

# Taken for Granted.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS—PART I.

## CHAPTER I.

Oh, I must have that! exclaimed Honour Fortescue, as she strove to reach a particularly fine cluster of honeysuckle that hung temptingly just above her head.

She succeeded in getting it after several efforts, and was about to add it to the great bunch she had already gathered, when she was startled by hearing a childish voice, just behind her, say in accents of deep vexation—

'Oh, what a shame! she has taken all the best, Truda.'

Honour turned round to find two children regarding her with reproachful eyes.

One was a lovely little girl of about seven with the colouring of a gipsy.

The other was a handsome boy, blue eyed and fair haired, a year or two younger than his companion.

Both were dressed as plainly as any cottage children, but their looks and refined voices stamped them as belonging to a higher class.

'Did you want some of the flowers, dear?' asked Honour. I am afraid I have not left any that you can reach, but you shall have some of these.'

As she said this she offered part of those she held to the boy, who had been the speaker.

'No, I don't want them, they are no good; you have spoiled it all, and you can keep those,' he answered resentfully.

'Hush, Eric! you must not speak like that,' put in the other child hastily. 'The lady did not know, I daresay.'

Then, turning to Honour she said, with the gravity of an old woman—

'Eric is so young, he does not know any better; and we did so hope that no one would touch the flowers, because we wanted to bring Githa to see them.'

'There were tears of disappointment in the little one's eyes.

'I am very sorry; I would not have gathered them if I had known,' said Honour, who was feeling quite vexed with herself. 'But you must not cry, dear. There are more quite as nice further on in the wood. You must take Githa there.'

The child shook her head.

'The paths are too rough; they would hurt her,' she said. 'She will be so disappointed! I hope it will not make her ill. Do you think it will, Miss Fortescue?'

Honour was astonished to find the child knew her name.

'Why, how came you to know who I am?' she asked.

'Oh, we know you quite well; you live at the Hall—Margaret told us so.'

'Then now you must tell me your name.'

'I am Truda Rothsay, and this is my brother Eric,' was the reply.

The name of Rothsay struck Honour as being familiar, yet she could not remember ever having seen either of the children before.

'And where do you live, Truda?' she asked.

'At Rothsay Farm—Rothsay Court it used to be called a great while ago, mamma says. But, please, do you think Githa will be ill?'

Honour smiled at the question.

'No, I don't think a disappointment like this is serious enough to hurt her,' she answered. 'She is your sister, I suppose?'

'Yes, Eric's and mine—oh, and Clive's, too! I thought everybody knew that. She is never well like us; she can't walk much, and she has to lie down a great deal. She goes about in a chair, you know, and sometimes Eric and I wheel her out by ourselves; but she can only go over the smooth roads, because the rough ones shakes her too much.'

'And she can't ride in Clive's dog-cart because it is so high,' added Eric. 'She used to have her own pony chaise when papa was alive and we had plenty of money but, now we are poor, mamma can't afford it.'

As the boy said this, Honour suddenly remembered that her dead father had had a friend named Rothsay, and that he had died in difficulties.

Doubtless, these were his children, and she felt as if she had been guilty of an act of cruelty in unwittingly depriving the invalid of one of her few pleasures.

'Perhaps I could drive her over the common; there is plenty of honeysuckle there. Do you think she would like that?' she asked.

'No, she wouldn't. She hates strangers always, and she will hate you worst of all when she hears what you have done,' Eric answered passionately, something in Honour's proposal apparently rousing all his anger afresh. 'You were bad to take all the flowers and now—'

'Eric! Is it possible that you can be talking to a lady in that way?' interrupted a voice near them.

Its owner was a very handsome man of about thirty, closely resembling Truda.

'I am afraid this little ruffian has been very rude, Miss Fortescue,' he added apologetically, as he raised his hat to Honour.

'Oh, no! indeed he has not; so please don't scold him. It is I who deserve that, as I have gathered all the honeysuckle he was anxious to show his sister. I was just saying how pleased I should be to take her for a drive somewhere, so that she might see some other, but he tells me she would not like it. Do you really think she would not, Mr. Rothsay—it is Mr. Rothsay, is it

not?'

'Yes; I am Clive Rothsay, the brother, or, I should say, the half-brother, of these little people,' he replied. 'It is very kind of you to wish to give Githa the pleasure of a drive; but I fear she would decline,' he continued. 'She does not take readily to strangers, poor child!'

'But will you not try to persuade her, Mr. Rothsay? I generally get on well with children; and if the others came, perhaps she would not mind.'

