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EVAN HARRINGTON

By George Meredith

BOOK 4.

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CHAPTER XIX

SECOND DESPATCH OF THE COUNTESS

We do not advance very far in this second despatch, and it will be found chiefly serviceable for the indications it affords of our General's skill in mining, and addiction to that branch of military science. For the moment I must beg that a little indulgence be granted to her.

'Purely business. Great haste. Something has happened. An event? I know not; but events may flow from it.

'A lady is here who has run away from the conjugal abode, and Lady Jocelyn shelters her, and is hospitable to another, who is more concerned in this lady's sad fate than he should be. This may be morals, my dear: but please do not talk of Portugal now. A fine-ish woman with a great deal of hair worn as if her maid had given it one comb straight down and then rolled it up in a hurry round one finger. Malice would say carrots. It is called gold. Mr. Forth is in a glass house, and is wrong to cast his sneers at perfectly inoffensive people.

'Perfectly impossible we can remain at Beckley Court together--if not dangerous. Any means that Providence may designate, I would employ. It will be like exorcising a demon. Always excuseable. I only ask a little more time for stupid Evan. He might have little Bonner now. I should not object; but her family is not so good.

'Now, do attend. At once obtain a copy of Strike's Company people. You understand--prospectuses. Tell me instantly if the Captain Evremonde in it is Captain Lawson Evremonde. Pump Strike. Excuse vulgar words. Whether he is not Lord Laxley's half-brother. Strike shall be of use to us. Whether he is not mad. Captain E----'s address. Oh! when I think of Strike--brute! and poor beautiful uncomplaining Carry and her shoulder! But let us indeed most fervently hope that his Grace may be balm to it. We must not pray for vengeance. It is sinful. Providence will inflict that. Always know that Providence is quite sure to. It comforts exceedingly.

'Oh, that Strike were altogether in the past tense! No knowing what the Duke might do--a widower and completely subjugated. It makes my bosom bound. The man tempts me to the wickedest Frenchy ideas. There!

We progress with dear venerable Mrs. Bonner. Truly pious--interested in your Louisa. She dreads that my husband will try to convert me to his

creed. I can but weep and say--never!

'I need not say I have my circle. To hear this ridiculous boy Harry Jocelyn grunt under my nose when he has led me unsuspectingly away from company--Harriet! dearest! He thinks it a sigh! But there is no time for laughing.

'My maxim in any house is--never to despise the good opinion of the nonentities. They are the majority. I think they all look up to me. But then of course you must fix that by seducing the stars. My diplomatist praises my abilities--Sir John Loring my style--the rest follow and I do not withhold my smiles, and they are happy, and I should be but that for ungrateful Evan's sake I sacrificed my peace by binding myself to a dreadful sort of half-story. I know I did not quite say it. It seems as if Sir A.'s ghost were going to haunt me. And then I have the most dreadful fears that what I have done has disturbed him in the other world. Can it be so? It is not money or estates we took at all, dearest! And these excellent young curates--I almost wish it was Protestant to speak a word behind a board to them and imbibe comfort. For after all it is nothing; and a word even from this poor thin mopy Mr. Parsley might be relief to a poor soul in trouble. Catholics tell you that what you do in a good cause is redeemable if not exactly right. And you know the Catholic is the oldest Religion of the two. I would listen to the Pope, staunch Protestant as I am, in preference to King Henry the Eighth. Though, as a woman, I bear him no rancour, for his wives were--fools, point blank. No man was ever so manageable. My diplomatist is getting liker and liker to him every day. Leaner, of course, and does not habitually straddle. Whiskers and morals, I mean. We must be silent before our prudish sister. Not a prude? We talk diplomacy, dearest. He complains of the exclusiveness of the port of Oporto, and would have strict alliance between Portugal and England, with mutual privileges. I wish the alliance, and think it better to maintain the exclusiveness. Very trifling; but what is life!

'Adieu. One word to leave you laughing. Imagine her situation! This stupid Miss Carrington has offended me. She has tried to pump Conning, who, I do not doubt, gave her as much truth as I chose she should have in her well. But the quandary of the wretched creature! She takes Conning into her confidence--a horrible malady just covered by high-neck dress! Skin! and impossible that she can tell her engaged--who is--guess--Mr. George Up-----! Her name is Louisa Carrington. There was a Louisa Harrington once. Similarity of names perhaps. Of course I could not let her come to the house; and of course Miss C. is in a state of wonderment and bad passions, I fear. I went straight to Lady Racial, my dear. There was nothing else for it but to go and speak. She is truly a noble woman--serves us in every way. As she should!--much affected by sight of Evan, and keeps aloof from Beckley Court. The finger of Providence is in all. Adieu! but do pray think of Miss Carrington! It was foolish of her to offend me. Drives and walks--the Duke attentive. Description of him when I embrace you. I give amiable Sir Franks Portuguese dishes. Ah, my dear, if we had none but men to contend against, and only women for our tools! But this is asking for the world, and nothing less.

'Open again,' she pursues. 'Dear Carry just come in. There are fairies, I think, where there are dukes! Where could it have come from? Could any human being have sent messengers post to London, ordered, and had it despatched here within this short time? You shall not be mystified! I do not think I even hinted; but the afternoon walk I had with his Grace, on the first day of his arrival, I did shadow it very delicately how much it was to be feared our poor Carry could not, that she dared not, betray her liege lord in an evening dress. Nothing more, upon my veracity! And Carry has this moment received the most beautiful green box, containing two of the most heavenly old lace shawls that you ever beheld. We divine it is to hide poor Carry's matrimonial blue mark! We know nothing. Will you imagine Carry is for not accepting it! Priority of birth does not imply superior wits, dear--no allusion to you. I have undertaken all. Arch looks, but nothing pointed. His Grace will understand the exquisite expression of feminine gratitude. It is so sweet to deal with true nobility. Carry has only to look as she always does. One sees Strike sitting on her. Her very pliability has rescued her from being utterly squashed long ere this! The man makes one vulgar. It would have been not the slightest use asking me to be a Christian had I wedded Strike. But think of the fairy presents! It has determined me not to be expelled by Mr. Forth--quite. Tell Silva he is not forgotten. But, my dear, between us alone, men are so selfish, that it is too evident they do not care for private conversations to turn upon a lady's husband: not to be risked, only now and then.

'I hear that the young ladies and the young gentlemen have been out riding a race. The poor little Bonner girl cannot ride, and she says to Carry that Rose wishes to break our brother's neck. The child hardly wishes that, but she is feelingless. If Evan could care for Miss Bonner, he might have B. C.! Oh, it is not so very long a shot, my dear. I am on the spot, remember. Old Mrs. Bonner is a most just-minded spirit. Juliana is a cripple, and her grandmother wishes to be sure that when she departs to her Lord the poor cripple may not be chased from this home of hers. Rose cannot calculate--Harry is in disgrace--there is really no knowing. This is how I have reckoned; L10,000 extra to Rose; perhaps L1000 or nothing to H.; all the rest of ready-money--a large sum--no use guessing--to Lady Jocelyn; and B. C. to little Bonner--it is worth L40,000 Then she sells, or stops--permanent resident. It might be so soon, for I can see worthy Mrs. Bonner to be breaking visibly. But young men will not see with wiser eyes than their own. Here is Evan risking his neck for an indifferent--there's some word for "not soft." In short, Rose is the cold-blooded novice, as I have always said, the most selfish of the creatures on two legs.

'Adieu! Would you have dreamed that Major Nightmare's gallantry to his wife would have called forth a gallantry so truly touching and delicate? Can you not see Providence there? Out of Evil--the Catholics again!

'Address. If Lord Lax---'s half-brother. If wrong in noddle. This I know you will attend to scrupulously. Ridiculous words are sometimes the most expressive. Once more, may Heaven bless you all! I thought of you in church last Sunday.

'I may tell you this: young Mr. Laxley is here. He--but it was Evan's utter madness was the cause, and I have not ventured a word to him. He compelled Evan to assert his rank, and Mr. Forth's face has been one concentrated sneer since THEN. He must know the origin of the Cogglesbys, or something. Now you will understand the importance. I cannot be more explicit. Only--the man must go.

'P.S. I have just ascertained that Lady Jocelyn is quite familiar with Andrew's origin!! She must think my poor Harriet an eccentric woman. Of course I have not pretended to rank here, merely gentry. It is gentry in reality, for had poor Papa been legitimized, he would have been a nobleman. You know that; and between the two we may certainly claim gentry. I twiddle your little good Andrew to assert it for us twenty times a day. Of all the dear little manageable men! It does you infinite credit that you respect him as you do. What would have become of me I do not know.

'P.S. I said two shawls--a black and a white. The black not so costly--very well. And so delicate of him to think of the mourning! But the white, my dear, must be family--must! Old English point. Exquisitely chaste. So different from that Brussels poor Andrew surprised you with. I know it cost money, but this is a question of taste. The Duke reconciles me to England and all my troubles! He is more like poor Papa than any one of the men I have yet seen. The perfect gentleman! I do praise myself for managing an invitation to our Carry. She has been a triumph.'

Admire the concluding stroke. The Countess calls this letter a purely business communication. Commercial men might hardly think so; but perhaps ladies will perceive it. She rambles concentrically, if I may so expound her. Full of luxurious enjoyment of her position, her mind is active, and you see her at one moment marking a plot, the next, with a light exclamation, appeasing her conscience, proud that she has one; again she calls up rival forms of faith, that she may show the Protestant its little shortcomings, and that it is slightly in debt to her (like Providence) for her constancy, notwithstanding. The Protestant you see, does not confess, and she has to absolve herself, and must be doing it internally while she is directing outer matters. Hence her slap at King Henry VIII. In fact, there is much more business in this letter than I dare to indicate; but as it is both impertinent and unpopular to dive for any length of time beneath the surface (especially when there are few pearls to show for it), we will discontinue our examination.

The Countess, when she had dropped the letter in the bag, returned to her chamber, and deputed Dorothy Loring, whom she met on the stairs, to run and request Rose to lend her her album to beguile the afternoon with; and Dorothy dances to Rose, saying, 'The Countess de Lispy-Lispy would be delighted to look at your album all the afternoon.'

'Oh what a woman that is!' says Rose. 'Countess de Lazy-Lazy, I think.'

The Countess, had she been listening, would have cared little for

accusations on that head. Idlesse was fashionable: exquisite languors were a sign of breeding; and she always had an idea that she looked more interesting at dinner after reclining on a couch the whole of the afternoon. The great Mel and his mate had given her robust health, and she was able to play the high-born invalid without damage to her constitution. Anything amused her; Rose's album even, and the compositions of W. H., E. H., D. F., and F. L. The initials F. L. were diminutive, and not unlike her own hand, she thought. They were appended to a piece of facetiousness that would not have disgraced the abilities of Mr. John Raikes; but we know that very stiff young gentlemen betray monkey-minds when sweet young ladies compel them to disport. On the whole, it was not a lazy afternoon that the Countess passed, and it was not against her wish that others should think it was.

CHAPTER XX

BREAK-NECK LEAP

The August sun was in mid-sky, when a troop of ladies and cavaliers issued from the gates of Beckley Court, and winding through the hopgardens, emerged on the cultivated slopes bordering the downs. Foremost, on her grey cob, was Rose, having on her right her uncle Seymour, and on her left Ferdinand Laxley. Behind came Mrs. Evremonde, flanked by Drummond and Evan. Then followed Jenny Graine, supported by Harry and William Harvey. In the rear came an open carriage, in which Miss Carrington and the Countess de Saldar were borne, attended by Lady Jocelyn and Andrew Cogglesby on horseback. The expedition had for its object the selection of a run of ground for an amateur steeple-chase: the idea of which had sprung from Laxley's boasts of his horsemanship: and Rose, quick as fire, had backed herself, and Drummond and Evan, to beat him. The mention of the latter was quite enough for Laxley.

'If he follows me, let him take care of his neck,' said that youth.

'Why, Ferdinand, he can beat you in anything!' exclaimed Rose, imprudently.

But the truth was, she was now more restless than ever. She was not distant with Evan, but she had a feverish manner, and seemed to thirst to make him show his qualities, and excel, and shine. Billiards, or jumping, or classical acquirements, it mattered not--Evan must come first. He had crossed the foils with Laxley, and disarmed him; for Mel his father had seen him trained for a military career. Rose made a noise about the encounter, and Laxley was eager for his opportunity, which he saw in the proposed mad gallop.

Now Mr. George Uplift, who usually rode in buckskins whether he was after the fox or fresh air, was out on this particular morning; and it happened that, as the cavalcade wound beneath the down, Mr. George trotted along the ridge. He was a fat-faced, rotund young squire--a bully where he

might be, and an obedient creature enough where he must be--good-humoured when not interfered with; fond of the table, and brimful of all the jokes of the county, the accent of which just seasoned his speech. He had somehow plunged into a sort of half-engagement with Miss Carrington. At his age, and to ladies of Miss Carrington's age, men unhappily do not plunge head-foremost, or Miss Carrington would have had him long before. But he was at least in for it half a leg; and a desperate maiden, on the criminal side of thirty, may make much of that. Previous to the visit of the Countess de Saldar, Mr. George had been in the habit of trotting over to Beckley three or four times a week. Miss Carrington had a little money: Mr. George was heir to his uncle. Miss Carrington was lean and blue-eyed.

Mr. George was black-eyed and obese. By everybody, except Mr. George, the match was made: but that exception goes for little in the country, where half the population are talked into marriage, and gossips entirely devote themselves to continuing the species. Mr. George was certain that he had not been fighting shy of the fair Carrington of late, nor had he been unfaithful. He had only been in an extraordinary state of occupation. Messages for Lady Racial had to be delivered, and he had become her cavalier and escort suddenly. The young squire was bewildered; but as he was only one leg in love--if the sentiment may be thus spoken of figuratively--his vanity in his present office kept him from remorse or uneasiness.

He rode at an easy pace within sight of the home of his treasure, and his back turned to it. Presently there rose a cry from below. Mr. George looked about. The party of horsemen hallooed: Mr. George yoicked. Rose set her horse to gallop up; Seymour Jocelyn cried 'fox,' and gave the view; hearing which Mr. George shouted, and seemed inclined to surrender; but the fun seized him, and, standing up in his stirrups, he gathered his coat-tails in a bunch, and waggled them with a jolly laugh, which was taken up below, and the clump of hoofs resounded on the turf as Mr. George led off, after once more, with a jocose twist in his seat, showing them the brush mockingly. Away went fox, and a mad chase began. Seymour acted as master of the hunt. Rose, Evan, Drummond, and Mrs. Evremonde and Dorothy, skirted to the right, all laughing, and full of excitement. Harry bellowed the direction from above. The ladies in the carriage, with Lady Jocelyn and Andrew, watched them till they flowed one and all over the shoulder of the down.

