

THE Master of the Hounds

CHAPTER XLV

(CONTINUED)

'By Jove! Tom, it's all right, just as I expected,' exclaimed his lordship, 'and your fortune is made, my boy, if things turn out as I believe they will. Now you go back into the square, to the elm trees, where you can keep your eye on Mangle's doorway—watch him like a cat at a mouse-hole, and if he leaves the office before I return, follow close on his heel, whether he takes omnibus or cab, to Brompton—mark the number of the house he calls at, and wait for me in the road, at the upper turning.'

After giving these directions, Lord Henry went in search of a Bow Street officer, and having made him do his best, and look as little like a man of his calling as possible, they returned to Lincoln's Inn—but the boy was nowhere to be seen. They then walked into Holborn, got into a cab, and pulling down the blinds, drove to the Brompton road. Tom was on his post at the corner, and Lord Henry seeing him, pulled up, when the boy, running to the door, whispered the number of the house which he said the lawyer had just left, and was walking towards his own home, which lay further down the road. The cab was dismissed, and Lord Henry with his friend approached arm-in-arm to the house. On ringing the bell, the door was opened by a servant girl, who seeing a handsome-looking gentleman in Lord Henry (the officer having turned his back to her), said she believed Mr. Monkton was at home; on which both entered the passage, and the door was closed.

'What name shall I say, sir?' asked the girl.

A friend's card being substituted for his own, Lord Henry was shown up stairs into a back sitting-room, and a tall, rather genteel-looking young man came forward to meet him.

'Your name is Monkton, sir, I believe,' said Lord Henry. A bow was returned only. 'I wish to know,' continued his lordship, 'whether you are really Mr. Monkton or not, before entering on my business.'

'My name is Monkton, sir.'

'And I think you are acquainted with a friend of mine also. Mr. Mangle, of Lincoln's Inn,' added Lord Henry.

An affirmative being given, Lord Henry proceeded, 'you have assumed another name lately, Mr. Monkton, that of Douglas, and are attempting to set up a claim to the property of Miss Douglas, in Scotland, on the plea of being her cousin.' The eyes of Lord Henry were riveted on Monkton's face (from which the Bow Street officer had never wandered since entering the room), and he turned pale during this address, his lips quivering with fear, when Lord Henry, reading guilt in his averted looks, suddenly exclaimed, 'You are an impostor, sir.' 'And my prisoner,' added the official, producing a pair of handcuffs. 'I am a Bow Street officer, Mr. Monkton, alias Douglas, alias Jones; and I think, sir, I have had the pleasure of meeting you before.'

In a moment the culprit fell on his knees before Lord Henry, begging and imploring not to be sent to prison, and he would reveal everything. 'Indeed, sir, I have been put up to this by Mangle, indeed I have, and will tell you the whole plot if you will only spare me.'

'You are a d—d rascal!' exclaimed Lord Henry, 'and deserve to be transported; but what shall we do, Forrester?'

'Cage him, my lord, cage him, by all manner of means; he gave me the slip once before in a little swindling affair—'tis the same youngster, I verily believe.'

'Oh no, sir, indeed I never saw you before in my life, to the best of my recollection.'

'Which seems to be very bad, young gentleman,' replied Forrester. 'It want's tramping up a little, you'll soon remember something more, when we have a quiet chat in the lock-up to night. But stay a moment, just let me have a look at my memorandum book.' Mangle, on left arm, and with

'Oh, yes, sir,' replied Monkton; 'but my father knows nothing of this business, indeed he don't.'

'Well, you young villain, I've got you now safe enough; your father will perhaps lose his situation when this thing is made known, and you will be transported to a dead certainty. Now, my lord, I await your order; time presses, and I must return.'

'Then my decision is this: before I see Lord Malcolm, take this young gentleman with you to your own house, and keep him there till to-morrow at twelve o'clock, by which time I shall have Lord Malcolm's instructions how to act. Treat him well, and ascertain all about his family, his mother particularly, if she is still living, and where.'

'Yes, my lord,' replied Monkton, 'my father and my mother live together at 8, Dock Street.'

