POOR DOCUMENT

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THE BETRAYAL

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CHAPTER XIX.

Mrs. Smith-Lessing.

Ray and I left the building together. As we turned into Pall Mall he glanced at his watch.

"You have missed the six o'clock train," he remarked. "I suppose you know that there is nothing now till the nine-twenty. Will you come to the club with me, and have some dinner?"

It was less an invitation than a command. I felt a momentary impulse of rebellion, but the innate masterfulness of the man triumphed easily. I found myself walking, a little against my will, down Pall Mall by his side. A man of some note, he was saluted every minute by passers-by, whom, however, he seemed seldom to notice. In his town clothes, his great height, his bronzed face, and black beard made him a sufficiently striking personality. I myself, though I was little short of six feet, seemed almost insignificant by his side. Until we reached the club he maintained an unbroken silence. He even ignored some passng comment of mine; but when once inside the building he seemed to remember that he was my host, and his manner became one of stiff kindness. He ordered an excelelnt dinner and chose the wine with care. Then he leaned a little forward across the table, and electrified me by his first remark.

"Ducaine," he said, "what relatives have you with whom you are in any sort of communication?"

"None at all!" I answered.

"Sir Michael Trogoldy was your mother's brother," he remarked. "He is still alive."

"I believe so," I admitted. "I have never approached him, nor has he ever taken any notice of me."

"You did not write to him, for instance, when Heathcote absconded, and you had to leave college?"

"Certainly not," I answered. "I did not choose to turn beggar."

"How much," he asked, "do you know of your family history?"

"I know," I told him, "that my father was cashiered from the army for misconduct, and committed suicide. I know, too, that my mother's people treated her shamefully, and that she died alone in Paris and almost in poverty. It was scarcely likely, therefore, that I was going to apply to them for help."

Ray nodded.

'I thought so," he remarked grimly. "I shall have to talk to you for a few minutes about your father."

I said nothing. My surprise, indeed, had bereft me of words. He sipped his wine slowly, and continued.

"Fate has dealt a little hardly with you," he said. "I am almost a stranger to you, and there are even reasons why you and I could never be friends. Yet it apparently falls to my lot to supplement the little you know of a very unpleasant portion of your family history. That rascal of a lawyer who absconded with your money should have told you on your twenty-first birthday."

"A pleasant heritage!" I remarked bitterly; "yet I always wanted to know the whole truth."

"Here goes, then," he said, filling my glass with wine. "Your father was second in command at Gibraltar. He sold a plan of the gallery forts to the French Government, and was dismissed from the army."

I started as though I had been stung. Ray continued, his stern matter-of-fact tone unshaken.

"He did not commit suicide as you were told. He lived, in Paris, a life of continual and painful degeneration. Your mother died of a broken heart. There was another woman, of course, whose influence over your father was unbounded, and at whose instigation he committed this disgraceful act. This woman is now at Brasier."

My brain was in a whirl. I was quite incapable of speech. "Her real name," he continued coolly, "God only knows. For the moment she calls herself Mrs. Smith-Lessing. She is a Franco-American, a political adventuress of the worst type, living by her wits. She is ugly enough to be Satan's mistress, and she's forty-five if she's a day, yet she has but to hold up her finger, and men tumble the gifts of their life into her lap, gold and honor, conscience and duty. At present I think it highly probable that you are her next selected victim."

For several minutes Ray proceeded with his dinner. I did my best to follow his example, but my appetite was gone. I could scarcely persuade myself that the whole affair was not a dream—that the men who sat all round us in little groups, the dark liveried servants passing noiselessly backwards and forwards, were not figures in some shadowy nightmare, and that I should not wake in a moment to find myself curled up in a railway carriage on my way home. But there was no mistaking the visible presence of Colonel Mostyn Ray. Strong, stalwart, he sat within a few feet of me, calmly eating his dinner as though my agony were a thing of little account. He, at least was real.

"This woman," he continued, presently, "either is, or would like to be, mixed up with the treachery that is somewhere close upon us. Sooner or later she will approach you. You are warned."

"Yes," I repeated vaguely, "I am warned."

"I have finished," Colonel Ray remarked. "Go on with your dinner and think. I will answer any question presently."

