

A RACE FOR A WIFE!

CHAPTER XI.

'Oh my!—oh my!' sobbed the housekeeper, 'to think of those old rubishing things being of any consequence! And what right have you, sir, to say I took them? To think of my being accused of taking things after all these years! But I suppose a poor servant's character is not to be taken away for nothing? I'll have the law of you, I will.'

'You're right, Mrs. Uperoff; you will, and very much to your detriment, too, if the paper I want is not forthcoming. You're not talking to a woman now. You'll neither frighten me, nor get the slightest mercy at my hands. You're in as fair a way of spending the next seven years at Portland as anybody I know; and, by Heavens, I'll take pretty good care you get there! They have stood your insolence long enough here. If you want to take a few things with you, I'll ring, and one of the maids can put up your box. I'll run through your accounts after you are gone, and tancy I can substantiate a tolerable charge of peccation to boot.'

The housekeeper had rallied a little, but this last speech of Rose's completely crushed her. She knew that she had carried on a systematic scale of robbery for years. She flopped down on her knees, and implored that mercy might be shown her, basking her entreaties with many sobs and tears.

'Here they all are, Gren,' said Maude, entering the room. 'I tumbled them into this towel; I couldn't carry them in my hands. Good gracious, Mrs. Uperoff, do get up! What is the matter?'

'Stay where you are, and apologize to Miss Denison for your impertinence before you rise!' thundered Grenville. 'Quick, woman, and I'll be lenient about the second charge I have against you!'

'Oh, please forgive me, Miss Maude. I didn't mean it—indeed I didn't!' whimpered the crestfallen housekeeper.

'There, that'll do,' said Rose, contemptuously, while Maude stood in open-eyed wonderment at the complete subjugation of her ancient foe. 'Eureka!' he shouted, as, after running his eye over some half a dozen mouldy papers, a more musty parchment than usual came beneath his ken. 'This will do. You can go, Mrs. Uperoff, without a police escort for the present; but you had better bear in mind, in future, that if you are insolent to Miss Denison you will settle with me, and that next time I promise you, it shall be a settlement in full.'

With a low courtesy the discomfited housekeeper left the room—anger raging in her breast, but mixed with a strong proportion of fear. Her malevolence would know no bounds if she should ever see her opportunity, but for the present Grenville Rose had established a wholesome terrorism. Her feelings were much like those of the Indian mutineers after the fall of Delhi.

'Let her go, my darling,' said Grenville, as he stole his arm round Maude's waist. 'This is the deed I wanted. I must leave for town directly after breakfast. Armed with this, I think I can safely say Pearman shall trouble you no more. What guardian is your champion to have when he has rescued you from the dragon—eh, *anima mia!*'

'Nothing, I'm afraid.'
'You ingrate! What do you mean?'

'What I said. I fear, Gren,' replied the girl, as she lifted her smiling face to his, 'that I have given my champion all I have to give already, and, if that don't satisfy him, I can only—'

Miss Denison's further views on the subject were never promulgated, for reasons that are palpably obvious; nor will an ordinary observer be much astonished to hear that the consins put in a disgracefully late appearance at the breakfast-table—a fact that may be quoted in support of my great theory, that early rising is dependent on fictitious excitement, and not in accordance with natural laws. Breakfast over, Grenville had a hurried interview with the squire, the result of which was great jubilation on Harold Denison's part, and a remark that he had always had an immense opinion of his (Grenville's) talents, and that he thought present circumstances already justified his opinion.

morning. 'Tell me they offered three at the clubs. What's wrong with him? What against The Saint?' and similar hurried interrogations fall on the ear. Now a brougham, now a well-appointed cab, whose driver throws the reins from his lax-ender-kid hands to the next tiger; now the Hansoms of ordinary life drop their respective occupants at the small door-way.

The Subscription-Room is full; round the big circular desks much paying and receiving is going on. The sofas round the room are crowded with loungers; the tessellated pavement is trod by a fluctuating mass, who ebb and flow to different points as some one or two large speculators vociferate the odds or cease to do so. It is the settling day, after the broken week at Newmarket, and sinister rumors are rife about the first favorite for the Two Thousand. He has stood at five to two for a long while, but report says that three to one has been laid and offered, to any amount of money, at the racing clubs this morning. Half-past four—fatal hour for many a favorite at Pattersall's, the adjustment of last week's accounts—is over, and the ring has time to turn its attention to forthcoming events.

