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#29 in our series by Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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PART XV.

CHAPTER I.

There would have been nothing in what had chanced to justify the suspicions that tortured me, but for my impressions as to the character of Vivian.

Reader, hast thou not, in the easy, careless sociability of youth, formed acquaintance with some one in whose more engaging or brilliant qualities thou hast,--not lost that dislike to defects or vices which is natural to an age when, even while we err, we adore what is good, and glow with enthusiasts for the ennobling sentiment and the virtuous deed,--no, happily, not lost dislike to what is bad, nor thy quick sense of it,--but conceived a keen interest in the struggle between the bad that revolted, and the good that attracted thee, in thy companion? Then, perhaps, thou hast lost sight of him for a time; suddenly thou hearest that he has done something out of the way of ordinary good or commonplace evil; and in either--the good or the evil--thy mind runs rapidly back over its old reminiscences, and of either thou sayest, "How natural! Only, So-and-so could have done this thing!"

Thus I felt respecting Vivian. The most remarkable qualities in his character were his keen power of calculation and his unhesitating audacity,--qualities that lead to fame or to infamy, according to the cultivation of the moral sense and the direction of the passions. Had I recognized those qualities in some agency apparently of good,--and it seemed yet doubtful if Vivian were the agent,--I should have cried, "It is he; and the better angel has triumphed!" With the same (alas! with a yet more impulsive) quickness, when the agency was of evil, and the agent equally dubious, I felt that the qualities revealed the man, and that the demon had prevailed.

Mile after mile, stage after stage, were passed on the dreary, interminable, high north road. I narrated to my companion, more intelligibly than I had yet done, my causes for apprehension. The Captain at first listened eagerly, then checked me on the sudden. "There may be nothing in all this," he cried. "Sir, we must be men here,--have our heads cool, our reason clear; stop!" And leaning back in the chaise, Roland refused further conversation, and as the night advanced, seemed to sleep. I took pity on his fatigue, and devoured my heart in silence. At each stage we heard of the party of which we were in pursuit. At the first stage or two we were less than an hour behind; gradually, as we advanced, we lost ground, despite the most lavish liberality to the post-boys. I supposed, at length, that the mere circumstance of changing, at each relay, the chaise as well as the horses, was the cause of our comparative slowness; and on saying this to Roland as we were changing horses, somewhere about midnight, he at once

called up the master of the inn and gave him his own price for permission to retain the chaise till the journey's end. This was so unlike Roland's ordinary thrift, whether dealing with my money or his own,--so unjustified by the fortune of either,--that I could not help muttering something in apology.

"Can you guess why I was a miser?" said Roland, calmly.

"A miser? Anything but that! Only prudent,--military men often are so."

"I was a miser," repeated the Captain, with emphasis. "I began the habit first when my son was but a child. I thought him high-spirited, and with a taste for extravagance. 'Well,' said I to myself, 'I will save for him; boys will be boys.' Then, afterwards, when he was no more a child (at least he began to have the vices of a man), I said to myself, 'Patience! he may reform still; if not, I will save money, that I may have power over his self-interest, since I have none over his heart. I will bribe him into honor!' And then--and then--God saw that I was very proud, and I was punished. Tell them to drive faster,--faster; why, this is a snail's pace!"

All that night, all the next day, till towards the evening, we pursued our journey, without pause or other food than a crust of bread and a glass of wine. But we now picked up the ground we had lost, and gained upon the carriage. The night had closed in when we arrived at the stage at which the route to Lord N--'s branched from the direct north road. And here, making our usual inquiry, my worst suspicions were confirmed. The carriage we pursued had changed horses an hour before, but had not taken the way to Lord N--'s, continuing the direct road into Scotland. The people of the inn had not seen the lady in the carriage, for it was already dark; but the man-servant (whose livery they described) had ordered the horses.

The last hope that, in spite of appearances, no treachery had been designed, here vanished. The Captain at first seemed more dismayed than myself, but he recovered more quickly. "We will continue the journey on horseback," he said; and hurried to the stables. All objections vanished at the sight of his gold. In five minutes we were in the saddle, with a postilion, also mounted, to accompany us. We did the next stage in little more than two thirds of the time which we should have occupied in our former mode of travel,--indeed I found it hard to keep pace with Roland. We remounted; we were only twenty-five minutes behind the carriage,--we felt confident that we should overtake it before it could reach the next town. The moon was up: we could see far before us; we rode at full speed. Milestone after milestone glided by; the carriage was not visible. We arrived at the post-town or rather village; it contained but one posting-house. We were long in knocking up the hostlers: no carriage had arrived just before us; no carriage had passed the place since noon.

What mystery was this?

"Back, back, boy!" said Roland, with a soldier's quick wit, and spurring his jaded horse from the yard. "They will have taken a cross-road or by-lane. We shall track them by the hoofs of the horses or the print of the wheels."

Our postilion grumbled, and pointed to the panting sides of our horses. For answer, Roland opened his hand--full of gold. Away we went back through the dull, sleeping village, back into the broad moonlit thoroughfare. We came to a cross-road to the right, but the track we pursued still led us straight on. We had measured back nearly half the way to the post-town at which we had last changed, when lo! there emerged from a by-lane two postilions and their horses!

At that sight our companion, shouting loud, pushed on before us and hailed his fellows. A few words gave us the information we sought. A wheel had come off the carriage just by the turn of the road, and the young lady and her servants had taken refuge in a small inn not many yards down the lane. The man-servant had dismissed the post-boys after they had baited their horses, saying they were to come again in the morning and bring a blacksmith to repair the wheel.

"How came the wheel off?" asked Roland, sternly.

"Why, sir, the linch-pin was all rotted away, I suppose, and came out."

"Did the servant get off the dicky after you set out, and before the accident happened?"

"Why, yes. He said the wheels were catching fire, that they had not the patent axles, and he had forgot to have them oiled."

"And he looked at the wheels, and shortly afterwards the linch-pin came out? Eh?"

"Anan, sir!" said the post-boy, staring; "why, and indeed so it was!"

"Come on, Pisistratus, we are in time; but pray God, pray God that--" The Captain dashed his spurs into the horse's sides, and the rest of his words were lost to me.

