

rank in his own snugery, and, making her dignity, there endeavor to worm out of him farther particulars, when Catamount was pulled up with some difficulty at her door, and his master's card sent in, accompanied by a humble petition that the early visitor might be admitted. Having darkened her eyelashes just before breakfast, and being, moreover, dressed in an unusually becoming morning toilet, she returned a favorable answer, so that Subler Bill, glowing from his ride, was ushered into her boudoir without delay.

Her womanly tact observed his fussed and anxious looks. She assumed, therefore, an air of interest and gravity in her own. "There's some bother," said she kindly; "I see it in your face. How can I help you, and what can I do?"

"You're a conjuror, by Jove!" gasped Bill, in a paroxysm of admiration at her omniscience.

"You're not, at any rate!" she replied, smiling. "But, come, tell me all about it. You're in a scrape? You've been a naughty boy. What have you been doing? Out with it!"

"It's nothing of my own; I give you my honor," replied Bill. "It's Daisy's turn now. Look here, Mrs. Lushington. I'm completely puzzled—regularly knocked out of time. Read that. I can't make head or tail of it."

He handed her the telegram, which she perused in silence, then burst out laughing, and read it again aloud for his edification.

"Very strong Honey just arrived—bulls a-light on Bank of Ireland—Sent by an unknown Friend—fail immediately—Sell Chief—consult a Gent, and strip Aaron at once—Do not lose a moment."

"Mr. Walters must be gone raving mad, or is this a practical joke, and why do you bring it here?"

"I don't think it's a joke," answered Bill ruefully. "I brought it because you know everything. If you can't help me, I'm done!"

"Quite right," said she. "Always consult a woman in a tangle. Now this thing is just like a skein of silk. If we can't unravel it at one end, we begin at the other. In the first place, who is Aaron? and how would you proceed to strip him?"

"Aaron," repeated Bill thoughtfully. "Aaron, I never heard of such a person. There's Sharon, you know; but stripping him would be out of the question. It's generally the other way!"

"Sharon's a money-lender, isn't he?" she asked. "What business have you to know anything about him, you wicked young man!"

"Never borrowed a sixpence in my life," protested Bill, which was perfectly true. "But I've been to him often enough lately about this business of Daisy's. We've arranged to get fifteen hundred from him alone. Perhaps this is what is meant by stripping him. But it was all to be in hard money; and though I know Sharon sometimes makes you take goods, I never heard of his sending a fellow bulls, or strong honey, or indeed, anything but dry sherry and cigars."

She knit her brows and read the message again. "I think I have it," said she. "Strip Aaron. That must mean 'Strip Sharon.' Sell the Chief—that's 'tell the Colonel.' Then 'fail immediately' signifies that the writer means to cross by the first boat. Where does it come from—Dublin or Roscommon?"

"Roscommon," answered Bill. "They're not much in the habit of telegraphing up there."

"Depend upon it, Daisy has dropped into a good thing. Somebody must have left, or lent, or given him a lot of money. I have it! I have it! This is how you must read it," she exclaimed, and following the lines with the taper finger, she put them into sense with no little exultation, for the benefit of her admiring listener. "Very strange! Money just arrived. Bills at sight, on Bank of Ireland. Sent by an unknown Friend. Sail immediately. Tell Chief. Consult Agent, and stop Sharon at once. Do not lose a moment. There, sir, should I, or should I not, make a good expert at the Bank?"

"You're a witch—simply a witch," roared the delighted Bill. "It's a regular, downright magic. Of course, that's what he means. Of course, he's come into a fortune. Hurrah! hurrah! Mrs. Lushington, have you any objection? I should like to throw

at least partially enlightened, particularly as the transaction was but little to the credit of any one concerned, and could not, therefore, be made public too soon. So she laid her hand on Bill's coat-sleeve, and observed impressively—

"Never mind about my being old and ugly, but attend to what I say. Daisy, as you call him, has evidently found a good friend. Now I know who that friend is. Don't ask me how I found it out. I never speak without being sure. That money came from Miss Douglas."

Bill opened his eyes and mouth. "Miss Douglas!" he repeated. "Not the black girl with the black mare?"

"The black girl with the black mare, and no other," she answered. "Miss Douglas has paid his debts, and saved him from ruin. What return can a man make for such generosity as that?"

