

Kate Coventry.

CHAPTER III.

(CONTINUED.)

The younger girl, Jane, was the very reverse of her sister, short and dark and energetic—rather blue, and I thought a little impudent—however, I liked her the best of the two. Then came Sir Guy and Lady Scapegrace. The Baronet, a stout, square, elderly man, with enormous dyed whiskers and hair to match, combining as much as possible the manners of the coachman with the morals of the roue. A tremendous dandy of the Four in Hand Club school, high neck-cloth, huge pins, gorgeous patterns, enormous buttons, and a flowers in his mouth. His lady as handsome as a star, though a little hollow-eyed and *passee*. She looked like a tragedy queen, with her magnificent figure, and long black hair, and fierce flashing eyes, and woe-begone expression, and the black velvet ribbon, with its diamond cross, which she always wore round her neck. Ah me! what stories that diamond cross could tell, if all be true that we hear of Lady Scapegrace! A girl sold for money, to become a ruthless wife to an unfeeling husband. A handsome young cousin, who cut his own throat in despair—they brought it in temporary insanity, of course; an elopement with a gallant Major to the south of France, and a duel there, in which the Major was shot, but not by Sir Guy; an English lady Frank travelling on the Continent, independent and alone, breaking banks in all directions with her luck, and hearts with her beauty; a reconciliation, entirely for money-considerations, which drove another far less erring woman into a mad-house (but that was Sir Guy's fault), and a darker tale still of a certain portion prepared by her hand, which the Baronet was prevented from swallowing only by his invariable habit of contradicting his wife on all points, and which the lady herself had the effrontery to boast would have settled all accounts. Not a word of truth in any of these stories, probably, but still, such is the character the world's good-nature affixes to that dark handsome woman at whom Cousin John seems so very much alarmed.

Then there was an elderly Miss Minnow, who was horribly afraid of catching cold, but in whose character I could perceive no other very salient point, and a fair haired young gentleman, whose name I did not distinctly catch, and who looked as if he ought to have been at school, where, indeed, I think he would have been much happier; and sundry regular stereotyped London men and women, well-bred and well-dressed, and cool and composed, and altogether thoroughly respectable and stupid; and a famous author, who drank a great deal of wine, and never spared his lips to speak, and I think that was all nobly the by, there was Captain Lovell, who came very late—and we went soberly into Richmond Park, and dined under a tree.

I do not think I quite like a picnic. It is an very well, like most other arrangements, if everything goes right, but I sat between Sir Guy Scapegrace and the light-haired young gentleman, and although I could hear lots of fun going on at the other end of the table-cloth, where Cousin John and Mary Molasses and Captain Lovell had got together, I was too far off to partake of it, and my vis-a-vis, Lady Scapegrace, scowled at me so from under her black eyebrows, though I never felt any uneasiness, that she made me feel nervous. Then it was not so much as I thought that Sir Guy pressing me to cut a slice, and looking right up at my vis-a-vis, and asking me to drink champagne at least four times, and if I turned to my other neighbor, and ventured to address him on the most commonplace subject, he blushed so painfully that I began to think he was quite as much afraid of me as I was of Sir Guy. Altogether, I was rather glad when the things were cleared away and put back into the hampers, and the gentleman asked leave to light their cigars, and I took up my circle, and I had to be so close to the table that I could see the faces of the ladies. We were rather put to it, though,

character? Shall I never be able to keep the straight path in life, because I can turn an awkward corner with four horses of a trot? Female voices answer volubly in a negative; and I give in.

But odious Sir Guy thinks none the worse of me for my coining predilections. 'Fond of driving, Miss Coventry?' said he, leering at me from over his great choking neckcloth. 'Seen my team? three greys and a piebald. If you like going fast, I can accommodate you. Proud to take you back on my drag. What? go on the box. Drive, if you like. Hey!'

I confess for one instant, much as I hated the old reprobate, I should have liked to go, if it was only to make all the women so angry; but just then I caught Captain Lovell's eye fixed upon me with a strange, earnest expression, and all at once I felt that nothing should induce me to trust myself with Sir Guy. I couldn't help blushing though as I declined; more particularly when my would-be charioteer swore he considered it an engagement, hey?—only put off to another time—got the coach new painted—begad, Miss Coventry's favorite color!—and the old monster grinned in my face till I could have boxed his ears.