A few yards back from the causeway, a broad patch of green before it, stood the inn,--a sullen, old-fashioned building of cold gray stone, looking livid in the moonlight, with black firs at one side throwing over half of it a dismal shadow. So solitary,--not a house, not a but near it! If they who kept the inn were such that villany might reckon on their connivance, and innocence despair of their aid, there was no neighborhood to alarm, no refuge at hand. The spot was well chosen.

The doors of the inn were closed; there was a light in the room below: but the outside shutters were drawn over the windows on the first floor. My uncle paused a moment, and said to the postilion,--

"Do you know the back way to the premises?"

"No, sir; I does n't often come by this way, and they be new folks that have taken the house,--and I hear it don't prosper over much."

"Knock at the door; we will stand a little aside while you do so. If any one ask what you want, merely say you would speak to the servant,--that you have found a purse. Here, hold up mine."

Roland and I had dismounted, and my uncle drew me close to the wall by the door, observing that my impatience ill submitted to what seemed to me idle preliminaries.

"Hist!" whispered he. "If there be anything to conceal within, they will not answer the door till some one has reconnoitred; were they to see us, they would refuse to open. But seeing only the post-boy, whom they will suppose at first to be one of those who brought the carriage, they will have no suspicion. Be ready to rush in the moment the door is unbarred."

My uncle's veteran experience did not deceive him. There was a long silence before any reply was made to the post-boy's summons; the light passed to and fro rapidly across the window, as if persons were moving within. Roland made sign to the post-boy to knock again. He did so twice, thrice; and at last, from an attic window in the roof, a head obtruded and a voice cried, "Who are you? What do you want?"

"I'm the post-boy at the Red Lion; I want to see the servant with the brown carriage: I have found this purse!"

"Oh! that's all; wait a bit."

The head disappeared. We crept along under the projecting eaves of the house; we heard the bar lifted from the door, the door itself cautiously opened: one spring, and I stood within, and set my back to the door to admit Roland.

"Ho, help! thieves! help!" cried a loud voice, and I felt a hand grip at my throat. I struck at random in the dark, and with effect, for my blow was followed by a groan and a curse.

Roland, meanwhile, had detected a ray through the chinks of a door in the hall, and, guided by it, found his way into the room at the window of which we had seen the light pass and go, while without. As he threw the door open, I bounded after him and saw, in a kind of parlor, two females,--the one a stranger, no doubt the hostess; the other the treacherous abigail. Their faces evinced their terror.

"Woman," I said, seizing the last, "where is Miss Trevanion?" Instead of replying, the woman set up a loud shriek. Another light now gleamed from the staircase which immediately faced the door, and I heard a voice, that I recognized as Peacock's, cry out, "Who's there?--What's the matter?"

I made a rush at the stairs. A burly form (that of the landlord, who had recovered from my blow) obstructed my way for a moment, to measure its length on the floor at the next. I was at the top of the stairs; Peacock recognized me, recoiled, and extinguished the light. Oaths, cries, and shrieks now resounded through the dark. Amidst them all I suddenly heard a voice exclaim, "Here, here! help!" It was the voice of Fanny. I made my way to the right, whence the voice came, and received a violent blow. Fortunately it fell on the arm which I extended, as men do who feel their way through the dark. It was not the right arm, and I seized and closed on my assailant. Roland now came up, a candle in his hand; and at that sight my antagonist, who was no other than Peacock, slipped from me and made a rush at the stairs. But the Captain caught him with his grasp of iron. Fearing nothing for Roland in a contest with any single foe, and all my thoughts bent on the rescue of her whose voice again broke on my ear, I had already (before the light of the candle which Roland held went out in the struggle between himself and Peacock) caught sight of a door at the end of the passage, and thrown myself against it: it was locked, but it shook and groaned to my pressure.

"Hold back, whoever you are," cried a voice from the room within, far different from that wail of distress which had guided my steps. "Hold back at the peril of your life!"

The voice, the threat, redoubled my strength: the door flew from its fastenings. I stood in the room. I saw Fanny at my feet, clasping my hands; then raising herself, she hung on my shoulder and murmured "Saved!" Opposite to me, his face deformed by passion, his eyes literally blazing with savage fire, his nostrils distended, his lips apart, stood the man I have called Francis Vivian.

"Fanny--Miss Trevanion--what outrage, what villainy is this? You have not met this man at your free choice,--oh, speak!" Vivian sprang forward.

"Question no one but me. Unhand that lady,--she is my betrothed; shall be my wife."

"No, no, no,--don't believe him," cried Fanny; "I have been betrayed by my own servants,--brought here, I know not how! I heard my father was ill; I was on my way to him that man met me here and dared to--"

"Miss Trevanion--yes, I dared to say I loved you!"

"Protect me from him! You will protect me from him?"

"No, madam!" said a voice behind me, in a deep tone; "it is I who claim the right to protect you from that man; it is I who now draw around you the arm of one sacred, even to him; it is I who, from this spot, launch upon his head--a father's curse. Violator of the hearth, baffled ravisher, go thy way to the doom which thou hast chosen for thyself! God will be merciful to me yet, and give me a grave before thy course find its close in the hulks or at the gallows!"

A sickness came over me, a terror froze my veins; I reeled back, and leaned for support against the wall. Roland had passed his arm round Fanny, and she, frail and trembling, clung to his broad breast, looking fearfully up to his face. And never in that face, ploughed by deep emotions and dark with unutterable sorrows, had I seen an expression so grand in its wrath, so sublime in its despair. Following the direction of his eye, stern and fixed as the look of one who prophesies a destiny and denounces a doom, I shivered as I gazed upon the son. His whole frame seemed collapsed and shrinking, as if already withered by the curse; a ghastly whiteness overspread the cheek, usually glowing with the dark bloom of Oriental youth; the knees knocked together; and at last, with a faint exclamation of pain, like the cry of one who receives a death-blow, he bowed his face over his clasped hands, and so remained --still, but cowering.

Instinctively I advanced, and placed myself between the father and the son, murmuring, "Spare him; see, his own heart crushes him down." Then stealing towards the son, I whispered, "Go, go; the crime was not committed, the curse can be recalled." But my words touched a wrong chord in that dark and rebellious nature. The young man withdrew his hands hastily from his face and reared his front in passionate defiance.

