

## Kate Coventry.

CHAPTER V

(CONTINUED.)

Yet men see something in her that is totally inexplicable to us, and she seems to have a mysterious influence over all ages and all sorts. One of these infatuated noblemen is decrepit and twaddling, the other a stern reserved man, that up to forty years of age was supposed to be the very impersonation of common sense; and the third, young, clever, hands me, a man that might marry half the nicest women in England, if he liked. And why, de you think, she won't pick and choose from such a trio? Why, forsooth, because she has set her stupid heart on a drunken stockbroker, who won't have a word to say to her, and would have been here to-day, I have no doubt, if he hadn't been afraid of meeting her. Well, there's a stranger story than that about the girl with long fair hair in the next carriage. You can see her now, in a pink bonnet, drinking sherry and soda-water—it is supposed that she is old Goldfinch's daughter, and that he won't give her a farthing, but I know somebody who knows his lawyer, and that girl will have half a million, if she don't drink herself to death before old Goldfinch takes his departure from this wicked world. She is beautiful, and clever, and accomplished, and all the young men are in love with her; but she cannot keep sober, and in three years' time she will have lost her youth, and her health, and her faculties, and in all probability, will finish in a madhouse. There's Frank Lovell making fierce love to her now.

And as Mrs. Lumley concluded with this amiable remark, I looked round for Cousin John, and rode away from her in disgust at her flippancy, and sick at heart to think of such a man as Captain Lovell wasting his smiles on such a creature. To be sure, he only said three words to her, for when I looked round again at the carriage he was gone. There is something very amusing to me in the hustle of a race-course; and yet, after talking to Mrs. Lumley, the gloss seemed to be only on the surface. She had told me enough of the company to make me fancy there must be some strange history belonging to each. Like the man that saw through the roofs of the houses in Madrid, thanks to the agency of his familiar! I thought that my demon on a side-saddle had taught me to see into the very hearts and secrets of the motley assembly.

There was a handsome girl, with beautiful eyes, and neatly braided hair, and such a brilliant smile, attracting a crowd round her, as she sang quaint songs in a sweet, deep-toned voice, that ought to have made her fortune on the stage, if it had been properly cultivated—sang them, too, with a look and manner that I have seen seldom rivalled by the cleverest actresses, and I thought what a face and form were wasted here to make profit for one knave, and sport for some fifty fools. As she accompanied herself on the harp, and touched its strings with a grace and expression which made amends for a certain want of tuition, I could not help fancying her in a drawing-room, surrounded by admirers, making many a heartache with her arch smile and winning ways. Without being positively beautiful, she had the knack, so few women possess, of looking charming in every attitude, and with every expression of countenance, and although her songs were of a somewhat florid school, yet I could not help thinking that, with those natural gifts, and a pianissimo old ballad, English or Scotch, such as 'Aunt Laurie,' or 'The Nut-brown Maid,' to bring them out, in a pretty drawing-room, with the assistance of a good dressmaker—dear! she might marry a duke, if she liked.

And yet all this belonged to a dark, close-shaved roshan, with silver rings and a yellow handkerchief, who scowled and prowled about her, and looked as if he was likely enough to beat her when they got home. But she hands up an ivory bowl for contributions amongst the young dandies on the roof of a neighboring coach, who have been listening open-mouthed to the dizen, and shillings and half-crowns, and a bit of gold from the one

'We always call him "Baby" in the Lancashire,' explained Frank, 'because he joined us so very young. He is nineteen, though you would guess him about twelve, but he's got the brains of a team of sixty and the nerves of a giant. Ah! Parachute, you may tickle old girl, but you won't get rid of that child!'

And sure enough 'The Baby' sat like a rock, with a grim smile, and preserving throughout a silence and sang froil which nothing seemed able to overcome. Two more seedy-looking animals made up the entry. The lamer one of the two was ridden by a stout major, with a redundancy of moustaches—the other by a lanky cornet of Heavy Dragoons, who seemed not to know where on earth to dispose of his arms and legs, besides finding his cap somewhat in his way, and being much embarrassed with his whip. They gallop up and down before starting, till I wonder how any galloping can be left for the race; and after a futile attempt or two they get away. 'The Baby' making strong running, the stout Major waiting closely upon his infantine antagonist, while the long cornet, looming like a windmill in the distance, brings up the rear.

