

## CHAPTER X

### LADY HONORIA MAKES ARRANGEMENTS

In another moment somebody entered the room; it was Elizabeth. She had returned from her tithe collecting expedition--with the tithe. The door of the sitting-room was still ajar, and Geoffrey had his back towards it. So it happened that nobody heard Elizabeth's rather cat-like step, and for some seconds she stood in the doorway without being perceived. She stood quite still, taking in the whole scene at a glance. She noticed that her sister held her head down, so that her hair shadowed her, and guessed that she did so for some reason--probably because she did not wish her face to be seen. Or was it to show off her lovely hair? She noticed also the half shy, half amused, and altogether interested expression upon Geoffrey's countenance--she could see that in the little gilt-edged looking-glass which hung over the fire-place, nor did she overlook the general air of embarrassment that pervaded them both.

When she came in, Elizabeth had been thinking of Owen Davies, and of what might have happened had she never seen the tide of life flow back into her sister's veins. She had dreamed of it all night and had thought of it all day; even in the excitement of extracting the back tithe from the recalcitrant and rather coarse-minded Welsh farmer, with strong views on the subject of tithe, it had not been entirely forgotten. The farmer was a tenant of Owen Davies, and when he called her a "parson in petticoats, and wus," and went on, in delicate reference to her powers

of extracting cash, to liken her to a "two-legged corkscrew only screwier," she perhaps not unnaturally reflected, that if ever--pace Beatrice--certain things should come about, she would remember that farmer. For Elizabeth was blessed with a very long memory, as some people had learnt to their cost, and generally, sooner or later, she paid her debts in full, not forgetting the overdue interest.

And now, as she stood in the doorway unseen and noted these matters, something occurred to her in connection with this dominating idea, which, like ideas in general, had many side issues. At any rate a look of quick intelligence shone for a moment in her light eyes, like a sickly sunbeam on a faint December mist; then she moved forward, and when she was close behind Geoffrey, spoke suddenly.

"What are you both thinking about?" she said in her clear thin voice; "you seem to have exhausted your conversation."

Geoffrey made an exclamation and fairly jumped from his chair, a feat which in his bruised condition really hurt him very much. Beatrice too started violently; she recovered herself almost instantly, however.

"How quietly you move, Elizabeth," she said.

"Not more quietly than you sit, Beatrice. I have been wondering when anybody was going to say anything, or if you were both asleep."

For her part Beatrice speculated how long her sister had been in the room. Their conversation had been innocent enough, but it was not one that she would wish Elizabeth to have overheard. And somehow Elizabeth had a knack of overhearing things.

"You see, Miss Granger," said Geoffrey coming to the rescue, "both our brains are still rather waterlogged, and that does not tend to a flow of ideas."

"Quite so," said Elizabeth. "My dear Beatrice, why don't you tie up your hair? You look like a crazy Jane. Not but what you have very nice hair," she added critically. "Do you admire good hair, Mr. Bingham."

"Of course I do," he answered gallantly, "but it is not common."

Only Beatrice bit her lip with vexation. "I had almost forgotten about my hair," she said; "I must apologise for appearing in such a state. I would have done it up after dinner only I was too stiff, and while I was waiting for Betty, I went to sleep."

"I think there is a bit of ribbon in that drawer. I saw you put it there yesterday," answered the precise Elizabeth. "Yes, here it is. If you like, and Mr. Bingham will excuse it, I can tie it back for you," and without waiting for an answer she passed behind Beatrice, and gathering up the dense masses of her sister's locks, tied them round in such fashion that they could not fall forward, though they still rolled down

her back.

Just then Mr. Granger came back from his visit to the farm. He was in high good humour. The pig had even surpassed her former efforts, and increased in a surprising manner, to the number of fifteen indeed.

Elizabeth thereon produced the two pounds odd shillings which she had "corkscrewed" out of the recalcitrant dissenting farmer, and the sight added to Mr. Granger's satisfaction.

"Would you believe it, Mr. Bingham," he said, "in this miserably paid parish I have nearly a hundred pounds owing to me, a hundred pounds in tithe. There is old Jones who lives out towards the Bell Rock, he owes three years' tithe--thirty-four pounds eleven and fourpence. He can pay and he won't pay--says he's a Baptist and is not going to pay parson's dues--though for the matter of that he is nothing but an old beer tub of a heathen."

"Why don't you proceed against him, then, Mr. Granger?"

