

# One Of The Six Hundred

where she might sit and compose herself till I considered what we should do next, and where we were.

She was greatly agitated, but passively permitted me to encircle her with my arms, to assure her that she was safe, to press her hands, and to wipe away her tears caressingly. I forgot all about poor Pitblado, "spilt" on the road, all about my uncle's best blood mare hanging in the traces, and all about the half-ruined gig.

In short, I felt only the most exquisite joy that I had gained, as it were, and as I was together. It was that moment of intense rapture, when, combined with the natural revulsion of feeling consequent to escape from a deadly peril, I enjoyed that emotion which a man feels once, and once only, in a life-time, when the first woman he loves confesses to a mutual regard; and, half-kneeling, I stooped over her, kissing her again and again, assuring her—of I know not what.

From one of her fingers I transferred to mine a ring of small value—a pearl set in blue enamel, leaving in its place a rose diamond. It was a beautiful stone, of the purest water, which I had found when our troops sacked the great pagoda at Rangoon, and I had it set at Calcutta by a jeweller, who assured me that it was worth nine hundred rupees, or ninety pounds, and I only regretted now that it was not worth ten times as much, to be truly worthy of the slender finger on which I placed it.

She regarded me with a loving smile on her pale face, and in the quiet depths of her soft dark eyes, as she reclined in my arms. I gazed on her with emotions of the purest rapture. She was now humbled, gentle and loving—this brilliant beauty, this proud earl's daughter—mine, indeed—all that a man could dream of as perfection in a woman or as a wife; at least, I thought so then; and I was not a little proud of the idea of what our mess would say—the colonel, Studhome, Scriven, Wilford, Berkeley, and the rest—of a marriage that would certainly be creditable to the regiment, though we had titles and honorables enough in the lancers; and already, in fancy, I saw myself "tooling" into Maldstone barrack-square in a dashing phaeton, with a pair of cream coloured ponies, with Morrell and Loftus quartered on the panels, and silver harness, and Louisa by my side, in one of the most perfect of morning toilettes and of marriage bonnets that London millinery could produce.

Poor devil! with only two hundred per annum besides my pay, and the war before me, I was thus acquiring castles in Airshire, and estates in the Isle of Sky.

Oblivious of time, while the woods and hills of Dairies were darkening against the sky, while the murmuring Eden flowed past towards the Tay, and the ever changing spears and streamers of the northern aurora were growing brighter and more bright, I remained by the side of Louisa, wholly entranced, and only half-conscious that something should be done to enable us to return home; for night was coming on—the early night of the last days of January, when the sober sun must set at half past four—and I knew not how far we were from Calderwood Glen.

Suddenly a shout startled us; the hoofs of horses were heard coming rapidly along the highway, and then three mounted men wheeled into the field and rode straight towards us. To my great satisfaction, one proved to be my faithful fellow, Willie Pitblado, who, not a wit the worse for his capsizing on the road, had procured horses and assistance at the place called Drumhead, and tracked us to where we lay, wrecked by the old bridge of the Eden.

"Poor Willie," said Louisa, "I thought you were killed."

"No, my lady," said he, touching his hat; "it's lang or the de'il dees by the dykeside."

Of this answer she could make nothing. The gig was now released and run back, and though scratched, splintered and started in many places by the shock to which it had been subjected it was still quite serviceable. The wheeler was traced to it again, the leader, her arduous completely cooled now was fished out of the stream, and harnessed again, and in less than half an hour, so able had been the assistance rendered us, we were bowling along the highway towards my uncle's house.

An hour's rapid driving soon brought us in sight of the long avenue, the lighted windows, and quaint facade of the old mansion, at the door of which I drew up; and as I threw the whip and reins to Willie Pitblado, and, fearless now even of Mamma Chillingham, handed my companion down, tenderly and caressingly, I found myself an engaged man, and the fiancee of one of the fairest women in Britain—the brilliant Louisa Loftus!

