Lord Ormont and His Aminta — Volume 4 eBook

Lord Ormont and His Aminta — Volume 4 by George Meredith

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BOOK 4.

CHAPTER XVII

LADY CHARLOTTE'S TRIUMPH

One of the days of sovereign splendour in England was riding down the heavens, and drawing the royal mantle of the gold-fringed shadows over plain and wavy turf, blue water and woods of the country round Steignton. A white mansion shone to a length of oblong lake that held the sun-ball suffused in mild yellow.

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‘There’s the place,’ Lady Charlotte said to Weyburn, as they had view of it at a turn of the park. She said to herself—where I was born and bred! and her sight gloated momentarily on the house and side avenues, a great plane standing to the right of the house, the sparkle of a little river running near; all the scenes she knew, all young and lively. She sprang on her seat for a horse beneath her, and said, ’But this is healthy excitement,’ as in reply to her London physician’s remonstrances. ‘And there’s my brother Rowsley, talking to one of the keepers,’ she cried. ’You see Lord Ormont? I can see a mile. Sight doesn’t fail with me. He ’s insisting. ’Ware poachers when Rowsley’s on his ground! You smell the air here? Nobody dies round about Steignton. Their legs wear out and they lie down to rest them. It ’s the finest air in the world. Now look, the third window left of the porch, first floor. That was my room before I married. Strangers have been here and called the place home. It can never be home to any but me and Rowsley. He sees the carriage. He little thinks! He’s dressed in his white corduroy and knee-breeches. Age! he won’t know age till he’s ninety. Here he comes marching. He can’t bear surprises. I’ll wave my hand and call.’

She called his name.

In a few strides he was at the carriage window. ‘You, Charlotte?’

’Home again, Rowsley! Bring down your eyebrows, and let me hear you’re glad I ‘ve come.’

‘What made you expect you would find me here?’

’Anything-cats on the tiles at night. You can’t keep a secret from me. Here’s Mr. Weyburn, good enough to be my escort. I ‘ll get out.’

She alighted, scorning help; Weyburn at her heels. The earl nodded to him politely and not cordially. He was hardly cordial to Lady Charlotte.

That had no effect on her. ‘A glorious day for Steignton,’ she said. ’Ah, there’s the Buridon group of beeches; grander trees than grow at Buridon. Old timber now. I knew them slim as demoiselles. Where ’s the ash? We had a splendid ash on the west side.’

‘Dead and cut down long since,’ replied the earl.

‘So we go!’

She bent her steps to the spot: a grass-covered heave of the soil.

‘Dear old tree!’ she said, in a music of elegy: and to Weyburn: ’Looks like a stump of an arm lopped off a shoulder in bandages. Nature does it so. All the tenants doing well, Rowsley?’

‘About the same amount of trouble with them.’

‘Ours at Olmer get worse.’

‘It’s a process for the extirpation of the landlords.’

‘Then down goes the country.’

’They ‘ve got their case, their papers tell us.’

’I know they have; but we’ve got the soil, and we’ll make a, fight of it.’

‘They can fight too, they say.’

‘I should be sorry to think they couldn’t if they’re Englishmen.’

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She spoke so like his old Charlotte of the younger days that her brother partly laughed.

’Parliamentary fighting ’s not much to your taste or mine. They ’ve lost their stomach for any other. The battle they enjoy is the battle that goes for the majority. Gauge their valour by that.’

‘To be sure,’ said his responsive sister. She changed her note. ’But what I say is, let the nobles keep together and stick to their class. There’s nothing to fear then. They must marry among themselves, think of the blood: it’s their first duty. Or better a peasant girl! Middle courses dilute it to the stuff in a publican’s tankard. It ’s an adulterous beast who thinks of mixing old wine with anything.’

‘Hulloa!’ said the earl; and she drew up.

’You’ll have me here till over to-morrow, Rowsley, so that I may have one clear day at Steignton?’

He bowed. ‘You will choose your room. Mr. Weyburn is welcome.’

Weyburn stated the purport of his visit, and was allowed to name an early day for the end of his term of service.

Entering the house, Lady Charlotte glanced at the armour and stag branches decorating corners of the hall, and straightway laid her head forward, pushing after it in the direction of the drawing room. She went in, stood for a minute, and came out. Her mouth was hard shut.

At dinner she had tales of uxorious men, of men who married mistresses, of the fearful incubus the vulgar family of a woman of the inferior classes ever must be; and her animadversions were strong in the matter of gew-gaw modern furniture. The earl submitted to hear.

She was, however, keenly attentive whenever he proffered any item of information touching Steignton. After dinner Weyburn strolled to the points of view she cited as excellent for different aspects of her old home.

He found her waiting to hear his laudation when he came back; and in the early morning she was on the terrace, impatient to lead him down to the lake. There, at the boat-house, she commanded him to loosen a skiff and give her a paddle. Between exclamations, designed to waken louder from him, and not so successful as her cormorant hunger for praise of Steignton required, she plied him to confirm with his opinion an opinion that her reasoning mind had almost formed in the close neighbourhood of the beloved and honoured person providing it; for abstract ideas were unknown to her. She put it, however, as in the abstract:—

’How is it we meet people brave as lions before an enemy, and rank cowards where there’s a botheration among their friends at home? And tell me, too, if you’ve thought the thing over, what’s the meaning of this? I ’ve met men in high places, and they’ve risen to distinction by their own efforts, and they head the nation. Right enough, you’d say. Well, I talk with them, and I find they’ve left their brains on the ladder that led them up; they’ve only

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the ideas of their grandfather on general subjects. I come across a common peasant or craftsman, and he down there has a mind more open—he's wiser in his intelligence than his rulers and lawgivers up above him. He understands what I say, and I learn from him. I don't learn much from our senators, or great lawyers, great doctors, professors, members of governing bodies—that lot. Policy seems to petrify their minds when they 've got on an eminence. Now explain it, if you can.'

'Responsibility has a certain effect on them, no doubt,' said Weyburn. 'Eminent station among men doesn't give a larger outlook. Most of them confine their observation to their supports. It happens to be one of the questions I have thought over. Here in England, and particularly on a fortnight's run in the lowlands of Scotland once, I have, like you, my lady, come now and then across the people we call common, men and women, old wayside men especially; slow-minded, but hard in their grasp of facts, and ready to learn, and logical, large in their ideas, though going a roundabout way to express them. They were at the bottom of wisdom, for they had in their heads the delicate sense of justice, upon which wisdom is founded. That is what their rulers lack. Unless we have the sense of justice abroad like a common air, there 's no peace, and no steady advance. But these humble people had it. They reasoned from it, and came to sound conclusions. I felt them to be my superiors. On the other hand, I have not felt the same with "our senators, rulers, and lawgivers." They are for the most part deficient in the liberal mind.'

'Ha! good, so far. How do you account for it?' said Lady Charlotte.

'I read it in this way: that the world being such as it is at present, demanding and rewarding with honours and pay special services, the men called great, who have risen to distinction, are not men of brains, but the men of aptitudes. These men of aptitudes have a poor conception of the facts of life to meet the necessities of modern expansion. They are serviceable in departments. They go as they are driven, or they resist. In either case, they explain how it is that we have a world moving so sluggishly. They are not the men of brains, the men of insight and outlook. Often enough they are foes of the men of brains.'

'Aptitudes; yes, that flashes a light into me,' said Lady Charlotte. 'I see it better. It helps to some comprehension of their muddle. A man may be a first-rate soldier, doctor, banker—as we call the usurer now-a -days——or brewer, orator, anything that leads up to a figure-head, and prove a foolish fellow if you sound him. I 've thought something like it, but wanted the word. They say themselves, "Get to know, and you see with what little wisdom the world is governed!" You explain how it is. I shall carry "aptitudes" away.'

She looked straight at Weyburn. 'If I were a younger woman I could kiss you for it.'

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He bowed to her very gratefully.

’Remember, my lady, there’s a good deal of the Reformer in that definition.’

’I stick to my class. But they shall hear a true word when there’s one abroad, I can tell them. That reminds me——you ought to have asked; let me tell you I’m friendly with the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey. We had a wrestle for half an hour, and I threw him and helped him up, and he apologized for tumbling, and I subscribed to one of his charities, and gave up about the pew, but had an excuse for not sitting under the sermon. A poor good creature. He ’s got the aptitudes for his office. He won’t do much to save his Church. I knew another who had his aptitude for the classics, and he has mounted. He was my tutor when I was a girl. He was fond of declaiming passages from Lucian and Longus and Ovid. One day he was at it with a piece out of Daphnis and Chloe, and I said, “Now translate.” He fetched a gurgle to say he couldn’t, and I slapped his check. Will you believe it? the man was indignant. I told him, if he would like to know why I behaved in “that unmaidenly way,” he had better apply at home. I had no further intimations of his classical aptitudes; but he took me for a cleverer pupil than I was. I hadn’t a notion of the stuff he recited. I read by his face. That was my aptitude—always has been. But think of the donkeys parents are when they let a man have a chance of pouring his barley-sugar and sulphur into the ears of a girl. Lots of girls have no latent heckles and prickles to match his villany. —There’s my brother come back to breakfast from a round. You and I ’ll have a drive before lunch, and a ride or a stroll in the afternoon. There’s a lot to see. I mean you to get the whole place into your head. I ’ve ordered the phaeton, and you shall take the whip, with me beside you. That’s how my husband and I spent three-quarters of our honeymoon.’

Each of the three breakfasted alone.

They met on the terrace. It was easily perceived that Lord Ormont stood expecting an assault at any instant; prepared also to encounter and do battle with his redoubtable sister. Only he wished to defer the engagement. And he was magnanimous: he was in the right, she in the wrong; he had no desire to grapple with her, fling and humiliate. The Sphinx of Mrs. Pagnell had been communing with himself unwontedly during the recent weeks.

What was the riddle of him? That, he did not read. But, expecting an assault, and relieved by his sister Charlotte’s departure with Weyburn, he went to the drawing-room, where he had seen her sniff her strong suspicions of a lady coming to throne it. Charlotte could believe that he flouted the world with a beautiful young woman on his arm; she would not believe him capable of doing that in his family home and native county; so, then, her shrewd wits had nothing or little to learn. But her vehement fighting against facts; her obstinate aristocratic prejudices, which he shared; her stinger of a tongue: these in ebullition formed a discomforting prospect. The battle might as well be conducted through the post. Come it must!

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Even her writing of the pointed truths she would deliver was an unpleasant anticipation. His ears heated. Undoubtedly he could crush her. Yet, supposing her to speak to his ears, she would say: ’You married a young woman, and have been foiling and fooling her ever since, giving her half a title to the name of wife, and allowing her in consequence to be wholly disfigured before the world—your family naturally her chief enemies, who would otherwise (Charlotte would proclaim it) have been her friends. What! your intention was (one could hear Charlotte’s voice) to smack the world in the face, and you smacked your young wife’s instead!’

His intention had been nothing of the sort. He had married, in a foreign city, a young woman who adored him, whose features, manners, and carriage of her person satisfied his exacting taste in the sex; and he had intended to cast gossipy England over the rail and be a traveller for the remainder of his days. And at the first she had acquiesced, tacitly accepted it as part of the contract. He bore with the burden of an intolerable aunt of hers for her sake. The two fell to work to conspire. Aminta ‘tired of travelling,’ Aminta must have a London house. She continually expressed a hope that ’she might set her eyes on Steignton some early day.’ In fact, she as good as confessed her scheme to plot for the acknowledged position of Countess of Ormont in the English social world. That was a distinct breach of the contract.

As to the babble of the London world about a ‘very young wife,’ he scorned it completely, but it belonged to the calculation. ’A very handsome young wife,’ would lay commands on a sexagenarian vigilance while adding to his physical glory. The latter he could forego among a people he despised. It would, however, be an annoyance to stand constantly hand upon sword-hilt. There was, besides, the conflict with his redoubtable sister. He had no dread of it, in contemplation of the necessity; he could crush his Charlotte. The objection was, that his Aminta should be pressing him to do it. Examine the situation at present. Aminta has all she needs—every luxury. Her title as Countess of Ormont is not denied. Her husband justly refuses to put foot into English society. She, choosing to go where she may be received, dissociates herself from him, and he does not complain. She does complain. There is a difference between the two.

He had always shunned the closer yoke with a woman because of these vexatious dissensions. For not only are women incapable of practising, they cannot comprehend magnanimity.

Lord Ormont’s argumentative reverie to the above effect had been pursued over and over. He knew that the country which broke his military career and ridiculed his newspaper controversy was unforgiven by him. He did not reflect on the consequences of such an unpardoning spirit in its operation on his mind.

