

...and Mr. William Beauchamp will be very sorry for money, and any donation to your daughter's large expectations would be quite rather to keep him at a distance from her."

"Oh, goodness me! then pray don't mention the subject, my dear ma'am," said Mrs. Winterbottom, "for here he comes with Honoria."

After addressing a few words to the main, Beauchamp resigned her daughter, Beauchamp, to be taken by Mrs. Gordon, saying, "You must not think me rude, dear aunt, if I do not remain very long with you, since I have to direct the part of master of the ceremonies tonight, but I shall come for you and Blanche when supper is ready."

"William," whispered Mrs. Gordon, "have you been lecturing Blanche again? she looks very serious."

"No, dear aunt, but I told her a secret which she is to reveal to yourself only, and that which made me feel very happy has rendered her sad, but now she is coming, and will tell you herself—so I must be off."

As Blanche resumed her seat, Mrs. Gordon inquired in a low tone what had caused her such anxious looks, when speaking with Beauchamp.

"Something which William has been telling me, dear aunt; but you must not divulge the secret. His father is now next heir to an earldom."

"Good Heaven! Blanche, you are joking!"

"No, aunt, indeed I am not," and she then repeated Beauchamp's communication.

"And has this made you look so serious to-night, you silly child?" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon.

"Yes, dear aunt; I fear he may become a man of the world, and all my dreams of happiness with him, as my constant friend and companion, would then be at an end."

"My dear Blanche, do not worry yourself thus unnecessarily. William Beauchamp will never change—why should he more than Charles? you don't like him less because he is Lord Malcolm? or Constance either—nonsense, dear child, you ought to feel as happy as I do at this joyful news. Really, it has put me in such spirits, I think I shall have a dance with the old squire before the ball closes. Only think the surprise of Mrs. Harcourt when she hears my favorite announced some day as Lord Beauchamp. Oh, Blanche, this is indeed a delightful anticipation! how we shall triumph over that match-making pair! But, as William suggests, we will keep silence on this subject for the present; so now dance away, child, and look as happy and cheerful as you ought to feel."

Beauchamp's next partner was Selina Markham, whom he deemed it necessary to lecture on her behavior to Mrs. Winterbottom.

"Don't lecture me, Will Beauchamp," exclaimed that self-willed young lady; "your reproaches to me are like water on a duck's back. I don't care a rap for them, and shall treat that odious woman as I please."

"Very well, Selina, if you are determined to raise up another enemy to our sport in the very centre of our best hunting country, pray do so. Conyers and myself cannot but be greatly obliged by your kind interference. One such person as Lord Mervyn is quite enough in any country, without your coming up a new opponent, whom it is our policy to conciliate, now he has become a landed proprietor in our neighborhood. We consulted Sir Lionel before inviting them here, and his opinion decided us, when you run in like a fire-brand to set us all in a blaze."

"Then, I suppose, Will Beauchamp, I must cry peccat, and beg that vulgar woman's pardon."

"No, Selina; only spare her for the future."

"Very well, I will let her off as easy as possible on your account; and now tell me

...to a dukedom, under his present lacerated feelings, which must have time to subside; but we will consult Aunt Gordon on the subject, although my own impression is, that he will most decidedly refuse my proposals, and I fear, dear Blanche, that we must have a little more patience."

"For myself, I do not care," she replied; "but it vexes me to see you obliged to use subterfuge and evasion, which imply a doubt of my true feelings towards you, and place you in such a humiliating position."

"Talk not of humiliation, dear Blanche; you have made me one of the proud-at men in existence, and you alone can humble me; for the rest, remember, 'the course of true love never did run smooth,' and I am content to suffer anything for you, so that I am sure of your love."

"Of that you ought to be doubly assured, since I have the prospect of becoming Lady Beauchamp. You are quite safe now, William, if not before—so don't feel jealous again," she replied with a laugh. "Now let us go and sit with Aunt Gordon until supper time, for I shall not dance again till I have had a glass of wine, and aunt says she shall drink the health of Lord and Lady Beauchamp in a bumper."

As Blanche and Beauchamp were approaching Mrs. Gordon, they observed the old squire and her in earnest conversation, evidently engrossed with each other.

"Stay, Blanche," whispered Beauchamp; "my governor looks as if he were making love to aunt; let us turn aside elsewhere."

"Oh, William, how can you talk such nonsense?"

"My dear girl, there is no nonsense in the case, but just the reverse; the squire considers your aunt perfection, and there we must both concede he is not far out in his reckoning. Well, then, what are they both to do, when Malcolm carries off Constance from Bampton, and I run away with you from the Priory? which I propose doing on the very first fitting opportunity, provided you don't give me the slip in London, and run away with some one else first. There will be an old solitary man in one house, and (we must not say old) solitary lady in another. Under these circumstances, as they both suit each other so exactly in disposition, temper, and habits (fox hunting excepted, and even so far I think the governor might get aunt into the kennel, although the whole household could not put her on horseback), as houses cannot be joined together, the next best thing to be thought of is to unite the owners—there would then be one house for the old, and the other for the young pair of birds."

