

THE BLACK MARE.

A Story of Funchestown Races.

CHAPTER XVI.

A GARDEN OF EDEN.

(Continued.)

"Now what on earth do you suppose I wanted to speak to you about?" she continued, in rather a hard voice. "Let us turn down here. I dare say you'd like all London to see us together; but that wouldn't suit me at all."

"This was both unprovoked and unjust, for a more direct person in such matters than the accused never existed. He felt hurt, and answered gravely, "I don't think I deserve that. You cannot say I have ever shown myself obtuse or impatient with regard to you."

"Don't look vexed," she replied; "and don't be old me though I deserve it. I am in one of my worst tempers this morning; and who can I wreak it on but you?—the kindest, the bravest, the most generous of men!"

His features quivered; the tears were not far from his eyes. A little boy with a hoop stood still, and stared up his face, marveling to see so tall a gentleman so greatly moved.

"He took her hand. "You can always depend on me," he said softly; and, dropping it, walked on by her side in silence.

"I know I can," she answered. "I've known it a long time, though you don't think so. What a ludicrous little boy! Now he's gone on with his hoop, I'll tell you what I mean.—One of the things that first made me like you, was this—you're a gentleman down to the heels of your boots!"

"There's not much in that," he replied, looking pleased, nevertheless. "So are most of men amongst whom you live. A fellow ought to have some thing more than a good coat and decent manners, to be worthy of your regard; and you do like me, Miss Douglas? Tell me so again. It is almost too much happiness for me to believe."

"That's not the question. If I hated anybody very much, do you think I would ask him to come and walk with me in Kensington Gardens at an hour when all respectable people are brooding in the Park?" said she with one of her winning laughs. "You're wrong, though, about the people in good coats. What I call a gentleman is—well—I can't think of many—King Arthur, for instance, in 'Guinevere.'"

"Not Lancelot!" he asked. "I thought you ladies liked Lancelot best."

"There are plenty of Lancelots," she answered dreamily, "and always will be. Not Lancelot, nor another, except it be my General!"

"Could he do less than take her arm and press it fondly to his side?"

They had lapsed into the seclusion of a forest glade, that might have been a hundred miles from London. The little boy had vanished with his hoop, the nursery-maids and their charges were pervading the broad gravel walks and more frequented lawns of this sylvan paradise; not a soul was to be seen threading the stems of the tall trees but themselves, and an enthusiastic thrush straining its throat in their ears, seemed to ensure them from all observation less tolerant than its own.

"Now or never!" thought Satebella. "It must be done, and its no use thinking about it!"

Turning round on her companion, she crossed her slender hands over his arm, looked earnestly in his face and murmured—

"General, will you do me a favor?"

Pages could not have conveyed the refinement expressed by his monosyllable, "Try!"

She looked about, as if searching for some means of escape, then said hurriedly—

"I am in a difficulty. I want money. Will you help me?"

Watching his face, she saw it turn very grave. The most devoted of lovers, even while rejoicing because of the confidence reposed in him, cannot but feel that such a question must be approached with caution—not at to answer it satisfactorily will require prudence, forethought, and self-sacrifice. To do the General justice, which Satebella at the moment did not, his circumspection was far removed from hesitation; he had no reason for refusing, than the gallant horse who shortens his stride, and draws himself together, for a larger fence than common, that he may collect his energies, and cover it without a mistake.

For one delightful moment Miss Douglas felt it a weight lifted from her heart, and was already beginning to unsay her words as a recollection as she might when he stopped her, with a firm, deliberate acquiescence.

"Of course I will! And you ought to know by this time nothing can make me so happy as to be of use to you in any way. Give me, Miss Douglas—business is business—how much?"

Her face fell; she let go of his arm, and as they were very dry, while she whispered

"To the end of the world!" she answered, with the sob and smiles of a child. "There's nobody like you—nobody!—not even King Arthur! Ask what you will, I'll never refuse you—never—as long as I live!"

But it need hardly be said that the General would rather have cut off his right hand, than presumed on the position in which her confidence had placed him. Though she appreciated his consideration, she hardly understood why his manner became unusually respectful and courteous, why his farewell under the supervision of a cabman and a gate-keeper—should be almost distant; why he lifted his hat to her, at parting, as he would to the queen—but, while he replaced it on his bald and grizzled head, Blanche Douglas was nearer being in love than she suspected with this true, unselfish admirer, who was old enough to be her father.