There were only two I put to him, and that was when my hansom had been called and I was on the point of leaving.

"Is he—my father—alive now?" I asked.

"I have reason to believe," Ray answered, "that he may be dead."

"How is it," I asked, "that you are so well acquainted with these things? Were you at any time my father's friend?"

"I was acquainted with him," Ray answered. "We were at one time in the same regiment. My friendship was—with your mother."

The answer was illuming, but he never winced.

"Indirectly," I said, "I seem to have a good deal to thank you for. Why do you say that you can never be my friend?"

"You are your father's son," he answered curtly.

"I am also my mother's son," I objected.

"For which reason," he said, "I have done what I could to give you a start in life."

And with these words he dismissed me.

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I received Ray's warning concerning Mrs. Smith-Lessing, the new tenant of Brasier Grange, somewhere between seven and eight o'clock, and barely an hour later I found myself alone in a first-class carriage with her, and a four hours' journey before us. She had arrived at King's Cross apparently only a few minutes before the departure of the train, for the platform was almost deserted when I took my seat. Just as I had changed my hat for a cap, however, wrapped my rug around my knees and settled down for the journey, the door of my carriage was thrown open, and I saw two women looking in, one of whom I recognized at once. Mrs. Smith-Lessing, although the night was warm, was wearing a heavy and magnificent fur coat, and the guard of the train himself was attending her. Behind stood a plainly dressed woman, evidently her maid, carrying a flat dressinx-case. There was a brief colloquy between the three. It ended in dressing-case, a pile of books, a reading lamp and a formidable array of hat-boxes, and milliner's parcels being placed upon the rack and vacant seats in my compartment, and immediately afterwards Mrs. Smith-Lessing herself entered. I heard her tell her maid to enter the carriage behind. The door was closed and the guard touched off his hat. A minute later and we were off.

I was alone with the adventuress. I had no doubt but that she had chosen my carriage with intent. I placed my dispatch-box on the rack above my head, and opened out a newspaper, which I had no intention of reading. She, for her part, arranged her traveling light and took out a novel. She did not apparently even glance in my direction, and seemed to become immersed at once in her reading. So we traveled for half an hour or so.

At the end of that time I was suddenly conscious that she had lain down her book, and was regarding me through partially-closed eyes. I too laid down my paper. Our eyes met, and she smiled.

"Forgive me," she said, "but did I not see you one day last week upon the sands at Brasier with Lady Angela Harberly?"

"I believe so," I answered. "You were riding, I think, with her brother."

"How fortunate that I should find myself traveling with a neighbor!" she murmured. "I rather dreaded this night journey. I just missed the six o'clock, and I have been at the station ever since."

I understood at once one of the charms of this woman. Her voice was deliciously soft and musical. The words seemed to leave her lips slowly, almost lingeringly, and she spoke with the precision and slight accent of a well-educated foreigner. Her eyes seemed to be wandering all over me and my possessions, yet her interest, if it amounted to that, never even suggested curiosity or inquisitiveness.

"It is scarcely a pleasant journey at this time of night," I remarked.

"Indeed, no," she assented. "I wonder if you know my name? I am Mrs. Smith-Lessing, of Brasier Grange. And you?"

"My name is Guy Ducaine," I told her. "I live at a small cottage called the 'Brand'."

"That charming little place you can just see from the sands?" she exclaimed. "I thought the Duke's head-keeper lived there."

"It was a keeper's lodge before the Duke was kind enough to let it to me," I told her.

She nodded.

"It is a very delightful abode," she murmured.

She picked up her book, and after turning over the pages aimlessly for a few minutes, she recommenced to read. I followed her example; but when a little later on I glanced across in her direction, I found that her eyes were fixed upon me, and that her novel lay in her lap.

"My book is so stupid," she said apologetically. "I find, Mr. Ducaine," she added with sudden earnestness, "the elements of a much stranger story closer at hand."

"That," I remarked, laying down my own book, and looking steadily across at her, "sounds enigmatic."