Waving me aside, he cried, "Away! I acknowledge no authority over my actions and my fate; I allow no mediator between this lady and myself! Sir," he continued, gazing gloomily on his father, "--sir, you forget our compact. Our ties were severed, your power over me annulled; I resigned the name you bear: to you I was, and am still, as the dead. I deny your right to step between me and the object dearer to me than life.

"Oh!--and here he stretched forth his hands towards Fanny--"Oh, Miss Trevanion, do not refuse me one prayer, however you condemn me. Let me see you alone but for one moment; let me but prove to you that, guilty as I may have been, it was not from the base motives you will hear imputed to me,--that it was not the heiress I sought to decoy, it was the woman I sought to win; oh, hear me--"

"No, no," murmured Fanny, clinging closer to Roland, "do not leave me. If, as it seems, he is your son, I forgive him; but let him go,--I shudder at his very voice!"

"Would you have me indeed, annihilate the memory of the bond between us?" said Roland, in a hollow voice; "would you have me see in you only the vile thief, the lawless felon,--deliver you up to justice, or strike you to my feet? Let the memory still save you, and begone!"

Again I caught hold of the guilty son, and again he broke from my grasp.

"It is," he said, folding his arms deliberately on his breast, "it is for me to command in this house; all who are within it must submit to my orders. You, sir, who hold reputation, name, and honor at so high a price, how can you fail to see that you would rob them from the lady whom you would protect from the insult of my affection? How would the

world receive the tale of your rescue of Miss Trevanion; how believe that--Oh! pardon me, madam--Miss Trevanion--Fanny--pardon me--I am mad. Only hear me,--alone, alone; and then if you too say, 'Begone!' I submit without a murmur I allow no arbiter but you."

But Fanny still clung closer and closer still to Roland. At that moment I heard voices and the trampling of feet below; and supposing that the accomplices in this villany were mustering courage perhaps to mount to the assistance of their employer, I lost all the compassion that had hitherto softened my horror of the young man's crime, and all the awe with which that confession had been attended. I therefore this time seized the false Vivian with a grip that he could no longer shake off, and said sternly, "Beware how you aggravate your offence! If strife ensues, it will not be between father and son, and--"

Fanny sprang forward. "Do not provoke this bad, dangerous man! I fear him not. Sir, I will hear you, and alone."

"Never!" cried I and Roland simultaneously.

Vivian turned his look fiercely to me, and with a sullen bitterness to his father; and then, as if resigning his former prayer, he said: "Well, then, be it so; even in the presence of those who judge me so severely, I will speak at least." He paused, and throwing into his voice a passion that, had the repugnance at his guilt been less, would not have been without pathos, he continued to address Fanny: "I own that when I first saw you I might have thought of love as the poor and ambitious think of the way to wealth and power. Those thoughts vanished, and nothing remained in my heart but love and madness. I was as a man in a delirium when I planned this snare. I knew but one object, saw but one heavenly vision. Oh! mine--mine at least in that vision--are you indeed lost to me forever?"

There was that in this man's tone and manner which, whether arising from accomplished hypocrisy or actual, if perverted, feeling, would, I thought, find its way at once to the heart of a woman who, however wronged, had once loved him; and with a cold misgiving, I fixed my eyes on Miss Trevanion. Her look, as she turned with a visible tremor, suddenly met mine, and I believe that she discerned my doubt; for after suffering her eyes to rest on my own with something of mournful reproach, her lips curved as with the pride, of her mother, and for the first time in my life I saw anger on her brow.

"It is well, sir, that you have thus spoken to me in the presence of others, for in their presence I call upon you to say, by that honor which the son of this gentleman may for a while forget, but cannot wholly forfeit,--I call upon you to say whether, by deed, word, or sign, I, Frances Trevanion, ever gave you cause to believe that I returned the feeling you say you entertained for me, or encouraged you to dare this attempt to place me in your power."

"No!" cried Vivian, readily, but with a writhing lip, "no; but where I loved so deeply, perilled all my fortune for one fair and free occasion

to tell you so alone, I would not think that such love could meet only loathing and disdain. What! has Nature shaped me so unkindly that where I love no love can reply? What! has the accident of birth shut me out from the right to woo and mate with the high-born? For the last, at least that gentleman in justice should tell you since it has been his care to instil the haughty lesson into me, that my lineage is one that befits lofty hopes and warrants fearless ambition. My hopes, my ambition--they were you Oh, Miss Trevanion, it is true that to win you I would have braved the world's laws, defied every foe save him who now rises before me. Yet, believe me, believe me, had I won what I dared to aspire to, you would not have been disgraced by your choice; and the name, for which I thank not my father, should not have been despised by the woman who pardoned my presumption, nor by the man who now tramples on my anguish and curses me in my desolation."

Not by a word had Roland sought to interrupt his son,--nay, by a feverish excitement which my heart understood in its secret sympathy, he had seemed eagerly to court every syllable that could extenuate the darkness of the offence, or even imply some less sordid motive for the baseness of the means. But as the son now closed with the words of unjust reproach and the accents of fierce despair,--closed a defence that showed, in its false pride and its perverted eloquence, so utter a blindness to every principle of that Honor which had been the father's idol,--Roland placed his hand before the eyes that he had previously, as if spell-bound, fixed on the hardened offender, and once more drawing Fanny towards him, said,--

"His breath pollutes the air that innocence and honesty should breathe. He says all in this house are at his command,--why do we stay? Let us go." He turned towards the door, and Fanny with him.

Meanwhile the louder sounds below had been silenced for some moments; but I heard a step in the hall. Vivian started, and placed himself before us.

"No, no; you cannot leave me thus, Miss Trevanion. I resign you,--be it so; I do not even ask for pardon. But to leave this house thus, without carriage, without attendants, without explanation! The blame falls on me,--it shall do so; but at least vouchsafe me the right to repair what I yet can repair of the wrong, to protect all that is left to me,--your name."

As he spoke he did not perceive (for he was facing us, and with his back to the door) that a new actor had noiselessly entered on the scene, and, pausing by the threshold, heard his last words.

