

Enstace, the Outcast

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONSTANT OF LOVE AND THE CRUELTY OF PRIDE.

Eustace Grahame left his father's presence with mingled feelings of surprise, indignation and sorrow; indignation being perhaps the strongest of the three. The contemptuous and disrespectful way in which his father had referred to Lilius at the close of their conversation roused his spirit a way it had never been roused before, and if Mr. Grahame had been better versed in the philosophy of human nature he would have known that this was the most effectual way he could take to strengthen his son in his rebellious determination.

But Mr. Grahame knew as little of the affairs of the heart as Eustace did of his father's pride and heartlessness, and while the latter supposed that, after the unmistakable way in which he had announced his will, the youth would abandon his absurd thoughts in connection with the girl, Eustace on the other hand was under the impression that, however strongly his father was against his marriage with Lilius, he would become reconciled to it when it was an accomplished fact.

In short, the youth having spent all the day in solitary meditation in the woods, came to the conclusion that the best thing to do was to marry Lilius in a quiet way, and then inform his father of the fact. The conversation in the library had given him sufficient insight into his father's character, to show him that to reason with him on the matter would have no effect, and that to gain his consent was hopeless. He never doubted that when he went to him and said that Lilius was his wife, and that they were united past all human power of separation, he would submit to the inevitable, and receive her as a daughter.

'Let him once know Lilius,' reflected the fond lover, 'and he will be abundantly satisfied with my choice.'

In this there was of course an utter misapprehension of his father's character. Eustace had never conceived it possible for any man to cherish such views and feelings as those which governed Mr. Grahame. He could understand and make allowance for the prejudice and opposition which resulted from ignorance, but did not dream that even though his father had the fullest demonstration of the goodness and virtue of the girl whom he loved, his opposition to the marriage would not be one whit abated.

In the evening, and without returning to the mansion house, the youth went down to the cottage, and told, freely and fully, both to Lilius and Willy, the whole conversation of the library.

'I feared this,' said Lilius, who pale and tearful, had listened to the recital. 'I knew full well your father would not consent to your marrying a poor peasant girl!'

'That is because he doesn't know you, darling,' whispered Eustace.

'I dinna ken about that,' observed the more sagacious Willy. 'It strikes me, Maister Grahame, that yer father is ane o' those folk that look only to the birth and station, and dinna gae a ring for guidance. A lassie like Lilius, that's the daughter o' our folk, is, in his view o' the matter, no fit to be the wife o' his son and heir, even if she had a' the virtues o' an angel.'

'No, no,' faltered Lilius, 'we should have known this. It was wrong to foster an affection that could never be approved of, and cherish hopes that could not be realized. Farewell, Eustace. Since we have to part let us do so at once.'

Lilius tried to be very brave when she said these words, but the pallid cheek and trembling lips attested the effort it cost her to utter them.

Eustace, amazed, flew towards her. 'Lilius, what mean you?' he exclaimed. 'To part? How could such a dreadful thing ever cross your mind? Are not our hearts inseparably united? Are we not pledged to one another by promises the most sacred and holy?'

'Yes,' she murmured, 'but your father—he will not listen to it.'

'He will, when he knows that opposition is vain.'

'Oh, no, Eustace; I feel he will not.'

'Whether, he will or not, cannot effect our betrothal,' said Eustace. 'Mine you are, and my wife you shall be, whatever any one else shall say. Love and marriage are too sacred to be interfered with, even by a parent. So, never again, dear Lilius, hint the terrible idea of parting.'

He drew her to his bosom, and with a burst of tears which brought relief to her overcharged heart, she hid her face upon his breast and sobbed vehemently.

Willy's warm honest heart was deeply moved at the sight, and he got up and walked to and fro, coughing down the choking sensation that came into his throat. At last he went forward and slapped Eustace on the shoulder.