"Proceed, I have proceeded. I've got judgment, and I mean to issue execution in a few days. I won't stand it any longer," he went on, working himself up and shaking his head as he spoke till his thin white hair fell about his eyes. "I will have the law of him and the others too. You are a lawyer and you can help me. I tell you there's a spirit abroad which just comes to just--no man isn't to pay his lawful debts, except of course the parson and the squire. They must pay or go to the

court. But there is law left, and I'll have it, before they play the Irish game on us here." And he brought down his fist with a bang upon the table.

Geoffrey listened with some amusement. So this was the weak old man's sore point--money. He was clearly very strong about that--as strong as Lady Honoria indeed, but with more excuse. Elizabeth also listened with evident approval, but Beatrice looked pained.

"Don't get angry, father," she said; "perhaps he will pay after all. It is bad to take the law if you can manage any other way--it breeds so much ill blood."

"Nonsense, Beatrice," said her sister sharply. "Father is quite right. There's only one way to deal with them, and that is to seize their goods. I believe you are socialist about property, as you are about everything else. You want to pull everything down, from the Queen to the laws of marriage, all for the good of humanity, and I tell you that your ideas will be your ruin. Defy custom and it will crush you. You are running your head against a brick wall, and one day you will find which is the harder."

Beatrice flushed, but answered her sister's attack, which was all the sharper because it had a certain spice of truth in it.

"I never expressed any such views, Elizabeth, so I do not see why you

should attribute them to me. I only said that legal proceedings breed bad blood in a parish, and that is true."

"I did not say you expressed them," went on the vigorous Elizabeth; "you look them--they ooze out of your words like water from a peat bog. Everybody knows you are a radical and a freethinker and everything else that is bad and mad, and contrary to that state of life in which it has pleased God to call you. The end of it will be that you will lose the mistressship of the school--and I think it is very hard on father and me that you should bring disgrace on us with your strange ways and immoral views, and now you can make what you like of it."

"I wish that all radicals were like Miss Beatrice," said Geoffrey, who was feeling exceedingly uncomfortable, with a feeble attempt at polite jocosity. But nobody seemed to hear him. Elizabeth, who was now fairly in a rage, a faint flush upon her pale cheeks, her light eyes all ashine, and her thin fingers clasped, stood fronting her beautiful sister, and breathing spite at every pore. But it was easy for Geoffrey who was watching her to see that it was not her sister's views she was attacking; it was her sister. It was that soft strong loveliness and the glory of that face; it was the deep gentle mind, erring from its very greatness, and the bright intellect which lit it like a lamp; it was the learning and the power that, give them play, would set a world aflame, as easily as they did the heart of the slow-witted hermit squire, whom Elizabeth coveted--these were the things that Elizabeth hated, and bitterly assailed.

Accustomed to observe, Geoffrey saw this instantly, and then glanced at the father. The old man was frightened; clearly he was afraid of Elizabeth, and dreaded a scene. He stood fidgeting his feet about, and trying to find something to say, as he glanced apprehensively at his elder daughter, through his thin hanging hair.

Lastly, Geoffrey looked at Beatrice, who was indeed well worth looking at. Her face was quite pale and the clear grey eyes shone out beneath their dark lashes. She had risen, drawing herself to her full height, which her exquisite proportions seemed to increase, and was looking at her sister. Presently she said one word and one only, but it was enough.

"Elizabeth."

Her sister opened her lips to speak again, but hesitated, and changed her mind. There was something in Beatrice's manner that checked her.

"Well," she said at length, "you should not irritate me so, Beatrice."

Beatrice made no reply. She only turned towards Geoffrey, and with a graceful little bow, said:

"Mr. Bingham, I am sure that you will forgive this scene. The fact is, we all slept badly last night, and it has not improved our tempers."

There was a pause, of which Mr. Granger took a hurried and rather undignified advantage.

"Um, ah," he said. "By the way, Beatrice, what was it I wanted to say? Ah, I know--have you written, I mean written out, that sermon for next Sunday? My daughter," he added, addressing Geoffrey in explanation--"um, copies my sermons for me. She writes a very good hand----"

Remembering Beatrice's confidence as to her sermon manufacturing functions, Geoffrey felt amused at her father's naïve way of describing them, and Beatrice also smiled faintly as she answered that the sermon was ready. Just then the roll of wheels was heard without, and the only fly that Bryngelly could boast pulled up in front of the door.

"Here is the fly come for you, Mr. Bingham," said Mr. Granger--"and as I live, her ladyship with it. Elizabeth, see if there isn't some tea ready," and the old gentleman, who had all the traditional love of the lower middle-class Englishman for a title, trotted off to welcome "her ladyship."