"The name of Miss Trevanion, sir,--and from what?" asked the new comer as he advanced and surveyed Vivian with a look that, but for its quiet, would have seemed disdain.

"Lord Castleton!" exclaimed Fanny, lifting up the face she had buried in her hands.

Vivian recoiled in dismay, and gnashed his teeth.

"Sir," said the marquis, "I await your reply; for not even you, in my presence, shall imply that one reproach can be attached to the name of that lady."

"Oh, moderate your tone to me, my Lord Castleton!" cried Vivian; "in you, at least, there is one man I am not forbidden to brave and defy. It was to save that lady from the cold ambition of her parents; it was to prevent the sacrifice of her youth and beauty to one whose sole merits are his wealth and his titles,--it was this that impelled me to the crime I have committed; this that hurried me on to risk all for one hour when youth at least could plead its cause to youth; and this gives me now the power to say that it does rest with me to protect the name of the lady, whom your very servility to that world which you have made your idol forbids you to claim from the heartless ambition that would sacrifice the daughter to the vanity of the parents. Ha! the future Marchioness of Castleton on her way to Scotland with a penniless adventurer! Ha! if my lips are sealed, who but I can seal the lips of those below in my secret? The secret shall be kept, but on this condition,--you shall not triumph where I have failed; I may lose what I adored, but I do not resign it to another. Ha! have I foiled you, my Lord Castleton? Ha, ha!"

"No, Sir; and I almost forgive you the villany you have not effected, for informing me, for the first time, that had I presumed to address Miss Trevanion, her parents at least would have pardoned the presumption. Trouble not yourself as to what your accomplices may say. They have already confessed their infamy and your own. Out of my path, Sir!"

Then, with the benign look of a father and the lofty grace of a prince, Lord Castleton advanced to Fanny. Looking round with a shudder, she hastily placed her hand in his, and by so doing perhaps prevented some violence on the part of Vivian, whose heaving breast and eye bloodshot, and still unquailing, showed how little even shame had subdued his fiercer passions. But he made no offer to detain them, and his tongue seemed to cleave to his lips. Now, as Fanny moved to the door she passed Roland, who stood motionless and with vacant looks, like an image of stone; and with a beautiful tenderness, for which (even at this distant date, recalling it) I say, "God requite thee, Fanny," she laid her other hand on Roland's arm and said, "Come, too: your arm still."

But Roland's limbs trembled and refused to stir; his head, relaxing, drooped on his breast, his eyes closed. Even Lord Castleton was so struck (though unable to guess the true and terrible cause of his dejection) that he forgot his desire to hasten from the spot, and cried with all his kindness of heart, "You are ill, you faint; give him your arm, Pisistratus."

"It is nothing," said Roland, feebly, as he leaned heavily on my arm while I turned back my head, with all the bitterness of that reproach which filled my heart speaking in the eyes that sought him whose place

should have been where mine now was. And oh!--thank Heaven, thank Heaven!--the look was not in vain. In the same moment the son was at the father's knees.

"Oh, pardon, pardon! Wretch, lost wretch though I be, I bow my head to the curse. Let it fall,--but on me, and on me only; not on your own heart too."

Fanny burst into tears, sobbing out, "Forgive him, as I do."

Roland did not heed her.

"He thinks that the heart was not shattered before the curse could come," he said, in a voice so weak as to be scarcely audible. Then, raising his eyes to heaven, his lips moved as if he prayed inly. Pausing, he stretched his hands over his son's head, and averting his face, said, "I revoke the curse. Pray to thy God for pardon."

Perhaps not daring to trust himself further, he then made a violent effort and hurried from the room.

We followed silently. When we gained the end of the passage, the door of the room we had left closed with a sullen jar.

As the sound smote on my ear, with it came so terrible a sense of the solitude upon which that door had closed, so keen and quick an apprehension of some fearful impulse, suggested by passions so fierce to a condition so forlorn, that instinctively I stopped, and then hurried back to the chamber. The lock of the door having been previously forced, there was no barrier to oppose my entrance. I advanced, and beheld a spectacle of such agony as can only be conceived by those who have looked on the grief which takes no fortitude from reason, no consolation from conscience,--the grief which tells us what would be the earth were man abandoned to his passions, and the Chance of the atheist reigned alone in the merciless heavens. Pride humbled to the dust; ambition shivered into fragments; love (or the passion mistaken for it) blasted into ashes; life, at the first onset, bereaved of its holiest ties, forsaken by its truest guide; shame that writhed for revenge; and remorse that knew not prayer,--all, all blended, yet distinct, were in that awful spectacle of the guilty son.

And I had told but twenty years, and my heart had been mellowed in the tender sunshine of a happy home, and I had loved this boy as a stranger; and lo, he was Roland's son! I forgot all else, looking upon that anguish; and I threw myself on the ground by the form that writhed there, and folding my arms round the breast which in vain repelled me, I whispered, "Comfort, comfort: life is long. You shall redeem the past, you shall efface the stain, and your father shall bless you yet!"

I could not stay long with my unhappy cousin, but still I stayed long enough to make me think it probable that Lord Castleton's carriage would have left the inn; and when, as I passed the hall, I saw it standing before the open door, I was seized with fear for Roland,--his emotions might have ended in some physical attack. Nor were those fears without foundation. I found Fanny kneeling beside the old soldier in the parlor where we had seen the two women, and bathing his temples, while Lord Castleton was binding his arm; and the marquis's favorite valet, who, amongst his other gifts, was something of a surgeon, was wiping the blade of the penknife that had served instead of a lancet. Lord Castleton nodded to me. "Don't be uneasy,--a little fainting fit; we have bled him. He is safe now,--see, he is recovering." Roland's eyes, as they opened, turned to me with an anxious, inquiring look. I smiled upon him as I kissed his forehead, and could, with a safe conscience, whisper words which neither father nor Christian could refuse to receive as comfort.

In a few minutes more we had left the house. As Lord Castleton's carriage only held two, the marquis, having assisted Miss Trevanion and Roland to enter, quietly mounted the seat behind and made a sign to me to come by his side, for there was room for both. (His servant had taken one of the horses that had brought thither Roland and myself, and already gone on before.) No conversation took place between us then. Lord Castleton seemed profoundly affected, and I had no words at my command.