"I think," she said, "that I am very foolish to talk to you at all about it. If you know who I am, you are probably armed against me at all points. You will weigh and measure my words, you will say to yourself, 'Lies, lies, lies!' You will not believe in me or anything I say. And, again, if you do not know, the story is too painful a one for me to tell."

"Then let us both avoid it," I said, reaching again for my paper. "We shall stop at Ipswich in an hour. I will change carriages there."

She turned round in her seat towards the window, as though to hide her face. My own attempt at reading was a farce. I watched her over the top of my paper. She was looking out into the darkness, and she seemed to me to be crying. Every now and then her shoulders heaved convulsively. Suddenly she faced me once more. There were traces of tears on her face; a small lace handkerchief was knotted up in her nervous fingers.

"Oh, I cannot," she exclaimed plaintively. "I cannot sit here alone with you and say nothing. I know that I am judged already. It does not matter. I am your father's wife, Guy. You owe me at least some recognition of that fact."

"I never knew my father," I said, "except as the cause of my own miserable upbringing and friendless life."

"You never knew him," she answered, "and therefore you believe the worst. He was weak, perhaps, and, exposed to a terrible temptation, he fell! But he was not a bad man. He was never that."

"Do you think, Mrs. Smith-Lessing," I said, struggling to keep my voice firm, though I felt myself trembling, "that this is a profitable discussion for either of us?"

"Why not?" she exclaimed almost fiercely. "You have heard his story from enemies. You have judged him from the report of those who were never his friends. He sinned and he repented. Better and worse men than he have done that. If he were wholly bad, do you believe that after all these years I should care for him still?"

I held my peace. The woman was leaning over towards me now. She seemed to have lost the desire to attract. Her voice had grown sharper and less pleasant, her carefully arranged hair was in some disorder, and the telltale blue veins by her temples and the crow's feet under her eyes were plainly visible. Her face seemed suddenly to have become pinched and wan, the flaming light in her strangely colored eyes was a convincing assertion of her earnestness. She was not acting now, though what lay behind the storm I could not tell.

"You seem afraid to talk to me," she exclaimed. "Why I have done you no harm!"

"Perhaps not," I answered, "yet I cannot see what we gain by raking up this miserable history. It is both painful and profitless."

"I will say no more," she declared, with a sudden note of dignity in her tone. "I can see that I am judged already in your mind. After all, it does not really matter. No one likes to be thought worse of than they deserve, and women are all—a little foolish. But at least you must answer me one question. I have the right to ask it. You must tell me where he is."

"Where who is?" I asked.

Again her eyes flamed upon me. Her lips parted a little, and I could see the white glimme of her teeth.

"Oh, you shall not fence with me like a baby!" she exclaimed. "Tell me, or lie to me, or refuse to tell me! Which is it?"

"Upon my honor," I said, looking at her curiously, "I have no idea whom you mean!"

She looked at me steadily for several moments, her lips parted, her breath seeming to come sharply between her teeth.

"I mean your father," she said. "Whom else should I mean!"

CHAPTER XX.

Two to One.

I looked across at the woman, who was waiting my answer with every appearance of feverish interest.

"What should I know about him?" I said slowly. "I have been told that he is dead. I know no more than that."

She started as though my words had stung her.

"It is not possible!" she exclaimed. "I must have heard of it. When he left me—it was less than three months ago—he seemed better than I had known him for years."

"All my life," I said, "I have understood that my father died by his own hand after his disgrace. Tonight for the first time I was told that this was not the fact. I understood, from what my informant said, that he had died recently."

She drew a sharp breath between her teeth, and suddenly struck the cushioned arm of the carriage by her side with her clenched hand.

"It is a lie!" she declared. "Whoever told you so, it is a lie!"

"Do you mean that he is not dead?" I exclaimed.

"Do you mean that you have not seen him yourself—within the last few months?" she demanded fiercely. "He left me to come to you on the first day of the New Year."

"I have never seen him to my knowledge in my life," I answered.

