

# Eustace, the Outcast

## CHAPTER III.

MR. GRAHAME HOLDS A SECRET CONFERENCE WITH RALPH, THE GAMERKEEPER—A CONFERENCE BETWEEN FATHER AND SON, WHICH ASSURES A STORMY AFTERNOON.

Bengary House was a large old-fashioned mansion, with several straggling wings that seemed to have been added to the main building at various times, without much regard either to order of arrangement or style of architecture. One of these wings to the west was shut up, and this wing being likewise at a distance from the kitchen and the office, it was often as solitary without as within, especially after nightfall.

It might be an hour after the betrothal of Eustace and Lillias on the grassy bank by the river side, that a dark form emerged from the shadow of some ancient trees in the park to the mansion, and stealthily approached the latter, through the now deepening twilight.

The figure was that of a man, who, having reached the vicinity of the building, paused and peered round in all directions to satisfy himself that he was free from observation. This done, he lifted a pebble from the ground and threw it against an upper window, the while curtain of which was drawn.

Presently the curtain was lifted slightly aside, and a woman's head showed itself for a moment within. The instant it appeared the man below made a sign with his arm, when the curtain again dropped, and he sauntered round towards the deserted wing, at the end of which he took up his solitary position.

As he awaits here for a few moments in the fading western light we may get a glimpse of his appearance. So far as an observation through the gathering twilight allowed, the man seemed to be a shaggy fellow of between thirty and forty, heavy of countenance—his stature short and thickset, and his dress slovenly arranged, as well as coarse in texture.

As he leant against the wall, with his hand thrust into his breeches pocket, he had a decided hang-dog air about him, which indicated a rough if not almost a brutal nature.

He had not stood many minutes when a light footstep fell upon the gravel path, and a woman, turning the opposite angle of the wall approached him.

—'What is it, Ralph?' she asked in a whisper, as she stood close beside him. 'Have you any news, that you ask me out at this late hour?'

'I should think I have, Nell,' answered the man, in a deep, harsh voice, quite in keeping with his appearance as far as we have been able to make it out.

'Hush, don't name me,' said the other, in an admonishing tone.

'Bah! what's the difference? There's nobody about to hear me; and if there were, why shouldn't a brother call his sister by her first name?'

'Now, Ralph, how can you speak so? returned the other deprecatingly. 'You know what a dreadful business it would be for me if it was discovered that you were my brother.'

'It would disgrace you, I suppose?' he savagely growled.

'Yes it would,' she firmly rejoined. 'It would utterly disgrace me, and ruin myself, for I could no longer befriend you.'

'And much befriended I have been from you,' muttered the fellow. 'All that you've done is to get me the place of keeper on this grand estate of your husband's. I wonder how his proud stomach would feel if some day when he was ordering me about I was to tell him that I was his brother-in-law?'

'Ralph, you have been drinking to-night, and that's why you are in such bad humor,' said his company, whom the reader has now discovered to be Mrs. Grahame.

'No, I haven't; but I want a glass and that's a truth. Come, tip me up a shilling, for I've to go down to the village to meet a friend or two at the Lion,' and I guess I needn't go there wanting money.'

'You go there too often Ralph; far too often. I think you might have been warned by the fate of—'

'Of our father, you would say. Why, he did drink rather hard, that's a fact; but I don't go to his length by a long chalk. He used to make a beast of himself. Now I am never more than jolly, and can take care of myself precious well. But you needn't grudge a little money now and then, Nell, when you have so much of it.'

'I don't grudge the money, but would gladly give you ten times more if you would use it for your elevation in life. That, however, is a vain hope, and I am forever kept in terror lest, when drink renders you imprudent, you let out the secret that is between us.'

'Yes, you have, Ralph; and if you would only take less drink and try to make yourself respectable, you might rise to a higher position than that you now occupy.'

'Now, don't preach, Nell. I'm well enough for all that I can see. I hadn't such a notion of rising in the world as you had, though I must say that it was mighty clever of you to sink old dad and the rest of us, give yourself out as an orphan and manage to get Grahame for a husband.'

