

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"JACK."

The first person they saw, when they reached the lawn, was Mr. Dugald Binnie, who had deigned to present himself, and was talking to Mr. Burmestone, Lucia, and Miss Belinda.

"I'll go to them," said Octavia. "Aunt Belinda will wonder where I have been."

But, before they reached the group, they were intercepted by Lord Lansdowne; and Barold had the pleasure of surrendering his charge, and watching her, with some rather sharp pangs, as she was borne off to the conservatories.

"What is the matter with Mr. Barold?" exclaimed Miss Pilcher. "Pray look at him."

"He has been talking to Miss Octavia Bassett, in one of the arbors," put in Miss Lydia Burnham. "Emily and I passed them a few minutes ago, and they were so absorbed that they did not see us. There is no knowing what has happened."

"Lydia!" exclaimed Mrs. Burnham, in stern reproof of such flippancy.

But, the next moment, she exchanged a glance with Miss Pilcher.

"Do you think"--she suggested. "Is it possible"--

"It really looks very like it," said Miss Pilcher; "though it is scarcely to be credited. See how pale and angry he looks."

Mrs. Burnham glanced toward him, and then a slight smile illuminated her countenance.

"How furious," she remarked cheerfully, "how furious Lady Theobald will be!"

Naturally, it was not very long before the attention of numerous other ladies was directed to Mr. Francis Barold. It was observed that he took no share in the festivities, that he did not regain his natural air of enviable indifference to his surroundings,--that he did not approach Octavia Bassett until all was over, and she was on the point of going home. What he said to her then, no one heard.

"I am going to London to-morrow. Good-by."

"Good-by," she answered, holding out her hand to him. Then she added quickly, in an under-tone, "You oughtn't to think badly of me. You won't, after a while."

As they drove homeward, she was rather silent, and Miss Belinda remarked it.

"I am afraid you are tired, Octavia," she said. "It is a pity that Martin should come, and find you tired."

"Oh! I'm not tired. I was only--thinking. It has been a queer day."

"A queer day, my dear!" ejaculated Miss Belinda. "I thought it a charming day."

"So it has been," said Octavia, which Miss Belinda thought rather inconsistent.

Both of them grew rather restless as they neared the house.

"To think," said Miss Belinda, "of my seeing poor Martin again!"

"Suppose," said Octavia nervously, as they drew up, "suppose they are here--already."

"They?" exclaimed Miss Belinda. "Who"--but she got no farther. A cry burst from Octavia,--a queer, soft little cry. "They are here," she said: "they are! Jack--Jack!"

And she was out of the carriage; and Miss Belinda, following her closely, was horrified to see her caught at once in the embrace of a tall, bronzed young man, who, a moment after, drew her into the little parlor, and shut the door.

Mr. Martin Bassett, who was big and sunburned, and prosperous-looking, stood in the passage, smiling triumphantly.

"M--M--Martin!" gasped Miss Belinda. "What--oh, what does this mean?"

Martin Bassett led her to a seat, and smiled more triumphantly still.

"Never mind, Belinda," he said. "Don't be frightened. It's Jack Belasys, and he's the finest fellow in the West. And she hasn't seen him for two years."

"Martin," Miss Belinda fluttered, "it is not proper--it really isn't."

"Yes, it is," answered Mr. Bassett; "for he's going to marry her before we go abroad."

It was an eventful day for all parties concerned. At its close Lady Theobald found herself in an utterly bewildered and thunderstruck condition. And to Mr. Dugald Binnie, more than to any one else, her demoralization was due. That gentleman got into the carriage, in rather a better humor than usual.

"Same man I used to know," he remarked. "Glad to see him. I knew him as soon as I set eyes on him."

"Do you allude to Mr. Burmestone?"

"Yes. Had a long talk with him. He's coming to see you to-morrow. Told him he might come, myself. Appears he's taken a fancy to Lucia. Wants to talk it over. Suits me exactly, and suppose it suits her. Looks as if it does. Glad she hasn't taken a fancy to some haw-haw fellow, like that fool Barold. Girls generally do. Burmestone's worth ten of him."

Lucia, who had been looking steadily out of the carriage-window, turned, with an amazed expression. Lady Theobald had received a shock which made

all her manacles rattle. She could scarcely support herself under it.

"Do I"--she said. "Am I to understand that Mr. Francis Barold does not meet with your approval?" Mr. Binnie struck his stick sharply upon the floor of the carriage.

"Yes, by George!" he said. "I'll have nothing to do with chaps like that. If she'd taken up with him, she'd never have heard from me again. Make sure of that."

When they reached Oldclough, her ladyship followed Lucia to her room. She

stood before her, arranging the manacles on her wrists nervously.

"I begin to understand now," she said. "I find I was mistaken in my impressions of Mr. Dugald Binnie's tastes--and in my impressions of you. You are to marry Mr. Burmestone. My rule is over. Permit me to congratulate you."

The tears rose to Lucia's eyes.

"Grandmamma," she said, her voice soft and broken, "I think I should have been more frank, if--if you had been kinder sometimes."

"I have done my duty by you," said my lady.

Lucia looked at her pathetically.

"I have been ashamed to keep things from you," she hesitated. "And I have often told myself that--that it was sly to do it--but I could not help it."

"I trust," said my lady, "that you will be more candid with Mr. Burmestone."

Lucia blushed guiltily.

"I--think I shall, grandmamma," she said.

It was the Rev. Alfred Poppleton who assisted the rector of St. James to marry Jack Belasys and Octavia Bassett; and it was observed that he was almost as pale as his surplice.

Slowbridge had never seen such a wedding, or such a bride as Octavia. It was even admitted that Jack Belasys was a singularly handsome fellow, and had a dashing, adventurous air, which carried all before it. There was a rumor that he owned silver-mines himself, and had even done something in diamonds, in Brazil, where he had spent the last two years. At all events, it was ascertained beyond doubt, that, being at last a married woman, and entitled to splendors of the kind, Octavia would not lack them. Her present to Lucia, who was one of her bridesmaids, dazzled all beholders. When she was borne away by the train, with her father and husband, and Miss Belinda, whose bonnet-strings were bedewed with tears, the Rev. Alfred Poppleton was the last man who shook hands with her. He held in his hand a large bouquet, which Octavia herself had given him out of her abundance. "Slowbridge will miss you, Miss--Mrs. Belasys," he faltered. "I--I shall miss you. Perhaps we--may even meet again. I have thought that, perhaps, I should like to go to America."

And, as the train puffed out of the station and disappeared, he stood motionless for several seconds; and a large and brilliant drop of moisture appeared on the calyx of the lily which formed the centre-piece of his bouquet.