In women, far more than in men, there can exist an affection that springs from the head alone. It is the result of respect, admiration, and gratitude. It is to be won by devotion, consist not only, above all, self-control; and, like a garden flower, so long as it is tended with attention, prospers bravely till autumn cools the temperature, and saddens all the sky. But this is a very different plant from the weed, wild rose, nightshade—call it what you will—that is sown by the winds of heaven, to strike root blindly and at haphazard in the heart; sweeter for being trampled, stronger for being broken, proof against the suns that scorch, the winds that shatter, the worms that eat away its core, and, refusing to die, even in the frown of winter, under the icy breath of scorn and unmerited neglect.

Which of these kindred sentiments the General had succeeded in awaking, was a problem he shrank from setting himself honestly to solve. He tried to hope it might be the one; he felt sadly convinced it was only the other. Traversing the gardens with swift, unequal strides, so as to leave them at the very farthest point from where his companion made her exit, for he was always loyal to *les convenances*, he argued the question with his own heart, till he dared not think about it any longer, subsiding at last into composure, with the chivalrous reflection, that, come what might, if he could but minister to the happiness of Blanche Douglas, he would grudge no sacrifice, even the loss of his money—shrank from no disappointment, even the destruction of his hopes.

Satebella meanwhile had selected a Hansom cab, in which to make her homeward journey, characteristically choosing the best-looking horse on the stand. To be seen, however, spanking along, at the rate of twelve miles an hour, in such a vehicle, she reflected, might be considered fast in a young unmarried lady, and originate, also, surmises as to the nature of her expedition; for it is quite a mistake to suppose that people in London are either blind or dumb, because they have so much on hand of their own, that they cannot devote all their attention to the business of their neighbors. With commendable modesty, therefore, she kept her parasol well before her face, so as to remain unrecognized by her friends, while she scanned everything about her with the keen, bright glances of a hawk. Bowling past Kingston House, then, and wondering whether it would not be possible, in time, to raise a domestic pedestal for General St. Joseph, on which she might worship him as a hero, if she could not love him as a Cupid, her Hansom cab passed within six inches of another, moving rapidly in the opposite direction; and who should be seated therein, smoking a cigar, with a white hat and light-colored gloves, but ruined, reckless, never-to-be-forgotten Daisy!

She turned sick, and white even to the lips. In one glance, as women will, she had taken in every detail of his face and person, had marked that the one seemed devoid of care, the other well-dressed, as usual. Like a stab came the conviction, that ruin to him meant only a certain amount of personal inconvenience, irrespective of any extraneous sorrow or vexation; and in this she misjudged him, not quite understanding a nature she had unwittingly chosen for the god of her idolatry.

Though they passed each other so quickly, she stretched her arms out and spoke his name, but Daisy's whole attention was engrossed by a pretty horse-breaker in difficulties on his other side. Satebella felt, as she rolled on, that he had not recognized her, and that if she acted up to her own standard of right, this miserable glimpse must be their last meeting, for she ought never to see him again.

"He'll be sure to call, poor fellow!" she murmured, when she reached her own door. So it is fair to suppose she had been thinking of him for a mile and a quarter. "I should like to wish him good-bye, really for the last time. But no, no! Honor, even among thieves. And I'm sure he deserves it, that kind, noble, generous old man. Oh! I wish I was dead! I wish I was dead!" Then she paid the cabman (more than his fare), told her servant, in a strange, hoarse voice, that "she was at home to nobody this afternoon—nobody, not even Mrs. Lushington!" and so ran fiercely upstairs, and locked herself into her room.

monetary crisis, Daisy had travelled, night and day, from Ireland, nor could he have chosen a better adviser in the whole Army. Last, as regarded kindness of heart, combined with that tenacious courage Englishmen call "pluck."

"I'm not a clever chap, I know," Bill used to acknowledge, in moments of expansion after dinner. "But what I say is this: If you've got to do a thing, catch hold, and do it! Keep square, run straight, and into the shortest way! You won't beat that, my boy, with all the dodges that ever put one of your nobblers in the hole!"