'For my sake, Ralph, keep silent about such things,' said Mrs. Grahame, as she suddenly grasped his arm. 'You know not what ear may be listening to your words. Surely you would not desire to be the means of ruining me.'

'Raising you,' he repeated. 'Of course I wouldn't. I am particularly interested in the clever scheme you are up to, and would like to see you succeed in getting your son and my nephew put snug in the estate. Gad, Nell, I should feel about two feet higher if I saw myself the uncle of Randolph Grahame, esq., of Bengary.'

'I don't think I would carry this game bag then as I do now, and bear with all his proud airs. Do you know, Nell, I have more than once been tempted to bring his pride down a peg or two when he spoke as if I was no better than the dust under his feet. It took me all my time to keep from telling him that I was as good as he, and—'

'Really, Ralph,' interrupted the other impatiently, 'if you have asked me out here to rehearse these unpleasant recollections, I am not inclined to remain a moment longer. Mr. Grahame may miss me. So, if you have no intelligence to give me—'

'But I have intelligence,' said Ralph, 'and rather tip-top intelligence, too. Not two hours ago the young un popped the question to the girl Sommerville.'

'Ha! are you sure of that, Ralph?' said Mrs. Grahame, in a tone of vehement eagerness.

'As sure as my two ears can make me,' was the reply. 'The interesting business came off on Beechwood Bank, not four feet from the bush where I had crept in for concealment, and I heard and saw everything just as comfortable as if I had been one of the party.'

'Well?' whispered Mrs. Grahame, breathlessly.

'It was uncommon well, and no mistake,' added Ralph. 'The sweetest sort of thing I ever saw in my life—such sighing and kissing and embracing as mostly made my teeth water to have a share of it.'

'But did Eustace offer to marry her?' demanded Mrs. Grahame, with the same breathless eagerness.

'In course he did. To marry her? 'Boney feely.'

'Jumped at it like a cock at a gooseberry—or as you did when old Grahame made the same offer to you.'

'They are betrothed then?'

'Fast and sure. The girl didn't feel altogether comfortable over the matter, though. She thought the old boy might object, on the score of lowness of station.'

'Well, and what did Eustace say to that?' asked Mrs. Grahame, who could hardly breathe with excitement.

'Didn't agree with her. Thought the Governor would come out all smooth and pleasant when he heard that sweet Lillias was the only one who could make him happy, and so on. My eye but the lad is precious green for one of his inches.'

'So much the better for us,' whispered his listener. 'Was anything more said?'

'Bushels more. Soft as down and sweet as honey, and I got mortal tired of it ere it was over; but the only thing he said much to your purpose was that if the Governor should object, he'd stick to her through all weathers, and marry her in spite of his father's teeth—so he is like to play your card, and win the game for you right off hand.'

'By a little management of mine, he will,' said Mrs. Grahame, in a tone of intense satisfaction. 'You have done me good service, Ralph by bringing me this intelligence.'

'It's worth a bob, isn't it?' rejoined her refined brother. 'Come, fork out, now, or I'll be too late to meet my chums at the Lion.'

'There is the shilling, Ralph, said his sister, as she put the coin into his hand. 'I would far more willingly give you five of them, if for a better purpose. But, for heaven's sake, be on your guard when drinking with your companions.'

'All right, Nell, catch a weasel asleep,' was Ralph's rejoinder, as he pocketed the shilling, and moved away through the park in the direction of the gate which led towards the village.

Mrs. Grahame stood watching his receding form, and as he vanished through the twilight she muttered—

'He is my only bugbear. Through him I am constantly in danger. At any moment he might betray our relationship, and then farewell to my hopes for Randolph, for well I know that John would never settle the estate on the grandson of a drunken paper. Oh, that Ralph had never discovered me—oh, that I had never seen or heard of my relations more. But I cannot shake

him off, and he is the sword of Damocles hanging over me, yet has he proved himself useful too, and the information he has brought to-night is to me invaluable. I will now prompt John to press forward the marriage of Eustace with Mary Maxwell, and if I have read the youth's character aright, he will absolutely refuse, and there will be a breach made between them which it shall be my care to make wider.'

