

...blushing her cheeks and brow, which, not unnoticed by Mrs. Gordon, revealed to her a secret unknown to Blanche herself until that moment, that she loved William Beauchamp. She had long looked upon him as a dear friend, but had hitherto remained totally unconscious of any deeper feeling towards him, when the sudden revelation made by Captain Markham of his life, perhaps, being at stake, sent a thrilling suffocating sensation circling round her heart, to which she had hitherto been a stranger. Her ill-concealed trepidation at his approach delightfully confirmed Mrs. Gordon in her long indulged hopes that William Beauchamp might become the object of her niece's choice.

'William,' exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, as he stood before her, 'I have sent for you to hear an account from your own lips of this unpleasant fracas with Lord Mervyn, whom, I am told, it was your intention to challenge to-morrow morning.'

For a moment Blanche's face was raised to him to scan his looks. Their eyes met, and by that quick, hurried glance, Beauchamp seemed entranced, riveted to the spot; for a moment the full spell of fascination was upon him, as he gazed in silent surprise on the varying color and trembling form of Blanche Douglas.

'William!' suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, in a sharp tone, 'what ails you to-morrow?—are you tipsy or crazy?'

'Neither tipsy nor crazy, dear Mrs. Gordon; but a fit of abstraction seized me; my thoughts were wandering; pray forgive me.'

'A pretty confession, Mr. William, in the presence of three ladies,' added Constance; 'so now, to make your peace with Aunt Gordon, just have the goodness to occupy my seat till I return, and make a full confession of your wicked conduct, whilst I hear Mr. Conyers' version of the story; we shall then know who speaks most truth; so sit down between those two ladies, who, I hope, will both in turn give you a thorough good lecture.'

Beauchamp required no second invitation, and turning first to Miss Douglas, who was on his right side, and in a low tone, scarcely above a whisper, 'Dear Blanche, you look pale and agitated; what has distressed you?'

'Oh, nothing now!' she replied. 'I felt faint a little while ago, but dear aunty's vinaigrette—again applying it to her nostrils—has nearly revived me.'

'Now, William,' interposed Mrs. Gordon, 'I am all impatience; pray begin, and tell me the whole truth.'

'And so I will, dear madam,' replied Beauchamp; 'every word of it.'

'Don't dear madam me, sir; your sister, Constance, like a good, dear, obedient child, does as she is bid, and calls me Aunt Gordon; and I desire you will do the same, unless you wish me to call you Mr. Beauchamp.'

'Then, dear Aunt Gordon, I will give you chapter and verse of the whole conversation in the dining-room, after the ladies left, without further delay.'

'Only what concerns yourself, William, and has reference to your quarrel with Lord Mervyn. I don't want to hear all the nonsense that is usually talked by gentlemen over their wine.'

Beauchamp, as succinctly as possible, related what passed relative to his altercation with Lord Mervyn, and producing his pocket-book, in which the entry of his appointment to draw the Marston coverts was written, Mrs. Gordon expressed herself satisfied with his explanation.

'Thus far, she said, all is well; but I wish you cordially to understand, William Beauchamp, that I thoroughly disapprove of duelling. It is a cowardly, unchristian practice, adapted to heathens and atheists only and, as such, I must exact from you a promise that you will never again permit yourself to stand in the position you have this evening, of meditating the sacrifice of a fellow-creature's life, to satisfy what you gentlemen call by the false name of honor.'

'I hope you will acquit me of any such

...plaid Mrs. Gordon, on which Vernon turned abruptly away.

Soon after he was engaged in an animated conversation with Captain Markham, the nature of which will transpire in the following colloquy.

'What makes you look so demmed pleasant to-night—claret sour, or what—with that vinegar countenance?'

'That old aunt's enough to put any man out of temper,' replied Vernon; 'and that fellow, Beauchamp, thinking they are going to have it all their own way with the heiress.'

'Eh! 'pon honor—what d'ye mean?'

'I have been watching Beauchamp very intently since he joined her on the sofa, and her looks, when he ventured on some soft speech, betrayed the nature of it; in fact, I believe he is making up to her.'