'Parachute still making running,' says John, standing erect in his stirrups, his honest face beaming with excitement—'Waa, horse!—Stand still, White Stockings—now they reach the turn, and 'The Baby' takes a pull—Gad, old Ganymede's coming up. Well done, Major—no, the old one's flogging. Parachute wins. Now Baby!—now Major—the horse!—the mare!—Beat race! I ever saw in my life—a "dead heat"—Ha! ha! ha!' The last explosion of mirth is due to the procrastinated arrival of the long cornet, who flogs and works as religiously home as if he had a hundred more behind him, and who reaches the weighing enclosure in time to ascertain with his own eyes that Ganymede has won, the lame plater who rejoices in that classical appellation having struggled home first by a head, 'notwithstanding,' as the sporting papers afterwards expressed themselves, 'the judicious riding and beautiful finish of that promising young jockey, Mr. B. Larkins.' 'The Baby' himself, however, is unmoved as usual, nodding to Parachute's disappointed owner without moving a muscle of his countenance. He merely remarks, 'Short of work, Frank—told you so afore I got up; and putting on a tiny white overcoat like a plaything, disappears, and is seen no more.

What a confusion there is in getting away. Sir Guy Scapegrace has a yearly bet with the young Phaeton, who wanted to invite me on his box, as to which shall get first to Kelsington on their way back to town. You would suppose Sir Guy was very happy at home, by his anxiety to be off; the two drags are soon bumping and rolling and rattling along the sward. The narrow lane through which they must make their way is completely blocked up with spring vans, and tax cabs, and open carriages, and broughams and landaus, and every description of vehicle that ever came out of Long Acre, whilst more four-horsed coaches, with fast teams, and still faster loads, are thundering in the rear. Slang reigns supreme; and John Gilpin's friend, who had a 'ready wit,' would here meet with his match. Nor are jest and repartee (what John calls 'chaff') the only missiles bandied about; toys, knocked off the stacks for that purpose, darken the air as they fly from one vehicle to another—and the broadside from a well-supplied coach is like that of a seventy-four. Fun and good humor abound, but confusion gets worse confounded. Young Phaeton's wheel is locked with a market-gardener's, who is accompanied by two sisters-in-law, and the suitors of those nowise disconcerted damsels, all more or less intoxicated. Thriftless has his near leader in the back seat of a pony carriage, and Sir Guy's off-wheeler is over the pole. John and I agree to make a detour, have a pleasant ride in the country, never mind about dinner, and so get back to London by moonlight. As we reach a quiet sequestered lane, and inhale the pleasant fragrance of the Hawthorn—always sweetest towards nightfall—we hear a horse's tramp behind us, and are joined by Frank Lovell, who explains with unnecessary distinctness that he always makes a practice of riding back from Hampton to avoid the crowd, and always comes that way; if so, he must be in the habit of taking a considerable detour, but he joins our party, and we ride home together.

it more than once to order my horse; but I thought better of it. Poor Aunt Deborah's cold was still bad, though I was downstairs; so I determined to take care of her, in common gratitude, and give her the advantage of my agreeable society. I am very fond of Aunt Deborah, in my own way; and I know there is nothing she likes so much as a 'quiet morning with Kate.'

The hours passed off rather slowly till luncheon-time. I did forty-two stitches of worsted-work—I never do more than fifty at a time, unless it's 'grounding'—and I got off Hannah More because Aunt Deborah was too hoarse to read to me, and I really cannot read that excellent work to her without laughing; but I thought luncheon never would be ready, and when it did come I could not eat any. However, I went upstairs afterwards and smoothed my hair, and set my collar straight, and was glad to hear Aunt Deborah give her usual order that she was 'at home,' with her usual solemnity. I had not been ten minutes in the drawing-room, before a knock at the door brought my heart into my mouth, and our tragic footman announced 'Captain Lovell,' in his most tragic voice. In marched Frank, who had never set eyes on my aunt in his life, and shook hands with me, and made her a very low bow, with a degree of effrontery that nothing but a man could ever have been capable of assuming. Aunt Deborah drew herself up—and she is really very formidable when she gets on her high horse—and looked first at me, and then at Frank, and then at me again, and I blushed like a fool, and hesitated, and introduced 'Captain Lovell' to 'My Aunt, Miss Horsingham!' and I didn't the least know what to do next, and had a great mind to make a bolt of it and run upstairs. But our visitor seemed to have no misgivings whatever, and smoothed his hat, and talked about the weather, as if he had known us all from childhood. I have often remarked, that if you only deprive a man of the free use of his hands, there is no difficulty which he is unable to face. Give him something to handle and keep fidgeting at, and he seems immediately to be in his element; never mind what it is, a paper knife, and a book to open, or a flower to pull in pieces, or a pair of scissors and a bit of thread to snip, or even the end of a stick to suck, and he draws inspiration, and what is more to the purpose, conversation, from any and all of these sources.