## CHAPTER XII.

It passed—and never marble looked more pale

Than Lucy, while she listened to his tale. He marked her not; his eye was cold and clear. Fixed on a bed of withering roses there; He marked her not, for different thoughts possessed His anxious mind, and laboured in his breast.

Ellis.

Notwithstanding all that had passed, and that we had been carried so far in the wrong direction, we were not long behind the rest of our party in reaching Calderwood, where the history of our disaster fully eclipsed for the evening all the exciting details of the fox-hunters, though many gentlemen in scarlet, with spattered tops and tight, whom Sir Nigel had brought, made the drawing-room look unusually gay.

Lady Louisa remained long in her own apartment; the time seemed an age to me; yet I was happy—supremely happy. I had a vague idea of the new emotions that served, perhaps, to detain her there; but an air of cold reserve and unmistakable displeasure hovered on the forehead of her haughty mother.

When Louisa joined us, she had perfectly recovered her usual equanimity and presence of mind—her calm, pale, and placid aspect. She was somewhat silent and reserved; this passed for her natural terror of the late accident, and though we remained some distance apart, her fine dark eyes sought mine, ever and anon, and were full of intelligent glances, that made my heart leap with joy.

Coro, who shrewdly suspected that there had been more in the affair than what Berkeley called "a doocid spill," regarded us with interest, and with a tearful earnestness that surprised us, after our return, and during the explanation which we were pleased to make. But whatever tales my face told, Louisa's was unathomable, so from its expression suspicious little Coro could gather nothing; though, had she carried her scrutiny a little further, she might have detected my famous Rangoon diamond sparkling on the engaged finger of her friend's left hand.

Coro was on this night, to me, an enigma!

What had gone wrong with her? When she smiled, it seemed to several—to me especially—that the kind little heart from whence these smiles were wrung was sick. Why was this, and what or who was the source of her taciturnity and secret sorrow?—not Berkeley, surely—they had come home in the drag together—she could never love such an ass as Berkeley; and if the fellow dared to trifle with her—but I thrust the thought aside, and resolved to trust the affair to her friend and gossip, the Lady Loftus.

A few more days glided swiftly and joyously past at Calderwood Glen; we had no more riding and driving; but, as the weather was singularly open and balmy for the season, we actually had more than one picnic in the leafless woods, and I betook me to the study of botany and arboriculture with the ladies.

I enjoyed all the delicious charm of a successful first love! The last thought on going to repose; the first on waking in the morning; and the source of many a soft and happy dream between.

The peculiarity, or partial disparity, of our positions in life caused secrecy. Denied, by the presence of others, the pleasure of openly conversing of our love, at times we had recourse to furtive glances, or a secret and thrilling pressure of the hand or arm as all we could achieve.

Then there were sighs the deeper for suppression, And stolen glances sweeter for the theft; And burning blushes, though for no transgression, Tremblings when met, and restless nesses when left.

Small and trivial though these may seem, they proved the sum of our existence, and even of mighty interest, lighting up the eye and causing the pulses of the heart to quicken.

We became full of petty and lovable stratagems, and of enigmatical phrases, all the result of the difficulties that surrounded our intercourse when others were present—especially Lady Chillingham, who was by nature cold, haughty, and suspicious, with, I think, a natural born antipathy to subalterns of cavalry in particular. Coro saw through our little artifices, and Berkeley, that An-

glo-Scotch snob of the nineteenth century, had ever his eyes remarkably wide open to all that was going on around him, and thus the perils of discovery and instant separation were great, while our happy love was in the flush.

This danger gave us a common sympathy, a united object, a delicious union of thought and impulse. Nor was romance wanting to add zest to the secrecy of our passion. Ah, were I to live a thousand years, never should I forget the days of happiness I spent in Calderwood Glen with Louisa Loftus.

Our interviews had all the mystery of a conspiracy, though, save Coro, none as yet suspected our love; and there was a part of the garden, between two old yew hedges—so old that they had seen the Calderwoods of past ages cooling and billing, in powdered wigs and coats of mail, with dames in Scotland, at certain hours, by a tacit understanding, we were sure of meeting but with all the appearance of chance, though occasionally for a time so brief, that we could but exchange a pressure of the hand, or snatch a caress, perhaps a kiss, and then separate in opposite directions.