Having finished this characteristic soliloquy, the ambitious woman moved away from the solitary spot, and re-entered the house.

On the following morning as they rose from breakfast, Mr. Grahame requested Eustace to accompany him to the library, and the latter went without having the faintest suspicion that the conversation there was to be of a disagreeable nature.

There was nothing in his father's manner to lead him to expect so; on the contrary he had been all that morning more than usually affable and his tone of voice and expression of countenance when he made the request were peculiarly pleasant and cheerful.

The library was a long and lofty room immediately over the front entrance, and its windows looked across the extensive park, and commanded a view of a large portion of the estate. The spaces between the windows had been filled with the portraits of the former proprietors of the property, but only two of these were now occupied—one by the portrait of the grandfather of Eustace, the rich manufacturer who had purchased the estate, and the other by that of his father, the present possessor.

Before the conversation opens let us in a sentence or two, describe the latter.

Mr. Graham was a tall, straight man, stout and ruddy. He was considerably past middle age; but his form was erect as ever; and although his head was bald, the vigor of his life did not seem to have begun to fail. He was a grave, dignified, self-possessed man, sharp of feature, pompous in manner—and though at all times unobtrusive, a judge of character would have seen by the smallness and firmness of mouth, his high cheek bones and the fulness of forehead just over the eyes, that he was a man of inflexible will, and determination which was in no danger of being turned aside by weakness of heart.

'I have asked you hither this morning, Eustace,' he began, 'in order that we might have a serious and important conversation. When you returned home some months ago, I gave you to understand that I wished you to marry one of Mr. Maxwell's daughters—Mary I thought the most suitable, but left you to make your choice. I have not seen, however, that you are particularly eager in making up your mind, for you seem to go very seldom so Kinnair—a fact not quite in keeping with your position as a suitor.'

Eustace smiled.

'Indeed, father, you have judged truly,' he said, 'I have found no particular attraction at Kinnair. Not one of the fair young ladies took my fancy much. Mary indeed is most to my mind, but she impressed me with no feeling akin to affection, and thus my visits have not been more frequent than those of a common acquaintance.'

'Well, I desire you to alter this somewhat,' returned the father. 'You are now of age when it is proper that you should marry, and I have a particular desire to see you settled in life as soon as possible.'

'To this I have no objection,' said Eustace, with another smile.

'I am glad of that, though I fully expected it of you. Your own good sense and the education you have received must, of course, show you your incumbent duty in this matter. As the heir to this large estate, and after me the representative of the family, you cannot but be aware of what is required of you. Only it has occurred to me that you are somewhat dilatory, and hence my reason for speaking to you on this subject.'

'I assure you, father,' cried Eustace, gaily, 'you shall have no longer cause to think me dilatory. I am now most anxious to marry as soon as arrangements can be made, because, fortunately I am now in a position to enter heart and soul into your wishes.'

'That is quite right and proper Eustace, and I am highly satisfied. My intention is that you bring your wife here. The mansion is large enough, and the west wing shall be repaired and properly furnished. This shall be done immediately, and the marriage shall take place in autumn. Does this arrangement satisfy you?'

'Most fully,' answered Eustace, with an air of joyous anticipation.

'Then,' continued his father, 'this being so, it might be as well to make your proposal to the lady, for no doubt she will have her arrangements to make, and the drawing up of the settlements will occupy some time.'

'My dear father, I have proposed to the lady, and have been accepted too,' said Eustace, with a slight blush.

'You have?' returned his father, regarding him with surprise. 'Gad, that's news indeed. Sly dog; why did you keep this a secret from me?'

'Indeed, sir, you do me injustice now,' returned the youth. 'Our betrothal took

place only last night, and I intended to acquaint you to-day.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Mr. Grahame, as he rubbed his hands together in great glee, 'this is stealing a march on me in famous style. I have indeed been doing you injustice. I have been accusing you of a sad indifference to my wishes in regard to your marriage, while you have in reality forwarded them as satisfactorily as I could desire. And so you were over to Kinnair yesterday?'

'At Kinnair?' echoed Eustace. 'Oh no, I have not been to Kinnair for some time.'

