

# THE Master of the Hounds

CHAPTER XXI.

(CONTINUED.)

'For that I am engaged to Captain Melville.'

'The succeeding one, then?'

'I have promised that to Major Hammond.'

'Ah, yes, I see,' exclaimed Beauchamp, in an offended tone, 'your engagements to me are to be broken, but not to others.'

'And he was turning indignantly away, when Lord Danby said, 'I fear, Beauchamp, there is some misunderstanding with Miss Douglas and yourself about this quadrille, and if you have a prior claim to mine, which I gather from your words, I will, although most reluctantly, resign her hand for this set, trusting to be more fortunate in another.'

'Oh no,' replied Beauchamp, 'Miss Douglas has made her election in favour of your lordship, although previously engaged to me, and of course therefore I must retire,' with which he turned haughtily round and left them.

Lord Malcolm, who was near enough to hear all that passed between Blanche and Beauchamp, looked serious. Blanche was so hurt as to be ready to cry, and Lord Danby, although flattered by her preference for him, felt rather uncomfortable. 'I am really sorry,' he observed to Blanche, 'for this unpleasant misunderstanding, but I hope you will acquit me of the least intentional offence to Mr. Beauchamp.'

'It is entirely my fault,' replied Blanche. 'I remember now I did promise Mr. Beauchamp the sixth quadrille, which this unfortunately is, although the seventh dance.'

'Oh, never mind, Blanche,' whispered Malcolm; 'I will set this mistake right with Beauchamp presently, although he is confoundedly capricious sometimes, and here I fear he has been treated rather unceremoniously; as I think, having the first claim, you should have waived that of the Captain or Major in his favor, at least, or have at once accepted his arm in place of Lord Danby's.'

'But really, Charles, I did not intend to offend him, although wishing to avoid being considered rude by Lord Danby when the set was formed.'

'No, my dear girl, that I hope he does not believe, and I will endeavour to smooth down this unpleasantness.'

After the quadrille was concluded, Malcolm sought his friend, trying to persuade him to ask Blanche for another dance, which he hoped might be the means of reconciling this little difference.

'No, Malcolm,' he replied, 'I will sue no further, having done so three times in vain; and when positively in the right, to be postponed even for a Duke's son is not very palatable.'

'Come, come, Beauchamp, don't give way to temper.'

'No Malcolm, temper has little to do with my present feelings, which are acute enough without your accusing me of being bad-tempered—that I am not, and never have been, although I can feel an insult from those I love more deeply than any man living. But now I am engaged, and must go in search of my partner.'

As he turned away, Malcolm said, 'Mind, Beauchamp, you are of our party to the supper-table; to which no answer was returned.'

On Malcolm's seeking Blanche, whom he found sitting with her Aunt Gordon, she anxiously inquired, 'Well, Charles, have you succeed in pacifying William?'

'No, dear girl, I am sorry to say I have not yet prevailed; he seems exceedingly hurt, and says you refused him three times, and that you ought at once to have taken his arm, instead of Lord Danby's, as being positively engaged to him before his lordship. This admits of no doubt, Blanche; and he also feels very much annoyed that you should have shown so distinguishing a mark of favor to Lord Danby, by accepting him for two dances so close upon each other, contrary to etiquette and his advice, and thereby placing him you have known so long

decline your proffered olive branch, I shall take part against him.'

Malcolm was not long in explaining to Beauchamp his cousin's regret for what had occurred, and her determination to dance with no other until she had fulfilled her engagement to himself; which brought him to her side immediately—softened, although not satisfied. Blanche held out her hand as he approached, and on his sitting down, she candidly admitted her fault, and want of consideration, in dancing with Lord Danby.

'Pray say no more, Blanche; you have a perfect right to please yourself, and I have no pretensions to dictate to you; but as you were so averse to behave rudely, as you thought, to Lord Danby, you will of course feel equally reluctant to offend either Captain Melville or Major Hammond, to whom you told me you were engaged for the next two dances; and therefore, to avoid any more unpleasantness to yourself (as I find you have already refused Melville on my account), I will explain to him how the matter really stood between us, and take my chance after supper. Don't you think, Malcolm,' asked Beauchamp, appealing to him, 'this is the proper course to pursue, to avoid further remarks?'

