

Literature, &c.

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THE ORPHAN'S DEPARTURE.

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THE early years of few have been so carefully guarded and protected as were those of Edith Frazier. Her father was the rector of a church in a beautiful and secluded country village in the South of England. In addition to his sincere piety and high-toned moral character, Mr Frazier possessed a well-cultivated mind. His wife was also a superior woman, and as Edith was their only child, her early training was the object of their most careful attention. In a lovely and sequestered home, surrounded not only by the comforts and luxuries, but the elegances of life, and in close association with persons of high refinement and elevated goodness, the young girl grew slowly up to womanhood. There was no undue excitement of vanity or the passions to force her, like some hothouse plant, into an early maturity; and no unseasonable call upon her for self-reliance or exertion, which entirely blots out of some lives the sweet carelessness of girlhood. At sixteen, she was still almost a child, when the death of her mother, her first great sorrow, made her sensible for the first time that this world is not the place for that uninterrupted happiness which had until then, been her portion.

Edith was almost heart-broken at the loss of her mother. They had been constant companions, and she missed her every moment more and more. Mr Frazier tried to supply to his daughter the place both of father and mother, but he was a studious, reserved man, and himself suffering deeply from his bereavement, so that they did little else but remind each other constantly of their great sorrow.

About a year after Mrs Frazier's death, finding that his daughter did not rally from the depression so foreign to her nature, Mr Frazier proposed a tour through the northern part of England and Scotland. It was just at the beginning of the pleasant summer weather, and, arranging matters in his parish so that his absence for two or three months would not be felt, he decided to leave immediately.

On the Sunday before his departure, a stranger was seen in a little parish church. He was a man who would have been noticed in any place, and who, in a quiet country village, was an object of general attention. Tall, handsome, and with a strikingly high-bred and gentlemanlike appearance, he would have been singled out anywhere as one of nature's nobility. Edith was struck and gratified by the stranger's evident interest in the sermon her father preached that day. It was one which he had taken especial pains, and the daughter, proud as well as fond of her father, was glad to see that he had at least one appreciative listener.

A few days after, Mr. Frazier and Edith set out on their journey. London was their first stopping place, and several very busy days were spent there, while Edith, with the vivid interest of one to whom almost everything in that vast and crowded city was strange and new, visited the many places of interest and note within it. While they were standing in St. Paul's the stranger who had attracted their attention in Hillecomb, their own village, a few days before, passed them with a look of evident recognition. They met again while going over Westminster Abbey; and it so happened that they were at the same time paying to the genius of Shakespeare the homage of a visit to his grave at Stratford, and that they passed each other again while strolling over the grounds around Newstead Abbey.

By this time they had advanced so far on the way to acquaintanceship, that, when they again encountered each other near the lakes in Westmoreland, the home of so many of the poets of England, a bow was the almost involuntary mark of recognition. English reserve and shyness might have prevented any more intimate intercourse, but for an accident that happened to Edith in Scotland.

Mr Frazier, finding that the cool and bracing air of that country had as favorable an effect on his daughter's health as the wild and romantic scenery had on her mind, and being pleased with a quiet country inn which he had found, proposed that they should make it their home for two or three weeks. They could not have found a pleasanter resting-place, for Loch Lomond was spread out in calm serenity at their feet, and Ben Lomond towered in savage grandeur above their heads.

The first person whom they recognised on taking their seats at the table of the inn was the stranger whom they had met so frequently. Edith could not repress a smile as she shyly returned the stranger's salutation, at the chance that seemed to take such a whimsical pleasure in thus bringing them together.

A few days after, while walking with her father in the rude paths on the side of the mountain, she strayed a little way from him when he stopped to admire the scene from some particularly favourable point of view; and when she attempted to return, she found herself, to her dismay, so perplexed by the intricate windings of the paths that she was at a loss which to take. She called to her father and heard his voice in reply, but it grew fainter and fainter, until, at last, it could no longer be discerned. Becoming aware that every step she took only led her farther from home, she stopped to see if she could not in some way distinguish the right path. But she was so utterly bewildered that she found it to be impossible. She thought that the only thing that was left for her to do was to remain stationary; in that way she would, at least, avoid the danger of falling into the mountain streams around, or down any of the precipices.

Night closed around Edith as she sat alone under the shelter of a gray rock that jutted out from the side of the mountain. She had around her only the light shawl she had thrown on for the afternoon's walk, and it was but a slight protection from the chilling night-air. In her hurried and toilsome search after her father, she had bruised her feet and wearied herself so that she could no longer stand. She called at intervals, in the faint hope that some wanderer might hear her and come to her assistance; but her voice died away from exhaustion, and she was still alone.

It was not so much a feeling of fear that weighed upon her, for the perfect trust in her all-seeing Father, which her mother had taught her from her childhood, was a tower of strength to her in this her hour of need; and a physical discomfort she could bear; but she thought of her father's anxiety and distress on her account almost overcome her.

The stars were going out one by one, when Edith heard in the distance a faint shout. She could not answer it, but, almost as if led by some unseen spirit, it came nearer and nearer. At last she gathered voice to reply, and she had evidently been heard. She could distinguish the sound of footsteps, and at last dimly discern a man's figure as it stopped before her.