'Three to one against Coriander for the Guinea,' is vociferated in more than one quarter. Nothing positive seems known about the horse; but a panic has set in, and backers stand aloof from a wager that yesterday they would have jumped at. Some few adventurous men take the increased odds to a little, but speedily repent as they find the disposition to lay that price rapidly increasing.

At this juncture Pearman, attired in deep mourning, entered the Subscription-Room. It was but a few days since his father's funeral, and, to do him justice, he would not have been there had not a friend telegraphed to him early in the day the onslaught that was being made on Coriander. Business must be attended to, he argued, whether racing or otherwise, and, knowing his horse to be perfectly well, he ran up at once to town to stop this demonstration against it.

Foremost among the opponents of the favorite was a big, corpulent north-countryman, who enjoyed the reputation of by no means throwing his money away. In turf parlance, when he persistently bet against a horse 'he knew something.' 'Here's 1,000 to 800 against Coriander!' vociferated Mr. Playart, for the second or third time.

'Put it down to me,' said Pearman, quietly.

'Yes, sir. Will you take it twice?'

Pearman nodded. The bookmaker pencilled it into his notebook. The crowd, attracted by the fact of Coriander's owner coming to the rescue, had surged round them; but no sooner had Mr. Playart completed his memorandum than he reiterated his hoarse war-cry of 'Here's 1,000 to 800 against Coriander!'—a shout in which he was almost immediately joined by two or three other large speculators.

'Put it down again, Playart,' said Pearman, grimly; and now, inspired with confidence by the way in which its owner had supported him, several backers invested on the favorite.

For a little it seemed as if Coriander would rally in the market; but the layers of odds far exceeded the backers, and finally came forth Mr. Playart's ominous shout of '4,000 to 1,000 against the favorite for the Guinea!'

'I'll take that!' cried Pearman, though his astonishment knew no bounds; and as the bookmaker noted it, he remarked with a sneer, 'You'll find my horse bad to get out of on the Two Thousand day. I don't think you will hedge, except at loss.'

'Perhaps so, sir; perhaps so; but I'll bet you an even hundred he don't start.'

'Done! and I'll make it 5,000, if you like?'

'No; you might start him on three legs. I won't risk more than a hundred on his not starting; but here's 4,000 to 1,000 he don't win, once more.'

Sam Pearman shook his head, and, at all events for once in his life, walked out of Pattersall's thoroughly puzzled. He knew his horse to be perfectly well, he had seen him that morning. As far as he had tried him, he had never tried a three-year-old better. What the devil were these ring-men going on?

They make great mistakes at times, these members of the magic circle. Their brethren of the Stock exchange occasionally get

such a blot in his game if he knew it. Though, for the matter of that, it was no blot so long as he lived. Now look here. I must trust to you for the legal workings of this affair; the racing part I can manage. We've got Sam Pearman in a regular hole, and, better still he doesn't know it. I make probably a good bit of money out of this, both for you and myself, without any risk whatever; but ulterior events must decide that. Mr. Denison, at all events, must make a good bit; but, without hurting his interests, in fact, rather furthering them, you and I might pick-up some five thousand pounds apiece. Do you understand?'

'Not in the least,' replied Grenville.

'Well, there's not much necessity you should. Leave that to me; but you must work the legal machinery as I direct. Can you put it in motion by Wednesday or Thursday?'

'Let's say Thursday, certain,' rejoined Rose.

'Very good, that will do; but don't let's have any mistakes about it.'

'All right,' nodded the other. 'I'll guarantee that, and go down myself.'

'Good. The stake you told me you were playing for, to start with, and, as you are in real earnest about winning a wife, I think one may trust you. I shall commence operations at once. I'll see Playart, the boot-maker, to-morrow, and put the first part of the programme in his hands. We're going, you and I, to lay about a couple of thousand each against Coriander; and I'm going to give him free license to do as much as he likes for himself.'

'Well—what next?' inquired Rose—'there must be no ultimate chance of my losing two thousand pounds, mind!'

'Certainly not. All I mean, at present, is to drive Coriander back in the betting as far as I can. When the news of your proceedings arrive, which I shall take good care to disseminate at once, I flatter myself we shall have got him at twenty to one, or thereabouts, for the Guinea.' We must then be guided by what terms you make with Pearman.'

'I think I follow you, Silky. And now each to his avocation, and—good night.'

'Good night,' laughed Dallison, as he followed Grenville to the door. 'If ever Sam Pearman was in a biggish hole, he is just now. Mind, you've a clever man against you, though, so do your work thoroughly. Never forget your stake.'

'No. I'm not likely to, if you knew all.'