An assent being given, Beauchamp went in search of Melville, when Malcolm observed to Blanche, 'He is stiff and formal still, dear girl, and my impression is you will find him so for some little time; but take my advice, don't ever dance twice with a stranger to his exclusion, for he is confoundedly jealous and particular in some things, and as haughty as a prince when treated with indifference; but here he comes,' as Beauchamp again approached, saying Captain Melville consented to take his turn after the Major; and now, Blanche, taking a card and pencil from his pocket, 'if you will, on due reflection, mark any dance on the list after supper, and give it to me on my return. I will hold myself engaged to you, even though it should be the very last.'

'You are not going to leave us again now, William,' said Mrs. Gordon; 'I have not seen you the whole evening; so sit down with me a little, unless you prefer strangers to your aunt.'

'No, dear aunt, this is not my character, you well know; those I profess to love, I love deeply and for ever, and no stranger can ever induce me to waver for one moment in my affections or respect to those who are entitled to my esteem and confidence.'

Soon after, Major Hammond came up, offering his arm to Blanche; and when they were alone, Mrs. Gordon said, 'You have sufficiently punished dear Blanche for her trifling error, to-night, William, and you are now more severe to her than she deserves.'

'The happiness of life, dear aunt, depends on trifles apparently as light as air; and the disposition is shown as much in little things as in great events; and you see my anticipations about Blanche are being realised. I fear it will be some time before she really knows her own mind. What! ought Lord Danby, or a dozen lords, to influence her conduct towards one she profess to love, and make him insignificant in the presence of a perfect stranger! A woman cannot love the man she would help to humiliate. No, no, aunt; it harasses me to think more about Blanche's treatment, which has sunk deep in my heart. No sooner have I risked my life to save her from one lord than I am nearly involved in a quarrel with another, whom she thinks proper to patronize and place on an equal, if not a superior, footing to myself; but from this night Blanche is free to act as she pleases, without the least reference to me, as I will never presume to advise or influence her for the future; in fact, I believe she does not rightly yet understand her own feelings towards me, which, most probably, are those of sisterly regard only, as she appears to be much taken, at first sight, with Lord Danby.'

'William, you are now not only severe but unjust also, and are magnifying a trifle into a serious offence. Blanche has atoned and suffered most severely for her error, and it was all I could do to console her. Will you make me also miserable, as well as herself?'

'No, dear aunt, I will say no more; perhaps I have said too much.

ing this room, and therefore I am of course bound to keep before all others.'

'Oh, never mind, there will be plenty of time yet, and I will find you a place.'

'Then I must go without you, as I certainly shall not offend my Aunt Gordon by not being ready to attend her as I promised.'

'Oh, Miss Douglas, I cannot allow you to go alone, and will of course attend you.'

Constance and Mrs. Gordon, with Malcolm and Beauchamp, met them, as they were returning, when the latter said, 'There is room for you at our table, Melville, if you will join our party.'

'Most willingly, Beauchamp,' was the reply; and in this order, Mrs. Gordon having released Beauchamp's arm, they descended the stairs to the supper-room, when Melville whispered to Blanche, 'I do not now regret the interruption to our dance, as it has afforded me the enviable position of sitting near you and basking in the sunshine of those smiles I value beyond all price.'

'Pray spare me such fulsome compliments, Captain Melville,' said Blanche, loud enough for Beauchamp to hear; 'I do not like fine speeches; which stopped the Captain from any further attempts in that line.'

## CHAPTER XXII.

Four long tables were arranged in the supper-room for the members of the four hunts, at the head of which each master presided; and Will Beauchamp took his place, with Mrs. Gordon on one hand, and Blanche on the other, at the head of his table; the old squire sitting next to Blanche, and Malcolm on the other side, below Mrs. Gordon; next in succession came Sir Lionel Markham, with his party, Sir Francis Burnett, Gwynne, and other members of the hunt, Bob Conyers facing William Beauchamp as vice-president at the lower end, around whom all the youngsters (as Bob called them) were congregated with their partners. Of eatables and potables there was a grand display; with a profusion of game, wild fowl, &c., with the usual accompaniments of confectionary exhibited on such occasions, to which, when the company had paid ample attention, the toasts of the evening succeeded. The health of the ladies was of course received with rapturous applause, for which Bob Conyers returned thanks on their behalf in a very humorous and gallant speech, being the oldest bachelor of the company, jocosely taking his date from the age of George the Second.