'Well, why shouldn't he? She is fair game to any man to try for without poaching on your ground. Demmit, Vernon, you seem to think no fellow has a right to speak to her but yourself. Eh, 'pon my soul, that's a good joke!—and, if that's your humor, just give me leave to observe, my fine fellow, that Ned Markham considers he has quite as good a chance for the heiress as Dick Vernon.'

'Oh! certainly, a much better one,' replied Vernon, with a sneer. 'Heir to a baronetcy—life guardsman—fine figure—lots of small talk, and all that sort of thing; but I hate Will Beauchamp, and intend to pick a quarrel with him, to get him out of the way. Will you be my second?'

'No, Richard Vernon, I will not; that's plain enough, I suppose.' With which the Captain walked away.

A voice from behind whispered in his ear, 'Don't despair Dick; I will supply Edward's place; and turning round, he confronted Miss Markham.

'You my second, Selma?'

'And why not? Put on Ned's dress, par of false moustaches, and all that sort of thing—just do, 'pon honor—masculine enough, eh?'

'Decidedly the latter,' remarked Vernon, with a sneer; 'but I fear you would load my pistol with powder only.'

'Oh, no, Dick!—but in place of ball I should load with dice. No fear then of missing your victim. You are a deadly hand with them, Richard Vernon.'

'Your remarks are so eccentric and ambiguous sometimes,' replied Vernon, 'that it would puzzle a philosopher to interpret them.'

'Indeed, Mr. Richard Vernon, your usual sharp wit is at fault, eh? Then I will leave you to guess my meaning, with this little piece of advice: don't assume the part of assassin and bully by plotting against the life of an innocent man, who is your superior in every point but one—villany!'

'Oh, indeed, Miss Markham, you are in a particularly factious humor this evening; but suppose I were to insinuate that a certain very gifted and highly accomplished young lady thought more deeply than people imagine of a certain person, whose great recommendation lies in chasing those poor devils of foxes to death, and whose proficiency in dog language, to the exclusion of every other, is notorious.'

'You may insinuate what you please, Mr. Vernon; but facts are stubborn things, and two or three little transactions of yours have come to my knowledge, which shall be certainly disclosed when Mr. Vernon dares to apply any insulting terms either to William Beauchamp or your humble servant; with which, making him a low curtesy, she laughingly turned on her heel.

'Ah, I see,' muttered Vernon to himself, 'that d—d fool, her brother, has been letting the cat out of the bag, so now I must try another game; with which purpose he crossed the room and joined Mrs. Harcourt, whose glance towards the sofa, where Mrs. Gordon, Blanche, and Beauchamp were sitting, revealed the nature of her thoughts.'

'Well, Mrs. Harcourt,' he inquired, noticing her dissatisfied looks, 'have I misrepresented matters in that quarter?'

...her as I ought to do; although so young, she thinks deeply, judges carefully, and where she does love, intensely; and of this I am quite convinced, that an impression upon her heart, once made, will never be obliterated.'

'Well, my dear, enthusiastic sister, time is said to prove the constancy of faithful love.'

'William,' she said, 'will you answer me one question, sincerely and confidentially—for you know me too well to believe that I ever would betray your confidence—do you love Blanche as a sister only?'

'Until this night, dear Cousin, I believed I did regard her in that light only; but now, my feelings have undergone a change—would that they never had!'

'Why say this, my own darling brother, and in so sad a tone?'

'Because from this hour they must be suppressed, if not extinguished. What! Will Beauchamp a fortune hunter! never,' he replied with emphasis; 'perish the thought!'

'And perish thus,' added Constance, 'the happy dreams, the brightening hopes of that dear confiding girl, who thinks she has found a responding pulse to her own feelings in the breast of Will Beauchamp.'

'Constance,' exclaimed her brother in surprise, 'what does it mean?'

'Simply this, William; I know the language of the eyes, the looks of love; and if the latter were not exhibited to me this night by Blanche Douglas, when Markham spoke of your quarrel with Lord Mervyn, I know nothing nothing of womankind.'

'Oh, say not so, Constance.'