She leaned back in her seat, murmuring something to her-self which I could not catch. Past-mistress of deceit though she may have been, I was convinced that her consternation at my statement was honest. She did not speak or look at me again for some time. As for me, I sat silent with the horror of a thought. Underneath the rug my limbs were cold and lifeless. I sat looking out of the rain-splashed window into the darkness, with fixed staring eyes, and a hideous fancy in my brain. Every now and then I thought that I could see it—a white evil face pressed close to the blurred glass, grinning in upon me. Every shriek of the engine—and there were many just then, for we were passing through a network of tunnels—brought beads of moisture on to my forehead, made me start and shake like a criminal. Surely that was a cry! I started in my seat, only to see that my companion, now her old self again, was watching me intently.

"I am afraid," she said softly, "that you are not very strong. The excitement of talking of these things has been too much for you."

"I have never had a day's illness in my life," I answered. "I am perfectly well."

"I am glad," she said simply. "I must finish what I was telling you. Your father was continually talking and thinking of you. He knew all about you at college. He knew about your degree, of your cricket and rowing. Lately he began to get restless. He lost sight of you after you left Oxford, and it worried him. There were reasons, as you know, why it was not well for him to come to England, but nevertheless he determined to brave it out. It was to find you that he risked so much. He left me on New Year's day, and I have never heard a word from him since. That is why I came to England."

"The whole reason?" I asked, like a fool.

"The whole reason," she affirmed simply.

"I do not wish to see my father," I said. "If he comes to me I shall tell him so."

"He wants to tell you his story himself," she murmured.

"I would never listen to it," I answered. She sighed.

"You are very young," she said. "You do not know what temptation is. You do not know how badly he was treated. You have heard his history, perhaps, from his enemies. He is getting old now, Guy. I think that if you saw him now you would pity him."

"My pity," I answered, "would never be strong enough to suffer me to open the door to him—if he should come. He has left me alone all these years. The only favor I would ever ask of him would be that he continues to do so."

"You will believe the story of strangers?"

"No one in the world could be a greater stranger to me than he."

She sighed.

"You will not even let me be your friend," she pleaded. "You are young, you are perhaps ambitious. There may be many ways in which I could help you."

"As you helped my father, perhaps," I answered bitterly. "Thank you, I have no need of friends—that sort of friends."

Her eyes seemed to narrow a little, and the smile upon her lips was forced.

"Is that kind of you?" she exclaimed. "Your father was in a position of great trust. It is different with you. You are idle, and you need a career. England has so little to offer her young men, but there are other countries——"

I interrupted her brusquely.

"Thank you," I said, "but I have employment, and such ambitions as I have admit of nothing but an honest career."

Again I saw that contraction of her eyes, but she never winced or changed her tone.

"You have employment?" she asked, as though surprised.

"Yes. As you doubtless know, I am in the service of the Duke of Rowchester," I told her.

"It is news to me," she replied. "You will forgive me at least for being interested, Guy. But when you say in the service of the Duke of Rowchester you puzzle me. In England what does that mean?"

"I am one of the Duke's secretaries," I answered.

"Is the Duke, then, a politician?" she asked, "that he needs secretaries?"

"Not at all," I answered drily. "His Grace is President of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, or Children, whichever you like. We have a large correspondence."

She picked up her book.

"I am afraid that I understand you," she said. "You have a good deal of the brutality of youth, Guy, and, I might add, of its credulity also. Whose word is it, I wonder, that you have taken so abjectly—with such an open mouth? If I have enemies I have not deserved them. But, after all, it matters little."

We did not speak again until we neared the junction. Then she began to gather up her things.

"How are you getting home?" she asked. "It is 2 o'clock, and raining."

"I am going to walk," I answered.

"But that is absurd," she protested. "I have a closed carriage here. I insist that you let me drive you. It is only common humanity; and you have that great box, too."

I buttoned up my coat.

"Mrs. Smith-Lessing," I said, "you perhaps wish to force me into seeming ungracious. You have even called me brutal. It is your own fault. You give me no chance of escape. You even force me now to tell you that I do not desire—that I will not accept—any hospitality at your hands."

She fastened her jacket with trembling fingers. Her face she kept averted from me.

"Very well," she said softly, "I shall not trouble you any more."

I was alone with the adventuress, and opened out a newspaper, which I had no intention of reading.