'And who may the poor hunted animal be?' inquired the Countess.

'George Uplift,' said Lady Jocelyn, pulling out her watch. 'I give him twenty minutes.'

'Providence speed him!' breathed the Countess, with secret fervour.

'Oh, he hasn't a chance,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'The squire keeps wretched beasts.'

'Is there not an attraction that will account for his hasty capture?' said the Countess, looking tenderly at Miss Carrington, who sat a little

straighter, and the Countess, hating manifestations of stiff-backedness, could not forbear adding: 'I am at war with my sympathies, which should be with the poor brute flying from his persecutors.'

She was in a bitter state of trepidation, or she would have thought twice before she touched a nerve of the enamoured lady, as she knew she did in calling her swain a poor brute, and did again by pertinaciously pursuing:

'Does he then shun his captivity?'

'Touching a nerve' is one of those unforgivable small offences which, in our civilized state, produce the social vendettas and dramas that, with savage nations, spring from the spilling of blood. Instead of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, we demand a nerve for a nerve. 'Thou hast touched me where I am tender thee, too, will I touch.'

Miss Carrington had been alarmed and hurt at the strange evasion of Mr. George; nor could she see the fun of his mimicry of the fox and his flight away from instead of into her neighbourhood. She had also, or she now thought it, remarked that when Mr. George had been spoken of casually, the Countess had not looked a natural look. Perhaps it was her present inflamed fancy. At any rate the Countess was offensive now. She was positively vulgar, in consequence, to the mind of Miss Carrington, and Miss Carrington was drawn to think of a certain thing Ferdinand Laxley had said he had heard from the mouth of this lady's brother when she was in him. Alas! how one seed of a piece of folly will lurk and sprout to confound us; though, like the cock in the eastern tale, we peck up zealously all but that one!

The carriage rolled over the turf, attended by Andrew, and Lady Jocelyn, and the hunt was seen; Mr. George some forty paces a-head; Seymour gaining on him, Rose next.

'Who's that breasting Rose?' said Lady Jocelyn, lifting her glass.

'My brother-in-law, Harrington,' returned Andrew.

'He doesn't ride badly,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'A little too military. He must have been set up in England.'

'Oh, Evan can do anything,' said Andrew enthusiastically. 'His father was a capital horseman, and taught him fencing, riding, and every accomplishment. You won't find such a young fellow, my lady--'

'The brother like him at all?' asked Lady Jocelyn, still eyeing the chase.

'Brother? He hasn't got a brother,' said Andrew.

Lady Jocelyn continued: 'I mean the present baronet.'

She was occupied with her glass, and did not observe the flush that took hold of Andrew's ingenuous cheeks, and his hurried glance at and off the

quiet eye of the Countess. Miss Carrington did observe it.

Mr. Andrew dashed his face under the palm of his hand, and murmured:

'Oh-yes! His brother-in-law isn't much like him--ha! ha!'

And then the poor little man rubbed his hands, unconscious of the indignant pity for his wretched abilities in the gaze of the Countess; and he must have been exposed--there was a fear that the ghost of Sir Abraham would have darkened this day, for Miss Carrington was about to speak, when Lady Jocelyn cried: 'There's a purl! Somebody's down.'

The Countess was unaware of the nature of a purl, but she could have sworn it to be a piece of Providence.

'Just by old Nat Hodges' farm, on Squire Copping's ground,' cried Andrew, much relieved by the particular individual's misfortune. 'Dear me, my lady! how old Tom and I used to jump the brook there, to be sure! and when you were no bigger than little Miss Loring--do you remember old Tom? We're all fools one time in our lives!'

'Who can it be?' said Lady Jocelyn, spying at the discomfited horseman. 'I'm afraid it's poor Ferdinand.'

They drove on to an eminence from which the plain was entirely laid open.

'I hope my brother will enjoy his ride this day,' sighed the Countess. 'It will be his limit of enjoyment for a lengthened period!'

She perceived that Mr. George's capture was inevitable, and her heart sank; for she was sure he would recognize her, and at the moment she misdoubted her powers. She dreamed of flight.

'You're not going to leave us?' said Lady Jocelyn. 'My dear Countess, what will the future member do without you? We have your promise to stay till the election is over.'

'Thanks for your extreme kind courtesy, Lady Jocelyn,' murmured the Countess: 'but my husband--the Count.'

'The favour is yours,' returned her ladyship. 'And if the Count cannot come, you at least are at liberty?'

'You are most kind,' said the Countess.

'Andrew and his wife I should not dare to separate for more than a week,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'He is the great British husband. The proprietor! "My wife" is his unanswerable excuse.'

'Yes,' Andrew replied cheerily. 'I don't like division between man and wife, I must say.'

The Countess dared no longer instance the Count, her husband. She was

heard to murmur that citizen feelings were not hers:

'You suggested Fallow field to Melville, did you not?' asked Lady Jocelyn.

'It was the merest suggestion,' said the Countess, smiling.

'Then you must really stay to see us through it,' said her ladyship.

'Where are they now? They must be making straight for break-neck fence. They'll have him there. George hasn't pluck for that.'

'Hasn't what?'

It was the Countess who requested to know the name of this other piece of Providence Mr. George Uplift was deficient in.

'Pluck-go,' said her ladyship hastily, and telling the coachman to drive to a certain spot, trotted on with Andrew, saying to him: 'I'm afraid we are thought vulgar by the Countess.'

Andrew considered it best to reassure her gravely.

'The young man, her brother, is well-bred,' said Lady Jocelyn, and Andrew was very ready to praise Evan.

Lady Jocelyn, herself in slimmer days a spirited horsewoman, had correctly estimated Mr. George's pluck. He was captured by Harry and Evan close on the leap, in the act of shaking his head at it; and many who inspected the leap would have deemed it a sign that wisdom weighted the head that would shake long at it; for it consisted of a post and rails, with a double ditch.

Seymour Jocelyn, Mrs. Evremonde, Drummond, Jenny Graine, and William Harvey, rode with Mr. George in quest of the carriage, and the captive was duly delivered over.

'But where's the brush?' said Lady Jocelyn, laughing, and introducing him to the Countess, who dropped her head, and with it her veil.

'Oh! they leave that on for my next run,' said Mr. George, bowing civilly.

'You are going to run again?'

Miss Carrington severely asked this question; and Mr. George protested.

'Secure him, Louisa,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'See here: what's the matter with poor Dorothy?'

Dorothy came slowly trotting up to them along the green lane, and thus expressed her grief, between sobs:

'Isn't it a shame? Rose is such a tyrant. They're going to ride a race

and a jump down in the field, and it's break-neck leap, and Rose won't allow me to stop and see it, though she knows I'm just as fond of Evan as she is; and if he's killed I declare it will be her fault; and it's all for her stupid, dirty old pocket handkerchief!

'Break-neck fence!' said Lady Jocelyn; 'that's rather mad.'

'Do let's go and see it, darling Aunty Joey,' pleaded the little maid. Lady Jocelyn rode on, saying to herself: 'That girl has a great deal of devil in her.' The lady's thoughts were of Rose.

'Black Lymport'd take the leap,' said Mr. George, following her with the rest of the troop. 'Who's that fellow on him?'

'His name's Harrington,' quoth Drummond.

'Oh, Harrington!' Mr. George responded; but immediately laughed-- 'Harrington? 'Gad, if he takes the leap it'll be odd--another of the name. That's where old Mel had his spill.'

'Who?' Drummond inquired.

'Old Mel Harrington--the Lymport wonder. Old Marquis Mel,' said Mr. George. 'Haven't ye heard of him?'

'What! the gorgeous tailor!' exclaimed Lady Jocelyn. 'How I regret never meeting that magnificent snob! that efflorescence of sublime imposture! I've seen the Regent; but one's life doesn't seem complete without having seen his twin-brother. You must give us warning when you have him down at Croftlands again, Mr. George.'

'Gad, he'll have to come a long distance--poor old Mel!' said Mr. George; and was going on, when Seymour Jocelyn stroked his moustache to cry, 'Look! Rosey 's starting 'em, by Jove!'

The leap, which did not appear formidable from where they stood, was four fields distant from the point where Rose, with a handkerchief in her hand, was at that moment giving the signal to Laxley and Evan.

Miss Carrington and the Countess begged Lady Jocelyn to order a shout to be raised to arrest them, but her ladyship marked her good sense by saying: 'Let them go, now they're about it'; for she saw that to make a fuss now matters had proceeded so far, was to be uncivil to the inevitable.

The start was given, and off they flew. Harry Jocelyn, behind them, was evidently caught by the demon, and clapped spurs to his horse to have his fling as well, for the fun of the thing; but Rose, farther down the field, rode from her post straight across him, to the imminent peril of a mutual upset; and the party on the height could see Harry fuming, and Rose coolly looking him down, and letting him understand what her will was; and her mother, and Drummond, and Seymour who beheld this, had a common sentiment of admiration for the gallant girl. But away went the

rivals. Black Lymport was the favourite, though none of the men thought he would be put at the fence. The excitement became contagious. The Countess threw up her veil. Lady Jocelyn, and Seymour, and Drummond, galloped down the lane, and Mr. George was for accompanying them, till the line of Miss Carrington's back gave him her unmistakeable opinion of such a course of conduct, and he had to dally and fret by her side. Andrew's arm was tightly grasped by the Countess. The rivals were crossing the second field, Laxley a little a-head.

'He 's holding in the black mare--that fellow!' said Mr. George. 'Gad, it looks like going at the fence. Fancy Harrington!'

They were now in the fourth field, a smooth shorn meadow. Laxley was two clear lengths in advance, but seemed riding, as Mr. George remarked, more for pace than to take the jump. The ladies kept plying random queries and suggestions: the Countess wishing to know whether they could not be stopped by a countryman before they encountered any danger. In the midst of their chatter, Mr. George rose in his stirrups, crying:

'Bravo, the black mare!'

'Has he done it?' said Andrew, wiping his poll.

'He? No, the mare!' shouted Mr. George, and bolted off, no longer to be restrained.

The Countess, doubly relieved, threw herself back in the carriage, and Andrew drew a breath, saying: 'Evan has beat him--I saw that! The other's horse swerved right round.'

'I fear,' said Mrs. Evremonde, 'Mr. Harrington has had a fall. Don't be alarmed--it may not be much.'

'A fall!' exclaimed the Countess, equally divided between alarms of sisterly affection and a keen sense of the romance of the thing.

Miss Carrington ordered the carriage to be driven round. They had not gone far when they were met by Harry Jocelyn riding in hot haste, and he bellowed to the coachman to drive as hard as he could, and stop opposite Brook's farm.

The scene on the other side of the fence would have been a sweet one to the central figure in it had his eyes then been open. Surrounded by Lady Jocelyn, Drummond, Seymour, and the rest, Evan's dust-stained body was stretched along the road, and his head was lying in the lap of Rose, who, pale, heedless of anything spoken by those around her, and with her lips set and her eyes turning wildly from one to the other, held a gory handkerchief to his temple with one hand, and with the other felt for the motion of his heart.

But heroes don't die, you know.

CHAPTER XXI

TRIBULATIONS AND TACTICS OF THE COUNTESS

'You have murdered my brother, Rose Jocelyn!'

'Don't say so now.'

Such was the interchange between the two that loved the senseless youth, as he was being lifted into the carriage.

Lady Jocelyn sat upright in her saddle, giving directions about what was to be done with Evan and the mare, impartially.

'Stunned, and a good deal shaken, I suppose; Lympport's knees are terribly cut,' she said to Drummond, who merely nodded. And Seymour remarked, 'Fifty guineas knocked off her value!' One added, 'Nothing worse, I should think'; and another, 'A little damage inside, perhaps.' Difficult to say whether they spoke of Evan or the brute.

No violent outcries; no reproaches cast on the cold-blooded coquette; no exclamations on the heroism of her brother! They could absolutely spare a thought for the animal! And Evan had risked his life for this, and might die unpitied. The Countess diversified her grief with a deadly bitterness against the heartless Jocelyns.

Oh, if Evan dies! will it punish Rose sufficiently?

Andrew expressed emotion, but not of a kind the Countess liked a relative to be seen exhibiting; for in emotion worthy Andrew betrayed to her his origin offensively.

'Go away and puke, if you must,' she said, clipping poor Andrew's word about his 'dear boy.' She could not help speaking in that way--he was so vulgar. A word of sympathy from Lady Jocelyn might have saved her from the sourness into which her many conflicting passions were resolving; and might also have saved her ladyship from the rancour she had sown in the daughter of the great Mel by her selection of epithets to characterize him.

Will it punish Rose at all, if Evan dies?

Rose saw that she was looked at. How could the Countess tell that Rose envied her the joy of holding Evan in the carriage there? Rose, to judge by her face, was as calm as glass. Not so well seen through, however. Mrs. Evremonde rode beside her, whose fingers she caught, and twined her own with them tightly once for a fleeting instant. Mrs. Evremonde wanted no further confession of her state.

Then Rose said to her mother, 'Mama, may I ride to have the doctor ready?'

Ordinarily, Rose would have clapped heel to horse the moment the thought came. She waited for the permission, and flew off at a gallop, waving back Laxley, who was for joining her.

'Franks will be a little rusty about the mare,' the Countess heard Lady Jocelyn say; and Harry just then stooped his head to the carriage, and said, in his blunt fashion, 'After all, it won't show much.'

'We are not cattle!' exclaimed the frenzied Countess, within her bosom. Alas! it was almost a democratic outcry they made her guilty of; but she was driven past patience. And as a further provocation, Evan would open his eyes. She laid her handkerchief over them with loving delicacy, remembering in a flash that her own face had been all the while exposed to Mr. George Uplift; and then the terrors of his presence at Beckley Court came upon her, and the fact that she had not for the last ten minutes been the serene Countess de Saldar; and she quite hated Andrew, for vulgarity in others evoked vulgarity in her, which was the reason why she ranked vulgarity as the chief of the deadly sins. Her countenance for Harry and all the others save poor Andrew was soon the placid heaven-confiding sister's again; not before Lady Jocelyn had found cause to observe to Drummond:

'Your Countess doesn't ruffle well.'