'Got his measles pretty bad, apparently,' observed the astute host to himself, as Gren's footsteps died away down the staircase. 'Hope his success there really does depend, as he says, on this business coming off all right; else, when it's a regular case of 'spoons,' never a soul, ever I knew, could be counted on in a business way—or any other way, for the matter of that. It is wisely, by Jove! with a confederate in this state. D—n it, I believe I'm a fool to trust him! That idiot, Jim Durfey, lost me a pony last year at Lord's—crack bowler of his eleven—and blest if they hadn't to play with ten men because he was seeing some bit of a cousin off at Paddington Station. Wonder why they do it! Never was spoons myself but once, and—' and, despite his tirade, Dallison sat down and mused for more than an hour over that by-gone flirtation of eight years ago. He might be cynical about all that sort of thing now, yet there was a woman still living who could make his pulses leap should she meet him. It is a fact that, in some cases, women retain their sway years after they are, not only unconscious of it, but have almost forgotten their admirer. It is true we also sometimes see the converse of this, when a woman would fain pick up the dropped stitches of a by-gone love-affair, but the male creature has freed himself from the yoke.

The early train on Thursday morning saw Grenville Rose, accompanied by Mr. Nightjar, solicitor, junior partner of the firm of Hawk, Sparrowbill, & Co., on his way to Slantover, the nearest railway station to Mannersley, from which it was distant about four miles. Having arrived at the latter place and ascertained that Pearman was at home, Grenville sent in his card, and a request to see that gentleman for a few minutes on business of importance. Now, if so happened, that though Rose had a thorough knowledge of Sam Pearman, the other knew nothing of him. He had never encountered him personally, except to exchange that sentence or two after the Xminster ball. I don't know whether even when he had identified

the abbey, and being ever ready to do service under the banner of Sir James Denison of Glinn, the then lay lord and champion of the abbey. He further lay under the right of heriot; in the first place, to the monks of Xminster, who were entitled to claim three beasts upon the death of Hugh Wilson, or any one of his descendants holding Mannersley, as an acknowledgment of the fealty they owed to the abbey; in the second place, of one beast to the lords of Glinn, as a similar acknowledgment to the secular representative of the abbey. But the monks of Xminster were swept away in the Reformation under Henry VIII., and of course that right of heriot disappeared. Still the masters of Glinn continued to exercise their claim upon every occasion for rather over two hundred years, at the expiration of which time, in consequence of the decay of the Wilson family, Mannersley fell, by purchase, into their hands, where it remained till sold to Mr. Pearman twelve years ago. The curious thing is, this right of heriot still exists; the owner of Glinn is still entitled to demand whatever beast he may choose upon the Mannersley estate upon the death of an owner thereof, and the successor can but submit to the claim. Do you follow me, Mr. Pearman?'

'Pretty well, I think. May I ask when was this right of heriot last enforced, and in what shape?'

'In 1748, Stephen Denison, Esq., of Glinn, received the sum of £25 in lieu of right of heriot on the death of Matthew Wilson. This was the last case: it was his heir and successor that sold it to the Denisons—that being Stephen, before mentioned.'

'Well, gentlemen,' rejoined Pearman, 'of course I am not quite prepared as yet to acknowledge this right—I must consult my solicitors first on the subject. Still, it looks plausible enough. I am afraid,' said he, laughing, 'money don't go quite so far as in Matthew Wilson's day. What, may I ask, do you assess me at?'

'Ten thousand pounds,' replied Grenville Rose, quietly taking up the parable, as had been agreed between himself and his coadjutor beforehand.

'Ten thousand! Why, you're mad!' But there was no laugh now in his rejoinder. His quick intelligence gathered at a glance what a desperate position he was in; and, moreover, that the opposite side were pretty well aware of it.

'We're certainly not mad. I don't think we are foolish. I don't pretend to know much about these things myself, but the veriest tyro know the first favorite for the Two Thousand, ten days before the race, is worth a big sum. Mr. Denison is in difficulties; money is an object to him. We give you the option of paying a £10,000 fine or letting us make what we can out of Coriander. I fancy there will be plenty of people to bid for him, either one way or the other—I mean either to try and win with him, or to take very good care he don't.'

Sam Pearman's turf-training stood him in good stead. He had learned how to lose. He swallowed the ferocious execration that rose to his lips. 'You will allow me to look at that deed,' he inquired; 'and, of course, you cannot expect an answer till I have had time to communicate with my solicitors.'