When we reached the inn at which Lord Castleton had changed horses, about six miles distant, the marquis insisted on Fanny's taking some rest for a few hours; for indeed she was thoroughly worn out.

I attended my uncle to his room; but he only answered my assurances of his son's repentance with a pressure of the hand, and then, gliding from me, went into the farthest recess of the room and there knelt down. When he rose, he was passive and tractable as a child. He suffered me to assist him to undress; and when he had lain down on the bed, he turned his face quietly from the light, and after a few heavy sighs, sleep seemed mercifully to steal upon him. I listened to his breathing till it grew low and regular, and then descended to the sitting-room in which I had left Lord Castleton, for he had asked me in a whisper to seek him there.

I found the marquis seated by the fire, in a thoughtful and dejected attitude.

"I am glad you are come," said he, making room for me on the hearth, "for I assure you I have not felt so mournful for many years; we have much to explain to each other. Will you begin? They say the sound of the bell dissipates the thunder-cloud; and there is nothing like the voice of a frank, honest nature to dispel all the clouds that come upon us when we think of our own faults and the villany of others. But I beg you a thousand pardons: that young man your relation,--your brave

uncle's son? Is it possible?"

My explanations to Lord Castleton were necessarily brief and imperfect. The separation between Roland and his son; my ignorance of its cause; my belief in the death of the latter; my chance acquaintance with the supposed Vivian; the interest I took in him; the relief it was to the fears for his fate with which he inspired me, to think he had returned to the home I ascribed to him; and the circumstances which had induced my suspicions, justified by the result,--all this was soon hurried over.

"But I beg your pardon," said the marquis, interrupting me "did you, in your friendship for one so unlike you, even by your own partial account, never suspect that you had stumbled upon your lost cousin?"

"Such an idea never could have crossed me."

And here I must observe that though the reader, at the first introduction of Vivian, would divine the secret, the penetration of a reader is wholly different from that of the actor in events. That I had chanced on one of those curious coincidences in the romance of real life which a reader looks out for and expects in following the course of narrative, was a supposition forbidden to me by a variety of causes. There was not the least family resemblance between Vivian and any of his relations; and, somehow or other, in Roland's son I had pictured to myself a form and a character wholly different from Vivian's. To me it would have seemed impossible that my cousin could have been so little curious to hear any of our joint family affairs; been so unheedful, or even weary, if I spoke of Roland,--never, by a word or tone, have betrayed a sympathy with his kindred. And my other conjecture was so probable,--son of the Colonel Vivian whose name he bore. And that letter, with the post-mark of "Godalming," and my belief, too, in my cousin's death,--even now I am not surprised that the idea never occurred to me.

I paused from enumerating these excuses for my dulness, angry with myself, for I noticed that Lord Castleton's fair brow darkened; and he exclaimed, "What deceit he must have gone through before he could become such a master in the art!"

That is true, and I cannot deny it," said I. "But his punishment now is awful; let us hope that repentance may follow the chastisement. And though certainly it must have been his own fault that drove him from his father's home and guidance, yet, so driven, let us make some allowance for the influence of evil companionship on one so young,--for the suspicions that the knowledge of evil produces, and turns into a kind of false knowledge of the world. And in this last and worst of all his actions--"

"Ah, how justify that?"

"Justify it? Good Heavens! Justify it? No. I only say this, strange as it may seem, that I believe his affection for Miss Trevanion was for herself,--so he says, from the depth of an anguish in which the most

insincere of men would cease to feign. But no more of this; she is saved, thank Heaven!"

"And you believe," said Lord Castleton, musingly, "that he spoke the truth when he thought that I--" The marquis stopped, cowered slightly, and then went on. "But no; Lady Ellinor and Trevanion, whatever might have been in their thoughts, would never have so forgot their dignity as to take him, a youth, almost a stranger,--nay, take any one into their confidence on such a subject."

"It was but by broken gasps, incoherent, disconnected words, that Vivian--I mean my cousin--gave me any explanation of this. But Lady N--, at whose house he was staying, appears to have entertained such a notion, or at least led my cousin to think so."

"Ah! that is possible," said Lord Castleton, with a look of relief.

"Lady N-- and I were boy and girl together; we correspond; she has written to me suggesting that--Ah! I see,--an indiscreet woman. Hum! this comes of lady correspondents!"

Lord Castleton had recourse to the Beaudesert mixture; and then, as if eager to change the subject, began his own explanation. On receiving my letter, he saw even more cause to suspect a snare than I had done, for he had that morning received a letter from Trevanion, not mentioning a word about his illness; and on turning to the newspaper, and seeing a paragraph headed, "Sudden and alarming illness of Mr. Trevanion," the marquis had suspected some party manoeuvre or unfeeling hoax, since the mail that had brought the letter must have travelled as quickly as any messenger who had given the information to the newspaper. He had, however, immediately sent down to the office of the journal to inquire on what authority the paragraph had been inserted, while he despatched another messenger to St. James's Square. The reply from the office was that the message had been brought by a servant in Mr. Trevanion's livery, but was not admitted as news until it had been ascertained by inquiries at the minister's house that Lady Ellinor had received the same intelligence, and actually left town in consequence.

"I was extremely sorry for poor Lady Ellinor's uneasiness," said Lord Castleton, "and extremely puzzled; but I still thought there could be no real ground for alarm until your letter reached me. And when you there stated your conviction that Mr. Gower was mixed up in this fable, and that it concealed some snare upon Fanny, I saw the thing at a glance. The road to Lord N--'s, till within the last stage or two, would be the road to Scotland. And a hardy and unscrupulous adventurer, with the assistance of Miss Trevanion's servants, might thus entrap her to Scotland itself, and there work on her fears, or if he had hope in her affections, entrap her into consent to a Scotch marriage. You may be sure, therefore, that I was on the road as soon as possible. But as your messenger came all the way from the City, and not so quickly perhaps as he might have come; and then as there was the carriage to see to, and the horses to send for,--I found myself more than an hour and a half behind you. Fortunately, however, I made good ground, and should probably have overtaken you half-way, but that, on passing between a