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If he could but have passed the injury, he would ultimately—for his claims of service were admitted—have had employment of some kind. Inoccupation was poison to him; travel juggled with his malady of restlessness; really, a compression of the warrior's natural forces. His Aminta, pushed to it by the woman Pagnell, declined to help him in softening the virulence of the disease. She would not travel; she would fix in this London of theirs, and scheme to be hailed the accepted Countess of Ormont. She manoeuvred; she threw him on the veteran soldier's instinct, and it resulted spontaneously that he manoeuvred.

Hence their game of Pull, which occupied him a little, tickled him and amused. The watching of her pretty infantile tactics amused him too much to permit of a sidethought on the cruelty of the part he played. She had every luxury, more than her station by right of birth would have supplied.

But he was astonished to find that his Aminta proved herself clever, though she had now and then said something pointed. She was in awe of him: notwithstanding which, clearly she meant to win and pull him over. He did not dislike her for it; she might use her weapons to play her game; and that she should bewitch men—a, man like Morsfield —was not wonderful. On the other hand, her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley scored tellingly: that was unaccountably queer. What did Mrs. Lawrence expect to gain? the sage lord asked. He had not known women devoid of a positive practical object of their own when they bestirred themselves to do a friendly deed.

Thanks to her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence, his Aminta was gaining ground —daily she made an advance; insomuch that he had heard of himself as harshly blamed in London for not having countenanced her recent and rather imprudent move. In other words, whenever she gave a violent tug at their game of Pull, he was expected to second it. But the world of these English is too monstrously stupid in what it expects, for any of its extravagances to be followed by interjections.

All the while he was trimming and rolling a field of armistice at Steignton, where they could discuss the terms he had a right to dictate, having yielded so far. Would she be satisfied with the rule of his ancestral hall, and the dispensing of hospitalities to the county? No, one may guess: no woman is ever satisfied. But she would have to relinquish her game, counting her good round half of the honours. Somewhat more, on the whole. Without beating, she certainly had accomplished the miracle of bending him. To time and a wife it is no disgrace for a man to bend. It is the form of submission of the bulrush to the wind, of courtesy in the cavalier to a lady.

'Oh, here you are, Rowsley,' Lady Charlotte exclaimed at the drawing room door. 'Well, and I don't like those Louis Quinze cabinets; and that modern French mantelpiece clock is hideous. You seem to furnish in downright contempt of the women you invite to sit in the room. Lord help the wretched woman playing hostess in such a pinchbeck bric-a-brac shop, if there were one! She 's spared, at all events.'

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He stepped at slow march to one of the five windows. Lady Charlotte went to another near by. She called to Weyburn—

'We had a regatta on that water when Lord Ormont came of age. I took an oar in one of the boats, and we won a prize; and when I was landing I didn't stride enough to the spring-plank, and plumped in.'

Some labourers of the estate passed in front.

Lord Ormont gave out a broken laugh. 'See those fellows walk! That 's the raw material of the famous English infantry. They bend their knees five-and-forty degrees for every stride; and when you drill them out of that, they 're stiff as ramrods. I gymnasticized them in my regiment. I'd have challenged any French regiment to out-walk or out-jump us, or any crack Tyrolese Jagers to out-climb, though we were cavalry.'

'Yes, my lord, and exercised crack corps are wanted with us,' Weyburn replied. 'The English authorities are adverse to it, but it 's against nature—on the supposition that all Englishmen might enrol untrained in Caesar's pet legion. Virgil shows knowledge of men when he says of the row-boat straining in emulation, 'Possunt quia posse videntur.''

He talked on rapidly; he wondered that he did not hear Lady Charlotte exclaim at what she must be seeing. From the nearest avenue a lady had issued. She stood gazing at the house, erect—a gallant figure of a woman—one hand holding her parasol, the other at her hip. He knew her. She was a few paces ahead of Mrs. Pagnell, beside whom a gentleman walked.

The cry came: 'It's that man Morsfield! Who brings that man Morsfield here? He hunted me on the road; he seemed to be on the wrong scent. Who are those women? Rowsley, are your grounds open every day of the week? She threatens to come in!'

Lady Charlotte had noted that the foremost and younger of 'those women' understood how to walk and how to dress to her shape and colour. She inclined to think she was having to do with an intrepid foreign-bred minx.

Aminta had been addressed by one of her companions, and had hastened forward. It looked like the beginning of a run to enter the house.

Mrs. Pagnell ran after her. She ran cow-like.

The earl's gorge rose at the spectacle Charlotte was observing.

With Morsfield he could have settled accounts at any moment, despatching Aminta to her chamber for an hour. He had, though he was offended, an honourable guess that she had not of her free will travelled with the man and brought him into the grounds. It

was the presence of the intolerable Pagnell under Charlotte's eyes which irritated him beyond the common anger he felt at Aminta's pursuit of him right into Steignton. His mouth locked. Lady Charlotte needed no speech from him for sign of the boiling; she was too wary to speak while that went on.

He said to Weyburn, loud enough for his Charlotte to heir. 'Do me the favour to go to the Countess of Ormont. Conduct her back to London. You will say it is my command. Inform Mr. Morsfield, with my compliments, I regret I have no weapons here. I understand him to complain of having to wait. I shall be in town three days from this date.'

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‘My lord,’ said Mr. Weyburn; and actually he did mean to supplicate. He could imagine seeing Lord Ormont’s eyebrows rising to alpine heights.

Lady Charlotte seized his arm.

’Go at once. Do as you are told. I’ll have your portmanteau packed and sent after you —the phaeton’s out in the yard—to Rowsley, or Ashead, or Dornton, wherever they put up. Now go, or we shall have hot work. Keep your head on, and go.’

He went, without bowing.

Lady Charlotte rang for the footman.

The earl and she watched the scene on the sward below the terrace.

Aminta listened to Weyburn. Evidently there was no expostulation.

But it was otherwise with Mrs. Pagnell. She flung wild arms of a semaphore signalling national events. She sprang before Aminta to stop her retreat, and stamped and gibbed, for sign that she would not be driven. She fell away to Mr. Morsfield, for simple hearing of her plaint. He appeared emphatic. There was a passage between him and Weyburn.

‘I suspect you’ve more than your match in young Weyburn, Mr. Morsfield,’ Lady Charlotte said, measuring them as they stood together. They turned at last.

‘You shall drive back to town with me, Rowsley,’ said the fighting dame.

She breathed no hint of her triumph.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SCENE ON THE ROAD BACK

After refusing to quit the grounds of Steignton, in spite of the proprietor, Mrs. Pagnell burst into an agitation to have them be at speed, that they might ’shake the dust of the place from the soles of their feet’; and she hurried past Aminta and Lord Ormont’s insolent emissary, carrying Mr. Morsfield beside her, perforce of a series of imperiously-toned vacuous questions, to which he listened in rigid politeness, with the ejaculation steaming off from time to time, ’A scandal!’

He shot glances behind him.

Mrs. Pagnell was going too fast. She, however, world not hear of a halt, and she was his main apology for being present; he was excruciatingly attached to the horrid woman.

Weyburn spoke the commonplaces about regrets to Aminta.

‘Believe me, it’s long since I have been so happy,’ she said.

She had come out of her stupefaction, and she wore no theatrical looks of cheerfulness.

’I regret that you should be dragged away. But, if you say you do not mind, it will be pleasant to me. I can excuse Lord Ormont’s anger. I was ignorant of his presence here. I thought him in Paris. I supposed the place empty. I wished to see it once. I travelled as the niece of Mrs. Pagnell. She is a little infatuated. . . . Mr. Morsfield heard of our expedition through her. I changed the route. I was not in want of a defender. I could have defended myself in case of need. We slept at Ashead, two hours from Steignton. He and a friend accompanied us, not with my consent. Lord Ormont could not have been aware of that. These accidental circumstances happen. There may be pardonable intentions on all sides.’

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She smiled. Her looks were open, and her voice light and spirited; though the natural dark rose-glow was absent from her olive cheeks.

Weyburn puzzled over the mystery of so volatile a treatment of a serious matter, on the part of a woman whose feelings he had reason to know were quick and deep. She might be acting, as women so cleverly do.

It could hardly be acting when she pointed to peeps of scenery, with a just eye for landscape.

‘You leave us for Switzerland very soon?’ she said.

’The Reversion I have been expecting has fallen in, besides my inheritance. My mother was not to see the school. But I shall not forget her counsels. I can now make my purchase of the house and buildings, and buy out my partner at the end of a year. My boys are jumping to start. I had last week a letter from Emile.’

‘Dear little Emile!’

‘You like him?’

‘I could use a warmer word. He knew me when I was a girl.’

She wound the strings of his heart suddenly tense, and they sang to their quivering.

‘You will let me hear of you, Mr. Weyburn?’

’I will write. Oh! certainly I will write, if I am told you are interested in our doings, Lady Ormont.’

‘I will let you know that I am.’

‘I shall be happy in writing full reports.’

’Every detail, I beg. All concerning the school. Help me to feel I am a boarder. I catch up an old sympathy I had for girls and boys. For boys! any boys! the dear monkey boys! cherub monkeys! They are so funny. I am sure I never have laughed as I did at Selina Collett’s report, through her brother, of the way the boys tried to take to my name; and their sneezing at it, like a cat at a deceitful dish. “Aminta”—was that their way?’

‘Something—the young rascals!’

‘But please repeat it as you heard them.’

‘” Aminta."’

He subdued the mouthing.

’It didn’t, offend me at all. It is one of my amusements to think of it. But after a time they liked the name; and then how did they say it?’

He had the beloved Aminta on his lips.

He checked it, or the power to speak it failed. She drew in a sharp breath.

’I hope your boys will have plenty of fun in them. They will have you for a providence and a friend. I should wish to propose to visit your school some day. You will keep me informed whether the school has vacancies. You will, please, keep me regularly informed?’

She broke into sobs.

Weyburn talked on of the school, for a cover to the resuming of her fallen mask, as he fancied it.

She soon recovered, all save a steady voice for converse, and begged him to proceed, and spoke in the flow of the subject; but the quaver of her tones was a cause of further melting. The tears poured, she could not explain why, beyond assuring him that they were no sign of unhappiness. Winds on the great waters against a strong tidal current beat up the wave and shear and wing the spray, as in Aminta’s bosom. Only she could know that it was not her heart weeping, though she had grounds for a woman’s weeping. But she alone could be aware of her heart’s running counter to the tears.

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Her agitation was untimely. Both Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Morsfield observed emotion at work. And who could wonder? A wife denied the admittance to her husband's house by her husband! The most beautiful woman of her time relentlessly humiliated, ordered to journey back the way she had come.

They had reached the gate of the park, and had turned.

'A scandal!'

Mr. Morsfield renewed his interjection vehemently, for an apology to his politeness in breaking from Mrs. Pagnell.

Joining the lady, whose tears were of the nerves, he made offer of his devotion in any shape; and she was again in the plight to which a desperado can push a woman of the gentle kind. She had the fear of provoking a collision if she reminded him, that despite her entreaties, he had compelled her, seconded by her aunt as he had been, to submit to his absurd protection on the walk across the park.

He seemed quite regardless of the mischief he had created; and, reflecting upon how it served his purpose, he might well be. Intemperate lover, of the ancient pattern, that he was, his aim to win the woman acknowledged no obstacle in the means. Her pitiable position appealed to the best of him; his inordinate desire of her aroused the worst. It was, besides, an element of his coxcombry, that he should, in apeing the utterly inconsiderate, rush swiftly to impersonate it when his passions were cast on a die.

Weyburn he ignored as a stranger, an intruder, an inferior.

Aminta's chariot was at the gate.

She had to resign herself to the chances of a clash of men, and, as there were two to one, she requested help of Weyburn's hand, that he might be near her.

A mounted gentleman, smelling parasite in his bearing, held the bridle of Morsfield's horse.

The ladies having entered the chariot, Morsfield sprang to the saddle, and said: 'You, sir, had better stretch your legs to the inn.'

'There is room for you, Mr. Weyburn,' said Aminta.

Mrs. Pagnell puffed.

'I can't think we've room, my dear. I want that bit of seat in front for my feet.'

Morsfield kicked at his horse's flanks, and between Weyburn and the chariot step, cried: 'Back, sir!'

His reins were seized; the horse reared, the unexpected occurred.

Weyburn shouted 'Off!' to the postillion, and jumped in.

Morsfield was left to the shaking of a dusty coat, while the chariot rolled its gentle course down the leafy lane into the high-road.

His friend had seized the horse's bridle-reins; and he remarked: 'I say, Dolf, we don't prosper to-day.'

'He pays for it!' said Morsfield, foot in stirrup. 'You'll take him and trounce him at the inn. I don't fight with servants. Better game. One thing, Cumnock: the fellow's clever at the foils.'

'Foils to the devil! If I tackle the fellow, it won't be with the buttons. But how has he pushed in?'

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Morsfield reported ‘the scandal!’ in sharp headings.