The author by this time was fast asleep, with a handkerchief over his face—Miss Minnows searching in vain for a fabulous pair of clogs, as she imagined the dew must be falling—it was about six p. m., and hot June weather. Sir Guy was off to the hampers in search of brandy and soda, and the rest of the party lounging about in twos and threes, when Captain Lovell proposed we should stroll down to the river, and have a row in the cool of the evening. Mary Molasses voted it charming; Lady Scapegrace was willing to go anywhere away from Sir Guy; John, of course, all alive for a lark; and though Mrs. Molasses preferred remaining on dry land, she had no objection to trusting her girls with us. So we mustered a strong party for embarkation on Father Thames. Our two cavaliers ran forward to get the boat ready, Captain Lovell bounding over the fences and stiles almost as actively as Brilliant could have done; and John, who is no mean proficient at such exercises, following him; whilst we ladies paced along soberly in the rear.

'Can you row, Miss Coventry?' asked Lady Scapegrace, who seemed to have taken rather a fancy to me, probably out of contradiction to the other women; 'I can—I rowed four miles once on the Lake of Geneva,' she added in her deep, melancholy voice, 'and we were caught in one of those squalls, and nearly lost. If it hadn't been for poor Alphonse, not one of us could have escaped. I wonder if drowning's a painful death, Miss Coventry—the water always looks so inviting.'

'Goodness, Lady Scapegrace!' exclaimed I; 'don't take this opportunity of finding out: none of us can swim but John; and if he saves anybody, he's solemnly engaged to save me.'

'I quite think with you, Lady Scapegrace,' said the romantic Miss Molasses; 'it looks so peaceful, and gives one such an idea of repose; I for one have not the slightest fear of death, or indeed of any mere bodily changes—gracious goodness! the bull! the bull!'

What a rout it was! The courageous young lady who thus gave us the first intimation of danger, leading the flight with a speed and activity of which I should have thought her languid totally incapable, Lady Scapegrace making use of her long legs with an utter forgetfulness of her usually grave and tragic demeanor; and the rest of the party seeking safety helter skelter.

It was, indeed, a situation of some peril. Our course to the river side had led us through a long narrow strip of meadow land, bounded by high impervious thorn fences, such as I knew would be bullfinches in the winter, and which now, in all the luxuriance of summer foliage, presented a mass of thorns and fragrances that no mortal could expect to get through. At either end of the field was a high hog-backed stile, such as ladies usually make considerable difficulties about surmounting, but which are by no means so impossible of transit when an infuriated bull is bringing up the rear. We are already a quarter of the way across the field, when Miss Mary's exclamation made us aware of our enemy, who had been quietly cropping the grass in a corner behind us, but who now, roused by our gaudy dresses and

a French bonnet before, and he didn't seem to know what to make of the combination; so there we stood, he and I, staring each other out of countenance, but without proceeding to any farther extremities. I know I have plenty of courage, for after the first minute I wasn't the least bit afraid; I felt just as I do when I ride at a large fence—as I get nearer and nearer, I feel something rising and rising within me, that enables me to face anything; and so when I had confronted the bull for a little time, I felt inclined to carry the war into the enemy's country, and advance upon him. But of course all this is very delicate and unfeminine; and it would have been far more virtuous and lady-like to have run shrieking away like Miss Molasses, or laid down and given in at once like poor Lady Scapegrace, who was quite resigned to be being tossed and trampled upon, and only gave vent every now and then to a stifled moan.

Well, at last I did advance a few steps, and the bull gave ground in the same proportion. I began to think I should beat him after all; when, to my great relief, I must allow, I heard a voice behind me exclaim, 'By Jove, what a plucky girl!' and I thought I heard something muttered that sounded very like darling, but of course that couldn't be meant for me; and Captain Lovell, hot, handsome, and breathless, made his appearance, and soon drove our enemy into the farthest corner of the field. As soon as the coast was clear, we raised poor Lady Scapegrace, who kissed me with tears in her eyes as she thanked me for what she called saving her life. I had no idea the woman had so much feeling. Captain Lovell gave each of us an arm as we walked on to join our party, and he explained how the screams of Miss Molasses had reached him even at the riverside, and how he had turned and hastened back immediately. 'Fortunately in time to be of some use. But I never saw a finer thing done, Miss Coventry: if I live to a hundred, I shall never forget it'—and he looked as if he would have added, 'or you either.'