ditch and wagon, the carriage was upset, and that somewhat delayed me. On arriving at the town where the road branched off to Lord N--'s, I was rejoiced to learn you had taken what I was sure would prove the right direction; and finally I gained the clew to that villanous inn, by the report of the post-boys who had taken Miss Trevanion's carriage there, and met you on the road. On reaching the inn I found two fellows conferring outside the door. They sprang in as we drove up, but not before my servant Summers--a quick fellow, you know, who has travelled with me from Norway to Nubia--had quitted his seat and got into the house, into which I followed him with a step, you dog, as active as your own! Egad! I was twenty-one then! Two fellows had already knocked down poor Summers, and showed plenty of fight. Do you know," said the marquis, interrupting himself with an air of serio-comic humiliation-- "do you know that I actually--no, you never will believe it; mind, 't is a secret--actually broke my cane over one fellows shoulders? Look!" (and the marquis held up the fragment of the lamented weapon). "And I half suspect, but I can't say positively, that I had even the necessity to demean myself by a blow with the naked hand,--clenched too! Quite Eton again; upon my honor it was! Ha, ha!"

And the marquis--whose magnificent proportions, in the full vigor of man's strongest, if not his most combative, age, would have made him a formidable antagonist even to a couple of prize-fighters, supposing he had retained a little of Eton skill in such encounters--laughed with the glee of a schoolboy, whether at the thought of his prowess; or his sense of the contrast between so rude a recourse to primitive warfare, and his own indolent habits and almost feminine good temper. Composing himself, however, with the quick recollection how little I could share his hilarity, he resumed gravely, "It took us some time, I don't say to defeat our foes, but to bind them, which I thought a necessary precaution; one fellow, Trevanion's servant, all the while stunning me with quotations from Shakspeare. I then gently laid hold of a gown, the bearer of which had been long trying to scratch me, but being, luckily, a small woman, had not succeeded in reaching to my eyes. But the gown escaped, and fluttered off to the kitchen. I followed, and there I found Miss Trevanion's Jezebel of a maid. She was terribly frightened, and affected to be extremely penitent. I own to you that I don't care what a man says in the way of slander, but a woman's tongue against another woman,--especially if that tongue be in the mouth of a lady's lady,--I think it always worth silencing; I therefore consented to pardon this woman on condition she would find her way here before morning. No scandal shall come from her. Thus you see some minutes elapsed before I joined you; but I minded that the less as I heard you and the Captain were already in the room with Miss Trevanion. And not, alas! dreaming of your connection with the culprit, I was wondering what could have delayed you so long,--afraid, I own it, to find that Miss Trevanion's heart might have been seduced by that--hem, hem!--handsome--young--hem, hem--There's no fear of that?" added Lord Castleton, anxiously, as he bent his bright eyes upon mine.

I felt myself color as I answered firmly, "It is just to Miss Trevanion to add that the unhappy man owned, in her presence and in shine, that he had never had the slightest encouragement for his attempt,--never one

cause to believe that she approved the affection which, I try to think, blinded and maddened himself."

"I believe you; for I think--" Lord Castleton paused uneasily, again looked at me, rose, and walked about the room with evident agitation; then, as if he had come to some resolution, he returned to the hearth and stood facing me.

"My dear young friend," said he, with his irresistible kindly frankness, "this is an occasion that excuses all things between us, even my impertinence. Your conduct from first to last has been such that I wish, from the bottom of my heart, that I had a daughter to offer you, and that you felt for her as I believe you feel for Miss Trevanion. These are not mere words; do not look down as if ashamed. All the marquises in the world would never give me the pride I should feel if I could see in my life one steady self-sacrifice to duty and honor equal to that which I have witnessed in you."

"Oh, my lord! my lord!"

"Hear me out. That you love Fanny Trevanion I know; that she may have innocently, timidly, half-unconsciously, returned that affection, I think probable. But--"

"I know what you would say; spare me,--I know it all."

"No! it is a thing impossible; and if Lady Ellinor could consent, there would be such a life-long regret on her part, such a weight of obligation on yours, that--No, I repeat, it is impossible! But let us both think of this poor girl. I know her better than you can,--have known her from a child; know all her virtues,--they are charming; all her faults,--they expose her to danger. These parents of hers, with their genius and ambition, may do very well to rule England and influence the world; but to guide the fate of that child--no!" Lord Castleton stopped, for he was affected. I felt my old jealousy return, but it was no longer bitter.

"I say nothing," continued the marquis, "of this position, in which, without fault of hers, Miss Trevanion is placed: Lady Ellinor's knowledge of the world, and woman's wit, will see how all that can be best put right. Still, it is awkward, and demands much consideration. But putting this aside altogether, if you do firmly believe that Miss Trevanion is lost to you, can you bear to think that she is to be flung as a mere cipher into the account of the worldly greatness of an aspiring politician,--married to some minister too busy to watch over her, or some duke who looks to pay off his mortgages with her fortune; minister or duke only regarded as a prop to Trevanion's power against a counter-cabal, or as giving his section a preponderance in the cabinet? Be assured such is her most likely destiny, or rather the beginning of a destiny yet more mournful. Now, I tell you this, that he who marries Fanny Trevanion should have little other object, for the first few years of marriage, than to correct her failings and develop her virtues. Believe one who, alas! has too dearly bought his knowledge of woman,--"

hers is a character to be formed. Well, then, if this prize be lost to you, would it be an irreparable grief to your generous affection to think that it has fallen to the lot of one who at least knows his responsibilities, and--who will redeem his own life, hitherto wasted, by the steadfast endeavor to fulfil them? Can you take this hand still, and press it, even though it be a rival's?"

"My lord! this from you to me is an honor that--"

"You will not take my hand? Then, believe me, it is not I that will give that grief to your heart."

Touched, penetrated, melted, by this generosity in a man of such lofty claims, to one of my age and fortunes, I pressed that noble hand, half raising it to my lips,--an action of respect that would have misbecome neither; but he gently withdrew the hand, in the instinct of his natural modesty. I had then no heart to speak further on such a subject, but faltering out that I would go and see my uncle, I took up the light and ascended the stairs. I crept noiselessly into Roland's room, and shading the light, saw that, though he slept, his face was very troubled. And then I thought, "What are my young griefs to his?" and sitting beside the bed, communed with my own heart and was still.

