

DIANA TRELAWNY

BY
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DIANA

CHAPTER I. HERSELF.

DIANA TRELAWNY was a great heiress in the ordinary sense of the word, though the term was one which she objected to strongly. She was rather a great proprietor and landowner, no longer looking forward to any inheritance, but in full possession of it. She had a fine estate, a fine old English house, and a great deal of money in all kinds of stocks and securities. Besides this, she was a handsome woman, quite sufficiently handsome in the light of her wealth to be called beautiful—not a girl, a beautiful woman of thirty, with some talents, a great deal of character, and a most enviable and desirable position. She was not, indeed, chairman of the quarter-sessions, as she might have been had she written herself Daniel instead of Diana, nor was she even on the commission of the peace. She did not, so far as I am aware, regret either of these disabilities; but these, and a few more of the same kind, were the chief things that distinguished her from the other great county magnates. She paid very little attention to these points of difference. A woman who is rich, and has a commanding position, has few but sentimental grievances to complain of. These sentimental grievances are often very disagreeable, and tell like personal insults by times; but they are practically inoperative in cases like that of Miss Trelawny. She had broken the bonds of youth, the only ones which, in her position, might have restrained her. She had no objections that all the country and all the world should know she was thirty; and being thirty, she claimed full independence, which was as fully accorded to her. She had no tastes or inclinations to make that independence unlovely; and no theory of emancipation which demanded

exceptional boldness of fact to justify it—a thing which gets many women into trouble. Her house was as pleasant a house as could be found, her society courted, her character respected. She had all the advantages of a country gentleman, and she had other advantages inseparable from the fact that she was a lady and not a gentleman. A marriageable young squire of her age and good looks would no doubt have been an extremely popular and much-sought-after person; but Diana was more popular and more sought after than any young squire. For even if you take the very worst view of English society, and believe that managing mothers and daughters eager to be married are as abundant as blackberries, the fact still remains that certain reticences must be observed, and that the best women do not throw themselves at the hero's head—or feet. Whereas, in Diana's case, these reticences were scarcely necessary, for everybody paid undisguised court to the beautiful, wealthy, smiling, and gracious young woman, and the best men in the neighbourhood thought no shame to throw themselves at *her* head—or feet, as the case might be. She was more openly courted than any man, for it was more seemly and fit that she should be courted, and no disgrace to the noblest. The county was more proud of her, more devoted to her, than it would have been to any male potentate. It made a kind of queen of her, always in dutiful and loyal subordination to the real mistress of these realms; but Diana was the queen of the county. Thus her sex was nothing but an additional pedestal to this enviable person: for to be sure she did not much care, being as yet indifferently interested in politics, for the disadvantage of having no vote.

Diana, however, had not always been so fortunate and so great: she was not born the heiress of the Chase, and of all the good things involved in that. Old Lady Trelawny, its last ruler, was a

Trelawny born, and princess of the name, as well as a Trelawny by marriage. She and her husband had united the two branches of the family, he having the title and she the property: and had intended in so doing to re-found and concentrate in their descendants the strength of the race, which had become straggling and weakly, running into wild offshoots of collaterals which sucked all the strength from the parent stem. But, alas! there is nothing more remarkable than the indifference of Providence to such arrangements, even in the most important families. In this case Heaven took no notice of the intention at all, but simply left this pair childless, as if their offspring had been of no consequence, confounding all their designs. They could not believe for a long time that such a neglect was possible; but they lived long enough to get over their surprise, and to form a great many new plans for their future heir, who had to be chosen within a certain circle of kinship. It may be supposed that this choice, which had to be made among them, fluttered the family of Trelawny beyond measure, and kept up for years a wonderful excitement in all its branches. Such a possibility hanging over one's head is very bad for the character, and it is to be feared that the Trelawnys in general made exhibitions of their eagerness in a way which did not please the sharp-sighted old pair to whom the privilege of choice was given.

