

CHAPTER XXX

What did occur was not at all complicated. It would not have been possible for a woman to have spent her girlhood with the cleverest mother of her day and have emerged from her training either obstinate or illogical. Lady Lothwell listened to as much of the history of Robin as her mother chose to tell her and plainly felt an amiable interest in it. She knew much more detail and gossip concerning Mrs. Gareth-Lawless than the Duchess herself did. She had heard of the child who was kept out of sight, and she had been somewhat disgusted by a vague story of Lord Coombe's abnormal interest in it and the ugly hint that he had an object in view. It was too unpleasantly morbid to be true of a man her mother had known for years.

"Of course you were not thinking of anything large or formal?" she said after a moment of smiling hesitation.

"No. I am not launching a girl into society. I only want to help her to know a few nice young people who are good-natured and well-mannered. She is not the ordinary old lady's companion and if she were not so strict with herself and with me, I confess I should behave towards her very much as I should behave to Kathryn if you could spare her to live with me. She is a heart-warming young thing. Because I am known to have one of my eccentric fancies for her and because after all her father WAS well connected, her

present position will not be the obstacle. She is not the first modern girl who has chosen to support herself."

"But isn't she much too pretty?"

"Much. But she doesn't flaunt it."

"But heart-warming--and too pretty! Dearest mamma!" Lady Lothwell laughed again. "She can do no harm to Kathryn, but I own that if George were not at present quite madly in love with a darling being at least fifteen years older than himself I should pause to reflect. Mrs. Stacy will keep him steady--Mrs. Alan Stacy, you know--the one with the magnificent henna hair, and the eyes that droop. No boy of twenty-two can resist her. They call her adorers 'The Infant School'."

"A small dinner and a small dance--and George and Kathryn may be the beginning of an interesting experiment. It would be pretty and kind of you to drop in during the course of the evening."

"Are you hoping to--perhaps--make a marriage for her?" Lady Lothwell asked the question a shade disturbedly. "You are so amazing, mamma darling, that I know you will do it, if you believe in it. You seem to be able to cause the things you really want, to evolve from the universe."

"She is the kind of girl whose place in the universe is in the home of some young man whose own place in the universe is in the heart and soul and life of her kind of girl. They ought to carry out the will of God by falling passionately in love with each other. They ought to marry each other and have a large number of children as beautiful and rapturously happy as themselves. They would assist in the evolution of the race."

"Oh! Mamma! how delightful you always are! For a really brilliant woman you are the most adorable dreamer in the world."

"Dreams are the only things which are true. The rest are nothing but visions."

"Angel!" her daughter laughed a little adoringly as she kissed her. "I will do whatever you want me to do. I always did, didn't I? It's your way of making one see what you see when you are talking that does it."

It was understood before they parted that Kathryn and George would be present at the small dinner and the small dance, and that a few other agreeable young persons might be trusted to join them, and that Lady Lothwell and perhaps her husband would drop in.

"It's your being almost Early Victorian, mamma, which makes it easy for you to initiate things. You will initiate little Miss

Lawless. It was rather neat of her to prefer to drop the 'Gareth.'
There has been less talk in late years of the different classes
'keeping their places'--'upper' and 'lower' classes really strikes
one as vulgar."

"We may 'keep our places'," the Duchess said. "We may hold on to
them as firmly as we please. It is the places themselves which
are moving, my dear. It is not unlike the beginning of a landslide."

Robin went to Dowie's room the next evening and stood a moment in
silence watching her sewing before she spoke. She looked anxious
and even pale.

"Her grace is going to give a party to some young people, Dowie,"
she said. "She wishes me to be present. I--I don't know what to
do."

"What you must do, my dear, is to put on your best evening frock
and go downstairs and enjoy yourself as the other young people
will. Her grace wants you to see someone your own age," was Dowie's
answer.

"But I am not like the others. I am only a girl earning her living
as a companion. How do I know--"

"Her grace knows," Dowie said. "And what she asks you to do it is

your duty to do--and do it prettily."

