

**THE BEVERLEYS: A
STORY OF
CALCUTTA**

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "ALEXIA"



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THE BEVERLEYS.



CHAPTER I.

THE Winterfords were at breakfast, and Eileen had not yet come down. It was late; but it always is late in India,—that is to say, in the households of men in any of the services, civil, military, and forensic. The head of this one—if it could be said to have a head, or if Barney Winterford could be said to be the head of anything—had nothing more exigent on most days than the exercising of his saddle-horses to demand his early morning attention. He had not even been out for his usual gallop this time, but was sleepily assimilating a scolding, with his curry and rice, from his wife, Philippa.

Philippa—in other words, Lady Barney Winterford—had rarely allowed herself to descend to the rôle of a fault-finder until lately, although she might have done so at any moment for seventeen years, with every excuse in life. Remonstrance, vain but irresistible, was becoming more of a habit with her latterly, however; for she found her patience pretty

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well at an end. A long course of separation from her children, of jungle-fevers, and all kinds of malarial distempers, — for they had not always been lodged sumptuously in Calcutta, — and a very long and trying course of her husband, Barney, had worn a temper once of the sweetest to a point, and that a sharp one.

Philippa had been out in India a good many years. Seven children had been born to her, from each of whom, one after the other, she had been obliged to sever herself with a mighty wrench. Until this last year there had always been one child young enough to stay with her; but Bidly, the baby, was five, and Philippa, in a real agony, had left the last precious one with its grandfather in England, knowing it dangerous to the child's health to keep it any longer in a hot climate. It was a terrible blow to her; no one, from her haughty and self-contained demeanor, suspected how terrible. And although she had never up to this time swerved from her fidelity to Barney, — who, to say truth, was not exactly the man to be cast loose on his own recognizances in a gay country like India, — Philippa was fast losing her steadfastness, and her self-control too, and showed her utter weariness of spirit by ordinary apathy to most persons and things, and now and then extraordinary severity to Barney.

It was his sixteenth year in India, this bad Barney, and he was only now magistrate of the "24-Pergunnahs" in Calcutta. Men who had never blinked at an eastern sun until long after Barney had been dried and seasoned by a many years' process of them, were

drawing handsome salaries as High Court Judges or officers of the Viceroy's Council. It had been Barney's own fault, — his bad luck, of course he said. He had done wild things in his youth, and middle age had not steadied him to slowness. He was, not to put too fine a point upon it, good for nothing ; and Philippa knew it.

Besides all this as one may say chronic grievance, the subject of the breakfast-table philippic was another and an acuter cause of complaint.

Anything sweeter or more peaceful than the scene it would be hard to find. As Philippa sat in her high-backed wrought-ebony chair, she could gaze, through wide French window-ways, with arches of shrubbery for further frames, at lovely flowering trees, and ivies, and all kinds of tropic wonders, growing in gay profusion. The air was blossoming with fairy orchids ; pointzettias and bright red hibiscus made flames of color in the glowing distance. In the foreground were the aloes and the yucca and the commoner garden flowers, — the brighter ones having taken to themselves Oriental dyes, it seemed ; for a color must be vivid in India or the sun fades every vestige of hue from it. The air was filled with sweetness, not pungent, but languid. The very roses, which are gay and self-asserting in a colder clime, are delicate and faint, like women under the same conditions, in an eastern air. The room in which Philippa sat — as discontented a woman as ever sat — was full of softness and luxury and perfume. Crystal lamps hung from the ceiling by broad bands of crimson silk ; the curtains were of the same rich

hue and of a marvellous texture ; rugs of the deepest, softest pile covered the tessellated floor, — for this was the cold weather, although its rigors were hardly extreme. Turbaned and draped retainers awaited in silence the faintest breath of behest. Everything spoke of comfort and of ease. How little was of either in that barren house !

“ You know very well, Barney,” Philippa was saying, as she toyed with her fruit, “ I have sacrificed myself in everything. I was willing enough to bring Eileen out the first time, and to do all in my power to marry her well and to keep her from throwing herself away on that wretch. And in spite of her idiotic refusals of fine offers, and her suicidal acceptance of the worst one she had ; in spite of her escapades and follies, in every one of which you encouraged her, Barney,” — a twinkle came into Barney’s eye, — “ you know how fond I have always been of Eileen, even although you have spent more on her than you have ever spent on your own children.” Barney sighed resignedly. “ When it came to bringing her out the second time, — a young widow, with no signs of widowhood about her except her independence, and with all those shocking clouds hanging over her, — it was too much for me to undertake, I felt ; and yet I tried to do my best then. But now that she is going on in exactly the same old way, flirting wildly with ineligible men, spending no end of money, and giving one more than one can possibly do to look after her, without the excuses of youth and inexperience she had before, I say, Barney, that something must be done to stop it. And if you

won't take some step, I must. I am not called upon to endure this sort of thing any longer, and Eileen is ruining herself." Philippa had never in her life spoken so explicitly to Barney; but her speech had gathered impetus as it rose from her lips.

Ordinarily, Barney Winterford was one mass of good-nature. Your harum-scarums mostly are. He could not argue, for several reasons; one being his ignorance of any coherent line, and another his laziness, — it was too much trouble. But Eileen was his idol, — his sister, and the one person who combined, for him, all human attraction. He never heard her disparaged without a protest. "My darlin'," he said, sleepy still, but not without a flush, "when will you learn not to exaggerate? You mean Jack Beverley, I suppose, when you say 'ineligible' men and Eileen is 'flirting wildly,' because he is no good as a *parti*, and because she won't look at old Warwick, who's a catch. I wish she would marry Warwick; you know how I've tried to bring it about. But she won't. If Jack were a match now, you would say Eileen was behaving most discreetly in encouraging him. I don't know that she is leading him on any more than a dozen others. How the men do like her!"

"Like her? Of course they like her. No one can help liking her. But only the poverty-stricken younger sons — and Mr. Warwick — want to marry her. Men like anybody who is pretty and fascinating, and amuses them, and has a good seat on a horse. But Eileen can't afford to go in for that sort of thing alone. She must look for something else;

and she's not a girl any more, to be wasting her time and her looks, as she does."

"Well, what is she then?" retorted Barney. "Faith, she's not one-and-twenty, and had misery enough with that brute Beaufort to last a score of years. As for giving you more than you can manage to look after her, my love, when was that? We sent you home from the Friths' ball at one; and did n't I look after the child myself,— and I blind in both eyes from sleep?"

"Yes, there's an instance," quickly broke in Philippa, — "that ball! Eileen was fairly stared at the whole night. So free and off-hand in her manner,— so gay, and as if she had not a care! Valsing madly about like a top, and going on for all the world like an American! Her looks, bearing, those of a girl of eighteen, at most!"

"And just as long as she can look eighteen, I hope she will then," replied Barney, whose sleepiness had entirely departed. "If she keeps her smooth skin and her merry laugh and her yellow hair, like a baby's, I'll be the last man to begrudge them to her, the lamb!" Barney had not shown much anxiety to preserve Philippa's skin or her hair or her laugh, but I doubt if he would have done much more than talk about Eileen's. "If she were to have nothing but wild merriment from now till the day of her death, and that fifty years hence, it would not make up for the agony that girl has suffered. It's precious few, now I tell you, Philippa, who go through half Eileen has done, or bear it with half her spirit."