'Very well, send for them to be at your house then, Forrester, to-morrow by twelve o'clock; but no communication before we arrive; and now, Mr. Monkton,' said Lord Henry, 'if you make a clean breast of the whole business, I will endeavour to persuade Lord Malcolm to deal leniently with you. Good night, Forrester, and mind your charge,' and Lord Henry ran down stairs, slipping a half crown into the girl's hand, got into a cab and drove furiously to Grosvenor square. The ladies had just left the dining room, when Lord Henry, without any ceremony, rushed in, exclaiming, 'I have won my bet Malcolm and nabbed the impostor, Mr. Archibald Douglas alias Monkton, alias Jones, and left him in old Forrester's clutches.'

'Hurrah!' shouted Malcolm. 'Thank God!' ejaculated the old earl. 'Bravo!' cried Beauchamp, as Lord Henry proceeded in his story. 'But you have not dined yet, Bayntum,' the latter remarked.

'I never think of dinner, Beauchamp, when I've work on hand; but won't refuse some now,' which being immediately ordered, he succinctly related all that occurred since his interview with Mangle.

'Well done! capital! excellent!' was echoed by all, 'lawyer outwitted at last!'

The soup being placed on the table, Beauchamp ran up stairs to give Blanche the joyful intelligence, and taking her aside, whispered, 'can you bear good news my dearest girl, as well as you have borne bad?'

'Oh, yes, dear William, I hope I can.'

'Then our suspicions are verified, and the impostor who assumed your name is in custody.'

'Thank Heaven, dear William!' she cried, falling into his arms and bursting into tears; 'then I have not been a usurper of another's rights.'

'No, my love; Lord Henry has unravelled the iniquitous plot got up by that villain, Mangle, and is now having some dinner below, whilst I ran up to tell you that you are the heiress still.'

Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Gordon, and Constance, now crowded around Beauchamp, kissing Blanche, and expressing their rapturous delight at the recovery of her fortune, whilst he was giving a more detailed account of Lord Henry's clever trick in catching the lawyer. Leaving the ladies to the enjoyment of mutual felicitations, Beauchamp descended to the dining-room, where Lord Henry, having quickly despatched his dinner was discussing with Malcolm, over their claret, the proceedings to be taken on to-morrow; and it being finally arranged that Malcolm and Beauchamp should meet him the next day at Forrester's house, at twelve o'clock, Lord Henry soon after took his leave, saying he had engaged to attend the Duchess of B—'s grand reunion that evening.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Being fully enlisted on the Douglas side, Lord Henry astonished his friend Danby and others with his adventures of the day, and speaking in high terms of the Earl of Annandale and Beauchamp, said, 'father and son are both trumps, and have invited me to stay with them at Bampton the whole of next hunting season, and given me carte blanche to shoot over their property in the

with open house at Bampton. Balls and dinner parties without end. Won't you come down, Lord Henry, and see how we do things in our quiet country?'

'Not very quiet, I suspect, Miss Markham, if I am to judge by what I hear of your gaieties and hospitalities last winter; Dauby says he enjoyed himself amazingly.'

'Ah, yes, I dare say he did; but then he saw everything *coulour de rose*—every scene was one of enchantment to him, where Blanche was present.'

'Ah, Miss Markham, Dauby is daudedly cut up about that little affair; but he did not go the way to mend matters by playing the grandee over Beauchamp. Your sex are ever ready to avenge an insult offered to their favorites, and from the night of his purposely excluding Beauchamp from the last ball at Castleton House, Miss Douglas has scarcely noticed him; but for this piece of folly, he would have stood second favorite at least—certainly before Ayrshire; and my advice is to never throw away a chance, as the first favorite does not always come in a winner.'

'But in a love-race is seldom a loser, Lord Henry, if the young lady has to decide herself.'

'Then Miss Douglas, in your opinion, would neither have accepted Danby, Ayrshire, or any other, notwithstanding Harcourt's assertions to the contrary, and would have continued constant to Beauchamp until she became mistress of her own fortune?'

'Certainly, Lord Henry; 'still waters run deep,' and Blanche feels deeply, although her true character is not known to common acquaintances.'

'Well, Miss Markham, she has made fools of many knowing heads this season.'

'Or rather,' cried Selina, 'they have made fools of themselves, by choosing to assume that a young country girl must of necessity be such a simpleton as to be taken directly by their flattering, fulsome, fine speeches. We are not quite the Jenny Raws you are condescending enough to think us, my lord.'

