

It was an unjust one. Cannot this creature be punished for her audacity in attempting such a fraud?"

Percy raised himself from the couch on which he had been lying. "I don't feel up to you wrangle this morning, so I'll go; but in future, Ida, I'll thank you to speak with more respect of a young girl, who, in many virtues—in Christian charity and forbearance, for instance—is vastly your superior!"

Her ladyship's bright eyes were full of angry tears as she turned them towards her cousin.

"You see to what length Percy's infatuation has carried him. He actually insults me with a most degrading comparison! I repeat that this bad creature ought to be punished. Don't you agree with me?"

"I must first be convinced that fraud has been attempted," Darcy gravely told her; "and secondly, that Lestello has participated in it."

She looked dissatisfied. "You are, as papa says, too chivalrous. Then, if the suit is dropped, you will not take any more notice of the authors of this annoyance?"

Darcy hesitated. "I must think seriously before I come to any decision. I must consult my uncle. In fact, I cannot rest until I know why the claim is not to be prosecuted."

"Is not the reason patent to every one?" Ida demanded with impatience. "This woman and her advisors are evidently afraid to pursue their nefarious schemes any further. Don't you see this? Is it possible that Percy has infected you with his folly?"

"If it be a folly to judge less harshly of the young girl we call Lestello than you have been doing, I must answer yes!"

Ida grew crimson with indignation. "You offend me deeply when you uphold the vile cause of so much sorrow to my parents. You are the last person who should view her conduct so leniently. I am obliged to fear that there is some truth in the reports that have reached me concerning you."

"Who is your informant, Ida, and what sins have been laid to my charge?" he queried, with equal warmth.

"I should be sorry to repeat all I have heard," she answered, with an air of dignified displeasure. "It is enough that you have abetted Percy in his insults, and named the odious Lestello in my presence."

"Insults, Ida! I must beg of you to use more temperate language."

"Towards you, or the lady whose cause you espouse so warmly?"

"Towards both; for I think both Lestello and myself deserve gentler usage at your hands."

"If I am to be constantly teased in this manner," said the young lady, now losing her temper altogether, "our engagement had better cease. I have been exposed to so much unpleasant remarks already, through the postponement of our marriage, that I don't feel disposed to submit to additional mortifications."

At this moment, Mrs. Lavington came into the room for a book for the Countess, and perceiving the flushed faces of the young couple, she paused.

"You are not quarrelling, are you, you naughty children?"

"I never quarrel," said Ida, coldly.

"And you, Mr. Lesmere—are you equally peaceable?"

It was not with the best of grace that Darcy replied, "I hope so."

"Then let me see you shake hands before I go back to the Countess. Except match-making, there's nothing I like better than reconciling lovers," cried the vivacious widow.

"Don't be ridiculous!" said Lady Ida, snatching away the hand Mrs. Lavington tried to put into Darcy's. "I prefer to tell my cousin in your presence, that until this claim has been entirely set at rest, and its advisors severely punished, I shall consider our engagement void."

Mrs. Lavington looked uneasy, for she knew how entirely the Earl's heart was set on the match, and she whispered something to that effect in Ida's ear, which that young lady answered aloud.

"Papa will have no right to be angry with me for refusing to unite myself to a gentleman who shows so little consideration for me as to laud a low-minded actress in my presence."

"Lestello is not low-minded," said Darcy, controlling his wrath as well as he could.

Lady Ida turned from him with a disdainful gesture. "You hear this, Mrs. Lavington? My chivalrous cousin, secure, I suppose, of my affections, does not scruple to defend himself, and sees no shame in being on terms of intimacy with one whom I blush to be obliged to name."

Darcy was now fairly roused.

"You speak in ignorance of the truth, or you could not say these unwomanly things. I tell you, as Percy has told you repeatedly, that you belle Lestello whom you call her vile. She is as pure and good as yourself."

"She is of no birth; she is an actress and an impostor," Ida sullenly repeated.

"The latter term does not apply to her," said Darcy, with generous warmth; "and for the rest, I could tell you the names of many who have dignified their profession with pure lives and good deeds, although you use the word 'actress' as if it were a term of reproach! Low birth, did you say? Are you so proud of your wealth and rank, that you quite forget how we are all equal in the eyes of our Maker, workers and nobles, peasants and patricians? I tell you frankly, that these prejudices offend me. I never have and never will adopt them. I prize the good things that my position gives me—perhaps I never valued them more than now;

but I can also honor and esteem those who have been less favored than ourselves, and have to labor for their daily bread."