But a lady who is at war with two or three of the facts of Providence, and yet will have Providence for her ally, can hardly ruffle well. Do not imagine that the Countess's love for her brother was hollow. She was assured when she came up to the spot where he fell, that there was no danger; he had but dislocated his shoulder, and bruised his head a little. Hearing this, she rose out of her clamorous heart, and seized the opportunity for a small burst of melodrama. Unhappily, Lady Jocelyn, who gave the tone to the rest, was a Spartan in matters of this sort; and as she would have seen those dearest to her bear the luck of the field, she could see others. When the call for active help reached her, you beheld a different woman.

The demonstrativeness the Countess thirsted for was afforded her by Juley Bonner, and in a measure by her sister Caroline, who loved Evan passionately. The latter was in riding attire, about to mount to ride and meet them, accompanied by the Duke. Caroline had hastily tied up her hair; a rich golden brown lump of it hung round her cheek; her limpid eyes and anxiously-nerved brows impressed the Countess wonderfully as she ran down the steps and bent her fine well-filled bust forward to ask the first hurried question.

The Countess patted her shoulder. 'Safe, dear,' she said aloud, as one who would not make much of it. And in a whisper, 'You look superb.'

I must charge it to Caroline's beauty under the ducal radiance, that a stream of sweet feelings entering into the Countess made her forget to tell her sister that George Uplift was by. Caroline had not been abroad, and her skin was not olive-hued; she was a beauty, and a majestic figure,

little altered since the day when the wooden marine marched her out of Lympport.

The Countess stepped from the carriage to go and cherish Juliana's petulant distress; for that unhealthy little body was stamping with impatience to have the story told to her, to burst into fits of pathos; and while Seymour and Harry assisted Evan to descend, trying to laugh off the pain he endured, Caroline stood by, soothing him with words and tender looks.

Lady Jocelyn passed him, and took his hand, saying, 'Not killed this time!'

'At your ladyship's service to-morrow,' he replied, and his hand was kindly squeezed.

'My darling Evan, you will not ride again?' Caroline cried, kissing him on the steps; and the Duke watched the operation, and the Countess observed the Duke.

That Providence should select her sweetest moments to deal her wounds, was cruel; but the Countess just then distinctly heard Mr. George Uplift ask Miss Carrington

'Is that lady a Harrington?'

'You perceive a likeness?' was the answer.

Mr. George went 'Whew!--tit-tit-tit!' with the profound expression of a very slow mind.

The scene was quickly over. There was barely an hour for the ladies to dress for dinner. Leaving Evan in the doctor's hand, and telling Caroline to dress in her room, the Countess met Rose, and gratified her vindictiveness, while she furthered her projects, by saying:

'Not till my brother is quite convalescent will it be adviseable that you should visit him. I am compelled to think of him entirely now. In his present state he is not fit to be, played with.'

Rose, stedfastly eyeing her, seemed to swallow down something in her throat, and said:

'I will obey you, Countess. I hoped you would allow me to nurse him.'

'Quiet above all things, Rose Jocelyn!' returned the Countess, with the suavity of a governess, who must be civil in her sourness. 'If you would not complete this morning's achievement--stay away.'

The Countess declined to see that Rose's lip quivered. She saw an unpleasantness in the bottom of her eyes; and now that her brother's decease was not even remotely to be apprehended, she herself determined to punish the cold, unimpressionable coquette of a girl. Before

returning to Caroline, she had five minutes' conversation with Juliana, which fully determined her to continue the campaign at Beckley Court, commence decisive movements, and not to retreat, though fifty George Uplofts menaced her. Consequently, having dismissed Conning on a message to Harry Jocelyn, to ask him for a list of the names of the new people they were to meet that day at dinner, she said to Caroline:

'My dear, I think it will be incumbent on us to depart very quickly.'

Much to the Countess's chagrin and astonishment, Caroline replied:

'I shall hardly be sorry.'

'Not sorry? Why, what now, dear one? Is it true, then, that a flagellated female kisses the rod? Are you so eager for a repetition of Strike?'

Caroline, with some hesitation, related to her more than the Countess had ventured to petition for in her prayers.

'Oh! how exceedingly generous!' the latter exclaimed. How very refreshing to think that there are nobles in your England as romantic, as courteous, as delicate as our own foreign ones! But his Grace is quite an exceptional nobleman. Are you not touched, dearest Carry?'

Caroline pensively glanced at the reflection of her beautiful arm in the glass, and sighed, pushing back the hair from her temples.

'But, for mercy's sake!' resumed the Countess, in alarm at the sigh, 'do not be too--too touched. Do, pray, preserve your wits. You weep! Caroline, Caroline! O my goodness; it is just five-and-twenty minutes to the first dinner-bell, and you are crying! For God's sake, think of your face! Are you going to be a Gorgon? And you show the marks twice as long as any other, you fair women. Squinnying like this! Caroline, for your Louisa's sake, do not!'

Hissing which, half angrily and half with entreaty, the Countess dropped on her knees. Caroline's fit of tears subsided. The eldest of the sisters, she was the kindest, the fairest, the weakest.

'Not,' said the blandishing Countess, when Caroline's face was clearer, 'not that my best of Carrys does not look delicious in her shower. Cry, with your hair down, and you would subdue any male creature on two legs. And that reminds me of that most audacious Marquis de Remilla. He saw a dirty drab of a fruit-girl crying in Lisbon streets one day, as he was riding in the carriage of the Duchesse de Col da Rosta, and her husband and duena, and he had a letter for her--the Duchesse. They loved! How deliver the letter? "Save me!" he cried to the Duchesse, catching her hand, and pressing his heart, as if very sick. The Duchesse felt the paper--turned her hand over on her knee, and he withdrew his. What does my Carry think was the excuse he tendered the Duke? This--and this gives you some idea of the wonderful audacity of those dear Portuguese--that he --he must precipitate himself and marry any woman he saw weep, and be her

slave for the term of his natural life, unless another woman's hand at the same moment restrained him! There!' and the Countess's eyes shone brightly.

'How excessively imbecile!' Caroline remarked, hitherto a passive listener to these Lusitanian contes.

It was the first sign she had yet given of her late intercourse with a positive Duke, and the Countess felt it, and drew back. No more anecdotes for Caroline, to whom she quietly said:

'You are very English, dear!'

'But now, the Duke--his Grace,' she went on, 'how did he inaugurate?'

'I spoke to him of Evan's position. God forgive me!--I said that was the cause of my looks being sad.'

'You could have thought of nothing better,' interposed the Countess. 'Yes?'

'He said, if he might clear them he should be happy!'

'In exquisite language, Carry, of course.'

'No; just as others talk.'

'Hum!' went the Countess, and issued again brightly from a cloud of reflection, with the remark: 'It was to seem business-like--the commerciality of the English mind. To the point--I know. Well, you perceive, my sweetest, that Evan's interests are in your hands. You dare not quit the field. In one week, I fondly trust, he will be secure. What more did his Grace say? May we not be the repository of such delicious secrecies?'

Caroline gave tremulous indications about the lips, and the Countess jumped to the bell and rang it, for they were too near dinner for the trace of a single tear to be permitted. The bell and the appearance of Conning effectually checked the flood.

While speaking to her sister, the Countess had hesitated to mention George Uplift's name, hoping that, as he had no dinner-suit, he would not stop to dinner that day, and would fall to the charge of Lady Racial once more. Conning, however, brought in a sheet of paper on which the names of the guests were written out by Harry, a daily piece of service he performed for the captivating dame, and George Uplift's name was in the list.

'We will do the rest, Conning-retire,' she said, and then folding Caroline in her arms, murmured, the moment they were alone, 'Will my Carry dress her hair plain to-day, for the love of her Louisa?'

'Goodness! what a request!' exclaimed Caroline, throwing back her head

to see if her Louisa could be serious.

'Most inexplicable--is it not? Will she do it?'

'Flat, dear? It makes a fright of me.'

'Possibly. May I beg it?'

'But why, dearest, why? If I only knew why!'

'For the love of your Louy.'

'Plain along the temples?'

'And a knot behind.'

'And a band along the forehead?'

'Gems, if they meet your favour.'

'But my cheek-bones, Louisa?'

'They are not too prominent, Carry.'

'Curls relieve them.'

'The change will relieve the curls, dear one.'

Caroline looked in the glass, at the Countess, as polished a reflector, and fell into a chair. Her hair was accustomed to roll across her shoulders in heavy curls. The Duke would find a change of the sort singular. She should not at all know herself with her hair done differently: and for a lovely woman to be transformed to a fright is hard to bear in solitude, or in imagination.

'Really!' she petitioned.

'Really--yes, or no?' added the Countess.

'So unaccountable a whim!' Caroline looked in the glass dolefully, and pulled up her thick locks from one cheek, letting them fall on the instant.

'She will?' breathed the Countess.

'I really cannot,' said Caroline, with vehemence.

The Countess burst into laughter, replying: 'My poor child! it is not my whim--it is your obligation. George Uplift dines here to-day. Now do you divine it? Disguise is imperative for you.'

Mrs. Strike, gazing in her sister's face, answered slowly, 'George? But how will you meet him?' she hurriedly asked.

'I have met him,' rejoined the Countess, boldly. 'I defy him to know me. I brazen him! You with your hair in my style are equally safe. You see there is no choice. Pooh! contemptible puppy!'

'But I never,'--Caroline was going to say she never could face him. 'I will not dine. I will nurse Evan.'

'You have faced him, my dear,' said the Countess, 'and you are to change your head-dress simply to throw him off his scent.'

As she spoke the Countess tripped about, nodding her head like a girl. Triumph in the sense of her power over all she came in contact with, rather elated the lady.

Do you see why she worked her sister in this roundabout fashion? She would not tell her George Uplift was in the house till she was sure he intended to stay, for fear of frightening her. When the necessity became apparent, she put it under the pretext of a whim in order to see how far Caroline, whose weak compliance she could count on, and whose reticence concerning the Duke annoyed her, would submit to it to please her sister; and if she rebelled positively, why to be sure it was the Duke she dreaded to shock: and, therefore, the Duke had a peculiar hold on her: and, therefore, the Countess might reckon that she would do more than she pleased to confess to remain with the Duke, and was manageable in that quarter. All this she learnt without asking. I need not add, that Caroline sighingly did her bidding.

'We must all be victims in our turn, Carry,' said the Countess. 'Evan's prospects--it may be, Silva's restoration--depend upon your hair being dressed plain to-day. Reflect on that!'

Poor Caroline obeyed; but she was capable of reflecting only that her face was unnaturally lean and strange to her.

The sisters tended and arranged one another, taking care to push their mourning a month or two ahead and the Countess animadverted on the vulgar mind of Lady Jocelyn, who would allow a 'gentleman to sit down at a gentlewoman's table, in full company, in pronounced undress': and Caroline, utterly miserable, would pretend that she wore a mask and kept grimacing as they do who are not accustomed to paint on the cheeks, till the Countess checked her by telling her she should ask her for that before the Duke.

After a visit to Evan, the sisters sailed together into the drawing-room.

'Uniformity is sometimes a gain,' murmured the Countess, as they were parting in the middle of the room. She saw that their fine figures, and profiles, and resemblance in contrast, produced an effect. The Duke wore one of those calmly intent looks by which men show they are aware of change in the heavens they study, and are too devout worshippers to presume to disapprove. Mr. George was standing by Miss Carrington, and he also watched Mrs. Strike. To bewilder him yet more the Countess

persisted in fixing her eyes upon his heterodox apparel, and Mr. George became conscious and uneasy. Miss Carrington had to address her question to him twice before he heard. Melville Jocelyn, Sir John Loring, Sir Franks, and Hamilton surrounded the Countess, and told her what they had decided on with regard to the election during the day; for Melville was warm in his assertion that they would not talk to the Countess five minutes without getting a hint worth having.

'Call to us that man who is habited like a groom,' said the Countess, indicating Mr. George. 'I presume he is in his right place up here?'

'Whew--take care, Countess--our best man. He's good for a dozen,' said Hamilton.

Mr. George was brought over and introduced to the Countess de Saldar.

'So the oldest Tory in the county is a fox?' she said, in allusion to the hunt. Never did Caroline Strike admire her sister's fearful genius more than at that moment.

Mr. George ducked and rolled his hand over his chin, with 'ah-um!' and the like, ended by a dry laugh.

'Are you our supporter, Mr. Uplift?'

'Tory interest, ma--um--my lady.'

'And are you staunch and may be trusted?'

'Pon my honour, I think I have that reputation.'

'And you would not betray us if we give you any secrets? Say "'Pon my honour," again. You launch it out so courageously.'

The men laughed, though they could not see what the Countess was driving at. She had for two minutes spoken as she spoke when a girl, and George--entirely off his guard and unsuspecting--looked unenlightened. If he knew, there were hints enough for him in her words.

If he remained blind, they might pass as air. The appearance of the butler cut short his protestation as to his powers of secrecy.

The Countess dismissed him.

'You will be taken into our confidence when we require you.' And she resumed her foreign air in a most elaborate and overwhelming bow.

She was now perfectly satisfied that she was safe from Mr. George, and, as she thoroughly detested the youthful squire, she chose to propagate a laugh at him by saying with the utmost languor and clearness of voice, as they descended the stairs:

'After all, a very clever fox may be a very dull dog--don't you think?'

Gentlemen in front of her, and behind, heard it, and at Mr. George's expense her reputation rose.

Thus the genius of this born general prompted her to adopt the principle in tactics--boldly to strike when you are in the dark as to your enemy's movements.

CHAPTER XXII

IN WHICH THE DAUGHTERS OF THE GREAT MEL HAVE TO DIGEST HIM AT DINNER

You must know, if you would form an estimate of the Countess's heroic impudence, that a rumour was current in Lymport that the fair and well-developed Louisa Harrington, in her sixteenth year, did advisedly, and with the intention of rendering the term indefinite, entrust her guileless person to Mr. George Uplift's honourable charge. The rumour, unflavoured by absolute malignity, was such; and it went on to say, that the sublime Mel, alive to the honour of his family, followed the fugitives with a pistol, and with a horsewhip, that he might chastise the offender according to the degree of his offence. It was certain that he had not used the pistol: it was said that he had used the whip.

