

George's Hanover Square, between the Marquis of A. or D. and the beautiful and accomplished Miss Douglas, niece to Lady Malcolm of Grosvenor Square. Of course, my dear, there was a little pardonable vanity on my side, mixed up in this anticipated *deuouement*, but as you appear to think Lady Beauchamp a much prettier name—to which I quite agree—with the Countess of Annandale in perspective, I have only been building castles in the air to little purpose, like other enthusiastic people. Yet, joking apart, my dear Blanche, I thoroughly approve your choice.

Blanche, blushing excessively, expressed her thanks for her aunt's kindness and commendation of her lover, when Malcolm added, 'Ah my dear, that Will Beauchamp is a very Bluebeard already, and what will he become with a title tacked to his name? My gracious! as Mrs. Summertop says, there will be no living in the same house with him. To begin, my love, he has laid an embargo on you, that you do not attend more than three balls or parties per week, and appointed me keeper of the seals, or private turnkey, to lock you up in your own room every other night after eleven, and it shall be done, Blanche, by Jupiter Ammon as the old squire says. Will Beauchamp is a long-headed fellow, and his edicts and opinions are not to be gainsayed; so now, my love, as you don't go with us tonight, I will see you to your room before I leave the house, and take the key in my pocket. Just fancy Ayrshire's astonishment—anticipating, no doubt, a little *tete-a-tete* in his sister's boudoir. 'Are we not to have the honor of seeing Miss Douglas to-night?' 'Oh, no, my lord, can't come—very naughty—looked in her room—here's the key.' 'Oh, Charles, Charles,' exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, 'can't you spare your cousin this one night—are your promises so soon forgotten?'

Blanche burst into tears, and was escaping from the table, when Malcolm sprang from his chair, and throwing himself before her on one knee, seized her hand, exclaiming, 'Oh Blanche! my dear, soft-hearted girl, will you forgive my ill-timed foolery? but, indeed, I thought to rouse your spirits, that was my only motive, on my honour.' 'Dear Charles, I believe you,' she replied; 'but my heart is too full now to bear even a joke—pray let me go to my room.'

'So you shall, my love,' opening the door for her; 'but, do you forgive me?' 'She may; but I shall not, Charles,' interposed Mrs. Gordon, taking her niece's arm and leading her away.

The fourth morning after Beauchamp had left London, Mrs. Gordon received a very affectionate letter from him, with another enclosed for Blanche, written in the most affectionate terms, and enjoining her to be more careful of herself for his sake; telling her also, that, having felt persuaded of Lady Malcolm's motives in taking her to so many parties, and witnessing her decreasing health and strength from such excessive dissipation, he had deemed it expedient to make her ladyship acquainted with their relative position, which he hoped would at once put a stop to that incessant whirl of gaiety. After having perused the contents half a dozen times in her own room, Blanche sought Mrs. Gordon.

'There, dear aunt, I must show you the kind, affectionate letter from my own dear William, which has made me so very happy.'

'Then you can read mine in the meantime, my love, which has put me also in high spirits.'

Next to the pleasure of seeing those we love, is the enjoyment of seeing their handwriting when separated from us, and the delight of Mrs. Gordon and her niece on perusing Beauchamp's heart-stirring terms of endearment to them both (though rather differently worded as applied to each) is easier to imagine than describe. Lord Malcolm, after a severe lecture from his aunt, now ceased his bantering tone towards his cousin,

view, egad, I think she will just suit your book, *id est*, if you can take up the running.'

'Then, Malcolm, I've no objection to try my luck, provided she is likely to suit.'

During this dialogue, broken at intervals, Fred had shaken hands with the ladies, and answered various little inquiries about country friends and country affairs, when Malcolm rising, said, 'Well, Fred, you dine with us this evening, as a matter of course, and we go to Almack's afterwards, when I will introduce you to the widow.'

'I hardly know what to say to that proposition, and don't think I can sport brass enough for such an august assembly.'

'Pooh, pooh, Fred! you have brass enough for anything—faint heart, you know, won't do in these cases.'