"She's a tramp, and he ought to marry her!" exclaimed the young officer. "No great sacrifice either. Only," he added, on reflection, "she looks a bit of a Tartar—wants her head let quite alone at her fences, I should think. She'd be rather a handful; but Daisy wouldn't mind that. Yes; he's bound to marry her, no doubt; and I'll see him through it."

"I quite agree with you," responded Mrs. Lushington, "but I won't have you talk about ladies as if they were hunters. It's bad style, young gentleman, so don't do it again. Now, attend to what I tell you. Jump on that poor horse of yours; it must be very tired of staring into my dining-room windows. Go to your agent, and send him to Sharon. Let your Colonel know at once. When Daisy arrives, impress on him all that he is bound in honor to do, and you may come and see me again, whenever you like, to report progress."

So Bill leapt into the saddle in exceedingly good spirits, while Mrs. Lushington sat down to her writing-table, with the self-satisfied sensations of one who has performed an action of provident kindness and goodwill.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE DEBT OF HONOR.

Daisy's astonishment, on receiving by post those documents that restored him to the world from his vegetation in Roscommon, was no less unbounded than his joy. When he opened the registered letter, and bills for the whole amount of his liabilities fluttered out, he could scarcely believe his eyes. Then he puzzled himself to no purpose, in wild speculations as to the friend who had thus dropped from the skies at his utmost need. He had an uncle prosperous enough in worldly matters, but this uncle hated parting with his money, and was, moreover, abroad, whereas the welcome letter bore a London post-mark. He could think of no other relative nor friend rich enough, even if willing, to assist him in so serious a difficulty. The more he considered his good luck, the more inexplicable it appeared; nor, taking his host into consultation, did that worthy's suggestions tend to elucidate the mystery.

In the first place, recalling many similar instances under his own observation, Denis opined that the money must have been hidden up for his guest, long ago, by his great grandmother, in a stocking, and forgotten! Next, that the Prussian Government, having heard of the mare's performances at Punchestown, had bought her for breeding purposes, at such a sum as they considered her marketable value. And, lastly (standing the more stoutly by this theory, for the failure of its predecessors), that the whole amount had been subscribed under a general vote of the Kildare Street Club, in testimony of their admiration for Daisy's bold riding and straightforward conduct as a sportsman!

Leaving him perfectly satisfied with this explanation, Daisy bade his host an affectionate farewell, and started without delay for London, previously telegraphing to his comrade at Kensington certain information and instructions for his guidance. Warped in its transmission by an imaginative clerk in a hurry, we have seen how this message confused and distracted the honest perceptions of its recipient.

That young officer was sitting down to breakfast, with Venus under his chair, while Benjamin, the badger, poked a cautious nose out of his stronghold in the wardrobe, when the hasty retreat of one animal, and formidable growlings of the other, announced

something of a blush, "I mean me and Mrs. Lushington."

"What had she to do with it?" asked Daisy, pushing his plate away, and lighting a cigar. "She didn't send the stuff, I'll take my oath!"

"But she knows who did," said Bill, filling a meerschaum pipe of liberal dimensions, with profound gravity.

Then they smoked in silence for several minutes.

"It's a very ruin go," observed Daisy, after a prolonged and a thoughtful puff. "I don't know when I've been so completely at fault. Tell me what you've heard, Bill, for you have heard something, I'm sure. In the first place how came you to take counsel with Mrs. Lushington?"

"Because she is up to every move in the game," was the answer. "Because she's the cleverest woman in London, and the nicest. Because I was regularly beat, and could think of nobody else to help me at short notice. The telegram said, 'Do not lose a moment.'"

"And what did she make of it?" asked Daisy.

"Tumbled to the whole plant in three minutes," answered Bill. "Put the telegram straight—bulls, honey and all—as easy as wheeling into line. I tell you, we know as much as you do now, and more. You've got three 'thous,' Daisy, ready-money down, to do what you like with. Isn't that right?"

Daisy nodded assent.

"The Chief's delighted, and I've sent the agent to Sharon. Luckily, the little beggar's not so unreasonable as we thought he'd be. That reckons up the telegram, doesn't it?"

Again Daisy nodded, smoking serenely.

"Then there's nothing more for you to bother about," continued his host; "and I'm glad of it. Only, next time, Daisy, you won't pull for on old woman, I fancy, in a winning race."

"Nor a young one either," said his friend.

"But you haven't told me now who the money came from."

"Can't you guess? Have you no idea?"

"Not the faintest."

"What should you say to Miss Douglas?"

"Miss Douglas!"