Presently Lady Honoria entered the room, a sweet, if rather a set smile upon her handsome face, and with a graceful mien, that became her tall figure exceedingly well. For to do Lady Honoria justice, she was one of the most ladylike women in the country, and so far as her personal appearance went, a very perfect type of the class to which she belonged.



Geoffrey looked at her, saying to himself that she had clearly recovered her temper, and that he was thankful for it. This was not wonderful, for it is observable that the more aristocratic a lady's manners are, the more disagreeable she is apt to be when she is crossed.

"Well, Geoffrey dear," she said, "you see I have come to fetch you. I was determined that you should not get yourself drowned a second time on your way home. How are you now?--but I need not ask, you look quite well again."

"It is very kind of you, Honoria," said her husband simply, but it was doubtful if she heard him, for at the moment she was engaged in searching out the soul of Beatrice, with one of the most penetrating and comprehensive glances that young lady had ever enjoyed the honour of receiving. There was nothing rude about the look, it was too quick, but Beatrice felt that quick as it might be it embraced her altogether. Nor was she wrong.

"There is no doubt about it," Lady Honoria thought to herself, "she is lovely--lovely everywhere. It was clever of her to leave her hair down; it shows the shape of her head so well, and she is tall enough to stand it. That blue wrapper suits her too. Very few women could show such a figure as hers--like a Greek statue. I don't like her; she is different from most of us; just the sort of girl men go wild about and women hate."

All this passed through her mind in a flash. For a moment Lady Honoria's blue eyes met Beatrice's grey ones, and she knew that Beatrice liked her no better than she did Beatrice. Those eyes were a trifle too honest, and, like the deep clear water they resembled, apt to throw up shadows of the passing thoughts above.

"False and cold and heartless," thought Beatrice. "I wonder how a man like that could marry her; and how much he loves her."

Thus the two women took each other's measure at a glance, each finding the other wanting by her standard. Nor did they ever change that hastily formed judgment.

It was all done in a few seconds--in that hesitating moment before the words we summon answer on our lips. The next, Lady Honoria was sweeping towards her with outstretched hand, and her most gracious smile.

"Miss Granger," she said, "I owe you a debt I never can repay--my dear husband's life. I have heard all about how you saved him; it is the most wonderful thing--Grace Darling born again. I can't think how you could do it. I wish I were half as brave and strong."

"Please don't, Lady Honoria," said Beatrice. "I am so tired of being thanked for doing nothing, except what it was my duty to do. If I had

let Mr. Bingham go while I had the strength to hold on to him I should have felt like a murderess to-day. I beg you to say no more about it."

"One does not often find such modesty united to so much courage, and, if you will allow me to say it, so much beauty," answered Lady Honoria graciously. "Well, I will do as you wish, but I warn you your fame will find you out. I hear they have an account of the whole adventure in to-day's papers, headed, 'A Welsh Heroine.'"

"How did you hear that, Honoria?" asked her husband.

"Oh, I had a telegram from Garsington, and he mentions it," she answered carelessly.

"Telegram from Garsington! Hence these smiles," thought he. "I suppose that she is going to-morrow."

"I have some other news for you, Miss Granger," went on Lady Honoria.

"Your canoe has been washed ashore, very little injured. The old boatman--Edward, I think they call him--has found it; and your gun in it too, Geoffrey. It had stuck under the seat or somewhere. But I fancy that you must both have had enough canoeing for the present."

"I don't know, Lady Honoria," answered Beatrice. "One does not often get such weather as last night's, and canoeing is very pleasant. Every sweet has its salt, you know; or, in other words, one may always be upset."

At that moment, Betty, the awkward Welsh serving lass, with a fore-arm about as shapely as the hind leg of an elephant, and a most unpleasing habit of snorting audibly as she moved, shuffled in with the tea-tray. In her wake came the slim Elizabeth, to whom Lady Honoria was introduced.

After this, conversation flagged for a while, till Lady Honoria, feeling that things were getting a little dull, set the ball rolling again.

"What a pretty view you have of the sea from these windows," she said in her well-trained and monotonously modulated voice. "I am so glad to have seen it, for, you know, I am going away to-morrow."

Beatrice looked up quickly.

"My husband is not going," she went on, as though in answer to an unspoken question. "I am playing the part of the undutiful wife and running away from him, for exactly three weeks. It is very wicked of me, isn't it? but I have an engagement that I must keep. It is most tiresome."

Geoffrey, sipping his tea, smiled grimly behind the shelter of his cup.

"She does it uncommonly well," he thought to himself.

"Does your little girl go with you, Lady Honoria?" asked Elizabeth.