’Turned her away. Won’t have her enter his house—grandest woman in all England! Sent his dog to guard. Think of it for an insult! It’s insult upon insult. I ’ve done my utmost to fire his marrow. I did myself a good turn by following her up and entering that park with her. I shall succeed; there ’s a look of it. All I have—my life—is that woman’s. I never knew what this devil’s torture was before I saw her.’

His friend was concerned for his veracity. ‘Amy!’

’A common spotted snake. She caught me young, and she didn’t carry me off, as I mean to carry off this glory of her sex—she is: you’ve seen her!—and free her, and devote every minute of the rest of my days to her. I say I must win the woman if I stop at nothing, or I perish; and if it ’s a failure, exit ’s my road. I ’ve watched every atom she touched in a room, and would have heaped gold to have the chairs, tables, cups, carpets, mine. I have two short letters written with her hand. I ’d give two of my estates for two more. If I were a beggar, and kept them, I should be rich. Relieve me of that dog, and I toss you a thousand-pound note, and thank you from my soul, Cumnock. You know what hangs on it. Spur, you dolt, or she’ll be out of sight.’

They cantered upon application of the spur. Captain Cumnock was an impecunious fearless rascal, therefore a parasite and a bully duellist; a thick-built north-countryman; a burly ape of the ultra-elegant; hunter, gamester, hard-drinker, man of pleasure. His known readiness to fight was his trump-card at a period when the declining custom of the duel taxed men’s courage to brave the law and the Puritan in the interests of a privileged and menaced aristocracy. An incident like the present was the passion in the dice-box to Cumnock. Morsfield was of the order of men who can be generous up to the pitch of their desires. Consequently, the world accounted him open-handed and devoted when enamoured. Few men liked him; he was a hero with some women. The women he trampled on; the men he despised. To the lady of his choice he sincerely offered his fortune and his life for the enjoyment of her favour. His ostentation and his offensive daring combined the characteristics of the peacock and the hawk. Always near upon madness, there were occasions when he could eclipse the insane. He had a ringing renown in his class.

Chariot and horsemen arrived at the Roebuck Arms, at the centre of the small town of Ashead, on the line from Steignton through Rowsley. The pair of cavaliers dismounted and hustled Weyburn in assisting the ladies to descend.

The ladies entered the inn; they declined refection of any sort. They had biscuits and sweetmeats, and looked forward to tea at a farther stage. Captain Cumnock stooped to their verdict on themselves, with marvel at the quantity of flesh they managed to put on their bones from such dieting.

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‘By your courtesy, sir, a word with you in the inn yard, if you please,’ he said to Weyburn in the inn-porch.

Weyburn answered, ‘Half a minute,’ and was informed that it was exactly the amount of time the captain could afford to wait.

Weyburn had seen the Steignton phaeton and coachman in the earl’s light-blue livery. It was at his orders, he heard. He told the coachman to expect hire shortly, and he followed the captain, with a heavy trifle of suspicion that some brew was at work. He said to Aminta in the passage—

’You have your settlement with the innkeeper. Don’t, I beg, step into the chariot till you see me.’

‘Anything?’ said she.

‘Only prudence.’

‘Our posting horses will be harnessed soon, I hope. I burn to get away.’

Mrs. Pagnell paid the bill at the bar of the inn. Morsfield poured out for the injured countess or no-countess a dram of the brandy of passion, under the breath.

’Deny that you singled me once for your esteem. Hardest-hearted of the women of earth and dearest! deny that you gave me reason to hope—and now! I have ridden in your track all this way for the sight of you, as you know, and you kill me with frost. Yes, I rejoice that we were seen together. Look on me. I swear I perish for one look of kindness. You have been shamefully used, madam.’

‘It seems to me I am being so,’ said Aminta, cutting herself loose from the man of the close eyes that wavered as they shot the dart.

Her action was too decided for him to follow her up under the observation of the inn windows and a staring street.

Mrs. Pagnell came out. She went boldly to Morsfield and they conferred. He was led by her to the chariot, where she pointed to a small padded slab of a seat back to the horses. Turning to the bar, he said:— My friend will look to my horse. Both want watering and a bucketful. There!’—he threw silver—’I have to protect the ladies.’

Aminta was at the chariot door talking to her aunt inside.

’But I say I have been insulted—is the word—more than enough by Lord Ormont to-day!’ Mrs. Pagnell exclaimed; ’and I won’t, I positively refuse to ride up to London with

any servant of his. It's quite sufficient that it's his servant. I'm not titled, but I 'in not quite dirt. Mr. Morsfield kindly offers his protection, and I accept. He is company.'

Nodding and smirking at Morsfield's approach, she entreated Aminta to step up and in, for the horses were coming out of the yard.

Aminta looked round. Weyburn was perceived; and Morsfield's features cramped at thought of a hitch in the plot.

'Possession,' Mrs. Pagnell murmured significantly. She patted the seat. Morsfield sprang to Weyburn's place.

That was witnessed by Aminta and Weyburn. She stepped to consult him. He said to the earl's coachman—a young fellow with a bright eye for orders—

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’Drive as fast as you can pelt for Dornton. I’m doing my lord’s commands.’

‘Trust yourself to me, madam.’ His hand stretched for Aminta to mount. She took it without a word and climbed to the seat. A clatter of hoofs rang out with the crack of the whip. They were away behind a pair of steppers that could go the pace.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PURSUERS

For promptitude, the lady, the gentleman, and the coachman were in such unison as to make it a reasonable deduction that the flight had been concerted.

Never did any departure from the Roebuck leave so wide-mouthed a body of spectators. Mrs. Pagnell’s shrieks of ‘Stop, oh! stop!’ to the backs of the coachman and Aminta were continued until they were far down the street. She called to the innkeeper, called to the landlady and to invisible constables for help. But her pangs were childish compared with Morsfield’s, who, with the rage of a conceited schemer tricked and the fury of a lover beholding the rape of his beautiful, bellowed impotently at Weyburn and the coachman out of hearing, ‘Stop! you!’ He was in the state of men who believe that there is a virtue in imprecations, and he shot loud oaths after them, shook his fist, cursed his friend Cumnock, whose name he vociferated as a summons to him,—-generally the baffled plotter misconducted himself to an extreme degree, that might have apprised Mrs. Pagnell of a more than legitimate disappointment on his part.

Pursuit was one of the immediate ideas which rush forward to look back woefully on impediments and fret to fever over the tardiness of operations. A glance at the thing of wrinkles receiving orders to buckle at his horses and pursue convinced them of the hopelessness; and Morsfield was pricked to intensest hatred of the woman by hearing the dire exclamation, ‘One night, and her character’s gone!’

‘Be quiet, ma’am, if you please, or nothing can be done,’ he cried.

’I tell you, Mr. Morsfield—don’t you see?—he has thrown them together. It is Lord Ormont’s wicked conspiracy to rid himself of her. A secretary! He’ll beat any one alive in plots. She can’t show her face in London after this, if you don’t overtake her. And she might have seen Lord Ormont’s plot to ruin her. He tired of her, and was ashamed of her inferior birth to his own, after the first year, except on the Continent, where she had her rights. Me he never forgave for helping make him the happy man he might have been in spite of his age. For she is lovely! But it’s worse for a lovely woman with a damaged reputation. And that ’s his cunning. How she could be so silly as to play into it! She can’t have demeaned herself to look on that secretary! I said from the first

he seemed as if thrown into her way for a purpose. But she has pride: my niece Aminta has pride. She might well have listened to flatterers—she had every temptation—if

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it hadn't been for her pride. It may save her yet. However good-looking, she will remember her dignity—unless he's a villain. Runnings away! drivings together! inns oh! the story over London! I do believe she has a true friend in you, Mr. Morsfield; and I say, as I have said before, the sight of a devoted admirer would have brought any husband of more than sixty to his senses, if he hadn't hoped a catastrophe and determined on it. Catch them we can't, unless she repents and relents; and prayers for that are our only resource. Now, start, man, do!'

The postillion had his foot in position to spring. Morsfield bawled Cumnock's name, and bestrode his horse. Captain Cumnock emerged from the inn-yard with a dubitative step, pressing a handkerchief to his nose, blinking, and scrutinizing the persistent fresh stains on it.

Stable-boys were at the rear. These, ducking and springing, surcharged and copious exponents of the play they had seen, related, for the benefit of the town, how that the two gentlemen had exchanged words in the yard, which were about beastly pistols, which the slim gentleman would have none of; and then the big one trips up, like dancing, to the other one and flicks him a soft clap on the check—quite friendly, you may say; and before he can square to it, the slim one he steps his hind leg half a foot back, and he drives a straight left like lightning off the shoulder slick on to t' other one's nob, and over he rolls, like a cart with the shafts up down a bank; and he' a been washing his 'chops' and threatening bullets ever since.

The exact account of the captain's framework in the process of the fall was graphically portrayed in our blunt and racy vernacular, which a society nourished upon Norman-English and English-Latin banishes from print, largely to its impoverishment, some think.

By the time the primary narrative of the encounter in the inn yard had given ground for fancy and ornament to present it in yet more luscious dress, Lord Ormont's phaeton was a good mile on the road. Morsfield and Captain Cumnock—the latter inquisitive of the handkerchief pressed occasionally at his nose—trotted on tired steeds along dusty wheel-tracks. Mrs. Pagnell was the solitary of the chariot, having a horrid couple of loaded pistols to intimidate her for her protection, and the provoking back view of a regularly jogging mannikin under a big white hat with blue riband, who played the part of Time in dragging her along, with worse than no countenance for her anxieties.

News of the fugitives was obtained at the rampant Red Lion in Dudsworth, nine miles on along the London road, to the extent that the Earl of Ormont's phaeton, containing a lady and a gentleman, had stopped there a minute to send back word to Steignton of their comfortable progress, and expectations of crossing the borders into Hampshire before sunset. Morsfield and Cumnock shrugged at the bumpkin artifice. They left their line of route to be communicated to the chariot, and chose, with practised acumen, that

very course, which was the main road, and rewarded them at the end of half an hour with sight of the Steignton phaeton.

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But it was returning. A nearer view showed it empty of the couple.

Morsfield bade the coachman pull up, and he was readily obeyed. Answers came briskly.

Although provincial acting is not of the high class which conceals the art, this man's look beside him and behind him at vacant seats had incontestable evidence in support of his declaration, that the lady and gentleman had gone on by themselves: the phaeton was a box of flown birds.

'Where did you say they got out, you dog?' said Cumnock.

The coachman stood up to spy a point below. 'Down there at the bottom of the road, to the right, where there's a stile across the meadows, making a short cut by way of a bridge over the river to Busley and North Tothill, on the high-road to Hocklebourne. The lady and gentleman thought they 'd walk for a bit of exercise the remains of the journey.'

'Can't prove the rascal's a liar,' Cumnock said to Morsfield, who rallied him savagely on his lucky escape from another knock-down blow, and tossed silver on the seat, and said —

'We 'll see if there is a stile.'

'You'll see the stile, sir,' rejoined the man, and winked at their backs.

Both cavaliers, being famished besides baffled, were in sour tempers, expecting to see just the dead wooden stile, and see it as a grin at them. Cumnock called on Jove to witness that they had been donkeys enough to forget to ask the driver how far round on the road it was to the other end of the cross-cut.

Morsfield, entirely objecting to asinine harness with him, mocked at his invocation and intonation of the name of Jove.

Cumnock was thereupon stung to a keen recollection of the allusion to his knock-down blow, and he retorted that there were some men whose wit was the parrot's.

Morsfield complimented him over the exhibition of a vastly superior and more serviceable wit, in losing sight of his antagonist after one trial of him.

Cumnock protested that the loss of time was caused by his friend's dalliance with the Venus in the chariot.

Morsfield's gall seethed at a flying picture of Mrs. Pagnell, coupled with the retarding reddened handkerchief business, and he recommended Cumnock to pay court to the

old woman, as the only chance he would have of acquaintanceship with the mother of Love.

Upon that Cumnock confessed in humility to his not being wealthy. Morsfield looked a willingness to do the deed he might have to pay for in tenderer places than the pocket, and named the head as a seat of poverty with him.

Cumnock then yawned a town fop's advice to a hustling street passenger to apologize for his rudeness before it was too late. Whereat Morsfield, certain that his parasitic thrasyleon apeing coxcomb would avoid extremities, mimicked him execrably.

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Now this was a second breach of the implied convention existing among the exquisitely fine-bred silken-slender on the summits of our mundane sphere, which demands of them all, that they respect one another's affectations. It is commonly done, and so the costly people of a single pattern contrive to push forth, flatteringly to themselves, luxuriant shoots of individuality in their orchidean glass-house. A violation of the rule is a really deadly personal attack. Captain Cumnock was particularly sensitive regarding it, inasmuch as he knew himself not the natural performer he strove to be, and a mimicry affected him as a haunting check.