'You behold, ladies and gentlemen,' said Bob, 'in your humble servant a true specimen of the bashful man, who has had the misfortune to be in love ever since entering his teens, and who has now advanced very deep into the ties, without being tied up himself; the fact is, ladies, I never could muster courage to pop the question, for, when the time arrived for popping, the cork would never come out; in short, I am like a stale bottle of stout, there's no pop left in me; and then as to a choice—these lines are continually running in my head—

'How happy could I be with either,  
Were t'other dear charmer away!'

My sensitive and soft heart is ever receiving impressions, but the wax is always melting, for it ain't like cobble's way, which keeps many a man in the saddle. This very night I have fallen in love ten times, at least; and were I offered the selection of all the beauty here assembled on this auspicious occasion to do us honor, for my life I could never make up my mind, ladies, which to choose, as you all appear so irresistibly bewitching. I see some men looking unutterably soft things, and others whispering exceedingly foolish ones to their fair partners, whilst I am standing by my unfortunate partner's side like an ass, twisting and twirling her fan (I believe I have broken half a dozen to-night); but the very attempt to make love absolutely chokes me; in short, unless some kind soul, pitying my distressed situation, does actually propose for me, Bob Conyers must continue a bachelor to the end of the chapter. It behoves me now, gentlemen, on behalf of the ladies, to express their thanks for the compliment paid them, and the married who have experienced the felicity of

Alter some flattering remarks on the fair sex, Manvers resumed his seat.

A move was soon after made; and, as the ladies were leaving, Blanche whispered Beauchamp—

'You will find me disengaged, William, when you return.'

'No, no, my dear Blanche, this must not be. Do you think me so unreasonable?'

'It must be so, dear William, until you join us; on which she took her aunt's arm.

Beauchamp, from his position as president, was obliged to continue his sitting at his table during the delivery of a few other toasts, much to his annoyance; as several gentlemen had already deserted to the more agreeable society of the fair sex in the ball-room; who, from the movement heard overhead, were evidently much more pleasantly occupied than in listening to the drones who were attempting to utter dull speeches below.

Manvers, determined to have the master of the C— Hunt on his legs, proposed his health, which, after being duly honoured, forced him to rise.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' he began. ('The ladies are gone,' was shouted out.) 'I beg pardon—well, then, gentlemen, I'll begin again. Ladies and gentlemen.' (Shouts of laughter.)

'Let him have it,' cried Gwynne, 'that's his text; he can't preach from any other. Now then, old cock, out with it. We give you, ladies and gentlemen.' (Shouts of laughter—'Order, order,' from Sir Francis Burnett—'Hear, hear,' from Gwynne.)

'Gentlemen,' said the master of the C— Hunt, 'for the honour you have done me, in drinking my health, I return you my best thanks, and beg to say—that (another pause)—I beg to say that I feel'—another pause—when a voice replied—

'A bigger fool than I ever thought myself.'

Roars of laughter again burst forth, during which the master of the C— Hunt resumed his seat in a violent passion; and thus this speechifying terminated.

Lord Danby was one of the first to quit the supper-table, Blanche Douglas having thrown a spell of fascination over him, which made him most anxious to become more intimately acquainted with her; when, finding her sitting with her two aunts, Harcourt and Gordon, and Lady Seaton, he joined their party, and stood talking with Blanche, until the sets were again beginning to form.

'Really, Miss Douglas, this is the most delightful ball,' Lord Danby observed, 'I have ever attended; everything is so well arranged; and the great variety of beautiful and elegant costumes selected by the ladies renders it quite a fairy scene. The music also is so enlivening, one feels it almost impossible to resist its influence. Are you not, also, very fond of dancing, Miss Douglas?'

'Oh, yes!' she replied. 'I enjoy a ball exceedingly.'

'Then, as I perceive you have no partner, will you consider me too presuming in petitioning for the honour of another dance?'

'I must beg to decline, Lord Danby, being already engaged.'

'Really,' he continued, 'I think your partner, whoever he may be, deserves severe punishment for his negligence or indifference, in preferring his friends' society in the supper-room to yours.'