'Maister Grahame, I'm proud o' ye, he exclaimed, 'ye are a guid, generous, true-hearted man, and matchless as Lilius is, ye are worthy o' her. Not because ye are rich, or a great man's son. If that had been a' I would rather that Lilius had been drowned yon mornin' than been your wife. But it is because you are every inch a man, and will stick to her in the teeth o' everything.'

'And if I fail, you give me leave to bring Lilius here, and you will marry us!'

'I will. But even then the result may not be as you expect. Your father may not be so ready to bow to the inevitable as you suppose.'

'What can he do?' asked the youth. 'The matter will then be wholly beyond his control, and he, feeling this, must of necessity yield.'

'Let us hope so,' was Mr. Leslie's rejoinder. 'And now, my boy, we will to dinner, for your long ride must have given you an appetite.'

Eustace's natural promptness and decision of character now manifested itself. That evening when he returned from Balreavie it was too late to make the intended appeal to his father; but on the following morning as they rose from breakfast, he requested an interview in the library.

He had seen very little of his father during the two previous days; but the little intercourse they had was characterized by any particular manifestations of displeasure. Mr. Grahame had been grave, silent and cold; but inasmuch as he was not at all times demonstrative, Eustace could gather little from this. Not by look or word had he referred to their previous interview. Arriving in the library Eustace closed the door to secure them against intrusion and took a chair opposite his father, who had already seated himself at the large reading table, and silently awaited his son's communication.

'Father,' began Eustace, 'I wish to speak to you again on the subject of our conversation here the other morning.'

'Very good,' returned Mr. Grahame with cold gravity. 'I am glad to think that two days' reflection has enabled you to see the impropriety of your conduct, and made you ready to perform your duty.'

'Nay, sir, you mistake,' interrupted Eustace. 'I was in hopes that reflection had made you more reasonable in your own mind.'

'Silence,' cried Mr. Grahame, starting forward in his seat and bringing his hand down with violence on the table. 'Now, sir,' he continued, 'tell me at once what your object is in requesting this interview. Is it to intimate that you are ready to marry Mary Maxwell?'

'No,' returned Eustace steadily. 'It is to reason the matter with you, and to appeal to the proper principles of your mind and heart.'

'Then the interview may terminate at once,' rejoined Mr. Grahame, 'for I listen to nothing from you but an intimation of obedience.'

'Father, this is preposterous,' cried Eustace. 'You would treat me as if I were a child. Allow me to say this is a matter which chiefly concerns myself, for it affects my life's happiness, and not even you have a right to interfere in the way you are doing!'

'Those monstrous sentiments I will not permit you to utter in my hearing,' said Mr. Grahame, waving his hand impatiently. 'And to show you how vain it is to hope for my consent to the atrocious and infamous alliance you were good enough to speak of, let me inform you in a few brief sentences what is your duty, and therefore your duty. My father, as you have heard was a Dundee manufacturer, who accumulated wealth, and resolved therewith to found a family—which should become great and honorable in the land. In pursuance of this resolution he purchased this estate, and revealed to me his intentions. Need I say that I enthusiastically fell in with his honorable ambition, and joined him heart and soul in carrying out his magnificent views. I married your mother, and so connected myself with an ancient and honorable Scottish house. You were born—born to the heritage alike of your grandfather's estate and intention. Judge, then, if I can permit you to destroy both his hope and the work which I have already done.'

'And for the sake of an imaginary worldly honor I am expected to dishonor myself, and betray my own heart and the heart of the girl who trusts me,' cried Eustace, his manly face coloring with indignation.

'Sentiment and romance must give way before the serious business of life,' rejoined his father.

'Sentiment and romance,' burst out the youth with a swelling bosom. 'You call the heart's deepest and most passionate love a sentiment, and the hopes which are built upon it a romance. You would put these eternal verities of our natures before the juggernaut of birth, station, rank, and worldly position, that are but things of earth and time, and would try to crush them out by the rolling of the hideous car. Look at it, father, just look at it. Were I to forsake Lilius Somerville and marry Mary Maxwell, as you would have me, the sense of dishonor would cling to me, and poison all my after existence. My happiness would also be sacrificed, and the essence of my life destroyed. And all for what? What is attained by it? Where is Mary Maxwell's superiority over Lilius Somerville? Has she more beauty, more goodness, virtue, truth? I tell you no. What has she then that Lilius has not? Has she any real, substantial advantage?'

