

## Kate Coventry.

## CHAPTER VII.

(CONTINUED.)

'Well, let me see, Gilbert,' rejoined her ladyship. 'You'll see. He is to join our party at Greenwich this afternoon. By the way, when Sir Guy heard you were coming, he expected to drive us all down on that horrid coach, but I told him we should be taken for the people that usually occupy it, and nothing should induce me to go, so that plan was given up. But you and I will go down in the broughie, and I'll call for you, and we'll take Mr. Jones with us; and mind you're very civil to him, and only notice the other in a quiet, good-humoured way, for he mustn't think you do it out of pique, and before the whit-bait is on the table you'll see he'll be a different man. But now you must go—there's a dear. I'll call for you at five—it's too bad to turn you out, but I'm never at home to any one between three and half-past four. Good-bye, dear—good-bye.'

And Lady Scapegrace kissed me most affectionately and promised to call for me punctually at five, till which hour I cannot make out why her time was always engaged.

As I trooped down stairs, hoping to make my escape without being attended by the whole establishment to open the house door, whom should I come across but odious Sir Guy, in a sort of scarlet fancy dress, which I concluded was his morning 'demi-toilette.' He actually had the effrontery to propose that I should accompany him to the stable, and that he should then 'show me his bon-doir—how?' You look like a rose this morning, Miss Coventry, should like to transplant you—what? and while he stood dodging and grinning on the stairs, I managed to slip by him, and get safe into the street. I wonder when men think they are beginning to grow old; I am sure Sir Guy fancies he is still in the flower of his youth, and so charming that nobody can resist him.

What a pleasant day we had! Only we four,—Lady Scapegrace, Cousin John, Captain Lovell, and I. We went down in Lady Scapegrace's barouche, and walked in Greenwich Park, and adjourned to a nice room with a bay window, and such a look-out over the river, blushing rose colour in the evening sun. And the white-bait was so good, and the champagne cup so nice; and we were all in such spirits, and Frank was so kind, and attentive, and agreeable, I couldn't find it in my heart to be cross to him, so it ended in our making up my little imaginary difficulties we may have had, and becoming better friends than ever. As we sat in the balcony over the river—the two gentlemen smoking their after-dinner cigars, and we ladies sipping our coffee—I thought I had never enjoyed an evening so much, and even John, who was generally dreadfully afraid of Lady Scapegrace, became quite lively and gallant (for him), and they laughed and talked, and joked about all sorts of things, while Frank bent over my shoulder, and conversed more gravely than was his habit, and I listened, and thought him pleasant even than usual. By the way, that nice bonnet never quite lost the odour of tobacco afterwards.

'How quick the time passes!' said Frank, with almost a sigh. 'Can't we do anything to put off horrid London, and home, and bed? Let's all go to Vauxhall.'

'What do you say, Mr. Jones?' inquired Lady Scapegrace, who was always ready for a lark. 'Your dear chaperon, you know, do you think you can be responsible?'

'Oh yes, John,' I exclaimed. 'You promised to take me one before the end of the season; we shall never have such another chance.'

'This is a capital night to go,' remarked Frank, 'because there is a new riding-club, and you can take a horse, Miss

modified form, with great advantage, into good society; and here we came across Cousin John and Lady Scapegrace, just in time to witness a short and abrupt interview between the latter and Sir Guy. Yes—there was Sir Guy, with the flower in his mouth and all—dancing, actually dancing—and he can't be much less than sixty—with a little smart lady wearing the most brilliant color, and the blackest eyelashes, and the reddest lips, and the lightest eyes I ever saw upon a human being. The little lady—whose hair, moreover, was dressed à l'Impératrice, thereby imparting additional boldness to a countenance not remarkable for modesty—frisked and whisked round Sir Guy with a vivacity that must have been of Parisian growth; whilst the baronet labored ponderously along with true British determination, like a man who habitually wears very thick shoes, and is used to take his own time. In the course of his evolutions he brought his foot down heavily on the skirt of a lady's dress, and turning round to apologize found himself face to face with his wife! To do him justice he was not the least taken aback—anger rather than confusion seemed to be his dominant feeling; and although he tried to smother a rising oath in a laugh, or rather a grin, it was such a muscular contraction of the mouth as does not give me the idea of a smile.