'So it appears, Miss Markham; and I'll bet a cool hundred Ayrshire does not forget the name of Douglas for these next ten years, if then. Well, that supercilious fool wanted a settler, and he has got one at last. Egad! all the women were at him like magpies round a table hawk, when they found his wing had been clipped, and he bolted at once for the Continent. And you, Miss Markham, have, I fear, made sad havoc with some hearts also.'

'Not with yours, my lord, I hope.'

'Why, no, not exactly yet, Miss Markham; although I must confess a little penchant was beginning to spring up, when I was informed you had decided on being an old man's darling.'

'Well, my lord, if such were the case, that is far preferable to being a gambler's wife.'

'Thank you for the compliment, Miss Markham.'

'Which your impertinence called forth, Lord Henry; young gentlemen should not pry into the secrets of ladies' work-boxes, where they may find needles which will prick their fingers.'

'It is only what I deserved; but I hope we shall still be friends, and I will keep clear of the needles for the future, which I feel can prick confoundedly. But why call a lady's heart a workbox?'

'Because the heart lies in the chest; and an Italian friend of mine would persist in calling a pain in his chest a pain in his box; but this pain in his box was cured by marrying the lady who caused it.'

'Well, Miss Markham, I have always heard matrimony was a specific cure for that tormenting malady known as love.'

'It may allay the unpleasant irritation attending it, without working a radical cure, Lord Henry, except in such cases as my friend, the Count's whose disorder was of a most acute and inflammatory kind; but in a chronic disease of long standing, the patient seldom expects or hopes for a remedy; and now I think it is time to bid adieu to those fairy scenes and you, as we leave town to-morrow for Barton Court, where probably, I may have the pleasure of seeing you, and showing you the way to clear a five-barred safe after the Bampton foxhounds.'

'Noting would delight me more than to follow such a leader,' replied Lord Henry; 'and, if alive, I shall certainly avail myself of Beauchamp's kind invitation.'

Returning to his house, the lawyer wrote a short note to his partners, telling them what had occurred, and that, in consequence he should leave town for a short time, until the thing had blown over; and taking all the money he had in his strong box, he immediately started for America. At twelve o'clock the same morning, Malcolm and Beauchamp met Lord Henry at the private residence of the Bow Street officer, and found Sir Monkton in a most communicative mood; and it was evident from this young gentleman's confessions, that Mangle was the originator and inventor of the plot, the the alt rat on in the date of the marriage certificate being made in his own hand. Monkton's father and mother were also in attendance, both declaring they knew nothing of the business in which their son was implicated, as he had ceased to live with them for several months. The father implored Malcolm and Beauchamp not to prosecute his son, or he would be most likely be dismissed from his employment in the docks. 'Indeed, my lords,' pleaded he, 'this lad, although wilful and wayward sometimes, would never have imagined such a trick as this—he is only the dupe of that rascally lawyer.'

'But your sister,' replied Beauchamp, 'is also concerned in this conspiracy. Where is she?'

'She has lived at Islington, my lord, since her return from India; but she passes herself off for a lady now, we seldom meet, and she is too good or too bad, for us humble people.'

'Very well, Mr. Monkton,' continued Beauchamp; 'then I shall require you to go with me and Lord Malcolm to her residence, whilst your wife remains here until our return; your son will then swear to the statement he has made before a magistrate, and you must be bound over to produce him as a witness against Mangle, when required; do you agree to this proposal?'

'Yes, my lord, most willingly.'

'Very well; then, Bayntum, will you be kind enough to await our return from Islington?'

This was readily assented to; and Beauchamp and Malcolm, with Monkton, drove directly to Islington, where they found Mrs Douglas at home. Leaving Monkton below, they were ushered into her sitting-room, when Beauchamp thus addressed her—

'Your name is Douglas, I presume, madam?'

'Yes, sir, it is.'

'You have set up a claim, I believe, to the property of Miss Douglas in Scotland, on behalf of a young man you call your son?'

'He is my son, sir, and I'll swear it—born in lawful wedlock; and Miss Douglas will soon be bundled out of her ill-gotten estates.'

'You audacious woman!' exclaimed Beauchamp, in just indignation; 'your plot is discovered, and this young scamp you would perjure yourself to prove your son, is now in custody, and his father in this house—call Mr. Monkton up, Malcolm.' The lady sat in speechless horror at this sudden announcement; and when her brother entered the room, fell back senseless in her chair. Restoratives being promptly applied, she soon recovered; but a change came over the spirit of her dream on her brother saying her trick had been found out, and that she must now expect to go to prison for it, as Dick had confessed all. Tears and entreaties were now substituted for boasts and threats, and appeals for mercy to Beauchamp, on account of her children, who would be thrown almost penniless on the world.

