

Eustace, the Outcast

CHAPTER VI. THE EVICTION.

It was drawing towards evening, and Lillias and Eustace sat together in a little rustic arbor in front of the cottage...

The serious labor of the day was over—the boat was drawn up on the beach—the nets were hung on the poles—and the three happy inmates of the cottage had come forth to enjoy themselves in the soft, calm evening.

Willy found his recreation in the tripping of a flower bed, but Lillias and Eustace set them down side by side in the arbor to enjoy that sweet communion which their loving hearts so prized and delighted in.

The hand of Lillias lay in that of Eustace, now growing brown and hard by unwonted toil, his other arm was thrown fondly round her, and her head rested on his breast, while his chin rested on her glossy hair.

Before them was the river, whose surface was without a ripple, and in the distance lay the opposite shore, clear, distinct and beautiful in the pure atmosphere of evening.

The scene was in unison with the deep, satisfying joy of their souls. The influence of its perfect repose was to make them pensively silent, till from his dreamy delicious reverie, Eustace was aroused by something warm dropping on his hand.

He looked down towards the face that nestled in his bosom, and saw the tears were rolling down the cheeks of Lillias.

'My darling, what's the matter? Why do you weep? Are you unhappy? I'm anxiously inquired.'

'No; oh, no,' she answered. 'But when I saw the hard blisters on your hand, I was reminded how much you are enduring for my sake, and how unworthy I am of your great love and sacrifice.'

'And is it so great a sacrifice to earn one's daily bread?' said Eustace, with a smile. 'For my part I eat the bread thus wrought for with a relish I never before experienced.'

'My former life of idle indulgence was far inferior to this. And then, my Lillias, are we not supremely happy?'

'Very, very happy,' she murmured. 'But you were meant for a nobler work than this, and I cannot get quit of the thought that you are living in this obscurity for my sake.'

'And for my own, my precious. There's selfishness in it too, for without you I should be miserable.'

'But had your love lighted on one who was your equal in rank you would have enjoyed all the advantages of wealth.'

'And think you I would have been happier for these? No, Lillias, I am happy, perfectly happy with you here in this secluded spot. Whether our life is to be spent so I know not, but for the present it is sufficient, and I must not again find my Lillias weeping over an imaginary loss. Come now, dry your tears, for if Willy comes this way he will think I have been scolding you.'

'You would me, Eustace, I don't think you would do that if I were to be ever so naughty, you are so kind and good.'

'Oh, but I have got some of the devil in me too, and more than I was myself aware of,' he returned. 'Randolph roused it up yesterday, and if I had not remembered he was my brother I would assuredly have crushed him to pieces.'

'I fear he will try to injure you,' said Lillias. 'His look when he vowed vengeance was terrible.'

'So it was, and it gives me a glimpse into his dark, vindictive character, but he cannot injure me, Lillias. My father's injustice has in reality made me independent. By Jove, here he comes, and a host of people with him. What can be the meaning of this?'

Eustace sprang to his feet, for Randolph, the factor and some half a dozen laborers, had come round the corner of the wood and were approaching the cottage gate.

Willy had noticed them likewise, and was resting on the hoe, looking at them as they advanced with some surprise, for he could not divine the purport of their visit.

Eustace, seeing that they meant to enter the garden, advanced to meet them, for he suspected that their visit was in some way connected with himself, and the sight of Randolph produced an angry feeling in his bosom.

The latter's vindictive face gleamed with triumph when he beheld Eustace, but neither he nor the rest of the party took further notice of him—their business being apparently with Willy who stood at the door of the cottage waiting their coming.

'I say my man,' said the factor, 'you'll have to turn out of this place. Mr. Graham has given orders to that effect.'

'Leave the cottage!' echoed Willy. 'What's that for?'

'I have no time to give the reasons but I have been ordered to shut it up. These men will help you to carry out your things.'

'But what is this for?' persisted Willy. 'Perhaps it's because of the sort of people you harbor about the place, remarked Randolph, with a baleful glance towards Eustace and Lillias.'

'But Master Graham has no notice, said to turn us out at a moment's notice,' said Willy.

'Yes, he has, replied the factor. 'You are not properly a tenant of the cottage. I allowed you to go into it simply because it was empty, but you have no lease of it for any particular time.'

'Now, then,' exclaimed Randolph, 'Band, no more words with the fellow but take out the things at once. I have come to see the eviction effected, and my time is too valuable to be wasted here all night. Away into the house men, and haul out its contents.'

The men made a move towards the door, and Willy instinctively took up a position for resistance.