Ida heard his remonstrance unmoved.

"Your enthusiasm would be amusing if it were not carried to such extraordinary lengths. I hope you do not expect me to admire it?"

"Certainly not," he replied, "and I have been obliged to see that our likes and dislikes do not assimilate; but I have no desire to force mine upon you. I only entreat you to spare me the pain of hearing you allude to Lestello in terms which—I give you my honor—she does not merit. If you know—"

But here Ida interrupted him with a semblance of wounded delicacy. She had just remembered that this was not a subject a young lady, so carefully educated, should discuss.

"Excuse me, Mr. Lesmere; I would rather not hear any more. Nothing you could say would induce me to alter my opinion."

As this was conclusive he bowed and left her.

A rather garbled account of this quarrel was whispered to Percy by Mrs. Lavington as they sat at chess together in the evening; while the Marquis de Lechade leaned over Lady Ida's chair, and talked to her, *sotto voce*, at the other end of the room.

Percy made no comment upon the widow's report, but it troubled him; and when his sister came to his side to say good night, he put his arm round her and accompanied her to the ante-chamber.

"Ida, dear, I don't like to hear that you and Darcy are at variance. For my sake, make up this silly quarrel."

"I will not," she answered, resolutely; "at least, not while he plays the advocate for a creature I detest."

"A hatred which, if I remember rightly, dates back from the time that some of your schoolfellows pronounced her handsomer than you. Oh, Ida, I hoped you were superior to such petty malice!"

She colored angrily. "Nonsense! I liked her till I knew who she was; and she has amply revenged herself for any slights I put upon her then. First you are caught in her toils, and now Darcy."

"My dear little sister, why will you persist in believing that my acquaintance with Lestello originated through her desire to fascinate me? I had committed my worst follies before I knew her, and she came to me like an angel of goodness when I was overwhelmed with the consequences of my madness; aggravated as they were by another and still greater trouble, which not even her sympathy could alleviate."

"But you lavished hundreds upon her," his sister persisted.

"On the contrary, she devoted her own savings to releasing me from the clutches of a merciless debtor—this Wyatt Paulton—who seems to have us all in his clutches."

"In what manner?" asked Ida, curiously.

He kissed her with sorrowful tenderness. "I may not tell you. Be reconciled to Darcy, and let your marriage take place at once; if the worst comes to the worst, he has his mother's property, which will ensure him a certain income."

Ida's beautiful mouth took a dissatisfied curve.

"And I should have to be economical, and live in the country always! I love Darcy—that is, I love him better than any one else I have met with—but I could not support such a life, even for his sake; nor would I marry any man whose birth was not equal to my own."

"But what if there are troublous days at hand?" asked Percy, in lowered tones; "days in which no one could shield you from sorrow and shame as tenderly as Darcy would? You look incredulous; but, alas! Ida, I fear that this is but the first omen of an approaching storm. Before it is over you may wish yourself with me in the quiet grave!"

His impressive manner affected her.

"You are horrifying me with your wild sayings. Tell me more! I will know what you mean."

"Marry Darcy, and persuade him to take you abroad," was Percy's only reply. "And now good night. Think over what I have said, and let me recall our cousin."

But Ida clung to him, and would not be shaken off. With that importuneness to which the more gentle nature of her brother frequently succumbed, she refused to leave him till he had explained himself.

"You have told me too much, and yet too little. I will not rest till I know all! You refuse me! Then I will go to papa!"

"You must not do that, Ida," said Percy, agitatedly.

"Then satisfy my curiosity yourself!"

Wearied at length by her persistence, he murmured a few words in her ear, which meant the blood reeds from her cheek.

"It is false!" she gasped; "I will never, never believe it!"

He was silent, and, with a sob, she faltered, "Oh, Percy, is it—*is it true?*"

"I fear so."

She had unwound her arms from his neck, and stood steadily gazing at him, as if asking herself whether it were possible that he was deceiving her. She would have questioned him, but a step was heard approaching, and she hurried away.