'I will try, Miss Fortescue, but I fear it will be useless. She is not really a child, you see, though I spoke of her as such; she is seventeen, and—and—well, she is a little difficult with strangers. Poor Githa! the change in our circumstances has touched her more acutely than any of us.'

He seemed to be certain that she knew all about their affairs.

'I had no idea she was so old, or I should not have made such an unceremonious proposal,' Honour said apologetically. 'But I hope she will allow me to make her acquaintance. I ought to have called on Mrs. Rothsay before, but I have been very idle since my return to the Hall. I have positively done nothing but wander about all day; the country is so tempting, after hot, dusty London. But I must return and attend to my duties, or all my neighbours will be offended.'

'We shall be very pleased to see you, Miss Fortescue; but I must warn you that we are nothing but farmers now, and my step-mother's health is so shaken that she cannot attend to things as she would. She worries over it a great deal, especially on her children's account; it obliges her to allow them too much liberty, and so they get wild and unruly—spoilt, in fact.'

'Oh, I am sure they are not that, Mr. Rothsay,' protested Honour. 'I think they are charming.'

Clive laughed and shook his head.

'Have you been long in Great Braydon, Mr. Rothsay?' Honour asked, after they had walked on in silence for a few minutes. 'I have been at the Hall for two months.'

'And we have been here almost two years.'

'There used to be some people of the name of Gray at the farm when I was here last; I heard they were dead, but I never heard who was living there now.'

'Old Gray was my last tenant. On his death I decided to turn farmer myself.'

Neither spoke again for some minutes, then Honour said—

'What a beautiful face your little sister has, Mr. Rothsay!'

'Then you must think Clive beautiful, too, Miss Fortescue, for he is just like Truda,' put in Eric, whose anger seemed quite to have vanished.

Honour's face crimsoned.

She had not thought of the resemblance between the two, and she felt greatly embarrassed.

'You ought to have seen him in his soldier's dress,' continued the boy; 'he did look nice in that. We have a picture of him in it at home; I will show it to you if you ever come to our house.'

He would have chattered on had not his brother said sharply—

'You must not talk nonsense, Eric.'

'But it isn't nonsense, Clive!' rejoined the boy; it is quite true, and I'm sure Miss Fortescue would like to see that picture. Wouldn't you?' he asked, turning to Honour.

But again Clive came to the rescue.

'Why, what is Truda after?' he exclaimed quickly. 'Look, Eric, I think it is a peacock butterfly! She will catch it before you get near if you don't make haste.'

This was quite enough, and the boy was off at once.

'What pretty quaint names your sisters have, Mr. Rothsay!' remarked Honour.

'Oh, Githa and Truda are only diminutives; Edelgitha and Alltruda are rather too long for everyday use,' he explained.

They had now left the wood and reached a large field, where some beautiful Jersey cows were grazing.

On the gate was a notice board warning trespassers away.

'I shall have to ask permission to go this way this time, Mr. Rothsay,' said Honour pointing to it. 'I was so accustomed to roam about the farm when the Grays were here that I had quite forgotten the path was not a public one; but it is too far to go back through the wood.'

'You must not think of such a thing, Miss Fortescue. I hope you will use this and every other path about the place when ever you like,' Clive answered courteously.

'You are very kind, Mr. Rothsay. I think the Grays spoiled me,' Honour went on. 'I used to spend half my time at the farm, and no cream or milk I could get at home was nearly as good as what they gave me.'

At this point the path branched off, and she held out her hand to take leave of him.

'Will you be offended if I ask you to waive ceremony and come in to see my mother now as you are so near, Miss Fortescue?' Clive said after an instant's hesitation. 'Then you can judge if our cream is equal to old Gray's,' he added, with a smile.

'You evidently think me very greedy,' laughed Honour. 'I should like to accept your invitation, Mr. Rothsay; she went on, 'but I fear it is too late to make a call, it

must be nearly your dinner hour.'

Clive colored slightly.

'We dine in the middle of the day, like other farmers,' he said. 'You know they do not keep society hours.'

'Then I will come if you are sure I shall not shock Mrs. Rothsay.'

'Indeed, you will not; she will be very pleased to see you.'

'Then, turning to the children, he told them to run on and tell their nurse to make them presentable for tea. 'Miss Fortescue is coming to taste our cream,' he added, with a mischievous glance at his companion.

## CHAPTER II.

'Mother, I have brought you a visitor—Miss Fortescue,' Clive said, as he opened the door of a pretty room looking into the garden.

A lady of about forty at once came forward.

She was very fair, and had all the blonde loveliness of the boy Eric.