But let him have his hands entirely to himself, give him nothing to lay hold of, and he is completely dumb-founded on the spot. Here was Frank brushing and smoothing away at his hat till it shone like black satin, and facing my aunt with a gallantry and steadiness beyond all praise; but I believe if I could have snatched it away from him and hid it under the sofa, he would have been routed at once, and must have fled in utter bewilderment and dismay. After my aunt had replied courteously enough to a few commonplace observations, she gave one of her ominous coughs, and I trembled for the result.

'Captain Beville,' said my aunt; 'I think I once knew a family of your name in Hampshire; the New Forest, if I remember rightly.'

'Excuse me, said Frank, nowise disconcerted, and with a sly glance at me, 'my name is Lovell.'

'Oh,' replied my aunt, with a considerable assumption of stateliness, 'then, a-hem, Captain Beville, I don't think I have ever had the pleasure of meeting you before.'

And my aunt looked as if she didn't care whether she ever met him again. This would have been a poser to most people, but Frank applied himself diligently to his hat, and opened the trenches in his own way.

'The fact is, Miss Horsingham,' said he, 'that I have taken advantage of my intimacy with your nephew to call upon you without a previous introduction, in hopes of ascertaining what has become of an old brother officer of mine, a namesake of yours, and consequently, I should conclude, a relative. There is, I believe, only one family in England of your name. Excuse me, Miss Horsingham, for so personal a remark, but I am convinced he must have been a near connection from a peculiarity which every one, who knows anything about our old English families, is aware belongs to yours—my poor friend Charlie had a beautiful "hand"; you, madam, I perceive, own the same advantage; therefore I am convinced you must be

possible, and glancing at the lavender kids) through so many changes and so many successive generations.'

Aunt Deborah was delighted. 'Such a clever young man, my dear,' she said to me, afterwards; 'such manners! such a voice! quite one of the old school—evidently well-bred and with that respect for good blood which, in these days, I regret to say, is fast becoming obsolete. Kate! I like him vastly!'

In the meantime she entered freely into conversation with our visitor; and before he went away, by which time his hat looked as if it had been ironed. She hoped he would call again; she was always at home till two o'clock, and trusted to have the pleasure of his company at dinner, as soon as she was well enough to get anybody to meet him.'

So Frank went off to ride in the Park, on the neatest possible brown hack; for I saw him quite plainly trot round the corner, as I went into the balcony to water my poor geraniums.

Well, I waited and waited, and John never came for me, as was his usual habit; and I began to think I must lose my ride, for I am not allowed to go by myself in the afternoon; and at last I was obliged to coax Aunt Deborah to take me out in the open carriage, for it was a beautiful day, and it would be just the thing for her cold; so we went dawdling about, and shopped in Bond Street, and looked at some lace in Regent Street, and left cards for Lady Horsingham, as in duty bound, after helping her to make a good ball; and then we went into the Ring, and I looked and looked everywhere, but I could not see anything like Frank or his brown hack. To be sure the Ride was as crowded as a fair. But I did see Cousin John, and I must say it was too bad of him to keep me waiting and watching all the afternoon, and then never to take the trouble of sending a note or a message, but to start off by himself, and escort Miss Molasses, as if he was her brother at least, if not a nearer relation. Miss Molasses, forsooth! with her lackadaisical ways, and her sentimental nonsense; and that goose John taking it all in open-mouthed, as if she was an angel upon earth. Well, at all events, she don't ride like me. Such a figure I never saw on a horse! all on one side, like the handle of a teapot, bumping when she trots, and wobbling when she canters, with braiding all over her habit, and a white feather in her hat, and gauntlet gloves (of course one may wear gauntlet gloves for hunting, but that's not London), and her sallow face. People call her interesting, but I call her bilious; and a wretched long-legged Rosinante, with round reins and tassels, and a netting over its ears, and a head like a fiddle-case, and no more action than a camp stool. Such a couple I never beheld. I wonder John wasn't ashamed to be seen with her, instead of leaning his hand upon her horse's neck, and looking up in her face with his broad honest smile; and taking no more notice of her sister Jane, who is a clever girl, with something in her, than if she had been the groom. I was provoked with him beyond all patience. Had it been Mrs. Lumley, for instance, I could have understood it; for she certainly is a chatty, amusing woman, though dreadfully bold; and it is a pleasure to see her canter up the Park, in her close-fitting habit, and her neat hat, with her beautiful round figure swaying gracefully to every motion of her horse, yet so imperceptibly, that you could fancy she might balance a glassful of water on her head without spilling a drop. To say nothing of the brown mare, the only animal in London I covet, who is herself a picture; such action! such a mouth! and such a shape! I coaxed Aunt Deborah to wait near Apsley House, on purpose that we might see her before we left the Park; and sure enough we did see her, as usual, surrounded by a swarm of admirers, and next to her, positively next to her, Frank Lovell, on the very brown hack that had been standing an hour at our door. He saw me, too, and took his hat off, and she said something to him, and they both laughed!