The only one of all the lineage who did not answer to the general call, and put in some claim more or less servilely to his chance of the inheritance, was a certain Captain John, who had disappeared from the surface of the family long before, and Lady Trelawny knew why. Up to the time when the old lady was seventy, it still seemed quite clear to her that Captain John kept out of the way because he could not bear to see her the wife of Sir John, though such had been her position for the last half-century.

The old pair were at Brighton when the husband's last illness began; and looking from their windows, in the feebleness of their old age, they watched daily a certain procession of girls from one of the many girls' schools (or should I not say establishments for young ladies?) in the place, which amused the old people much. It was an event in Sir John's dull morning when they passed with their fresh faces, in charge of a handsome, stately young woman, who was the English governess. By degrees both Sir John and my lady became interested in this girl: and it may be supposed what a leap of additional warmth was given to the rising fancy when they found out that her name, too, was Trelawny. Trelawnys are not so plentiful as Browns: the old lady drove to Mrs. Seymour's school to find out who she was, and sent her half-a-dozen invitations before Diana could be persuaded to go. "Why should I go? I would in a moment if I could do anything for them; but they are smothered in friends and doctors and servants," said the proud young woman. Mrs. Seymour, who was a sensible person, coaxed and persuaded and half compelled the visit; and when it turned out that this stately Diana was the only child of Captain John, it may be supposed what excitement awoke among all the Trelawnys. It gave the old lady a great shock at first, for she had believed in Captain John as living on somewhere in mournful old bachelorhood, keeping out of sight and out of the world in order to escape the misery of seeing herself at seventy the wife of another, and her *désillusionnement* cost her a pang. Afterwards, when she found out that Captain John had married late in life—he was older by ten years than she—a homely little clergyman's daughter who had been kind to him in a little village in Wales where he fished and dreamed his life away, and had died there a dozen years before, her heart was touched more than ever; and it was Lady Trelawny's tears that persuaded Diana, against her will, to leave her

independent position and become the nurse and companion of the old people. Before Sir John died the decision was made, but it was the old lady who carried it out. Captain John had been the nearest in blood, first cousin to both husband and wife. His daughter was, of all the Trelawnys, the one most near to them, their natural heir.

A year afterwards Diana had become Miss Trelawny of the Chase, a very great lady, and had taken the county by storm at the first glance. Perhaps, indeed, their want of any previous familiarity with her had something to do with the position to which she rose immediately in her own right. The county had not seen her grow up, and did not know all her youthful faults and weaknesses, as was the case with most of her fellow-magnates. She came into it full-grown, full-blown, beautiful, stately, independent, neither to be snubbed nor patronised nor put down. The episode of the school, which might have sentenced a humbler woman to exclusion from the reigning caste, what did it matter in a Trelawny? Your princesses born can do anything, the humblest offices. She neither bragged of it nor was ashamed of it, but would mention it simply in her conversation when need was, in the most matter-of-fact way, as a princess ought to do. What did it matter to her one way or another? The humility and the greatness were immaterial to Diana. She was herself in all times and places, and had been herself before she became Miss Trelawny of the Chase; though the title (really a title in the circumstances) suited her admirably. Her neighbour, Mr. Biddulph, called her “the image that fell down from Jupiter.” Such was her position in the world, eminent, rich, remarkable in position, yet something more—something that had nothing to do with her position, which was simply her, and her alone.

There was one thing, however, which startled the county much, and filled it with disapproval, which would have been warmer had

