

"I have had the honor of meeting Mrs. Percy before."

Addy, in turning her imploring eyes from my wife, had encountered those of Banks. She was red enough now, and there was an expression in her face of a pain so intense that my wife was alarmed. She made a slight movement, nevertheless, in return for a formal bow of grim civility from Banks; but her eyes again returned to the mesmerist plate, and her face to its rigid pallor. I could not resist a malicious glance at my wife, who was, I perceived, ashamed of her management. She was not to be beat, however. She dashed at once into her pet subjects, and engaged Banks in conversation on them, appealing now and then to Addy to confirm facts relative to the Flora of her neighborhood, or some foreign incident. Addy replied in monosyllables; but I had never heard Banks so eloquent or agreeable. He and my wife kept up the conversational ball between them—losing it from gardens to museums, from museums to picture-galleries, and finally letting it fall in Italy. I had time fully to enjoy my *petit dîner*; for not a word could I get from Addy, and not one could I thrust in between this collision of tongues. Only once, when my wife suddenly mentioned Milan, did I remark any other sign of acquaintanceship between our friends. They appear to look at one another involuntarily, but only for a moment; the mesmerist plate and my mesmerist wife drew them apart again irresistibly.

I never passed so uncomfortable a dinner. It was worse than cold soup and ill-cooked venison; but it was over at last, and the ladies withdrew. If women are hyper-inquisitive, men are rationally inquisitive. I felt a reasonable curiosity concerning the previous meetings of Banks and Addy, so I put the former a few delicate questions:

"Strange that you two should have met before. How, when, and where?"

I thought my facetious introduction of this interesting game would excite a smile; but it produced a frown.

"In Italy—years ago. What excellent wine!" was the response.

"You do not appear to be well acquainted; but I hope you will improve on your slight intimacy while Mrs. Percy stays with us," I continued. "She is one of the most amiable and accomplished women I know, and I am sure you would like her."

"I scarcely think I should. I do not care for female society," he replied; and I could get no more out of him.

We found the ladies even more silent than we had been, and they did not, as is their rule, brighten up when we appeared. But Banks grew exceedingly lively, and was so devoted to my wife, that I remarked aside. Addy that I began to feel jealous. It was strange how he lingered on—strange how he looked from time to time at immovable Addy, who sat with her elbow on the table, shrouding her face with a white hand, on which was the ring which had bound her to old Percy, and no other. She had left off her weeds, and was only in slight mourning—something black and white I remember it was, which became her wonderfully.

When at last he and Flush rose to go, she rose also; and when he had wished my wife and me good-night, and was about to make her a distant bow, she walked towards him and held out her hand. The action must have been premeditated, for it had the calm dignity of a certain thoughtfulness, which was touching even to the bystanders, and overpowering to him who took the hand, held it a moment, then let it go without speaking.

What did it all mean? I resolved to find out with my rational inquisitiveness, my wife having failed with her hyper-inquisitiveness.

"And you have had the advantage of us all these years, Addy?" I said. "You do know Banks?"

"Yes," said Addy, with a large tear in her eye.

"Do tell us all about it; we are dying to know."

"I met Mr. Banks abroad at the saddest time of my whole life," said Addy, in the same calm premeditated sort of way as the previous withholding of her hand. "His mother and my brother were killed by that frightful railway accident at Milan, and he and I were left alone. He was very good to me. Do not ask me any more, dear, dear friends."

She sat down and burst into tears. It was our last attempt at curiosity, for we knew that the frightful catastrophe which had caused the death of a brother she loved with all her heart had been the precursor of a long illness and brain-fever. We had heard that she was alone at the time, and that, until her parents reached her, she had been indebted to strangers for care and aid. Still we could not account for her peculiar kind of emotion on meeting Banks, or for his strange manner.

"There is something under the rose," said my wife.

"Your match-making may as well be stowed away with it," quoth I.

"On the contrary, I shall invite Banks again every day and all day," said she.

But the following morning we ascertained that our restless friend had left home for an indefinite period, and his servants did not know where he was gone. It was my wife's pleasure that Addy should not be told this, and we prevailed on her to remain with us longer than she intended. Her manner grew fitful and excitable, and my wife declared that she started at every sound, and turned red and pale at every bell. I began to hint that she was not, after all, the piece of calm perfection I had imagined, but a

mere woman, and my wife required to know what I could desire better.

More than a month passed thus, when we were suddenly informed that an old and favorite horse belonging to Banks was ill, and that he had been telegraphed for, and had returned immediately. He had often told us that he had two faithful friends, his horse and dog.

"We must go and see after him," said my wife. "If that stupid old horse dies, he will shoot himself, and leave orders that they shall be buried together. Addy, there are marvellous recipes for moribund quadrupeds in that huge folio over the dining-room window. Look them out while we are away. Olivers will bring you the steps; but take care you don't break your neck, or we shall have to add you to the becalomb."

