

## CHAPTER V.

LUCIA.

In this manner Slowbridge received the shock which shook it to its foundations, and it was a shock from which it did not recover for some time. Before ten o'clock the next morning, everybody knew of the arrival of Martin Bassett's daughter.

The very boarding-school (Miss Pilcher's select seminary for young ladies, "combining the comforts of a home," as the circular said, "with all the advantages of genteel education") was on fire with it, highly colored versions of the stories told being circulated from the "first class" downward, even taking the form of an Indian princess, tattooed blue, and with difficulty restrained from indulging in war-whoops,--which last feature so alarmed little Miss Bigbee, aged seven, that she retired in fear and trembling, and shed tears under the bedclothes; her terror and anguish being much increased by the stirring recitals of scalping-stories by pretty Miss Phipps, of the first class--a young person who possessed a vivid imagination, and delighted in romances of a tragic turn.

"I have not the slightest doubt," said Miss Phipps, "that when she is at home she lives in a wampum."

"What is a wampum?" inquired one of her admiring audience.

"A tent," replied Miss Phipps, with some impatience. "I should think any goose would know that. It is a kind of tent hung with scalps and--and--moccasins, and--lariats--and things of that sort."

"I don't believe that is the right name for it," put in Miss Smith, who was a pert member of the third class.

"Ah!" commented Miss Phipps, "that was Miss Smith who spoke, of course. We may always expect information from Miss Smith. I trust that I may be allowed to say that I think I have a brother"--

"He doesn't know much about it, if he calls a wigwam a wampum," interposed Miss Smith, with still greater pertness. "I have a brother who knows better than that, if I am only in the third class." For a moment Miss Phipps appeared to be meditating. Perhaps she was a trifle discomfited; but she recovered herself after a brief pause, and returned to the charge.

"Well," she remarked, "perhaps it is a wigwam. Who cares if it is? And at any rate, whatever it is, I haven't the slightest doubt that she lives in one."

This comparatively tame version was, however, entirely discarded when the diamonds and silver-mines began to figure more largely in the reports.

Certainly, pretty, overdressed, jewel-bedecked Octavia gave Slowbridge abundant cause for excitement.

After leaving her, Lady Theobald drove home to Oldclough Hall, rather out of humor. She had been rather out of humor for some time, having never quite recovered from her anger at the daring of that cheerful builder of mills, Mr. John Burmestone. Mr. Burmestone had been one innovation, and Octavia Bassett was another. She had not been able to manage Mr. Burmestone, and she was not at all sure that she had managed Octavia Bassett.

She entered the dining-room with an ominous frown on her forehead.

At the end of the table, opposite her own seat, was a vacant chair, and her frown deepened when she saw it.

"Where is Miss Gaston?" she demanded of the servant.

Before the man had time to reply, the door opened, and a girl came in hurriedly, with a somewhat frightened air.

"I beg pardon, grandmamma dear," she said, going to her seat quickly. "I did not know you had come home."

"We have a dinner-hour," announced her ladyship, "and I do not disregard it."

"I am very sorry," faltered the culprit.

"That is enough, Lucia," interrupted Lady Theobald; and Lucia dropped her eyes, and began to eat her soup with nervous haste. In fact, she was glad to escape so easily.

She was a very pretty creature, with brown eyes, a soft white skin, and a slight figure with a reed-like grace. A great quantity of brown hair was twisted into an ugly coil on the top of her delicate little head; and she wore an ugly muslin gown of Miss Chickie's make. For some time the meal progressed in dead silence; but at length Lucia ventured to raise her eyes.

"I have been walking in Slowbridge, grandmamma," she said, "and I met Mr. Burmestone, who told me that Miss Bassett has a visitor--a young lady from America."

Lady Theobald laid her knife and fork down deliberately.

"Mr. Burmestone?" she said. "Did I understand you to say that you stopped on the roadside to converse with Mr. Burmestone?"

Lucia colored up to her delicate eyebrows and above them.

"I was trying to reach a flower growing on the bank," she said, "and he

was so kind as to stop to get it for me. I did not know he was near at first. And then he inquired how you were--and told me he had just heard about the young lady."

"Naturally!" remarked her ladyship sardonically. "It is as I anticipated it would be. We shall find Mr. Burmestone at our elbows upon all occasions. And he will not allow himself to be easily driven away. He is as determined as persons of his class usually are."

"O grandmamma!" protested Lucia, with innocent fervor. "I really do not think he is--like that at all. I could not help thinking he was very gentlemanly and kind. He is so much interested in your school, and so anxious that it should prosper."

"May I ask," inquired Lady Theobald, "how long a time this generous expression of his sentiments occupied? Was this the reason of your forgetting the dinner-hour?"

"We did not"--said Lucia guiltily: "it did not take many minutes. I--I do not think that made me late."

Lady Theobald dismissed this paltry excuse with one remark,--a remark made in the deep tones referred to once before.

"I should scarcely have expected," she observed, "that a granddaughter of mine would have spent half an hour conversing on the public road with the

proprietor of Slowbridge Mills."

"O grandmamma!" exclaimed Lucia, the tears rising in her eyes: "it was not half an hour."

"I should scarcely have expected," replied her ladyship, "that a granddaughter of mine would have spent five minutes conversing on the public road with the proprietor of Slowbridge Mills."

To this assault there seemed to be no reply to make. Lady Theobald had her granddaughter under excellent control. Under her rigorous rule, the girl--whose mother had died at her birth--had been brought up. At nineteen she was simple, sensitive, shy. She had been permitted to have no companions, and the greatest excitements of her life had been the Slowbridge tea-parties. Of the late Sir Gilbert Theobald, the less said the better. He had spent very little of his married life at Oldclough Hall, and upon his death his widow had found herself possessed of a substantial, gloomy mansion, an exalted position in Slowbridge society, and a small marriage-settlement, upon which she might make all the efforts she chose to sustain her state. So Lucia wore her dresses a much longer time than any other Slowbridge young lady: she was obliged to mend her little gloves again and again; and her hats were retrimmed so often that even Slowbridge thought them old-fashioned. But she was too simple and sweet-natured to be much troubled, and indeed thought very little about the matter. She was only troubled when Lady Theobald scolded her, which was by no means infrequently. Perhaps the straits to which, at

times, her ladyship was put to maintain her dignity imbibed her somewhat.

"Lucia is neither a Theobald nor a Barold," she had been heard to say once, and she had said it with much rigor.

A subject of much conversation in private circles had been Lucia's future. It had been discussed in whispers since her seventeenth year, but no one had seemed to approach any solution of the difficulty. Upon the subject of her plans for her granddaughter, Lady Theobald had preserved stern silence. Once, and once only, she had allowed herself to be betrayed into the expression of a sentiment connected with the matter.

"If Miss Lucia marries"--a matron of reckless proclivities had remarked.

Lady Theobald turned upon her, slowly and majestically.

"If Miss Gaston marries," she repeated. "Does it seem likely that Miss Gaston will not marry?"

This settled the matter finally. Lucia was to be married when Lady Theobald thought fit. So far, however, she had not thought fit: indeed, there had been nobody for Lucia to marry,--nobody whom her grandmother would have allowed her to marry, at least. There were very few young men in Slowbridge; and the very few were scarcely eligible according to Lady Theobald's standard, and--if such a thing should be mentioned--to

Lucia's, if she had known she had one, which she certainly did not.