'It is said and done,' she replied; 'the die is cast: the happiness or misery of her you love now rests in your keeping, to whom she has intrusted, though not yet revealed, her life's dearest treasure. Now, William, we are just at home; and remember, the conversation we have had this evening must never escape your lips, even to our nearest and dearest friends.'

'Of that there is little fear; honor and delicacy will keep my lips hermetically sealed on this subject; but beware, my dear Constance, you do not compromise your brother.'

'As soon, dear William, should I compromise myself.'

Mr. Beauchamp and Sir Francis had retired to rest before the return of William and his sister, but Miss Raymond awaited in the drawing-room, in the expectation of receiving a true and particular account of that evening's proceedings.

The appointment for the next morning having been advertised for Barton Court, the seat of Sir Lionel Markham, the worthy baronet threw open his doors to all comers, a substantial breakfast being laid out for their discussion; after which, punctual to the time, half past ten, Charley made his appearance with the pack, which soon after trotted off to the home wood, where an abundance of foxes was provided for their entertainment. The multiplicity of these animals, however, proved a bar to much sport, from their continual interference with each other's business; but after an hour's rattling work in covert, one of these gentlemen of the brush thought to sneak quietly away from the din ringing in his ears; and, taking advantage of a hedge-row to screen him from observation, faced the open. Charley's quick eye detected his foe slinking along, until, jumping the fence two fields off, he gave one hasty look behind him, and then disappeared. 'Ah, old fellow, you think you've done the trick cleverly? just the ticket, namesake,' he was muttering to himself, when an old master of harriers came up.

'Well, Charley, just in my way this—round and round.'

'Yes, sir, we have had enough of that fun, and now you shall have something in ours; when, putting his fingers to his ear, he sent forth a scream, which nearly unhorsed the thistle whipper.

'Gone away!' screamed Charley again.

...you had better adopt skins and juck-boots at once.'

'I have done it already, daddy dear!' she replied, laughing, and patting her boot with her riding-whip.

'Oh, you hoiden!' laughed Sir Lionel, 'what next?'

'Don't exactly know, papa, after riding over Dick Vernon, his horse, and a five-barred gate at one swoop.'

'The devil she did!' remarked Sir Francis; 'that beats Leicestershire hollow.'

'And a demmed scurvy trick to play a fellow who was politely stooping to open the gate for you,' put in the Captain.

'Think so, Ned? 'pon honor, eh! Now for a scamper on the open; come on, Will Beauchamp, while my blood is up!' saying which, she cantered off towards the downs.

Before throwing the hounds into the gorse, at Will Beauchamp's request, the horsemen ranged themselves in line, to prevent the fox breaking towards the valley, an extent of open downs stretching for several miles in the opposite direction. A brace of foxes were on foot directly, one breaking through the horsemen, with the body of the pack upon his scent, and just emerging from the gorse, where a rat from Charley stopped them in a moment, and they were immediately capped by William Beauchamp on to the line of the other, which had gone straight away at the right point.

'Hold hard one minute, gentlemen!' shouted Beauchamp; 'let them get their heads well down first, then ride as hard as you please.' But none heeded him, every man going off at score, and leaving the hounds to get together as they could, threading their way with inconceivable dexterity through nearly two hundred horses, without a hound being disabled. The pack got together like a flash of lightning, and took up the running at such a terrific pace, that in a few minutes they were clear away from all interference, the hardest riders being unable to live with them. In five minutes more, in ascending some rising ground, the hounds fairly beat every horse, and in another five minutes they run into their fox on the open down, not an individual being within a mile of them at the finish.

Sir Francis and Will Beauchamp rode side by side through the burst. 'Well, Sir Francis,' remarked the latter, 'they are putting their best legs foremost now, and beating us hollow.'

'Gad, Beauchamp! they are flying instead of running. I never could have believed it possible those big, bony hounds could slip away in that fashion.'

'Power and speed together, Sir Francis,' replied Beauchamp; 'that has been our object in breeding hounds.'

'And that you have succeeded to the utmost, no man can doubt who rides after them to-day,' rejoined his companion.

The delight of Mr. Beauchamp, senior, when arriving on the scene, may be more easily imagined than described. Pulling off his hat, and wiping the perspiration trickling from his head down to his neckcloth, 'Well, Burnett,' he asked, puffing and blowing from exertion, 'does this suit you?'