'Come out for a lark, too, my lady—hey?' said the baronet, studiously interposing his large person between 'my lady' and his partner. 'Reminds one of Paris; dance with anybody, whether one knows them or not; and Sir Guy tried to look as if he was telling the truth, with indifferent success. But Lady Scapegrace's face was a perfect study; I never saw a countenance so expressive of scorn—intense scorn—and yet, as it seemed to me, not so much of him as of herself.

'I am glad you amuse yourself, Sir Guy, she said very quietly; but her lip was as white as ashes while she spoke. 'I should think this place must suit you exactly. Mr. Jones, we shall be late for the fireworks; and she swept on, taking no further notice of the discomfited Sir Guy, whilst Frank and I followed in her wake, feeling rather awkward even at witnessing this ill-timed *re-contre*.

'And so you leave town to-morrow, Miss Coventry?' said Frank; and I thought his voice shook a little whilst he spoke. 'I shall ride down Lowndes Street every day, and think how deserted it looks! No more walks in the morning for me—no more pleasant rides in the afternoons; I shall send my hackshome and sulk by myself, for I shall be miserable when my friends are gone. Do you know, Miss Coventry,—(I listened, all attention; how could I tell what he might not be going to say?)—do you know that I have never had courage to ask you something till to-night?'—(Goodness! I thought, now it's coming, and my heart beat as it does when I'm going out hunting)—'I want you to give me'—(a lock of my hair, thinks I; well! I don't know—perhaps I may)—'I want you to give me—Miss Horsingham's receipt for making barley-water; but I know it's a long business to write out, and I'm afraid of being troublesome.' So that was all I was it? I felt half-inclined to laugh, and more than half-inclined to cry; but turning round, I was somewhat consoled to find Lady Scapegrace and her cavalier close behind us; and I do confess, I rather attributed Frank's extremely moderate request to their immediate vicinity; there was no opportunity, however, of renewing the subject. John had said all he had to say to his companion; John soon gets high and dry with these smart ladies, and they seem mutually tired of each other; so we got the carriage, and took our departure. Frank pressing my hand as he bade me farewell, and whispering 'Au revoir, Miss Coventry; something tells me it won't be very long before we meet again.' What could he mean?

## CHAPTER VIII.

It was a melancholy walk to slide out of

'Hush, my dear,' said Aunt Deborah, 'there is no occasion for all this against John. After all, it is very natural, poor fellow, that he should feel aggrieved and annoyed; there's that Captain Lovell—I don't mean to say that he's not an agreeable, well-informed young man,—out there he is coming to see you at all hours—riding with you in the Park—whispering to you at the Opera—bringing you new music, and old china, and fresh flowers; and conducting himself altogether as if he was either your accepted suitor or mine—and I don't think the latter very likely, Kate; whereas, you know, John'—my aunt stopped short; the ringing of the bell, and loud exclamations of 'Trotter's Heath! Trotter's Heath! all out for Sheepshanks, Fleecyfold, and Market Middlebury!' announced that we had arrived at the Middlebury Junction; and the opportune entrance into the carriage of a stranger, who seemed extremely anxious concerning the safety of a brace of pointers that accompanied him, effectually prevented my aunt from proceeding with her discourse: while the dead silence which followed the renewed puffing of the engine, and the vibration of the train, gave me an opportunity of studying attentively the person and features of our new fellow-traveller.

I don't think I ever saw a man so freckled in my life; even the backs of his hands for he wore no gloves—I should think he didn't even know his number! were studded with spots, till you could hardly put a pin's point on a place free from this horrid disfigurement. His face, too, was like a plum-pudding, on which the fruit had been showered with a most liberal hand; but the features were good, and had it not been for his red hair, a little grizzled, and his stiff red whiskers, the bright blue eye and white teeth, would almost have entitled him to be considered 'handsome.' He had a strong stiff built figure, about the middle size, well made for everything but dancing; and large, useful feet encased in the stoniest double-soled shooting shoes. The latter articles of costume proved him at once to be a country gentleman. Every one must have remarked this peculiarity in that enviable class. Their attire, particularly as regards the lower man, is invariably of a nature to defy the utmost inclemency of the weather, and is worn totally irrespective of the season, or the pursuit in which the owner may chance to be engaged at the time. But even independent of these tall-tails, the stranger's social position was easily enough discerned by the deference with which he was treated 'along the line,' and the title of 'Squire,' which greeted him from guards, porters, and book-keepers at every station we passed.

