

for without Mrs. Harcourt's consent, I cannot claim your hand until two long years have elapsed, and how many things may happen in that time to dash the cup of happiness from my lips."

"Nah, William, but the hand of death can ever prevent me fulfilling my engagement, although I fear you will never believe me sincere in this oft expressed determination. Oh, would that you could read every secret feeling of my heart, which beats for you only! Indeed, indeed, dear William, your doubts and suspicions make me very miserable, for three long weeks, day after day, hour after hour, I sat wondering why you never came, watching and hoping that the sound of every horse I heard approaching might be yours. Oh, had you come as usual, I had been spared that unpleasant scene with Lord Danby, and you the agony of believing for one moment that I could prefer him or any other human being to yourself."

"Dear dear Blanche, pray spare me those bitter recollections which my past conduct calls up; but, indeed, I could not help thinking, from what occurred at the ball, and afterwards at Barton Court, when you were sitting so long with Lord Danby, and so evidently pleased with his society, that his attentions must be most agreeable to you; and it was on that account solely, and least my presence might influence you, or deter him from an expression of his sentiments, that I absented myself so long from the Priory."

"Well, dear William, you do not now, I hope, believe that I ever intended anything more than common civility to Lord Danby; but to convince you of my unswerving attachment to yourself, here is a little present which I had purchased expressly for your own hand"—producing a beautiful diamond ring, with a small lock of her hair inside—"and which you must wear as a symbol of my love. Come, give me your hand—I shall place it myself on your finger, and when I cease to be your own dear Blanche, as you so often call me, then return this ring to me again."

"That you will never cease to be to me, my own sweet girl," pressing her to his heart; "and now, dear Blanche, see that I also had prepared a similar present for yourself, which I had intended giving you after the hunt ball; and now I must examine which finger it will fit best."

"Place it where you would my wedding-ring, dear William; and now, with my hand in yours, by that token I pledge my faith to you. Dear William, will that pledged promise satisfy your jealous, unjust suspicions? and will you from this hour promise never to doubt more your own dear Blanche?"

"Yes, dear girl, that promise I give most cheerfully, and trust to observe most faithfully; but, believe me, without any desire to extenuate my own conduct, true, devoted affection cannot exist without some jealousy; and now tell me, were I to pay great attention to any pretty girl by dancing with her two or three times on the same night, and sitting with her apart from the other company, when meeting at dinner or other parties—were I also, in addition to these little acts of attention, to be frequently calling at her father's house, and monopolising her society as much as I conveniently could—would you not, dear girl, experience some little uneasy sensations at my conduct, and begin with good cause to doubt the sincerity of my professed undivided regard for yourself?"

"Unquestionably I should, William; but with a full knowledge of your meaning, and seeing how you intend to apply it, the case between us is not exactly parallel. Gentlemen have the option of paying any such attentions, which ladies have not the option of declining sometimes, without apparent rudeness, and where no necessity exists for showing it, particularly to those whose behavior is courteous and their society agreeable; but surely, my dear William, there is a wide distinction between being pleased with a

never encouraging flirtations with men of this description."

"So you really can repose some little confidence in me after all your lecturing, Mr. William?"

"Yes, Blanche, I do, indeed, believe you incapable of wilfully misleading any one; and as you know the happiness or misery of my future life now rests in your keeping, you will not, I am convinced, think lightly of that trust which from this hour is so implicitly confided in you; and if I am a little jealous sometimes, set it down to the right account—my sole, undivided love and anxious solicitude about one who is, and ever must be, far dearer to me than my own life. And now, dear girl, let us return to Aunt Gordon, who, I dare say, begins to think we have been a most unreasonable time love-making this morning."

"Well, children," remarked that lady, "your delightful little topic appears quite inexhaustible."

"My dear aunt," replied Blanche, laughing, "you are greatly deceived in thinking William has been talking love to me all this time, whereas he has been giving me a most severe lecture on flirtation; in fact, dear aunt, his speeches are often the reverse of romantic, pathetic, or even complimentary."

"So much the better, my love; it is the greatest proof that he has formed a high and true estimate of your own good sense. The silly trash talked by most lovers is perfectly sickening, and I never thought William would pour into your ears such fulsome, unmeaning stuff, which even a child of twelve years old might feel ashamed of listening to."

"There is no fear of that, dear aunt; only just give him a hint not to lecture me quite so much for the future."

"Return the compliment, my love, as he requires some sharp admonitions on his weak point—jealousy. And now, I want you both to assist me in the conservatory."

## CHAPTER XXV.

On the morning of the trial, the court was crowded to excess by well-dressed persons of both sexes, attracted by the novelty of the case and the strong feeling excited in the neighborhood against the perpetrators of this daring outrage. Lord Vancourt did not, of course, appear, being still on his travels, nobody knew where, not even Lord Mervyn; but one of the leading counsel was employed (everybody said by his lordship, *sub rosa*) to defend his two underkeepers or night watchers, who had remained prisoners ever since the commission of the offence; the wounded man, now in a fair way of recovery, having turned king's evidence. One of the most talented as well as gentlemanly men at the bar, named Whalley, had been retained by Malcolm to conduct the prosecution; the sharp-witted, brow-beating Sergeant Wrangler appeared for the defence.