Those were blessed and joyous interviews; memories to treasure and brood over with delight when alone. In the society of our friends, my heart throbed wildly, when by a glance, a smile, a stolen touch of the hand, Louisa reminded me of what none else could perceive, the secret understanding that existed between us.

And yet all this happiness was clouded by a sense of its brevity, and by our fears for the future; the obstacles that rank and great fortune on her side, the lack of both on mine, raised between us; and then there was the certain prospect of a long and dangerous—alas! it might prove, a final separation.

"They who love," writes an anonymous author, "must ever drink deeply of the cup of trembling; but, at times, there will arise in their hearts a nameless terror, a sickening anxiety for the future whose brightness all depends upon this one cherished treasure, which often proves a foreboding of some real anguish looming in the distant hours."

"Where is all this to end?" I asked myself, as the conviction that something must be done forced itself upon me, for the happy days were passing, and my short leave of absence was drawing to a close.

One day, by the absence of some of our friends, and by the occupation of others, we found ourselves alone, and permitted to have a longer interview than usual, in our yew-hedge walk and we were conversing of the future.

"I have two hundred a year besides my pay, Louisa." (She smiled sadly at this, and the smile went doubly to her heart.) "The money has been lodged for my troop with Cox and Co, and my good uncle means well concerning me; yet, I feel all these as being so small, that were I to address the Earl of Chillingham on the subject of my engagement, it would seem that I had little to offer, and little to urge, save that which is, perhaps, valueless in his aristocratic eyes—"

"And that is?"

"My love for you."

"Don't think of addressing him," said she, weeping on my shoulder; "he has already views for me in another quarter."

"Views, Louisa!"

"Yes; pardon me for paining you, dearest, by saying so; but it is nevertheless true."

"And these views?" I asked, impetuously.

"Are an offer made for my hand by Lord Slubber de Gullion."

My heart died within me on hearing this name, which, as I once before stated, comes as near the original as possible.

"Hence you see, dearest Newton," she resumed, in a mournful and sweetly modulated voice, "were you to address my father, it would only rouse mamma, and have the effect of interrupting our correspondence for ever."

"Good heavens! what then are we to do?"

"Wait in hope."

"How long?"

"As I know not; but for the present let us our engagement, like our meetings, and our letters, if we can correspond, must be secret—secret all! Were the earl, my father, to know that I loved you, Newton (how sweetly those words sounded), he and mamma would urge on Lord Slubber's suit, and, on finding that I refused, there would be no bounds to mamma's wrath. You remember Coro's story of the 'Clenched Hand,' you remember the 'Bride of Lammermoor,' and must see what a determined mother and long domestic tyranny may do."

I clasped my hands, for my heart was wrung; but she regarded me kindly and lovingly.

"On your return home as colonel of your regiment, perhaps, we shall then, at all hazards, bring the matter before him, and treat Slubber's offer with contempt, as the senile folly of an old man in his dotage. You, at least, shall propose for me in form—"

"And if Lord Chillingham refuse?"

"Though we English people can't make Scotch marriages now, I shall be yours, dearest Newton, as I am now, only that it shall be irrevocably and for ever."

A close and mute embrace followed and then I left her in a paroxysm of grief, while my head whirled with the combined effects of love and joy, and of sorrow, not unmixed with anger.

"I wonder what the subjects are that lovers talk of in their tete-a-tetes," says my brother of the pen and sword, W. H. Maxwell, and the same surmise frequently occurred to myself, before I met or knew Louisa Loftus.

We never lacked a subject now. The peculiarities of our relative positions, our caution for the present, and our natural anxieties, for the future, afforded us full topics for conversation or surmise; but the few remaining days of my leave "between returns" glided away at Calderwood Glen; the time for my departure drew nigh; already had Pitblado divided a sixpence with my lady's soubrette, and packed up all my superfluous traps—and within six and thirty hours Berkeley and I would have to report ourselves in uniform at head-quarters, or be returned absent without leave.

