

(Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.)

TALES OF THE LINKS OF LOVE.

BY ALEXANDER BOMBVILLE.

GOING TO AMERICA.

IN SIX CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER II.

THE SATIN CORSET.

The house of Lillymere is old as the Saxons in England. Surviving the Norman conquest, the civil wars, and other vicissitudes, it has arrived at to-day with but few dislocations from a direct line of succession. Its lords, the barons and earls of Roynlfort, did not often loiter behind national events. They led. Hence their prominence in history and great estates.

The present Earl, Theodore De Lacy Lillymere, is a Tory of the Tories. A Conservative by instinct, by prescience of reason. Comprehending the present, penetrating the future, he shapes a course demanded by the spirit of the age; lives, thinks, acts, in advance of revolutions. He does not merely speak the axiom—"property has its duties as well as its rights," but practically evolves it. Happy are the people inhabiting the lands of Lillymere.

But the Earl has troubles. The first is, want of an heir in the direct line. This might be a real sorrow and source of gloom to him, as it is to the Countess, were he not compensated in some degree by the presumptive successor, his nephew, the accomplished, brilliant Colonel De Lacy Lillymere, M. P. Yet again, the Colonel is unmarried, and beyond him there is extinction of the peerage. Another trouble staggers Lord Roynlfort as statesman: what to do with the myriads of handloom weavers now starving all over England, Ireland, Scotland?

Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands are stricken down from honest, honorable labour and prosperity by the supreme industrial utility of the age, the steam power loom.

And there is the marriage of the presumptive successor. Lord and Lady Roynlfort cannot be uninterested in that. They have cheerfully accepted Dorothy Eccley's suggestion that the bride should be the Lady Mary Mortimer. But De Lacy Lillymere must be a party in this consultation.

"What is psychological affinity," says the uncle to the nephew, who had disguised, under that cumbersome phrase, the old delightful word, "love," in speaking of Edith Ogleburn.

"It may be defined analytically," he replies, "as emanations from two souls interchanging places in sweet communion. But you would speak of the person, I presume, not of the phrase."

"Yes, about that taint of blood in the Ogleburns. One drop in every woman of that family not feminine, in fact not human."

"What is the blood if not human?"

"The Scotch term it witch seed. Women possessing it are said to give birth to witches. I may not give it credence. Indeed I do not. You do not. But the evil reputation is not the less a fact. I dislike the evil reputation. The ancient and noble lineage—I may term it the pure and heroic descent, of the De Lacy Lillymeres, should not be exposed to the taint of even a questionable tradition, or idle legend."

"Lord Roynlfort, I do not lightly esteem the lineage of our house. But the spiritual emanation of my being has gone into Edith. Her's has come into me. I see it, feel it, and am purified because my soul is her abiding place, and her's is mine."

"Eustace, if it has come to that I may be silent. But what if this be witchcraft? It seems like it."

"It is witchery! It is the mutual enchantment of the affinities."

"Enchantment of the affinities? It was called love when I was young. But, Eustace, is military service consistent with this exquisite dalliance of the affections? You may be, any day, appointed to regimental command abroad, to higher and more complex duties,—may it not be prejudicial to the service and to Colonel De Lacy Lillymere that so much of him is now feminine, so much less of him manly? How of that? Had you not better resign?"

"No, my lord. The house of Roynlfort will never be dishonoured, nor England poorly served by your gallant brother's son. Were I abroad on service now, the spiritual second self, or psychological emanation of Edith Ogleburn would pass through the globe—a current of invisible magnetism, or wander around the circle of the longitudes and find me. I not weaker, but rising nearer to the heroic for her presence. Were I in battle that guardian spirit would be there deflecting the line of bullets, parrying unfriendly sabres. If, by destined fate, wounded, the pure sweet

spirit of Edith would alight on me in the carriage, and minister to body and soul the surgery of love. Either inspiring to health, or by the grace of heaven to a foretaste of the happier life."

"Enough, Eustace, enough. I not seeing this Edith with your eyes, yet perceiving in you what I once was, say no more. But what of Dame Dorothy Eccley who holds so much of your possible fortunes in her keeping? What of the unquenchable pride of Lady Mary Mortimer? What of the borough of Eccley and your seat in Parliament? Postpone marriage with Edith for a time, Eustace, and preserve silence for twelve months, at least."

