

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

(CONTINUED.) CHAPTER IV.

BEATRICE'S PROPOSAL.

In describing Hazelwood House and its belongings, no mention has been made of Miss Clouston...

There is no reason for enlarging upon the admirable way in which Lady Clouston filled the position which her own merits had gained...

At last he remembered an aunt of his own who lived in quiet retirement in one of the suburbs of London...

At seven years Beatrice Clouston was still a spoiled child. All distracted widowers, until they marry again, spoil an only child...

And civil war in families—baronets or otherwise—is a deplorable thing; doubly deplorable for the neutral parties...

It matters little who was most to blame—the girl for her unreasonableness and stubborn spirit, and want of resignation...

When alone with her father Beatrice always behaved prettily. She was very fond of him, although the remembrance of the tears, the text, his distracted yows, when contrasted with his second marriage for nothing but good looks...

"I don't want to be a nuisance to you, papa. I am eighteen now—too old to go back to school. It's nonsense, of course, to say I should like to earn my own living, because when I come of age I shall have some money. May I go and live at Fairholme?"

"I can't go abroad with you," said Beatrice. "I shall be miserable myself and make you miserable."

"But if you stay in England you must be presented and come out and all that sort of thing."

"If ever I do get married," said Beatrice drily, "I will be presented as Lady Clouston was, on my marriage."

Sir Maingay's cheek reddened. He was much hurt by the sarcasm. Poor old King Lear found a fitting simile for an ungrateful child, but the sharpness of a sarcastic child is more painful than a whole Jewell of serpents' teeth.

At last he remembered an aunt of his own who lived in quiet retirement in one of the suburbs of London. It was of course absurd for Beatrice to think of living at Fairholme, in a half-closed house with a housekeeper and one or two servants.

After a while Sir Maingay almost forgot he had a daughter. The Cloustons settled down to continental life for an indefinite time. Lady Clouston knew she was improving herself, and moreover, that Sir Maingay was saving enough money to refurbish the town house from top to bottom whenever they did return to England.

At last the Cloustons returned to England. Whether her ladyship wrote her book or not is a matter of uncertainty; anyway, it was never published. Beatrice made no objection to rejoining the family circle.

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His bright hair in quite a paternal way. Even the respectable Whittaker was smiling pleasantly.

"What a dear little man!" exclaimed Beatrice, as she walked to the table and looked at the sturdy urchin.

She was the first woman the child had seen since he left his friends at the refreshment room. Maid servants, with the curiosity of their sex and kind, had peeped surreptitiously over the balustrade, but had not attracted notice.

"Certainly," said uncle Horace. "Where had he better sleep?"

"Jane has a most comfortable bed," said Herbert.

"No, no," exclaimed Beatrice; "he shall sleep with me. Look at him, uncle Horace; isn't he a perfect cherub?"

"He's a pretty little boy; but we don't know where he comes from, my dear. I hardly think you ought to take a strange infant to sleep with you."

"Oh, nonsense, uncle Horace! See what a clean, beautiful boy it is. Whittaker, send a large can of hot water to my room. Come, my pet; I will see how I can act the part of a nursemaid."

Herbert gave his quiet smile. He was of less stern stuff than Horace—that is, if either of the Talberts could be called stern.

"You will let me keep him?" pleaded Beatrice. "I am sure you will."

"Horace made no reply to her unreasonable request. In their usual dignified manner the two gentlemen made their preparations for shutting up. Beatrice went back to her room.

"She grows very, very impulsive," sighed Horace. This time Herbert said nothing.

"The next morning the Talberts did an unusual thing; they broke one of their rules by opening their letters before breakfast.

"In about half an hour's time Beatrice reappeared with the intelligence that the boy's clothing bore no mark of any kind. Indeed, it all seemed brand new.

"The boy seemed happy enough in his new quarters. It is indeed a sad thing to remark how soon a child forgets its mother."

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"I never inquire now—it is too painful to be told that the noble presence of a man who smiles so condescendingly in Mrs. Smith, whilst that other insignificant-looking being is Lord This or the Duke of That. It upsets one's cherished ideal as to what the aristocracy should be."

"This morning she threw books, music, painting, everything aside, and played with her new toy. It was Saturday. The 'Tabbies,' who invariably went shopping together, were bound to Blacktown to buy groceries.

"When, in a few hours' time, the brothers drove back with a wagonette full of tea, coffee, sugar, yellow soap, house flannel, Bath stone, emery paper, or whatever else was useful to make the wheels of household management run smoothly, they found Beatrice still engrossed by her charge.

"The Talberts made no objection to Beatrice's proceedings, although they fancied the child would have been sent to breakfast with the servants. Being anxious to see him by daylight, they screwed their eye-glasses in place, and once more minutely inspected their sturdy little visitor.

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BEATRICE CLOUSTON.

After a while Sir Maingay almost forgot he had a daughter. The Cloustons settled down to continental life for an indefinite time.



Miss Clouston made her appearance with the child on her arm.

washed him and dressed him, combed his hair into a wavy mass of burnished gold, and so brought him to the breakfast table fresh, and sweet as a rose in June.

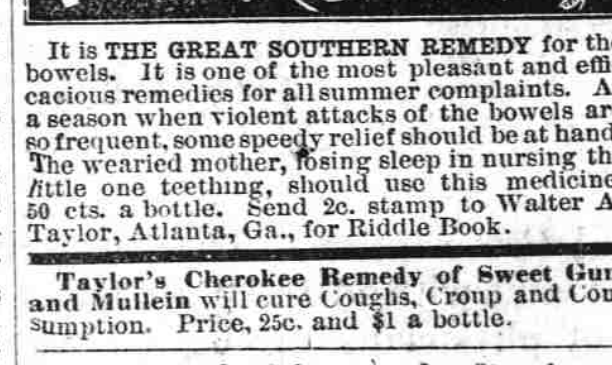
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