'I fear it will be useless,' returned Eustace.

'Possibly, but still it is your duty to make the attempt.'

'Yes,' roared Mr. Grahame, furiously, 'he has an all important advantage of birth and station, while the creature you put in comparison is a beggarly peasant girl, whose base blood would poison the family tree at its very root. But have done with this ridiculous folly. I have done wrong in listening to you thus far. Go, and seek no future intercourse with me till you are ready to obey me.'

'Father,' cried Eustace, with the utmost earnestness, 'for the last time I appeal to you, to the justice and the principle which must be in your nature. Pride and ambition are blinding you to the dictates of conscience. Let your nobler parts triumph. Be just to yourself and generous to me. Seek not to thwart the holiest feeling of my soul. Ask me not to dishonor my manhood and make my whole life a lie.'

'Will you go, sir?' thundered his father, as he sprang to his feet, and stamped in rage on the floor, while he clenched his hand and lifted his arm, as if to strike.

One flash from the eye of Eustace warned him to desist.

'Enough,' said the latter, with lofty calmness, 'I appeal to you no more. I have done all that is required of me, and have freed my soul from blame. I go, as you command. Let it not be forgotten that you did command me to go.'

He quitted the room without another word, and Mr. Grahame threw himself back into the chair from which he had risen.

'Thank heaven, he is conquered at last,' he murmured. 'My firmness has done it. Had I been weak or vacillating he would have clung to his folly; but I have shown him if not its madness, yet its impossibility, and now he sees that necessity compels him to abandon it. Heavens! what a danger to have escaped! I may well congratulate myself in thus saving the family honor.'

'It cheats me very much if you have saved it, though,' chuckled Mrs. Grahame from her position in a closet only a few feet from the chair on which her husband sat. This closed had two doors one to wards the library, and the other to the adjoining room, and Mrs. Grahame, entering it by the latter, had listened to every word of the conversation, and drawn her own inference from it.

'John thinks that Eustace is conquered, and is now ready to marry Mary Maxwell,' she muttered, as with a self-congratulatory smile she quitted her lurking place. 'I am pretty certain that in this he is deceived, and that the youth means to take a step of a nature entirely different. A crisis is coming, and my opportunity is at hand. I must instruct Randolph to obtain leave of absence, for his presence will be useful in forwarding my views.'

Mrs. Grahame's opinion was, of course, the correct one. When Eustace left the library it was with the full determination of being privately married to Lilius Somerville. The appeal to his father had been received very much as he had expected, though it had lowered considerably his estimate of his father's character. He felt a pity sad enough to be akin to sorrow for the low, material, worldly standard of his father's views—the readiness, the alacrity, nay, the devotion to which he bowed down to his idol of family pride and social distinction. He, indeed, felt it difficult to avoid despising his father for his unworthy and misplaced ambition in exalting an earthly and temporary object above the high and abiding claims of love and happiness but in the charity of his filial disposition he entertained the hope that ere long the delusion would be dispelled.

Lilius and Willy were immediately made acquainted with the result of the youth's visit to Mr. Leslie, the advice he had given, the faithfulness with which Eustace had followed it, and the barrenness of the issue. And the youth closed his report by claiming the fulfilment of the promises which Lilius had made—that she would abide by the good old minister's opinion and advice.