It was the Earl, who had been writing in the library. He did not perceive Ida's rapid flight, for his eyes were fixed on vacancy, and he was muttering to himself the carefully prepared sentences of a speech which was to be spoken

in the House on the following evening. But his glance fell upon Percy, who was quietly retreating.

"My dear boy, you look terribly fatigued," he said, kindly. "Have you forgotten that your physicians advocate early hours?"

"I am going to bed directly, sir. Good night!"

"One moment, Percy. You have great influence with your cousin, I think?"

This was said inquiringly, and the answer was prompt.

"Darcy likes me much, but I should never be able to prevail with him to do anything that was against his conscience."

"Surely you would not try!" the Earl exclaimed, hastily. "Heaven forbid that either you or he should ever do anything that would embitter the future with vain regrets!"

They stood for a minute silent, and then his lordship added, with some hesitation, "Darcy is a noble fellow, and it grieves me to see his inheritance endangered. Can you not make some effort to free him from his unpleasant position? Will you see this girl, this Lestello—privately, of course—and ascertain what price she sets upon her forbearance."

"Darcy strenuously opposes such a course," Percy reminded his father.

"I know, I know; and my interference must be kept a secret from him until the affair is arranged. But he is my brother's son, and Ida's betrothed, and his interests are so dear to me that I cannot sit by and see him wronged."

"He will not be, sir. Lestello has already sent him an assurance that the legal proceedings shall be stayed."

Lord Glonaughton was evidently relieved.

"May we trust her, think you?—will she keep her word?"

"Trust Lestello? Undoubtedly you may," Percy replied, with so much fervor, that the Earl looked uneasy.

"They must marry at once—Darcy and Ida, I mean—and they shall take you with them to Italy. You'll not get well in this close city."

"Nor anywhere else, sir," the young man told him, emphatically, but his father would not hear this. He preferred to think, with the Countess's favorite physician, that he would regain his strength by-and-by; and almost angrily bidding him cease to forebode evil, he joined his lady and Mrs. Lavington in the drawing-room.

Two or three evenings after this, Percy, in defiance of the manager, who rigorously enforced the rule that no strangers were to be admitted behind the scenes, made his way to the door of Lestello's dressing-room. She came herself to know who was there, looking dazlingly beautiful in the costume of a sea-nymph, her long, dark hair and white arms fantastically wreathed with coral, and her skirts caught up with water lilies and feathery bunches of seaweed. But the rouge which gave her eyes such brilliancy did not wholly conceal the dark rings around them, nor the excessive paleness of her complexion, while the hand she put in Percy's burned with inward fever.

"You must not talk to me," she said, hurriedly; "I need all my strength to nerve me for my part."

"You are ill; I feel sure of it. Don't act tonight, Lestello; better disappoint the public than injure your health."

"I must act!" and snatching up her part, she was passing on without bidding him adieu, but he caught hold of her dress.

"I want to say five words to you. Why did you bid me tell Darcy what is not true? The suit is being carried on vigorously. The tenants on the Lesmere estate have received an injunction not to pay their rents."

Lestello listened to him with dismay; but the voice of the call-boy was heard, and she dared not linger except to say, "To-morrow, — you shall hear from me to-morrow!" and Percy, who felt unable to cope with the jostling of busy carpenters and supernumeraries, went home.

Wyett Paulton was a little startled by the wild face that confronted him at the close of the first act.

"You have been duping me again. The suit is not quashed. Oh, villain, villain! how dared you swear to me so falsely?"

"Who told you this?" he queried, evidently disconcerted.

"Percy Branceleigh; and so I know it to be true, for I can trust him."

"It is both true and false, as I will explain to you in the morning."

"I will not wait till then. Tell me at once, or I refuse to finish my part. Be quick; the bell will ring directly."

Wyett Paulton ground his teeth, and stamped his foot with vexation.

"Your self-will is intolerable. I did not say when I would stay the legal proceedings; but I tell you now that Darcy Lesmere is not safe till you have spoken your marriage-vows. As soon as you are my wife, I will—"

"You will laugh at the credulity that placed any reliance in your promises!" she impetuously interposed. "You do not love me well enough to relinquish the chance of winning a fortune because I wish it."

His color rose, and Mr. Paulton walked away, inwardly cursing the officiousness of Percy in revealing what he had intended to keep from her. But Lestello, who thought she saw the prospect of a reprieve, rallied her spirits, and sang with all her accustomed *verve* and sweetness.