there been any real belief in the purpose announced. Diana declared from the beginning that she would not marry. This is not an announcement which excites very warm belief in any case. If it is not believed of a man, how should it be of a woman, to whom (as everybody still believed in those days) it is the one thing needful? This, however, was what Diana said, quite seriously, without, it was supposed, meaning any joke; and, indeed, joking was not in her character. She said in so many words that she did not mean to marry. There was a great deal to do on the estate, she said, which was true; for the old Trelawnys had done little, and had not at all marched with the times, but contented themselves with the state of affairs which had existed a hundred years ago, or at least in the beginning of the century. The farming was bad, the cottages were bad, everything was behind in Trelawny parish. "But a gentleman could do all that so much better than you could," her friends said to her. "It is my business, and not any problematical gentleman's," said this impracticable young woman. She had a belief in celibacy which was incredible to the community in general; and thought, however bad it might be to make that state compulsory, that unmarried persons, both lay and clerical, were an advantage here and there to their fellow-creatures. The question was discussed continually between her and her neighbours, the Biddulphs, to whom such a rebellion against all the rules which regulate human life seemed monstrous, and not to be put up with. It was un-English, they said—it was wicked; but Diana only smiled. One thing was certain, that this fad kept up her importance and her unique position as the finest of matches could not have done; and it seemed to some of her friends that it was more to Diana's credit to allege this as the reason, than to allow it to be believed that she was guilty of the eccentricity of despising or objecting to matrimony. "She would be nobody if she married,"

they said. "She would just be like other people; but Miss Trelawny of the Chase is a great personage." This was so much more reasonable, so much more natural a motive, everybody felt, than any foolish fancy about work to be done or personal responsibilities to be upheld, that the neighbourhood was quite glad to adopt it. "Diana likes to be important," was an answer to everything; and Diana did not contradict the opinion so universally formed. Perhaps she did like the importance of her position, and even the suitors and suitors' friends who paid such court to her, in hopes of appropriating, some time or other, her solid attractions of money and land and social position to themselves. So Queen Elizabeth did too, I suppose, whatever were the real motives of that astute sovereign for declining to share her throne. Diana did not want her throne to be shared; but she did not, perhaps, being human, dislike the great competition there was for the vacant place.

Besides this, probably there had been experiences in her life which made the question of marriage less attractive to her. Few people live to be thirty without something of the kind, happy or unhappy; but nobody in the neighbourhood of Trelawny had been taken into her confidence in this respect. So she lived in the great house a cheerful and busy life, working at her estate as few landlords take the trouble to work, making a profession of it which cannot be said to be usual. Sometimes she was alone, but more generally there were guests to give the semblance of a family to the huge old mansion; and very pleasant society Diana managed to gather round her,—people of all kinds, almost of all classes, within the limits which education and refinement made possible—poor people and rich people, great people and small people, in a *mélange* which was both picturesque and pleasant. There is nothing that gives such a zest to society as having been shut out

from it for years; and if it was at all common for the poor and aspiring to be frequently raised at once into the possession of great means and independence as had happened to Diana, nothing, I believe, would benefit more by this than society. What dreams she had entertained in her loneliness, when Mrs. Seymour's parlour was the highest sphere possible to her, of the fine company she would like to see if she had the power! To sit and work, and listen diligently to the words of wisdom which fell from the lips of the senior curate, sometimes on her own account venturing a respectful remark as to the last story in the 'Monthly Packet,' was all that Diana could hope for in those days; and as she sat with her head bowed and her mind half impatient, half amused, listening to the conversation of these her superiors, it would be endless to tell how many fascinating groups she gathered round her, how much brilliant conversation went flashing about, while Mrs. Seymour prosed, and the curate at his ease laid down the law. Sometimes she was half afraid these good people would hear the fun and the laughter that were going on so near them, and would bend her head close over her needlework to hide the smile upon her face. Strange freaks of fancy? for often now, when the beautiful drawing-room at the Chase was full of the best society, Diana, drooping her head, would hear again Mrs. Seymour prosing and the curate laying down the law, and listen to them a while with a smile on her face and very gentle thoughts. But in all probability, had she been born in the purple at Trelawny, and never sat in Mrs. Seymour's parlour, she would have been satisfied with the county magnates and fine people within reach, and would not have made those efforts after *good* society which the county enjoyed, yet looked upon with suspicion—wondering why its own provisions in that particular should not be good enough for her, as they had been for her forefathers. It did not injure her popularity, however—rather

increased it. The Chase was a pleasant house to visit, and its mistress “a delightful person to know:” and she was one of the best matches in England, and might at any moment turn anybody’s second son into an important county gentleman. Can the reader be surprised that on all accounts, and in every section of society, there should be but one opinion about such an important and attractive person as Miss Trelawny of the Chase?