Constance here interposed, saying, if he would accompany them, Blanche would accept him as her first partner.'

'Well, Con, that of course decides the matter.'

'And if not willtully disposed to turn restive,' she added, 'we will enlist you in our service for the whole of the day, as I have a hundred little things to talk about before the dinner hour.'

'I am quite at your service, my fair cousin,' replied Fred; 'so do with me as you please.'

'Well, then, we will take a drive after luncheon, in Aunt Gordon's carriage, as I know your dislike to drawing-room work, and show you the belles in the park on our return.'

Malcolm, having an engagement, soon after left the ladies and Fred to get through their time until the carriage came to the door. Various conjectures were hazarded on Fred Beauchamp's appearance in Mrs. Gordon's carriage, by the noble Marquis, until he encountered Captain Markham, who at once solved the mystery. 'What! another bumpkin of the Beauchamp family, Markham?'

'Eh! 'pon honor, Ayrshire, you don't fancy the name much; but, my fine fellow, take care Fred don't hear you call him a bumpkin, or—'

'What, Markham?'

'You'll have to attend a little meeting somewhere in the country pretty soon.'

The Marquis turning away muttered, 'Ah, another fool in my path, I suppose.'

On Fred's standing up at Almack's in the first quadrille that night with Blanche Douglas, he had to undergo the ordeal of a first appearance in public or fashionable life, which not altogether relishing, he remarked to his partner: 'Some of those dowagers will know me again, I conclude, although my Lord Danby gave me the cut direct just now. By Jove! if I meet him again in the hunting field he shall have cause to remember me to the last hour of his life.'

'Don't speak so loud, Fred,' she whispered, 'he is just behind us.'

'So much the better, Blanche—I hope he heard me; but—I beg pardon—perhaps he is in favor again with yourself?'

'Oh, no, Fred, that is certainly not the case; nor likely to be.'

'Glad to hear it, for I hate fellows who know men only in the country. But, to judge by appearances, you seem to have a good many strings to your bow—or in other words, a rather long list of admirers.'

'And yet, Fred, I would much rather be at Bampton, I mean the Priory, than joining in this gaiety.'

'Why not have said Bampton, Blanche, at once?'

'Well, I might have said so,' she replied, 'as I never enjoy anything more than a visit to the old squire.'

'Except, Blanche, a visit to the young one.'

'Don't be impertinent, Master Fred,' was the rejoinder, 'or I shall cut you, like Lord Danby.'

When she was talked in turn, by Fred Beauchamp saying, 'You appear to take rather a deep interest in my cousin's love affairs. Is he a very old friend of yours?'

'Not very,' was the reply; and a deeper tint stole over her cheeks; 'but we met several times during his short stay in town, and I liked him very much, from being so different to the generality of our fops and fine gentlemen. But don't you think Miss Douglas exceedingly lovely?'

'Ah, yes,' replied Fred: 'beautiful—too beautiful—but I look at her as I do at a splendid three hundred-guinea horse—beyond my reach: and her guardian, Harcourt, will have a peer for his ward—nothing short will do for the heiress. So you see my falling in love with her is a hopeless affair.'

'Then you confess to being in love with her, Mr. Beauchamp?'

'I won't deny,' he replied, 'that I have been in that predicament; but the fit has passed, as others have before; in short, since the age of fourteen I have always been the slave of Cupid. First, I was smitten by a housemaid at our school, a buxom young lady, nearly six feet high, who knocked out the first flame by knocking me out of a high-backed chair, on which I had perched myself to snatch a kiss from my enchantress. In falling against the edge of the table, a black eye was the consequence, for which, not being able to give a satisfactory explanation to our master, who declared I had been fighting with another boy, I got a thorough good flogging. This cooled my courage for a twelvemonth; after which I had a desperate affair with the daughter of the village schoolmaster—possessing a very red face, snub nose, and black, glossy ringlets. The flame being reciprocal, clandestine meetings, billets doux, and little presents followed; but one from my Dulcinea, a lock of hair, nearly extinguished the fire, as well as your humble servant at the same time.'

