

...settled in short, I am so disgusted with the Harcourt that I have sent for all my traps, and do not intend just yet, if ever again, to enter their house.

Quite right, Malcolm, replied Bob, 'it is the most shameful, disgraceful affair I have ever known, and no one will believe but that Harcourt and Mervyn had some concern in the plot; and my dear pet Blanche what a fate has she escaped with that d—d rascal! Melville says you served my lord out for it, however, Will, with a split nose and a broken arm. Gad! I should like to have seen you hit him off his legs, as Mark tells, like a mumpkin.

'I was mad enough to have killed him,' replied Beauchamp.

'And I wish you had,' interposed Malcolm, 'as he tried hard to murder you.'

'I am thankful no eyes are lost; and now I will go down till the governor is ready; but recollect, Malcolm, Blanche is now under your protection.'

'It is not likely I shall forget either her interest or yours, old fellow,' replied Malcolm; 'and I expect you to take care of Constance for me.'

'No fear of that,' was the reply, as the two friends and Conyers descended the staircase.

Mrs. Gordon was much vexed at hearing Beauchamp's intention to leave the Priory with his father, but on his motives being made known, she was constrained to admit their force, and a compromise was effected by Constance remaining in his place.

The rage of Lord Mervyn on the discovery of his daughter's elopement with Vernon would be difficult to describe. This agreeable piece of information was communicated to him at breakfast next morning, when the housemaid, entering the young lady's room to light the fire, found the bird had flown, and her bed had been unoccupied. She had pleaded a bad headache the night before, and retired with her maid about nine o'clock, when, immediately bolting the door, she descended the back staircase whilst the servants were at supper, and running across two fields, through which a pathway led to the high road, she was there met by Vernon with a carriage and horses all in readiness. The head-keeper also now acquainted his lordship with the capture of his three watchers, who had been employed by Lord Vancourt in assisting to carry off Miss Douglas. Lord Mervyn raged and stormed about the house like a madman, accusing his servants of connivance in his daughter's escape, and vowing vengeance on the whole household. He saw at a glance that pursuit would now, after the lapse of so many hours, be useless. He trayed, faked, and outwitted by Vernon, imprecations loud and deep were vented furiously on his head. The failure also of Vancourt, with the capture of his men, and the probable exposure to the world of his own participation in the contemplated flight of the heiress, drove him almost to frenzy. Again, to this succeeded the reflection that he had lent Lord Vancourt five hundred pounds, the preceding day, to aid in his flight which added fuel to the fire that was already scorching his very brain. In every breath he drew at a disgrace awaited him, and he rushed from the house, like a maniac, to cool his fevered and throbbing temples in the fresh air.

Not even a transient feeling of regret for his child dived a moment in his troubled breast, but anger only, and fierce, irritable rage against her and Vernon for the disgrace they had brought upon his name. Against Beauchamp, too, he vowed eternal hatred for seizing his man and defeating his plans.

From this monstrous inhuman shape we will turn to those more kindly feelings. Beauchamp, though his sufferings from the fatal shot and not much abated, felt unrelieved by a sense of duty and love to Blanche, to save her from further attempts at outrage, to attend the magistrates' meeting, where his evidence, with the confessions

would be severely punished for daring to leave their place on such an errand. This avowal he deemed necessary, to prove, as he expected, his entire ignorance of Lord Vancourt's intentions.

The next morning, Mrs. Gordon, with Blanche and Constance, drove over to Bampton, where they found Will Beauchamp lying on the sofa in the library. 'I am come over on purpose to give you a severe lecture, William,' said Aunt Gordon, 'for going yesterday to the magistrates' meeting, which, Mr. Gordon tells me, was a very imprudent act, and has increased the inflammation in your side. Indeed, if your father cannot keep you at home, I shall insist on taking you back to the Priory to see what I can do with such a wayward boy.'

'My dear aunt,' replied Beauchamp, 'my presence was absolutely necessary yesterday, or I should not have ventured out on so cold a day; but I will now be a good boy, and will remain in the house until my wound is healed.'

'Will you promise me to keep this resolution?'

'Yes, certainly, dear aunt, if it will afford you any satisfaction.'

'Very well, sir; and now, Constance, we will take off our bonnets, as I intend remaining here till after luncheon.'

As they were leaving the room, Beauchamp said, in what was intended for an injured tone, 'Blanche, you have not shaken hands with me; have I offended you?'

'Oh, no,' she replied, turning back and offering her hand; 'how could you think so, William?'

'Then I will not think so,' still holding her hand, 'if you will shut the door and sit with me a few minutes till Aunt Gordon returns.' A deep blush mantled in her cheek, and her eyes were cast towards the door, as if wishing to escape. 'Go, then, dear Blanche,' said Beauchamp; 'I read your thoughts—you would leave me; but why should you thus avoid me? Have I ever uttered one word in your presence offensive or repulsive to your feelings?'

'Oh, no, William, never; but I have been so nervous and agitated ever since that dreadful night.'

'That you fear to be left alone even with William Beauchamp; but there is another cause of dread, Blanche, from which I would release you, and if you will shut the door and sit with me only a few moments, that cause shall be explained. Don't fear me, dear girl, I will not presume on your confidence.'

Blanche, without saying another word, closed the door, and returned trembling to his side, sitting down on a chair near him.

