

the mortification of being refused; for to allow his only and beautiful daughter, who might ally herself to the highest house in the kingdom, to marry the penniless and proscribed Baron de Lisle, was impossible. She dared not remonstrate with Walter, for the distance between them was too great now. She sighed over the estrangement, without being conscious she had caused it.

"It is as I foresaw," mused she; "he would not take my counsel, and this is the result."

The Earl came home somewhat unexpectedly; and as he sat at supper that night, he seemed disinclined for conversation, but his glance passed often from Constance to Walter and from Walter to Constance, till the former felt embarrassed. When alone that night, Walter determined the following day he would tell his story of his love for Constance to Lord Beauville. He was not utterly blind to the possibility of refusal, but when he reflected on the evident encouragement the Earl had given to hopes he must have known but too likely to spring up, his courage rose. Walter was sanguine and lovers look not beyond the present; he went to sleep to dream of Constance.

At an early hour the following day, while Walter was deliberating what would be the best time for him to seek Lord Beauville, he was summoned to the Earl. He found him in his private cabinet, employed in writing, and surrounded with papers and letters, for he had no little charge of state affairs, nor share of the queen's confidence.

"Ah, Walter," said he turning round so as to face him, "I desire some converse with you. Dost know thou hast been here full six months?"

Walter started. "Is it indeed so long?" said he, as he remembered that spring had indeed passed into summer, and summer begun to yield to autumn, and it had seemed one short day to him, who had so sighed over the loneliness and tedium of the first few weeks.

"It is too long since your mother's death," answered the Earl, "for you to be able to plead that excuse for retirement from court; you must now present your self before the queen, and endeavor to win her favor."

"But can I appear before her in my own title, my lord?"

"Most certainly you can; you have now only to come forward, and by swearing fealty to Elizabeth you can hold both your title and estates."

"Swear fealty!" answered Walter; "that is all that is required, I am willing and ready to make all the reasonable submission that a sovereign can require of a subject; but I had deemed far more was asked than this."

"When I say swear fealty," said the Earl, "I do not mean saying the oath with your lips, but ranging yourself among those faithful followers who abjure all that can hinder their devotion to their queen. Those who hold an Italian Prince as greater than an English born sovereign, are no true and loyal subjects."

"I understand you not, my Lord. In all temporal matters I will serve Elizabeth Tudor; but I will never forswear my religion, and confess that the keys given to an apostle long ages ago are now fallen into a woman's hands."

Walter drew himself up when he spoke; he was arming himself as if for a contest with Master Gregory. The Earl fixed his keen eyes upon him.

"I had deemed differently, Walter de Lisle; observing as I have done, certain passages between you and the Lady Constance. Dost mean me to understand," continued he, his voice growing hoarse with anger, "that to trifle away thy time thou hast dared to act the suitor to a daughter of mine?"

"Lord Beauville," he answered, "this very day I would have sought you to tell my tale. I love the Lady Constance with my whole heart and soul, the very earth she treads upon is dear to me."

A momentary expression of anguish passed over the Earl's face; but he answered, "I do not perceive your meaning; what proposals had you to make, if you intended to seek the hand of Lady Constance Beauville?"

Walter raised his head proudly. "My Lord, a de Lisle may wed with the noblest house in Europe and bring no stain on their escutcheon. You know well the injustice of the law which deprives me of my inheritance; give me Constance for my wife, and let us seek a foreign court, where my rank will be recognized."

"I would sooner see her dead at my feet than send her an exile to a foreign court. No, Walter, there is but one path—take your place as it is offered you, among the peers of England: an alliance with this house would not prejudice you in the eyes of Elizabeth, and believe me, to no man on earth would I sooner commit my child. To-night you shall see Constance, for it is but fair that you should learn whether you have won her favor. I am no tyrant; Constance shall marry the man she loves, for I know my child will love no one that is not noble, true and fitting for her alliance. I return to court in three days, ere then I must receive your answer, for, save as the accepted suitor for my daughter, with your present feelings, Apswell Court is no fitting place for you."

Soon after Walter had quitted the apartment, the Lady Constance was summoned thither, and remained for a considerable time alone with her father. Meanwhile Walter spent the day wandering restlessly about and counting the hours ere he could see Constance. "She shall marry the man she loves," rang in his ears. If she loves me, he cannot refuse, he cannot part us; and Walter had not much uncertainty. He believed Constance, as the type of all womanly perfection, incapable of trifling; and Walter's nature, like all true ones, was full of trust in others.

The short autumn evening was closing in, the gorgeous hues of the sunset yet floated in the sky, and on the distant horizon the moon was rising, when Walter and Constance met beneath the shades of the trees of Apswell Court. What needs it to linger on that meeting? Then was whispered the story, that though so very old, is still ever new, as the world goes on. They loved each other, and in the first bliss of the acknowledgment the future was forgotten.

"Constance, my own," said Walter at last, "have you seen the Earl, and do you know what passed between him and me this morning?"

"Yes," she whispered, drawing closer to her lover; "he told me all, and bade me come hither this evening."

"He cannot mean the cruelty he threatened," said Walter; "he will not part us now, my Constance?"

"Dear Walter, my father is very firm; I fear me if you will not comply with his conditions—" she hesitated.

"But, sweet Constance, he has not then told you all; you would not honor me with your love if I were a recreant to honor and faith?"

"But, Walter listen," said Constance, sweetly; "I know the court and you do not; there are hundreds there Catholics in heart, though Protestants in outward seeming. Nay, am I not nearly that myself, for your eloquence has well nigh converted me?"

"Has it, dearest?" answered he; "then surely there is no reason why we should not cast our fates together, and seek a land where we may worship God in peace, and wait for brighter days to dawn over this unhappy land."

"Alas!" said she sadly, "I know my father too well, his word once passed will not be broken. And consider, Walter the disgrace and ruin it would bring on him. The Queen would banish him at once, perhaps even worse. Oh no, Walter, it is we must submit."

"But Constance cannot ask me to stoop to dishonor?"

"Dearest, it is not dishonor. Surely, the prisoner who feigned in order to outwit his jailor, and escaped, would be fully justified, and England now is one great prison, where we dare not say or do as we list, but as pleases the queen. Walter you have such wild notions," continued she, looking playfully at him, "fit only for the times of the crusades, this is what half the world does now, why should you scruple?"

(To be continued.)

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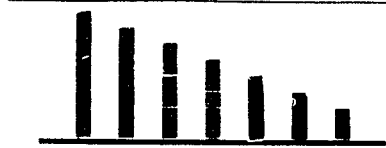
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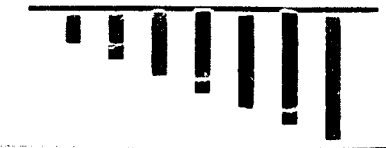
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