"Well, no, I think not. I can't bear parting with her--you know how hard it is when one has only one child. But I think she would be so bored where I am going to stay, for there are no other children there; and besides, she positively adores the sea. So I shall have to leave her to her father's tender mercies, poor dear."

"I hope Effie will survive it, I am sure," said Geoffrey laughing.

"I suppose that your husband is going to stay on at Mrs. Jones's," said the clergyman.

"Really, I don't know. What are you going to do, Geoffrey? Mrs. Jones's rooms are rather expensive for people in our impoverished condition. Besides, I am sure that she cannot look after Effie. Just think, she has eight children of her own, poor old dear. And I must take Anne with me; she is Effie's French nurse, you know, a perfect treasure. I am going to stay in a big house, and my experience of those big houses is, that one never gets waited on at all unless one takes a maid. You see, what is everybody's business is nobody's business. I'm sure I don't know how you will get on with the child, Geoffrey; she takes such a lot of looking after."

"Oh, don't trouble about that, Honoria," he answered. "I daresay that Effie and I will manage somehow."

Here one of those peculiar gleams of intelligence which marked the advent of a new idea passed across Elizabeth's face. She was sitting next her father, and bending, whispered to him. Beatrice saw it and made a motion as though to interpose, but before she could do so Mr. Granger spoke.

"Look here, Mr. Bingham," he said, "if you want to move, would you like a room here? Terms strictly moderate, but can't afford to put you up for nothing you know, and living rough and ready. You'd have to take us as you find us; but there is a dressing-room next to my room, where your little girl could sleep, and my daughters would look after her between them, and be glad of the job."

Again Beatrice opened her lips as though to speak, but closed them without speaking. Thus do our opportunities pass before we realise that they are at hand.

Instinctively Geoffrey had glanced towards Beatrice. He did not know if this idea was agreeable to her. He knew that her work was hard, and he did not wish to put extra trouble upon her, for he guessed that the burden of looking after Effie would ultimately fall upon her shoulders. But her face told him nothing: it was quite passive and apparently indifferent.

"You are very kind, Mr. Granger," he said, hesitating. "I don't want to go away from Bryngelly just at present, and it would be a good plan in

some ways, that is if the trouble to your daughters would not be too much."

"I am sure that it is an excellent plan," broke in Lady Honoria, who feared lest difficulties should arise as to her appropriation of Anne's services; "how lucky that I happened to mention it. There will be no trouble about our giving up the rooms at Mrs. Jones's, because I know she has another application for them."

"Very well," said Geoffrey, not liking to raise objections to a scheme thus publicly advocated, although he would have preferred to take time to consider. Something warned him that Bryngelly Vicarage would prove a fateful abode for him. Then Elizabeth rose and asked Lady Honoria if she would like to see the rooms her husband and Effie would occupy.

She said she should be delighted and went off, followed by Mr. Granger fussing in the rear.

"Don't you think that you will be a little dull here, Mr. Bingham?" said Beatrice.

"On the contrary," he answered. "Why should I be dull? I cannot be so dull as I should be by myself."

Beatrice hesitated, and then spoke again. "We are a curious family, Mr. Bingham; you may have seen as much this afternoon. Had you not better

think it over?"

"If you mean that you do not want me to come, I won't," he said rather bluntly, and next second felt that he had made a mistake.

"I!" Beatrice answered, opening her eyes. "I have no wishes in the matter. The fact is that we are poor, and let lodgings--that is what it comes to. If you think they will suit you, you are quite right to take them."

Geoffrey coloured. He was a man who could not bear to lay himself open to the smallest rebuff from a woman, and he had brought this on himself. Beatrice saw it and relented.

"Of course, Mr. Bingham, so far as I am concerned, I shall be the gainer if you do come. I do not meet so many people with whom I care to associate, and from whom I can learn, that I wish to throw a chance away."

"I think you misunderstand me a little," he said; "I only meant that perhaps you would not wish to be bothered with Effie, Miss Granger."

She laughed. "Why, I love children. It will be a great pleasure to me to look after her so far as I have time."

Just then the others returned, and their conversation came to an end.



"It's quite delightful, Geoffrey--such funny old-fashioned rooms. I really envy you." (If there was one thing in the world that Lady Honoria hated, it was an old-fashioned room.) "Well, and now we must be going. Oh! you poor creature, I forgot that you were so knocked about. I am sure Mr. Granger will give you his arm."

Mr. Granger ambled forward, and Geoffrey having made his adieus, and borrowed a clerical hat (Mr. Granger's concession to custom, for in most other respects he dressed like an ordinary farmer), was safely conveyed to the fly.

And so ended Geoffrey's first day at Bryngelly Vicarage.