He burst out: 'Damned if I don't understand why you're hated by men and women both!'

Morsfield took a shock. 'Infernal hornet!' he muttered; for his conquests had their secret history.

'May and his wife have a balance to pay will trip you yet, you 'll find.'

'Reserve your wrath, sir, for the man who stretched you on your back.'

The batteries of the two continued exchangeing redhot shots, with the effect, that they had to call to mind they were looking at the stile. A path across a buttercup meadow was beyond it. They were damped to some coolness by the sight.

'Upon my word, the trick seems neat!' said Cumnock staring at the pastoral curtain.

'Whose trick?' he was asked sternly.

'Here or there 's not much matter; they 're off, unless they 're under a hedge laughing.'

An ache of jealousy and spite was driven through the lover, who groaned, and presently said—

'I ride on. That old woman can follow. I don't want to hear her gibberish. We've lost the game—there 's no reckoning the luck. If there's a chance, it's this way. It smells a trick. He and she—by all the devils! It has been done in my family—might have been done again. Tell the men on the plain they can drive home. There's a hundred-pound weight on your tongue for silence.'

Cumnock cried: 'But we needn't be parting, Dolf! Stick together. Bad luck's not repeated every day. Keep heart for the good.'

'My heart's shattered, Cumnock. I say it's impossible she can love a husband twice her age, who treats her—you 've seen. Contempt of that lady!

By heaven! once in my power, I swear she would have been sacred to me. But she would have been compelled to face the public and take my hand. I swear she would

have been congratulated on the end of her sufferings. Worship!—that's what I feel. No woman ever alive had eyes in her head like that lady's. I repeat her name ten times every night before I go to sleep. If I had her hand, no, not one kiss would I press on it without her sanction. I could be in love with her cruelty, if only I had her near me. I 've lost her—by the Lord, I 've lost her!'

'Pro tem.,' said the captain. 'A plate of red beef and a glass of port wine alters the view. Too much in the breast, too little in the belly, capsizes lovers. Old story. Horses that ought to be having a mash between their ribs make riders despond. Say, shall we back to the town behind us, or on? Back's the safest, if the chase is up.'

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Morsfield declared himself incapable of turning and meeting that chariot. He sighed heavily. Cumnock offered to cheer him with a song of Captain Chanter's famous collection, if he liked; but Morsfield gesticulated abhorrence, and set out at a trot. Song in defeat was a hiss of derision to him.

He had failed. Having failed, he for the first time perceived the wildness of a plot that had previously appeared to him as one of the Yorkshire Morsfields' moves to win an object. Traditionally they stopped at nothing. There would have been a sunburst of notoriety in the capture and carrying off of the beautiful Countess of Ormont.

She had eluded him during the downward journey to Steignton. He came on her track at the village at the junction of the roads above Ashead, and thence, confiding in the half-connivance or utter stupidity of the fair one's duenna, despatched a mounted man-servant to his coachman and footmen, stationed ten miles behind, with orders that they should drive forthwith to the great plain, and be ready at a point there for two succeeding days. That was the plot, promptly devised upon receipt of Mrs. Pagnell's communication; for the wealthy man of pleasure was a strategist fit to be a soldier, in dexterity not far from rivalling the man by whom he had been outdone.

An ascetic on the road to success, he dedicated himself to a term of hard drinking under a reverse; and the question addressed to the chief towns in the sketch counties his head contained was, which one near would be likely to supply the port wine for floating him through garlanding dreams of possession most tastily to blest oblivion.

He was a lover, nevertheless, honest in his fashion, and meant not worse than to pull his lady through a mire, and wash her with Morsfield soap, and crown her, and worship. She was in his blood, about him, above him; he had plunged into her image, as into deeps that broke away in phosphorescent waves on all sides, reflecting every remembered, every imagined, aspect of the adored beautiful woman piercing him to extinction with that last look of her at the moment of flight.

Had he been just a trifle more sincere in the respect he professed for his lady's duenna, he would have turned on the road to Dornton and a better fortune. Mrs. Pagnell had now become the ridiculous Paggy of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and her circle for the hypocritical gentleman; and he remarked to Captain Cumnock, when their mutual trot was established: 'Paggy enough for me for a month—good Lord! I can't stand another dose of her by herself.'

'It's a bird that won't roast or boil or stew,' said the captain.

They were observed trotting along below by Lord Ormont's groom of the stables on promotion, as he surveyed the country from the chalk-hill rise and brought the phaeton to a stand, Jonathan Boon, a sharp lad, whose comprehension was a little muddled by 'the rights of it' in this adventure. He knew, however, that he did well to follow the

directions of one who was in his lordship's pay, and stretched out the fee with the air of a shake of the hand, and had a look of the winning side, moreover. A born countryman could see that.

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Boon watched the pair of horsemen trotting to confusion, and clicked in his cheek. The provincial of the period when coaches were beginning to be threatened by talk of new-fangled rails was proud to boast of his outwitting Londoners on material points; and Boon had numerous tales of how it had been done, to have the laugh of fellows thinking themselves such razors. They compensated him for the slavish abasement of his whole neighbourhood under the hectoring of the grand new manufacture of wit in London:—-the inimitable Metropolitan *pun*, which came down to the country by four-in-hand, and stopped all other conversation wherever it was reported, and would have the roar—-there was no resisting it. Indeed, to be able to see the thing smartly was an entry into community with the elect of the district; and when the roaring ceased and the thing was examined, astonishment at the cleverness of it, and the wonderful shallowness of the seeming deep hole, and the unexhausted bang it had to go off like a patent cracker, fetched it out for telling over again; and up went the roar, and up it went at home and in stable-yards, and at the net puffing of churchwardens on a summer's bench, or in a cricket-booth after a feast, or round the old inn's taproom fine. The pun, the wonderful bo-peep of double meanings darting out to surprise and smack one another from behind words of the same sound, sometimes the same spelling, overwhelmed the provincial mind with awe of London's occult and prolific genius.

Yet down yonder you may behold a pair of London gentlemen trotting along on as fine a fool's errand as ever was undertaken by nincompoops bearing a scaled letter, marked urgent, to a castle, and the request in it that the steward would immediately upon perusal down with their you-know-what and hoist them and birch them a jolly two dozen without parley.

Boon smacked his leg, and then drove ahead merrily.

For this had happened to his knowledge: the gentleman accompanying the lady had refused to make anything of a halt at the Red Lion, and had said he was sure there would be a small public-house at the outskirts of the town, for there always was one; and he proved right, and the lady and he had descended at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers, and Boon had driven on for half an hour by order.

This, too, had happened, external to Boon's knowledge: the lady and the gentleman had witnessed, through the small diamond window-panes of the Jolly Cricketers' parlour, the passing-by of the two horsemen in pursuit of them; and the gentleman had stopped the chariot coming on some fifteen minutes later, but he did not do it at the instigation of the lady.

CHAPTER XX

AT THE SIGN OF THE JOLLY CRICKETERS

The passing by of the pair of horsemen, who so little suspected the treasure existing behind the small inn's narrow window did homage in Aminta's mind to her protector's adroitness. Their eyes met without a smile, though they perceived the grisly comic of the incident. Their thoughts were on the chariot to follow.

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Aminta had barely uttered a syllable since the start of the flight from Ashead. She had rocked in a swing between sensation and imagination, exultant, rich with the broad valley of the plain and the high green waves of the downs at their giant's bound in the flow of curves and sunny creases to the final fling-off of the dip on sky. Here was a twisted hawthorn carved clean to the way of the wind; a sheltered clump of chestnuts holding their blossoms up, as with a thousand cresset-clasping hands; here were grasses that nodded swept from green to grey; flowers yellow, white, and blue, significant of a marvellous unknown through the gates of colour; and gorse-covers giving out the bird, squares of young wheat, a single fallow threaded by a hare, and cottage gardens, shadowy garths, wayside flint-heap, woods of the mounds and the dells, fluttering leaves, clouds: all were swallowed, all were the one unworried significance. Scenery flew, shifted, returned; again the line of the downs raced and the hollows reposed simultaneously. They were the same in change to an eye grown older; they promised, as at the first, happiness for recklessness. The whole woman was urged to delirious recklessness in happiness, and she drank the flying scenery as an indication, a likeness, an encouragement.

When her wild music of the blood had fallen to stillness with the stopped wheels, she was in the musky, small, low room of the diamond window-panes, at her companion's disposal for what he might deem the best: he was her fate. But the more she leaned on a man of self-control, the more she admired; and an admiration that may not speak itself to the object present drops inward, stirs the founts; and if these are repressed, the tenderness which is not allowed to weep will drown self-pity, hardening the woman to summon scruples in relation to her unworthiness. He might choose to forget, but the more she admired, the less could her feminine conscience permit of an utter or of any forgetfulness that she was not the girl Browny, whom he once loved—perhaps loved now, under some illusion of his old passion for her—does love now, ill-omened as he is in that! She read him by her startled reading of her own heart, and she constrained her will to keep from doing, saying, looking aught that would burden without gracing his fortunes. For, as she felt, a look, a word, a touch would do the mischief; she had no resistance behind her cold face, only the physical scruple, which would become the moral unworthiness if in any way she induced him to break his guard and blow hers to shreds. An honourable conscience before the world has not the same certificate in love's pure realm. They are different kingdoms. A girl may be of both; a married woman, peering outside the narrow circle of her wedding-ring, should let her eyelids fall and the unseen fires consume her.

Their common thought was now, Will the chariot follow?

What will he do if it comes? was an unformed question with Aminta.

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He had formed and not answered it, holding himself, sincerely at the moment, bound to her wishes. Near the end of Ashead main street she had turned to him in her seat beside the driver, and conveyed silently, with the dental play of her tongue and pouted lips, ‘No title.’

Upon that sign, waxen to those lips, he had said to the driver, ’You took your orders from Lady Charlotte?

And the reply, ’Her ladyship directed me sir, exonerated Lord Ormont so far.

Weyburn remembered then a passage of one of her steady looks, wherein an oracle was mute. He tried several of the diviner’s shots to interpret it: she was beyond his reach. She was in her blissful delirium of the flight, and reproached him with giving her the little bit less to resent —she who had no sense of resentment, except the claim on it to excuse.

Their landlady entered the room to lay the cloth for tea and eggs. She made offer of bacon as well, homecured. She was a Hampshire woman, and understood the rearing of pigs. Her husband had been a cricketer, and played for his county. He didn’t often beat Hampshire! They had a good garden of vegetables, and grass-land enough for two cows. They made their own bread, their own butter, but did not brew.

Weyburn pronounced for a plate of her home-cured. She had children, the woman told him—two boys and a girl. Her husband wished for a girl. Her eldest boy wished to be a sailor, and would walk miles to a pond to sail bits of wood on it, though there had never been a sea-faring man in her husband’s family or her own. She agreed with the lady and gentleman that it might be unwise to go contrary to the boy’s bent. Going to school or coming home, a trickle of water would stop him.

Aminta said to her companion in French, ‘Have you money?’

She chased his blood. ‘Some: sufficient. I think.’ It stamped their partnership.

’I have but a small amount. Aunt was our paymaster. We will buy the little boy a boat to sail. You are pale.’

’I ‘ve no notion of it.’

‘Something happened it Ashead.’

‘It would not have damaged my complexion.’

He counted his money. Aminta covertly handed him her purse. Their fingers touched. The very minor circumstance of their landlady being in the room dammed a flood.

Her money and his amounted to seventeen pounds. The sum-total was a symbol of days that were a fiery wheel.

Honour and blest adventure might travel together two days or three, he thought. If the chariot did not pass:—Lord Ormont had willed it. A man could not be said to swerve in his duty when acting to fulfil the master's orders, and Mrs. Pagnell was proved a hoodwinked duenna, and Morsfield was in the air. The breathing Aminta had now a common purse with her first lover. For three days or more they were, it would seem, to journey together, alone together: the prosecution of his

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duty imposed it on him. Sooth to say, Weyburn knew that a spice of passion added to a bowl of reason makes a sophist's mess; but he fancied an absolute reliance on Aminta's dignity, and his respect for her was another barrier. He begged the landlady's acceptance of two shillings for her boy's purchase of a boat, advising her to have him taught early to swim. Both he and Aminta had a feeling that they could be helpful in some little things on the road if the chariot did not pass.

Justification began to speak loudly against the stopping of the chariot if it did pass. The fact that sweet wishes come second, and not so loudly, assured him they were quite secondary; for the lover sunk to sophist may be self-beguiled by the arts which render him the potent beguiler.

'We are safe here,' he said, and thrilled her with the 'we' behind the curtaining leaded window-panes.

'What is it you propose?' Her voice was lower than she intended. To that she ascribed his vivid flush. It kindled the deeper of her dark hue.

He mentioned her want of luggage, and the purchase of a kit.