It is but justice to admit that, in every relation of life, sport or earnest, this simple moralist acted strictly in accordance with his creed. That he was a favorite in his regiment need hardly be said. The younger son of a great nobleman, he had joined at seventeen, with a frank childish face and the spirits of a boy fresh from school. Before he was a week at drill, the very privates swore such a young dare-devil had never ridden in their ranks since the corps was raised. Utterly reckless, as it seemed, of life and limb, that fair-haired, half-grown lad, would tackle the wildest horse, swim the swiftest stream, leap the largest fence, and fight the strongest man, with such rollicking, mirthful enjoyment, as could only spring from an excess of youthful energy and light-heartedness. But, somehow, he was never beat, or didn't know it when he was. Eventually, it always turned out that the horse was mastered, the stream crossed, the fence cleared, and the man obliged to give in. His warlike house had borne for centuries on their shield the well-known motto, "Go on!" To never a scion of the line could it have been more appropriate than to this light-footed, light-headed, light-hearted light dragoon!

In his own family, of course, he was the pet and treasure of all. His mother worshipped him, though he kept her in continual hot water with his vagaries. His sisters thought (perhaps reasonably enough) that there was nobody like him in the world. And his stately old father, while he frowned and shook his head at an endless catalogue of larks, steeplechases, broken bones, etc., was more proud of Bill in his heart than of all his ancestors and all his other sons put together.

They were a distinguished race. Each had made his mark in his own line. It was "Soldier Bill's" ambition to attain military fame; every step in the ladder seemed to him, therefore, of priceless value. And promotion was as the very breath of his nostrils.

But a man who delights in personal risk is rarely of a selfish nature. In reply to Daisy's statement, made with that terseness of expression, that total absence of circumlocution, complimentary or otherwise, which distinguishes the conversation of a respectable Bill ordered his visitor a "brandy-and-soda" on the spot, and thus delivered himself.

"Troop be d—d, Daisy! It's no fun soldiering without your 'pals.' I'd rather be a 'Serrafle' for the rest of my life, or a 'bantam,' or a trumpeter, by Jove! than command the regiment, only because all the good fellows in it had come to grief. Sit down. Never mind the dog, she's always smelling about a strange pair legs, but she won't lay hold, if you keep perfectly still. Have a weed, and let's see what can be done!"

The room in which their meeting took place was characteristic of its occupant. Devoid of superfluous furniture, and with an uncarpeted floor, it boasted many works of art, spirited enough, and even elaborate, in their own peculiar line. The series of prints representing a steeplechase, in which yellow jacket cut out all the work, and eventually won by a neck, could not be surpassed for originality of treatment and fidelity of execution. Satebella's celebrated acrobats stood on brackets along the walls, alternating with cavalry spurs, riding-whips, boxing-gloves, and basket-hilted sticks, while the place of honor over the chimney-piece was filled by a portrait of Mendoza in fighting attitude, at that halcyon period of the prize-ring.

"When Humphreys stood up to the Israelite's thumps, in kerseymere breeches, and 'touch-me-not' pumps."

"It's very pleasant this," observed Daisy, with his legs on a chair, to avoid the attentions of Venus, an ill-favored lady of the "bull" kind, beautiful to connoisseurs as her Olympian namesake, but for the uninitiated an impersonation of hideous ferocity and anatomical distortion combined.

"Jolly little crib, isn't it?" replied Bill; "and though I'm not much in 'fashionable circles,' suits me down to the ground. Wasn't it luck, though, the small-pox and the regimental steeplechase putting so many of our captains on the sick-list, that they detached a subaltern here to command? We were so short of officers, my boy, I thought the Chief would have made you 'hark back' from Ireland. Don't you wish he had? You'd better have been in bed on the 17th; though, by all accounts, you rode the four miles truly through, and squeezed the old mare as dry as an orange!"

"Gammon!" retorted Daisy. "She had five pounds in hand, only we..."

we've all had time to turn ourselves round." "Where can I go to?" said Daisy. "What a queer smell there is in this room, Bill. Something between dead rats and a Stilton cheese."