It was in the evening, when I had gone as usual to meet Louisa at the seat where the close-clipped yew hedges formed a pleasant screen, that, to my surprise, and by the merest chance, I found it occupied by my cousin Coro.

The January sunset was beautiful; the purple flush of evening covered all the western sky, and bathed in warm tints the slopes of the Lomond hills. The air was still, and we heard only the cawing of the venerable rooks that perched among the woods of the old manor, or swung to and fro on its many gilt vanes.

Coro was somewhat silent, and I, being thoroughly disappointed by finding her there in lieu of Louisa Loftus, was somewhat taciturn, if not almost sulky.

"Somehow—but how, I know not—Coro led me to talk insensibly of our early days, and as we did so, I could perceive that she regarded me earnestly from time to time, after I simply remarked that ere long I should be far, far away from her, and among other scenes. Her dovelike, dark eye became suffused, and the tinge on her rounded cheek died away when I laughingly referred to the days when we had been little lovers, and when Fred Wilford and I—he was now a captain—ours—used to punch each other's heads in pure spite and jealousy about her; but this youthful jealousy once took a more dangerous turn.

Among the rocks in the glen an adder of vast size took up its residence, and had bitten several persons. It had been seen by some, to leap more than seven yards high, and was a source of such a terror to the whole parish, that my uncle, and even the provost of Dunfermline, had offered rewards for its destruction.

On this I boldly dared my boy-rival to face it; but Fred Wilford, who was on a visit to us from Rugby, had more prudence, or less love for little Coro, and so declined the attempt.

Flushed with boyish pride and recklessness, I climbed the steep face of the rock, stirred up the adder with a long stick, flung it to the ground, and killed it by repeated blows of an axe, a feat of which my uncle never grew tired of telling, and the reptile was now in the library, sealed up in a glass case, being deemed a family trophy, and, as Binns said, always kept in the best of spirits.

I sat with Coro's white and slender hand in mine, gazing at her soft and piquant features, her pouting lips and dimpled chin, and the dark hair so smoothly braided under her little hat and over each pretty and delicate ear. Coro was very gentle and very charming; she had ever been to me a kind little playmate, a loving sister, and she sighed deeply, when I spoke of my approaching departure.

"You go by sea?" she asked.

"If we go to Turkey—of course."

"Embarking at Southampton?"

"Embarking at Southampton—exactly, and sailing directly for the east, I suppose," said I, while leisurely lighting a cigar; "I shall soon learn all the details and probabilities at headquarters; but the route may not come for two months yet, as red-tape goes."

"You will think of us sometimes, Newton, in those strange and dangerous lands? Of your poor uncle, who loves you so well, and—and of me?"

"Of course, and of Louisa Loftus. Don't you think her very handsome?"

"I think her lovely."

"My cigar annoys you?"

"Not at all Newton."

"But it makes you turn your face away."

"You met often, I believe, before you came here?"

"Oh, very often. I used to see her at the cathedral every Sunday in Canterbury; at the balls at Rochester and Maidstone—"

"And in London?"

"Repeatedly! I saw her at her first presentation at Court, when the colonel presented me, or obtaining my lieutenantancy, and returning from foreign service. She created quite a sensation!"

I spoke in such glowing terms of my admiration for Louisa Loftus, that some time elapsed before I detected the extreme pallor of Coro's cheek, and a peculiar quivering of her under lip.

"Good heavens, my dear girl, you are ill! It is this confounded cigar of one of a box Willie got me in Dunfer-

line," I exclaimed, throwing it away.

"Your hand is trembling, too."

"Is it? Oh, no Stay, I am only a little faint," she murmured.

"Faint. Why the deuce should you be faint, Coro?"

"This bower of yew hedges is close the atmosphere is still, or chill, or something," she said, in a low voice, while pressing a lovely little hand on her bosom; "and it seems to me that I felt a pang here."

"A pang, Coro?"

"Yes, I feel it sometimes."