The details of the interview between Mel and Mr. George were numerous, but at the same time various. Some declared that he put a pistol to Mr. George's ear, and under pressure of that persuader got him into the presence of a clergyman, when he turned sulky; and when the pistol was again produced, the ceremony would have been performed, had not the outraged Church cried out for help. Some vowed that Mr. George had referred all questions implying a difference between himself and Mel to their mutual fists for decision. At any rate, Mr. George turned up in Fallow field subsequently; the fair Louisa, unhurt and with a quiet mind, in Lymport; and this amount of truth the rumours can be reduced to--that Louisa and Mr. George had been acquainted. Rumour and gossip know how to build: they always have some solid foundation, however small. Upwards of twelve years had run since Louisa went to the wife of the brewer--a period quite long enough for Mr. George to forget any one in; and she was altogether a different creature; and, as it was true that Mr. George was a dull one, she was, after the test she had put him to, justified in hoping that Mel's progeny might pass unchallenged anywhere out of Lymport. So, with Mr. George facing her at table, the Countess sat down, determined to eat and be happy.

A man with the education and tastes of a young country squire is not likely to know much of the character of women; and of the marvellous power they have of throwing a veil of oblivion between themselves and what they don't want to remember, few men know much. Mr. George had thought, when he saw Mrs. Strike leaning to Evan, and heard she was a Harrington, that she was rather like the Lymport family; but the reappearance of Mrs. Strike, the attention of the Duke of Belfield to her, and the splendid tactics of the Countess, which had extinguished

every thought in the thought of himself, drove Lympart out of his mind.

There were some dinner guests at the table-people of Fallow field, Beckley, and Bodley. The Countess had the diplomatist on one side, the Duke on the other. Caroline was under the charge of Sir Franks. The Countess, almost revelling in her position opposite Mr. George, was ambitious to lead the conversation, and commenced, smiling at Melville:

'We are to be spared politics to-day? I think politics and cookery do not assimilate.'

'I'm afraid you won't teach the true Briton to agree with you,' said Melville, shaking his head over the sums involved by this British propensity.

'No,' said Seymour. 'Election dinners are a part of the Constitution': and Andrew laughed: 'They make Radicals pay as well as Tories, so it's pretty square.'

The topic was taken up, flagged, fell, and was taken up again. And then Harry Jocelyn said:

'I say, have you worked the flags yet? The great Mel must have his flags.'

The flags were in the hands of ladies, and ladies would look to the rosettes, he was told.

Then a lady of the name of Barrington laughed lightly, and said:

'Only, pray, my dear Harry, don't call your uncle the "Great Mel" at the election.'

'Oh! very well,' quoth Harry: 'why not?'

'You 'll get him laughed at--that 's all.'

'Oh! well, then, I won't,' said Harry, whose wits were attracted by the Countess's visage.

Mrs. Barrington turned to Seymour, her neighbour, and resumed:

'He really would be laughed at. There was a tailor--he was called the Great Mel--and he tried to stand for Fallow field once. I believe he had the support of Squire Uplift--George's uncle--and others. They must have done it for fun! Of course he did not get so far as the hustings; but I believe he had flags, and principles, and all sorts of things worked ready. He certainly canvassed.'

'A tailor--canvassed--for Parliament?' remarked an old Dowager, the mother of Squire Copping. 'My what are we coming to next?'

'He deserved to get in,' quoth Aunt Bel: 'After having his principles

worked ready, to eject the man was infamous.'

Amazed at the mine she had sprung, the Countess sat through it, lamenting the misery of owning a notorious father. Happily Evan was absent, on his peaceful blessed bed!

Bowing over wine with the Duke, she tried another theme, while still, like a pertinacious cracker, the Great Mel kept banging up and down the table.

'We are to have a feast in the open air, I hear. What you call pic-nic.'

The Duke believed there was a project of the sort.

'How exquisitely they do those things in Portugal! I suppose there would be no scandal in my telling something now. At least we are out of Court-jurisdiction.'

'Scandal of the Court!' exclaimed his Grace, in mock horror.

'The option is yours to listen. The Queen, when young, was sweetly pretty; a divine complexion; and a habit of smiling on everybody. I presume that the young Habral, son of the first magistrate of Lisbon, was also smiled on. Most innocently, I would swear! But it operated on the wretched youth! He spent all his fortune in the purchase and decoration of a fairy villa, bordering on the Val das Rosas, where the Court enjoyed its rustic festivities, and one day a storm! all the ladies hurried their young mistress to the house where the young Habral had been awaiting her for ages. None so polished as he! Musicians started up, the floors were ready, and torches beneath them!--there was a feast of exquisite wines and viands sparkling. Quite enchantment. The girl-Queen was in ecstasies. She deigned a dance with the young Habral, and then all sat down to supper; and in the middle of it came the cry of Fire! The Queen shrieked; the flames were seen all around; and if the arms of the young Habral were opened to save her, or perish, could she cast a thought on Royalty, and refuse? The Queen was saved the villa was burnt; the young Habral was ruined, but, if I know a Portuguese, he was happy till he died, and well remunerated! For he had held a Queen to his heart! So that was a pic-nic!'

The Duke slightly inclined his head.

'Vrai Portughez derrendo,' he said. 'They tell a similar story in Spain, of one of the Queens--I forget her name. The difference between us and your Peninsular cavaliers is, that we would do as much for uncrowned ladies.'

'Ah! your Grace!' The Countess swam in the pleasure of a nobleman's compliment.

'What's the story?' interposed Aunt Bel.

An outline of it was given her. Thank heaven, the table was now rid of

the Great Mel. For how could he have any, the remotest relation with Queens and Peninsular pic-nics? You shall hear.

Lady Jocelyn happened to catch a word or two of the story.

'Why,' said she, 'that's English! Franks, you remember the ballet divertissement they improvised at the Bodley race-ball, when the magnificent footman fired a curtain and caught up Lady Racial, and carried her--'

'Heaven knows where!' cried Sir Franks. 'I remember it perfectly. It was said that the magnificent footman did it on purpose to have that pleasure.'

'Ay, of course,' Hamilton took him up. 'They talked of prosecuting the magnificent footman.'

'Ay,' followed Seymour, 'and nobody could tell where the magnificent footman bolted. He vanished into thin air.'

'Ay, of course,' Melville struck in; 'and the magic enveloped the lady for some time.'

At this point Mr. George Uplift gave a horse-laugh. He jerked in his seat excitedly.

'Bodley race-ball!' he cried; and looking at Lady Jocelyn: 'Was your ladyship there, then? Why--ha! ha! why, you have seen the Great Mel, then! That tremendous footman was old Mel himself!'

Lady Jocelyn struck both her hands on the table, and rested her large grey eyes, full of humorous surprise, on Mr. George.

There was a pause, and then the ladies and gentlemen laughed.

'Yes,' Mr. George went on, 'that was old Mel. I'll swear to him.'

'And that's how it began?' murmured Lady Jocelyn.

Mr. George nodded at his plate discreetly.

'Well,' said Lady Jocelyn, leaning back, and lifting her face upward in the discursive fulness of her fancy, 'I feel I am not robbed. 'Il y a des miracles, et j'en ai vu'. One's life seems more perfect when one has seen what nature can do. The fellow was stupendous! I conceive him present. Who'll fire a house for me? Is it my deficiency of attraction, or a total dearth of gallant snobs?'

The Countess was drowned. The muscles of her smiles were horribly stiff and painful. Caroline was getting pale. Could it be accident that thus resuscitated Mel, their father, and would not let the dead man die? Was not malice at the bottom of it? The Countess, though she hated Mr. George infinitely, was clear-headed enough to see that Providence alone

was trying her. No glances were exchanged between him and Laxley, or Drummond.

Again Mel returned to his peace, and again he had to come forth.

'Who was this singular man you were speaking about just now?' Mrs. Evremonde asked.

Lady Jocelyn answered her: 'The light of his age. The embodied protest against our social prejudice. Combine--say, Mirabeau and Alcibiades, and the result is the Lymport Tailor:--he measures your husband in the morning; in the evening he makes love to you, through a series of pantomimic transformations. He was a colossal Adonis, and I'm sorry he's dead!'

'But did the man get into society?' said Mrs. Evremonde. 'How did he manage that?'

'Yes, indeed! and what sort of a society!' the dowager Copping interjected. 'None but bachelor-tables, I can assure you. Oh! I remember him. They talked of fetching him to Dox Hall. I said, No, thank you, Tom; this isn't your Vauxhall.'

'A sharp retort,' said Lady Jocelyn, 'a most conclusive rhyme; but you're mistaken. Many families were glad to see him, I hear. And he only consented to be treated like a footman when he dressed like one. The fellow had some capital points. He fought two or three duels, and behaved like a man. Franks wouldn't have him here, or I would have received him. I hear that, as a conteur, he was inimitable. In short, he was a robust Brummel, and the Regent of low life.'

This should have been Mel's final epitaph.

Unhappily, Mrs. Melville would remark, in her mincing manner, that the idea of the admission of a tailor into society seemed very unnatural; and Aunt Bel confessed that her experience did not comprehend it.

'As to that,' said Lady Jocelyn, 'phenomena are unnatural. The rules of society are lightened by the exceptions. What I like in this Mel is, that though he was a snob, and an impostor, he could still make himself respected by his betters. He was honest, so far; he acknowledged his tastes, which were those of Franks, Melville, Seymour, and George--the tastes of a gentleman. I prefer him infinitely to your cowardly democrat, who barks for what he can't get, and is generally beastly. In fact, I'm not sure that I haven't a secret passion for the great tailor.'

'After all, old Mel wasn't so bad,' Mr. George Uplift chimed in.

'Granted a tailor--you didn't see a bit of it at table. I've known him taken for a lord. And when he once got hold of you, you couldn't give him up. The squire met him first in the coach, one winter. He took him for a Russian nobleman--didn't find out what he was for a month or so.

Says Mel, "Yes, I make clothes. You find the notion unpleasant; guess how disagreeable it is to me." The old squire laughed, and was glad to have him at Croftlands as often as he chose to come. Old Mel and I used to spar sometimes; but he's gone, and I should like to shake his fist again.'

Then Mr. George told the 'Bath' story, and episodes in Mel's career as Marquis; and while he held the ear of the table, Rose, who had not spoken a word, and had scarcely eaten a morsel during dinner, studied the sisters with serious eyes. Only when she turned them from the Countess to Mrs. Strike, they were softened by a shadowy drooping of the eyelids, as if for some reason she deeply pitied that lady.

Next to Rose sat Drummond, with a face expressive of cynical enjoyment. He devoted uncommon attention to the Countess, whom he usually shunned and overlooked. He invited her to exchange bows over wine, in the fashion of that day, and the Countess went through the performance with finished grace and ease. Poor Andrew had all the time been brushing back his hair, and making strange deprecatory sounds in his throat, like a man who felt bound to assure everybody at table he was perfectly happy and comfortable.

'Material enough for a Sartoriad,' said Drummond to Lady Jocelyn.

'Excellent. Pray write it forthwith, Drummond', replied her ladyship; and as they exchanged talk unintelligible to the Countess, this lady observed to the Duke:

'It is a relief to have buried that subject.'

The Duke smiled, raising an eyebrow; but the persecuted Countess perceived she had been much too hasty when Drummond added,

'I'll make a journey to Lymport in a day or two, and master his history.'

'Do,' said her ladyship; and flourishing her hand, "'I sing the Prince of Snobs!'"

'Oh, if it's about old Mel, I'll sing you material enough,' said Mr. George. 'There! you talk of it's being unnatural, his dining out at respectable tables. Why, I believe--upon my honour, I believe it's a fact--he's supped and thrown dice with the Regent.'

Lady Jocelyn clapped her hands. 'A noble culmination, Drummond! The man's an Epic!'

'Well, I think old Mel was equal to it,' Mr. George pursued. 'He gave me pretty broad hints; and this is how it was, if it really happened, you know. Old Mel had a friend; some say he was more. Well, that was a fellow, a great gambler. I dare say you've heard of him--Burley Bennet--him that won Ryelands Park of one of the royal dukes--died worth upwards of L100,000; and old Mel swore he ought to have had it, and would if he hadn't somehow offended him. He left the money to Admiral

Harrington, and he was a relation of Mel's.'

'But are we then utterly mixed up with tailors?' exclaimed Mrs. Barrington.

'Well, those are the facts,' said Mr. George.

The wine made the young squire talkative. It is my belief that his suspicions were not awake at that moment, and that, like any other young country squire, having got a subject he could talk on, he did not care to discontinue it. The Countess was past the effort to attempt to stop him. She had work enough to keep her smile in the right place.

Every dinner may be said to have its special topic, just as every age has its marked reputation. They are put up twice or thrice, and have to contend with minor lights, and to swallow them, and then they command the tongues of men and flow uninterruptedly. So it was with the great Mel upon this occasion. Curiosity was aroused about him. Aunt Bel agreed with Lady Jocelyn that she would have liked to know the mighty tailor. Mrs. Shorne but very imperceptibly protested against the notion, and from one to another it ran. His Grace of Belfield expressed positive approval of Mel as one of the old school.

'Si ce n'est pas le gentilhomme, au moins, c'est le gentilhomme manque,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'He is to be regretted, Duke. You are right. The stuff was in him, but the Fates were unkind. I stretch out my hand to the pauvre diable.'

'I think one learns more from the mock magnifico than from anything else,' observed his Grace.

'When the lion saw the donkey in his own royal skin, said Aunt Bel, 'add the rhyme at your discretion--he was a wiser lion, that's all.'

'And the ape that strives to copy one--he's an animal of judgement,' said Lady Jocelyn. 'We will be tolerant to the tailor, and the Countess must not set us down as a nation of shopkeepers: philosophically tolerant.'

The Countess started, and ran a little broken 'Oh!' affably out of her throat, dipped her lips to her table napkin, and resumed her smile.

'Yes,' pursued her ladyship; 'old Mel stamps the age gone by. The gallant adventurer tied to his shop! Alternate footman and marquis, out of intermediate tailor! Isn't there something fine in his buffoon imitation of the real thing? I feel already that old Mel belongs to me. Where is the great man buried? Where have they, set the funeral brass that holds his mighty ashes?'

Lady Jocelyn's humour was fully entered into by the men. The women smiled vacantly, and had a common thought that it was ill-bred of her to hold forth in that way at table, and unfeminine of any woman to speak continuously anywhere.

'Oh, come!' cried Mr. George, who saw his own subject snapped away from him by sheer cleverness; 'old Mel wasn't only a buffoon, my lady, you know. Old Mel had his qualities. He was as much a "no-nonsense" fellow, in his way, as a magistrate, or a minister.'

'Or a king, or a constable,' Aunt Bel helped his illustration.

'Or a prince, a poll-parrot, a Perigord-pie,' added Drummond, whose gravity did not prevent Mr. George from seeing that he was laughed at.

'Well, then, now, listen to this,' said Mr. George, leaning his two hands on the table resolutely. Dessert was laid, and, with a full glass beside him, and a pear to peel, he determined to be heard.

