

At the junction the cripple shied. I saw it a man of color.

Your friendship and best good-will with this gentleman, said he, indicating the fat farmer, 'if the young lady is not afraid to go on. I can take care of her as far as the rail way, if it's not too great a liberty, and bring the ponies back to the Hall afterwards, my lady.' With an interrogative snarl at his ragged hat.

It seemed the best thing to be done under the circumstances. My aunt, after such demurring, and another ineffectual attack of the hysterics, consented to entrust herself to the fat farmer's guidance, not, however, until she was assured that his horse was both blind and broken-winded. I put Mour's bridle down on the lower bar instead of the cheek, on which he had been previously driven. My aunt climbed into the gig, I mounted the pony-carriage, the cripple took his seat deliberately by my side, and away we went on our respective journeys, certainly in a mode which we had little anticipated when we left the front-door at Dangerfield Hall.

My preserver sat half in and half out of the carriage, leaning his white, well-shaped hand upon the splashboard. The bandaged side of his face was towards me; the ponies went quietly enough, they had enjoyed their gallop, and were, I think, a little blown. I had leisure to take a good survey of my companion. When we had tramped a mile for a quarter of a mile in silence, and turned his face towards me. We looked at each other for about half a minute, and then both burst out laughing.

'You didn't know me, Miss Coventry! not the least in the world,' exclaimed the cripple, pulling the bandage off his face, and showing another eye quite as handsome as the one that had previously been uncovered.

'How could you do so, Captain Lovell?' was all I could reply. 'Conceive my aunt had found you out; or even if any one should recognise you now. What would people think of me? But how did you know we were going to London to-day, and how could you tell the ponies would run away?'

'Never mind how I knew your movements, Miss Coventry,' was the reply. 'Kate! may I call you Kate? it's such a soft, sweet name,' he added, now sitting altogether inside the carriage, which certainly was a small one for two people. 'You don't know how I've watched for you, and waited and prowled about, during the last few days. You don't know how anxious I've been only for one word—even one look. I've spent hours out on the down just to see the flutter of your white dress as you went through the shrubbery—even at that distance it was something to gaze at you, and know you were there. Last night I crossed the ice under your window.'

'You did, indeed,' I replied with a laugh, 'and what a ducking you must have got!'

Frank laughed, too, and resumed. 'I was sadly afraid that your aunt might have found out you were holding a parley with the enemy outside the walls. I knew you were to go to London to-day. I thought very likely you might be annoyed, and put under surveillance on my account, and I was resolved to see you, if only for one moment; so I borrowed these ragged garments of a professional beggar, who I believe is a great deal better off in reality than myself, and I determined to watch for your carriage and trust to chance for a word, or even a glance of recognition. She has been a deal more than I could expect. At first, when I saw Aunt Deborah alone in the carriage, it flashed across me that perhaps you were to stay *en passant* at Dangerfield. But I knew Lady Horsingham had a pony carriage. I also knew—or what would be the use of servants?—that it was ordered this morning; so I stumped gaily along the road, thinking that at all events I might have an opportunity of saying three words to you at the station, whilst the ser-

vice of the relaxation of ladies' society after his morning labors and researches. With me he was good-humored and full of fun; and his wife's jokes and stories, most of them somewhat scandalous, he would laugh till he cried. 'I'm responsible for you, Miss Coventry,' he would say, with a sly laugh; 'you're not fit to be trusted with Madge; upon my life I believe she is the wildest of the two. If you won't have the carriage I must walk back with you myself. How far is it, Madge? Do you think I can stay the distance, as you sporting people term it in your inexplicable jargon?'

'Why, you know you can't get a hundred yards; you foolish old man,' laughed his wife; 'a nice chaperon you'd make for Kate; why she'd have to carry you, and you know you'd tumble off even then. No, no, you and I will stay comfortably here by the fire, and I'll give you your tea, and put you tidily to bed; I shan't be home any other night this week. Kate has a conveyance coming for her; haven't you, Kate? *Le beau cousin* will take the best possible care of her; and even prim Aunt Deborah won't object to our walking back with him. I believe he came up from Wales on purpose. What would somebody else give to take the charge off his hands? You needn't blush, Kate; I can see through a millstone as far as my neighbors. I'm not quite such a fool as I look; am I, "old man"? There's the door-bell. John, ask Mr. Jones if he won't step up and have some tea.' We were sitting by a blazing fire in the boudoir, a snug and beautiful little room, to which no one was admitted but the lady's especial favorites—even the 'old man' never entered it during the day.

CHAPTER XVI.