"We are married, my lord. I have been silent, but silence is no longer possible."

In a magazine of fashion on a street near St. James's Palace, London, Madame Cecilia presides. Edith Ogleburn, a lady of graceful form, wife and mother, though aged only nineteen, very beautiful to look upon, spiritual witchery in her blue eyes, examines and approves the material and mode of certain articles of attire. The corset is of blue and white satin, having intervals of envelope in the embroidery for concealment of money or papers.

At home the maid, Rosa, embroiders the lady's name in gold thread, with the date; and, as directed, inserts within the satin three Bank of England notes of £1,000 each; other notes to the amount of £700; also the lady's certificate of marriage.

Next day this lady, in passionate emotion, rends asunder within her soul that which is wife, from that which is mother. She gives the babe to Rosa and the nurse, Mrs. Ashe, to convey to Scotland for safe keeping, and takes ship from England, constrained to go by spiritual affinity, a magnetic compulsion, irresistible. She seeks the Colonel, Sir Eustace De Lacy Lillymere, but before finding him walks on a field of battle.

The time is six hours after darkness and silence have covered the carnage and the wreck. The dun sulphurous smoke of a dread conflict has settled to blackness. Rain pours into the pools of blood. This lady of slender form wades in the pools. Alone but not afraid. Alone but for this dead man or that; for this heap of carnage and wreck, or that other heap. Most of the wounded, if able to creep, or indicate in the darkness where they might be found, have been gathered to field hospitals. She climbs over shattered artillery, or gropes around it. Onward, and still on, in direct line of the magnetic constraint she glides in the darkness.

None have told her where Sir Eustace fell, nor if he fell. The direction in which the cavalry brigade was engaged, late in the day, has been indicated by the pointing of a weary sentinel's finger, nothing more.

A voice, a faint voice almost at her feet: "Is it you, Edith? It is you. I feel the presence. I knew you would come."

The words are faintly murmured, while yet no eye can discern the person of one or the other.

"Eustace? My love, my life, I am here!" "Yes, I know; knew you would come. Felt the approach coming nearer and nearer. But why did you? And the babe? Where is our darling?"

"I was impelled to come. I know not how. I only know why; to guard dear Eustace. Life of my life! Found you—found you! Will not part again. Knew I should find you. Knew you were wounded the instant it happened. When did it happen? Hurt, my Eustace? Much hurt?"

"Sweet Edith, fatally injured, I fear. Cannot extricate my limb from that artillery wreck, else might have crept to the ambulance. Was unable to call when men passed near looking for wounded. Fainted then. They gone when I awoke. Knew you would come, sweet Edith. Prayed you might come."

"Let me remove this cannon, the broken wheels, this dead horse. Your dear foot under them all! Yes, I can, the strength of giants is in me. Alas, too heavy. I try again. Got it free. Eustace! your dear right foot shattered. You faint! Hope of my life, say you live! Else I die with you."

"Fatally, mortally wounded, Edith! Have much to say. Short time to say it. The baby? Our son? Heir of Roynlfort—when I am gone—where is the babe?"

"With Mrs. Ashe to Scotland, to my aunt Ogleburn's."

"Dying on the field of battle. Succession to a title so old, ultimate succession to the Wiltshire estates—all fading away. Pray, dear Edith, for my poor soul that it be not disinherited. Heaven sustain you, and the babe, and me, in this dread hour. Life is passing. Leaving my widow publicly unacknowledged as wife. My child publicly unacknowledged as legitimate. Oh! cruel pride of that proud house of Eccley Manor, and of Roynlfort."

"But, Eustace, my husband; the Scotch certificate of marriage is sufficient, is it not? Say again it is. You often said it was. Say it again."

"It is legally sufficient; where is it?"

"In my bodice with the bank notes?"

"Keep it there. Place this with it. A fragment written yesterday and witnessed by

Drum and Horton when battle was imminent. It satisfies the Roynlforts. That Wiltshire old witch, Dorothy Eccley, your enemy and mine, may bequeath her estate to whom it pleases her, the gipsy convict, or the church. The Scotch certificate binds all legally to you not lying within the option of her disposal. I cannot say more. Faint. Pray for me, Edith."