'Pray may I ask how, Mr. Beauchamp?'

'Oh, certainly, if it will afford you any satisfaction to know how silly I was in my teens. Well, you must know then, that of this precious lock I swallowed one hair per night, at bedtime—such was the devouring nature of my passion.'

'Really, Mr. Beauchamp,' exclaimed the gay widow, laughing at the drollery of the thing, 'you must be joking now, to see how much I can swallow.'

'Well you may laugh at such an absurdity!' continued Fred, 'but, 'pon honor, it is perfectly true. I had nearly eaten up the lock, hair by hair, when one night, from an over-exciting meeting with my beloved, I took an extra allowance, two or three together, which, sticking in my throat, nearly choked me; in short, I had a hair-breadth escape of my life, from being patted on the back by the strapping housemaid—who came in to take our candles away—until the breath was knocked out of my body.'

'Oh, Mr. Beauchamp, how very ridiculous!'

'Yes, ridiculous enough; and it surprises me now to think how I ever could have been such a ninny.'

'Well, but how did this love affair terminate?'

'Rather tragically; my master having caught me kneeling at my fair one's feet one evening in a secluded arbor, gave me a precious good caning, upbraiding me the while for being a sallow-faced, hook-nosed, sparrow-legged dog, in the presence of the young lady, by which my armor *propre* was more hurt than my back; and my enchantress not exhibiting much compassion at my distressed situation, but rather inclined, I thought, to titter at these insulting epithets, flame number two was thus quickly put out. I had, it is true, formed a desperate resolution of covering my shame and love together in a duck-pond; but the water looked so extremely dark and disgusting, that the idea of spoiling a new pair of white trousers saved me. Since then, with the exception of looking at Blanche

had his dismissal—nothing more likely, and I am satisfied in my own mind this is the fact.'

'Well, Ayrshire, I quite agree with you that this is a very natural solution of the mystery; and knowing before her guardian's decided objection to this young pretender, I think it more than probable that he has been ordered to the right-about.'

Blanche's returning cheerfulness, after the receipt of Beauchamp's letter, tendered also to impress Lord Ayrshire (who had joined them again in their ride that afternoon) with the idea that the wound inflicted on the heart of Miss Douglas by her lover's dismissal was one of a very superficial character, and he argued with himself—

'Ah, young girls brought up in the country have always some bumpkin hankering about them, with whom they fancy themselves terribly in love, until the delusion is dispelled by their coming to London and meeting well-bred, polite men of the world; they then wonder at the absurdity of their first foolish, romantic *penchant* for a fellow who has not two ideas in his head, beyond the price of corn and cattle; and whose fund of entertainment consists of a few threadbare sporting anecdotes, too coarse for a lady's ear. A few tears, of course, at parting; and, by the end of the first week, Colin is forgotten!'

There was another cause, also, for Blanche's cheerfulness—Lady Malcolm's knowledge and full approval of her choice, which she believed would carry great weight with her guardian; so that she felt comparatively at ease on that point, and in good humor with every one and every thing around her. On this morning her pretty Arab obtained an unusual share of caresses and pattings from the hand of his fair mistress, and Lord Ayrshire's sparkling conversation elicited her approving smiles.

It was now the Harcourt's turn for a grand display—invitations having been issued a month previously, to ensure a full attendance for a ball to take place that night; and it being well known by this time that Mr. Harcourt was Miss Douglas's guardian, admittance to their party was eagerly sought by all the fashionable young men about town. Mrs. Harcourt, as may be supposed, derived no trifling satisfaction from observing the crowd of aristocratic admirers pressing round her niece, all anxious for a share of her smiles; but Lord Ayrshire, from his great wealth, and as leader of ton, had become her special favorite.