"You, one of the best waltzers in the county! You have no affection of the heart, or any of that sort of thing?"

She smiled sadly, even bitterly, and rose, saying—

"Here comes Lady Louisa. Say nothing of this."

Her dark eyes were swimming; but not a tear fell from her long black, silky lashes, that lent such softness to her sweet and feminine face. She abruptly withdrew her tremulous hand from mine, and just as Louisa approached, hurriedly left me.

What did all this emotion mean? What did it display or conceal? I was thoroughly bewildered.

A sudden light began to break upon me.

"What is this?" thought I. "Can Coro be in love with me herself? Oh, nonsense, she has known me from boyhood. The idea is absurd! Yet her manner— This will never do. I must avoid her, and tomorrow I leave for England!"

Louisa sat beside me, and, save her, Coro and all the world were alike forgotten.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Forget thee? If to dream by night, and muse on thee by day;

If all the worship, deep and wild a poets heart can pay;

If prayers in absence, breathed for thee to Heaven's protecting power;

If winged thoughts that flit to thee, a thousand in an hour,

If busy Fancy, blending thee with all my future lot;

If this thou call'st forgetting, thou, indeed, shalt be forgot.

Moultfie.

I had but one, only one, meeting with Lady Louisa, and it was indeed, a sad one. We could but hope to meet again—near Canterbury, perhaps—at some vague period before my regiment marched; and prior to that I was to write to her, on some polite pretence, under cover to Coro.

This was certainly somewhat undefined and unsatisfactory for two engaged lovers, especially for two so ardent as we were, and in the first flush of a grand passion; but we had no other arrangement to make; and never shall I forget our last, long, mute embrace on the last evening, when, scared by footsteps on the garden walk, we literally tore ourselves away, and separated to meet at the dinner-table, and act as those who were almost strangers to each other, and to perform the mere formalities, the politenesses, and cold ceremonials of well-bred life.

I could not help telling my good uncle of my success; but under a solemn promise of secrecy, for a time at least.

"All right, boy," said he, clapping me on the shoulder. "Keep her well in hand, and I'll back you against the field to any amount that is possible; but that gouty old peer, my Lord Slubber, is richer than I am; and then Lady Chillingham has the pride of Lucifer. Since Archie died at college, and poor Nigel at the battle of Goojerat, I have no boy to look after but you."

The last hour came inexorably. We shook hands with all. When that solemn snob, my brother officer, Mr. de Warr Berkeley, and I entered the carriage which was to take us to the nearest railway station, there were symptoms of considerable emotion in the faces of the kind circle we were leaving, for the clouds of war had darkened fast in the East during the month we had spent so pleasantly; and the ladies—the loo girls especially—half viewed us as foredoomed men.

Louisa was pale as death; she trembled with suppressed emotion, and her eyes were full of tears. When her cold and stately mother kissed me lightly on the cheek; and at that moment, for Louisa's sake, I felt my heart swell with sudden emotion of regard for her.

My uncle's hand but manly hand gave mine a hearty pressure, and he kindly shook the hand of Willie Pitblado, who was bidding adieu to his father, the old keeper, and slipped a couple of sovereigns into it.

Sir Nigel's voice was quite broken; but there was no tears in the hot, dry eyes of poor Coro. Her charming face was very pale, and she bit her pouting nether lip, to conceal, or to prevent, its nervous quivering.

"An odd girl," thought I, as I kissed her twice, whispering, "Give the last one to Louisa."

But, ah! how little could I read the secret of the dear little heart of Coro, which was beating wildly and convulsively beneath that apparently calm and unmoved exterior? But a time came when I was to learn it all.

"Good-bye to Calderwood Glen," cried I, leaping into the carriage.

"A good-bye to all, and hey for pipe-clay again!"

"Pipeclay and gunpowder too, lad," said my uncle. "Every ten years or so the atmosphere of Europe requires to be fumigated with it somewhere. Adieu, Mr. Berkeley. God bless you, Newton!"