'Yes, my old friend, although a trifle too fast.'

'Glad to hear you are pleased at last—said they couldn't run away from you—what d'ye think now, Burnett?'

'Beaten, sir, beaten, I confess. By Jove! sir, this is Newmarket work.'

'Ay, Burnett, and I'll back five or ten couple of those hounds against any Newmarket horse of the present day, over six miles of turf.'

'And I believe,' added Sir Francis, 'you would win the wager.'

Selina and Constance, in company with Bob Conyers, now reached the spot, the last ceremonies being delayed until their arrival, when Beauchamp presented the brush to Miss Markham, saying the fox had been selected for the ladies' especial amusement, and hoped they had enjoyed their gallop.

'You entered beautifully for the petticoats, William Beauchamp, and we never enjoyed such a gallop before; have we, Constance?'

'We think of travelling in that direction,' replied the master huntsman, 'seeing we are now eighteen miles from the kennels.'

'Of course you do,' added Bob Conyers; 'I'd never risk the spoiling such a day's sport as this by drawing again. There are some fellows who hunt by the day, and don't know what to do with themselves until the day is over; which puts me in mind of an answer given by Lord Mervyn to a gentleman who asked him for a day's shooting. 'Not an hour's sir,' was the reply, and a fair rebuke; for a good shot in half an hour would bag more game in my lord's preserves than he could within a week in common shooting. Sport cannot be measured by time; that's my idea of it.'

'And a very correct one, Bob,' replied Sir Francis. 'I have enjoyed these fifteen minutes over the turf at this splitting pace, more—ten times more—than I should the longest woodland run.'

'Come along then, Burnett,' exclaimed Mr. Beauchamp, and their horses heads were turned homewards. As the squire moved off, Sir Lionel shouted, 'Mind you dine with us to-morrow, Beauchamp, with Will and Constance.'

'Not likely to forget that, Markham,' was the response.

On their ride home they met Newman Butler galloping towards them, puffing and blowing like a grampus.

'Eh! well! Will Beauchamp, what have you done with him?' inquired the master of the harriers.

'Carrying him home, Newman,' pointing to the hounds with his whip.

'Ah, indeed! too fast for old Foreman—couldn't hold the pace; obliged to give in.'

'You are not singular, Newman,' replied Will Beauchamp; 'scores of others were told off as well as yourself, and are riding at this moment dispersed over the downs.'

#### CHAPTER V.

The dinner party at Barton Court the next evening consisted of nearly the same individuals we have before described as dining at Mr. Harcourt's, with the exception of Lord Mervyn's family, who sent excuses, in whose places we must substitute Newman Butler and Mr. Compton, of Brockley Park (the other member for that division of the county, also a great game preserver), with Mrs. Compton, a remarkably fine, handsome woman of about five-and-thirty, who had presented him with a goodly array of young olive branches around his table, the eldest of whom, a boy of fourteen, was then at Eton.

Under the presidency of Sir Lionel, at his own festive board, backed by the old squire of Bampton, formality was obliged to throw off her cold, freezing aspect, and even Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt thawed under the genial influence induced by the warm-hearted and jovial hospitality of the old baronet, now in his seventieth year, whose still tall, stately form, measuring over six feet in height, and fine open countenance, beaming with hilarity and good humor, presented the beau ideal of a true English gentleman, 'one of the olden time.' The squire of Bampton, although not so tall as his friend and contemporary, was cast nearly in the same mould, and very closely resembled Sir Lionel in disposition also.

Notwithstanding the tendency in this ill-assuming age to detract from the manners and merits of the old school of *squirearchy*, it would be well did the rising generation resemble more in essential points that which has passed away. What are the forward, flippant manners of the young men of the present day, and especially their pert behaviour to ladies, in comparison with the refined, respectful, and courtly demeanor of their fathers? The antics and airs of apes, or of a linen-draper's assistant, without even his politeness, instead of the conduct and bearing of gentlemen; and their language and conversation with ladies, what are they but a positive insult to any woman of chaste ideas?

To be Continued.