"Oh, William! don't talk so foolishly; Aunt Gordon would never give up to the Priory, and your father would never live anywhere but at Bampton; so your anticipations are very unlikely to be realized; but I suppose we must divide the year between them."

"No doubt, Blanche, that will be expected of us, as dutiful children, although Malcolm and Constance have promised to spend their winter at Bampton; still, I cannot help thinking the governor is bent on trying to persuade your aunt that Beauchamp is a prettier name than Gordon; and as she always will call me her dear boy, my idea is, that the squire will assail her in this her weak point, and make me a stepping-stone to my promotion as her step-son. But, my gracious! Blanche, as Mrs. Winter says, don't hallucinate to this delicate torped with aunt, or I shall get my locks pulled and my ears boxed for my impudence. Look, my dear, just observe how serious they both look; depend upon it, the governor has popped the question."

"What possesses you to-night, William, I cannot conceive, to run on in this silly strain."

"Why, my dear, the fact is, like Mrs. Summertop, I'm rather swikey, I suspect."

...most exalted description; and it must be admitted that Blanche Douglas was not devoid of pleasurable anticipations from a visit to the gay metropolis, that pleasure being greatly enhanced by having her friend Constance as a participator in all her contemplated gaieties and amusements. There was one great drawback, however, acting as a drag on the wheels of her fancy, which otherwise might have run on without a check—the thought of leaving William Beauchamp (who had now become her second self) alone in the country. There was another unpleasant reflection which would sometimes obtrude. Constance had invited Miss Honoria, at the ball, to stay a few days at Bampton; and that romantic young person having taken it into her head or heart to fall desperately in love with her brother (as a grateful return, I suppose, for his sister's kindness), had let fall certain hints in her confidential communications to Constance, which revealed the nature of her feelings towards William Beauchamp. Constance again, in joke, had warned Blanche of the danger to be apprehended from this formidable rival.

"Really, Blanche," she observed one day, "I don't like leaving William behind us, at the mercy of mother and daughter; for what with bags of money on one side, which are daily increasing in number, and such winning smiles, on the other, from the young lady, who has evidently made up her mind to have the young squire, whether he will or no, we are in what I call rather a disagreeable fix."

"Don't talk so absurdly, Constance," replied Blanche; "as if William would marry a brewer's daughter, to be saddled with such a vulgar mother-in-law, for a hundred thousand a year, instead of as many thousand pounds."

"I'm not afraid of his being tempted by money bags, my dear Blanche, but by the bewitching smiles of that siren Honoria, who, it must be confessed sings and plays beautifully, and is much more highly accomplished than I had any conception of before her visit to Bampton."

"Then, Constance, his profession of love and attachment to me would be a hollow pretence," replied Blanche.

"Come, sister dear, don't take my joke in earnest, and visit my railery on poor, dear William's head, who, I believe, will ever prove as constant, and turn as true to Blanche Douglas, as the needle to the Pole. Don't fear, my love, that the wealth of Croesus, or the beauty of Hebe, could shake William's loyalty; but you must ask him to join us in London, and that will be sufficient to ensure his presence."

The day before the breaking-up of the establishment at the Priory, Beauchamp rode over early and inflicted a long lecture on Blanche, which he deemed necessary previous to her first entrance on this new sphere so surrounded with allurements and temptations.

"The routine of fashionable life in London, my dear girl," said he, "is comprehended in one word—dissipation. Night there is turned into day, and morning into night. You dine at eight o'clock in the evening, go at ten or eleven to balls and parties, which generally last till three or four in the morning; come home tired and fevered with the heat of the rooms, and retire to your room when the birds have left theirs to warble forth their matutinal songs. Breakfast about eleven; pay or receive visits from three to five, then take your ride or drive in the Park, and return home to dress for dinner about seven. This, with some little variation, is the usual every-day routine of life to those who move in the first circles of fashionable society. But there is one place of amusement, dear girl, although quite the fashion to patronise, which is a disgrace to any Christian country, and that is, without hesitation I say so, the Opera House. Against the singing and

"The thought, my own precious child," said he, rising and clasping her to his heart, "of the many miles by which I shall be separated, this time to-morrow, from her I love so dearly; and the dread, which I cannot dispel, of that change which may be effected in your present pure feelings by dissipation and worldly influences. Many an innocent, chaste girl like yourself, hitherto cheerful, happy, and contented in her rural home, has, after a season in town, returned thither an altered being—povish, fretful, unhappy, and discontented—longing again for the excitement of those scenes which have rendered her dissatisfied and miserable in domestic life."

"You think, then, William, that I have no self-control or strength of mind, but like a child shall be led astray and taken captive by the glittering allurements of the fashionable world?"