'Stop,' said Eustace, in a stern, authoritative voice. 'Mr. Phillip, if you continue, addressing the factor, 'you can't seriously intend to do such an infamous deed as this?'

'I have no choice, Mr. Eustace,' answered the factor. 'The order from your father is imperative, and must be carried out.'

'At this hour of the evening, when darkness will be on almost immediately, and no possibility of shelter being obtained?'

'Yes, this very hour,' roared Randolph. 'My father and I are resolved not to harbor rascals on our property. Philip, you have no business to allow anyone to interfere with you in the execution of your employer's order.'

The face of Eustace flushed with anger and he was visited with a strong impulse to knock the speaker down, but Lillias held a gentle restraining grasp on his arm and the touch brought back his self-command.

'No, my man,' said the factor, addressing Willy, 'I would advise you not to make any useless resistance, for the cottage must be immediately cleared, and my force can easily overcome any opposition you may attempt to make.'

'Oh, let him resist,' exclaimed Randolph. 'Such a fellow as him and all like him,' he added with an insolent glance at Eustace, 'wouldn't be the worse of having the conceit taken out of them.'

This was more than Willy could stand, and with one spring forward he fetched the speaker a box on the ear, which made him stagger some paces back.

'Knock the fellow down,' the recipient furiously exclaimed.

'Let anyone dare to touch him,' thundered Eustace, stepping forward to Willy's side.

'For God's sake, let there be no violence, cried the factor.

'Towards! are you afraid of two men?' shouted Randolph. 'Down with them both. Break every bone in their bodies. The laborers looked at each other, and made some show of an intention to obey Randolph's order.'

'Look you, men,' exclaimed Eustace, with a boldness of bearing that never fails to awe common minds. 'You outnumber us so far that we shall make no resistance to the execution of the infamous deed for you which you are sent; but if one of you would be incited to do violence by the insolent bully whose impertinence has been properly chastised, I shall resent that as long as I have power to wield this weapon.'

And as he spoke he lifted an iron rake which lay at his feet and gazed at the group with a look so determined that every one shrunk back from him.

'And so will I, as long as this paddle hauds guid,' cried Willy, grasping firmly with both hands the hoe which he held.

Meanwhile Lillias was in terrible distress, and felt ready to faint, but she bravely kept silent and outwardly firm, in order not to occupy the attention of Eustace or her brother at such a critical moment.

Randolph, still smarting by the blow from Willy, went stamping and foaming behind the laborers, commanding them to rush in upon the two youths, but the men had no heart for the job, and refused to move.

'There is no occasion for violence at all,' said the factor. 'Mr. Eustace has intimated that no resistance will be made to the eviction. Let the furniture, therefore be carried out and placed on the beach.'

'Yes, and carry it off the property within high-water mark,' roared Randolph. 'Not a stick of it will I allow to remain on the ground.'

'But the tide is bowing,' remonstrated the factor.

'What the duce do I care for that? Do as I order you—that's all.'

'Allow me to say, Mr. Randolph,' returned the factor, that I take my instructions only from Mr. Graham, and as he said nothing about the high-water mark, the men shall not carry the furniture within reach of the tide.'

Resistance being evidently useless, Willy was persuaded to stand aside and allow the eviction to go forward. He and Eustace and Lillias carried out the finer articles, and the men brought the more bulky pieces of furniture.

The feeling of the three inmates of the cottage under this cruel proceeding can scarcely be described. Willy was silent and indignant and Lillias tearfully sobbed, but in the soul of Eustace a tempest raged of fiercest bitterness.

What had he done to merit all this? Nothing for which his conscience condemned him—yes, heart and conscience agreed in emphatic approval of the course he had taken.

He had been staunchly true to himself—to his honor and manly virtue, and resisted an arbitrary attempt made by his father to make him false to both.

This was the head and front of his offending—this and no more; and as the reward of his integrity all this injustice and indignity had been heaped upon him.

He had been less than human had he felt no rebellious rising of spirit under the wrong. The bitterest and strongest passions of his nature were roused into force, and it was the utmost he could do to control these as the household goods were brought out and heaped upon the beach—particularly as Randolph was standing by gloating over his humiliation, aggravating by his mocking, scolding laugh, the misery of their situation.

'What is to be done, Willy?' whispered Eustace, drawing the other a little distance apart.

'The only plan that I can think of,' returned Willy, 'is to pit the two boats and gang awa' down the river to Woodhaven. There's ane or two empty hooses there where we might tak' our quarters.'

'I'm glad of that,' said Eustace; 'away lik' a good fellow and bring around the boats, while I give some comfort to poor Lillias by telling her what we mean to do.'

