

## **Chapter II. The Governess Enters.**

Mr. Herbert Linley arrived at his own house in the forenoon of the next day. Mrs. Linley, running out to the head of the stairs to meet her husband, saw him approaching her without a traveling companion. "Where is the governess?" she asked--when the first salutes allowed her the opportunity of speaking.

"On her way to bed, poor soul, under the care of the housekeeper," Linley answered.

"Anything infectious, my dear Herbert?" Mrs. Presty inquired appearing at the breakfast-room door.

Linley addressed his reply to his wife:

"Nothing more serious, Catherine, than want of strength. She was in such a state of fatigue, after our long night journey, that I had to lift her out of the carriage."

Mrs. Presty listened with an appearance of the deepest interest. "Quite a novelty in the way of a governess," she said. "May I ask what her name is?"

"Sydney Westerfield."

Mrs. Presty looked at her daughter and smiled satirically.

Mrs. Linley remonstrated.

"Surely," she said, "you don't object to the young lady's name!"

"I have no opinion to offer, Catherine. I don't believe in the name."

"Oh, mamma, do you suspect that it's an assumed name?"

"My dear, I haven't a doubt that it is. May I ask another question?" the old lady continued, turning to Linley. "What references did Miss Westerfield give you?"

"No references at all."

Mrs. Presty rose with the alacrity of a young woman, and hurried to the door. "Follow my example," she said to her daughter, on her way out. "Lock up your jewel-box."

Linley drew a deep breath of relief when he was left alone with his wife. "What makes your mother so particularly disagreeable this morning?" he inquired.

"She doesn't approve, dear, of my leaving it to you to choose a governess for Kitty."

"Where is Kitty?"

"Out on her pony for a ride over the hills. Why did you send a telegram, Herbert, to prepare me for the governess? Did you really think I might be jealous of Miss Westerfield?"

Linley burst out laughing. "No such idea entered my head," he answered. "It isn't in you, my dear, to be jealous."

Mrs. Linley was not quite satisfied with this view of her character. Her husband's well-intended compliment reminded her that there are occasions when any woman may be jealous, no matter how generous and how gentle she may be. "We won't go quite so far as that," she said to him, "because--" She stopped, unwilling to dwell too long on a delicate subject. He jocosely finished the sentence for her. "Because we don't know what may happen in the future?" he suggested; making another mistake by making a joke.

Mrs. Linley returned to the subject of the governess.

"I don't at all say what my mother says," she resumed; "but was it not just a little indiscreet to engage Miss Westerfield without any references?"

"Unless I am utterly mistaken," Linley replied, "you would have been quite as indiscreet, in my place. If you had seen the horrible woman who persecuted and insulted her--"

His wife interrupted him. "How did all this happen, Herbert? Who first introduced you to Miss Westerfield?"

Linley mentioned the advertisement, and described his interview with the schoolmistress. Having next acknowledged that he had received a visit from Miss Westerfield herself, he repeated all that she had been able to tell him of

her father's wasted life and melancholy end. Really interested by this time, Mrs. Linley was eager for more information. Her husband hesitated. "I would rather you heard the rest of it from Miss Westerfield," he said, "in my absence."

"Why in your absence?"

"Because she can speak to you more freely, when I am not present. Hear her tell her own story, and then let me know whether you think I have made a mistake. I submit to your decision beforehand, whichever way it may incline."

Mrs. Linley rewarded him with a kiss. If a married stranger had seen them, at that moment, he would have been reminded of forgotten days--the days of his honeymoon.

"And now," Linley resumed, "suppose we talk a little about ourselves. I haven't seen any brother yet. Where is Randal?"

"Staying at the farm to look after your interests. We expect him to come back to-day. Ah, Herbert, what do we not all owe to that dear good brother of yours? There is really no end to his kindness. The last of our poor Highland families who have emigrated to America have had their expenses privately paid by Randal. The wife has written to me, and has let out the secret. There is an American newspaper, among the letters that are waiting your brother's return, sent to him as a little mark of attention by these good grateful people." Having alluded to the neighbors who had left Scotland, Mrs. Linley was reminded of other neighbors who had remained. She was still relating events of local interest, when the clock interrupted her by striking the hour of the nursery dinner. What had become of Kitty? Mrs. Linley rose and rang the bell to make inquiries.

On the point of answering, the servant looked round at the open door behind him. He drew aside, and revealed Kitty, in the corridor, hand in hand with Sydney Westerfield--who timidly hesitated at entering the room. "Here she is mamma," cried the child. "I think she's afraid of you; help me to pull her in."

Mrs. Linley advanced to receive the new member of her household, with the irresistible grace and kindness which charmed every stranger who approached her. "Oh, it's all right," said Kitty. "Syd likes me, and I like Syd. What do you think? She lived in London with a cruel woman who never gave her enough to eat. See what a good girl I am? I'm beginning to feed her

already." Kitty pulled a box of sweetmeats out of her pocket, and handed it to the governess with a tap on the lid, suggestive of an old gentleman offering a pinch of snuff to a friend.

"My dear child, you mustn't speak of Miss Westerfield in that way! Pray excuse her," said Mrs. Linley, turning to Sydney with a smile; "I am afraid she has been disturbing you in your room."

Sydney's silent answer touched the mother's heart; she kissed her little friend. "I hope you will let her call me Syd," she said gently; "it reminds me of a happier time." Her voice faltered; she could say no more. Kitty explained, with the air of a grown person encouraging a child. "I know all about it, mamma. She means the time when her papa was alive. She lost her papa when she was a little girl like me. I didn't disturb her. I only said, 'My name's Kitty; may I get up on the bed?' And she was quite willing; and we talked. And I helped her to dress." Mrs. Linley led Sydney to the sofa, and stopped the flow of her daughter's narrative. The look, the voice, the manner of the governess had already made their simple appeal to her generous nature. When her husband took Kitty's hand to lead her with him out of the room, she whispered as he passed: "You have done quite right; I haven't a doubt of it now!"