"Heaven grant, dear girl, that you may ever continue, as now, a child in simplicity of heart and thought; yet how few of the greatest and best of mankind, even the most favored children of the Almighty, have been able to resist temptation in their hour of trial, or whose minds have not been affected by those follies and vices to which all human nature is so prone to yield? Lady Malcolm is, I fear, a votary of fashion; and when once engaged in that vortex of dissipation, of balls, routs, plays, operas, concerts, dinner-parties, &c., your mind having become enervated or overstrained by unnatural excitement, you will find yourself imperceptibly gliding down that current which has carried thousands to destruction. Flattery also, which none can wholly withstand, will lend her aid to beguile and reconcile you to this mode of life. Can you wonder, then, dear girl, that my thoughts are troubled at the risk you will incur when entering so young and inexperienced on these treacherous and deceptive scenes? Were you to be changed from that dear, artless, unaffected girl I now hold in my arms, into a flirting, heartless woman of fashion, the now bright dawning of my earthly happiness would sink into endless night. That dear form, too, although so beautiful, so enchanting to my enraptured vision, is but as the fair casket, containing a far more precious jewel within—a chaste and unsullied heart, which I value beyond all price. Oh, Blanche! that you may be restored to me as you now leave me, is my constant, anxious prayer."

"Dear, dear William, do not distress yourself by these forebodings of evil, or doubt my constant, unflinching love, which will strengthen and support me in every trial; and knowing how much your happiness depends on me, and is now confided to my keeping, rest assured that consideration alone would be sufficient, had I no stronger motives, to prevent that change you dread; but unless you are with me also, my fashionable career in London will be short indeed; and when you leave town, Aunt Gordon and myself have resolved to return to the Priory."

Malcolm entering the room at this moment, exclaimed—

"Ah, Beauchamp, at the old game, lecturing Blanche, I conclude, from those tearful eyes. Really, my dear fellow, there is sometimes too much of a good thing; but all your advice will be thrown away after a month in town, by which time you will find this country lassie converted into an acerbated town belle, receiving the homage of numerous slaves, attracted by her beauty and grace, with the dignity of a princess. You will get lectured yourself then, my boy, and ordered to the right-about in double quick time."

"Take care Constance does not serve you the same trick, Malcolm."

"Egad! I should not be marvellously astonished if she did, Beauchamp, and therefore I shall keep a pretty sharp look out; but she shall have her run of gaiety—go everywhere, and see everything, for it is far better

"Do leave William alone, Charles," replied Mrs. Gordon.

"I dare not, aunt dear, until he has swallowed a bottle of which may keep him from committing *felo-de-se* until to-morrow evening, when Miss Honoria Winterbottom will perhaps enliven him with her innocent prattle and sweet musical strains, or her ma' and the old squire may, all four, get comfortably merry together."

"Charles," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, "naming to leave the room, 'you are incorrigible—but remember, we must retire early to-night.'"

We will draw a veil over the parting scene between Blanche and Beauchamp the following morning, after which he handed her to the carriage in silence, not daring to trust his voice in a last farewell; and Blanche sunk back on the cushion to conceal her fast falling tears. When shaking hands with Mrs. Gordon, Constance, and Malcolm, the firm grasping of their hands in his proved, more than words could tell, what his feelings were, although utterance failed him from emotion, which, unable longer to control, he turned quickly away, and rushed towards the stables for his horse.

"There goes," said Malcolm, "a man whose deep feelings are almost, if not quite, a misery to himself; and I fear Will Beauchamp is more to be pitied than envied in the possession of too sensitive a heart."

"Oh, no, Charles," replied Mrs. Gordon, "it is that very profound depth and delicacy of feeling which has so endeared him to me since a boy, and made me love him as my own son."

"Ah, aunt dear, he is, I know, a paragon of perfection in your eyes; but notwithstanding his heart is in the right place, he is considerably jealous and haughty too; and I suspect we shall have a scene or two with him in town, if my sweet cousin there attracts many admirers."

"I do not wish to have any more admirers, Charles," replied Blanche; "and will take care never again to give William the slightest cause for uneasiness on that account."

"A noble resolution, my unsophisticated little pet; but, as a cat may look at a king, I conclude men may look at and admire Blanche Douglas without being thought very impertinent. But wait a little, my love; and, when you have been a month in London, will think very differently on these matters."

"I hope never, Charles," was the reply, which being echoed by Mrs. Gordon and Constance, prevented Lord Malcolm from venturing any further remarks on the supposed fickleness of the fair sex.

## CHAPTER XXX.

The hurry and excitement of travelling with four post horses, and the ever-varying objects on the road, roused and diverted Blanche Douglas from giving unchecked indulgence to more gloomy thoughts; Mrs. Gordon using her best endeavours also to draw her attention to other things. But still, the unbidden tear would glisten in her eye, as she dwelt on her parting with him whom she loved far beyond every human being; and save when losing the kind instructress of her early years, this pang of separation from Beauchamp (although believing it to be of so short a duration) was the most bitter she had ever experienced. To her, Beauchamp had stood successively in the place of brother, friend, and lover. She had regarded him first with the affection of a sister; then esteemed him as a friend, and now loved him, with all the intensity of which her gentle, confiding nature was susceptible, as her affianced husband.

To be Continued.