"I will see you in the morning," the manager said, as he walked beside her to her carriage. His arm had been disdainfully rejected. "You

are, as usual, too hasty in your conclusions. I have good reasons for not dropping the suit yet."

"I do not doubt that," Lestello sarcastically commented.

"Good reasons," he repeated, his eyes flashing angrily. "But, in spite of your doubts, I shall keep my promise, and I shall hold you to yours."

"Darcy Lesmere must be insured from all risk of your breaking faith with me before I will consent to go to the altar," said Lestello, resolutely.

"He shall be. As you persist in doubting my word, I will sign an agreement to that effect; will that satisfy you?"

"I suppose it must," she sighed.

"And, hark ye, m'am; let me find you in a more conciliating mood when I call. At present, I am inclined to be civil and forbearing; but I may be goaded into merging my interests in revenge, and then not one of those proud Glonaughtons shall escape unscathed!"

"Lestello, he threatens me! I no longer dare oppose him!" moaned Lestello, when she reached home. "And you, who but yesterday soothed and flattered me with false hopes, sit here idly and do nothing! In three days I shall be his wife! Do you hear? In three days!"

"Be patient," said her friend, tenderly; "there is time yet." But the unhappy girl thrust her away impatiently.

Her fate was drawing very near, and turn which way she would, no help came in sight. How would it—how must it end?"

(To be continued.)

A NERVOUS TRAVELER.

Those of you who had the pleasure of living in the country four years ago, know how remarkably hot the weather was. Flies and wasps, bees and spiders, struggling for their lives in an ocean of tepid cream, tea-kettles boiling without being put on the fire, haystacks burning of their own accord—these were some of the horrors which characterized the summer of 1868.

But if England was hot, Russia was hotter. The temperature was often so high that India was left, speaking literally, in the shade. It was dangerous to venture out in the sun in the middle of the day; it was spontaneous liquefaction to put one foot before the other. When you tried to put your boots on, you found them full of beetles, which had gone there for the sake of a little shelter. When you had got them on, you called, with the little voice you had left, for two men and a boot jack to pull them off again. All the world stood still, or sat still, or lay still, and gave itself up to its fate. You had not the energy to abuse even the mosquito which perched itself on the end of your celestial nose. If you brushed it away, it returned in a moment or two with several lively friends, who converted your face into a battle field and dug trenches, soon to be filled with human gore and their own shattered remains. And so you may imagine that I found it no pleasant prospect, in the midst of these annoyances, to contemplate a railway journey from St. Petersburg to Berlin. Moreover, as I was just recovering from a severe illness—brought on by drinking incautiously some of the detestable river water—I was not in the most charming temper or in the highest spirits. Behold me, however, seated on a four wheeled dröcky, without springs, with a large trunk behind me, and a small hat box before me, speeding toward the railway station; the strong, wiry little Russian horses pulling with a will, in spite of the fierce glare of the sun; the driver uniting oaths, mingled with a strong odor of onions, Russian leather, sheep-skin, and stale tobacco; the passenger holding on for his life, of which he had not much left. At last the station is reached; porters rushed forward; away goes my luggage; away goes the dröcky on its return passage, the driver suspecting that change will be asked for.

There being only two trains during the day which run through to Berlin, you may imagine that they were usually well filled with passengers. After taking my ticket I took a survey of the compartments. They were all occupied. Just as I had decided upon going into one of them, which held four persons, I was asked in French, by a man evidently excited and hurried, whether this was the train for the Continent. I replied in the affirmative, and he, a friend of his, and myself, took our seats. The whistles sounded, and we start. Let me here explain to you the construction of the carriage, which differs from those of both England and America. A door opens in the middle of the side of the carriage. On entering this door you go straight forward for about a yard; to the right and left of you are two other passages, at the ends of each of them being a door. The doors open into compartments extending the whole width of the carriage, and capable of seating about eight persons each. Facing the main entrance is a small coupé to hold four people. You will understand then, that, supposing the middle compartments to be empty, persons occupying the two end compartments are separated from one another by two doors and a long passage—this renders it impossible to overhear what is said or done in either place. If you will keep this in mind, you will readily understand what I am about to relate to you. I examined my two companions over the top of a newspaper. One was a fair, tall, strongly built man, with moustache and beard; the other, dark, with rather the air of