The fair girl, in the fulness and sincerity of her love, did not shrink from this promise, though it was with a blushing cheek and trembling heart that she whispered her consent on the bosom of her lover. The expectation of all three was that the private marriage would never be known except to Mr. Grahame, who would then, they imagined, see the necessity of consenting to their union, when their marriage would be publicly celebrated, as if no previous ceremony had taken place. It was in this expectation that Lilius made the few simple preparations, and on a bright sunny summer morning, she and Willy seated themselves in the vehicle which was to convey them to Balreavie. It was arranged that Eustace was to proceed thither on horseback by a different route, and be waiting for them at Mr. Leslie's manse. And so he was, for at the moment, Willy pulled up at the gate, Eustace came with a quick joyful step down the gravel path, and assisted the blushing Lilius to alight, led her into the parlour, where Leslie's kind fatherly reception calmed her trembling agitation. In a quiet, beautiful, homely way, the lovers were united for life, Mr. Leslie's aged housekeeper and Willy being the only witnesses. Very pure and sweet

looked Lilius in her simple dress, and proud was the heart of Eustace when her hand returned the pressure of his as the words were uttered which joined them in that indissoluble union which death alone could sever.

The prayer was ended, and the gentle girl, bewildered by her feelings, felt in a kind of dream as she received the congratulations of Mr. Leslie and Willy. Last of all the arms of Eustace tenderly encircled her, and the pressure of his warm lips upon her cheek sent a thrill of joy through all her being. By the housekeeper's considerate hospitality an early tea was provided, and Lilius was again seated in the vehicle to return home. This time it was Eustace her husband who lifted her to her seat, and he rode by her side several miles of the way. At a point of the road he left them, and proceeded towards Bengarry, for the express purpose of informing his father of the event which had taken place.

The sun was verging towards the west when he reached the manse, and dinner being over, he entered the drawing room, where, to his surprise, he was greeted by his brother Randolph, who had arrived during the afternoon.

'Didn't expect to find me here, of course,' remarked Randolph with an affected hilarity.

'No,' returned Eustace, 'but I am not less glad to see you. How much you are changed since the last time we met. The service is making a man of you all at once.'

'Egad, and you are changed too, my boy. Yes, the service does draw a fellow out. Awfully confining, though, and I longed to come off for a month and have some shooting. We'll have rare sport together, I hope—that is, unless you have already cleared the ground.'

'Which is very likely,' observed Mrs. Grahame with every show of affability. 'For Eustace has spent almost every day out of door since his return. And this reminds me, my dear boy, that you have not had dinner. I will order it to be served for you in the dining room.'

'No, thank you,' said Eustace, 'I am not hungry. I was at Balreavie and had dined at the manse. Father,' he added, turning to Mr. Grahame, 'I have to request a few moments' conversation in the library.'

'Why not here in the drawing room?' said Mr. Grahame. 'It can relate to nothing, I suppose, that is not proper for your mother and your brother to hear.'

'Certainly not,' returned Eustace, coloring. 'I have no desire for ultimate concealment, yet in the first instance I think it might be better that you alone my communication should be made.'

'No,' said his father sternly, 'I will not countenance secrets in the family. I have hitherto kept the subject of our former conversation to myself, but will do so no longer. I grieve to have to inform you,' he added, turning to Mrs. Grahame and Randolph, 'that Eustace has had the indescribable folly to be engaged in what he calls an affair of the heart with a low, artful, peasant girl, the sister of a salmon fisher who lives in a cottage by the river side.'

'Mr. Grahame, this is not possible!' exclaimed his wife, holding up both her hands in pretended amazement.

'The sister of a salmon fisher—incredible!' cried Randolph, in the very extremity of his ireful surprise.

'You may well be incredulous,' rejoined Mr. Grahame. 'Had anyone but himself told me, I would have scornfully declared it a lie, but infatuated by his folly, he actually disclosed to me the disgraceful fact, and—I blush to say it—was even mad enough to wish me to consent to his marrying her.'

'Marrying her!' echoed Mrs. Grahame, throwing herself into an attitude of petrification.

'Monstrous!' ejaculated Randolph, darting a look of intense reproach towards Eustace.

'Fortunately,' continued Mr. Grahame, 'by firmness and inflexible determination I showed him how utterly impossible was his mad project, and now I expect the communication he wishes to make to me is to the effect that he is ready to contract an alliance in accordance with my wishes, and suited to his rank and position.'