After having met Mr. Harcourt at Lady Malcolm's, the Marquis continued his acquaintance, cards were exchanged, and invitations followed, so that the two families were now on visiting terms, and Lord Ayrshire had dined in Upper Brook Street two or three times previously to the Harcourt's ball, when he ingratiated himself into the lady's favor by bestowing the high-flown panegyrics on her niece, declaring her, without exception, the belle of the season. Mrs. Harcourt in turn descended on her many amiable qualities, and gave a glowing description of her fine mansion and large landed property in Scotland, with a hint of their expectations that she would form some suitable alliance. Having made these preliminary observations, Mrs. Harcourt flattered herself that, before the close of the season, she should see her niece Marchioness of Ayrshire; and so in all probability she would, had Blanche been ambitious of the distinction.

On this night, Lady Armore, sitting near Mrs. Harcourt, when her brother was dancing with Miss Douglas, remarked, 'I have never seen George so unremittingly attentive to any young lady as he has been to Miss Douglas since our first ball. We have long given him up as a confirmed bachelor, but I really begin to think he is caught at last, and now for the first time seriously in love.'

'My niece,' replied Mrs. Harcourt, thinking to enhance her value, 'has very peculiar ideas on marriage, and having a splendid

known him from childhood, he is one of my very oldest friends.'

'I stand corrected, Miss Douglas, for my futile attempt at jocularity, which appears to have been exceedingly ill-timed; but, believe me, no reflection whatever was intended on your friends.'

Blanche made no reply, and Lord Ayrshire puzzled his brain in vain to account for her unexpected transition from light good humor to grave formality. But the dance being concluded, he was obliged to resign her hand without the opportunity of obtaining any further elucidation.

On entering the room that night, Selina Markham had suggested that they should go through one quadrille together to have a chat, to which Blanche assented. 'You are almost danced off your legs, my dear, and were I in your place, I would see half these fine fellows smothered in the Serpentine mud before I would sag myself to death by accepting them for partners, night after night, as you do. So hold yourself engaged to me—as I have a little bit of gossip to talk about—for one quadrille.'

'Won't it look very strange, Selina, for us both to be sitting together?'

'Not in the least, my dear, only missed our partners, or they missed us—nothing more common in such crowds as these.'

At the appointed time, therefore, the two girls ensconced themselves in the most retired seats of the apartments they could select, hoping to escape observation.

'There, I declare,' exclaimed Selina, 'that jackanapes Bayntum has found us out already; as he appeared with May I have the honor, Miss Douglas?'

'No, you can't,' said Selina, 'she's engaged as well as myself.'

'Very odd, Miss Markham, that you should both have lost your partners.'

'Your lordship is always thinking about the odds,' replied Selina; 'but, whether odd or even, we haven't lost our partners, and as you can keep a stable secret, I will tell you a ball-room one. We are both tired of dancing, and therefore have decided on a little respite. You know what running a horse off his legs means, so have a little compassion on Miss Douglas.'

'Then will you allow me the next dance after this, Miss Douglas?'

An assent being given, Selina added, 'On the condition that you leave us now to ourselves,' with which Lord Henry bowed and withdrew.

'Well, my dear Blanche, what a bore it must be to be a belle, listening night after night to all the soft twaddle of so many soft heads. I declare it would drive me distracted, or send me to sleep, and I advise you to pick out half-a-dozen of your best and richest admirers to choose from, and turn the rest adrift, for it is high time to make up your mind, and select one pet to keep the other off from so continually pestering you with their attentions. *A propos*, the *on dit* is, in well-informed circles, that Lady Malcolm has given Will Beauchamp his *conge* for proposing to her niece, and that his travelling ticket was made out at a moment's notice, and it does appear very strange that he left in such a vast hurry, without the slightest notice to any one.'

'And pray, Selina, of whom did you hear this news?'

'My brother Ned says it is the general talk at the clubs, where, by the way, there is more gossip discussed than at any old woman's tea-party. Those clubs, my dear, are the cause of quarrels and dissensions among married couples, almost innumerable, and mischief incalculable—destructive of conjugal bliss; for, on the slightest pretences, the husband flies off to his club, then somewhere else, and leaves his poor young wife moping at home. In short, I recommend you to make it a condition in your marriage articles, that the Marquis is to resign his club, or forfeit an additional thousand a year to you as pin-money.'

To be Continued.