'I do hope you will forgive me for calling at such an uncanonical hour, Mrs. Rothsay,' Honour said, as he shook hands; 'but it is Mr. Rothsay's fault—he asked me, and I could not resist the temptation, so you must blame him, please. He found me making acquaintance with your two little children.'

'Yes, I was just in time to hear Master Eric talking in a style that would have procured me an application of the birch when I was his age,' observed Clive.

'Oh, I hope he was not rude, Miss Fortescue,' exclaimed Mrs. Rothsay, with a troubled look.

'Indeed, he was not. It is a shame of Mr. Rothsay to have told you anything about it.'

'I am afraid they are both getting quite uncivilized,' Mrs. Rothsay sighed; 'but will you let me introduce my elder daughter to you? You will excuse her rising—she is an invalid, as you may have heard, Miss Fortescue.'

'The children told me,' said Honour, as she offered her hand to the invalid—a dark, beautiful girl, closely resembling her sister and half-brother.

Githa Rothsay took no notice of the outstretched hand, and merely acknowledged the introduction by a movement of her head.

'Githa never shakes hands unless she knows people quite well,' explained Truda, who just then came into the room.

'And a very good rule too. Handshaking is a sign of friendship, and one cannot feel that for a stranger,' answered Honour brightly.

She was determined not to be offended at any oddity the afflicted girl might display.

Both Mrs. Rothsay and her stepson, however, looked uncomfortable, and it was an evident relief to them that the servant appeared at that moment with the tea.

'You must give Miss Fortescue plenty of cream, please, mother,' said Clive slyly, as they took their seats in old fashioned style. 'She has confessed to a great weakness for it.'

'Oh Mr. Rothsay, it is too bad of you to make me out so greedy!' laughed Honour.

'Are you fond of cream, Miss Fortescue?' asked Eric, who was discussing a basin of bread and milk. 'I am, but sometimes we can't have it, because Clive wants it to sell.'

'Too much cream will spoil your complexion, Eric,' Honour answered gravely; 'at least, that is what they used to tell me when I was a child.'

'Did you have it here then? It seems quite like old times to be sitting here,' Honour continued, turning to Mrs. Rothsay.

'I can almost fancy that I shall find Madame Boisel waiting in the schoolroom, when I get back to the Hall, to lecture me for having skirted my lessons. Poor madame! her lectures were wasted, for the farm had an attraction for me that I could not resist.'

'I wish we might venture to hope that it might have equal attractions now,' said Clive. 'We should be very glad, should we not mother?'

'Yes, indeed,' Mrs. Rothsay answered cordially, 'though I fear that Miss Fortescue would deem it rather dull.'

'We'll find lots to amuse you, Miss Fortescue,' declared Truda solemnly. 'Come every day, and we'll take you every where and show you everything.'

A laugh followed this ample promise.

But Honour noticed that Githa did not even smile, neither did she endorse her mother's and half brother's invitation.

'I wonder if she has taken a dislike to me, mused Honour, or if she treats all strangers alike? I am sure I should love her if she would let me.'

Just as she was thinking of taking her leave, the servant brought in a note, and informed her mistress that the bearer was waiting for an answer, whereupon Mrs. Rothsay excused herself to her visitor, and left the room, taking the two children with her.

Honour chatted a little with Clive, and then moved nearer the invalid.

'I am so grieved to have been the cause of so great a disappointment to you, Miss Rothsay,' she said—she had heard the children telling her about the honeysuckle. 'I hope you will believe that I would not have touched it had I known.'

'Its of no consequence; pray do not think anymore about it, Miss Fortescue. You had a perfect right to the flowers, since the place where they grow is your own.'

'I wish you would let me have the pleasure of driving you to see the honeysuckle the other side of the common. I should feel sure you had forgiven me then.'

'You are very kind, but I would rather not.'

'But, why?' asked Honour disappointedly. 'Mr. Rothsay, cannot you induce her to change her mind?'

'I really think you might go, darling,' he said, touching his half sister's cheek with loving fingers.

'It would be quite a charity to me, for



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I have no one to drive with, as my brother has not yet come to the Hall,' put in Honour persuasively.

Githa hesitated a little longer; then she said, with a smile—the first that had brightened her face since Honour had been there—

'I know quite well on which side the charity will be, Miss Fortescue; but as I believe you are really sincere in wishing to do me a kindness, I will accept your invitation, though I warn you I shall probably be a great nuisance to you.'

Her acceptance gave Honour the greatest pleasure.

Since her walk through the wood with Clive and the children she had wished above all things—she did not ask herself why at present—to be friendly with all the family.