She said, 'Have we the means?'

'We can adjust the means to the ends.'

'We must be sparing of expenses.'

'Will you walk part of the way?'

'I should like it.'

'We shall be longer on the journey.'

'We shall not find it tiresome, I hope.'

'We can say so, if we do.'

'We are not strangers.'

The recurrence of the 'we' had an effect of wedding: it was fatalistic, it would come; but, in truth, there was pleasure in it, and the pleasure was close to consciousness of some guilt when vowing itself innocent.

And, no, they were not strangers; hardly a word could they utter without cutting memory to the quick; their present breath was out of the far past.

Love told them both that they were trembling into one another's arms, not voluntarily, against the will with each of them; they knew it would be for life; and Aminta's shamed reserves were matched to make an obstacle by his consideration for her good name and her station, for his own claim to honest citizenship also.

Weyburn acted on his instinct at sight of the postillion and the chariot; he flung the window wide and shouted. Then he said, 'It is decided,' and he felt the rightness of the decision, like a man who has given a condemned limb to the surgeon.

Aminta was passive as a water-weed in the sway of the tide. Hearing it to be decided, she was relieved. What her secret heart desired, she kept secret, almost a secret from herself. He was not to leave her; so she had her permitted wish, she had her companion plus her exclamatory aunt, who was a protection, and she had learnt her need of the smallest protection.

'I can scarcely believe I see you, my dear, dear child!' Mrs. Pagnell cried, upon entering the small inn parlour; and so genuine was her satisfaction that for a time she paid no heed to the stuffiness of the room, the meanness of the place, the unfitness of such a hostelry to entertain ladies—the Countess of Ormont!

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‘Eat here?’ Mrs. Pagnell asked, observing the preparations for the meal. Her pride quailed, her stomach abjured appetite. But she forbore from asking how it was that the Countess of Ormont had come to the place.

At a symptom of her intention to indulge in disgust; Aminta brought up Mr. Morsfield by name; whereupon Mrs. Pagnell showed she had reflected on her conduct in relation to the gentleman, and with the fear of the earl if she were questioned.

Home-made bread and butter, fresh eggs and sparkling fat of bacon invited her to satisfy her hunger. Aminta let her sniff at the teapot unpunished; the tea had a rustic aroma of ground-ivy, reminding Weyburn of his mother’s curiosity to know the object of an old man’s plucking of hedgeside leaves in the environs of Bruges one day, and the simple reply to her French, ‘Tea for the English.’ A hint of an anecdote interested and enriched the stores of Mrs. Pagnell, so she capped it and partook of the infusion ruefully.

‘But the bread is really good,’ she said, ’and we are unlikely to be seen leaving the place by any person of importance.’

‘Unless Mr. Morsfield should be advised to return this way,’ said Aminta.

Her aunt proposed for a second cup. She was a manageable woman; the same scourge had its instant wholesome effect on her when she snubbed the secretary.

So she complimented his trencherman’s knife, of which the remarkably fine edge was proof enough that he had come heart-whole out of the trial of an hour or so’s intimate companionship with a beautiful woman, who had never been loved, never could be loved by man, as poor Mr. Morsfield loved her! He had sworn to having fasted three whole days and nights after his first sight of Aminta. Once, he said, her eyes pierced him so that he dreamed of a dagger in his bosom, and woke himself plucking at it. That was love, as a born gentleman connected with a baronetcy and richer than many lords took the dreadful passion. A secretary would have no conception of such devoted extravagance. At the most he might have attempted to insinuate a few absurd, sheepish soft nothings, and the Countess of Ormont would know right well how to shrivel him with one of her looks. No lady of the land could convey so much either way, to attract or to repel, as Aminta, Countess of Ormont! And the man, the only man, insensible to her charm or her scorn, was her own wedded lord and husband. Old, to be sure, and haughty, his pride might not allow him to overlook poor Mr. Morsfield’s unintentional offence. But the presence of the countess’s aunt was a reply to any charge he might seek to establish. Unhappily, the case is one between men on their touchiest point, when women are pushed aside, and justice and religion as well. We might be living in a heathen land, for aught that morality has to say.

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Mrs. Pagnell fussed about being seen on her emergence from the Jolly Cricketers. Aminta sent Weyburn to spy for the possible reappearance of Mr. Morsfield. He reported a horseman; a butcher-boy clattered by. Aminta took the landlady's hand, under her aunt's astonished gaze, and said: 'I shall not forget your house and your attention to us.' She spoke with a shake of her voice. The landlady curtseyed and smiled, curtseyed and almost whimpered. The house was a poor one, she begged to say; they didn't often have such guests, but whoever came to it they did their best to give good food and drink.

Hearing from Weyburn that the chariot was bound to go through Winchester, she spoke of a brother, a baker there, the last surviving member of her family and, after some talk, Weyburn offered to deliver a message of health and greeting at the baker's shop. There was a waving of hands, much nodding and curtseying, as the postillion resumed his demi-volts— all to the stupefaction of Mrs. Pagnell; but she dared not speak, she had Morsfield on the mouth. Nor could she deny the excellent quality of the bread and butter, and milk, too, at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers. She admitted, moreover, that the food and service of the little inn belonged in their unpretentious honesty to the, kind we call old English: the dear old simple country English of the brotherly interchange in sight of heaven—good stuff for good money, a matter with a blessing on it.

'But,' said she, 'my dear Aminta, I do not and I cannot understand looks of grateful affection at a small innkeeper's wife paid, and I don't doubt handsomely paid, for her entertainment of you.'

'I feel it,' said Aminta; tears rushed to her eyelids, overflowing, and her features were steady.

'Ah, poor dear! that I do understand,' her aunt observed. 'Any little kindness moves you to-day; and well it may.'

'Yes, aunty,' said Aminta, and in relation to the cause of her tears she was the less candid of the two.

So far did she carry her thanks for a kindness as to glance back through her dropping tears at the sign-board of the Jolly Cricketers; where two brave batsmen cross for the second of a certain three runs, if only the fellow wheeling legs, face up after the ball in the clouds, does but miss his catch: a grand suspensory moment of the game, admirably chosen by the artist to arrest the wayfarer and promote speculation. For will he let her slip through his fingers when she comes down? or will he have her fast and tight? And in the former case, the bats are tearing their legs off for just number nought. And in the latter, there 's a wicket down, and what you may call a widower walking it bat on shoulder, parted from his mate for that mortal innings, and likely to get more chaff than consolation when he joins the booth.

CHAPTER XXI

UNDER-CURRENTS IN THE MINDS OF LADY CHARLOTTE AND LORD ORMONT

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Another journey of travellers to London, in the rear of the chariot, was not diversified by a single incident or refreshed by scraps of dialogue. Lady Charlotte had her brother Rowsley with her, and he might be taciturn,—she drove her flocks of thoughts, she was busily and contentedly occupied. Although separation from him stirred her mind more excitedly over their days and deeds of boy and girl, her having him near, and having now won him to herself, struck her as that old time's harvest, about as much as can be hoped for us from life, when we have tasted it.

The scene of the invasion of Steignton by the woman and her aunt, and that man Morsfield, was a steel engraving among her many rapid and featureless cogitations. She magnified the rakishness of the woman's hand on hip in view of the house, and she magnified the woman's insolence in bringing that man Morsfield—to share probably the hospitality of Steignton during the master's absence! Her trick of caricature, whenever she dealt with adversaries, was active upon the three persons under observation of the windows. It was potent to convince her that her brother Rowsley had cast the woman to her native obscurity. However, Lady Charlotte could be just: the woman's figure, and as far as could be seen of her face, accounted for Rowsley's entanglement.

Why chastize that man Morsfield at all? Calling him out would give a further dip to the name of Ormont. A pretty idea, to be punishing a roan for what you thank him for! He did a service; and if he's as mad about her as he boasts, he can take her and marry her now Rowsley 's free of her.

Morsfield says he wants to marry her—wants nothing better. Then let him. Rowsley has shown him there 's no legal impediment. Pity that young Weyburn had to be sent to do watch-dog duty. But Rowsley would not have turned her back to travel alone: that is, without a man to guard. He 's too chivalrous.

The sending of Weyburn, she now fancied, was her own doing, and Lady Charlotte attributed it to her interpretation of her brother's heart of chivalry; though it would have been the wiser course, tending straight and swift to the natural end, if the two women and their Morsfield had received the dismissal to travel as they came.

One sees it after the event. Yes, only Rowsley would not have dismissed her without surety that she would be protected. So it was the right thing prompted on the impulse of the moment. And young Weyburn would meet some difficulty in protecting his 'Lady Ormont,' if she had no inclination for it.

Analyzing her impulse of the moment, Lady Charlotte credited herself, not unjustly, with a certain considerateness for the woman, notwithstanding the woman's violent intrusion between brother and sister. Knowing the world, and knowing the upper or Beanstalk world intimately, she winked at nature's passions. But when the legitimate affection of a brother and sister finds them interposing, they are, as little parsonically as possible, reproved. If persistently intrusive, they are handed to the constable.

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How, supposing the case of a wife? Well, then comes the contest; and it is with an inferior, because not a born, legitimacy of union; which may be, which here and there is, affection; is generally the habit of partnership. It is inferior, from not being the union of the blood; it is a matter merely of the laws and the tastes. No love, she reasoned, is equal to the love of brother and sister: not even the love of parents for offspring, or of children for mother and father. Brother and sister have the holy young days in common; they have lastingly the recollection of their youth, the golden time when they were themselves, or the best of themselves. A wife is a stranger from the beginning; she is necessarily three parts a stranger up to the finish of the history. She thinks she can absorb the husband. Not if her husband has a sister living! She may cry and tear for what she calls her own: she will act prudently in bowing her head to the stronger tie. Is there a wife in Europe who broods on her husband's merits and his injuries as the sister of Thomas Rowsley, Earl of Ormont does? or one to defend his good name, one to work for his fortunes, as devotedly?

Over and over Lady Charlotte drove her flocks, of much the same pattern, like billows before a piping gale. They might be similar—a puffed iteration, and might be meaningless and wearisome; the gale was a power in earnest.

Her brother sat locked-up. She did as a wife would not have done, and held her peace. He spoke; she replied in a few words—blunt, to the point, as no wife would have done.

Her dear, warm-hearted Rowsley was shaken by the blow he had been obliged to deal to the woman—poor woman!—if she felt it. He was always the principal sufferer where the feelings were concerned. He was never for hurting any but the enemy.

His 'Ha, here we dine!' an exclamation of a man of imprisoned yawns at the apparition of the turnkey, was delightful to her, for a proof of health and sanity and enjoyment of the journey.

'Yes, and I've one bottle left, in the hamper, of the hock you like,' she said. 'That Mr. Weyburn likes it too. He drank a couple coming down.'

She did not press for talk; his ready appetite was the flower of conversation to her. And he slept well, he said. Her personal experience on that head was reserved.

London enfolded them in the late evening of a day brewing storm. My lord heard at the door of his house that Lady Ormont had not arrived. Yet she had started a day in advance of him. He looked down, up and round at Charlotte. He looked into an empty hall. Pagnell was not there. A sight of Pagnell would, strange to say, have been agreeable.

Storm was in the air, and Aminta was on the road. Lightning has, before now, frightened carriage-horses. She would not misconduct herself; she would sit firm. No woman in England had stouter nerve—few men.

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But the carriage might be smashed. He was ignorant of the road she had chosen for her return. Out of Wiltshire there would be no cliffs, quarries, river-banks, presenting dangers. Those dangers, however, spring up when horses have the frenzy.

Charlotte was nodded at, for a signal to depart; and she drove off, speculating on the bullet of a grey eye, which was her brother's adieu to her.

The earl had apparently a curiosity to inspect vacant rooms. His Aminta's drawing-room, her boudoir, her bed-chamber, were submissive in showing bed, knickknacks, furniture. They told the tale of a corpse.

He washed and dressed, and went out to his club to dine, hating the faces of the servants of the house, just able to bear with the attentions of his valet.

Thunder was rattling at ten at night. The house was again the tomb.

She had high courage, that girl. She might be in a bed, with her window-blind up, calmly waiting for the flashes: lightning excited her. He had seen her lying at her length quietly, her black hair scattered on the pillow, like shadow of twigs and sprays on moonlit grass, illuminated intermittently; smiling to him, but her heart out and abroad, wild as any witch's. If on the road, she would not quail. But it was necessary to be certain of her having a trusty postillion.

He walked through the drench and scream of a burst cloud to the posting-office. There, after some trouble, he obtained information directing him to the neighbouring mews. He had thence to find his way to the neighbouring pot-house.

The report of the postillion was, on the whole, favourable. The man understood horses —was middle-aged—no sot; he was also a man with an eye for weather, proverbially in the stables a cautious hand—slow 'Old Slow-and-sure,' he was called; by name, Joshua Abnett.