So humane a master of dumb animals, or one so fit-gety as to their welfare, I never came across; and thus, I confess, prepossessed me in his favour. Every time the train stopped, out jumped our fellow-traveller, and off he went to a certain van containing his treasures, from which he emerged with a very red face, and a constantly repeated apology for disturbing me on his return to his seat. Despite of thick shies and his freckles, I could see the man was a gentleman; but, dear me! what a contrast to the smart-gentlemen I had lately been accustomed to meet! Beyond a 'Beg your pardon, I fear I'm very much in your way,' accompanied by such a vivid blush as can be performed only by a red-haired man, the Squire did not venture on any communication either with me or my aunt; and with the latter's lecture fresh in my mind, I did not, as may be supposed, dare to take the initiative by dropping my gloves, or pretending I couldn't pull up the window, or any other little ladylike manoeuvre which lays the foundation of a temporary intimacy, and often furnishes one with an agreeable hour's conversation. I can not see why one should sit 'mum' opposite the same persons for miles, merely because one has never been introduced.

When we arrived at length at the Dangerfield Station, where Lady Horsingham's cmbazoned coach and fat horses were in waiting for us, 'The Squire,' who was here treated with a deference bordering on idolatry, got out too. He made an involuntary mo-

cesses that are never thinned, to say nothing of that stagnant moat, with its sombre and prolific vegetation; whilst within, black oak wainscoting, and heavy tapestry, and winding staircases, and small deep-set windows, and oddly-shaped rooms, with steps at the door like going down into a bath, and floors considerably up and down hill, and queer recesses that frighten one out of one's wits to go into, form altogether a domicile that would tame the wildest merry-andrew, in a fortnight, into as staid and sober and stupid a personage as the veriest Lady Superior could desire. Aunt Horsingham received us as usual, with a freezing smile.

'How do you do, Kate?' said she, putting two of her cold bony fingers into my hand. 'I'm afraid you will find it rather dull here, after London; but it is wholesome for young people to be occasionally sobered a little.'

Aunt Horsingham is tall and thin, with a turn-up nose, rather red at the point, a back that never stoops, and a grim smile that never varies. She dresses in bright colours, affecting strange and startling contrasts, both of hues and material. Her hands are always cold, and seldom clean; and she has sundry uncomfortable notions about damping the spirits of youth, and checking the exuberance of its gaiety, which render her a perfect terror and bugbear to the rising generation. When I was a little thing, laughing, prattling, and giggling, as children will, an admonishing look from my aunt, with a gaunt finger held aloft, and a cold 'Kate, don't be silly, my dear,' was always sufficient to make me dull and gloomy for the rest of the day.

I should like to know, indeed, why children are not to be 'silly?' Are grown-up people always so rational in their amusements, or irreproachable in their demeanour? 'Let the child alone,' poor Uncle Harry used to say; and once I overheard him mutter, 'I've more patience with a young fool than an old one.' Such training has not had a good effect on Cousin Amelia. She has been so constantly tutored to conceal her emotions, and to adopt the carriage and manners of an automaton, that the girl is now a complete hypocrite. It is quite impossible to make her out. If you tickled her, I don't believe you could get her to laugh; and if you struck her, I very much doubt whether she would cry. My aunt calls it 'self command;' I call it 'imbecility.' She shook hands with me in her provokingly patronizing manner—'hoped I had brought my horses with me' (as if I was coming to spend months at Dangerfield without Brilliant!); 'supposed I had my side-saddle in the cap-box; and showed me my room, without so much as a single kind word of welcome or a casual caress. It was quite a relief to help dear Aunt Deborah to unpack her dressing-case and kiss her pleasant face, and give the warm cup of tea, without which Aunt Deborah never dreams of dressing for dinner.