Mr. Whalley, in his opening address to the jury commented in severe terms upon the monstrous nature of the offence, by which the lives of two persons had been nearly sacrificed, characterizing it also as one of the most violent, wanton, and disgraceful outrages attempted by any man professing to be a gentleman.

The first person called to prove the assault and attempted abduction was Blanche Douglas, who entered the court attended by her aunt Gordon and Lord Malcolm; and her counsel, pitying her extreme agitation on entering the witness-box, merely asked a few questions as to Lord Vancourt's attempts to drag her from the carriage, and her previous rejection of his addresses. Having thanked her for her replies, Mr. Whalley said it was unnecessary for him to trouble her further, and was resuming his seat, when Sergeant Wrangler immediately rose, and addressing poor Blanche, who was turning to leave her unpleasant position, apologised in the blandest manner, and in the softest tones he

Wrangler, no wise disconcerted by this rebuke. "I can easily obtain my point in another way."

This little altercation had opened Blanche's eyes and understanding as to what Mr. Sergeant Wrangler was aiming at; and the spirit of the Douglases came to her rescue, to retort upon her crafty interrogator.

"You were in the habit, Miss Douglas, I believe, when at Marston Castle, of frequently driving and walking alone with Lord Vancourt?"

"No, I was not," answered Blanche, in a firm voice, which was distinctly audible in the court.

"Bravo! Miss Blanche," shouted a voice from the crowd near the door; "give it the rascally lawyer in turn."

"I beg pardon, Miss Douglas," continued her tormentor; "but we have evidence to prove you were seen several times walking alone with his lordship."

"Twice only—when invited to take a walk by Miss Mervyn, I was left alone, as I believed, purposely, to Lord Vancourt's attentions, which being disagreeable to me, I never again accompanied Miss Mervyn in her walks."

"Still, Miss Douglas, notwithstanding Lord Vancourt's attentions being, as you state, so disagreeable, you accepted him as a partner at the Cherrington Ball, not for one only, but for two quadrilles; and dancing twice the same evening with the same partner is generally considered a very particular favor."

"I accepted Lord Vancourt for the second dance in obedience to my aunt Mrs. Harcourt's commands, and most certainly contrary to my own inclination, being previously engaged to Major Hammond for that set."

"Well, Miss Douglas, we, who cannot enter into the fancies and feelings of young ladies, must judge by their acts; and I should certainly consider it an act of encouragement in any lady accepting me twice for a partner. Mamas and aunts are very convenient personages sometimes to fall back upon."

Blanche feeling too indignant to make any reply to this impertinent insinuation, Sergeant Wrangler, with another significant look at the jury, proceeded—

"It was only two days after this ball at Cherrington, when you danced twice with him, that Lord Vancourt wrote a formal proposal for your hand, Miss Douglas; and I can scarcely imagine that his lordship, a thorough man of the world, moving in the highest circles, well acquainted with the etiquette and forms generally observed on such occasions, and, as you admit, most courteous and deferential to ladies—neither forward nor presuming—would have committed such an act of folly as making a proposal for a young lady, unless fully satisfied in his own mind that he had good grounds for believing his offer would be accepted."

"I never gave Lord Vancourt," replied Blanche, indignantly, "the slightest encouragement in any way, having taken a dislike to him from the first; but, as an acquaintance of my Aunt Harcourt, I could not behave rudely to him whilst I was living under her protection at Throesby."

"Oh! of course not, Miss Douglas!" added Wrangler, with a sneer. "The letter addressed to your guardian, Mr. Harcourt, by Lord Vancourt, containing the proposal, was, I presume, submitted to your perusal, and the answer which was returned?"

"No, sir. I neither saw nor knew the contents of the letter written by my guardian in reply; but, when asked by my aunt what answer should be returned, I told her most distinctly that nothing should ever induce me to accept the addresses of Lord Vancourt."

"Very strange, Miss Douglas, when Mr. Harcourt's letter appears to me to warrant our arriving at a very opposite conclusion."

"I shall prove, sir," exclaimed Mr. Whalley, suddenly starting up, "by another witness, that Miss Douglas did, positively and unconditionally, refuse Lord Vancourt's proposals; and also the base, malicious plot

"Was he very particular in his attentions to your young lady, Miss Douglas?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Did she ever go out walking or driving with him alone?"

"No, sir; Miss Blanche would never dream of doing such a thing with a stranger."

"With whom then did she generally set out for a walk?"

"With Miss Mervyn, sir, accompanied sometimes by Lord Vancourt and Mr. Vernon."

"Did Miss Douglas ever allude to these walks on returning to her room?"

"Yes, sir; the day before we left the Castle, she told me she felt so annoyed by Miss Mervyn and Mr. Vernon's conduct, in leaving her purposely, as she believed, twice alone with Lord Vancourt, that she would never walk with her again."

"Did she keep to this resolution?"

"Yes, sir; the next morning, when Miss Mervyn entered her room, asking her to walk, she pleaded a bad headache, and would not go down-stairs till Mrs. Harcourt's carriage came to the door to take us home."