At the junction I fetched the sleepy-looking porter to see to her luggage, and then left her. My rug I left in the station-master's office, and with the dispatch-box in my hand I climbed the steps from the station, and turned into the long straight road which led to Brasier. I had barely gone a hundred yards when a small motor brougham, with blazing lights and insistent horn, came flying past me and on into the darkness. I caught a momentary glimpse of Mrs. Smith-Lessing's pale face as the car flashed by, a weird little silhouette, come and gone in a second. Away ahead I saw the mud and rain from the pools fly up into the air in a constant stream caught in the broad white glare of the brilliant search-lamps. Then the car turned a corner and vanished.

I was tired, yet I found the change from the close railway carriage, and the tension of the last few hours delightful. The road along which I trudged ran straight to the sea, the distant roar of which was already in my ears, and the wet wind which blew in my face was salt and refreshing. It was a little after two in the morning, and the darkness would have been absolute, but for a watery moon, which every now and then gave a fitful light. For a mile or more I walked with steady, unflagging footsteps. Then suddenly I found myself slackening my pace. I walked slower and slower. At last I stopped.

About fifty yards farther on my left was Brasier Grange. It stood a little way back from the road. Its gardens were enclosed by a thin storm-bent hedge, just thick enough to be a screen from the road. The entrance was along a lane which branched off here from the main road, and led on to the higher marshes, and thence on to the road from Brasier village to Rowchester and my cottage. Straight on the road which I was following led into Brasier, but the lane to the left round past the Grange saved me fully half a mile. In an ordinary way I should never have hesitated for a moment as to my route. I knew every inch of the lane, and though it was rough walking, there were no creeks or obstacles of any sort to be reckoned with. And yet, as I neared the corner, I came to a full stop. As I stood there in the road I felt my heart beating, I seemed possessed by a curious nerve failure. My breath came quickly. I felt my heart thumping against my side. I stood still and listened. Down on the shingles I could hear the sea come thundering in with a loud increasing roar, dying monotonously away at regular intervals. I could hear the harsh grinding of the pebbles, the backward swirl of long waves thrown back from the land. I heard the wind come booming across the waste lands, rustling and cracking amongst the few stunted trees in the grounds of Brasier Grange. Of slighter sounds there seemed to be none. The village ahead was dark and silent, the side of the house fronting the road was black and desolate. It was a lonely spot, a lonely hour. Yet as I stood there shivering with nameless apprehensions, I felt absolutely certain that I was confronted by some hidden danger.

In a moment or two, I am thankful to say, my courage returned. I struck a match and lit a cigar, one of a handful which Ray had forced upon me. Then I crossed stealthily to the other side of the road, and felt for the hedge. I pricked my hands badly, but after feeling about for some moments I was able to cut for myself a reasonably thick stick. With this in my right hand, and the dispatch-box under my left arm I proceeded on my way.

I walked warily, and when I had turned into the lane which passed the entrance to Brasier Grange I walked in the middle of it instead of skirting the wall which enclosed the grounds. I passed the entrance gates, and had only about twenty yards farther to go before I emerged upon the open marshland. Here the darkness was almost impenetrable, for the lane narrowed. The hedge on the left was ten or twelve feet high, and on the right were two long barns. I clasped my stick tightly, and walked almost stealthily. I felt that if I could come safely to the end of these barn buildings I could afford to laugh at my fears.

Suddenly my strained hearing detected what I had been listening for all the time. There was a faint but audible rustling in the shrubs overgrowing the wall on my left. I made a quick dash forward, tripped against some invisible obstacle stretched across the lane, and went staggering sideways, struggling to preserve my balance. Almost at the same moment two dark forms dropped from the shelter of the shrubs on to the lane by my side. I felt the soft splash of a wet cloth upon my cheeks, an arm round my neck, and the sickening odor of chloroform in my nostrils. But already I had regained my balance. I wrenched myself free from the arm, but was suddenly blinded by the glare of a small electric hand-light within a foot of my face. I struck a sweeping blow at it with my stick, and from the soft impact it seemed to me that the blow must have descended upon the head of one of my assailants. I heard a groan, and I saw the shadowy form of the second man spring at me. What followed was not, I believe, cowardice on my part, for my blood was up and my sense of fear gone. I dashed my stick straight at the approaching figure, and I leaped forward and ran. I had won the hundred yards and the quarter of a mile at Oxford, and I was in fair training. I knew how to get off fast, and after the first dozen yards I felt that I was safe. The footsteps which had started in pursuit ceased in a few minutes. Breathless, but with the dispatch-box safe under my arm, I sprinted across the marsh, and never paused till I reached the road. Then I looked back and listened. I could see or hear nothing, but from one of the top rooms in the Grange a faint but steady light was shining out.