'Oh ho,' cried his father with a sly smile; 'you and Mary have had meetings in the woods?'

'Quite mistaken, I assure you. Mary Maxwell and I have never met alone anywhere—I never saw her except at home in the presence of the others.'

'Not Mary?' said Mr. Grahame, 'your choice has fallen on one of her sisters. Well, well, you have a right to please yourself, only my idea was that Mary would have been the—'

'Pray, father let me explain,' interrupted Eustace. 'My intended wife is not one of the Miss Maxwells at all, but—'

'What?' interrupted Mr. Grahame in turn, as he started round, and fixed on Eustace a look of petrified astonishment.

'Not one of the Maxwells. I know of no other suitable family in the neighborhood. Eustace, you should have acquainted me with this. I hope you have not done anything which I cannot approve.'

'I hope not,' answered Eustace, quite calmly, for he was conscious of no wrong on his part, and was as yet entirely ignorant of the views and feelings which his father cherished.

'Then tell me who the lady is,' continued the father, 'for in my mind I have run over all the families in the neighborhood, and I fail to find one.'

The smile of Eustace made him suddenly pause.

'Do not guess in that direction,' observed the youth. 'The girl whose heart I have gained, and whom I love with all the ardour of my soul, has no family connection, though her personal and mental qualities are infinitely superior to those of any high-born lady I ever met.'

'Zounds, sir, what are you raving at?' cried his father, bending on him a look of alarmed amazement. 'Understand at once that I am in no humor to tolerate a joke on this subject. It concerns too nearly the most important affairs, both of my life and yours, to become the object of sport.'

'My dear father,' said Eustace, 'you do not know me if you suppose for a moment that I would think or speak less seriously than you could desire on such a matter. Let me assure you that all I have said has been said in the utmost sincerity, and I am at a loss to know how you could have imagined otherwise.'

'Because you said something about the lady having no family connection.'

'And in that I said truly—she has none.'

Mr. Graham drew a long breath, set his teeth very hard, compressed his lips, and said very slowly

'Then, sir, will you tell me who she is?'

'Certainly,' replied Eustace, beginning to wonder at the peculiar expression his father had assumed. And forthwith he began the story of his first meeting with Lillias Sommerville—of his rescuing her from the water—of the impression which her beauty and refinement made upon him—of their subsequent intercourse, during which that impression was deepened, till admiration grew into love of the tenderest character—and finally of their conversation and betrothal on the previous evening.

It is impossible to describe the feelings with which Mr. Graham listened to the clear, straightforward narrative. A statue could not have remained more rigid or looked more inanimate.

'My God,' he gasped, 'is this a dream—have my ears played me false, or have I indeed listened to such a monstrous tale?'

His appearance and words transfixed Eustace, and rendered him dumb.

'No, no,' he went on, as if oblivious of the presence of the other, 'my son is not idiot enough or insane enough to contemplate such an atrocity. This is—this must be—a wild delirious imagination of my own.'

He pressed his hand across his brow, started rapidly round the room, then fixed his eyes on Eustace, and approaching, grasped his arm.

'No vision,' he muttered, 'a real palpable substance, and the scene is actual.'

'Depart—where?' asked Eustace in amazement.

'Anywhere—France is shut against you at present; but Germany or Switzerland, or Russia are open, or you can take the Holy Land, if you will like it better.'

'But for what object?' inquired the youth.

'Heavens, sir! do you require to ask the object? said his father, angrily. 'Are you so stupid as not to know that it is to cure you of this absurd—this disgraceful fancy of yours for that peasant girl?'

'My betrothal does not meet your approbation, then?' said Eustace in a tone of disappointment.

His father turned sharply round, and regarded him for some moments in perfect silence.

'Well,' he exclaimed, 'you are either the most complete simpleton of the most egregious as I ever looked upon. My approbation!' he repeated in a tone of the most derisive incredulity. 'Why, is it possible that for one single moment you imagined that your infamous folly would meet my approbation?'

Eustace was nettled now, and his face flushed, and he met his father's eye with a bold and dauntless look.