I was not sorry to be once fairly settled in Lowndes street. Even in the winter, London has its charms. People don't watch everything you do, or carp at everything you say. If there is more apparent constraint, there is more real liberty than in the country. Besides, you have so much society, and everybody is so much pleasanter in the metropolis during December than July. The frost had set in again harder than ever. Brilliant and White Stockings, like Speir-Adam's steeds, were compelled to bide in stall. John was lingering at the Lloyds' or elsewhere in the Principality, though expected back every day. Aunt Deborah was still weak, and had only just sufficient energy to forbid Captain Lovell the house, and insist on my never speaking to him. I can't think what she has found out, or what Aunt Horsingham had told her; but this I know, that if ever I have a daughter, and I don't want her to like Mr. Dash, or to be continually thinking about him, I shall not forbid her to speak to him; nor shall I take every opportunity of impressing on her that he is wild, unprincipled, reckless, and dissipated, and that the only redeeming points about him are his agreeable conversation and his good looks. Altogether, I should have been somewhat dull had it not been for Mrs. Lumley; but of that vivacious lady I saw a good deal, and I confess took a far greater pleasure in her society than on our first acquaintance. I should have esteemed possible. When I am ill at ease with myself, not thoroughly satisfied with my own conduct, I always like the society of fast people; their liberality of sentiment, and general carelessness of demeanor, convey no tacit reproach on my own want of restraint; and I feel more at home with them than with such severe moralists as Aunt Horsingham, or hypocritical Cousin Amelia. So I drove and stopped and visited with Mrs. Lumley—nay, I was even permitted, as a great favor, to dine with her on one or two occasions; Aunt Deborah only stipulating that there should be no male addition to the party, except Mr. Lumley himself, or, as the lady of the house termed him, 'her old man.'

I confess I liked the old man, and so I think, in her own way, did his wife. Why she married him I cannot think, more particularly as she had not then succeeded to the comfortable fortune they now enjoy; he was

enjoying the relaxation of ladies' society after his morning labors and researches. With me he was good-humored and full of fun; and his wife's jokes and stories, most of them somewhat scandalous, he would laugh till he cried.

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'Mr. Jones's compliments, and he hopes you'll excuse him, ma'am,' was the footman's answer on his return; 'but it's very late, and he's promised to bring Miss Coventry back by eleven.'

'Well, I'm sure,' said Mrs. Lumley, 'if I was you, Kate, I shouldn't stand his anticipating his authority in this way. Never mind, be a good girl, and do as you're bid; pop your bonnet on. Shall I lend you an extra shawl? There, you may give my "old man" a kiss, if you like. Bless him! he's gone fast asleep. Good night, Kate; mind you come to luncheon to-morrow, there's a dear.' So saying, Mrs. Lumley bid her a most affectionate farewell; and I found myself leaning on John's arm, to walk home through the clear frosty night.

I do like perambulating London streets by gas-light—of course, with a gentleman to take care of one. It is so much pleasanter than being stowed up in a brougham. How I wish it was the fashion for people to take their bonnets out to dinner with them, and walk back in the cool fresh air! If it is delightful in winter, how much more so in the not summer nights of the season! Your spirits rise and your nerves brace themselves as you inhale the midnight air, with all its smoky particles, pure by comparison with that which has just been poisoning you in a crowded drawing room. Your cavalier asks leave to indulge in his 'walk,' and you enjoy its fragrance at second-hand, as he puffs contentedly away, and chats on in that prosy, confidential sort of manner, which no man ever succeeds in assuming, save with a cigar in his mouth. John lit his, of course; but was less communicative, to my fancy, than usual. After asking me if I had 'enjoyed a pleasant evening,' and whether 'I preferred walking,' he relapsed into a somewhat constrained silence. I, too, walked on without speaking. Much as I love the night, it always makes me rather melancholy; and I dare say we should have got to Lowndes Street without exchanging a syllable, had not some nip of mischief prompted me to cross-examine my cousin a little upon his *sojourn* in Wales, and to quiz him half spitefully, on his supposed penchant for pretty Fanny Lloyd. John rose freely in a moment.

'I know where you pick up all this non-

will you don't come of age till you're five and twenty. 'By that time, John,' said my aunt 'Kate will have seen plenty of others, and be old enough to know her own mind. If she takes you then, she takes you with her eyes open, and she won't get tired of you, and find out she likes somebody else better. Promise me, John, that you'll wait to then.' And I did promise, Kate; but I can't keep my word—I can't wait in this state of anxiety and uncertainty, and perhaps lose you after all. It's too great a stake to play for, if one is to be kept so long in suspense, and I have resolved to be put out of pain one way or the other.'

John paused. I had never seen him so excited before; he was quite hot, though the night was keen and frosty; his hand trembled as mine leaned upon it; and though his cigar was gone out, he kept puffing away, utterly unconscious of the fact. He seemed to expect an answer. I hesitated. I did not know what to reply. I had got so accustomed to Cousin John, that I never looked upon in any other light than that of a favorite brother, a constant companion and friend. Moreover, I was not prepared to take such decisive step as that which he now seemed to be urging me. There is a great difference between liking people, and giving them power of life and death over one for the rest of one's days. I will not say that the image of another did not rise before me in all its winning beauty, as I had seen it last, scarcely one short week ago. Although, I did not know what to say; so I wisely said nothing, but walked on, looking straight before me, with an uncomfortable feeling that I was driven into the corner, and should ere long be compelled to do that which is always distasteful to our liberty-loving sex—namely, to make up my mind. John, too, walked on for a few paces in silence. We were at the corner of Lowndes Street. There was not a soul to be seen but our two selves. All at once he stopped short under the light of a lamp, and looked me full in the face.