Robin lost even a shade more colour.

"Do you realize that I have never been to a party in my life--not even to a children's party, Dowie? I shall not know how to behave myself."

"You know how to talk nicely to people, and you know how to sit down and rise from your chair and move about a room like a quiet young lady. You dance like a fairy. You won't be asked to do anything more."

"The Duchess," reflected Robin aloud slowly, "would not let me come downstairs if she did not know that people would--be kind."

"Lady Kathryn and Lord Halwyn are coming. They are her own grandchildren," Dowie said.

"How did you know that?" Robin inquired.

Robin's colour began to come back.

"It's not what usually happens to girls in situations," she said.

"Her grace herself isn't what usually happens," said Dowie. "There

is no one like her for high wisdom and kindness."

Having herself awakened to the truth of this confidence-inspiring fact, Robin felt herself supported by it. One knew what far-sighted perception and clarity of experienced vision this one woman had gained during her many years of life. If she had elected to do this thing she had seen her path clear before her and was not offering a gift which awkward chance might spoil or snatch away from the hand held out to receive it. A curious slow warmth began to creep about Robin's heart and in its mounting gradually fill her being. It was true she had been taught to dance, to move about and speak prettily. She had been taught a great many things which seemed to be very carefully instilled into her mind and body without any special reason. She had not been aware that Lord Coombe and Mademoiselle Valle had directed and discussed her training as if it had been that of a young royal person whose equipment must be a flawless thing. If the Dowager Duchess of Darte had wished to present her at Court some fair morning she would have known the length of the train she must wear, where she must make her curtsies and to whom and to what depth, how to kiss the royal hand, and how to manage her train when she retired from the presence. When she had been taught this she had asked Mademoiselle Valle if the training was part of every girl's education and Mademoiselle had answered,

"It is best to know everything--even ceremonials which may or may

not prove of use. It all forms part of a background and prevents one from feeling unfamiliar with customs."

When she had passed the young pairs in the streets she had found an added interest in them because of this background. She could imagine them dancing together in fairy ball rooms whose lights and colours her imagination was obliged to construct for her out of its own fabric; she knew what the girls would look like if they went to a Drawing Room and she often wondered if they would feel shy when the page spread out their lovely peacock tails for them and left them to their own devices. It was mere Nature that she should have pondered and pondered and sometimes unconsciously longed to feel herself part of the flood of being sweeping past her as she stood apart on the brink of the river.

The warmth about her heart made it beat a little faster. She opened the door of her wardrobe when she found herself in her bedroom. The dress hung modestly in its corner shrouded from the penetration of London fogs by clean sheeting. It was only white and as simple as she knew how to order it, but Mademoiselle had taken her to a young French person who knew exactly what she was doing in all cases, and because the girl had the supple lines of a wood nymph and the eyes of young antelope she had evolved that which expressed her as a petal expresses its rose. Robin locked her door and took the dress down and found the silk stockings and slippers which belonged to it. She put them all on standing before her long mirror and

having left no ungiven last touch she fell a few steps backward and looked at herself, turning and balancing herself as a bird might have done. She turned lightly round and round.

"Yes. I AM--" she said. "I am--very!"

The next instant she laughed at herself outright.

"How silly! How silly!" she said. "Almost EVERYBODY is--more or less! I wonder if I remember the new steps." For she had been taught the new steps--the new walking and swayings and pauses and sudden swirls and swoops. And her new dress was as short as other fashionable girls' dresses were, but in her case revealed a haunting delicacy of contour and line.

So before her mirror she danced alone and as she danced her lips parted and her breast rose and fell charmingly, and her eyes lighted and glowed as any girl's might have done or as a joyous girl nymph's might have lighted as she danced by a pool in her forest seeing her loveliness mirrored there.

Something was awakening as something had awakened when Donal had kissed a child under the soot sprinkled London trees.