'Oh, Joshua Abnett?' said the earl, and imprinted it on his memory, for the service it was to do during the night.

Slow-and-sure Joshua Abnett would conduct her safely, barring accidents. For accidents we must all be prepared. She was a heroine in an accident. The earl recalled one and more: her calm face, brightened eyes, easy laughter. Hysterics were not in her family.

She did wrong to let that fellow Morsfield accompany her. Possibly he had come across her on the road, and she could not shake him off. Judging by all he knew of her, the earl believed she would not have brought the fellow into the grounds of Steignton of her free will. She had always a particular regard for decency.

According to the rumour, Morsfield and the woman Pagnell were very thick together. He barked over London of his being a bitten dog. He was near to the mad dog's fate, as soon as a convenient apology for stopping his career could be invented.

The thinking of the lesson to Morsfield on the one hand, and of the slow-and-sure postillion Joshua Abriett on the other, lulled Lord Ormont to a short repose in his desolate house. Of Weyburn he had a glancing thought, that the young man would be a good dog to guard the countess from a mad dog, as he had reckoned in commissioning him.

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Next day was the day of sunlight Aminta loved.

It happens with the men who can strike, supposing them of the order of civilized creatures, that when they have struck heavily, however deserved the blow, a liking for the victim will assail them, if they discover no support in hatred; and no sooner is the spot of softness touched than they are invaded by hosts of the stricken person's qualities, which plead to be taken as virtues, and are persuasive. The executioner did rightly. But it is the turn for the victim to declare the blow excessive.

Now, a just man, who has overdone the stroke, will indemnify and console in every way, short of humiliating himself.

He had an unusually clear vision of the scene at Steignton. Surprise and wrath obscured it at the moment, for reflection to bring it out in sharp outline; and he was able now to read and translate into inoffensive English the inherited Spanish of it, which violated nothing of Aminta's native 'donayre,' though it might look on English soil outlandish or stagey.

Aminta stood in sunlight on the greensward. She stood hand on hip, gazing at the house she had so long desired to see, without a notion that she committed an offence. Implicitly upon all occasions she took her husband's word for anything he stated, and she did not consequently imagine him to be at Steignton. So, then, she had no thought of running down from London to hunt and confound him, as at first it appeared. The presence of that white-faced Morsfield vindicated her sufficiently so far. And let that fellow hang till the time for cutting him down! Not she, but Pagnell, seems to have been the responsible party. And, by the way, one might prick the affair with Morsfield by telling him publicly that his visit to inspect Steignton was waste of pains, for he would not be accepted as a tenant in the kennels, et caetera.

Well, poor girl, she satisfied her curiosity, not aware that a few weeks farther on would have done it to the full.

As to Morsfield, never once, either in Vienna or in Paris, had she, warmly admired though she was, all eyes telescoping and sun-glassing on her, given her husband an hour or half an hour or two minutes of anxiety. Letters came. The place getting hot, she proposed to leave it.

She had been rather hardly tried. There are flowers we cannot keep growing in pots. Her fault was, that instead of flinging down her glove and fighting it out openly, she listened to Pagnell, and began the game of Pull. If he had a zest for the game, it was to stump the woman Pagnell. So the veteran fancied in his amended mind.

This intrusive sunlight chased him from the breakfast-table and out of the house. She would be enjoying it somewhere; but the house empty of a person it was used to

contain had an atmosphere of the vaults, and inside it the sunlight she loved had an effect of taunting him singularly.

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He called on his upholsterer and heard news to please her. The house hired for a month above Great Marlow was ready; her ladyship could enter it to-morrow. It pleased my lord to think that she might do so, and not bother him any more about the presentation at Court during the current year. In spite of certain overtures from the military authorities, and roused eulogistic citations of his name in the newspapers and magazines, he was not on friendly terms with his country yet, having contracted the fatal habit of irony, which, whether hitting or musing its object, stirs old venom in our wound, twitches the feelings. Unfortunately for him, they had not adequate expression unless he raged within; so he had to shake up wrath over his grievances, that he might be satisfactorily delivered; and he was judged irreconcilable when he had subsided into the quietest contempt, from the prospective seat of a country estate, in the society of a young wife who adored him.

An exile from the sepulchre of that house void of the consecration of ashes, he walked the streets and became reconciled to street sunlight. There were no carriage accidents to disturb him with apprehensions. Besides, the slowness of the postillion Joshua Abnett, which probably helped to the delay, was warrant of his sureness. And in an accident the stringy fellow, young Weyburn, could be trusted for giving his attention to the ladies—especially to the younger of the two, taking him for the man his elders were at his age. As for Pagnell, a Providence watches over the Pagnells! Mortals have no business to interfere.

An accident on water would be a frolic to his girl. Swimming was a gift she had from nature. Pagnell vowed she swam out a mile at Dover when she was twelve. He had seen her in blue water: he had seen her readiness to jump to the rescue once when a market-woman, stepping out of a boat to his yacht on the Tabus, plumped in. She had the two kinds of courage— the impulsive and the reasoned. What is life to man or woman if we are not to live it honourably? Men worthy of the name say this. The woman who says and acts on it is—well, she is fit company for them. But only the woman of natural courage can say it and act on it.

Would she come by Winchester, or choose the lower road by Salisbury and Southampton, to smell the sea? perhaps-like her!—dismissing the chariot and hiring a yacht for a voyage round the coast and up the Thames. She had an extraordinary love of the sea, yet she preferred soldiers to sailors. A woman? Never one of them more a woman! But it came of her quickness to take the colour and share the tastes of the man to whom she gave herself.

My lord was beginning to distinguish qualities in a character.

He was informed at the mews that Joshua Abnett was on the road still. Joshua seemed to be a roadster of uncommon unprogressiveness, proper to a framed picture.

While debating whether to lunch at his loathed club or at a home loathed more, but open to bright enlivenment any instant, Lord Ormont beheld a hat lifted and Captain May saluting him. They were near a famous gambling-house in St. James's Street.

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‘Good! I am glad to see you,’ he said. ’Tell me you know Mr. Morsfield pretty well. I’m speaking of my affair. He has been trespassing down on my grounds at Steignton, and I think of taking the prosecution of him into my own hands. Is he in town?’

’I ‘ve just left his lame devil Cumnock, my lord,’ said May, after a slight grimace. ‘They generally run in tandem.’

‘Will you let me know?’

‘At once, when I hear.’

‘You will call on me? Before noon?’

‘Any service required?’

‘My respects to your wife.’

‘Your lordship is very good.’

Captain May bloomed at a civility paid to his wife. He was a smallish, springy, firm-faced man, devotee of the lady bearing his name and wielding him. In the days when duelling flourished on our land, frail women could be powerful.

The earl turned from him to greet Lord Adderwood and a superior officer of his Profession, on whom he dropped a frigid nod. He held that all but the rank and file, and a few subalterns, of the service had abandoned him to do homage to the authorities. The Club he frequented was not his military Club. Indeed, lunching at any Club in solitariness that day, with Aminta away from home, was bitter penance. He was rejoiced by Lord Adderwood’s invitation, and hung to him after the lunch; for a horrible prospect of a bachelor dinner intimated astonishingly that he must have become unawares a domesticated man.

The solitary later meal of a bachelor was consumed, if the word will suit a rabbit’s form of feeding. He fatigued his body by walking the streets and the bridge of the Houses of Parliament, and he had some sleep under a roof where a life like death, or death apeing life, would have seemed to him the Joshua Abnett, if he had been one to take up images.

Next day he was under the obligation to wait at home till noon. Shortly before noon a noise of wheels drew him to the window. A young lady, in whom he recognized Aminta’s little school friend, of some name, stepped out of a fly. He met her in the hall.

She had expected to be welcomed by Aminta, and she was very timid on finding herself alone with the earl. He, however, treated her as the harbinger bird, wryneck of the nightingale, sure that Aminta would keep her appointment unless an accident delayed.

He had forgotten her name, but not her favourite pursuit of botany; and upon that he discoursed, and he was interested, not quite independently of the sentiment of her being there as a guarantee of Aminta's return. Still he knew his English earth, and the counties and soil for particular wild-flowers, grasses, mosses; and he could instruct her and inspire a receptive pupil on the theme of birds, beasts, fishes, insects, in England and other lands.

He remained discoursing without much weariness till four of the afternoon. Then he had his reward. The chariot was at the door, and the mounted figure of Joshua Abnett, on which he cast not a look or a thought. Aminta was alone. She embraced Selina Collett warmly, and said, in friendly tones, 'Ah! my lord, you are in advance of me.'

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She had dropped Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Weyburn at two suburban houses; working upon her aunt's dread of the earl's interrogations as regarded Mr. Morsfield. She had, she said, chosen to take the journey easily on her return, and enjoyed it greatly.

My lord studied her manner more than her speech. He would have interpreted a man's accurately enough. He read hers to signify that she had really enjoyed her journey, 'made the best of it,' and did not intend to be humble about her visit to Steignton without his permission; but that, if hurt at the time, she had recovered her spirits, and was ready for a shot or two—to be nothing like a pitched battle. And she might fire away to her heart's content: wordy retorts would not come from him; he had material surprises in reserve for her. His question concerning Morsfield knew its answer, and would only be put under pressure.

Comparison of the friends Aminta and Selina was forced by their standing together, and the representation in little Selina of the inferiority of the world of women to his Aminta; he thought of several, and splendid women, foreign and English. The comparison rose sharply now, with Aminta's novel, airy, homely, unchallengeing assumption of an equal footing beside her lord, in looks and in tones that had cast off constraint of the adoring handmaid, to show the full-blown woman, rightful queen of her half of the dominion. Between the Aminta of then and now, the difference was marked as between Northern and Southern women: the frozen-mouthed Northerner and the pearl and rose-nipped Southerner; those who smirk in dropping congealed monosyllables, and those who radiantly laugh out the voluble chatter.

Conceiving this to the full in a mind destitute of imagery, but indicative of the thing as clearly as the planed, unpolished woodwork of a cabinet in a carpenter's shop, Lord Ormont liked her the better for the change, though she was not the woman whose absence from his house had caused him to go mooning half a night through the streets, and though it forewarned him of a tougher bit of battle, if battle there was to be.

He was a close reader of surfaces. But in truth, the change so notable came of the circumstance, that some little way down below the surface he perused, where heart weds mind, or nature joins intellect, for the two to beget a resolution, the battle of the man and the woman had been fought, and the man beaten.

CHAPTER XXII

TREATS OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE CONTENTION OF BROTHER AND SISTER

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In the contest rageing at mid-sea still between the man and the woman, it is the one who is hard to the attractions of the other that will make choice of the spot and have the advantages. A short time earlier Lord Ormont could have marked it out at his leisure. He would have been unable to comprehend why it was denied him to do so now; for he was master of himself, untroubled by conscience, unaware, since he was assured of his Aminta's perfect safety and his restored sense of possession, that any taint of softness in him had reversed the condition of their alliance. He felt benevolently the much he had to bestow, and was about to bestow. Meanwhile, without complicity on his part, without his knowledge, yet absolutely involving his fate, the battle had gone against him in Aminta's breast.

Like many of his class and kind, he was thoroughly acquainted with the physical woman, and he took that first and very engrossing volume of the great Book of Mulier for all the history. A powerful wing of imagination, strong as the flappers of the great Roc of Arabian story, is needed to lift the known physical woman even a very little way up into azure heavens. It is far easier to take a snap-shot at the psychic, and tumble her down from her fictitious heights to earth. The mixing of the two make nonsense of her. She was created to attract the man, for an excellent purpose in the main. We behold her at work incessantly. One is a fish to her hook; another a moth to her light. By the various arts at her disposal she will have us, unless early in life we tear away the creature's coloured gauzes and penetrate to her absurdly simple mechanism. That done, we may, if we please, dominate her. High priests of every religion have successively denounced her as the chief enemy. To subdue and bid her minister to our satisfaction is therefore a right employment of man's unperverted superior strength. Of course, we keep to ourselves the woman we prefer; but we have to beware of an uxorious preference, or we are likely to resemble the Irishman with his wolf, and dance imprisoned in the hug of our captive.

For it is the creature's characteristic to be lastingly awake, in her moments of utmost slavishness most keenly awake to the chances of the snaring of the stronger. Be on guard, then. Lord Ormont had been on guard then and always: his instinct of commandership kept him on guard. He was on guard now when his Aminta played, not the indignant and the frozen, but the genially indifferent. She did it well, he admitted.

Had it been the indignant she played, he might have stooped to cajole the handsome queen of gypsies she was, without acknowledgement of her right to complain. Feeling that he was about to be generous, he shrugged. He meant to speak in deeds.

