

Chapter Four

The parts of the park nearest to the house already presented a busy aspect when Miss Fox-Seton passed through the gardens the following morning. Tables were being put up, and baskets of bread and cake and groceries were being carried into the tent where the tea was to be prepared. The workers looked interested and good-humoured; the men touched their hats as Emily appeared, and the women courtesied smilingly. They had all discovered that she was amiable and to be relied on in her capacity of her ladyship's representative.

"She's a worker, that Miss Fox-Seton," one said to the other. "I never seen one that was a lady fall to as she does. Ladies, even when they means well, has a way of standing about and telling you to do things without seeming to know quite how they ought to be done. She's coming to help with the bread-and-butter-cutting herself this morning, and she put up all them packages of sweets yesterday with her own hands. She did 'em up in different-coloured papers, and tied 'em with bits of ribbon, because she said she knowed children was prouder of coloured things than plain--they was like that. And so they are: a bit of red or blue goes a long way with a child."

Emily cut bread-and-butter and cake, and placed seats and arranged toys on tables all the morning. The day was hot, though beautiful, and she was so busy that she had scarcely time for her breakfast. The household

party was in the gayest spirits. Lady Maria was in her most amusing mood. She had planned a drive to some interesting ruins for the afternoon of the next day, and a dinner-party for the evening. Her favourite neighbours had just returned to their country-seat five miles away, and they were coming to the dinner, to her great satisfaction. Most of her neighbours bored her, and she took them in doses at her dinners, as she would have taken medicine. But the Lockyers were young and good-looking and clever, and she was always glad when they came to Loche during her stay at Mallowe.

"There is not a frump or a bore among them," she said. "In the country people are usually frumps when they are not bores, and bores when they are not frumps, and I am in danger of becoming both myself. Six weeks of unalloyed dinner-parties, composed of certain people I know, would make me begin to wear moreen petticoats and talk about the deplorable condition of London society."

She led all her flock out on to the lawn under the ilex-trees after breakfast.

"Let us go and encourage industry," she said. "We will watch Emily Fox-Seton working. She is an example."

Curiously enough, this was Miss Cora Brooke's day. She found herself actually walking across the lawn with Lord Walderhurst by her side. She did not know how it happened, but it seemed to occur accidentally.

"We never talk to each other," he said.

"Well," answered Cora, "we have talked to other people a great deal--at least I have."

"Yes, you have talked a good deal," said the marquis.

"Does that mean I have talked too much?"

He surveyed her prettiness through his glass. Perhaps the holiday stir in the air gave him a festive moment.

"It means that you haven't talked enough to me. You have devoted yourself too much to the laying low of young Heriot."

She laughed a trifle saucily.

"You are a very independent young lady," remarked Walderhurst, with a lighter manner than usual. "You ought to say something deprecatory or--a little coy, perhaps."

"I shan't," said Cora, composedly.

"Shan't or won't?" he inquired. "They are both bad words for little girls--or young ladies--to use to their elders."

"Both," said Miss Cora Brooke, with a slightly pleased flush. "Let us go over to the tents and see what poor Emily Fox-Seton is doing."

"Poor Emily Fox-Seton," said the marquis, non-committally.

They went, but they did not stay long. The treat was taking form. Emily Fox-Seton was hot and deeply engaged. People were coming to her for orders. She had a thousand things to do and to superintend the doing of. The prizes for the races and the presents for the children must be arranged in order: things for boys and things for girls, presents for little children and presents for big ones. Nobody must be missed, and no one must be given the wrong thing.

"It would be dreadful, you know," Emily said to the two when they came into her tent and began to ask questions, "if a big boy should get a small wooden horse, or a little baby should be given a cricket bat and ball. Then it would be so disappointing if a tiny girl got a work-box and a big one got a doll. One has to get things in order. They look forward to this so, and it's heart-breaking to a child to be disappointed, isn't it?"

Walderhurst gazed uninspiringly.

"Who did this for Lady Maria when you were not here?" he inquired.

"Oh, other people. But she says it was tiresome." Then with an illumined smile; "She has asked me to Mallowe for the next twenty years for the treats. She is so kind."

"Maria is a kind woman"--with what seemed to Emily delightful amiability. "She is kind to her treats and she is kind to Maria Bayne."

"She is kind to me," said Emily. "You don't know how I am enjoying this."

"That woman enjoys everything," Lord Walderhurst said when he walked away with Cora. "What a temperament to have! I would give ten thousand a year for it."

"She has so little," said Cora, "that everything seems beautiful to her. One doesn't wonder, either. She's very nice. Mother and I quite admire her. We are thinking of inviting her to New York and giving her a real good time."

"She would enjoy New York."

"Have you ever been there, Lord Walderhurst?"

"No."

"You ought to come, really. So many Englishmen come now, and they all

seem to like it."

"Perhaps I will come," said Walderhurst. "I have been thinking of it. One is tired of the Continent and one knows India. One doesn't know Fifth Avenue, and Central Park, and the Rocky Mountains."