Edith rends her under garments, making bandages for the wound. Surgery of frenzied love; the satin corset, stript from her body, is also a bandage.

"Shall not, must not die. Heaven abounds in mercy for all needs. Live a little longer, sweet Eustace. Does the wound pain much?"

"I bleed to death. Your breath, Edith. Breathe into me—kisses of life—kisses of heaven. Heaven is life. Your breath is life. Closer. Breathe into my soul, sweet Edith. More, more."

"Eustace! Not yet—go not yet. Mercy, dear Heaven! Spare my loved one yet a while."

Alone on this drear battle-field with her dead.

"Ha! What are you doing here? Who are you? A woman! Plundering the dead? Murdering the wounded belike. Who are you?"

"Man, woman, both of you, have patience. I am Lady Eustace Lillymere receiving the dying breath of my husband. You knew Colonel Lillymere?"

"False, base woman. There is no Lady Lillymere here. None anywhere else. Sir Eustace has no wife. And that gentleman is not here. He is gone to England with dispatches."

"Who is she? Take the plunder from her. Whip her out. Whip her at the gun-wheel. Better they who do the fighting should get the plunder. Take it from her. Give it up, limmer."

"Hold, you ruffians! Release that lady. Touch her—you die."

The voice! It is the voice of Sergeant Clinkengraith of the Foot Guards.

Shots flash and crack in the murky night. Bayonets clash. Steel strikes steel. Groans. Imprecations. Silence. Rain. More rain. Her footsteps—where? The footsteps of Edith seen no more.

Years and years. A freight train, on a branch line of railway in Canada, approaches Chippewa Mills. Will it stop? It stops. Is shunted into the siding, and a laden car detached, then the train departs.

The loading of the car comprises bales of rags, imported from England. Soon they are taken by horse waggons to the paper mill. Hoisted aloft, the bales lie in store, until wanted, then carried on hand-trucks and placed one by one, between two persons at a bench. Only two rag sorters are on this floor to-day.

The polite Englishwoman and the girl Lucy, to whom she acts as mother; as almost more than mother. They work together; the child sorting rags, the woman cutting off buttons, or ripping woollen from linen and cotton, or dissecting old corsets, cutting the cloth, extracting whalebones.

One bale, containing worn-out stays laid in thin layers between smaller fragments of rags is now at the bench. On a two-edged blade projecting upwards, the woman deftly rips open the seams, laying in a heap the splints, which once compressed the forms of maiden or matron; serving woman or daughter of fortune.

In words formed by thought, not spoken, Mrs. Myther—that is her name, feels herself saying:

Blue silk within. Blue and white satin it must have been once. Long ago fashion, too. Who may tell the wearer? Soiled and much chafed outside. Fresh within. Reminds me of a bodice made by Madame Cecilia of St. James's, in my happy young days. Such another was that worn by my Lady Lillymere, when she went to the field of battle. Fair saint, dwelling only a short time on earth, if she be really dead. Lost in a moment to all human knowledge. Gone with him,—the brave, the good, the gallant Sir Eustace! with him, I hope, to their fitting abode.

What punctured cut is this? Through the bone splints? A three-edged cut of a poignard—directly against the heart. This crusted hard brown blood! A mercy a me! This is murder or suicide. Was done with force to puncture the whalebone. Not suicide that cut, it must have been done with force.

Who was she? What was she? Who her enemy? Let me rip with care to examine the coloured silk within.

A mercy a me! Madame Cecilia's own trade mark. Rich this bodice was indeed. Rich it is to this day. Save me! The money, the marriage certificate! That brown hard crust is the blood of Lady Lillymere! My young, lovely mistress Edith Ogleburn. The Bank of England notes, three of £1,000 each, in all close on four thousand pounds sterling. Certificate of marriage: Eustace DeLacy Lillymere, Major in the army. Edith Ogleburn. Married at Springfield, parish of Grefna, Dumfriesshire, Scotland. By me Joseph Paisley. Witnesses: Foster Elliot, of Carlisle; Rosa Myther, of London.

My own handwriting. Mystery of mysteries.