'Kate,' said he, in a grave, deliberate voice, 'you know what I mean—Yes or No?'

I shook like a leaf. What would I have given to have been able to take counsel of one of my own sex—Mrs. Lumley, Aunt Deborah, or even cold, pitiless Lady Horsingham! But I had to choose for myself. I felt that the turning-point of my destiny had arrived—that the game was in my own hand, and that now I ought to decide one way or the other. I shrank from the responsibility. Like a very woman, I adopted a middle course.

'Give me time, John,' I pleaded, 'give me time to weigh matters over in my own mind. This is an affair that equally concerns the happiness of each of us. Do not let us decide in a hurry. Aunt Deborah was quite right; her wishes ought to be my law. When I am five-and-twenty, it will be soon enough to enter on this subject again. In the interval, believe me, John, I have the greatest regard and esteem for you.'

'Nothing more, Kate?' said John, looking as if he didn't know whether he was pleased or annoyed—'nothing but esteem?'

'Well, I musn't say any more,' was my reply; 'but you know you have that.'

John's face brightened considerably. 'And in the meantime, Kate,' he urged, 'you won't allow yourself to be entangled with any one else?'

'Of course not,' was my vigorous disclaimer; and by this time we had arrived at my aunt's door, and it was time to say, 'Good night.'

'What's the matter, Kate?' exclaimed Mrs. Lumley, when I called to lunch with her the following day, according to promise. 'You look pale and worried. For goodness' sake, tell me what has happened. Have you found out the rover transferring his adoration to Miss Molasses? or did mon cousin tak' advantage of the hour and the opportunity, to lecture us last night on our love of

I replied; 'but I should be afraid to try experiment too often. I am sure Brill would break away altogether if I used so. And I think the very man that would most would be the least likely to star repetition of such treatment. No, Lumley, I fear I must now choose between Frank and my cousin. The latter has behaved honorably, considerately, and kind, and like a thorough gentleman. The former seems to think I am to be at his beck and call, indeed, whenever he chooses. He never been to see me during the whole of this past week. At Dangerfield, he was little careful of my reputation as he was his own limbs. Did I tell you how he drowned he was, crossing the moat? If you would have laughed, you wicked laughing woman, if you had heard the splash! cold snowy night! and then to disguise self like a tramp, and stop the runaway ponies at the risk of his life, that he might speak three words to me before I went away. I will say for him that he is afraid of nothing; but I do not conceal from myself which has been best towards me. And yet, Mrs. Lumley, I concluded, rising and walking to the window, 'I would rather be Frank for a lover than Cousin John for a husband.'

'Many people would suggest there was impossibility in your having both, but I give such bad advice as that,' replied Mrs. Lumley; 'however, Kate, do nothing in a hurry—that's my counsel. I grant you think Master Frank a very slippery gentleman. I do know some curious stories about him; but I never tell tales out of school, the meantime, you are, after all, only coming from an *embarras de richesses*; it's better to have too many suitors than none at all. Come, I'll take you out shopping to-morrow till five; then we'll have some tea, you can go home quietly dinner, and Aunt Deborah's leave to join me at the Fré play. I've got a capital box, and I'll take the carriage for you. Wait half a second whilst I put on my bonnet.'

So we went off shopping, and we had tea, and I found no objections from Aunt Deborah to my going out again in the evening, and I was restless I did not the least get the trouble of dressing, or anything to take me away from my own thoughts. But the afternoon and all the evening I made my mind that I would give up Frank Lovell. A little resolution was all that was needed. It was plain he did not really care for me. Why, he wasn't even in London, though I knew quite well I had been there more than a week. Very likely I shouldn't see him in winter, and my heart sank as I thought how much easier this would make my sacrifice. At all events, I determined, when I did him, to be cold, and demure, and unamiable to show him unmistakably that I belonged to another—in which Spartan frame of mind I betook myself to the French play.

Alas, alas! well may the bard complain—

'Woman's vows are writ in water,
Woman's faith is traced in sand.'
Who should be in the back of the box with Frank Lovell himself! Mischief was done, Lumley, was this your doing? Before I went away, I had promised to meet him next morning in the Park, and he was disappointed.

plain all.

CHAPTER XVII.

I hope I have as much command of my temperance as falls to the lot of any lady who don't paint; but when I returned from my walk in the Park, the following morning, I must have looked flushed or excited, or some way different from usual. I met John at the corner of Lowndes street, and he stopped short, and looked me piercingly in the face.

'Where have you been, Kate?' said he, without waiting to bid me a 'good morning' or anything.

(To be Continued.)