

DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FORTUNES OF A DANSEUSE.

Mon cousin was a delightful fellow, and what we might have been his real relationship, acted the part of *chaperon* and collateral to admiration. He was connected in some way with the opera at St. Petersburg, and his anecdotal and illustrious favour, as may be supposed, neither tame nor uninteresting. He was a thorough Frenchman, and entered into everything with a *jouissance* only possessed by that mercurial nation. We dined, we talked, we laughed, we made the most of the present, for my two companions were to return almost immediately to Russia, and London, usually voted so *triste*, was delightful in comparison as being so much nearer Paris. We sent for a box at the French play; we criticised the audience, and quizzed the performers. We returned to the hotel to supper, where we again ate, drank, laughed, and talked as though dinner was completely forgotten, and towards two o'clock in the morning, after Coralie had teased, *à la coraine*, whether or not a structure that either I cannot tell, disclosed to me over a cigar the eventful career and singular history of the famous dancer. Coralie's mother, it appears, was a Spaniard by birth married to an English officer, of whom she was frantically jealous. Having reason to suppose that her husband was more attentive than she could wish to a younger sister of her own, for hers was a family in which beauty was as hereditary as the strong passions which made it a curse—she concealed herself near the spot where they were accustomed to meet, and without waiting for ocular demonstration of her suspicions, rushed upon the astonished pair, and stabbed the ill-fated girl to the heart. Report adds that nothing but the husband's superior strength saved him from the same fate. In any other country but the wild district of Catalonia, in which this tragedy took place, justice must have overtaken the murderer, but the unsifted fact of the murder, and the vertiginous whirl of the world, led her to escape into France, accompanied by her little girl, the child of that husband whom she never loved more. What added to the horror of the story, my informant went on to state, was the fact that the husband was passionately attached to his wife, whose jealousy was totally unfounded, and caused by the treachery first taken by the Englishman in a way that, concerning which, his unpretending mother-in-law sought his advice and assistance. My informant, however, knew but little more of the details antecedent to the acquaintance with her person and character, but I did from her second marriage with Monsieur De Rivolte, a relation, as he called of her own. Friendless and unprotected in the French capital, never expecting to hear more of her outrage and of her own husband, bearing along with her the heavy cross of Cain at her heart, the Spaniard was glad to avail herself of a fugitive pilot to land, under whose roof she might shelter her own heart and that of her treacherous little girl. De Rivolte took a great fancy to the child, who went by his own name, and whose fascinating manners and bewitching beauty were first bestowed upon her by the Frenchman, he was the first to

ance on the stage. The self-relying girl stood out firmly until a liberal and adequate remuneration was proposed, and then with a proud step and undaunted brow made her first appearance before those footlights that have witnessed the debut of so many a quailing heart. It is needless to say that this first appearance was a triumph—aye, an absolute *fulcrum*. The good Parisians, albeit critical and discriminating in their perceptions, do not give their approbation by halves, and the new danseuse, De Rivolte, was in every one's mouth. She was *charmante*—she was *magnifique*—she was a *genre colossal*—she was everything to which *un par exemple* could be added; and whilst print shops teemed with her likeness, and itinerant ladies staged herself under her image, the ladies clad themselves in flowing toilettes De Rivolte, and the cravattes courted strangulation in gorgeous *dandies à la Coralie*. Like Byron, she literally 'wore one fine morning' and found herself famous; nor did the reputation which she had acquired as a dancer suffer any diminution amongst those circles of clever people to which she immediately found herself admitted, from that lack of intellect which is too often concealed by so faultless a form. On the contrary, those whose eyes had already been dazzled by the bounding 'Sylphide' soon found their hearts in danger of being captivated by the fascinating countenance, and their imagination enthralled by the sparkling wit, of the famous Coralie, and many a good offer of marriage was refused, many a splendid proposal scouted by her whom all seemed to vie with each other in striving to win and wear. Her energetic reply to an overpressing suitor who suffered his ardor somewhat to outstep his delicacy, will long be remembered by those who witnessed the result and its chastisement. Snatching a heavy riding-whip from the hand of one of his companions, she struck her persecutor a blow across the face, which raised a wheal that snowy arm could hardly have been supposed capable of inflicting, and drawing her stately form to its utmost height, whilst her nostril dilated with fury, and her eye flashed with fire, she shook the weapon in his face, as if threatening a repetition of the punishment, and thus addressed him:—

'You think, because I am a girl and unprotected, that you are safe; but repeat this result if you dare, and I will show you that a Spanish lady needs no champion but her own courage! I will summon you to the Bois de Boulogne at ten paces with the pistol, and should you refuse to meet me, I will post you in society and at your clubs as a bully, a coward, and a dishonored man!