CHAPTER III.

At sunrise I went down into the sitting-room, having resolved to write to my father to join us; for I felt how much Roland needed his comfort and his counsel, and it was no great distance from the old Tower. I was surprised to find Lord Castleton still seated by the fire; he had evidently not gone to bed.

"That's right," said he; "we must encourage each other to recruit nature;" and he pointed to the breakfast-things on the table.

I had scarcely tasted food for many hours, but I was only aware of my own hunger by a sensation of faintness. I ate unconsciously, and was almost ashamed to feel how much the food restored me.

"I suppose," said I, "that you will soon set off to Lord N--'s?"

"Nay, did I not tell you that I have sent Summers express, with a note to Lady Ellinor begging her to come here? I did not see, on reflection, how I could decorously accompany Miss Trevanion alone, without even a female servant, to a house full of gossiping guests. And even had your uncle been well enough to go with us, his presence would but have created an additional cause for wonder; so as soon as we arrived, and while you went up with the Captain, I wrote my letter and despatched my man. I expect Lady Ellinor will be here before nine o'clock. Meanwhile I have already seen that infamous waiting-woman, and taken care to

prevent any danger from her garrulity. And you will be pleased to hear that I have hit upon a mode of satisfying the curiosity of our friend Mrs. Grundy--that is, 'the World'--without injury to any one. We must suppose that that footman of Trevanion's was out of his mind,--it is but a charitable, and your good father would say a philosophical, supposition. All great knavery is madness! The world could not get on if truth and goodness were not the natural tendencies of sane minds. Do you understand?"

"Not quite."

"Why, the footman, being out of his mind, invented this mad story of Trevanion's illness, frightened Lady Ellinor and Miss Trevanion out of their wits with his own chimera, and hurried them both off, one after the other. I, having heard from Trevanion, and knowing he could not have been ill when the servant left him, set off, as was natural in so old a friend of the family, saved her from the freaks of a maniac,--who, getting more and more flighty, was beginning to play the Jack o' Lantern, and leading her, Heaven knows where, over the country,--and then wrote to Lady Ellinor to come to her. It is but a hearty laugh at our expense, and Mrs. Grundy is content. If you don't want her to pity or backbite, let her laugh. She is a she-Cerberus,--she wants to eat you; well stop her mouth with a cake.

"Yes," continued this better sort of Aristippus, so wise under all his seeming levities, "the cue thus given, everything favors it. If that rogue of a lackey quoted Shakspeare as much in the servants' hall as he did while I was binding him neck and heels in the kitchen, that's enough for all the household to declare he was moon-stricken; and if we find it necessary to do anything more, why, we must induce him to go into Bedlam for a month or two. The disappearance of the waiting-woman is natural; either I or Lady Ellinor send her about her business for her folly in being so gulled by the lunatic. If that's unjust, why, injustice to servants is common enough, public and private; neither minister nor lackey can be forgiven if he help us into a scrape. One must vent one's passion on something. Witness my poor cane,--though, indeed, a better illustration would be the cane that Louis XIV. broke on a footman because his Majesty was out of humor with the prince, whose shoulders were too sacred for royal indignation."

"So you see," concluded Lord Castleton, lowering his voice, "that your uncle, amongst all his other causes of sorrow, may think at least that his name is spared in his son's. And the young man himself may find reform easier when freed from that despair of the possibility of redemption which Mrs. Grundy inflicts upon those who--Courage, then; life is long!"

"My very words!" I cried; "and so repeated by you, Lord Castleton, they seem prophetic."

"Take my advice, and don't lose sight of your cousin while his pride is yet humbled, and his heart perhaps softened. I don't say this only for his sake. No, it is your poor uncle I think of,--noble old fellow! And

now I think it right to pay Lady Ellinor the respect of repairing, as well as I can, the havoc three sleepless nights have made on the exterior of a gentleman who is on the shady side of remorseless forty."

Lord Castleton here left me, and I wrote to my father, begging him to meet us at the next stage (which was the nearest point from the high road to the Tower), and I sent off the letter by a messenger on horseback. That task done, I leaned my head upon my hand, and a profound sadness settled upon me, despite all my efforts to face the future and think only of the duties of life--not its sorrows.

CHAPTER IV.

Before nine o'clock Lady Ellinor arrived, and went straight into Miss Trevanion's room; I took refuge in my uncle's. Roland was awake and calm, but so feeble that he made no effort to rise; and it was his calm, indeed, that alarmed me the most,--it was like the calm of nature thoroughly exhausted. He obeyed me mechanically, as a patient takes from your hand the draught, of which he is almost unconscious, when I pressed him to take food. He smiled on me faintly when I spoke to him, but made me a sign that seemed to implore silence. Then he turned his face from me and buried it in the pillow; and I thought that he slept again, when, raising himself a little, and feeling for my hand, he said, in a scarcely audible voice,--

"Where is he?"

"Would you see him, sir?"

"No, no; that would kill me,--and then what would become of him?"

"He has promised me an interview, and in that interview I feel assured he will obey your wishes, whatever they are." Roland made no answer.

"Lord Castleton has arranged all, so that his name and madness (thus let us call it) will never be known."

"Pride, pride, pride still!" murmured the old soldier. "The name, the name,--well, that is much; but the living soul!--I wish Austin were here."

"I have sent for him, sir."

Roland pressed my hand, and was again silent. Then he began to mutter, as I thought, incoherently about the Peninsula and obeying orders; and how some officer woke Lord Wellington at night and said that something or other (I could not catch what,--the phrase was technical and military) was impossible; and how Lord Wellington asked, "Where's the order-book?" and looking into the order-book, said, "Not at all

impossible, for it is in the order-book;" and so Lord Wellington turned round and went to sleep again. Then suddenly Roland half rose, and said, in a voice clear and firm, "But Lord Wellington, though a great captain, was a fallible man, sir, and the order-book was his own mortal handiwork. Get me the Bible!"

Oh, Roland, Roland! and I had feared that thy mind was wandering!

So I went down and borrowed a Bible in large characters, and placed it on the bed before him, opening the shutters and letting in God's day upon God's word.