'Is this Miss Frazier?' said the man in a voice that revealed its owner to be a person of refinement and tenderness.

'Yes,' said Edith, rising with difficulty.

'I am Mr Hildreth, the gentleman whom you have met so frequently lately. I heard of your disappearance from your father, and have been seeking for some hours. Could you walk a little way with me? He is not far from here; we can soon find him.'

Edith tried to walk, but found it impossible. Taking her in his arms, Mr Hildreth carried her a little way; then meeting her father, he resigned her to him while he went before to act as a guide. With some difficulty they reached the bottom of the mountain, and obtaining a rude vehicle from some of the country people near, conveyed Edith to the inn.

The acquaintance thus begun soon ripened into a friendship. Mr Frazier and Edith learned that Mr Hildreth was an American from the city of New York. The letters of introduction that he had with him proved that he had a right to the best society in England, for which his polished manners and uncommon conversational powers showed that he was well fitted. He had been taking an invalid aunt to the South of France for the benefit of the climate, he told them, and after seeing her comfortably established there he had taken advantage of a few months' leisure to travel wherever his fancy led him. He readily accepted Mr Frazier's invitation to join him and his daughter in their tour. The similarity of taste they had shown so singularly was a sufficient evidence, he said, that any course they might take would be equally agreeable to both parties.

The next six weeks, Edith thought, were the most delightful she had ever spent. Nowhere does the society of an agreeable and intellectual person add more to the enjoyment of the company than in travelling. Although grave and quiet, Mr Hildreth was full of thoughtfulness and observant care for the comfort of his fellow-travellers. Whenever he spoke to Edith, there was a gentle deference in his manner that, from one of his superior abilities, was irresistibly attractive.

On his side, Mr Hildreth was no less charmed by those with whom he had been so strangely thrown. On the Sunday in which he had first seen them, he had been pleased and impressed by Mr Frazier's sermon, and thought that he had never seen a face of more artless and attractive loveliness than Edith Frazier's. She reminded him of Chaucer's beauties, of a rose half opened and still wet with the morning dews, and of all that was most fresh and delicate in nature. Her mind answered to the promise of her countenance. Ignorant of the world and uncontaminated by it, she walked in almost unconscious innocence the simple path of duty. Her disposition, naturally cheerful and bright, had already begun to recover its

buoyancy, and her happiness reacted on her graver companions, who seemed to vie with each other as to which should add most to her pleasure.

Seasons of unshaded happiness are generally as brief as bright. By the end of the six weeks, Mr Hildreth received a letter from his aunt, who wrote urgently for his immediate presence. He took a reluctant leave of his companions, but not before he had had a long conversation with Mr Frazier, in which he asked his permission to reveal to Edith the love that had already become a strong feeling in his heart.

Heretofore he had been thrown, he said, among a set of worldly and fashionable women, and had come to look upon simplicity and unworldliness as traits no longer to be met with among the educated and polished members of society, and Edith Frazier exhibited a character as new as attractive to him. She was the only woman that he had ever met, whose society and conversation never wearied or lost their interest to him.

Mr Frazier's parental pride was gratified at the tribute thus paid to Edith by a man like Mr Hildreth, but he could not bear to think of giving up the only object of affection left to him, nor contemplate without pain the idea that his daughter's home might be in a distant land. He did all that he felt justified in doing to avert the day of separation, and pleading Edith's youth requested Mr Hildreth to postpone for a year his declaration. To this delay Mr Hildreth was unwilling to consent; but at last was obliged unwillingly to yield to a probation of six months.

He left Edith, in accordance with the promise he had made Mr Frazier, entirely unconscious of his feelings towards her, and for some time almost equally unaware of her own. She knew that the loss of his society had deprived her of the greater part of the pleasure she had taken in the new scenes through which she was journeying, but it was not until she was again settled in her own home at Hillecomb that she began to feel that Mr Hildreth had been far more to her than a mere agreeable casual acquaintance.

This discovery mortified her extremely. She felt as though it was both wrong and humiliating, that one whom she had known so short a time, and who had shown no proof of regarding her as anything but a very young and rather pleasing girl, should engross so much of her thoughts. She resolved to use every means to crush the feelings that new as they were, seemed to have struck their roots so deeply in her heart. But first she would not resist asking her father one question.

'Do you think we shall ever see Mr Hildreth again, father?' said she one day, with affected indifference.

'Perhaps so,' said he, quietly; 'we can never tell what may happen.'

'He can never have spoken to my father about coming here,' thought Edith, 'or he would not have seemed so uncertain about it; and, with true feminine pride, the young girl forbore any further mention of the one whom she had found it impossible to forget.'

Two months of the six had passed away, when Edith was called to bear another heavy trial. Her father died suddenly, leaving her unprovided for and alone in the world. Such an event was apparently the last in the world to be expected, as Mr Frazier had always seemed to be a man in vigorous health, and with a fair prospect of long life. To a long life he had evidently looked forward for he had made no arrangements for his cherished daughter, and had felt no directions by which she might guide her future course.