CHAPTER XXI.

Lady Angela Approves.

It was the only breath of fresh air which I had allowed myself all the morning, though the dazzling sunlight and the soft west wind had tempted me all the time. And now, as ill luck would have it, I had walked straight into the presence of the one person in the world whom I wished most earnestly to avoid. She was standing on the edge of the cliff, her hands behind her, gazing seawards, and though I stopped short at the sight of her, and for a moment entertained wild thoughts of flight, it was not possible for me to carry them out. A dry twig snapped beneath my feet, and, turning quickly round, she had seen me.

She came forward at once, and for some reason or other I knew that she was glad. She smiled upon me almost gaily.

"So this sunshine has even tempted you out, Sir Hermit;" she exclaimed. "Is it not good to feel the Spring coming?"

"Delightful," I answered.

She looked at me curiously.

"How pale you are!" she said. "You are working too hard, Mr. Ducaine."

"I came down from London by the mail last night," I said. "I saw Colonel Ray—had dinner with him, in fact."

She nodded, but asked me no questions.

"I think," she said abruptly, "that they are all coming down here in a few days. I heard from my father this morning."

I sighed.

"I have been very unfortunate, Lady Angela," I said. "Your father is displeased with me. I think that but for Colonel Ray I should have been dismissed yesterday."

"Is it about—the Prince of Malors?" she asked in a low tone.

"Partly. I was forced to tell what I knew."

She hesitated for a moment, then she turned impulsively toward me.

"You were right to tell them, Mr. Ducaine," she said. "I have hated myself ever since the other night when I seemed to side against you. There are things going on about us which I cannot fathom, and sometimes I have fears, terrible fears. But your course at least is a clear one. Don't let yourself be turned aside by any one. My father has prejudices which might lead him into grievous errors. Trust Colonel Ray—no one else. Yours is a dangerous position, but it is a splendid one. It means a career and independence. If there should come a time even—"

She broke off abruptly in her speech. I could see that she was agitated, and I thought that I knew the cause.

"Lady Angela," I said slowly, "would it not be possible for you and Colonel Ray to persuade Lord Blenavon to go abroad?"

She swayed for a moment as though she would have fallen, and her eyes looked at me full of fear.

"You think—that it would be better?"

"I do."

"It would break my father's heart," she murmured, "if ever he could be brought to believe it."

"The more reason why Lord Blenavon should go," I said. "He is set between dangerous influences here. Lady Angela, can you tell me where your brother was last night?"

"How should I?" she answered slowly. "He tells me nothing."

"He was not at home?"

"He dined at home. I think that he went out afterwards."

I nodded.

"And if he returned at all," I said, "I think you will find that it was after three o'clock."

She came a little nearer to me, although indeed we were in a spot where there was no danger of being overheard.

"What do you know about it?"

"Am I not right?" I asked.

"He did not return at all," she answered. "He is not home yet."

I had believed from the first that Blenavon was one of my two assailants. Now I was sure of it.

"When he does come back," I remarked grimly, "you may find him more or less damaged."

"Mr. Ducaine," she said, "you must explain yourself."

"I saw no reason why I should not do so. I told her the story of my early morning adventure. She listened with quivering lips.

"You were not hurt, then?" she asked eagerly.

"I was not hurt," I assured her. "I was fortunate."

"Tell me what measures your are taking," she begged.

"What can I do?" I asked. "It was pitch dark, and I could identify no one. I am writing Colonel Ray. That is all."

"That hateful woman," she murmured. "Mr. Ducaine, I believe that if Blenavon is really concerned in this, it is entirely through her influence."

"Very likely," I answered. "I have heard strange things about her. She is a dangerous woman."