"Did Miss Douglas ever make any other remarks to you about Lord Vancourt?"

"She said, the night before she quitted Marston Castle, that she was very glad their visit was finished; that although entertaining sometimes, she had taken a great dislike to Lord Vancourt, and hoped never to meet him again."

"Do you remember anything particular occurring two days after the ball at Cherrington?"

"Yes, sir; after luncheon, Miss Blanche on that day ran up to her room, and began sobbing and crying as if her heart would break, because Mrs. Harcourt called her an ungrateful girl for refusing Lord Vancourt; 'but I could not marry such a man, Alice; indeed, I never would,' she said, 'if Aunt Harcourt turned me out of her house for refusing him.' 'No more wouldn't I, my dear young mistress,' said I, 'even to be made a lady of!' Then, the next morning, over comes Mrs. Gordon, and orders me to pack up her things directly, as Miss Blanche shouldn't stop another hour at Throesby, to be worried about that good-for-nothing man, Lord Vancourt, who, I heard her tell Mrs. Harcourt, was no better than he should be."

"Well, Alice," interposed Mr. Whalley, "that will do; now tell me what happened on the night you left the Priory to return to Throesby?"

Alice having related all the adventures on that occasion, with some comments of her own, was then asked if she could positively swear to Lord Vancourt being the man who attempted to drag her mistress from the carriage; and on this point being most positive, Mr. Whalley said he need not detain her any longer, and Sergeant Wrangler prudently declined preventing her standing down from the witness-box.

Robert Conyers, examined by Mr. Whalley:—

"How long have you known Miss Douglas?"

"Since childhood."

"Have you had any opportunities of knowing her true character and disposition?"

"Very many—having narrowly observed her, from being on very intimate terms with her relatives; and for the last two years she has been more immediately under my own eye, from my instructing her in riding."

"What has been your opinion of her, Mr. Conyers?"

"She has ever been a timid, gentle girl, of a very affectionate but retiring disposition, with strong religious principles."

"You were aware, I believe, of Lord Vancourt being invited to Marston Castle, and Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt being asked to spend a few days there at the same time, with their ward, Miss Douglas?"

"I was, sir; and two days previously to their leaving Throesby, I warned Miss Doug-

tion you try in vain to obtain, that she was a silly girl, caught at first sight by the hazel eyes of some person of this man, and despising all the warnings she had received of his true character, want of fortune, and lastly, of his actually being a married man; why, who on earth should induce her to clope with him—her guardian consenting to his proposal for Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt, blind to the revelations made to them, persisted to do last in taking his lordship's part, and the lady almost insisted on her niece marrying him. With these facts clear before you, can you hope to persuade a child of ten years old, much less twelve men of common sense, that there existed any pretence whatever by Miss Douglas consenting to run away with Lord Vancourt, nearly four hundred miles, to be married, when she could have been married at the parish church with her guardian's approval? This is all nonsense, Mr. Sergeant Wrangler, perfectly absurd; and you are wasting the time of the court to no purpose."

"Such is not my opinion, Mr. Conyers, but I do not wish to occupy more of your time, which seems so precious to you; and to be favored with another long-winded oration, which I have in vain attempted to interrupt."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Thomas Carter next deposed to the conversation he overheard between Vernon and Harley on the evening of the day on which the hounds met at Marston Castle, and having given his evidence, was turning to go down, when Sergeant Wrangler exclaimed—"Stop, Mr. Carter, I have a word or two to say to you. So, you audacious traitor and eavesdropper, you have had the assurance to swear that you heard all this trumped-up story through a thick mabogany door?"

"Yes, sir, I did—every word of it."

"Then you were in the habit, I conclude, of always listening at doors, to take some news into the servants' hall?"

"No, sir, I never did it before or since; but hearing the young squire's name mentioned in a loud, angry tone by Mr. Vernon, I thought some mischief was brewing against him, and so stopped to hear what it was."

"And now you are in Lord Malcolm's service, you have determined to make out this cock-and-bull story, which you think sensible men, like the gentlemen of the jury, will believe from a discharged, worthless servant like yourself, who couldn't get a character from your last place."

"I was not discharged, sir, from Lord Mervyn's service, but gave warning to leave, and never asked his lordship for a character."

"No, I should think not, Thomas Carter, as you know well enough you had not the remotest chance of getting one."

"My character is as good as yours, retorted Carter, 'any day in the week.'"

"Get down out of the box, you impudent liar, almost screamed Wrangler; 'I won't condescend to ask you another question.'"

William Beauchamp was then called, who related in a clear, straightforward manner all that passed under his observation on the night of the attempted abduction, for which, having been thanked by Mr. Whalley, he was then addressed by the Sergeant.

"Pray, Mr. Beauchamp, will you oblige me by stating from whom you obtained the information which directed you to Marston Common on that night?"

"That question, sir," replied Beauchamp, "I believe you cannot legally insist on my answering, although I should not hesitate giving a reply to any other counsel except Sergeant Wrangler."

"And why not to me, Mr. Beauchamp?"

To be Continued.