Lady Charlotte's house was at the distance of a stroller's half-hour across Hyde Park westward from his own. Thither he walked, a few minutes after noon, prepared for cattishness. He could fancy that he had hitherto postponed the visit rather on her account, considering that he would have to crush her if she humped and spat, and he hoped to be allowed to do it gently. There would certainly be a scene.

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Lady Charlotte was at home.

’Always at home to you, Rowsley, at any hour. Mr. Eglett has driven down to the City. There ’s a doctor in a square there’s got a reputation for treating weak children, and he has taken down your grand-nephew Bobby to be inspected. Poor boy comes of a poor stock on the father’s side. Mr. Eglett would have that marriage. Now he sees wealth isn’t everything. Those Benlews are rushlights. However, Elizabeth stood with her father to have Robert Benlew, and this poor child ’s the result. I wonder whether they have consciences!’

My lord prolonged the sibilation of his ‘Yes,’ in the way of absent-minded men. He liked little Bobby, but had to class the boy second for the present.

‘You have our family jewels in your keeping, Charlotte?’

‘No, I haven’t,—and you know I haven’t, Rowsley.’ She sprang to arms, the perfect porcupine, at his opening words, as he had anticipated.

‘Where are the jewels?’

’They’re in the cellars of my bankers, and safe there, you may rely on it.’

‘I want them.’

‘I want to have them safe; and there they stop.’

‘You must get them and hand them over.’

‘To whom?’

‘To me.’

‘What for?’

‘They will be worn by the Countess of Ormont’

’Who ‘s she?’

‘The lady who bears the title.’

’The only Countess of Ormont I know of is your mother and mine, Rowsley; and she’s dead.’

‘The Countess of Ormont I speak of is alive.’

Lady Charlotte squared to him. ‘Who gives her the title?’

‘She bears it by right.’

’Do you mean to say, Rowsley, you have gone and married the woman since we came up from Steignton?’

‘She is my wife.’

‘Anyhow, she won’t have our family jewels.’

‘If you had swallowed them, you’d have to disgorge.’

‘I don’t give up our family jewels to such people.’

‘Do you decline to call on her?’

‘I do: I respect our name and blood.’

’You will send the order to your bankers for them to deliver the jewels over to me at my house this day.’

’Look here, Rowsley; you’re gone cracked or senile. You ’re in the hands of one of those clever wenches who catch men of your age. She may catch you; she shan’t lay hold of our family jewels: they stand for the honour of our name and blood.’

‘They are to be at my house-door at four o’clock this afternoon.’

‘They’ll not stir.’

‘Then I go down to order your bankers and give them the order.’

‘My bankers won’t attend to it without the order from me.’

‘You will submit to the summons of my lawyers.’

‘You’re bent on a public scandal, are you?’

‘I am bent on having the jewels.’

’They are not yours; you ’ve no claim to them; they are heirlooms in our family. Things most sacred to us are attached to them. They belong to our history. There ’s the tiara worn by the first Countess of Ormont. There ’s the big emerald of the necklace-pendant —you know the story of it. Two rubies not counted second to any in England. All those diamonds! I wore the cross and the two pins the day I was presented after my marriage.’

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‘The present Lady Ormont will wear them the day she is presented.’

‘She won’t wear them at Court.’

‘She will.’

’Don’t expect the Lady Ormont of tradesmen and footmen to pass the Lord Chamberlain.’

’That matter will be arranged for next season. Now I ‘ve done.’

‘So have I; and you have my answer, Rowsley.’ They quitted their chairs.

‘You decline to call on my wife?’ said the earl.

Lady Charlotte replied: ’Understand me, now. If the woman has won you round to legitimize the connection, first, I’ve a proper claim to see her marriage lines. I must have a certificate of her birth. I must have a testified account of her life before you met her and got the worst of it. Then, as the case may be, I ’ll call on her.

‘You will behave yourself when you call.’

‘But she won’t have our family jewels.’

‘That affair has been settled by me.’

’I should be expecting to hear of them as decorating the person of one of that man Morsfield’s mistresses.’

The earl’s brow thickened. ’Charlotte, I smacked your cheek when you were a girl.’

’I know you did. You might again, and I wouldn’t cry out. She travels with that Morsfield; you ’ve seen it. He goes boasting of her. Gypsy or not, she ‘s got queer ways.’

’I advise you, you had better learn at once to speak of her respectfully.’

’I shall have enough to go through, if what you say’s true, with questions of the woman’s antecedents and her people, and the date of the day of this marriage. When was the day you did it? I shall have to give an answer. You know cousins of ours, and the way they ’ll be pressing, and comparing ages and bawling rumours. None of them imagined my brother such a fool as to be wheedled into marrying her. You say it’s done, Rowsley. Was it done yesterday or the day before?’

Lord Ormont found unexpectedly that she struck on a weak point. Married from the first? Why not tell me of it? He could hear her voice as if she had spoken the words. And how communicate the pell-mell of reasons?

‘You’re running vixen. The demand I make is for the jewels,’ he said.

‘You won’t have them, Rowsley—not for her.’

‘You think of compelling me to use force?’

‘Try it.’

‘You swear the jewels are with your bankers?’

‘I left them in charge of my bankers, and they’ve not been moved by me.’

‘Well, it must be force.’

‘Nothing short of it when the honour of our family’s concerned.’

It was rather worse than the anticipated struggle with this Charlotte, though he had kept his temper. The error was in supposing that an hour’s sharp conflict would settle it, as he saw. The jewels required a siege.

‘When does Eglett return?’ he asked.

’Back to lunch. You stay and lunch here, Rowsley we don’t often have you.’

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The earl contemplated her, measuring her powers of resistance for a prolonged engagement. Odd that the pride which had withdrawn him from the service of an offending country should pitch him into a series of tussles with women, for its own confusion! He saw that, too, in his dim reflectiveness, and held the country answerable for it.

Mr. Eglett was taken into confidence by him privately after lunch. Mr. Eglett's position between the brother and sister was perplexing; habitually he thought his wife had strong good sense, in spite of the costliness of certain actions at law not invariably confirming his opinion; he thought also that the earl's demand must needs be considered obediently. At the same time, his wife's objections to the new Countess of Ormont, unmasked upon the world, seemed very legitimate; though it might be asked why the earl should not marry, marrying the lady who pleased him. But if, in the words of his wife, the lady had no claim to be called a lady, the marriage was deplorable. On the other hand, Lord Ormont spoke of her in terms of esteem, and he was no fondling dotard.

How to compromise the matter for the sake of peace? The man perpetually plunged into strife by his combative spouse, cried the familiar question again; and at every suggestion of his on behalf of concord he heard from Lady Charlotte that he had no principles, or else from Lord Ormont that his head must be off his shoulders.

The man for peace had the smallest supply of language, and so, unless he took a side and fought, his active part was football between them.

It went on through the afternoon up to five o'clock. No impression was betrayed by Lady Charlotte.

She congratulated her brother on the recruit he had enlisted. He smiled his grimmest of the lips drawn in. A combat, perceptibly of some extension, would soon give him command of the man of peace; and energy to continue attacks will break down the energies of any dogged defensive stand.

He deferred the discussion with his unreasonable sister until the next day at half-past twelve o'clock. Lady Charlotte nodded to the appointment. She would have congratulated herself without irony on the result of the first day's altercation but for her brother Rowsley's unusual and ominous display of patience. Twice during the wrangle she had to conceal a difficult breathing. She felt a numbness in one arm now it was over, and mentally complimented her London physician on the unerringness of his diagnosis. Her heart, however, complained of the cruelty of having in the end, perhaps, if the wrangle should be protracted, to yield, for sheer weakness, without ceasing to beat.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ORMONT JEWELS

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At half-past twelve of the noon next day Lord Ormont was at Lady Charlotte's house door. She welcomed him affectionately, as if nothing were in dispute; he nodded an acceptance of her greetings, with a blunt intimation of the business to be settled; she put on her hump of the feline defensive; then his batteries opened fire and hers barked back on him. Each won admiration of the other's tenacity, all the more determined to sap or split it. They had known one another's character, but they had never seen it in such strong light. Never had their mutual and similar, though opposed, resources been drawn out so copiously and unreservedly. This was the shining scrawl of all that each could do to gain a fight. They admired one another's contemptibly justifiable evasions, changes of front, statements bordering the lie, even to meanness in the withdrawal of admissions and the denial of the same ever having been made. That was Charlotte! That was Rowsley! Anything to beat down the adversary.

As to will, the woman's will, of these two, equalled the man's. They were matched in obstinacy and unscrupulousness.

Her ingenuitics of the defence eluded his attacks, and compelled him to fall on heavy iteration of his demand for the jewels, an immediate restitution of the jewels. 'Why immediate?' cried she.

He repeated it without replying to her.

'But, you tell me, Rowsley, why immediate? If you're in want of money for her, you come to me, tell me, you shall have thousands. I'll drive down to the City to-morrow and sell out stock. Mr. Eglett won't mind when he hears the purpose. I shall call five thousand cheap, and don't ask to see the money again.'

'Ah! double the sum to have your own way!' said he.

She protested that she valued her money. She furnished instances of her carefulness of her money all along up to the present period of brutal old age. Yet she would willingly part with five thousand or more to save the family honour. Mr. Eglett would not only approve, he would probably advance a good part of the money himself.

'Money! Who wants money?' thundered the earl, and jumped out of her trap of the further diversion from the plain request. 'To-morrow, when I am here, I shall expect to have the jewels delivered to me.'

'That you may hand them over to her. Where are they likely to be this time next year? And what do you know about jewels? You may look at them when you ask to see them, and not know imitation paste—like the stuff Lady Beltus showed her old husband. Our mother wore them, and she prized them. I'm not sure I wouldn't rather hear they were exhibited in a Bond Street jeweller's shop or a Piccadilly pawnbroker's than have them on that woman.'

‘You speak of my wife.’

’For a season, perhaps; and off they’re likely to go, to pay bills, if her Adderwoods and her Morsfields are out of funds, as they call it.’

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‘You are aware you are speaking of my wife, Charlotte?’

‘You daren’t say my sister-in-law.’

He did not choose to say it; and once more she dared him. She could imagine she scored a point.

They were summoned to lunch by Mr. Eglett; and there was an hour’s armistice; following which the earl demanded the restitution of the jewels, and heard the singular question, childishly accentuated, ’What for?’

Patience was his weapon and support, so he named his object with an air of inveteracy in tranquillity they were for his wife to wear.

Lady Charlotte dared him to say they were for her sister-in-law.

He despised the transparent artifice of the challenge.

‘But you have to own the difference,’ she said. ’You haven’t lost respect for your family, thank God! No. It ’s one thing to say she ’s a wife: you hang fire when it ’s to say she ‘s my sister-in-law.’

‘You’ll have to admit the fact, Charlotte.’

‘How long is it since I should have had to admit the fact?’

‘From the date of my marriage.’

‘Tell me the date.’

’No, you don’t wear a wig, Charlotte; but you are fit to practise in the Law-courts!’ he said, exasperatedly jocular.

She had started a fresh diversion, and she pressed him for the date. ’I ‘m supposed to have had a sister-in-law-how many weeks?—months?’

‘Years.’

’Married years! And if you’ve been married years, where were you married? Not in a church. That woman’s no church-bride.’

‘There are some clever women made idiots of by their trullish tempers.’

‘Abuse away. I’ve asked you where you were married, Rowsley.’

‘Go to Madrid. Go to the Embassy. Apply to the chaplain.’

’Married in Madrid! Who’s ever married in Madrid! You flung her a yellow handkerchief, and she tied it round her neck—that ’s your ceremony! Now you tell me you’ve been married years; and she’s a young woman; you fetch her over from Madrid, set her in a place where those Morsfields and other fungi-fellows grow, and she has to think herself lucky to be received by a Lady Staines and a Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, and she the talk of the town, refused at Court, for all an honourable-enough old woman countenanced her in pity; and I ’m asked to believe she was my brother’s wife, sister-in-law of mine, all the while! I won’t.’

Lady Charlotte dilated on it for a length of time, merely to show she declined to believe it; pouring Morsfield over him and the talk of the town, the gypsy caught in Spain—now to be foisted on her as her sister-in-law! She could fancy she produced an effect.

She did indeed unveil to him a portion of the sufferings his Aminta had undergone; as visibly, too, the good argumentative reasons for his previous avoidance of the deadly, dismal wrangle here forced on him. A truly dismal, profitless wrangle! But the finish of it would be the beginning of some solace to his Aminta.

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The finish of it must be to-morrow. He refrained from saying so, and simply appointed to-morrow for the resumption of the wrestle, departing in his invincible coat of patience: which one has to wear when dealing with a woman like Charlotte, he informed Mr. Eglett, on his way out at a later hour than on the foregone day. Mr. Eglett was of his opinion, that an introduction of lawyers into a family dispute was 'rats in the pantry'; and he would have joined him in his gloomy laugh, if the thought of Charlotte in a contention had not been so serious a matter. She might be beaten; she could not be brought to yield.