CHAPTER II. HER NEIGHBOURS.

THERE were very great people in the county, whom I will not venture to describe here,—a duke, with his duchess, and all the fine things that naturally belong to dukes: and two barons, and Sir Johns without number: for the county was large and important. Miss Trelawny, I believe, had she acted with ordinary prudence, might have had the Marquis, and been Duchess in her day. He was some years younger than she was; but, as everybody said, if *his* family did not object to that difference of age on the wrong side, why should she? and the young man was fathoms deep in love, and did not get over his disappointment for three months at least; and nothing could have made a finer match than the Trelawny estate with the Duke's lands. However, I am not qualified to enter upon any discussion of the motives of such sublime personages. The neighbours who specially belonged to Diana, and who were most interested in the episode of her life which it is my business to relate, were the Hunstantons, who lived in the nearest "place" to Trelawny, and were deeply attached to its mistress; and another small and insignificant household, which, except in consequence of its connection with Diana, would scarcely have been of sufficient importance to be mentioned at all. This latter family was composed of two ladies, an aunt and a niece—the one a clergyman's widow, the other a clergyman's orphan-child; peevish, humble-minded, weakly little gentlewomen, with nothing remarkable about them except the simple prettiness of the girl, Sophy, who was a soft, smiling golden-haired creature, unobtrusive and gentle as a little bird. Mrs. Norton was disposed to be mysterious about the

connection of herself and her niece with Diana, fearing, as she said, to “compromise” a lady in her position; but this connection was of the very simplest kind. Sophy had been at Mrs. Seymour’s school—a piece of extravagance which had cost her kind aunt a great deal more than she could afford—but the girl had been delicate, and sea-air had been prescribed for her, and good little Mrs. Norton was willing to “live anyhow” in order to secure advantages for the child to whom she had performed all a mother’s duties. Diana was one of the women to whom a dependent of some kind is an invariable appendage, gathered to her by sheer attraction of nature: and Sophy Norton took the place of the necessary burden to be carried about on the other’s strong shoulders. The child was delicate, the governess was kind. She nursed her, she petted her, she became to her a sort of amateur mother. Mrs. Norton lived in cheap little lodgings at Brighton to be near her little girl, and when she asked the governess to come to tea with Sophy, she too felt that in her way she was exercising kindness and patronage, and that Miss Trelawny’s care of Sophy was compensated by the notice which she, a lady of private means, not requiring to work for her living, took of the governess—so that on this foundation of mutual kindness they got on in a very pleasant way.

I will not say that Diana herself felt Mrs. Norton’s notice to be of the elevating character which the excellent little woman herself supposed: but she was lonely, and very grateful for kindness of any description simply offered. She liked the prattle of the two innocent creatures, the aunt not much wiser than the niece; and she liked the spectacle of their love, which brought sometimes a wistful look to her own face, and sometimes lit her up with smiles, for it had its amusing as well as its tender aspects. When Diana