"Smell!" answered his host. "Pooh; nonsense. That's the badger; he lives in the bottom drawer of my wardrobe. We call him 'Benjamin.' Don't you like the smell of a badger, Daisy?"

Now "Benjamin" was a special favorite with his owner, in consideration of the creature's obstinate and tenacious courage. Bill loved it from his heart, protesting that it was the only living thing from which he "took a licking;" because on one occasion, after a very noisy supper, the man had tried, and failed, to "draw" the beast from its lair with his teeth! Therefore, "Benjamin" was now a free brother of the Guild, well cared for, unmolested, living on terms of armed neutrality with the redoubtable Venus herself.

Ignoring as deplorable prejudice Daisy's protest that he did not like the smell of a badger, his friend returned with unabated interest to the previous question.

"You mustn't stay in London, that's clear; though I've heard there's no covert like it to hang in for a fellow who's robbed a church! But it wouldn't suit you, you're not bad enough; besides it's too near Hounslow. The Continent's no use. Travelling costs a hat-full of money, and it's very slow abroad now the fighting's over. A quiet place, not too far from home; that's the ticket!"

"These Jersey," observed Daisy doubtfully. "I don't know where it is, but I Jersey it's quiet enough."

"Jersey be hanged!" exclaimed his energetic friend. "Why not Guernsey, Alderney, or what do you say to Shark? No, we must hit on a happier thought than that. You crossed last night, you say. Does any one know you're in town?"

"Only the waiter at Limmer's. I had breakfast there, and left my portmanteau, you know."

"Limmer's! I wish you hadn't gone to Limmer's! Never mind, the waiter is easily squared. Now, look here, Daisy, you're not supposed to be in London. Is there no retired spot you could dodge back to in Ireland, where you can get your health, and live cheap? Who's to know you ever left it?"

His friend Denis occurred to Daisy at once.

"There's a farm up in Roscommon," said he, "where they'd take me in and welcome. The air's good, and living must be cheap, for you can't get anything to eat but potatoes! I shouldn't wonder if they hunted all the year round in those hills, and the farmer is a capital fellow, never without a two-year-old that can jump!"

"That sounds like it," responded the other, with certain inward longings of his own for this favored spot. "Now, Daisy, will you ride to orders, and promise to be guided entirely by me?"

"All right," said Daisy; "fire away."

"Barney!" shouted his friend, in a voice that resounded over the barracks, startling even the sergeant of the guard. "Barney! look sharp. Tell them to put a saddle on Catamount, and turn him round ready to go out; then come here."

In two minutes a shock-headed batman, obviously Irish, entered the apartment, and stood at "attention," motionless, but for the twinkling of his light blue eyes.

"Go to Limmer's at once," said his master; "pay Mr. Walter's bill. Breakfast and B. and S., of course? Pack his things, and take them to Euston Station. Wait there till he comes, and see him off by the Irish mail. Do you understand?"

"I do, sir," answered Barney, and vanished like a ghost.

"You've great administrative powers, Bill," said his admiring friend. "Hang it! you're fit to command an army."

"I could manage the Commissariat, I think," answered the other modestly; "but of course you're only chaffing. I'm not a wise chap, I know; never learnt anything at school, and had the devil's own job to pass for my cornetcy. But I'll tell you what I can do. When a course is marked out, and the stewards have told me which side of the flags I'm to go, I do know my right hand from my left, and that's more than every fellow can say who gets up for a flutter in the pig-skin. And now I'm off to headquarters to see the Chief, and ask leave for you to fill muster, at any rate."

"You won't find him," observed Daisy. "It must be two o'clock now."

"Not find him!" repeated the other. "Don't you know the Chief better than that? He gets home-sick if he is a mile from the barrack-yard. It's my belief he was born in spurs, with the 'state' of the regiment in his hand. Besides he's ordered a parade for fitting on the new nose-bags at three. He wouldn't miss it to go to the Derby."

"You are a good chap," said his friend. "It's a long ride, and a beastly hard road." Bill was by this time dressing with inconceivable rapidity, and an utter disregard of his comrade's presence.

"A long ride," he repeated, in high scorn, while he dashed into a remarkably well-made coat. "What do you call a long ride?"

