on various alterations according to her taste and pleasure and taste. It was fixed that they should go to London for six weeks in the season, where Mary and Alice Hamilton were to stay with them in turn. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton had promised to come for a fortnight in May, and Olive was looking eagerly forward to this visit. Nurse Greer had arranged some very agreeable and well-ordered housekeeper. But when May came Mr. Hamilton had some urgent business which he could not leave, and he went to town, as they had previously arranged. Olive was anticipating with some awe her first meeting with Sir George's sister, by whom she was to be presented at Court. She had a secret liking for Mrs. Stanhope had not approved the marriage, and was anxious to make a favorable impression upon her. She was full of childish delight at the idea of going into society, and made all sorts of matrimonial projects for her sisters, much to her husband's amusement. "We shall be able to take them out a good deal, shall we George?"

"Not to dinner parties, dear."

"Oh! they will not care for that—we all have dinner parties; but to balls, and fetes, and flower shows, and the opera."

"Oh, yes, as much of that as they like."

"And may I come to us as soon as we go to town, as they had previously arranged. Olive was anticipating with some awe her first meeting with Sir George's sister, by whom she was to be presented at Court. She had a secret liking for Mrs. Stanhope had not approved the marriage, and was anxious to make a favorable impression upon her. She was full of childish delight at the idea of going into society, and made all sorts of matrimonial projects for her sisters, much to her husband's amusement. "We shall be able to take them out a good deal, shall we George?"

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CHAPTER XXIV.

Mr. Fairfax was speaking by the open window of his luxurious chamber, and he had just struck from the enormous sounding clock over the old gateway, and a flood of silver moonlight poured into the room, and he was looking out at the light of the silver lamps. He was thinking, deeply, intently; unmindful of all but his own reflections, and still as one in a trance, and he was looking out at the light of the silver lamps. He was thinking, deeply, intently; unmindful of all but his own reflections, and still as one in a trance, and he was looking out at the light of the silver lamps.

"In accordance with Sir George's wishes, Olive was very frequently with Mrs. Stanhope. There was no love or sympathy between the two women—Mrs. Stanhope always, cold, never showing her face, and Olive impulsive—Mrs. Stanhope was painfully correct in her sister-in-law despised her, and thought her silly, childish, and deficient in tact and manner. Sometimes when she was a little petulant with her husband, and disappointed because he excused himself from accompanying her in a walk or ride, she would be bitterly galled to read the cold contempt and displeasure in her sister's eyes. It was ten times more mortifying to her that Mrs. Stanhope never made the slightest comment upon her actions, than if she had reproved or reproached her; but under those disdainful eyes she never felt at rest. Her happiest time was when with Lady Vibart, who was always gracious and kind to her."

Mrs. Anson had persuaded her husband to bring her to London for a fortnight, and was thoroughly enjoying her glimpse of the world. She was asked to go to a good deal, in the first place for Mr. Anson's sake, and then because she was extremely agreeable, and knew perfectly well how to make herself liked. The fortnight had lengthened into three weeks, and Mrs. Anson had just consented to remain another week; Mrs. Stanhope was perfectly radiant. Sir George was often by her side, particularly at balls, for she was a wonderfully good dancer, and Mr. Anson was in a diligent search to get her to leave a visit to London thoroughly, and without restraint. She was so good to him, so solicitous about his health, so devotedly fond of him, that he had no heart to begrudge her these small enjoyments.

Olive never suffered so bitterly as when she watched Henrietta talking to Lady Vibart, or when she saw her face. She had a terrible intuitive kind of knowledge that this woman was trying to win away her husband's love, and she hated thought made her suffer terribly. She grew quite unlike herself—silent, preoccupied, petulant, very different. Sir George thought angrily from the fact that in the evening she had married eight months ago.

She was ungrateful, he argued—that could she possibly want, more? He gave her every luxury, every enjoyment that wealth could purchase; it was always kind, always considerate, never controlling her in any way; she might do as she pleased, and he never persisted in remaining away from her. "I will not go home, to be met by sullen looks," he declared to himself.