It is needless to say that the advances henceforth made to Madlle. De Rivolte were couched in the most cautious language, and carried on in the most delicate manner. Nevertheless, fierce as she was, she must have had her love-tale to the rose, and the more fragrant the flower, the greater will be the number of its insect admirers. Coralie was but a woman, after all—a gallant and high-spirited woman certainly—but still, like the rest of her sex, 'to be wooed, and consequently, to be won.' There was a handsome young French officer to whom she became attached, and to whom report, more charitable than its wont, affirms she was married. The gallant *militaire*, however, had served in Algeria, and perhaps borrowed from his Moslem foes some of their more liberal ideas with regard to a plurality of helpmates. However that might be, he had one wife at least living when Coralie bestowed her hand upon him, and the discovery of his perfidy created a total change in the character and conduct of the high-minded and ill-fated girl. Hitherto she had been pure and irreprescible, now she became reckless and imprudent. She left him immediately, but alas! it was another, and from that time, though generally more sunned against than sunning, the uncharitable construction which the world placed upon her actions was not wholly without foundation.

A perfectly irreprescible character, however, though it might be, it could not bear to be surpassed by his fellow-creatures, and disposed of a character for talent by a single bon-mot—St. Heliers was at her feet; and such was the position of Coralie De Rivolte when I first met her in that eventful thunder-shower at Richmond, which ripened our acquaintance into an intimacy delightful as dangerous; and such was the history given by her cousin of the career of this European celebrity; but it was only in an interview with the lady the following morning that I learned how this flattered, courted, and distinguished paragon was herself a victim to unfortunate circumstances, a prey to constant anxiety and terror, from causes arising in her own inconsiderate misconduct. She sent for me before she again departed for Russia, and it was evident to me that, with the inconsistency of her sex, she was now anxious to resume those relations between us which the day before she had given me to understand by her manner were no longer to exist. I was not, however, disposed to gratify this craving for admiration, and we parted with perhaps hardly so much cordiality as we had met, although not until she had explained to me the mystery, which I had never yet unravelled, of the attack made upon my person by a dark-looking stranger at the door of the opera-house, when handing her to her carriage.

I will give her account, as nearly as possible, in her own words, only omitting the broken English, and numerous French expletives in which her tale was clothed.

'You have a right, my dear Digby,' she began, in those well-known captivating tones—'you have a right to an explanation of a matter which nearly cost you your life, and which has been to me an unceasing source of anxiety and regret. You must know, then, that when a foolish girl, in fact not very long after my first appearance on the stage, I was induced to marry a French officer, whom, in my ignorance, I loved with all the freshness and devotion of eighteen. Rejecting each splendid offer made by nobler and wealthier admirers, I bestowed upon the young soldier all I had to give, my talents, my fame, and above all, my true and untainted heart. Conceive my feelings when I discovered I was deceived and ruined. The infamous traitor had another wife living, and this was my reward for all I had sacrificed on my behalf. My Spanish blood was roused, and revenge was the feeling uppermost in my breast. I could have stabbed him as he lay sleeping by my side, but I belittled me of a course that would wound him more keenly than could any bodily injury, and I forthwith bent all my energies to the task I had proposed myself. He shall love me, thought I, love me to distraction, and when his whole soul and being are wrapped up in me, I will leave him! leave him for another, and force him to drink the bitter cup that he has so treacherously caused me to drain. This was revenge—and for weeks and months, by alternate kindness and coquetry, now working upon his affections now exciting his jealousy, I succeeded in making that man my slave. A mischievous lesson which I have never since forgotten. Yes, Digby, I had my foot up in his neck; he haunted me like my shadow; he grew thin and haggard, and restless—neglected, nay, ill-treated his previous and lawful wife, and became day by day more infatuated in his adoration for myself. At times I could hardly bear it—at times I longed to love him as before, and, oh, what a happiness that had been! but when did a betrayed woman ever forego her revenge? At last, he proposed to me a scheme by which he was to invalidate his previous marriage, and make me all his own. My time was come. I listened in affected raptures, I put my arms round his neck, and whispered words of love in his ear, such as he had never yet heard from my lips. He parted from me in a state of intoxicated, almost delirious, happiness. That night I left him, with the only man in Europe for whom he entertained a feeling of jealousy—a friend and companion, who, in all the sports and trifles of youth, was ever his rival, and by whom, I had heard him say a thousand times, that he could not bear to be surpassed.

induce him to consent never to see me more. I shall know my fate before this time tomorrow, when I start for the north, and should we never chance to meet again, think of me, my dear Digby, as one who, with every earnest desire to do right, has through life been driven, by the force of circumstances, into a course of feelings and actions which those alone who have resisted temptations like mine, have a right to condemn.'

Such, as nearly as possible, was the account given me by Coralie of her ill-fated marriage, and such was the explanation of the ominous-looking ruffian by whom I had been attacked, and whom I had afterwards seen run through in the fencing-school. Nor could I help wondering that such a being as the bright and graceful Coralie could ever be prevailed upon to 'sink her fate with that dark, forbidding man, whose appearance alone argued him capable of committing any crime, and whose d-raved and reckless habits were concealed beneath no comely form, no smooth and polished exterior. The heart of woman is indeed a wondrous mystery, a labyrinth, the clue to which the wisest of mankind have sought in vain, and of which we may truly say, that—

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

For do we not see, every day, the wise, the high-minded, the virtuous, and the brave, supplanted by gaudy fools or profligate coxcombs in the graces of that incomprehensible sex? How is it to moralise upon general principles, or individual cases! how difficult to apply either the one or the other to our own conduct, or our own character!