'Indeed, indeed, sir,' she cried, 'Mr. Douglas had very little to leave me when he died; and I have scarcely sufficient to support them and myself.'

'The children of Mr. Douglas, although legitimate,' replied Beauchamp, 'shall not want a friend; neither shall you be left destitute—on one condition—that you make a full confession of the part you have taken in this business.'

'Do it, Susan,' whispered her brother; 'tis your only chance, and trust to his lordship's generosity.'

'I will make no terms with your sister, Mr. Monkton,' added Beauchamp, 'no promises of any kind, but will leave you with her alone for a few minutes, to decide how to act.'

In a quarter of an hour Monkton came

main at home and conduct himself steadily, he should be provided with some suitable employment, Beauchamp returned with Malcolm and Lord Henry to their club, where he wrote a note, with an order on his banker for ten thousand pounds, and handing it to Lord Henry, expressed his thanks for his ready wit in so quickly exposing the tricks of their opponents.

'Come, come, Beauchamp,' exclaimed Malcolm, on seeing the amount, 'only half this is your share—the other belongs to me.'

'We can settle that another day, Malcolm, as I have no time now to write another draft—so come along, or I must leave you; and, shaking hands with Lord Henry, he put on his hat and left the room.'

CHAPTER XLVII.

The delight of Blanche on hearing from her lover that her rights were now completely re-established, may be easily imagined, when Malcolm said, 'Ay, ay, Blanche, this is all right, and very capital news; but Beauchamp has not informed you that it has cost him ten thousand pounds; and he then told her of their agreement with Lord Henry, and his having the whole instead of his proper share.'

'I would willingly have given as much more,' replied Beauchamp, 'to relieve my dear Blanche of her apprehensions; and now the matter is settled, Malcolm. I beg you will never allude to it again, as it ought to have been private between us.'

'So it would, Beauchamp, had you not served me the trick you did, by paying it, but I will be even with you, old fellow.'

'My dear, generous William,' exclaimed Blanche, 'how can I ever repay you for all your kind, affectionate anxiety on my behalf?'

'Easily enough, my love,' he replied; and placing his arm round her waist whispered, 'by becoming my own dear Blanche once before the first of August.'

Her hand hand was placed in his, whilst a crimson hue suffused her face and forehead, but there was no reply.

'Well, Blanche,' interposed Malcolm, 'I guess what the reward is to be; but Beauchamp is not so very generous after all; and I think he has made a capital bargain by paying ten thousand pounds for ten thousand a-year; this is quite a *la Harcourt*; and you may depend upon it, my love, will Beauchamp is a long-headed, calculating fellow, and has got the blind side of you; stuff and nonsensens about disinterested affection! He has been all the time looking to your money, my dear.'

'Well, Charles, then I am most happy to find he has succeeded in getting it at last.'

'And he will make ducks and drakes of it before your are married a couple of years.'

'Ah Charles, I don't regard your joking and bantering now,' she replied, laughing; 'neither will William; so good-bye, Charles, dear, as I must run and tell Aunt Gordon, this joyful news; saying which she tripped lightly from the drawing-room like a second Hebe, radiant in smiles and beauty.'

'By Jove!' cried Malcolm, 'you are a lucky dog, Beauchamp, to have gained the love of that sweet, true-hearted girl, who is more like an angel than a woman.'

'Indeed, Malcolm, I am most thankful for this inestimable blessing, and my life shall be devoted to her happiness.'

'I don't doubt it, my dear fellow, for I believe you love her ten times more than your own self; and now let us dress for dinner.'

The family party that evening was one of the happiest in London; and the gloom which had hung over Blanche Douglas being dispelled, her usual cheerfulness returned, which put the old earl and Mrs. Gordon in high spirits.

'Ah, you naughty child,' exclaimed the former, 'you are rejoicing now that you are on a par with my boy Will. I see it all, you proud girl.'

'I am proud and pleased, my dear father, to have it in my power to bestow on him something which may compensate for the trouble he will have in taking care of me.'

'No, no, child, you are thinking of the dash you will make in town next season at