Many were the exclamations, and much the conversation created by our adventure. The ladies who had run away so gallantly were of course too much agitated for the proposed boating excursion; so, after sundry restoratives at the hotel, we ordered the carriages to return to town. Cousin John gave 'Frank' (as he calls him) a place in the back seat of his phaeton; and he leaned over and talked to me the whole way home. What a pleasant drive it was in the moonlight, and how happy I felt! I was really sorry when we got back to London. Frank seemed quite anxious to make Aunt Deborah's acquaintance; and I thought I shouldn't wonder if he was to call in Lowndes Street very soon.

CHAPTER V.

When Aunt Deborah is laid up with one of her colds, she always has a wonderful accession of 'propriety accompanying the disorder; and that which would appear to her at the worst a harmless escapade when in her usual health and spirits, becomes a crime of the blackest dye when seen through the medium of barley-broth and water-gruel, these being Aunt Deborah's infallible remedies for a catarrh. Now the cold in question had lasted its victim over the Ascot meeting, over our picnic to Richmond, and bade fair to give her employment during the greater part of the summer, so obstinate was the enemy when he had once possessed himself of the citadel, and, under these circumstances, I confess it appeared to me quite hopeless to ask her permission to accompany Cousin John on a long promised expedition to Hampton Races. I did not dare make the request myself, and I own I had great misgivings, even when I overheard from my boudoir the all-powerful John preferring his petition, which he did with a sort of abrupt good-humor peculiarly his own.

'Going to take Kate out for another lark, aunt, if you have no objection,' says John, plumping down into an arm-chair, and forthwith proceeding to entangle Aunt Deborah's knitting into the most hopeless confusion. 'Only some quiet races near town; all amongst ourselves, you know—gentlemen riders, and that sort of thing.'

Aunt Deborah, who is a good deal behind-

friend was a melancholy man, and nodded his silent affirmative with a sigh. I think, early as it was, they had both been drunk long.

'Look at that chestnut horse!' exclaimed a good-looking boy of some twenty summers, who had coached his own drag down, like a second Phaeton, only as yet with better luck, and was now smoking a huge cigar on its roof. 'Isn't he the image of old Paleface? Who's the woman, eh? Does nobody know her? I'll ask her to come and sit up here. She looks like a lady, too,' to added, checking himself; 'never mind, here goes!' and he was jumping off the coach, to tender me, I presume, his polite invitation in person, when his arm was caught by the man next him, who was no other than John's friend, Captain Lovell.

'Charley, stop!' exclaimed Frank, flushing all over his handsome face and temples; 'I know her, I tell you; have a care, it's Miss Coventry;' and in another instant he had bounded to the earth, accosted my chaperon with a hearty 'Jack, how goes it?' and was deep in conversation with my humble self, with his hand on my horse's neck—(Frank always wears such good gloves)—and his pleasant countenance beaming with delight at our chance interview. I liked the race better after this, and should have spent a happier day, perhaps, without the society of Mrs. Lumley, who appeared likewise on horseback, quite unexpectedly, and was riding the most beautiful brown mare I ever saw in my life. I quite wished I had brought down Brilliant, if only to have met her on more equal terms. As we were the only two ladies on horseback, of course we were obliged to fraternize (if the weaker sex may use such an expression), as, indeed, we must have done had we been the bitterest foes on earth, instead of merely hating each other with common civility. Mrs. Lumley seemed on particularly good terms with Frank Lovell. 'I do not know that I liked her any the better for that,'—and expressed her sentiments and opinions to the world in general with a vivacity and freedom peculiarly her own.

'I am out on the sly, you know,' she observed, with an arch smile. 'I have a good quiet aunt who lives down in Richmond, and I do penance there for a time, whenever I have been more than usually wicked; but to-day I could not resist the fine weather, and the crowd, and the fun, and, above all, the bad company, which amuses me more than all the rest put together, though I do not include you, Miss Coventry, nor yet Mr. Jones, but I am afraid I must Captain Lovell. Come, let's ride amongst the carriages, and see the ninnies.'

So Mrs. Lumley and I plunged into the crowd, leaving Frank to return to his drag and his betting-book, and Cousin John somewhat discontentedly to bring up the rear.