'Had I,' he answered, 'had I conceived that you could possibly characterize my love for Lillias Sommerville by such terms, I would have known that it was to displease you. But allow me to say that my thoughts of you were more filial and respectful than to anticipate that my true love for a girl, virtuous, pure and highly educated, would incite your anger or become the subject of your inventive.'

'Sir, there can be no honorable love between you and a salmon-fisher,' thundered Mr. Grahame, 'and were you not the most ignorant fool in Christendom you must know that.'

'Indeed I do not, but know quite the contrary,' retorted Eustace with spirit, for he was now fairly roused. 'Lillias Sommerville and I are as pure and guileless in our mutual love as ever lovers were since the Fall. I am not capable of conceiving one thought to do her wrong, and if I were base enough to do so she would send me forever from her presence with one withering look of scorn.'

'Eustace, let us cut short this ridiculous discussion,' said his father sternly. 'As I have said, the only cure for your folly is travel, and you will make ready to depart in the morning.'

'I ask again, to what purpose?' said Eustace, in a cold tone.

'Haven't I indicated that? roared his father. 'It is to cure you of your infatuation with regard to this girl, and when you return I shall see that no time is lost in effecting your marriage with Mary Maxwell.'

'Forsoke Lillias Sommerville!' exclaimed Eustace, bursting out with indignation; 'forsake the girl whom I adore, the girl who loves and trusts me; she to whom I have pledged my faith and honor? Father I blush that you have thought such a thing could be possible.'

'Have done with such heroics, and talk plain sense,' said Mr. Grahame, striving to suppress the fury that was now boiling up from his heart. 'Given your own way of it, what would you do? You repudiate what seeming virtuous horror the idea of making any dishonorable proposal to the girl, how then do you intend to act?'

'Marry her, of course,' answered Eustace, with perfect calmness.

'What,' roared his father, leaping back till brought up by the wall, 'marry her; did you say marry her?'

'I did. Is it not the most natural of all things? Why should not I marry the girl I love, and who is in all respects worthy of my love?'

'Hear me, sir. Talk sense and not nonsense. Is she worthy of your rank—your expectations?'

'Being worthy of my love, which is highest, she is worthy of all else that is lower,' answered Eustace. 'Rank, station, wealth—these are not to be named in preference to the heart's affection.'

'Good God,' ejaculated Mr. Grahame, 'are these the sentiments Leslie taught you?'

'They are; and are they not the best and noblest he could inculcate?'

'He taught you these, you say?'

'Of course he did.'

'Then curse the scoundrel for a traitor,' roared his father with inexpressible fury. 'I entrusted you to him that he might educate you for the station of life to which you were destined, and instead of that he seems to have imbued you with the most infamous principles. But thank goodness, I have discovered it in time, and shall take measures to eradicate the poison he has instilled. You are less to blame than he, and I doubt not, when I put the thing before you in a proper light you will take an entirely different view of it, and think, and speak, and act as becomes my son, and the representative of the family.'

This conversation has given me a pretty clear insight into your mind, but it does not seem to have shown you anything of the real nature of mine. I would have you bear in mind that I am not a child. I have now reached man's estate and have a mind and will, principles and convictions of my own. I have also a nature which causes me to stick with the most determined resolution to what I consider is right. Do not, therefore, entertain the notion that you will ever bring me to your way of thinking on this subject, or prevail on me to act in any but an honorable and an upright way towards Lillias Sommerville. Your worldly views and considerations I perfectly understand, but for them I have the utmost contempt, and nothing you can say will prevent me from marrying the girl to whom with all my heart I have pledged my troth.'

'Silence, Eustace! Silence, I command you,' cried Mr. Grahame, his pale lips trembled with passion. 'You are not yourself; you do not know what you are saying. Leave me now. By-and-by when you have time to reflect you will address me in a different strain and to a different purpose.'

'Never, father. Delude not yourself with the idea that—'

'Silence! I say. Not another word! Go!'

And he pointed his hand with an imperious gesture towards the door.

Eustace regarded him for a moment or two in silence, then drawing himself proudly up, he walked out of the room with an air of firm determination.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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