Coralie went back to Russia, and I remained in London, to pursue, under accumulating difficulties, the ever-fleeting pursuit after Pleasure, which like the summer butterfly, that lures the eager urchin from lawn to lawn, and field to field, is still just beyond the grasp, still in that immediate Future which never becomes the Present.

CHAPTER XV.

RAISING THE WIND.

As may easily be supposed, such a life as I was now leading in London entailed expenses of which the allowance I received from Sir Peregrine (still continued, notwithstanding our difference), could liquidate but a very few items. To say nothing of the absolute necessities of life—such as dinners at the Clarendon and boxes at the French play, posting down to the Vale of Aylesbury to hunt when the weather was open, and to half the country houses in England for shooting when it froze; to say nothing of these essentials, all requiring an immediate outlay of current coin of the realm, there were likewise regimental entertainments, of which, as a matter of course, I bore my share; benefits for the encouragement of pugilism, and douceurs for information of every kind, on none of which could the confiding system of credit be brought to bear. I say nothing of tailors', saddlers', and coachmakers' bills; of the swingeing livery accounts run up by four capital hunters standing at Tring, nor the actual outlay on the purchase of those valuable animals, as there were matters of expenditure not requiring immediate payment, and therefore considered of no moment; but in the mere everyday disbursements of my life, I found that my personal income was about sufficient to find me in gloves, blacking and cigars. How, then, to obtain sufficient funds to carry on the war? The problem had long since been solved, and I was no wiser than others of my station and pursuits. By deep and reckless play when in luck; by bills, post-obits, and every species of 'kite-flying' known to spendthrifts and money-lenders, when fortune frowned. Post-obits I had already done to a fearful amount, nor was it a satisfactory feeling to know that, under such an arrangement, every hundred laid out upon a fancy or a wager must be paid over to the creditor.

ers was full of mirth and jollity, as usual, in much as he played, he was never known to venture what could be called a high stake by a man of his wealth; and I, although my brain was heating, and the cold perspiration standing on my brow—although I was standing at heart to think that I was playing the highest stakes of all, wagering my heart against the cross which these men need only write their name to obtain, I could perceive at a glance their different feelings and feelings, and with a perspicuity only afforded during moments of intense excitement, I was enabled to watch their every movement, and felt as if I could see into their very souls. At one time, my losses were so enormous, that I determined to abide but one more deal, and then depart; nor did I dare to think of the morrow, and the means that might enable me to face my night's amusement. There was a vague idea present to my mind, that men had been known to fly from the consequence of follies such as this, even into the arms of death; but this was all a misty speculative sort of dream; nor was anything in the future clearer to my mental vision. If reason ever totters upon her throne without retaining an actual downfall, then was my overstrung brain as near madness as desperation and excitement can drive that organ, short of the bounds of veritable insanity. When things come to the worst, they mend, the tide turned; my courage rose with the first gleam of success, and I played on a though the Bank of England were at my back. After an unheard-of run of luck—the longest deal St. Heliers ever recollected to have seen, and one which made even the immovable Russian open his insensate eyes, I walked home, rejoicing in my loss of six hundred to that hyperborean nobleman more than ever yet neophyte counted in a crisp bank-note dividing the starched pocket of his clean white waistcoat, as winding his homeward way from Crookford, in the first flush of a summer's morning, he congratulated himself on having found out to his new way to pay old debts. And this is what men call pleasure, to watch the turning of a card with an anxiety less than that of a criminal when the jury re-enter their box—endure by anticipation all the agonies of remorse—to screw your nerves up to a pitch of excitement more racking than the keenest bodily pain, and then to walk away, having endured an amount of misery that makes the actual inconvenience of a moderate loss a positive pleasure by comparison. Anything for excitement. *Audax omnia perperam* *gens humana ruit per vitium et refusa*. But, *fas* or *nefas*, the money must be paid, and that immediately. I had but small acquaintance with the Russian prince; he was going back to Melton, where he kept a stud of horses, and rode like a demon, the instant the frost should break up; and there was nothing for it but to have recourse again to Mr. Shadrach, whither Tom Spruce accompanied me, for the purpose, to use his unconsciously prophetic words, 'of getting me up, and seeing me through the business.'

I have already expressed my opinion of that class of men who smooth all the difficulties of youth, and strew its path with roses, when gold is no longer a 'drug,' and future wealth must be anticipated to sustain your only Samaritan; and he is now-a-days charity itself as long as there remains an acre unmortgaged, an expectation likely to become a bequest. Nor was Mr. Shadrach any exception to the general rule; he received me as usual, politely, but familiarly, for our acquaintance was ripening by repeated interviews, and as my visits were more frequent, so were my future prospects less imposing, and the bow became a nod, and the deferential salutation a free-and-easy shake of the hand. Nevertheless, I then went to see old Shadrach, nor had I ever found him fail at the pinch. 'No difficulty, what-er, Captain,' was the well-known reply to my demand for an immediate £500 paid down then and there—'no difficulty, except as to time—could lend it you now?