The Countess's eyes went mentally up to the vindictive heavens. She stole a glance at Caroline, and was alarmed at her excessive pallor. Providence had rescued Evan from this!

'Now, I know this to be true,' Mr. George began. 'When old Mel was alive, he and I had plenty of sparring, and that--but he's dead, and I'll do him justice. I spoke of Burley Bennet just now. Now, my lady, old Burley was, I think, Mel's half-brother, and he came, I know, somewhere out of Drury Lane--one of the courts near the theatre--I don't know much of London. However, old Mel wouldn't have that. Nothing less than being born in St. James's Square would content old Mel, and he must have a Marquis for his father. I needn't be more particular. Before ladies--ahem! But Burley was the shrewd hand of the two. Oh-h-h! such a card! He knew the way to get into company without false pretences. Well, I told you, he had lots more than L100,000--some said two--and he gave up Ryelands; never asked for it, though he won it. Consequence was, he commanded the services of somebody pretty high. And it was he got Admiral Harrington made a captain, posted, commodore, admiral, and K.C.B., all in seven years! In the Army it 'd have been half the time, for the H.R.H. was stronger in that department. Now, I know old Burley promised Mel to leave him his money, and called the Admiral an ungrateful dog. He didn't give Mel much at a time--now and then a twenty-pounder or so--I saw the cheques. And old Mel expected the money, and looked over his daughters like a turkey-cock. Nobody good enough for them. Whacking handsome gals--three! used to be called the Three Graces of Lympport. And one day Burley comes and visits Mel, and sees the girls. And he puts his finger on the eldest, I can tell you. She was a spanker! She was the handsomest gal, I think, ever I saw. For the mother's a fine woman, and what with the mother, and what with old Mel--'

'We won't enter into the mysteries of origin,' quoth Lady Jocelyn.

'Exactly, my lady. Oh, your servant, of course. Before ladies. A Burley Bennet, I said. Long and short was, he wanted to take her up to London. Says old Mel: "London 's a sad place."--" Place to make money," says Burley. "That's not work for a young gal," says Mel. Long and short was, Burley wanted to take her, and Mel wouldn't let her go.' Mr. George lowered his tone, and mumbled, 'Don't know how to explain it very well before ladies. What Burley wanted was--it wasn't quite honourable, you

know, though there was a good deal of spangles on it, and whether a real H.R.H., or a Marquis, or a Viscount, I can't say, but--the offer was tempting to a tradesman. "No," says Mel; like a chap planting his flagstaff and sticking to it. I believe that to get her to go with him, Burley offered to make a will on the spot, and to leave every farthing of his money and property--upon my soul, I believe it to be true--to Mel and his family, if he'd let the gal go. "No," says Mel. I like the old bird! And Burley got in a rage, and said he'd leave every farthing to the sailor. Says Mel: "I'm a poor tradesman; but I have and I always will have the feelings of a gentleman, and they're more to me than hard cash, and the honour of my daughter, sir, is dearer to me than my blood. Out of the house!" cries Mel. And away old Burley went, and left every penny to the sailor, Admiral Harrington, who never noticed 'em an inch. Now, there!

All had listened to Mr. George attentively, and he had slurred the apologetic passages, and emphasized the propitiatory 'before ladies' in a way to make himself well understood a generation back.

'Bravo, old Mel!' rang the voice of Lady Jocelyn, and a murmur ensued, in the midst of which Rose stood up and hurried round the table to Mrs. Strike, who was seen to rise from her chair; and as she did so, the ill-arranged locks fell from their unnatural restraint down over her shoulders; one great curl half forward to the bosom, and one behind her right ear. Her eyes were wide, her whole face, neck, and fingers, white as marble. The faintest tremor of a frown on her brows, and her shut lips, marked the continuation of some internal struggle, as if with her last conscious force she kept down a flood of tears and a wild outcry which it was death to hold. Sir Franks felt his arm touched, and looked up, and caught her, as Rose approached. The Duke and other gentlemen went to his aid, and as the beautiful woman was borne out white and still as a corpse, the Countess had this dagger plunged in her heart from the mouth of Mr. George, addressing Miss Carrington:

'I swear I didn't do it on purpose. She 's Carry Harrington, old Mel's daughter, as sure as she 's flesh and blood!'

CHAPTER XXIII

TREATS OF A HANDKERCHIEF

Running through Beckley Park, clear from the chalk, a little stream gave light and freshness to its pasturage. Near where it entered, a bathing-house of white marble had been built, under which the water flowed, and the dive could be taken to a paved depth, and you swam out over a pebbly bottom into sun-light, screened by the thick-weeded banks, loose-strife and willow-herb, and mint, nodding over you, and in the later season long-plumed yellow grasses. Here at sunrise the young men washed their limbs, and here since her return home English Rose loved to walk by night. She had often spoken of the little happy stream to Evan in

Portugal, and when he came to Beckley Court, she arranged that he should sleep in a bed-room overlooking it. The view was sweet and pleasant to him, for all the babbling of the water was of Rose, and winding in and out, to East, to North, it wound to embowered hopes in the lover's mind, to tender dreams; and often at dawn, when dressing, his restless heart embarked on it, and sailed into havens, the phantom joys of which coloured his life for him all the day. But most he loved to look across it when the light fell. The palest solitary gleam along its course spoke to him rich promise. The faint blue beam of a star chained all his longings, charmed his sorrows to sleep. Rose like a fairy had breathed her spirit here, and it was a delight to the silly luxurious youth to lie down, and fix some image of a flower bending to the stream on his brain, and in the cradle of fancies that grew round it, slide down the tide of sleep.

From the image of a flower bending to the stream, like his own soul to the bosom of Rose, Evan built sweet fables. It was she that exalted him, that led him through glittering chapters of adventure. In his dream of deeds achieved for her sake, you may be sure the young man behaved worthily, though he was modest when she praised him, and his limbs trembled when the land whispered of his great reward to come. The longer he stayed at Beckley the more he lived in this world within world, and if now and then the harsh outer life smote him, a look or a word from Rose encompassed him again, and he became sensible only of a distant pain.

At first his hope sprang wildly to possess her, to believe, that after he had done deeds that would have sent ordinary men in the condition of shattered hulks to the hospital, she might be his. Then blow upon blow was struck, and he prayed to be near her till he died: no more. Then she, herself, struck him to the ground, and sitting in his chamber, sick and weary, on the evening of his mishap, Evan's sole desire was to obtain the handkerchief he had risked his neck for. To have that, and hold it to his heart, and feel it as a part of her, seemed much.

Over a length of the stream the red round harvest-moon was rising, and the weakened youth was this evening at the mercy of the charm that encircled him. The water curved, and dimpled, and flowed flat, and the whole body of it rushed into the spaces of sad splendour. The clustered trees stood like temples of darkness; their shadows lengthened supernaturally; and a pale gloom crept between them on the sward. He had been thinking for some time that Rose would knock at his door, and give him her voice, at least; but she did not come; and when he had gazed out on the stream till his eyes ached, he felt that he must go and walk by it. Those little flashes of the hurrying tide spoke to him of a secret rapture and of a joy-seeking impulse; the pouring onward of all the blood of life to one illumined heart, mournful from excess of love.

Pardon me, I beg. Enamoured young men have these notions. Ordinarily Evan had sufficient common sense and was as prosaic as mankind could wish him; but he has had a terrible fall in the morning, and a young woman rages in his brain. Better, indeed, and 'more manly,' were he to strike and raise huge bosses on his forehead, groan, and so have done with it. We must let him go his own way.

At the door he was met by the Countess. She came into the room without a word or a kiss, and when she did speak, the total absence of any euphuism gave token of repressed excitement yet more than her angry eyes and eager step. Evan had grown accustomed to her moods, and if one moment she was the halcyon, and another the petrel, it no longer disturbed him, seeing that he was a stranger to the influences by which she was affected. The Countess rated him severely for not seeking repose and inviting sympathy. She told him that the Jocelyns had one and all combined in an infamous plot to destroy the race of Harrington, and that Caroline had already succumbed to their assaults; that the Jocelyns would repent it, and sooner than they thought for; and that the only friend the Harringtons had in the house was Miss Bonner, whom Providence would liberally reward.

Then the Countess changed to a dramatic posture, and whispered aloud, 'Hush: she is here. She is so anxious. Be generous, my brother, and let her see you!'

'She?' said Evan, faintly. 'May she come, Louisa?' He hoped for Rose.

'I have consented to mask it,' returned the Countess. 'Oh, what do I not sacrifice for you!'

She turned from him, and to Evan's chagrin introduced Juliana Bonner.

'Five minutes, remember!' said the Countess. 'I must not hear of more.' And then Evan found himself alone with Miss Bonner, and very uneasy. This young lady had restless brilliant eyes, and a contraction about the forehead which gave one the idea of a creature suffering perpetual headache. She said nothing, and when their eyes met she dropped hers in a manner that made silence too expressive. Feeling which, Evan began:

'May I tell you that I think it is I who ought to be nursing you, not you me?'

Miss Bonner replied by lifting her eyes and dropping them as before, murmuring subsequently, 'Would you do so?'

'Most certainly, if you did me the honour to select me.'

The fingers of the young lady commenced twisting and intertwining on her lap. Suddenly she laughed:

'It would not do at all. You won't be dismissed from your present service till you're unfit for any other.'

'What do you mean?' said Evan, thinking more of the unmusical laugh than of the words.

He received no explanation, and the irksome silence caused him to look through the window, as an escape for his mind, at least. The waters streamed on endlessly into the golden arms awaiting them. The low moon burnt through the foliage. In the distance, over a reach of the flood,

one tall aspen shook against the lighted sky.

'Are you in pain?' Miss Bonner asked, and broke his reverie.

'No; I am going away, and perhaps I sigh involuntarily.'

'You like these grounds?'

'I have never been so happy in any place.'

'With those cruel young men about you?'

Evan now laughed. 'We don't call young men cruel, Miss Bonner.'

'But were they not? To take advantage of what Rose told them--it was base!'

She had said more than she intended, possibly, for she coloured under his inquiring look, and added: 'I wish I could say the same as you of Beckley. Do you know, I am called Rose's thorn?'

'Not by Miss Jocelyn herself, certainly!'

'How eager you are to defend her. But am I not--tell me--do I not look like a thorn in company with her?'

'There is but the difference that ill health would make.'

'Ill health? Oh, yes! And Rose is so much better born.'

'To that, I am sure, she does not give a thought.'

'Not Rose? Oh!'

An exclamation, properly lengthened, convinces the feelings more satisfactorily than much logic. Though Evan claimed only the handkerchief he had won, his heart sank at the sound. Miss Bonner watched him, and springing forward, said sharply:

'May I tell you something?'

'You may tell me what you please.'

'Then, whether I offend you or not, you had better leave this.'

'I am going,' said Evan. 'I am only waiting to introduce your tutor to you.'

She kept her eyes on him, and in her voice as well there was a depth, as she returned:

'Mr. Laxley, Mr. Forth, and Harry, are going to Lympport to-morrow.'

Evan was looking at a figure, whose shadow was thrown towards the house from the margin of the stream.

He stood up, and taking the hand of Miss Bonner, said:

'I thank you. I may, perhaps, start with them. At any rate, you have done me a great service, which I shall not forget.'

The figure by the stream he knew to be that of Rose. He released Miss Bonner's trembling moist hand, and as he continued standing, she moved to the door, after once following the line of his eyes into the moonlight.

Outside the door a noise was audible. Andrew had come to sit with his dear boy, and the Countess had met and engaged and driven him to the other end of the passage, where he hung remonstrating with her.

'Why, Van,' he said, as Evan came up to him, 'I thought you were in a profound sleep. Louisa said--'

'Silly Andrew!' interposed the Countess, 'do you not observe he is sleep-walking now?' and she left them with a light laugh to go to Juliana, whom she found in tears. The Countess was quite aware of the efficacy of a little bit of burlesque lying to cover her retreat from any petty exposure.

Evan soon got free from Andrew. He was under the dim stars, walking to the great fire in the East. The cool air refreshed him. He was simply going to ask for his own, before he went, and had no cause to fear what would be thought by any one. A handkerchief! A man might fairly win that, and carry it out of a very noble family, without having to blush for himself.

I cannot say whether he inherited his feeling for rank from Mel, his father, or that the Countess had succeeded in instilling it, but Evan never took Republican ground in opposition to those who insulted him, and never lashed his 'manhood' to assert itself, nor compared the fineness of his instincts with the behaviour of titled gentlemen. Rather he seemed to admit the distinction between his birth and that of a gentleman, admitting it to his own soul, as it were, and struggled simply as men struggle against a destiny. The news Miss Bonner had given him sufficed to break a spell which could not have endured another week; and Andrew, besides, had told him of Caroline's illness. He walked to meet Rose, honestly intending to ask for his own, and wish her good-bye.

Rose saw him approach, and knew him in the distance. She was sitting on a lower branch of the aspen, that shot out almost from the root, and stretched over the intervolving rays of light on the tremulous water. She could not move to meet him. She was not the Rose whom we have hitherto known. Love may spring in the bosom of a young girl, like Helper in the evening sky, a grey speck in a field of grey, and not be seen or known, till surely as the circle advances the faint planet gathers fire, and, coming nearer earth, dilates, and will and must be seen and known. When Evan lay like a dead man on the ground, Rose turned

upon herself as the author of his death, and then she felt this presence within her, and her heart all day had talked to her of it, and was throbbing now, and would not be quieted. She could only lift her eyes and give him her hand; she could not speak. She thought him cold, and he was; cold enough to think that she and her cousin were not unlike in their manner, though not deep enough to reflect that it was from the same cause.

She was the first to find her wits: but not before she spoke did she feel, and start to feel, how long had been the silence, and that her hand was still in his.

'Why did you come out, Evan? It was not right.'

'I came to speak to you. I shall leave early to-morrow, and may not see you alone.'

'You are going----?'

She checked her voice, and left the thrill of it wavering in him.

'Yes, Rose, I am going; I should have gone before.'

'Evan!' she grasped his hand, and then timidly retained it. 'You have not forgiven me? I see now. I did not think of any risk to you. I only wanted you to beat. I wanted you to be first and best. If you knew how I thank God for saving you! What my punishment would have been!'

Till her eyes were full she kept them on him, too deep in emotion to be conscious of it.

He could gaze on her tears coldly.

'I should be happy to take the leap any day for the prize you offered. I have come for that.'