Henrietta's keen eyes noted everything—she never lost an opportunity of fanning the flames. Sometimes she would say to herself, "I have so many advantages, their indisposition, their comforts; at others she would praise the sense, the breeding of fashionable women in seeking and enjoying their own amusements, without troubling or being dependent upon their lords."

"When women owe everything to their husbands," she would say to him, "it is hard indeed that they should wish to restrict their own enjoyments and pleasures. The great charm of wives possess is that fact which makes them keep their husbands with pleasant smiles, and keep them amused as long as they are in their company."

Henrietta uttered all these little sayings innocently enough, but with a delightful consciousness that she was applying all she said to Olive.

But one day an incident happened to Mrs. Anson that threatened to shake her highly built security to its very foundation. It was one of these strange accidents fate delights in, which proves that truth is stranger than fiction. One day, as she was walking down the garden, she met Sir George, and she was surprised to find that he was looking at her with a smile. "I have just had a letter from your sister, and she is very well, and she is looking at you with a smile."

"I shall be charmed," she answered, casting a glance at the stranger whose back was turned to her.

"A Vicomte" said Sir George, laying down lightly on his arm, and the gentleman seemed to pass through Henrietta's frame for a moment her head swam, and she turned deadly sick. Then, as the baronet pronounced the words "M. de Garnier," she went to introduce a lady who speaks your language perfectly; she recovered sufficiently to bend her head; but finished as she was, she could not control the burning blush that overspread her face. For an instant the Frenchman was equally petrified, then he took off his hat and murmured a few courteous words in broken English.

Sir George had turned to speak to Mrs. Anson, and he now observed the confusion of the new acquaintances, and he was looking at them, and then turned back to speak to Lady Fabian. Mrs. Anson asked the Vicomte a variety of questions. Had he been long in London?—did he intend to make any stay?—was he his first visit?—what did he think of the English ladies? And then, when she perceived that one of the party were observing them, she whispered, "I have, you see, no trahirez," and he answered in the same tone—

"N'avez pas peur, ma belle."

Then he inquired politely if madame would be so kind as to let him know what she thought of the evening, and Henrietta replied in the affirmative.

Had any other man paid her so much attention, been so constantly at her side, society would probably have commented upon it; but no one ever thought of passing any remark upon Alan Fairfax, who, though always courteous and kind, was so proverbially impassible to women.

"Oh, if Ethel said that," uttered Mr. Anson, languidly. "of course I would rather make a sacrifice than disappoint her."

"Pray do you think of it," entreated Henrietta. "I am sure your health is Lady Vibart's first consideration—and even if people remarked on your absence she knows so well how to explain everything."

Mr. Anson began to fidget a little. "Perhaps I had better go," he said. "But suppose it should make your headache worse?"

"Oh, my chance it—I shall try and take a nap before we go. We need not stay more than an hour."

Certainly not—even half an hour—just to let people see that—well, at all events, I will dress and order the carriage; it is easy enough to send it away if you alter your mind."

And Henrietta, secretly triumphant, rose to ring the bell.

Mr. Anson went to sleep for an hour, rose quite refreshed and cheerful, rang for his valet, and dressed complacently, to do honor to his daughter's first ball. "Ma foi!" he exclaimed, as Henrietta came tripping down the stairs. "What a toilet!—and how well you look!"

"I am glad you think so," she responded, with a radiant smile. "I do my best not to disgrace my handsome, aristocratic husband," and she pressed his arm fondly.

Who would have recognized in this brilliant, fascinating little creature, whom all the men about courted, the Slaters' despised governess, or Mrs. Fellow's dowdy companion! But then who would recognize in a little water lying at the bottom of a teacup, the resplendent diamond drop flashing back the sun's rays as it falls sparkling from the crystal fountain! We are all the playthings of circumstance.

"(To be continued.)"

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the risk of a bad headache. Lady Vibart will be terribly disappointed, but then she knows how careful you are. She was quite triumphant this morning to think that she had persuaded you to be present."

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