came to her kingdom, it is not to be described what awe, and wonder, and pride, took possession of Mrs. Norton's soul. To think that the governess to whom she had condescended should have risen to be such a great lady! but yet, at the same time, to think that she had always appreciated Miss Trelawny,—always done her best, though that was but little, to show her appreciation! When old Lady Trelawny died, Mrs. Norton wrote, with much timidity, to offer, if Diana would like it, a visit of sympathy for one day only—for she had her pride, and meant nothing but kindness, if not perhaps a tremulous expedient of love to recall little Sophy to the mind of one who now might be as good a friend to the little girl “as I tried to be to her, my dear, in her days of poverty.” Diana accepted this not entirely unalloyed kindness. She understood the alloy and forgave it; nay, perhaps liked the little bit of gold there was all the better for that heavenly kind of dross mixed with it—the anxious love of Sophy which prompted her aunt to seek her interest in any practicable way. They came to the Chase for two days, and stayed two months, amusing and refreshing their hostess in her loneliness with their pretty foolish ways. They were like two kittens to Diana; their harmless gambols gave her pleasure such as sensible persons did not always understand. When she had kept them with her all that time, it seemed hard to send the two little things away again into the seaside lodgings or small suburban house which they contemplated. Diana offered them a cottage in her park which had been built by some other kind Trelawny for a poor relation,—a little red house, overgrown with climbing roses and honey-suckle, set in a little clearing of green lawns in the heart of the trees. No words could tell Sophy's delight with this pretty nest; but Mrs. Norton did all she could to maintain her dignity, and to seem to doubt and hesitate a little—firstly, as to whether she ought to accept such a favour from a friend who was not a relation,

as she said; and secondly, as to whether in the midst of the trees it might be damp. But in a very short time both these fears were put to flight, and no children were ever more happy over the fitting up of a doll's house than those two little ladies were over their furnishing. And, again, to the wonder of her sensible friends, so was Diana too. Is not a grown-up sister, a young mother, sometimes excited about the doll's house as well as its lawful possessor? Miss Trelawny bought little bits of furniture, sought out scraps of china, had little brackets fitted in the little corners, and stands of flowers set out in the tiny hall. It was a toy mansion for her pets, upon which she expended more trouble than on her own stately dwelling-place; though what she could see in those two silly little women! as Mrs. Hunstanton constantly said.

The Hunstantons were of a totally different class. They were landed gentry as good as the Trelawnys themselves, if not quite so rich. They had a house in a great grove of trees which, except in the heat of summer, was not very cheerful, and which was supposed not to be wholesome for the delicate boy who was their eldest hope and the heir. He was a pale melancholy individual, like neither father nor mother, and it was on his account that they constantly spent their winters abroad. Mr. Hunstanton was an unsteady man with nerves, who had attacks of neuralgia and notions, and was fond of meddling, people said, with things that did not concern him much. He was thin to the utmost possible of thinness, running about in jerks and thinking in jumps, a hasty man, not wise but yet lovable, and ready to undertake anything for anybody. His wife was as unlike him in person as in character. She was sensible, cool, and indisposed to "mix herself up" with other people's affairs—still handsome though nearly fifty, calm in disposition, and somewhat disposed to criticism, for which she had

ample ground in her husband's doings and sayings. They had married late, and had some children still in the nursery, and the weakly boy of sixteen already mentioned, whom it was the chief object of their lives to tide over the difficult period of youth. For him they were always ready to move at a moment's notice, to fly from the east winds or from the damp, or from the too great heats of summer. Climate was one of the few things which both of them believed in, and their house was full of books on the subject, and every new place was eagerly caught at and inquired about. All along the Riviera they had wandered, over Italy with all its islands, into Spain, to Gibraltar, to Algiers, up the Nile—almost as many places as there had been winters in the delicate boy's life. Curiosities from all of these spots which possessed any curiosities filled their rooms, and the acquaintances which an active-minded man like Mr. Hunstanton made in these prolonged periods of leisure were beyond counting. He had something to do with private histories all over the world, and had thrust his nervous head into more tangled webs than could be reckoned. His wife, who at first had tried to restrain him, had long ago given up the attempt as impracticable, and only looked on and wondered and criticised.

Such were Diana's nearest neighbours. The Nortons were in the park, to be got at at a moment's notice—convenient people who could be sent for, who were always ready to fill up a corner, to do anything that might be agreeable. Sophy sung a little pleasantly and prettily, as she did everything. Her aunt was ready to play quadrilles and waltzes, or the simpler kind of accompaniments, till midnight at any time. They were liked by all the much greater people into whose society they had been transplanted bodily, and whom they delighted in, in return, with enthusiasm. The Duchess, on the one occasion when she had spent

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