By the tone in which Daisy repeated her name, that young lady was obviously the last person in the world from whom he expected to receive pecuniary assistance.

Though no longer peaceful, his meditations seemed deeper than ever. At length he threw away the end of his cigar with a gesture of impatience and vexation.

"This is a very disagreeable business," said he. "Hang it, Bill, I almost wish the money had never come. I can't send it back, for a thousand's gone already to our kind old major, who promised to settle my book at Tattersall's. I wonder where she got such a sum. By Jove, it's the handsomest thing I ever heard of! What would you do, Bill, if you were in my place?"

"Do," repeated his friend; "I've no doubt what I should do. I should order Catamount round at once; then I think I'd have a brandy-and-soda; in ten minutes I'd be at Miss Douglas's door, and in fifteen I'd have—what d'ye call it?—proposed to her. Proposed to her, my boy, all according to regulation. I'm not sure how you set about these things. I fancy you go down on your knees; I know you ought to put your arm round their waists; but lots of fellows could coach you for all that part, and even if you did anything that's not in the book, this is a case of emergency, and, in my opinion, you might chance it!"

Having thus delivered himself, the speaker assumed a judicial air, smoking severely.

"In plain English, a woman buys one for three thousand pounds!" said Daisy, laughing rather bitterly. "And only three thousand bid for him. Going! Going!"

"Gone!!!" added Bill, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang that startled the badger, and elicited an angry bark from Venus. "A deuced good price, too; I only hope I shall fetch half as much when I'm brought to the hammer. Why you ought to be delighted, my good fellow. She's as handsome as paint, and the best horsewoman that ever wore a habit."

"I don't deny her riding, nor her beauty, nor her merit in every way," said Daisy, somewhat ruefully. "In fact, she's much too good for a fellow like me. But do you mean seriously, Bill, that I must marry her because she has paid my debts?"

"I do, indeed," answered his friend; "and Mrs. Lushington thinks so too."

at barracks for four-and-twenty hours. To be sure, Miss Douglas is a good many cuts above Mrs. Martingale!"

"To be sure she is!" echoed his adviser. "And I dare say, after all, Daisy, it is not quite so bad as we think. Wet days and that you'd have to yourself, you know, and she wouldn't want you when she had a headache. Mrs. Martingale often has headaches, and so should I if I liquored up as freely!"

"But supposing," argued Daisy, "I say only supposing, Bill, one liked another girl better; oughtn't that to make a difference?"

"I'm afraid not," replied Bill, shaking his head. "I didn't think of putting the case in that way to Mrs. Lushington, but I don't imagine she'd admit the objection. No, no, my boy, it's no use being shifty about it. You've got to jump, and the longer you look, the less you'll like it! If it was a mere matter of business, I wouldn't say a word, but see how the case stands. There are no receipts, no vouchers; she has kept everything dark, that you might feel under no obligation. Hang it, old fellow, it's a regular debt of honor; and there's no way of paying up, that I can see, but this."

Such an argument was felt to be unanswerable.

"A debt of honour," repeated Daisy. "I suppose it is. Very well; I'll set about it at once. I can't begin to-day though."

"Why not?" asked his friend.

"No time," answered the other, who in many respects was a true Englishman. "I've got lots of things to do. In the first place, I must have my hair cut, of course!"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A PERTINENT QUESTION.

A letter, without date or signature, written in an upright, clerical hand, correctly spelt, sufficiently well expressed, and stamped at the General Post Office! St. Joseph had no clue to his correspondent, and could but read the following production over and over again with feeling of irritation and annoyance that increased at each perusal:—

"You have been grossly ill-treated and deceived. A sense of justice compels the writer of these lines to warn you before it is too late. You are the victim of a conspiracy to plunder and defraud. One cannot bear to see a man of honour robbed by the grossest foul play. General St. Joseph is not asked to believe a bare and unsupported statement. Let him recapitulate certain facts, and judge for himself. He best knows whether he did not lately borrow a large sum of money. He can easily discover if that amount corresponds, to a fraction, with the losses of a young officer celebrated for his horsemanship. Let him ascertain why that person's debts have stood over till now; also, how and when they have been settled. Will he have courage to ask himself, or somebody he trusts as 'himself,' whence came these funds that have placed his rival in a position to return to England? Will he weigh the answer in the balance of common-sense; or is he so infatuated by a certain dark lady that he can be fooled with his eyes open, in full light of day? There is no time to lose, or this caution would never have been given. If neglected, the General will regret his incredulity as long as he lives. Most women would appreciate his admiration; many would be more than proud of his regard. There is but one, perhaps, in the world who could thus repay it by injury and deceit. He is entreated to act at once on this communication, and to believe that of all his well-wishers it comes from the sincerest and the most reliable."