Oh! those solemn, heavy, stupid dinners, with the massive plate, and the dark oak wainscoting and the servants gliding about like ghosts at a festival in Acheron—what a relief it would have been even to have had a clownish footman spill soup over one's dress, or ice-cream down one's back, or anything to break the monony of the entertainment. But no! there we sat, Aunt Horsingham remarking that the weather was dull, and the crops looking very unpromising; Aunt Deborah with her eyes fixed on a portrait of the late Mr. David Jones, as a boy, opposite which she invariably took her place, and on which, though representing an insignificant urchin in a high frill and a blue jacket, she gazed intently during the whole repast; Cousin Amelia looking at herself in the silver dish-covers, and when those were removed relapsing into a state of irritable torpor; and as for poor me—all I could do was to think over the pleasures of the past season, and dwell more than I should otherwise have done on the image of Frank Lovell, and the very agreeable acquisition he would have been to such a party. And then the evenings were, if possible, worse than the dinners—work, work, work—mum, mum, mum—till tea; and after tea Aunt Horsingham would read to us, in her dry

influence might have produced the most beneficial results. But, unfortunately, young Lady Horsingham had but one feeling for her lord, and that was intense terror of his anger. She never sought to win his confidence—she never entered into his political schemes, his deeper studies, or even his country amusements and pursuits; all she thought of was how to avoid offending Sir Hugh; and ere long this one idea grew to such a pitch that she quite trembled in his presence, could scarcely answer distinctly when he spoke to her, and seemed hardly to draw breath in freedom save when out of his sight. Such a state of things could have but one ending—distrust and suspicion on one side, unqualified aversion on the other. A marriage, never of inclination (as, indeed, in those days amongst great families few marriages were), became an insupportable slavery ere the first year of wedded life had elapsed; and by the time an heir was born to the house of Horsingham, probably there was no unhappier couple within fifty miles of Dangerfield than dark Sir Hugh and his pretty, fair-haired, gentle wife. No she ought never to have married him at all. It was but the night before her wedding that she walked in the garden of her father's old manor-house with a bright, open-hearted, handsome youth, whose brow wore that expression of acute agony which it is so pitiable to witness on a young countenance—that look almost of physical pain, which betokens how the iron has indeed 'entered the sufferer's soul.' 'Ah, you may plead, "Cousin Edward;" but we women are of a strange mixture, and the weakest of us may possess obstinacy such as no earthly consideration can overcome.' 'Lucy! Lucy! for the last time, think of it—for the love of Heaven, do not drive me mad—think of it once more—it is the last, last chance!' The speaker was as white as a sheet, and his hollow voice came in hoarse, inarticulate whispers, as he looked almost almost fiercely into that dear face to read his doom. Too well he knew the set, fixed expression of her delicate profile. She did not dare turn towards him; she could not have looked him in the face and persevered; but she kept her eyes fastened on the horizon, as though she saw her future in the fading sunset; and whilst her heart seemed turning to very stone, she kept her lips firmly closed; she repressed the tears that would have choked her, and so for that time she conquered.

Lucy had a great idea of duty; hers was no high-principled love of duty from the noblest motives, but a morbid dread of self-reproach. She had not character enough to do anything out of her own notions of the beaten track. She had promised her father she would marry Sir Hugh Horsingham—not that he had the slightest right to exact such a promise,—and she felt bound to fulfil it. She never remembered the injury she was doing 'Cousin Edward,' the right which such devotion as his ought to have given him. She knew she loved him better than any one in the world; she knew she was about to commit an act of the greatest injustice towards Sir Hugh; but she had 'promised papa,' and though she would have given worlds to avoid fulfilling her compact, she had not strength of mind to break the chain and be free.

'Cousin Edward! Cousin Edward! you should have carried her off then and there; she would have been truly grateful for the rest of her life, but she would have died sooner than open her lips. He was hurtless—almost savage. He thought he sullen: "Once more, Lucy," he said, and his eyes glared fiercely in the waning light—'once more, will you give me one word, or never set eyes on me again?' Her lip never moved. 'I give you till we pass that tree,—he looked dangerous now—and then—he swore a great oath—I leave you for ever!' Lucy thought the tree looked strange and ghastly in the rising moon; she even remarked a knot upon its smooth white stem; but she held out whilst she might have counted ten; and when she turned round, poor girl! Cousin Edward was gone.