We were both silent for a moment. Then Lady Angela, whose eyes were fixed seawards, suddenly turned to me.

"Oh," she cried, "I am weary of all these bothers and problems and anxieties. Let us put them away for one hour of this glorious morning. Dare you play truant for a little while and walk on the sands?"

"I think so," I answered readily, "if you will wait while I go and put Grooton in charge."

"I will be scrambling down," she declared. "It is not a difficult operation."

I joined her a few minutes later, and we set our faces toward the point of the bay. Over our heads the seagulls were lazily drifting and wheeling, the quiet sea stole almost noiselessly up the firm yellow sands. Further over the marshes the larks were singing. Inland, men like tiny specks in the distance were working upon their farms. We walked for a while in silence, and I found myself watching my companion. Her head was thrown slightly back, she walked with all the delightful grace of youth and strength, yet there was a cloud which still lingered upon her face.

"These," I said abruptly, "should be the happiest days of your life, Lady Angela. After all, is it worth while to spoil them by worrying about other people's doings?"

"Other people's doings?" she murmured.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Selfishness, you know, is the permitted vice of the young—and lovers."

"Blenavon can scarcely rank amongst the other people with me," she said. "He is my only brother."

"Colonel Ray is to be your husband," I reminded her, "which is far more important."

She turned upon me with flaming cheeks.

"You do not understand what you are talking about, Mr. Ducaine," she said, stiffly. "Colonel Ray and I are not lovers. You have no right to assume anything of the sort."

"If you are not lovers," I said, "what right have you to marry?"

She seemed a little staggered, as indeed she might be by my boldness.

"You are very mediaeval," she remarked. "The mediaeval sometimes survives. It is as true now as then that loveless marriages are a curse and a sin," I answered. "It is the one thing which remains now as it was in the beginning."

She looked at me furtively, almost timidly.

"I should like to know why you are speaking to me like this," she said. "I do not want to seem unkind, but do you think that the length of our acquaintance warrants it?"

"I do not know how long I have known you," I answered. "I do not remember the time when I did not know you. You are one of those people to whom I must say the things which come into my mind. I think that if you do not love Colonel Ray you have no right to marry him."

She looked me in the face. Her cheeks were flushed with walking, and the wind had blown her hair into becoming confusion.

"Mr. Ducaine," she said, "do you consider that Colonel Ray is your friend?"

"He has been very good to me," I answered.

"There is something between you two. What is it?"

"It is not my secret," I told her.

"There is a secret, then," she murmured. "I knew it. Is this why you do not wish me to marry him?"

"I have not said that I do not wish you to marry him," I reminded her.

"Not in words. You had no need to put it into words."

"You are very young," I said, "to marry any one for any other reason save the only true one. Some day there might be some one else."

She watched the flight of a seagull for a few moments—watched it till its wings shone like burnished silver as it lit upon the sun-gilded sea.

"I do not think so," she said, dreamily. "I have never fancied myself caring very much for any one. It is not easy, you know, for some of us."

"And for some," I murmured, "it is too easy."

She looked at me curiously, but she had no suspicion as to the meaning of my words.

"I want you to tell me something," she said, in a few minutes. "Have you any other reason beyond this for objecting to my marriage with Colonel Ray?"

"I have," I answered slowly, "I cannot tell it you. It is his secret, not mine."

"You are mysterious!" she remarked.

"If I am," I objected, "you must remember that you are asking me strange questions."

"Colonel Ray is too honest," she said, thoughtfully, "to keep anything from me which I ought to know."

I changed the conversation. After all I was a fool to have blundered into it. We talked of other and lighter things. I exerted myself to shake off the depression against which I had been struggling all the morning. By degrees I think we both forgot some part of our troubles. We walked home across the sandhills, climbing gradually higher and higher, until we reached the cliffs. On all sides of us the coming change in the seasons seemed to be vigorously asserting itself. The plovers were crying over the freshly-turned ploughed fields, a whole world of wild birds and insects seemed to have imparted a sense of movement and life to what only a few days ago had been a land of desolation, a country silent and winterbound. Colour was asserting itself in all manner of places—in the green of the sprouting grass, the shimmer of the sun upon the sea-stained sands, in the silvery blue of the Brasier creeks. Lady Angela drew a long breath of content as we paused for a moment at the summit of the cliffs.