I asked Aunt Deborah to go home, for it was getting late, and the evening air was not very good for her poor cold. I did not feel well myself, somehow; and when dear aunt told me I looked pale, I was forced to confess to a slight headache. I am not subject to low spirits generally—I have no patience

and revolvers, that he might just as well at his ultimate destination in person, for the benefit one gets from his society. I confess I don't like the end of the season. You keep on trying to be gay, whilst your friends are dropping off, and disappearing one by one. Like the survivor in some horrid pestilence, you know your time must come too, but you shut your eyes to the certainty, and greet every fresh departure with a guilty more forced, and a smile more and more hopeless.

Well, my London season, too, was drawing to its close, and I confess I had enjoyed it very much. What with my morning gallops and afternoon saunters (for John had returned to his allegiance, and came to take me out regularly, although he always joined Miss Molasses' party when he got into the Park); what with Aunt Deborah's tiresome cold, which obliged me to go about a good deal by myself, and the agreeable society being with us, I had been very happy; and I was quite sorry to think it was all so soon to come to an end. John was already of fishing excursion to Norway, and actually proposed that I should accompany him, an arrangement which Aunt Deborah declared was totally impracticable; and which I confess I do not myself think would have been a very good plan. I had made several pleasant acquaintances, amongst whom I may number Lady Scapegrace, that much-maligned dame having taken a great fancy to me ever after the affair of the bull; and proving, when I came to know her better, a very different person from what the world gave her credit for being. With all her faults—the chief of which were an uncontrollable temper, and much too strong feelings for the nineteenth century—she had a warm, affectionate heart, and was altogether an energetic, straightforward woman, very much in earnest, whether for good or for evil. But there was one thing that vexed me considerably, amongst all my regrets for past pleasures and castles in the air for the future; and this was the conduct of Captain Lovell. What did he mean? I couldn't make him out at all. One day calling on my aunt at eleven o'clock in the morning, and staying to luncheon, and making himself so agreeable to her, and bringing bouquets of the loveliest flowers (which I knew came from Hardin's or else direct from Covent Garden) to me, and then going away as if he had fifty more things to say, and lingering over his farewell as if he was on the eve of departure for China instead of the Fair, and joining me again in the Park, asking me if I was going to the Opera, and finding out all my engagements and intentions, as if he couldn't possibly live five minutes out of my sight, and then, perhaps never coming near us for days together, even my aunt wondered what had become of that pleasant Captain Lovell, and when he meets in the Park taking off his hat with civil bow, as if he had only been introduced the night before; all this I couldn't make out, and I didn't half like, as I told Lady Scapegrace one hot morning, sitting with her in her boudoir. I was a good deal of Lady Scapegraces now; and the more so because that was the place of all others which I was least likely to meet Sir Guy. 'Men are so uncertain, my dear,' said the ladyship, sitting in a morning dress with her long black hair curled straight out over her shoulders, and reaching down to her knees; 'if you ask me candidly whether he means anything, I tell you I think Frank Lovell a shocking flirt. Flirt! I replied, half crying with vexation, 'it's enough for him to flirt with me when I give him encouragement; but I don't, Lady Scapegrace, nor I never will, I hope I'm too proud for that. Only when a man is ways in one's pocket wherever one goes when he sends one bouquets, and rides in the rain to get one a bracelet mended, and watches one from a corner of the room if one happens to be dancing with anybody else, and looks pleased when one is dull, and when one laughs; why, he either does prefer, or ought to prefer, one's society to that of Miss Molasses and Mrs. Lumley, and that is why I tell you I can't quite make out Captain Lovell.'

'Don't talk of that odious woman,' claimed Lady Scapegrace, between John and Mrs. Lumley there was a polite feud some years' standing, 'she is ready willing to jump down Frank Lovell's throat or any one else's for the matter of that, and as she is, and