Everybody affects to despise anonymous letters. No doubt it is a wise maxim that such communications should be put in the fire at once, and ignored as if they did not exist. Nevertheless, on the majority of mankind they inflict unreasonable anxiety and distress. The sting rankles, though the insect be infinitesimal and contemptible; the blow falls none the less severely than it has been delivered in the dark.

On a nature like the General's such an epistle as the above was calculated to produce the utmost amount of impatience and discomfort. To use a familiar expression, it worried him beyond measure. Straightforward in all his dealings, he felt utterly at a loss when he came in contact with mystery or deceit. Nothing could furnish plainer proof of the General's sincere attachment to Miss Douglas than the fortitude with which he confronted certain petty vexations and

tokens of her distress.

"You've been crying, my darling," said he, and taking her hand in both his own, he pressed it fondly to his lips.

It was not a bad beginning. Hitherto he had always been so formal, so respectful, so unlike a lover; now, when he saw she was unhappy, the man's real nature broke out, and she liked him none the worse.

Withdrawing her hand, but looking very kindly, and speaking in a softer tone than usual, she bade him take no notice of her agitation.

"I'm nervous," said she. "I often am. You men can't understand these things, but it's better than being cross at any rate."

"Cross!" he repeated. "Be as cross and as nervous as you like, only make me the prop when you require support, and the scapegoat when you want to scold."

"You're too good," said she, her dark eyes filling again, whereat he placed himself very close and took her hand once more. "Far too good for me! I've told you so a hundred times. General; shall I confess why I was—was making such a fool of myself, and what I was thinking of when you came in?"

"If it's painful to you, I'd rather not hear it," was his answer. "I want to be associated with the sunshine of your life, Blanche, not the shade."

She shook her head.

"Whoever takes that part in my life," she replied, "must remain a good deal in the dark. That's what I was coming to. General, it is time you and I should understand each other. I feel I could tell you things I would not breathe to any other living being. You're so safe, so honorable, so punctiliously, so ridiculously honorable, and I like you for it."

He looked grateful.

"I want you to like me," said he. "Better and better every day. I'll try to deserve it."

"They say time works wonders," she answered wistfully, "and I feel I shall. I know I shall. But there are some things I must tell you now, while I have the courage. Mind, I am prepared to take all consequences. I have deceived you, General. Deceived you in a way you could never imagine nor forgive."

"So people seem to think," he observed coolly, producing, at the same time, the anonymous letter from his pocket. "I should not have troubled you with such trash, but as you have chosen to make me your father-confessor, perhaps I ought to say your grand-father confessor, this morning you may as well look through it, before we put that precious production in the fire."

He walked to the window, so as not to see her face while she read it, nor was this little act of delicacy and forbearance lost on such a woman as Blanche Douglas.

Her temper nevertheless, became thoroughly roused before she got to the end of the letter, causing her to place herself once more in the position of an adversary. Her eyes shone, her brows lowered, and her words came in the tight concentrated accents of bitter anger while she bade him turn round and look her in the face.

"This has only anticipated me," said she, pale and quivering. "I stand here, arraigned like any prisoner in the dock, and with no excuses to offer, no defence to make. It is a fine position, truly; but having been fool enough to accept it, I do not mean to shrink from its disgrace. Ask me what questions you will, I am not afraid to answer them."

"Honestly?" said he, "without quibbles or afterthought, and once for all?"

"She looked very stern and haughty."

"I am not in the habit of shuffling," she replied. "I never yet feared results from word or action of mine. And what I say, you may depend upon it, I mean."

On the General's face came an expression of confidence and resolution she had never noticed before. Meeting his regard firmly, it occurred to her that so he must have looked when he rode through that Sepoy column, and charged those Russian guns. He was a gallant fellow no doubt, bold and kind-hearted too.

If he had only been twenty years younger or even ten!

He spoke rather lower than usual; but every syllable rang clear and true, while his eyes looked frankly and fearlessly into her own.

"Then answer my question once for all, Blanche, will you be my wife? Without farther hesitation or delay?"

"Let me explain first."

TO BE CONTINUED.