I had just done this when there was a slight knock at the door. I opened it, and Lord Castleton stood without. He asked me, in a whisper, if he might see my uncle. I drew him in gently, and pointed to the soldier of life "learning what was not impossible" from the unerring Order-Book.

Lord Castleton gazed with a changing countenance, and without disturbing my uncle, stole back. I followed him, and gently closed the door.

"You must save his son," he said in a faltering voice,--"you must; and tell me how to help you. That sight,--no sermon ever touched me more! Now come down and receive Lady Ellinor's thanks. We are going. She wants me to tell my own tale to my old friend Mrs. Grundy; so I go with them. Come!"

On entering the sitting-room, Lady Ellinor came up and fairly embraced me. I need not repeat her thanks, still less the praises, which fell cold and hollow on my ear. My gaze rested on Fanny where she stood apart,--her eyes, heavy with fresh tears, bent on the ground. And the sense of all her charms; the memory of the tender, exquisite kindness she had shown to the stricken father; the generous pardon she had extended to the criminal son; the looks she had bent upon me on that memorable night (looks that had spoken such trust in my presence), the moment in which she had clung to me for protection, and her breath been warm upon my cheek,--all these rushed over me, and I felt that the struggle of months was undone, that I had never loved her as I loved her then, when I saw her but to lose her evermore! And then there came for the first, and, I now rejoice to think, for the only time, a bitter, ungrateful accusation against the cruelty of fortune and the disparities of life. What was it that set our two hearts eternally apart and made hope impossible? Not nature, but the fortune that gives a second nature to the world. Ah, could I then think that it is in that second nature that the soul is ordained to seek its trials, and that the elements of human virtue find their harmonious place? What I answered I know not. Neither know I how long I stood there listening to sounds which seemed to have no meaning, till there came other sounds which indeed woke my sense and made my blood run cold to hear,--the tramp of the horses, the grating of the wheels, the voice at the door that said all was ready.

Then Fanny lifted her eyes, and they met mine; and then involuntarily and hastily she moved a few steps towards me, and I clasped my right

hand to my heart, as if to still its beating, and remained still. Lord Castleton had watched us both. I felt that watch upon us, though I had till then shunned his looks; now, as I turned my eyes from Fanny's, that look came full upon me,--soft, compassionate, benignant. Suddenly, and with an unutterable expression of nobleness, the marquis turned to Lady Ellinor and said: "Pardon me for telling you an old story. A friend of mine--a man of my own years--had the temerity to hope that he might one day or other win the affections of a lady young enough to be his daughter, and whom circumstances and his own heart led him to prefer from all her sex. My friend had many rivals; and you will not wonder, for you have seen the lady. Among them was a young gentleman who for months had been an inmate of the same house (hush, Lady Ellinor! you will hear me out; the interest of my story is to come), who respected the sanctity of the house he had entered, and had left it when he felt he loved, for he was poor, and the lady rich. Some time after, this gentleman saved the lady from a great danger, and was then on the eve of leaving England (hush! again, hush!). My friend was present when these two young persons met, before the probable absence of many years, and so was the mother of the lady to whose hand he still hoped one day to aspire. He saw that his young rival wished to say, 'Farewell!' and without a witness; that farewell was all that his honor and his reason could suffer him to say. My friend saw that the lady felt the natural gratitude for a great service, and the natural pity for a generous and unfortunate affection; for so, Lady Ellinor, he only interpreted the sob that reached his ear! What think you my friend did? Your high mind at once conjectures. He said to himself: 'If I am ever to be blest with the heart which, in spite of disparity of years, I yet hope to win, let me show how entire is the trust that I place in its integrity and innocence; let the romance of first youth be closed, the farewell of pure hearts be spoken, unembittered by the idle jealousies of one mean suspicion.' With that thought, which you, Lady Ellinor, will never stoop to blame, he placed his hand on that of the noble mother, drew her gently towards the door, and calmly confident of the result, left these two young natures to the unwitnessed impulse of maiden honor and manly duty."

All this was said and done with a grace and earnestness that thrilled the listeners; word and action suited to each with so inimitable a harmony that the spell was not broken till the voice ceased and the door closed.

That mournful bliss for which I had so pined was vouchsafed: I was alone with her to whom, indeed, honor and reason forbade me to say more than the last farewell.

It was some time before we recovered, before we felt that we were alone.

O ye moments that I can now recall with so little sadness in the mellow and sweet remembrance, rest ever holy and undisclosed in the solemn recesses of the heart! Yes, whatever confession of weakness was interchanged, we were not unworthy of the trust that permitted the mournful consolation of the parting. No trite love-tale, with vows not to be fulfilled, and hopes that the future must belie, mocked the

realities of the life that lay before us. Yet on the confines of the dream we saw the day rising cold upon the world; and if--children as we well-nigh were--we shrank somewhat from the light, we did not blaspheme the sun and cry, "There is darkness in the dawn!"

All that we attempted was to comfort and strengthen each other for that which must be; not seeking to conceal the grief we felt, but promising, with simple faith, to struggle against the grief. If vow were pledged between us,--that was the vow: each for the other's sake would strive to enjoy the blessings Heaven left us still. Well may I say that we were children! I know not, in the broken words that passed between us, in the sorrowful hearts which those words revealed, I know not if there were that which they who own in human passion but the storm and the whirlwind would call the love of maturer years,--the love that gives fire to the song, and tragedy to the stage; but I know that there was neither a word nor a thought which made the sorrow of the children a rebellion to the Heavenly Father.

And again the door unclosed, and Fanny walked with a firm step to her mother's side, and pausing there, extended her hand to me and said, as I bent over it, "Heaven Will be with you!"

A word from Lady Ellinor, a frank smile from him, the rival, one last, last glance from the soft eyes of Fanny, and then Solitude rushed upon me,--rushed as something visible, palpable, overpowering. I felt it in the glare of the sunbeam, I heard it in the breath of the air; like a ghost it rose there,--where she had filled the space with her presence but a moment before! A something seemed gone from the universe forever; a change like that of death passed through my being; and when I woke, to feel that my being lived again, I knew that it was my youth and its poet-land that were no more, and that I had passed, with an unconscious step, which never could retrace its way, into the hard world of laborious man!

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