'After all, I don't see much harm in Hampton,' said my lively guide, as we threaded our way between the carriages; 'though, to be sure, there are some very queer-looking people on the course. I could tell you strange stories of most of them, Miss Coventry, only you wouldn't believe me. Do you see that old, plainish woman, with such black hair and eyebrows—something like Lady Scapegrace, only not so handsome as my favorite enemy?—Would you believe it, she might marry three coronets at this moment if she chose, and she won't have any of them! She is not good-looking, you can see; she can scarcely write her own name. She has no conversation, I happen to know; for I met her once at dinner, and she cannot by any chance put an 'H' into its right place.

(To be continued.)

DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SETTLED AT LAST.

Maltby has sold out, and occupies the position for which Nature has best fitted him, a kind landlord and a hospitable country gentleman, doing good to all around him, and

voins of strong sound sense; and his frank and still somewhat staid exterior conceals a warm and benevolent heart. Of Coralie and his daughter he had much to tell me. The Colonel was at first enchanted with the recovery of his child. To the tired, worn soldier, weary of barracks, and blasé with society, the prospect of a quiet domestic home—such a home as can only exist under female influence—was refreshing to the utmost. He pictured to himself a life of calm pleasure and contented tranquillity, an interchange of thoughts and sentiments with that fascinating woman who had proved to be his daughter, that should make him amends for all the sufferings entailed upon him by her mother's unbridled passions, and the long, dreary years of loneliness that he had since worn through—a widower, though a husband. Alas! that he should have been disappointed and deceived. Neither Coralie nor himself were adapted, either by disposition or education, for the retirement of a country life. In vain the Colonel sold out of the service, and taking a sweet little place in Hampshire, embarked largely in the cultivation of the soil, and encouraged his child to take charge of a garden, such as many a flower-loving daughter of Eve would have esteemed a perfect paradise. It was all charm for a while—but the training in which the *danceuse* had spent her youth was of a nature which made constant excitement absolutely necessary to her existence. At first, the novelty of the home and a father—such a father too, as a girl might be proud of—was very pleasing; but, after a time, the country walks, the tete-a-tete dinners, the early dinners, the early hours, became monotonous and wearisome; she joined for the amusement to which she was accustomed—the lively professional society, the daily tribute of admiration, the constant change of scene, the flatteries of the green-room, and the ovations of the stage. Besides, our English ladies have certain wholesome rules of quarantine, to which they cling with meritorious tenacity; and the name of De Ruvé was quite sufficient to prevent the Hampshire matrons from subjecting themselves or their daughters to contamination in the society of a *figurante*. All this annoyed Coralie as much as it disgusted the Colonel. She was used to be courted and caressed wherever she made her appearance; and he had all his life been a welcome and admired guest in far higher circles than those which now affected to draw the cordon of exclusiveness to his prejudice. The rector of the parish was courtesy itself to the new-comers, but his wife gathered her brood under her wings wherever she caught sight of Coralie's little French bonnet in any of the walks and lanes surrounding the parsonage. Lord Overbearing, who spent a month every year in that one of his seven palaces, near which their pretty farm was situated, asked the Colonel to shoot, and came himself to luncheon, and remained to dinner, got a easy man, delighted to escape a party of fine folks who were staying at his own house; but her Ladyship never so much as left her card upon the inhabitants of the cottage. Altogether it did not answer, nor had they any right to expect it would. The sacred relationship of parent and child is not to be tampered with, as in their case it had been, with impunity; and the previous habits and education of Coralie were made the means of punishing her father's original neglect of that wife whom, whatever may have been her faults, he had no right totally to repudiate.

The upshot of all is this,—Coralie votes England very *triste*, and Hampshire particularly disagreeable. The Colonel, who has been too long in harness to sink contentedly into a quiet country gentleman, gets very tired of his red land and his south-downs, and out of all patience with the stupidity of the chaw-bacons, to use the venacular term by which the inhabitants of that beautiful county are distinguished; and there is a scheme in embryo which will probably be put in practice, of leaving the farm and cottage to take care of themselves, and indulging in a year's tour on the Continent, *mon cousin* making one of the family party. I think it not impossible that *mon cousin* may eventually aspire to a dearer title, though how such an arrangement will suit my old friend Coralie, I leave to be determined by those who are conversant with the habits of a British Englishman.