In a twinkling Willy had vanished, and speedily returned, first with one, then with the other boat, which, with the assistance of the men, were drawn upon the beach and laden with furniture.

They were sufficiently within high-water mark to float off when the tide reached them, which it would soon do—in fact the last of the things had just been placed on board when the water came gurgling up to the bows.

By this time the cottage was cleared of everything, and the factor looking it up, the whole party came out by the gate, and prepared to quit the spot.

Randolph lingered for a moment behind the others, and coming near enough to Eustace to be heard, he said in a triumphant tone, 'This is part of my revenge. More will follow; I owe you both and I never forget payment for a blow.'

'You had better keep by the heels of yer pretors, or I'll maybe gae ye another blank in the lug,' said Willy contemptuously.

'Au revoir, a pleasant voyage to you,' jeered Randolph, 'with another mocking laugh he turned on his heel and followed the rest.'

'Dear Eustace, I am so glad you kept silent and did not answer him,' said Lillias as she tenderly twined her arm round that of her husband.

'I am glad of it myself,' he returned, 'but the difficulty was a terrible one. My reason tells me that he is fit only for contempt. Yet his words had power to gall me, and my hand clenched of its own accord to smite him to the earth.'

'Just as mine did,' added Willy.

'Yes, Willy, but Eustace showed more self-command than you,' said Lillias, with a reproving shake of the head. 'It was very wrong of you to strike him.'

'Deal a bit if I could help it,' answered Willy.

'He richly merited it,' said Eustace. 'But see the tide is making fast. We shall be able to float the boat immediately and then farewell to Bongary. My father's power is exhausted now,' he bitterly added. 'This is the last act of vindictive cruelty he can do—enter the world now with every faculty severed. Home, I have none. None, did I say? Yes, dearest, my home is with thee. With thy love to sustain me I'll conquer still.'

'The glory of sunset had for some time faded from the western sky, but a bright light still lay along the horizon, showing with clear distinctness the tops of the far off mountains like the frontiers of another world. But all the rest of the landscape lay in a dusky shadow, to be speedily rescued from the dominion of darkness by the moon, which was rising full and broad in the east, brightening as she climbed the blue vault of night, and flooding earth and river with a sweet silver radiance.'

The arrangement was that Willy should row one boat and Eustace the other—the latter to be steered by Lillias, as Eustace was not like Willy intimate with the windings of the banks. The tide having now nearly surrounded the laden boats, Lillias was lifted into her place, and the two youths seated themselves at their respective oars, where they waited till the water should float them away in search of a new home.

CHAPTER VII. DOINGS AT BENGARRY.

Randolph Gramme and his mother held a secret conversation in one of the rooms of the deserted wing of the mansion.

Two weeks had elapsed since the eviction of Eustace and the others from the cottage and during that brief time much had been done.

First Mr. Gramme had executed a will by which the estate of Bengarry was to descend to Randolph and the eldest male issue of his proposed marriage with Mary Maxwell. In this document Eustace and his heirs were expressly excluded from the succession.

Next, Randolph and Mary Maxwell had been betrothed. The time had been very brief in which this important event was accomplished, but marriages of convenience do not require a long period for arrangement. Now this was pre-eminently a marriage of convenience on both sides. Randolph consented to it for the sake of obtaining Bengarry, and the lady consented to what would secure for her a wealthy position and a rich jointure. There was no love felt, and very little professed on either side.

Mary Maxwell was by no means a romantic girl. She was not pretty, though certainly the best looking of the four sisters. She was at bottom vain and selfish, strong-minded, and just a little bit coarse-natured. She was quite aware that it was her superiority of appearance which had obtained for her the preference over the other three, and towards these three she had, on the strength of her betrothal, given herself airs which they, in their envy and jealousy, had not been slow to resent.

Randolph, though he made no objection to the alliance, showed no eagerness to promote it, and but for its being an essential condition of his being one day possessor of Bengarry, there were signs given that he had no particular desire to become the husband of Mary Maxwell. Could he have obtained the estate without such terms, there was reason to infer that Mary would not have been the lady of his choice; but as this might not be, he made a formal offer of his hand and she accepted. And it was arranged that when he was promoted to the rank of first Lieutenant the marriage should be solemnized.

His leave of absence had expired—he was to depart on the following day—and he and his mother had adjourned to the deserted chamber that they might converse without the possibility of being overheard.

'But may he not return at a future time?' asked Mrs. Gramme, in reference to something her son had said.