'He may, perhaps, be detained there against his inclination,' she replied; 'or, probably, is not aware that dancing has recommenced.'

'You are very considerate and forbearing, Miss Douglas, where, perhaps, your clemency may fail to be appreciated; although I can scarcely believe it possible any gentleman could for a moment forget an engagement with yourself.'

'Then, of course,' she added, 'my partner being unavoidably absent, I cannot think of punishing him unjustly by accepting another in his place.'

'But if you will accept my arm conditionally,' pleaded Danby, 'until he makes his appearance, I promise to resign your hand the moment he approaches.'

Blanche still quietly declined, when Mrs. Harcourt overheard her, interposed; 'Surely, my dear, you will not refuse Lord Danby on such fair conditions; it is your partner's duty to be in attendance, if he wished to dance with you; and you are not

some short time afterwards, Lord Danby remarked to Mrs. Harcourt, 'Oh, I see now who the gentleman is to whom Miss Douglas was so unwilling to give offence; and I am told Mr. Beauchamp is decidedly in great favor, if not already engaged to her; yet, considering what has occurred, this is almost a natural consequence.'

'You are greatly misinformed, Lord Danby. Mr. Beauchamp cannot be engaged to my niece without her guardian's consent, which, I am quite sure, he will never obtain from Mr. Harcourt; nor has it ever been solicited. He and Miss Douglas have been known to each other from childhood, which makes them, of course, on very intimate terms; and Lord Malcolm, her cousin, is also, I believe, engaged to Mr. Beauchamp's sister.'

'Oh, perhaps, then,' said Lord Danby, 'this may account for that cordiality which is observable in their manner to each other.'

'Most certainly,' replied Mrs. Harcourt; 'Mr. Beauchamp cannot reasonably entertain any other views towards my niece, knowing the utter impossibility of his ever standing in a nearer relation to her than he does at present.'

Lord Danby, thus assured by Mrs. Harcourt, and knowing no cause to doubt her authority or sincerity in speaking so unsparingly on the subject, treated Blanche's rumored engagement to Beauchamp as mere gossip, without any good foundation; and accordingly resolved to prosecute his suit, on nearer acquaintance, she realised his expectations.

Beauchamp, although not doubting Blanche's resolution to adhere to her intention of not accepting any other partner than himself for the remainder of the evening, thought it more prudent to compromise the matter by engaging her for the last dance only.

'It would be very improper in me, dear girl,' he observed, 'to expose you to the remarks which would assuredly follow, and excite Mrs. Harcourt's suspicions of our attachment, which, for the present, it is more prudent to conceal; but, believe me, I do not for a moment doubt your constancy, or love for me as a brother,' he added in a lower tone, which she did not appear to have heard.

'What can I say, then, William, to Lord Danby, should he ask me again? Mrs. Harcourt will take offence, I suppose, if I refuse him.'

'You are not to consult Mrs. Harcourt's, but your own feelings, Blanche, in such cases; and knowing the general opinion on this point, you, of course, are the best judge, whether you feel inclined to give further encouragement to Lord Danby by such a very particular mark of favor, as accepting him three times for your partner, on the first night of your acquaintance. Lord Danby and lookers-on will of course draw the natural conclusion that you approve those marked attentions; but if you do not intend to give him encouragement, you can plead fatigue, or other engagements.' Beauchamp, having thus expressed himself, consigned Blanche to Mrs. Gordon's care, who was soon relieved of her charge by a succession of applicants for the honour of her niece's hand, which was not permitted to remain idle until the dawn of morning put an end to further exertions.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

The next day, a grand muster of fox-hunters took place about four miles from Cherrington, where the young squire made his appearance about twelve o'clock; and his usual good fortune having attended him, resulting in a good day's sport, all retired from the field well satisfied. The third morning, Beauchamp rode over to the Priory, and remained until after luncheon; when, sitting with Blanche in the drawing-room, to his surprise Captain Markham was announced, accompanied by Lord Danby.

'Ah, Beauchamp, old fellow, good day's sport, yesterday—'pon honour. Danby thinks first-rate. Called to inquire how the ladies were after the ball. Capital band, Miss Douglas; lots of partners; grand affair—don't you think so?'

Lord Danby, although received rather formally by Beauchamp, was very courteous in his address to Blanche; hoping she did not feel over-fatigued by her great exer-