"One might try them," suggested pretty Miss Cora.

This certainly was her day. Lord Walderhurst took her and her mother out in his own particular high phaeton before lunch. He was fond of driving, and his own phaeton and horses had come to Mallowe with him. He took only his favourites out, and though he bore himself on this occasion with a calm air, the event caused a little smiling flurry on the lawn. At least, when the phaeton spun down the avenue with Miss Brooke and her mother looking slightly flushed and thrilled in their high seats of honour, several people exchanged glances and raised eye-brows.

Lady Agatha went to her room and wrote a long letter to Curzon Street. Mrs. Ralph talked about the problem-play to young Heriot and a group of others.

The afternoon, brilliant and blazing, brought new visitors to assist by their presence at the treat. Lady Maria always had a large house-party, and added guests from the neighbourhood to make for gaiety. At two o'clock a procession of village children and their friends and parents, headed by the village band, marched up the avenue and passed before the

house on their way to their special part of the park. Lady Maria and her guests stood upon the broad steps and welcomed the jocund crowd, as it moved by, with hospitable bows and nods and becks and wreathed smiles. Everybody was in a delighted good-humour.

As the villagers gathered in the park, the house-party joined them by way of the gardens. A conjurer from London gave an entertainment under a huge tree, and children found white rabbits taken from their pockets and oranges from their caps, with squeals of joy and shouts of laughter. Lady Maria's guests walked about and looked on, laughing with the children.

The great affair of tea followed the performance. No treat is fairly under way until the children are filled to the brim with tea and buns and cake, principally cake in plummy wedges.

Lady Agatha and Mrs. Ralph handed cake along rows of children seated on the grass. Miss Brooke was talking to Lord Walderhurst when the work began. She had poppies in her hat and carried a poppy-coloured parasol, and sat under a tree, looking very alluring.

"I ought to go and help to hand cake," she said.

"My cousin Maria ought to do it," remarked Lord Walderhurst, "but she will not--neither shall I. Tell me something about the elevated railroad and Five-Hundred-and-Fifty-Thousandth Street." He had a slightly rude,

gracefully languid air, which Cora Brooke found somewhat impressive, after all.

Emily Fox-Seton handed cake and regulated supplies with cheerful tact and good spirits. When the older people were given their tea, she moved about their tables, attending to every one. She was too heart-whole in her interest in her hospitalities to find time to join Lady Maria and her party at the table under the ilex-trees. She ate some bread-and-butter and drank a cup of tea while she talked to some old women she had made friends with. She was really enjoying herself immensely, though occasionally she was obliged to sit down for a few moments just to rest her tired feet. The children came to her as to an omnipotent and benign being. She knew where the toys were kept and what prizes were to be given for the races. She represented law and order and bestowal. The other ladies walked about in wonderful dresses, smiling and exalted, the gentlemen aided the sports in an amateurish way and made patrician jokes among themselves, but this one lady seemed to be part of the treat itself. She was not so grandly dressed as the others,--her dress was only blue linen with white bands on it,--and she had only a sailor hat with a buckle and bow, but she was of her ladyship's world of London people, nevertheless, and they liked her more than they had ever liked a lady before. It was a fine treat, and she seemed to have made it so. There had never been quite such a varied and jovial treat at Mallowe before.

The afternoon waxed and waned. The children played games and raced and

rejoiced until their young limbs began to fail them. The older people sauntered about or sat in groups to talk and listen to the village band. Lady Maria's visitors, having had enough of rural festivities, went back to the gardens in excellent spirits, to talk and to watch a game of tennis which had taken form on the court.

Emily Fox-Seton's pleasure had not abated, but her colour had done so. Her limbs ached and her still-smiling face was pale, as she stood under the beech-tree regarding the final ceremonies of the festal day, to preside over which Lady Maria and her party returned from their seats under the ilex-trees. The National Anthem was sung loudly, and there were three tremendous cheers given for her ladyship. They were such joyous and hearty cheers that Emily was stirred almost to emotional tears. At all events, her hazel eyes looked nice and moistly bright. She was an easily moved creature.

Lord Walderhurst stood near Lady Maria and looked pleased also. Emily saw him speak to her ladyship and saw Lady Maria smile. Then he stepped forward, with his non-committal air and his monocle glaring calmly in his eye.

"Boys and girls," he said in a clear, far-reaching voice, "I want you to give three of the biggest cheers you are capable of for the lady who has worked to make your treat the success it has been. Her ladyship tells me she has never had such a treat before. Three cheers for Miss Fox-Seton."

Emily gave a gasp and felt a lump rise in her throat. She felt as if she had been without warning suddenly changed into a royal personage, and she scarcely knew what to do.

The whole treat, juvenile and adult, male and female, burst into three cheers which were roars and bellows. Hats and caps were waved and tossed into the air, and every creature turned toward her as she blushed and bowed in tremulous gratitude and delight.

"Oh, Lady Maria! oh, Lord Walderhurst!" she said, when she managed to get to them, "how kind you are to me!"