'Do not fear it,' answered Randolph. 'The Falcon, to which he will be drafted, is to join the fleet immediately, and he will be sure to get knocked on the head in an engagement. I'll guarantee that he'll never return to Bengarry to trouble you or endanger my prospects, now so magnificent.'

'Poor Ralph,' sighed Mrs. Gramme. 'It was his own fault. He might, after all, make no had use of his secret, but—'

'But I'll not trust him,' returned Randolph hastily. 'I don't choose to be at the mercy of such a vulgar, insolent fellow. I have been forced to be smooth with him since the day he boasted of the relationship, but the airs he takes when we are in the woods together have galled me to the quick. But my release and revenge are both near. Tonight he will find himself secure under hatches, and by daylight he will have the acquaintance of the Falcon's forecastle.'

'It seems to be the easiest and safest way of getting rid of him,' said his mother. 'He has his own rashness and folly to thank for it. Then he being safely cared for, for I should think there is not the slightest probability of Eustace and his father being reconciled.'

Randolph smiled sardonically. 'I shall effectually prevent that likewise,' he rejoined. 'By a single blow I mean to avert danger and to secure a sweet and ample revenge. Oh, shall I not repay them with tenfold interest for the blow they both gave me. By heavens, my heart bounds with joy at the thought of it.'

'I don't know what you mean,' observed his mother.

'Of course you don't. How should you? But hark! Ralph is not the only one who shall fall into the hands of the press gang to-night.'

His mother started, and looked at him with a strange look of enquiry.

'You do not mean Eustace?' she breathlessly whispered.

'Both Eustace and his associate, the salmon-fisher.'

'Carry them off by force—press them?'

'And make Eustace a common sailor?'

'There's the sting of it—putting him before the mast. Oh, the prospect is delicious.'

'That is indeed a terrible vengeance you are taking,' said the mother. 'But the point of the sting for him would lie in the knowledge that you it was who had instigated his seizure, and this he may never know.'

'He shall know it,' cried Randolph, fiercely.

'True, he will learn it from Ralph when they meet on board the Falcon.'

'The Falcon! They don't go to the Falcon.'

'To another ship.'

'Ay, to another ship. To the Hector.'

'Your own?' exclaimed his mother in amazement.

Randolph nodded again, and his eyes absolutely blazed with vindictive triumph.

'But will this not be inconvenient or even dangerous?' continued his mother.

'He may come to know that you were the means of his seizure, and—'

'He will know it,' shouted Randolph. 'This is a part of my revenge.'

'Then be sure he will do his utmost to resent it. He will seek a quarrel with you.'

'A quarrel!' exclaimed Randolph. 'You forgot, mother, that I shall be in the gunroom and he in the forecastle. There is no possibility of a quarrel between an officer and a common seaman.'

'But he never will accept the position of a common seaman,' said his mother.

'Accept it! I think ye he will have a choice? No. Once there, and he will be put on the same level as the most vulgar sailor on the ship. And look you here, mother, I shall be his officer—his officer. Think of that. He must obey my commands, and listen in silence to whatever I choose to say. Oh, what a sweet revenge to put him to daily torture, to gail his proud spirit, to make him go here and there as I choose, and work like a slave under my orders. I shall wring the bitter agony from his soul drop by drop, and every drop will go to sweeten the cup of my revenge.'

'He will never endure it,' rejoined Mrs. Gramme. 'You will goad him to retaliation.'

'I hope I shall,' said the miscreant. 'For then I shall have him flogged—tied up like a dog, and his back flayed by the lash till his spirit is crushed out, and he cries to me for the mercy I shall tauntingly refuse. What think ye of my scheme of revenge? Is it not perfect?'

'It is more than I would advise you to consummate,' answered Mrs. Gramme. 'We have triumphed over him already. He is an outcast, and his inheritance has become yours. What further triumph need you seek?'

'Revenge, mother; I tell you revenge. Revenge for the blow he gave me and the words he addressed to me. I swore to make him repent it, and by heaven, I would not forego my purpose for ten of Bengarry's. But see, the sun is sinking in the west. I must lure Ralph to the river for the hour draws near when I appointed the boat to be at the beach.'

'You plans are laid, then?'

'They are. After securing Ralph, the men are to row along the shore till they get to Woodhaven at midnight, when Eustace and the salmon-fisher will be seized in their sleep, and the pretty Lillias left to mourn for her darling.'

'Ah true! What is to become of her? I asked his mother. 'She will be left destitute.'

'She may starve or drown herself for aught I care,' returned the heartless scoundrel, as he caught up the rifle which lay on the floor and sallied forth in search of Ralph, the gamekeeper.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Important changes.

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CHAPTER I.

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