Another paper: "My revered, honoured,

noble relatives, Lord and Lady Roynlfort. About to engage the enemy. Death possible; a presentiment says, probable. This paper witnessed, as mine, by Captain Drew and Mr. Greville Horton, certifies that Edith Ogleburn is my wife, a lady of birth and lineage equal to our own. And the babe Eustace DeLacy Lillymere, born ten months after the marriage, is our son; and heir-at-law to all I might have inherited. The absurdities of Dorothy Eccley about the parliamentary seat for her rotten borough, and about her estates, with other occurrences known too well in the family, caused me foolishly to arrange a private marriage. Lady Lillymere, my wife, has a legal certificate of our marriage, duly signed."

"Lucy, my love, slip quietly out upon the stairs. Peep like a mouse. Observe if you see the Buddy Lowry Lundy anywhere around. In the machine room. In the yard. At the wood piles. In the boiler house. In the bleach house. In the paper mill. Keep him in your eye. Glide back if he follows. Lead him with your shadow to other rooms. Not in here."

Lucy vanishes softly, swiftly. Rosa Myther nimbly, but with care, opens the stitching of the rich, the once elaborately embroidered blue and white satin. And in words of thought, not spoken, continues:

Never heard of this document; but the first is witnessed in my own writing. The paper and the money where I myself stitched them there. Before robbery of her raiment, or murder, she has had opportunity to undo the stitches, insert the second paper, and embroider over the seams neatly, in her own style. I know her stitch, and the figure worked in the satin. What was your fate, darling Lady Lillymere? And of the babe? Does the child live? Most horrible of deaths if that child were really snatched away by eagles, as was told. Most cruel stealth of all stealing if the babe was stolen by gipseys. And even if alive, to be disinherited from rightful title and great estates on allegation of illegitimacy.

What had I best do now? Transfer the money to my own dress, meanwhile. Leave the corset aside with its papers until an exchange of linen rags, or purchase, makes them lawfully mine. May say the silk is wanted, and so it is, for Lucy's quilting. Not my money; yet I placed it there. None around here have better claim to the money. Besides, the babe may be discovered. The babe! what am I talking about?

Hope Lucy has Lowry Lundy under eye. He is a torment, the creature. Wants another wife; is always after me. Has had wives enough, the little Buddy.

The child flits from doorway to mill corner. From corner to the wood piles, to other doors, other corners. Not in the way a child should be trained. Not in accordance with the free, open, truthful nature of Lucy herself—bright-eyed, light-footed, merry little Lucy—but a natural sequence to the practice of Buddy Lowry Lundy in watching the workers through gimlet holes.

By the mill flume, drawn from the mighty Chippewa torrent, a battlefield of waters, two miles wide, three miles down, down, down in swift currents and waves. White-crested cavalry, galloping, wheeling, reeling, foaming, in the froth of rage. Three miles of battlefield artillery, in mad impetuosity, shooting white clouds of conflict in the air, thundering near, booming in the distance—cavalry and artillery leaping the fractured continent, down into the vortex. Mighty Niagara! The child looks, he is not by the flume.

By the acres of piled up basswood, raw material of paper, the child looks. He is not there.

At the dark cavernous mouths in the floor, where inexorable rollers draw in blocks of trees to be gnawed to chips by teeth of steel. He is not there.

In the vaults of the great cauldrons where pulp of wood, disgorged by the machines, is boiled with straw and bleached. He is not there. In the rooms where pulp of rags and of wood amalgamate. He is not there.

In the halls of the cylinders, where, diluted in water, it spreads on the blankets, issuing in endless webs of paper; not the best paper, possibly, but idealized to charming purity by the angelic journalism for which it is made. Lucy looks. He is not there.

Returning to the rag stores, the child ascends to a floor over the room where Rosa Myther works. There, recumbent on the boards, peering through an opening made for this use, secretly plugged at other times, Lowry Lundy watches the woman below. Dust of the rags ascending, his face is withdrawn to sneeze. Swift in motion though Lucy be, the Buddy sees her. She is likely to remember he saw her.

It is night. In the shanty of thin boards, occupied by Mrs. Myther and the orphan, a lamp burns late. More closely than usual, screens are drawn over windows and chimneys. Quietly before, softly again, the woman steps to the porch to make sure she is not watched. And Lucy, before she slept, toil-worn child, gilded around the shanty. No, he did not appear any way around.

But Lowry Lundy is there. Lying flat on the roof, astride over the shingles in shadow of the chimney top, his peering eye looks