'You fear being left alone with me, Blanche, because you apprehend a renewal of that subject, which from this day shall not again escape my lips. My poor father, the other night, in his excited state, placed your hand in mine, hoping and believing our love was mutual, and at the moment, no doubt, dear Blanche, your gratitude exercised a powerful influence over your feelings, but, dearly as I prize it, on such terms I could never accept the hand of Blanche Douglas. Gratitude must not be mistaken for love, and until such time as the excitement under which you then acted is entirely removed, I will not renew the subject nearest my heart—it would be ungenerous and unfair in me to do so. Moreover, you are young and inexperienced in the world, and I will not be so selfish as to fetter you with an engagement to myself before you have had a fair opportunity of judging whether, on mixing more in society, you could still prefer me to all others.'

'Then, William, said Blanche, sadly, 'you do not love me, as you have professed to do.'

'Not love you, my own dear, darling girl!' exclaimed Beauchamp, starting up and seizing her hand, 'dearer, fifty times dearer, than my own life do I love you, and you only; and here I vow that no other but this dear hand shall ever be joined with that of William Beauchamp. You are my first and only love—the only one of womankind who

recognized, these honest, kind-hearted fellows could not suppress their feelings of delight at her rescue from Lord Vancourt's cowardly attack; but see, Malcolm is now turning thanks.'

Lord Malcolm had just ridden up as the cheers subsided, and learning the cause spoke thus: 'Gentlemen, I thank you from my heart for your loudly expressed and, I am sure, warmly-felt congratulations on my cousin's escape from the dastardly attempt at her abduction by a cowardly and unprincipled scoundrel, which I have a hesitation in pronouncing Lord Vancourt to be—' ('Hear! hear!' shouted Stiles)—'I take this opportunity,' continued Malcolm, 'of stating here publicly, that so far from Miss Douglas being a willing participator in this vile plot (which has been insinuated by leading Radical paper in this county, that she would have preferred death to such a fate; and for myself, gentlemen, as one of her nearest and dearest relatives, I assert that I would rather have seen her consigned to the grave than married to such a man as Lord Vancourt.'

At the termination of this brief harangue during which a dead silence prevailed, a loud 'hurrah!' again burst forth, amid cries of 'Shame! shame!'

'Now, then,' Stiles vociferated, 'cheer more for Lord Malcolm and the young squire, with long lives and good wives to each both!' and another cheer, the strongest and loudest of all, echoed far and wide, making the very armor rattle in the old oak hall.

'Eh! 'pon honor!' exclaimed Captain Markham, who was pouring out some cherry brandy, 'those fellows make the very glasset dance on the table. Demmit, Bob, I wish you would stop their brazen throats; we shall have the old building about our ears like the walls of Jericho.'

'Ha! ha! not bad for you, Markham said Conyers; 'but these fellows are intent on propping up, not pulling down, the House of Beauchamp; let them cheer on, and I only hope the sound of their sweet voices may be borne on the breeze to Market Castle.'

Whilst the old squire and Bob Conyers were doing the honors at the breakfast table to a large party of visitors, Mark, with the underlings about the place, was occupied distributing strong beer and stout to the assemblage on the lawn, making every man who quaffed the contents of the black jack drink to the health of the young squire.

The drawing-room also was filled with ladies who had driven over to see the generally large attendance when the fixture was made for Bampton House, and, on this occasion, many more attended from curiosity, to hear from Will Beauchamp and Constance a true account of Lord Vancourt's attempt at the heiress. As Beauchamp entered the room, Selina Markham rushed forward to seize his hand, exclaiming, 'Will, Will, you are not such a sawney as I thought—and you gave my friend looknoose a good drubbing, I hear, and split his beautiful legs for him?—this is charming news, 'pon honor, but eh! aw! the thief has paled your face, Will Beauchamp—this is as bad as a fall over a five-barred gate, with a broken rib.'

'Not quite, Selina; I shall be all right again in a few days.'

'Mind you are, Master Will, as we are to have a hop next week to a fiddle and fute, and I shall parade you on that night as the champion of the Light Weights. Ned says you are a demned plucky young fellow, and ought to be in the Life Guards.'

'Much obliged for the compliment, Selina, although in time of peace a fox hunter's life is more exciting and perilous than a soldier's.'

The hounds now appeared, and were looking eagerly about, in expectation of seeing their young master. 'Oh, what a beautiful sight,' exclaimed Blanche, who was standing with Mrs. Gordon and Beauchamp at one of the windows; 'what handsome dogs.'

To be Continued.

CHAPTER XVI.

The breaking up of the frost, the same evening, set the fox-hunters once more in motion, and the first open day being as usual advertised for the kennels, a large assemblage of sportsmen mustered at Bampton, where genuine hospitality always awaited them, and sincere congratulations were offered to the old squire on his son's narrow escape. The farmers especially, when William Beauchamp walked out on the lawn among them, pressed round him, all eager to shake hands and testify their almost unbounded delight in having their favorite restored to them.

'Ah, squire,' exclaimed Farmer Stiles, 'it made my heart nearly jump up into my mouth when John Gubbins brought the news, the next morning, that you were shot and lying at the Priory—it hit me up all of a heap, squire, and I shook and trembled like an aspen tree. Why, master,' said John, 'what's the matter with ye? you do look flabbergasted like—shakes like old Trooper when he had the staggers.' Sure enough I did stagger more than walk into the house, and swallowing a wine-glass of brandy, rode tail split for the Priory, Missus and the servants thinking I were gone clean out of my mind; but at the turn of the lane I nearly unhorsed the doctor, who told me all about it. What ails thee, Stiles?' shouted the doctor, 'hurrahing and waving thy hat, and frightening my horse into the ditch; drunk or crazy?—'Neither, doctor,' says I, 'but overjoyed at hearing that the young squire ain't killed.'

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