"And you wonder," she murmured, "that I left London for this!"

"Yes, I still wonder," I answered. "The beauties of this place are for the lonely—I mean the lonely in disposition. For you life in the busy places should just be opening all her fascinations. It is only when one is disappointed in the more human life that one comes back to Nature."

"Perhaps then," she said, a little vaguely, "I too must be suffering from disappointments. I have never realized——"

We had taken the last turn. My cottage was in sight. To my surprise a man was standing there as though waiting. He turned round as we approached. His face was very pale, and the back of his head was bandaged. He carried his arm, too, in a sling. It was Colonel Mostyn Ray!

(To be continued.)

BROTHERS MEET AFTER 70 YEARS

James T. Davie of Bayswater has been enjoying a visit from his brother, William of Tacoma, Washington, who has come from the Pacific coast. The brothers last met seventy years ago.

William Davie, who is 86 years of age, is accompanied by his daughter, Mrs. Rhodes. They are going on to Halifax, N. S., to visit friends there.

James T. Davie is probably one of the oldest men living in the vicinity of St. John. He was born in Preston, Nova Scotia, on the 5th of October, 1811, and is therefore in his 95th year.

He has lived in the reign of five British sovereigns: George III., George IV., William IV., Queen Victoria and Edward VII.

He is the eldest of ten children, eight of whom are still living.

Mr. Davie left home when he was 23 years old, going as a ship's carpenter on a whaling voyage on board the bark Rose, which was originally a brig in the British service and as such was named the Ring-Door. Mr. Davie was on this voyage three years, when he left the vessel at New Zealand, and came on to New Bedford, Mass. From there he went to Boston, and after some time spent there went to Halifax and shortly afterwards was awarded the job of carrying the mail from St. Andrews to Maine, across the St. Croix river. Finding this work not to his liking, he gave it up after some months and came to St. John.

He secured work as a carpenter and helped to erect some of the notable old buildings of this city. While living here he visited Bayswater and became acquainted with Miss Mary Fenwick, daughter of Thomas Fenwick, to whom he was married on his 29th. birthday. They lived in St. John about eleven years, and several of their children were born here.

They then removed to Bayswater and Mr. Davie bought property and built a house, as well as a mill, where he made a lucrative income grinding buckwheat and corn. There was no duty on corn at that time, but only one load had been brought in when the duty was placed upon it. This had a rather depressing effect on the business and shortly afterwards Mr. Davie, seeing a chance to make some money in the woolen business, on account of the large number of sheep in the province, put in a machine for carding wool, and ran both industries very successfully for about 45 or 50 years.

He retired from active life some time ago and now makes his home with his daughter, Charlotte, now Mrs. Gibbons, at Bayswater.

Though he is almost a centenarian, Mr. Davie is hale and hearty, and gives promise of living to see the hundred mark registered in his birthday column.

Mr. Davie's youngest brother is 75 years of age. He is Charles R. Davie, of Elgin, Neb.

Needless to say Mr. Davie was greatly pleased to see his brother, William, after a lapse of seventy years.

Automobiles Hurled Down Embankment.

Stamford, Conn., Aug., 4—The occupants of two automobiles which came together today at high speed at the bottom of Norton Hill, had a miraculous escape, only one of the seven men and women in the two cars being a sufferer.

The forty horse power car of Charles Kroner, of New York, in which were Mr. Kroner's chauffeur and E. W. Marsh, of New Haven, struck the car belonging to Bernard Goldstein of New York and both machines were hurled down a three foot bank into a tree. Both cars were badly damaged. In the Goldstein car were Mr. and Mrs. Goldstein, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Bimberg of 225 east 38th street, New York, and the chauffeur, Wm. Mound. Marsh sustained a sprained ankle and several scratches.

Child Born to Princess Albert of Belgium.

Osten, Belgium, Aug. 4.—Princess Albert, wife of the heir presumptive to the throne of Belgium, gave birth to a daughter today. Mother and child are doing well.

There were nine mariages and nine births in the city last week. Five of the babies were boys.

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