## CHAPTER III.

When Honour drove to the farm the next day, she found Clive slowly pacing up and down the lawn, as if he were waiting for something.

'I am come, you see, Mr. Rothsay,' she said, as he came to meet her. 'I hope your sister has not changed her mind?'

'No, indeed she has not. Even the thought of the drive has done her good; her life is usually so monotonous, poor child. But will you not come in?'

'I think not now, thank you, if she is ready. I suppose you are taking a rest this warm afternoon, Mr. Rothsay?'

'No; I stayed to help Githa. You see, she cannot get down these steps without being carried, and I am the only one who can do that. If I am not at home, she is a prisoner in the grounds.'

'Then I have inconvenienced you by coming at this hour. Why did you not tell me, Mr. Rothsay? Any other would have suited me just as well,' Honour said quickly.

'Not at all, Miss Fortescue. I am not busy today, and can very well lose an hour. But I must not keep you waiting; I will fetch Githa if you will not come in.'

While he was arranging his half sister in the chaise, Truda and Eric came running up.

'Do you know, Miss Fortescue, I am really glad now that you took all that honeysuckle,' the latter said confidentially. 'Because, if you had not, perhaps we should never have known you, and then Githa would not have had this drive.'

Honour laughed.

'You and Truda shall have one some day,' she promised.

'The boy's eyes sparkled with delight. 'That will be jolly,' he said. 'But we're going to have a good time this afternoon; we're going into the hay field.'

'Yes, Clive says he will have us for a treat,' put in Truda.

'How would it be if you drove to the end of the lane with us, then? You could wait for your brother there, could you not?'

'Oh, yes! oh, yes!' screamed both the children at once.

Mrs. Rothsay, however, declared that there would not be room for them in the chaise.

'You can go some other day, if Miss Fortescue will have you,' she said.

'Oh, please let them come,' pleaded Honour. 'We can manage very well for that short distance. Truda can sit behind, and Eric must make himself small and sit on the floor in front of me.'

'They will be the plague of your life, Miss Fortescue, if you indulge them like this,' remonstrated Clive as he lifted them in.

'We know better than that, don't we, Eric?' laughed Honour as she drove off.

At the end of the lane the children got out and ran off to meet their brother in the fields, where they were soon capering about like young colts, pelting each other and him with the sweet scented hay, till he suddenly turned on them, and, catching up armful after armful, completely smothered them.

'How fond he is of them!' remarked Honour, who was driving slowly on purpose to watch the frolic.

'Yes, and they will give him no peace for the rest of the afternoon,' answered Githa, with a touch of bitterness. 'There is no one to check them, and he will never scold them if only his own comfort is concerned.'

'Mr. Rothsay does not look as if scolding would come at all easy to him,' observed Honour.

'No; he will bear anything for those he loves,' returned Githa. 'Oh, how I wish I were a man, or at least that I were like

other people,' she added, a moment later, with a deep sigh.

'I wish you were. I can fancy how you must suffer,' Honour returned, in tones of sympathy.

'I was not thinking of myself then, but of Clive. If I were different he should not slave as he does. I could earn money to help mother and the children, and then he would be free. You do not understand me, of course, because you do not know much about us—only that we are what people call 'come down in the world.' I should like to tell you what I mean if it would not bore you, then you would know what an angel of goodness Clive has been to us all.'

Honour assured her that she would like to hear, and it was out of no mere politeness that she did so.

She really wished to know more about Clive Rothsay, who was already beginning to interest her as no man had ever done before.

'It is not as if mamma were his own mother, or we were his full brother and sisters,' the girl began warmly. 'Then, of course, we might be said to have some claim on him; but as it is, most men, placed as he was, would have left us to do the best we could for ourselves. When papa died he had lost all his money, you know, and all we had to depend on was mamma's eighty pounds a year. How were four people to live on that?'

'Clive worried herself almost to death over it, for he could see no way to help us. He had never been extravagant but he had lived according to his position—an officer in the Guards has lots of expenses, you know—and he had never thought of saving anything; there had never been any need, as he naturally expected to have his share of papa's property.'

'Now everything was gone, and all he had was his pay and the income derived from this farm—that had been settled upon him by his uncle when he was quite a baby. He insisted on our taking the money now, and declared he could manage very well on his pay. Of course, it was simply martyrdom for him to live like that. But what could we do—a delicate woman, a helpless cripple, and two young children?'

'Things had gone on for nearly a year like this, when the farm became vacant, and then Clive determined to sell out of the army and work it himself. He did not know anything about farming, but he got papa's old steward to come to him for a year; and since then he has managed fairly well. But I know he hates the work, in spite of all he says to the contrary.'

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