'For what, Evan?' But while she was speaking the colour mounted in her cheeks, and she went on rapidly:

'Did you think it unkind of me not to come to nurse you. I must tell you, to defend myself. It was the Countess, Evan. She is offended with me--very justly, I dare say. She would not let me come. What could I do? I had no claim to come.'

Rose was not aware of the import of her speech. Evan, though he felt more in it, and had some secret nerves set tingling and dancing, was not to be moved from his demand.

'Do you intend to withhold it, Rose?'

'Withhold what, Evan? Anything that you wish for is yours.'

'The handkerchief. Is not that mine?'

Rose faltered a word. Why did he ask for it? Because he asked for nothing else, and wanted no other thing save that.

Why did she hesitate? Because it was so poor a gift, and so unworthy of him.

And why did he insist? Because in honour she was bound to surrender it.

And why did she hesitate still? Let her answer.

'Oh, Evan! I would give you anything but that; and if you are going away, I should beg so much to keep it.'

He must have been in a singular state not to see her heart in the refusal, as was she not to see his in the request. But Love is blindest just when the bandage is being removed from his forehead.

'Then you will not give it me, Rose? Do you think I shall go about boasting "This is Miss Jocelyn's handkerchief, and I, poor as I am, have won it"?''

The taunt struck aslant in Rose's breast with a peculiar sting. She stood up.

'I will give it you, Evan.'

Turning from him she drew it forth, and handed it to him hurriedly. It was warm. It was stained with his blood. He guessed where it had been nestling, and, now, as if by revelation, he saw that large sole star in the bosom of his darling, and was blinded by it and lost his senses.

'Rose! beloved!'

Like the flower of his nightly phantasy bending over the stream, he looked and saw in her sweet face the living wonders that encircled his image; she murmuring: 'No, you must hate me.'

'I love you, Rose, and dare to say it--and it 's unpardonable. Can you forgive me?'

She raised her face to him.

'Forgive you for loving me?' she said.

Holy to them grew the stillness: the ripple suffused in golden moonlight: the dark edges of the leaves against superlative brightness. Not a chirp was heard, nor anything save the cool and endless carol of the happy waters, whose voices are the spirits of silence. Nature seemed consenting that their hands should be joined, their eyes intermingling. And when Evan, with a lover's craving, wished her lips to say what her eyes said so well, Rose drew his fingers up, and, with an arch smile and a blush, kissed them. The simple act set his heart thumping, and from

the look of love, she saw an expression of pain pass through him. Her fealty--her guileless, fearless truth--which the kissing of his hand brought vividly before him, conjured its contrast as well in this that was hidden from her, or but half suspected. Did she know--know and love him still? He thought it might be: but that fell dead on her asking:

'Shall I speak to Mama to-night?'

A load of lead crushed him.

'Rose!' he said; but could get no farther.

Innocently, or with well-masked design, Rose branched off into little sweet words about his bruised shoulder, touching it softly, as if she knew the virtue that was in her touch, and accusing her selfish self as she caressed it:

'Dearest Evan! you must have been sure I thought no one like you. Why did you not tell me before? I can hardly believe it now! Do you know,' she hurried on, 'they think me cold and heartless,--am I? I must be, to have made you run such risk; but yet I'm sure I could not have survived you.'

Dropping her voice, Rose quoted Ruth. As Evan listened, the words were like food from heaven poured into his spirit.

'To-morrow,' he kept saying to himself, 'to-morrow I will tell her all. Let her think well of me a few short hours.'

But the passing minutes locked them closer; each had a new link--in a word, or a speechless breath, or a touch: and to break the marriage of their eyes there must be infinite baseness on one side, or on the other disloyalty to love.

The moon was a silver ball, high up through the aspen-leaves. Evan kissed the hand of Rose, and led her back to the house. He had appeased his conscience by restraining his wild desire to kiss her lips.

In the hall they parted. Rose whispered, 'Till death!' giving him her hands.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COUNTESS MAKES HERSELF FELT

There is a peculiar reptile whose stroke is said to deprive men of motion. On the day after the great Mel had stalked the dinner-table of Beckley Court, several of the guests were sensible of the effect of this creature's mysterious touch, without knowing what it was that paralyzed them. Drummond Forth had fully planned to go to Lymport. He had special

reasons for making investigations with regard to the great Mel. Harry, who was fond of Drummond, offered to accompany him, and Laxley, for the sake of a diversion, fell into the scheme. Mr. George Uplift was also to be of the party, and promised them fun. But when the time came to start, not one could be induced to move: Laxley was pressingly engaged by Rose: Harry showed the rope the Countess held him by; Mr. George made a singular face, and seriously advised Drummond to give up the project.

'Don't rub that woman the wrong way,' he said, in a private colloquy they had. 'By Jingo, she's a Tartar. She was as a gal, and she isn't changed, Lou Harrington. Fancy now: she knew me, and she faced me out, and made me think her a stranger! Gad, I'm glad I didn't speak to the others. Lord's sake, keep it quiet. Don't rouse that woman, now, if you want to keep a whole skin.'

Drummond laughed at his extreme earnestness in cautioning him, and appeared to enjoy his dread of the Countess. Mr. George would not tell how he had been induced to change his mind. He repeated his advice with a very emphatic shrug of the shoulder.

'You seem afraid of her,' said Drummond.

'I am. I ain't ashamed to confess it. She's a regular viper, my boy!' said Mr. George. 'She and I once were pretty thick--least said soonest mended, you know. I offended her. Wasn't quite up to her mark--a tailor's daughter, you know. Gad, if she didn't set an Irish Dragoon Captain on me!--I went about in danger of my life. The fellow began to twist his damned black moustaches the moment he clapped eyes on me--bullied me till, upon my soul, I was almost ready to fight him! Oh, she was a little tripping Tartar of a bantam hen then. She's grown since she's been countessed, and does it peacocky. Now, I give you fair warning, you know. She's more than any man's match.'

'I dare say I shall think the same when she has beaten me,' quoth cynical Drummond, and immediately went and gave orders for his horse to be saddled, thinking that he would tread on the head of the viper.

But shortly before the hour of his departure, Mrs. Evremonde summoned him to her, and showed him a slip of paper, on which was written, in an uncouth small hand:

'Madam: a friend warns you that your husband is coming here. Deep interest in your welfare is the cause of an anonymous communication. The writer wishes only to warn you in time.'

Mrs. Evremonde told Drummond that she had received it from one of the servants when leaving the breakfast-room. Beyond the fact that a man on horseback had handed it to a little boy, who had delivered it over to the footman, Drummond could learn nothing. Of course, all thought of the journey to Lympert was abandoned. If but to excogitate a motive for the origin of the document, Drummond was forced to remain; and now he had it, and now he lost it again; and as he was wandering about in his maze, the Countess met him with a 'Good morning, Mr., Forth. Have I impeded your

expedition by taking my friend Mr. Harry to cavalier me to-day?'

Drummond smilingly assured her that she had not in any way disarranged his projects, and passed with so absorbed a brow that the Countess could afford to turn her head and inspect him, without fear that he would surprise her in the act. Knocking the pearly edge of her fan on her teeth, she eyed him under her joined black lashes, and deliberately read his thoughts in the mere shape of his back and shoulders. She read him through and through, and was unconscious of the effective attitude she stood in for the space of two full minutes, and even then it required one of our unhappy sex to recall her. This was Harry Jocelyn.

'My friend,' she said to him, with a melancholy smile, 'my one friend here!'

Harry went through the form of kissing her hand, which he had been taught, and practised cunningly as the first step of the ladder.

'I say, you looked so handsome, standing as you did just now,' he remarked; and she could see how far beneath her that effective attitude had precipitated the youth.

'Ah!' she sighed, walking on, with the step of majesty in exile.

'What the deuce is the matter with everybody to-day?' cried Harry. 'I 'm hanged if I can make it out. There's the Carrington, as you call her, I met her with such a pair of eyes, and old George looking as if he'd been licked, at her heels; and there's Drummond and his lady fair moping about the lawn, and my mother positively getting excited--there's a miracle! and Juley 's sharpening her nails for somebody, and if Ferdinand don't look out, your brother 'll be walking off with Rosey--that 's my opinion.'

'Indeed,' said the Countess. 'You really think so?'

'Well, they come it pretty strong together.'

'And what constitutes the "come it strong," Mr. Harry?'

'Hold of hands; you know,' the young gentleman indicated.

'Alas, then! must not we be more discreet?'

'Oh! but it's different. With young people one knows what that means.'

'Deus!' exclaimed the Countess, tossing her head weariedly, and Harry perceived his slip, and down he went again.

What wonder that a youth in such training should consent to fetch and carry, to listen and relate, to play the spy and know no more of his office than that it gave him astonishing thrills of satisfaction, and now and then a secret sweet reward?

The Countess had sealed Miss Carrington's mouth by one of her most dexterous strokes. On leaving the dinner-table over-night, and seeing that Caroline's attack would preclude their instant retreat, the gallant Countess turned at bay. A word aside to Mr. George Uplift, and then the Countess took a chair by Miss Carrington. She did all the conversation, and supplied all the smiles to it, and when a lady has to do that she is justified in striking, and striking hard, for to abandon the pretence of sweetness is a gross insult from one woman to another.

The Countess then led circuitously, but with all the ease in the world, to the story of a Portuguese lady, of a marvellous beauty, and who was deeply enamoured of the Chevalier Miguel de Rasadio, and engaged to be married to him: but, alas for her! in the insolence of her happiness she wantonly made an enemy in the person of a most unoffending lady, and she repented it. While sketching the admirable Chevalier, the Countess drew a telling portrait of Mr. George Uplift, and gratified her humour and her wrath at once by strong truth to nature in the description and animated encomiums on the individual. The Portuguese lady, too, a little resembled Miss Carrington, in spite of her marvellous beauty. And it was odd that Miss Carrington should give a sudden start and a horrified glance at the Countess just when the Countess was pathetically relating the proceeding taken by the revengeful lady on the beautiful betrothed of the Chevalier Miguel de Rasadio: which proceeding was nothing other than to bring to the Chevalier's knowledge that his beauty had a defect concealed by her apparel, and that the specks in his fruit were not one, or two, but, Oh! And the dreadful sequel to the story the Countess could not tell: preferring ingeniously to throw a tragic veil over it. Miss Carrington went early to bed that night.

The courage that mounteth with occasion was eminently the attribute of the Countess de Saldar. After that dreadful dinner she (since the weaknesses of great generals should not be altogether ignored), did pray for flight and total obscurity, but Caroline could not be left in her hysteric state, and now that she really perceived that Evan was progressing and on the point of sealing his chance, the devoted lady resolved to hold her ground. Besides, there was the pic-nic. The Countess had one dress she had not yet appeared in, and it was for the picnic she kept it. That small motives are at the bottom of many illustrious actions is a modern discovery; but I shall not adopt the modern principle of magnifying the small motive till it overshadows my noble heroine. I remember that the small motive is only to be seen by being borne into the range of my vision by a powerful microscope; and if I do more than see--if I carry on my reflections by the aid of the glass, I arrive at conclusions that must be false. Men who dwarf human nature do this. The gods are juster. The Countess, though she wished to remain for the pic-nic, and felt warm in anticipation of the homage to her new dress, was still a gallant general and a devoted sister, and if she said to herself, 'Come what may, I will stay for that pic-nic, and they shall not brow-beat me out of it,' it is that trifling pleasures are noisiest about the heart of human nature: not that they govern us absolutely. There is mob-rule in minds as in communities, but the Countess had her appetites in excellent drill. This pic-nic surrendered, represented to her defeat in all its ignominy. The largest longest-headed of schemes

ask occasionally for something substantial and immediate. So the Countess stipulated with Providence for the pic-nic. It was a point to be passed: 'Thorough flood, thorough fire.'

In vain poor Andrew Cogglesby, to whom the dinner had been torture, and who was beginning to see the position they stood in at Beckley, begged to be allowed to take them away, or to go alone. The Countess laughed him into submission. As a consequence of her audacious spirits she grew more charming and more natural, and the humour that she possessed, but which, like her other faculties, was usually subordinate to her plans, gave spontaneous bursts throughout the day, and delighted her courtiers. Nor did the men at all dislike the difference of her manner with them, and with the ladies. I may observe that a woman who shows a marked depression in the presence of her own sex will be thought very superior by ours; that is, supposing she is clever and agreeable. Manhood distinguishes what flatters it. A lady approaches. 'We must be proper,' says the Countess, and her hearty laugh dies with suddenness and is succeeded by the maturest gravity. And the Countess can look a profound merriment with perfect sedateness when there appears to be an equivoque in company. Finely secret are her glances, as if under every eye-lash there lurked the shade of a meaning. What she meant was not so clear. All this was going on, and Lady Jocelyn was simply amused, and sat as at a play.

'She seems to have stepped out of a book of French memoirs,' said her ladyship. 'La vie galante et devote--voila la Comtesse.'

In contradistinction to the other ladies, she did not detest the Countess because she could not like her.

'Where 's the harm in her?' she asked. 'She doesn't damage the men, that I can see. And a person you can laugh at and with, is inexhaustible.'

'And how long is she to stay here?' Mrs. Shorne inquired. Mrs. Melville remarking: 'Her visit appears to be inexhaustible.'

'I suppose she'll stay till the Election business is over,' said Lady Jocelyn.

The Countess had just driven with Melville to Fallow field in Caroline's black lace shawl.

'Upwards of four weeks longer!' Mrs. Melville interjected.

Lady Jocelyn chuckled.

Miss Carrington was present. She had been formerly sharp in her condemnation of the Countess--her affectedness, her euphuism, and her vulgarity. Now she did not say a word, though she might have done it with impunity.

'I suppose, Emily, you see what Rose is about?' said Mrs. Melville.

'I should not have thought it adviseable to have that young man here,

myself. I think I let you know that.'

'One young man's as good as another,' responded her ladyship. 'I've my doubts of the one that's much better. I fancy Rose is as good a judge by this time as you or I.'

Mrs. Melville made an effort or two to open Lady Jocelyn's eyes, and then relapsed into the confident serenity inspired by evil prognostications.

'But there really does seem some infatuation about these people!' exclaimed Mrs. Shorne, turning to Miss Current. 'Can you understand it? The Duke, my dear! Things seem to be going on in the house, that really --and so openly.'

'That's one virtue,' said Miss Current, with her imperturbable metallic voice, and face like a cold clear northern sky. 'Things done in secret throw on the outsiders the onus of raising a scandal.'

'You don't believe, then?' suggested Mrs. Shorne.

Miss Current replied: 'I always wait for a thing to happen first.'