'Certainly,' returned Grenville; 'and your solicitors may also peruse it at the offices of Messrs. Hawk, Sparrowbill & Co. I tell you fairly we have had counsel's opinion upon it, and there is no doubt the right of heriot still exists. We mean to make the most we can out of it, and either take Coriander or a £10,000 equivalent.'

Sam Pearman ran his eye rapidly over that old deed, which stated, after some technicalities, 'And whereas Hugh Wilson, yeoman, did render to us good an secret service last time Ralph Everley did lay claim most sacrilegious and outrageous on lands appertaining to us, abbot and chapter of Xminster, in the year of our lord 1456, we do hereby grant to him and his body's heirs the fee-simple of the manor of Mannersley, in perpetuity, on the right of heriot of three beasts, to be delivered as token of fealty to us, the said abbot and chapter of Xminster; with further right of heriot on the part of Sir James Denison of Glinn, and his heirs, to claim one beast in acknowledgment of allegiance to him as lay-baron and secular leader of the retainers of Xminster Abbey. The above acknowledgments of fealty and allegiance to be paid on the death of the then holder by his successor and heir male.'

'Well, Nightjar,' said Grenville, when they got outside; 'so far, so good, we've done all we can; to-morrow will be the real tug of war. You go back to town with the deed. Dallison will be waiting for you; tell him all that passed, and that he shall hear from me, as agreed upon, the minute I hear anything definite. Meanwhile, good-bye, I'm off to Glinn. Yes; I turn off here; it's not three miles across the fields.'

I suppose it was a case of animal magnetism, but it certainly was odd that Maude should have selected that for her afternoon stroll. Nevertheless, it is a fact that, as Grenville Rose jumped over the stile at the corner of Edgerton Firs (a large plantation so called), he found that young lady seated on the grassy bank the other side, with Dan crouched at her feet—one of those coincidences that I presume have happened to most of us in our time, and sincerely do I pity the few whose want of luck and lack of observation have debarred them such sunny moments.

'Well, Gren,' she inquired, as she rose to her feet, 'have you overthrown my ogre? Am I a free girl again?'

'I don't know, darling—the great battle comes off to-morrow; but I think I can promise you shall never marry Pearman.'

'Don't talk nonsense; you know I never would now. Before you came down, it was different. I was weak, and foolish, and miserable. That story is all over, and I'm forgiven—at least, I thought so, and Maude looked shyly but archly up into her lover's face.'

Grenville behaved after the manner of young men generally when so circumstanced—those quiet footpaths over the fields have a deal to answer for—and what 'Don't, please, Gren!' meant, I must leave to the discrimination of the reader, merely remarking Grenville Rose either decided it meant nothing or could not have heard it.

'But do you think you can put things a bit right for papa?' inquired Maude, when she at last extricated herself.

'I hope so; but we must wait till to-morrow to know for certain.'

CHAPTER XII.

COMING TO TERMS.

Sam Pearman had received the writ of service of this heriot claim with apparent equanimity. It must be borne in mind that practised speculators on the turf, as elsewhere, are accustomed to take their reverses with much outward nonchalance. But, nevertheless, when his visitors had departed, he commenced pacing the room after the manner of a caged tiger. It was not likely Denison, whom he had deemed so entirely in his power, would have ventured upon such a bold stroke as this except under very high legal opinion; and, whatever it might suit him at the time to say in disparagement of Rumford, he was quite aware that no counsel's opinion in London stood in higher repute. He foresaw at one sweep the upset of all his forthcoming schemes. His father had told him how Harold Denison had first tal in his pretensions to Maude's hand. He knew, none better, how, under the pressure brought to bear upon him, the Squire of Glinn's self-interest had been enlisted in his behalf. He was far too keen a judge to think that he had any hold upon Maude's affections; his idea was that she just liked him sufficiently to marry him if her parents made a point of it. He was entirely ignorant of their being a favored lover in the field. He felt little doubt that, if Denison could extricate himself from his power—and should he establish this claim he would go near to do so—his marriage would be postponed to the Greek Kalends.

Now for the other point. If he disputed this 'right of heriot,' could they prevent his running Coriander for the Two Thousand? That became a question of great importance. He had backed the horse heavily—yes, taking last Monday's work into consideration, very heavily—for the race; and, if he was not to run, there at once was a loss of some thousands, to say nothing of the big stake he had hoped to win over that event.

'By—!' he exclaimed, 'that's it! There is some inkling of this in the turf market, and that's the reason the horse has been so much laid against lately. This accounts for Playart's determined attack, and his betting me a hundred even that he don't start. I'm off to town by the three train.'

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