

A Cardinal Sin.

"Your papa is tired, my dear," interposed Mrs. Bourchier. "I dare say he would rather be left in peace."

"It is this morning indoors makes the poor man ill," said Josephine. "After a good trot on a morning like this he will be much better."

"I wonder if it would do you good, Philip," said Mrs. Bourchier, inclined to agree with Josephine. "It may," said her husband. "Anyway I must obey my tyrant. Finey, dear, ring the bell and order my horse."

The girl clapped her hands, kissed her father again, and the horse was ordered at once. A handsome and happier-looking trio could scarcely have been found in England than Philip Bourchier and his two daughters as they rode along the winding drive to the lodge; the father sitting his horse as only an English gentleman accustomed to riding from childhood can sit a horse; the daughters, at his side, with their graceful figures, showing to the best advantage as they sat in the saddles in a way that showed their education in horsemanship was perfect.

It was a very short one. The lodge-keeper's wife opened the gate, and bidding Mr. Bourchier a respectful and his daughters a cheerful, good-morning, closed it again behind them. The girls reined in their horses for a moment to say a few words to the old woman, so that Mr. Bourchier rode out alone on to the main road. Then a tall, young man who appeared to rise from the opposite bank, approached, and, laying a firm hand on the horse's rein, compelled him to stop. The rider at once recognized the self-styled Digby Bourchier, his visitor of yesterday.

There was something different in the man's appearance; something not accounted for by an entire change in his dress—for now he was clad in garments more fitted to the country—there was a gravity a solemnity in the expression of his face which made Mr. Bourchier wonder, even fear. As the horse stopped, he came round to the off side, still keeping his right hand tightly on the rein, as though he feared the rider would endeavor to escape him.

"I must see you—speak to you alone," he said. "Let go my horse," said Mr. Bourchier, fiercely, but in an undertone, his daughters being within ear-shot. "Never, until you promise to return to your house with me. I have much to say."

There was command—menace even—in his voice. Although totally unaccustomed to being ordered what to do, Mr. Bourchier felt he must obey. He could not risk a struggle in the highway before his daughters and, in truth, he had no impudence on his face, he saw what this man had to reveal. Let it be the worst, it would be better than uncertainty as to the extent of his knowledge.

The girls came up at this moment, laughing at some quaint remark they had extracted from the old retainer at the lodge. They looked with surprise at the stranger talking to their father. He raised his hat mechanically, and appeared to be waiting anxiously for Mr. Bourchier to answer some question. "If your business is so pressing," they heard the latter say in his clear, incisive tones, "so pressing that you can take no denial, I must return to the house with you, I suppose."

"It is of the utmost importance," said the unknown, impressively. "Very well; I will come back. My dear girls, I am afraid I must disappoint you. I must go back and speak with this gentleman." Josephine turned her head away and made an ugly face at the trees on the other side of the road. Mabel said— "Very well, papa; but we are very sorry. Can't we wait for you?"

"My business, I fear, will take some time," said the unknown, with a significance which did not escape Mr. Bourchier. "I think you had better ride on slowly," he said; "I will tell a groom to follow you at once. Now, sir, be good enough to come with me." He turned his horse's head, and Mabel, again raising his hat in the same preoccupied way, followed him through the lodge gate. Mabel and Josephine exchanged looks of wonder, and walked their horses slowly along the road toward Longmere.

papa, and hear who the distinguished stranger is," she continued. "Finey, you are an idiot," said Mabel, laughing. "I believe the first romantic-looking young man you meet, may run off with you if he chooses."

"Any way," retorted her sister, "I shan't run off with a red face and no nose to speak of, like the Honorable John."

The Honorable John was a gentleman, son of Lord Coverton, and was hopelessly in love with Mabel. Had Mabel returned his passion Josephine would not have disparaged him, for the girls were true sisters.

Then the groom appeared in the distance behind, so the girls quickened their pace, and trotted merrily along the road to Longmere. Mr. Bourchier, with his unexpected and unwelcome visitor beside him, walked his horse up the long drive to the house; there he gave it in charge of a groom, whom he told to follow the ladies as soon as possible. He then conducted his visitor round the house until they arrived at the library window, which was a French casement, reaching to the ground. Drawing a key from his pocket, he opened the sash, and the two gentlemen entered. Motioning the young man to seat himself, Mr. Bourchier sank into his customary chair, and tried to prepare himself for what was to come. It felt to him as though he were seated in a trap.

Mr. Bourchier, as he sat there waiting the onslaught of his young antagonist, felt he was fully equal to the task—fully prepared and able to put on a bold yet tranquil front. But if ever a man was utterly routed and defeated by unforeseen, unimagined occurrences and revelations, it was Philip Bourchier, in that struggle about to commence.

To rightly understand the reason for the manner in which Manders commenced his second attack, you must bear in mind that he was intensely theatrical. His stage effect of the preceding night had given him great confidence in his powers as an actor; indeed, the greatest interest he now felt in his deep-laid scheme was the sensation he might be able to produce by striking some unsuspected stroke, revealing the existence of some unthought-of mine under his antagonist's feet, and having done so, enjoy his discomfort. The way of transgressors may be hard, but at times the excitement of the journey makes the criminal forget the pointed stones he treads on. The theme had arranged the programme of this encounter in a manner which was so original that his only feeling was one of delight at the ingenious device. He knew he had material different from Mr. Stokes to work upon, but his tools, he thought, were equal to the occasion.

He did not accept his host's invitation to be seated, but he was not at all desirous of stunning his eyes. He stood erect in the full light of the window, and when Mr. Bourchier, after waiting with apparent indifference for him to commence his business, glanced up at him with a look of well-bred impatience on his face, he saw what he had to reveal. Let it be the worst, it would be better than uncertainty as to the extent of his knowledge.

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"How strange," said Mabel. "I wonder who he can be." "Yes," answered her sister. "But wasn't he beautiful?" "I didn't notice him much. I was too cross with him, bothering poor papa just at that moment." "Oh, he was a lovely looking young man. Just the sort of creature you read about—with a pale face, large dark eyes and straight features, and quite unhappy looking." "My dear, don't talk such rubbish." "He didn't seem a bit afraid of papa, although papa spoke so sharply to him—you know his way, Mabel—if your business is so pressing, etc."

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