"Crack went the whip, round went the wheels;" the group of pale and tearful faces, the ivy-clad porch, and the turreted facade of the old house vanished, and then the trees of the avenue appeared to be careering past the carriage windows in the twilight, as we sped along at a rapid trot.

For mental worry or depression there is no more certain and rapid cure than quick travelling and transition from place to place; and assuredly that luxury is fully afforded by the locomotive appliances of the present age.

Within an hour after leaving Calderwood, we occupied a first-class carriage and were flying by the night express en route to London, muffled to the eyes in warm railway-rugs and border plaids, and each puffing a cigar in silence, gazing listlessly out of the windows, or doing his best to court sleep, to wile the dreary hours away.

Pitblado was fraternising with the guard in the luggage-van, doubtless enjoying a quiet "weed" the while.

Berkeley soon slept; but I prayed for the celebrated "forty winks" in vain; and thus, wakeful and full of exciting thoughts I pictured in reverie all that had occurred during the past month.

Gradually the unwilling, but startling, conviction forced itself upon my mind that my cousin Coro loved me! This dear and affectionate girl, from whom I had parted with such a frigid salute as that which Sir Charles Grandison gave Miss Byron at the end of their dreary seven years' courtship, loved me; and yet, blinded by my absorbing passion for the brilliant Louisa Loftus, I had neither known, or felt it.

Her frequent coldness to me, and her ill-concealed irritation at the cool insolence of Berkeley's languid bearing on more than one occasion, were all explained to me now.

Dear, affectionate, and single-hearted, Coro. A hundred instances of her self-denial now crowded on my memory I remembered now, at the meet of the Fifehire fox-hounds at Largo, that it was she who, by a little delicate tact and foresight, contrived to give me that which she knew I so greatly coveted—the drive home in the tandem with Lady Louisa.

What must that act of self-sacrifice have cost her heart, if indeed she loved me? I could not write to her on such a subject, or even approach an idea that might, after all, be based on supposition, if not on vanity. More than this—I felt that the suspicion of having excited this secret passion must preclude my writing to Louisa under cover to Coro. Common delicacy and kindness suggested that I should not, by doing so, further lacerate a good little heart that loved me so well.

But the next thought was how to communicate with Louisa, Coro being our only medium. Nor could I forget that when I was up the Rangoon river, and when my dear mother died at Calderwood that it was Coro's kiss, that was last upon her cold forehead, and Coro's little hand that closed her eyes for me.

Swiftly sped the express train while these thoughts passed through my mind, and agitated me greatly. To sleep was impossible, and ere midnight I heard the bells of Berwick-upon-Tweed announce, that we had left the stout old kingdom of Scotland far behind us, and were flying at the rate of fifty miles an hour by Bedford, Alnwick, and Morpeth, towards the Tyne, and the land of coal and fire.

Every instant bore me farther from Louisa; and I had but one comfort, that ere long she would be pursuing the same route—perhaps seated in the same carriage—as she sped to her home in the south of England.

I dearly loved this proud and beautiful girl; and if human language has a meaning, and if the human eye has an expression, she loved me truly in return; but though the conviction of this made my heart brim with happiness, it was a happiness not untinted with fears—fears that her love was, perhaps, the fancy of the hour, developed by propinquity and the social circle of a quiet country house; fears that my joy and success were too bright to last; and that, after a time, she might see her engagement with a nameless subaltern of cavalry in the light of a mesalliance, and be dazzled by some more brilliant offer, for the heress and only child of the Earl of Chinningham could command many.

War and separation were before us; and if I survived to return, would she love me still, and still indeed be mine?

Her father's consent was yet to be obtained. In my impatience to know the best or the worst, I frequently resolved to break the matter by letter to his lordship; but, remembering the tears and entreaties of Louisa, I shrank from the grave responsibility of tampering with our mutual happiness.

At other times I thought of confiding the management of the affair entirely to my uncle; but abandoned the idea almost as soon as I conceived it; knowing that the fox-hunting old baronet was more hot-headed, proud, and abrupt than politic. In conclusion, I