'Oh, that is delightful,' cried the artful woman, looking pleased and satisfied. 'Do not hesitate, Eustace, my dear boy, to announce your determination in the hearing of your brother and me, for who can have your honor and the greatness of the family more at heart than ourselves.'

'I hope,' said Eustace, with a lofty air, and in a calm and firm tone, 'I hope I have done nothing, and never shall, to dishonor either myself or my family. In my opinion I would have done both had I deserted the woman to whom I have pledged my faith, and sought an alliance with one whom I did not love. I tried by all the means in my power to bring my father to consent to my union with Lilius Somerville. I failed in this, and there was but one thing left me to do.'

'And that you have done?' said his father eagerly.

'I have,' answered Eustace. 'You have given the girl up?'

'No, I have married her'

'Married her!' screamed Mrs. Grahame.

'Married her!' echoed Randolph.

Mr. Grahame was powerless, either to speak or to move. He sat in his chair, pale and rigid, staring at Eustace, as if he had suddenly been transfixed into a stone.

'Yes,' resumed the youth, 'we were this day married in due form by Mr. Leslie in his own manse at Balreavie. Lilius Somerville is now my wife. I took this step because I found it was useless to expect my father's consent, out now that the matter is past beyond the region of doubt, I sincerely trust that I may be pardoned for my seeming disobedience, and that Lilius will be received into the family with kindness and affection.'

Slowly Mr. Grahame grasped the sides of his chair, and raised himself to his feet. The expression of his face was terrible to look on. An outburst of fury, an expression of wrath might be looked for, and a torrent of vehement reproach, but he was cold as ice and calm as steel. The human look in his countenance had gone from him, and there remained a hard, implacable expression which the face of man has seldom shown.

Then he spoke, and his tone was in keeping with his aspect—cruel, passionless, inexorable.

'You are no longer a son of mine,' he said. 'From this moment I renounce you. Your form shall never again stand in my presence. Go—quit my sight. From henceforth you are an outcast. You are expelled from the house which you have indelibly disgraced, and Randolph shall inherit the patrimony which was designed for you.'

'Father, you cannot mean this,' said Eustace, utterly aghast.

'No words. If you knew me you would know how hopeless is the attempt to move me. Depart instantly, or I shall summon the servants to expel you; if you dare to trespass on my ground at any time, you will be treated as a vagrant or a beggar.'

'Father, this is dreadful beyond conception,' exclaimed Eustace. 'Recall the inhuman words, and let us all forget that they were ever uttered.'

'Ah, 'tis like you now to realize your folly in its bitter and inevitable consequences, and are doubtless ready to give your right hand to recall the position in which you stood twenty-four hours ago. But that is impossible; for not more certain is the deed you have done than is the execution of the sentence I have pronounced.'

'You mistake me,' said Eustace, drawing himself up to his full height, and confronting his father with a proud and even stern look. 'It was for your sake, not mine, I asked you to recall the words you have uttered. I am conscious of no fault. I have done nothing of which I am ashamed; nothing which I regret; nothing to merit the expulsion to which you consign me. I obey your will. I go into the world alone, and I shall fight my battle in it as best I can, and do not fear that I shall ever demean myself by thrusting my presence upon you. But think not that in parting thus we part forever. There is a power above both you and me, and a tribunal before which we shall yet stand, where our quarrel shall receive a perfect adjustment. I am willing to leave it open till then, if you will have it so, and it will be seen which of us approaches that tribunal with the clearest conscience and the boldest front. Farewell, father, you will repent this some day. God grant that your repentance may not come too late.'

He ceased, and turned away—his eye being fixed on his father as he walked towards the door, and his form seeming to grow more erect and stately as he approached it. Of Mrs. Grahame and Randolph he took no notice. Without averting his steadfast gaze his hand passed from his father's sight forever. The sun was drawing towards its setting, and its slanting rays, streaming through the foliage of Bengarry woods, fell upon the erect and solitary form of EUSTACE THE OUTCAST.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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