'But haven't you seen, my dear?'

'I never see anything, my dear.'

'Then you must be blind, my dear.'

'On the contrary, that 's how I keep my sight, my dear.'

'I don't understand you,' said Mrs. Shorne.

'It's a part of the science of optics, and requires study,' said Miss Current.

Neither with the worldly nor the unworldly woman could the ladies do anything. But they were soon to have their triumph.

A delicious morning had followed the lovely night. The stream flowed under Evan's eyes, like something in a lower sphere, now. His passion took him up, as if a genie had lifted him into mid-air, and showed him the world on a palm of a hand; and yet, as he dressed by the window, little chinks in the garden wall, and nectarines under their shiny leaves, and the white walks of the garden, were stamped on his hot brain accurately and lastingly. Ruth upon the lips of Rose: that voice of living constancy made music to him everywhere. 'Thy God shall be my God.' He had heard it all through the night. He had not yet broken the tender charm sufficiently to think that he must tell her the sacrifice she would have to make. When partly he did, the first excuse he clutched at was, that he had not even kissed her on the forehead. Surely he had been splendidly chivalrous? Just as surely he would have brought on himself the scorn of the chivalrous or of the commonly balanced if he had been otherwise. The grandeur of this or of any of his proceedings, then,

was forfeited, as it must needs be when we are in the false position: we can have no glory though martyred. The youth felt it, even to the seeing of why it was; and he resolved, in justice to the dear girl, that he would break loose from his fetters, as we call our weakness. Behold, Rose met him descending the stairs, and, taking his hand, sang, unabashed, by the tell-tale colour coming over her face, a stave of a little Portuguese air that they had both been fond of in Portugal; and he, listening to it, and looking in her eyes, saw that his feelings in-- the old time had been hers. Instantly the old time gave him its breath, the present drew back.

Rose, now that she had given her heart out, had no idea of concealment. She would have denied nothing to her aunts: she was ready to confide it to her mother. Was she not proud of the man she loved? When Evan's hand touched hers she retained it, and smiled up at him frankly, as it were to make him glad in her gladness. If before others his eyes brought the blood to her cheeks, she would perhaps drop her eye-lids an instant, and then glance quickly level again to reassure him. And who would have thought that this boisterous, boyish creature had such depths of eye! Cold, did they call her? Let others think her cold. The tender knowledge of her--the throbbing secret they held in common sang at his heart. Rose made no confidante, but she attempted no mystery. Evan should have risen to the height of the noble girl. But the dearer and sweeter her bearing became, the more conscious he was of the dead weight he was dragging: in truth her behaviour stamped his false position to hard print the more he admired her for it, and he had shrinkings from the feminine part it imposed on him to play.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH THE STREAM FLOWS MUDDY AND CLEAR

An Irish retriever-pup of the Shannon breed, Pat by name, was undergoing tuition on the sward close by the kennels, Rose's hunting-whip being passed through his collar to restrain erratic propensities. The particular point of instruction which now made poor Pat hang out his tongue, and agitate his crisp brown curls, was the performance of the 'down-charge'; a ceremony demanding implicit obedience from the animal in the midst of volatile gambadoes, and a simulation of profound repose when his desire to be up and bounding was mighty. Pat's Irish eyes were watching Rose, as he lay with his head couched between his forepaws in the required attitude. He had but half learnt his lesson; and something in his half-humorous, half-melancholy look talked to Rose more eloquently than her friend Ferdinand at her elbow. Laxley was her assistant dog-breaker. Rose would not abandon her friends because she had accepted a lover. On the contrary, Rose was very kind to Ferdinand, and perhaps felt bound to be so to-day. To-day, also, her face was lighted; a readiness to colour, and an expression of deeper knowledge, which she now had, made the girl dangerous to friends. This was not Rose's fault but there is no doubt among the faculty that love is a contagious disease,

and we ought not to come within miles of the creatures in whom it lodges.

Pat's tail kept hinting to his mistress that a change would afford him satisfaction. After a time she withdrew her wistful gaze from him, and listened entirely to Ferdinand: and it struck her that he spoke particularly well to-day, though she did not see so much in his eyes as in Pat's. The subject concerned his departure, and he asked Rose if she should be sorry. Rose, to make him sure of it, threw a music into her voice dangerous to friends. For she had given heart and soul to Evan, and had a sense, therefore, of being irredeemably in debt to her old associates, and wished to be doubly kind to them.

Pat took advantage of the diversion to stand up quietly and have a shake. He then began to kiss his mistress's hand, to show that all was right on both sides; and followed this with a playful pretence at a bite, that there might be no subsequent misunderstanding, and then a bark and a whine. As no attention was paid to this amount of plain-speaking, Pat made a bolt. He got no farther than the length of the whip, and all he gained was to bring on himself the terrible word of drill once more. But Pat had tasted liberty. Irish rebellion against constituted authority was exhibited. Pat would not: his ears tossed over his head, and he jumped to right and left, and looked the raggedest rapparee that ever his ancestry trotted after. Rose laughed at his fruitless efforts to get free; but Ferdinand meditatively appeared to catch a sentiment in them.

'Down-charge, Sir, will you? Ah, Pat! Pat! You'll have to obey me, my boy. Now, down-charge!'

While Rose addressed the language of reason to Pat, Ferdinand slipped in a soft word or two. Presently she saw him on one knee.

'Pat won't, and I will,' said he.

'But Pat shall, and you had better not,' said she. 'Besides, my dear Ferdinand,' she added, laughing, 'you don't know how to do it.'

'Do you want me to prostrate on all fours, Rose?'

'No. I hope not. Do get up, Ferdinand. You'll be seen from the windows.'

Instead of quitting his posture, he caught her hand, and scared her with a declaration.

'Of all men, you to be on your knees! and to me, Ferdinand!' she cried, in discomfort.

'Why shouldn't I, Rose?' was this youth's answer.

He had got the idea that foreign cavalier manners would take with her; but it was not so easy to make his speech correspond with his posture, and he lost his opportunity, which was pretty. However, he spoke plain English. The interview ended by Rose releasing Pat from drill, and

running off in a hurry. Where was Evan? She must have his consent to speak to her mother, and prevent a recurrence of these silly scenes.

Evan was with Caroline, his sister.

It was contrary to the double injunction of the Countess that Caroline should receive Evan during her absence, or that he should disturb the dear invalid with a visit. These two were not unlike both in organization and character, and they had not sat together long before they found each other out. Now, to further Evan's love-suit, the Countess had induced Caroline to continue yet awhile in the Purgatory Beckley Court had become to her; but Evan, in speaking of Rose, expressed a determination to leave her, and Caroline caught at it.

'Can you?--will you? Oh, dear Van! have you the courage? I--look at me--you know the home I go to, and--and I think of it here as a place to be happy in. What have our marriages done for us? Better that we had married simple stupid men who earn their bread, and would not have been ashamed of us! And, my dearest, it is not only that. None can tell what our temptations are. Louisa has strength, but I feel I have none; and though, dear, for your true interest, I would indeed sacrifice myself--I would, Van! I would!--it is not good for you to stay,--I know it is not. For you have Papa's sense of honour--and oh! if you should learn to despise me, my dear brother!'

She kissed him; her nerves were agitated by strong mental excitement. He attributed it to her recent attack of illness, but could not help asking, while he caressed her:

'What's that? Despise you?'

It may have been that Caroline felt then, that to speak of something was to forfeit something. A light glimmered across the dewy blue of her beautiful eyes. Desire to breathe it to him, and have his loving aid: the fear of forfeiting it, evil as it was to her, and at the bottom of all, that doubt we choose to encourage of the harm in a pleasant sin unaccomplished; these might be read in the rich dim gleam that swept like sunlight over sea-water between breaks of clouds.

'Dear Van! do you love her so much?'

Caroline knew too well that she was shutting her own theme with iron clasps when she once touched on Evan's.

Love her? Love Rose? It became an endless carol with Evan. Caroline sighed for him from her heart.

'You know--you understand me; don't you?' he said, after a breathless excursion of his fancy.

'I believe you love her, dear. I think I have never loved any one but my one brother.'

His love for Rose he could pour out to Caroline; when it came to Rose's love for him his blood thickened, and his tongue felt guilty. He must speak to her, he said,--tell her all.

'Yes, tell her all,' echoed Caroline. 'Do, do tell her. Trust a woman utterly if she loves you, dear. Go to her instantly.'

'Could you bear it?' said Evan. He began to think it was for the sake of his sisters that he had hesitated.

'Bear it? bear anything rather than perpetual imposture. What have I not borne? Tell her, and then, if she is cold to you, let us go. Let us go. I shall be glad to. Ah, Van! I love you so.' Caroline's voice deepened. 'I love you so, my dear. You won't let your new love drive me out? Shall you always love me?'

Of that she might be sure, whatever happened.

'Should you love me, Van, if evil befel me?'

Thrice as well, he swore to her.

'But if I--if I, Van Oh! my life is intolerable! Supposing I should ever disgrace you in any way, and not turn out all you fancied me. I am very weak and unhappy.'

Evan kissed her confidently, with a warm smile. He said a few words of the great faith he had in her: words that were bitter comfort to Caroline. This brother, who might save her, to him she dared not speak. Did she wish to be saved? She only knew that to wound Evan's sense of honour and the high and chivalrous veneration for her sex and pride in himself and those of his blood, would be wicked and unpardonable, and that no earthly pleasure could drown it. Thinking this, with her hands joined in pale dejection, Caroline sat silent, and Evan left her to lay bare his heart to Rose. On his way to find Rose he was stopped by the announcement of the arrival of Mr. Raikes, who thrust a bundle of notes into his hand, and after speaking loudly of 'his curricle,' retired on important business, as he said, with a mysterious air. 'I'm beaten in many things, but not in the article Luck,' he remarked; 'you will hear of me, though hardly as a tutor in this academy.'

Scanning the bundle of notes, without a reflection beyond the thought that money was in his hand; and wondering at the apparition of the curricle, Evan was joined by Harry Jocelyn, and Harry linked his arm in Evan's and plunged with extraordinary spontaneity and candour into the state of his money affairs. What the deuce he was to do for money he did not know. From the impressive manner in which he put it, it appeared to be one of Nature's great problems that the whole human race were bound to set their heads together to solve. A hundred pounds--Harry wanted no more, and he could not get it. His uncles? they were as poor as rats; and all the spare money they could club was going for Mel's Election expenses. A hundred and fifty was what Harry really wanted; but he could do with a hundred. Ferdinand, who had plenty, would not even lend him

fifty. Ferdinand had dared to hint at a debt already unsettled, and he called himself a gentleman!

'You wouldn't speak of money-matters now, would you, Harrington?'

'I dislike the subject, I confess,' said Evan.

'And so do I' Harry jumped at the perfect similarity between them. 'You can't think how it bothers one to have to talk about it. You and I are tremendously alike.'

Evan might naturally suppose that a subject Harry detested, he would not continue, but for a whole hour Harry turned it over and over with grim glances at Jewry.

'You see,' he wound up, 'I'm in a fix. I want to help that poor girl, and one or two things--'

'It 's for that you want it?' cried Evan, brightening to him. 'Accept it from me.'

It is a thing familiar to the experience of money-borrowers, that your 'last chance' is the man who is to accommodate you; but we are always astonished, nevertheless; and Harry was, when notes to the amount of the largest sum named by him were placed in his hand by one whom he looked upon as the last to lend.

'What a trump you are, Harrington!' was all he could say; and then he was for hurrying Evan into the house, to find pen and paper, and write down a memorandum of the loan: but Evan insisted upon sparing him the trouble, though Harry, with the admirable scruples of an inveterate borrower, begged hard to be allowed to bind himself legally to repay the money.

'Pon my soul, Harrington, you make me remember I once doubted whether you were one of us--rather your own fault, you know!' said Harry. 'Bury that, won't you?'

'Till your doubts recur,' Evan observed; and Harry burst out, 'Gad, if you weren't such a melancholy beggar, you'd be the jolliest fellow I know! There, go after Rosey. Dashed if I don't think you're ahead of Ferdinand, long chalks. Your style does for girls. I like women.'

With a chuckle and a wink, Harry swung-off. Evan had now to reflect that he had just thrown away part of the price of his bondage to Tailor-dom; the mention of Rose filled his mind. Where was she? Both were seeking one another. Rose was in the cypress walk. He saw the star-like figure up the length of it, between the swelling tall dark pillars, and was hurrying to her, resolute not to let one minute of deception blacken further the soul that loved so true a soul. She saw him, and stood smiling, when the Countess issued, shadow-like, from a side path, and declared that she must claim her brother for a few instants. Would her sweet Rose pardon her? Rose bowed coolly. The hearts of the lovers were chilled, not that they perceived any malice in the Countess, but their

keen instincts felt an evil fate.

The Countess had but to tell Evan that she had met the insolvent in apples, and recognized him under his change of fortune, and had no doubt that at least he would amuse the company. Then she asked her brother the superfluous question, whether he loved her, which Evan answered satisfactorily enough, as he thought; but practical ladies require proofs.

'Quick,' said Evan, seeing Rose vanish, 'what do you want? I'll do anything.'

'Anything? Ah, but this will be disagreeable to you.'

'Name it at once. I promise beforehand.'

The Countess wanted Evan to ask Andrew to be the very best brother-in-law in the world, and win, unknown to himself, her cheerful thanks, by lending Evan to lend to her the sum of one hundred pounds, as she was in absolute distress for money.

'Really, Louisa, this is a thing you might ask him yourself,' Evan remonstrated.

'It would not become me to do so, dear,' said the Countess, demurely; and inasmuch as she had already drawn on Andrew in her own person pretty largely, her views of propriety were correct in this instance.

Evan had to consent before he could be released. He ran to the end of the walk through the portal, into the park. Rose was not to be seen. She had gone in to dress for dinner. The opportunity might recur, but would his courage come with it? His courage had sunk on a sudden; or it may have been that it was worst for this young man to ask for a loan of money, than to tell his beloved that he was basely born, vile, and unworthy, and had snared her into loving him; for when he and Andrew were together, money was not alluded to. Andrew, however, betrayed remarkable discomposure. He said plainly that he wanted to leave Beckley Court, and wondered why he didn't leave, and whether he was on his head or his feet, and how he had been such a fool as to come.

'Do you mean that for me?' said sensitive Evan.

'Oh, you! You're a young buck,' returned Andrew, evasively.