In her desolation, Edith could think of but one person from which she might expect protection; a half-sister of her father's, who resided in London. She had seen her aunt Mrs Burnleigh, but seldom, but knew that she was a widow in easy circumstances, with a large family of children. To her she accordingly applied, and received in return an invitation to come to her until she had decided on her future course.

With a sorrowful heart, Edith left the home where so many bright and happy years had been passed. As she sat alone waiting for the coach to pass that was to convey her to London, with no attendant but the gardener's boy, and no companion but her canary, a parting gift from Mr Hildreth, sent to Hillecomb by him from Dover just before he embarked for France, the contrast between her present desolation and the warm, sheltering love in which she had so long lived, almost overcame her. But the lonely soon acquire the power of self-control, and Edith had already begun to learn the hard lesson of self-reliance. With an outward composure that hid the painful throbbings of her heart for her travelling companion, she took her seat in the coach, and in a few hours arrived safely at Mrs Burnleigh's.

Edith found her aunt an apparently well-meaning, proper kind of a woman, kind and sympathising in her manners but who evidently had not the slightest intention of denying herself of her children the smallest luxury for the sake of her brother's orphaned daughter.

For a few weeks Edith was left to the quiet indulgence of her grief, and then Mrs Burnleigh, thinking she had done all that society could possibly demand of her in the way of respect to her brother's memory of kindness to his child, began to sound Edith as to her intention of the future.

The young girl, thrown so suddenly upon her own resources, had not yet begun to think for herself, and the idea of seeking a home among strangers made her heart sink within her. She begged her aunt to take upon herself the task of finding for her some position that she could fill creditably, but she hoped, she said, timidly, that it might be somewhere near her aunt, her only remaining relative.

This did not suit Mrs Burnleigh exactly, who, being of that turn of mind that always foresees the possible evil in all cases, was not pleased with the idea that she might at any time be called upon to offer a home to her friendless relative. Like a prudent woman, however, she forbore saying anything that might reveal her true feelings, but was none the less resolved that, if two equally favourable situations offered themselves, it would be wiser for her to advise Edith to accept the one at the greatest distance.

She succeeded beyond her hopes. Coming in one day, she said to Edith, with unusual animation—

'My dear, I have found a most delightful situation for you. Two hundred pounds a year for teaching one little girl. You can speak French, can you not?'

'Yes, I have spent a year in France.'

'And you play unusually well, and draw and paint beautifully, so that I think the parents of the child may consider themselves quite fortunate.'

'Who are they?' asked Edith.

'They are Americans—a Mr and Mrs Blake from South Carolina.'

Edith's heart had bounded at the mention of the country, but it sank when the state was named to which Mrs Burnleigh wished to send her. Unlike most English girls, she knew enough of the geography of the United States to remember that a wide distance separated South Carolina from New York, so that even if Mr Hildreth had returned to his own country, which was unlikely, she would be almost as distant from him there as if she remained in England. The idea of going so far away from all on whom her relationship or early association gave her any claim, was exceedingly painful to her.

'Don't you think, dear aunt,' said she, hesitating, 'that I might find something to do nearer home?'

'It would be impossible for me to find you another situation so advantageous in every respect; but, if you think you could succeed, you had better make the attempt,' replied Mrs Burnleigh, coldly, while a displeased expression settled upon her face.

There were a few moments' silence, and then Edith said:—

'How soon will Mr and Mrs Blake expect me?'

'They are now here. I have just met them at one of my friends, who have been speaking to them about you. They told me that they intended to sail for America in about two weeks, and that, if you were ready at that time, they would like you to accompany them.'

'Very well,' said Edith; 'you can tell them that I shall be ready to go with them.'

'They are charming people,' said her aunt caressingly; 'I am sure my dear, you will like them very much, and be very happy with them. Of course, I would not wish my brother's child to go where she would not be with those who are likely to take some interest in her.'

Edith could not help perceiving that her aunt was relieved by the prospect of her departure; and this thought, while it strengthened her in her resolve, made her feel her isolation still more deeply.

On board the same steamer with Mr and Mrs Blake and Edith, was a little girl, an invalid who interested the young English girl extremely. Edith had brought her bird with her. It was the only thing she had to remind her of happier days, and she could not bear to part with it. At little Ellen's earnest request, she hung the cage in her stateroom, and, before the end of the voyage, the little sick girl had become so attached to the pretty bird, whose sweet song was almost the only cheering sound she heard during the long and weary days at sea, that she could not speak of parting with it without showing by her tearful eyes the pain it gave her. Edith felt that she ought not to deprive the little sufferer of so great a pleasure, and, concealing her reluctance to give up a souvenir she had cherished so long, she told little Ellen that the bird was to be hers. The child's evident delight was some compensation to Edith for her self-reliance, yet it was with a sharp pang that she watched the cage as it was put in the carriage, after the arrival of the steamer at New York, to be conveyed to the upper part of the city, while Edith, with her new friends, went on board another steamer about to sail for Charleston.

Mr Blake's residence was among the pine