Catamount's first act of insubordination, indeed, was to run away with his newmaster for four miles on end, across the Carragh, but over excellent turf, smooth as a bowling green; he discovered, to his surprise, that Bill wished no better fun. He then repeated the experiment in a stilly-fenced part of Kildare; and here found himself not only indulged, but instigated to continue, when he wanted to leave off. He tried guiding his rider's leg against the wall: Bill turned a sharp spur inwards, and made it very uncomfortable. He lay down: Bill kept him on the ground an hour or two by sitting on his head.

At last he confined himself to kicking unreasonably, at intervals, galloping sullenly on, nevertheless, in the required direction, and doing a vast amount of work in an incredibly short space of time. He was never off his feed, and his legs never filled, so to Bill he was invaluable, notwithstanding their disputes, and a certain scorn about a Cup the horse ought to have won, had he not sulked at the finish; they loved each other dearly, and would have been exceedingly loth to part.

"My sergeant's wife will get you some dinner," said the rider, between certain sundry preliminary kicks in getting under way. "She's an outside cook, and I've told her what you'd like. There's a bottle of brandy on the chimney-piece, and soda-water in the drawer next the badger. I'll be back before it's time for you to start. Cut along, Catamount! Hang it! don't get me off the shop-board, before half the troop. Forrard! my lad! Forrard! away!" and Bill galloped out of the barracks at head-long speed, much to the gratification of the sentry manipulating his carbine at the gate. This true friend proved as good as his word. In less than three hours, he was back again, Catamount having hardly turned a hair in their excursion. The colonel had been kindness itself. The leave was all right. There was nothing more to be done, but to pack Daisy off in a Hansom, for Euston Square.

"Take a pony, old man," said Bill, urging his friend to share his purse, while he wished him "good-bye." "If I'd more, you should have it. Nonsense! I don't want it a bit. Keep your courage up and fight high. Write a line if anything turns up. I'll go working the job here, never fear. We won't let you out of the regiment. What is life, after all, to a fellow who isn't a light dragoon?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

DELILAH.

In consoling his friend, *Xanthias Phocæus*, for the result of a little flirtation, in which that Roman gentleman seems to have indulged without regard to station, Horace quotes for us a triad of illustrious persons whose brazen-plated armor, and bull-hide targets were of no avail to fence them from the shaft of love. If neither petulant Achilles, nor Ajax, son of Telamon, nor the king of men himself, could escape, it is not to be supposed that a young cavalry officer in her Majesty's service, however simple in his habits and frank in his demeanor, should be without some weakness of the same nature, unacknowledged perhaps, yet none the less a weakness on that account.

"Soldier Bill," notwithstanding his kindly disposition and fresh comely face, seemed the last man in the world to be susceptible of female influence, yet "Soldier Bill" felt, to a certain extent, in the same plight as Agamemnon. Though in dress, manners, and appearance, anything but what is usually termed a ladies' man; he was nevertheless a prime favorite with the sex, on such rare occasions as threw him in their way. Women in general seem most to appreciate qualities not possessed by themselves, and while they greatly admire all kinds of courage, find that which is mingled with good-humored hap-hazard recklessness, perfectly irresistible. They worship their heroes too, and believe in them, with ludicrous good faith. Observe a woman in a pleasure boat. If there comes a puff of wind, she never takes her eyes off the boatman, and trusts him implicitly. The more confidence she places in her guardian, and so long as the fancied danger lasts, clings devotedly to the pilot, be he the roughest, hairiest, farriest son of Neptune that ever turned a quid.

Now the converse of this relation between the sexes holds equally good. To live entirely with men and horses; to rough it habitually; from day to day enduring hardships, voluntary or otherwise, in the pursuit of field-sports; to share his studies with a dog, and take his pastime with a prize-fighter, does not necessarily unfit a man for the society of gentler, softer, sweeter, craftier creatures. On the contrary, in many natures, and those, perhaps, the strongest, such habits produce a longing for female society deeper and keener, that it has to be continually repudiated and repressed.

When he had started Daisy for the station, Bill renewed his toilet with peculiar care, and in spite of a few fears on his face, some the effects of falls, others, alas! of fights...