'We common-place business men-we 're out of our element; and there's poor Carry can't sit down to their dinners without an upset. I thank God I'm a Radical, Van; one man's the same as another to me, how he's born, as long as he's honest and agreeable. But a chap like that George Uplift to look down on anybody! 'Gad, I've a good mind to bring in a Bill for the Abolition of the Squirearchy.'

Ultimately, Andrew somehow contrived to stick a hint or two about the terrible dinner in Evan's quivering flesh. He did it as delicately as possible, half begging pardon, and perspiring profusely. Evan grasped

his hand, and thanked him. Caroline's illness was now explained to him.

'I'll take Caroline with me to-morrow,' he said. 'Louisa wishes to stay --there 's a pic-nic. Will you look to her, and bring her with you?'

'My dear Van,' replied Andrew, 'stop with Louisa? Now, in confidence, it's as bad as a couple of wives; no disrespect to my excellent good Harry at home; but Louisa--I don't know how it is--but Louisa, you lose your head, you're in a whirl, you're an automaton, a teetotum! I haven't a notion of what I've been doing or saying since I came here. My belief is, I've been lying right and left. I shall be found out to a certainty: Oh! if she's made her mind up for the pic-nic, somebody must stop. I can only tell you, Van, it's one perpetual vapour-bath to me. There 'll be room for two in my trousers when I get back. I shall have to get the tailor to take them in a full half.'

Here occurred an opening for one of those acrid pleasantries which console us when there is horrid warfare within.

'You must give me the work,' said Evan, partly pleased with his hated self for being able to jest on the subject, as a piece of preliminary self-conquest.

'Aha!' went Andrew, as if the joke were too good to be dwelt on; 'Hem'; and by way of diverting from it cleverly and naturally, he remarked that the weather was fine. This made Evan allude to his letter written from Lympport, upon which Andrew said: 'tush! pish! humbug! nonsense! won't hear a word. Don't know anything about it. Van, you're going to be a brewer. I say you are. You're afraid you can't? I tell you, sir, I've got a bet on it. You're not going to make me lose, are you--eh? I have, and a stiff bet, too. You must and shall, so there's an end. Only we can't make arrangements just yet, my boy. Old Tom--very good old fellow --but, you know--must get old Tom out of the way, first. Now go and dress for dinner. And Lord preserve us from the Great Mel to-day!' Andrew mumbled as he turned away.

Evan could not reach his chamber without being waylaid by the Countess. Had he remembered the sister who sacrificed so much for him? 'There, there!' cried Evan, and her hand closed on the delicious golden whispers of bank-notes. And, 'Oh, generous Andrew! dear good Evan!' were the exclamations of the gratified lady.

There remained nearly another hundred. Evan laid out the notes, and eyed them while dressing. They seemed to say to him, 'We have you now.' He was clutched by a beneficent or a most malignant magician. The former seemed due to him, considering the cloud on his fortunes. This enigma might mean, that by submitting to a temporary humiliation, for a trial of him--in fact, by his acknowledgement of the fact, loathed though it was, --he won a secret overlooker's esteem, gained a powerful ally. Here was the proof, he held the proof. He had read Arabian Tales and could believe in marvels; especially could he believe in the friendliness of a magical thing that astounded without hurting him.

He, sat down in his room at night and wrote a fairly manful letter to Rose; and it is to be said of the wretch he then saw himself, that he pardoned her for turning from so vile a pretender. He heard a step in the passage. It was Polly Wheedle. Polly had put her young mistress to bed, and was retiring to her own slumbers. He made her take the letter and promise to deliver it immediately. Would not to-morrow morning do, she asked, as Miss Rose was very sleepy. He seemed to hesitate--he was picturing how Rose looked when very sleepy. Why should he surrender this darling? And subtler question--why should he make her unhappy? Why disturb her at all in her sweet sleep?

'Well,' said Evan. 'To-morrow will do.--No, take it to-night, for God's sake!' he cried, as one who bursts the spell of an opiate. 'Go at once.' The temptation had almost overcome him.

Polly thought his proceedings queer. And what could the letter contain? A declaration, of course. She walked slowly along the passage, meditating on love, and remotely on its slave, Mr. Nicholas Frim. Nicholas had never written her a letter; but she was determined that he should, some day. She wondered what love-letters were like? Like valentines without the Cupids. Practical valentines, one might say. Not vapoury and wild, but hot and to the point. Delightful things! No harm in peeping at a love-letter, if you do it with the eye of a friend.

Polly spelt just a word when a door opened at her elbow. She dropped her candle and curtsied to the Countess's voice. The Countess desired her to enter, and all in a tremble Polly crept in. Her air of guilt made the Countess thrill. She had merely called her in to extract daily gossip. The corner of the letter sticking up under Polly's neck attracted her strangely, and beginning with the familiar, 'Well, child,' she talked of things interesting to Polly, and then exhibited the pic-nic dress. It was a lovely half-mourning; airy sorrows, gauzy griefs, you might imagine to constitute the wearer. White delicately striped, exquisitely trimmed, and of a stuff to make the feminine mouth water!

Could Polly refuse to try it on, when the flattering proposal met her ears? Blushing, shame-faced, adoring the lady who made her look adorable, Polly tried it on, and the Countess complimented her, and made a doll of her, and turned her this way and that way, and intoxicated her.

'A rich husband, Polly, child! and you are a lady ready made.'

Infamous poison to poor Polly; but as the thunder destroys small insects, exalted schemers are to be excused for riding down their few thousands. Moreover, the Countess really looked upon domestics as being only half-souls.

Dressed in her own attire again, Polly felt in her pockets, and at her bosom, and sang out: 'Oh, my--Oh, where! Oh!'

The letter was lost. The letter could not be found. The Countess grew extremely fatigued, and had to dismiss Polly, in spite of her eager petitions to be allowed to search under the carpets and inside the bed.

In the morning came Evan's great trial. There stood Rose. She turned to him, and her eyes were happy and unclouded.

'You are not changed?' he said.

'Changed? what could change me?'

The God of true hearts bless her! He could hardly believe it.

'You are the Rose I knew yesterday?'

'Yes, Evan. But you--you look as if you had not slept.'

'You will not leave me this morning, before I go, Rose? Oh, my darling! this that you do for me is the work of an angel--nothing less! I have been a coward. And my beloved! to feel vile is agony to me--it makes me feel unworthy of the hand I press. Now all is clear between us. I go: I am forgiven.'

Rose repeated his last words, and then added hurriedly:

'All is clear between us? Shall I speak to Mama this morning? Dear Evan! it will be right that I should.'

For the moment he could not understand why, but supposing a scrupulous honesty in her, said: 'Yes, tell Lady Jocelyn all.'

'And then, Evan, you will never need to go.'

They separated. The deep-toned sentence sang in Evan's heart. Rose and her mother were of one stamp. And Rose might speak for her mother. To take the hands of such a pair and be lifted out of the slough, he thought no shame: and all through the hours of the morning the image of two angels stooping to touch a leper, pressed on his brain like a reality, and went divinely through his blood.

Toward mid-day Rose beckoned to him, and led him out across the lawn into the park, and along the borders of the stream.

'Evan,' she said, 'shall I really speak to Mama?'

'You have not yet?' he answered.

'No. I have been with Juliana and with Drummond. Look at this, Evan.' She showed a small black speck in the palm of her hand, which turned out, on your viewing it closely, to be a brand of the letter L. 'Mama did that when I was a little girl, because I told lies. I never could distinguish between truth and falsehood; and Mama set that mark on me, and I have never told a lie since. She forgives anything but that. She will be our friend; she will never forsake us, Evan, if we do not deceive her. Oh, Evan! it never is of any use. But deceive her, and she cannot forgive you. It is not in her nature.'

Evan paused before he replied: 'You have only to tell her what I have told you. You know everything.'

Rose gave him a flying look of pain: 'Everything, Evan? What do I know?'

'Ah, Rose! do you compel me to repeat it?'

Bewildered, Rose thought: 'Have I slept and forgotten it?'

He saw the persistent grieved interrogation of her eyebrows.

'Well!' she sighed resignedly: 'I am yours; you know that, Evan.'

But he was a lover, and quarrelled with her sigh.

'It may well make you sad now, Rose.'

'Sad? no, that does not make me sad. No; but my hands are tied. I cannot defend you or justify myself; and induce Mama to stand by us. Oh, Evan! you love me! why can you not open your heart to me entirely, and trust me?'

'More?' cried Evan: 'Can I trust you more?' He spoke of the letter: Rose caught his hand.

'I never had it, Evan. You wrote it last night? and all was written in it? I never saw it--but I know all.'

Their eyes fronted. The gates of Rose's were wide open, and he saw no hurtful beasts or lurking snakes in the happy garden within, but Love, like a fixed star.

'Then you know why I must leave, Rose.'

'Leave? Leave me? On the contrary, you must stay by me, and support me. Why, Evan, we have to fight a battle.'

Much as he worshipped her, this intrepid directness of soul startled him--almost humbled him. And her eyes shone with a firm cheerful light, as she exclaimed: 'It makes me so happy to think you were the first to mention this. You meant to be, and that's the same thing. I heard it this morning: you wrote it last night. It's you I love, Evan. Your birth, and what you were obliged to do--that's nothing. Of course I'm sorry for it, dear. But I'm more sorry for the pain I must have sometimes put you to. It happened through my mother's father being a merchant; and that side of the family the men and women are quite sordid and unendurable; and that's how it came that I spoke of disliking tradesmen. I little thought I should ever love one sprung from that class.'

She turned to him tenderly.

'And in spite of what my birth is, you love me, Rose?'

'There's no spite in it, Evan. I do.'

Hard for him, while his heart was melting to caress her, the thought that he had snared this bird of heaven in a net! Rose gave him no time for reflection, or the moony imagining of their raptures lovers love to dwell upon.

'You gave the letter to Polly, of course?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, naughty Polly! I must punish you,' Rose apostrophized her. 'You might have divided us for ever. Well, we shall have to fight a battle, you understand that. Will you stand by me?'

Would he not risk his soul for her?

'Very well, Evan. Then--but don't be sensitive. Oh, how sensitive you are! I see it all now. This is what we shall have to do. We shall have to speak to Mama to-day--this morning. Drummond has told me he is going to speak to her, and we must be first. That 's decided. I begged a couple of hours. You must not be offended with Drummond. He does it out of pure affection for us, and I can see he's right--or, at least, not quite wrong. He ought, I think, to know that he cannot change me. Very well, we shall win Mama by what we do. My mother has ten times my wits, and yet I manage her like a feather. I have only to be honest and straightforward. Then Mama will gain over Papa. Papa, of course, won't like it. He's quiet and easy, but he likes blood, but he also likes peace better; and I think he loves Rosey--as well as somebody--almost? Look, dear, there is our seat where we--where you would rob me of my handkerchief. I can't talk any more.'

Rose had suddenly fallen from her prattle, soft and short-breathed.

'Then, dear,' she went on, 'we shall have to fight the family. Aunt Shorne will be terrible. My poor uncles! I pity them. But they will come round. They always have thought what I did was right, and why should they change their minds now? I shall tell them that at their time of life a change of any kind is very unwise and bad for them. Then there is Grandmama Bonner. She can hurt us really, if she pleases. Oh, my dear Evan! if you had only been a curate! Why isn't your name Parsley? Then my Grandmama the Countess of Elburne. Well, we have a Countess on our side, haven't we? And that reminds me, Evan, if we're to be happy and succeed, you must promise one thing: you will not tell the Countess, your sister. Don't confide this to her. Will you promise?'

Evan assured her he was not in the habit of pouring secrets into any bosom, the Countess's as little as another's.

'Very well, then, Evan, it's unpleasant while it lasts, but we shall gain the day. Uncle Melville will give you an appointment, and then?'

'Yes, Rose,' he said, 'I will do this, though I don't think you can know what I shall have to endure--not in confessing what I am, but in feeling that I have brought you to my level.'

'Does it not raise me?' she cried.

He shook his head.

'But in reality, Evan--apart from mere appearances--in reality it does! it does!'

'Men will not think so, Rose, nor can I. Oh, my Rose! how different you make me. Up to this hour I have been so weak! torn two ways! You give me double strength.'

Then these lovers talked of distant days--compared their feelings on this and that occasion with mutual wonder and delight. Then the old hours lived anew. And--did you really think that, Evan? And--Oh, Rose! was that your dream? And the meaning of that by-gone look: was it what they fancied? And such and such a tone of voice; would it bear the wished interpretation? Thus does Love avenge himself on the unsatisfactory Past and call out its essence.

Could Evan do less than adore her? She knew all, and she loved him! Since he was too shy to allude more than once to his letter, it was natural that he should not ask her how she came to know, and how much the 'all' that she knew comprised. In his letter he had told all; the condition of his parents, and his own. Honestly, now, what with his dazzled state of mind, his deep inward happiness, and love's endless delusions, he abstained from touching the subject further. Honestly, therefore, as far as a lover can be honest.

So they toyed, and then Rose, setting her fingers loose, whispered: 'Are you ready?' And Evan nodded; and Rose, to make him think light of the matter in hand, laughed: 'Pluck not quite up yet?'

'Quite, my Rose!' said Evan, and they walked to the house, not quite knowing what they were going to do.

On the steps they met Drummond with Mrs. Evremonde. Little imagining how heart and heart the two had grown, and that Evan would understand him, Drummond called to Rose playfully: 'Time's up.'

'Is it?' Rose answered, and to Mrs. Evremonde

'Give Drummond a walk. Poor Drummond is going silly.'

Evan looked into his eyes calmly as he passed.

'Where are you going, Rose?' said Mrs. Evremonde.

'Going to give my maid Polly a whipping for losing a letter she ought to

have delivered to me last night,' said Rose, in a loud voice, looking at Drummond. 'And then going to Mama. Pleasure first--duty after. Isn't that the proverb, Drummond?'

She kissed her fingers rather scornfully to her old friend.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Admirable scruples of an inveterate borrower
An obedient creature enough where he must be
Bound to assure everybody at table he was perfectly happy
Confident serenity inspired by evil prognostications
Enamoured young men have these notions
Gossip always has some solid foundation, however small
He kept saying to himself, 'to-morrow I will tell'
I always wait for a thing to happen first
I never see anything, my dear
Love is a contagious disease
Never to despise the good opinion of the nonentities
One seed of a piece of folly will lurk and sprout to confound us
Secrets throw on the outsiders the onus of raising a scandal
She did not detest the Countess because she could not like her
Thus does Love avenge himself on the unsatisfactory Past
Touching a nerve
Unfeminine of any woman to speak continuously anywhere
Vulgarity in others evoked vulgarity in her

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