She retired to her bedroom, and laid herself flat on her bed, immoveable, till her maid undressed her for the night. A cup of broth and strip of toast formed her sole nourishment. As for her doctor's possible reproaches, the symptoms might crowd and do their worst; she fought for the honour of her family.

At midday of the third day Lady Charlotte was reduced to the condition of those fortresses which wave defiantly the flag, but deliver no further shot, awaiting the assault. Her body, affected by hideous old age, succumbed. Her will was unshaken. She would not write to her bankers. Mr. Eglett might go to them, if he thought fit. Rowsley was to understand that he might call himself married; she would have no flower-basket bunch of a sister-in-law thrust upon her.

Lord Ormont and Mr. Eglett walked down to her bankers in the afternoon. As a consequence of express injunctions given by my lady five years previously, the assistant-manager sought an interview with her.

The jewels were lodged at her house the day ensuing. They were examined, verified by the list in Lady Charlotte's family record-book, and then taken away—forcibly, of course—by her brother.

He laughed in his dry manner; but the reminiscent glimpses, helping him to see the humour of it, stirred sensations of the tug it had been with that combative Charlotte, and excused him for having shrunk from the encounter until he conceived it to be necessary.

Settlement of the affair with Morsfield now claimed his attention. The ironical tolerance he practised in relation to Morsfield when Aminta had no definite station before the world changed to an angry irritability at the man's behaviour now that she had stepped forth under his acknowledgement of her as the Countess of Ormont. He had come round to a rather healthier mind regarding his country, and his introduction of the Countess of Ormont to the world was his peace-offering.

As he returned home earlier on the third day, he found his diligent secretary at work. The calling on Captain May and the writing to the sort of man were acts obnoxious to his dignity; so he despatched Weyburn to the captain's house, one in a small street of three narrow tenements abutting on aristocracy and terminating in mews. Weyburn's

mission was to give the earl's address at Great Marlow for the succeeding days, and to see Captain May, if the captain was at home. During his absence the precious family jewel-box was locked in safety. Aminta and her friend, little Miss Collett, were out driving, by the secretary's report. The earl considered it a wholesome feature of Aminta's character that she should have held to her modest schoolmate the fact spoke well for both of them.

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A look at the papers to serve for Memoirs was discomposing, and led him to think the secretary could be parted with as soon as he pleased to go: say, a week hence.

The Memoirs were no longer designed for issue. He had the impulse to treat them on the spot as the Plan for the Defence of the Country had been treated; and for absolutely obverse reasons. The secretary and the Memoirs were associated: one had sprung out of the other. Moreover, the secretary had witnessed a scene at Steignton. The young man had done his duty, and would be thanked for that, and dismissed, with a touch of his employer's hand. The young man would have made a good soldier—a better soldier, good as he might be as a scribe. He ought to have been in his father's footsteps, and he would then have disciplined or quashed his fantastical ideas. Perhaps he was right on the point of toning the Memoirs here and there. Since the scene at Steignton Lord Ormont's views had changed markedly in relation to everybody about him, and most things.

Weyburn came back at the end of an hour to say that he had left the address with Mrs. May, whom he had seen.

'A handsome person,' the earl observed.

'She must have been very handsome,' said Weyburn.

'Ah! we fall into their fictions, or life would be a bald business, upon my word!'

Lord Ormont had not uttered it before the sentiment of his greater luck with one of that queer world of the female lottery went through him on a swell of satisfaction, just a wave.

An old-world eye upon women, it seemed to Weyburn. But the man who could crown a long term of cruel injustice with the harshness to his wife at Steignton would naturally behold women with that eye.

However, he was allowed only to generalize; he could not trust himself to dwell on Lady Ormont and the Aminta inside the shell. Aminta and Lady Ormont might think as one or diversely of the executioner's blow she had undergone. She was a married woman, and she probably regarded the wedding by law as the end a woman has to aim at, and is annihilated by hitting; one flash of success, and then extinction, like a boy's cracker on the pavement. Not an elevated image, but closely resembling that which her alliance with Lord Ormont had been!

At the same time, no true lover of a woman advises her—imploring is horrible treason—to slip the symbolic circle of the law from her finger, and have in an instant the world for her enemy. She must consent to be annihilated, and must have no feelings; particularly no mind. The mind is the danger for her. If she has a mind alive, she will

certainly push for the position to exercise it, and run the risk of a classing with Nature’s created mates for reptile men.

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Besides, Lady Ormont appeared, in the company of her friend Selina Collett, not worse than rather too thoughtful; not distinctly unhappy. And she was conversable, smiling. She might have had an explanation with my lord, accepting excuses—or, who knows? taking the blame, and offering them. Weakness is pliable. So pliable is it, that it has been known for a crack of the masterly whip to fling off the victim and put on the culprit! Ay, but let it be as it may with Lady Ormont, Aminta is of a different composition. Aminta's eyes of the return journey to London were haunting lights, and lured him to speculate; and for her sake he rejected the thought that for him they meant anything warmer than the passing thankfulness, though they were a novel assurance to him of her possession beneath her smothering cloud of the power to resolve, and show forth a brilliant individuality.

The departure of the ladies and my lord in the travelling carriage for the house on the Upper Thames was passably sweetened to Weyburn by the command to him to follow in a day or two, and continue his work there until he left England. Aminta would not hear of an abandonment of the Memoirs. She spoke on the subject to my lord as to a husband pardoned.

She was not less affable and pleasant with him out of Weyburn's hearing. My lord earned her gratitude for his behaviour to Selina Collett, to whom he talked interestedly of her favourite pursuit, as he had done on the day when, as he was not the man to forget, her arrival relieved him of anxiety. Aminta, noticed the box on the seat beside him.

They drove up to their country house in time to dress leisurely for dinner. Nevertheless, the dinner-hour had struck several minutes before she descended; and the earl, as if not expecting her, was out on the garden path beside the river bank with Selina. She beckoned from the step of the open French window.

He came to her at little Selina's shuffling pace, conversing upon water-plants.

'No jewelry to-day?' he said.

And Aminta replied: 'Carstairs has shown me the box and given the key. I have not opened it.'

'Time in the evening, or to-morrow. You guess the contents?'

'I presume I do.'

She looked feverish and shadowed.

He murmured kindly: 'Anything?'

'Not now: we will dine.'

She had missed, had lost, she feared, her own jewelbox; a casket of no great treasure to others, but of a largely estimable importance to her.

After the heavy ceremonial entrance and exit of dishes, she begged the earl to accompany her for an examination of the contents of the box.

As soon as her chamber-door was shut, she said, in accents of alarm: 'Mine has disappeared. Carstairs, I know, is to be trusted. She remembers carrying the box out of my room; she believes she can remember putting it into the fly. She had to confess that it had vanished, without her knowing how, when my boxes were unpacked.'

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‘Is she very much upset?’ said the earl.

’Carstairs? Why, yes, poor creature! you can imagine. I have no doubt she feels for me; and her own reputation is concerned. What do you think is best to be done?’

‘To be done! Overhaul the baggage again in all the rooms.’

‘We’ve not failed to do that.’

’Control yourself, my dear. If, by bad luck, they’re lost, we can replace them. The contents of this box, now, we could not replace. Open it, and judge.’

’I have no curiosity—forgive me, I beg. And the servant’s fly has been visited, ransacked inside and out, footmen questioned; we have not left anything we can conceive of undone. My lord, will you suggest?’

’The intrinsic value of the gems would not be worth—not worth Aminta’s one beat of the heart. Upon my word—not one!’

An amatory knightly compliment breasting her perturbation roused an unwonted spite; and a swift reflection on it startled her with a suspicion. She cast it behind her. He could be angler and fish, he would not be cat and mouse.

She said, however, more temperately: ’It is not the value of the gems. We are losing precious minutes!’

’Association of them with the giver? Is it that? If that has a value for you, he is flattered.’

This betrayed him to the woman waxing as intensely susceptible in all her being as powder to sparks.

‘There is to be no misunderstanding, my lord,’ she said. ’I like— I value my jewels; but —I am alarmed lest the box should fall into hands —into strange hands.’

‘The box!’ he exclaimed with an outline of a comic grimace; and, if proved a voluptuary in torturing, he could instance half a dozen points for extenuation: her charm of person, withheld from him, and to be embraced; her innocent naughtiness; compensation coming to her in excess for a transient infliction of pain. ‘Your anxiety is about the box?’

‘Yes, the box,’ Aminta said firmly. ‘It contains—’

‘No false jewels? A thief might complain.’

‘It contains letters, my lord.’ ‘Blackmail?’

‘You would be at liberty to read them. I would rather they were burnt.’

‘Ah!’ The earl heaved his chest prodigiously. ’Blackmail letters are better in a husband’s hands, if they can be laid there.’

‘If there is a necessity for him to read them—yes.’

’There may be a necessity, there can’t be a gratification,—though there are dogs of thick blood that like to scratch their sores,’ he murmured to himself. ‘You used to show me these declaration epistles.’

‘Not the names.’

‘Not the names—no!’

’When we had left the country, I showed you why it had been my wish to go.’

’Xarifa was and is female honour. Take the key, open that box; I will make inquiries. But, my dear, you guess everything. Your little box was removed for the bigger impression to be produced by this one.’

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A flash came out of her dark eyes.

'No, you guess wrong this time, you clever shrew! I wormed nothing from you,' said he. 'I knew you kept particular letters in that receptacle of things of price: Aminta can't conceal. The man has worried you. Why not have come to me?'

'Oblige me, my lord, by restoring me my box.'

'This is your box.'

Her bosom lifted with the words Oh, no! unspoken. He took the key and opened the box. A dazzling tray of stones was revealed; underneath it the constellations in cases, very heavens for the worldly Eve; and he doubted that Eve could have gone completely out of her. But she had, as observation instructed him, set her woman's mind on something else, and must have it before letting her eyes fall on objects impossible for any of her sex to see without coveting them.

He bowed. 'I will fetch it,' he said magnanimously. Her own box was brought from his room. She then consented to look womanly at the Ormont jewels, over which the battle; whereof she knew nothing, and nothing could be told her, had been fought in her interests, for her sovereign pleasure.

She looked and admired. They were beautiful jewels the great emerald was wonderful, and there were two rubies to praise. She excused herself for declining to put the circlet for the pendant round her neck, or a glittering ring on her finger. Her remarks were encomiums, not quite so cold as those of a provincial spinster of an ascetic turn at an exhibition of the world's flycatcher gewgaws. He had divided Aminta from the Countess of Ormont, and it was the wary Aminta who set a guard on looks and tones before the spectacle of his noble bounty, lest any, the smallest, payment of the dues of the countess should be demanded. Rightly interpreting him to be by nature incapable of asking pardon, or acknowledging a wrong done by him, however much he might crave exemption from blame and seek for peace, she kept to her mask of injury, though she hated unforgivingness; and she felt it little, she did it easily, because her heart was dead to the man. My lord's hand touched her on her shoulder, propitiatingly in some degree, in his dumb way.

Offended women can be emotional to a towering pride, that bends while it assumes unbendingness: it must come to their sensations, as it were a sign of humanity in the majestic, speechless king of beasts; and they are pathetically melted, abjectly hypocritical; a nice confusion of sentiments, traceable to a tender bosom's appreciation of strength and the perceptive compassion for its mortality.

In a case of the alienated wife, whose blood is running another way, no foul snake's bite is more poisonous than that indicatory touch, however simple and slight. My lord's

hand, lightly laid on Aminta’s shoulder, became sensible of soft warm flesh stiffening to the skeleton.

ETEXT EDITOR’S BOOKMARKS:

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A bird that won’t roast or boil or stew
Acting is not of the high class which conceals the art
Ah! we fall into their fictions
Bad luck’s not repeated every day Keep heart for the good
Began the game of Pull
By nature incapable of asking pardon
Consciousness of some guilt when vowing itself innocent
Having contracted the fatal habit of irony
He had to shake up wrath over his grievances
Her vehement fighting against facts
His aim to win the woman acknowledged no obstacle in the means
His restored sense of possession
How to compromise the matter for the sake of peace?
I could be in love with her cruelty, if only I had her near me
Men who believe that there is a virtue in imprecations
Not men of brains, but the men of aptitudes
Not the indignant and the frozen, but the genially indifferent
One is a fish to her hook; another a moth to her light
One night, and her character’s gone
Passion added to a bowl of reason makes a sophist’s mess
Policy seems to petrify their minds
Rage of a conceited schemer tricked
Respect one another’s affectations
To time and a wife it is no disgrace for a man to bend
Uncommon unprogressiveness
When duelling flourished on our land, frail women powerful
Where heart weds mind, or nature joins intellect
With what little wisdom the world is governed

[The End]

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