Addy was struggling with some emotion, but turned upon this into my piece of calm perfection again.

We found Banks in the stable in the utmost distress. The horse was apparently dying.

"How kind of you!" he said, wringing my hand.

"My father had a horse just in this state, and one of those old recipes cured him," said my sagacious wife.

"Where is it? How can I get it?" asked Banks. "May I go with you and procure it, and have it made up at the chemist's at once?"

He had great faith in my wife's judgment; so we all hurried off together, leaving the horse to the groom and farrier. He outstrode us in his excitement, and was in the hall while we were barely on the threshold. Addy came out of the dining-room, breathless, exclaiming: "I have found them. How is he—how is the horse?"

They met face to face, and we heard him say: "Good heavens! Adelaide again!" as he strove to hurry past her.

"O, this is cruel! let us be friends!" she cried desperately.

"Friends! with one who has been the ruin of my life!—never! I have but one friend, and he lies dying," he said in a low hoarse voice.

Flush understood him, and barked a sharp protest.

"Ay, I forgot my poor Flush," he added, stooping over the dog, whose large eyes looked as reproachful as Adelaide's.

She hastened upstairs as he entered the hall, with the words, "Hard! unforgiving!" on her lips.

We found the folio open at the recipes, and two or three copied out in her clear large handwriting. My wife selected one, and gave it to Banks, who crumpled it up in his hand, but hurried with it to the chemist's. I accompanied him, and my wife ran up to Adelaide.

She recounted the scene to me afterwards, and I said it should be dramatised as sensational, thereby giving great offence.

She found Addy on her knees, in an agony of weeping, her face buried in her bed, her arms outstretched over it. My calm piece of perfection! What anomalies those women are! Of course my wife throw her arms about her, mingled her tears, and so forth, calming her by dogmatics. I can just imagine the stately Addy, encircled by my blonde, impulsive, satirical little wife, and the diverse feeling of the pair. But violent emotion sometimes produces confidence, and Addy's ended in a passionate relation of some passages of her history connected with Banks.

It appeared that she and her brother were travelling in Italy at the same time that Banks and his mother were, and that they made a casual acquaintance as they met occasionally at different places. They chanced to be all in the same train at the time of a fearful railway collision, which caused the death of many passengers. Poor Addy was frantically calling on a dead brother, when Banks came to her, himself in the terrible agony of the sudden consciousness that a mother, whom he devotedly loved, was also killed. He promised to find her brother if she would but consent to withdraw from the horrible scene, and she, injured herself, fainter at his side. He carried her away, and gave her the charge of some of the people who had gathered to the spot, while he returned to watch for the dead.

When she recovered consciousness, she found herself in a small railway station, surrounded by strangers. She tried to rush back to the scene of the accident, but she could not, for, although not seriously injured, she was unable to move. Carriages came from Milan in course of time, and Banks returned to her, and carried her to one, into which he also got. He had previously seen the dead bodies of those they each loved, best conveyed towards that city. Even I cannot think without intense pain of that journey; what must they have felt? My impression is, that they must have been attracted to each other before this time, and that they therefore found some consolation in a growing mutual attachment; but Addy owned to no such feelings, she only spoke of the tender, respectful, unselfish sympathy of him afflicted like herself.

When they reached an hotel at Milan, he confided her to the care of the landlady, having previously ascertained the address of her parents; then he gave way to his own grief.

Some time elapsed before her parents arrived, during part of which their dead were buried side by side in a cemetery at Milan, and she was delicious. She got better, however, and would leave her bed and go into a room where she could see and thank Banks. It is pretty evident that she must have loved him ere this. How could she have helped it? Still, she did not confess to it.

Her father and mother arrived at last. My wife knew them well, and disliked them par-

ticularly. They were narrow-minded, ambitious people, whose one object in life seemed to be to amass money for their only son, and to make a grand match for their daughter. However, Addy only said that Mr. Banks did his best to console them for their loss, and to amuse them while she continued ill.

I take it for granted that the upshot of it all was, that the young people fell over head and ears in love. It was apparent from Addy's disjointed account that Banks did not leave Milan until she did, and that they must have understood one another. She particularised their last meeting as having taken place in the cemetery where he had buried their beloved dead. She had resolved to see it; and he had taken her thither. My wife gathered with difficulty that a promise or engagement of some sort passed between them over the graves, on which they left emblematic flowers, and that love sprang out of death.

I am not sentimental; but even my imagination grows vivid when calling up the scene—the grief and beauty of Addy, the intensity of feeling of her remarkable lover; the cemetery; the deep blue of the Italian sky.

We could not discover whether Addy's parents were asked, and refused consent, at Milan; but it evinced that they left that place for England, while Banks pursued his travels alone. At any rate, he held the promise sacred; and so, doubtless, did Addy, until she had to endure the persecution of her father and mother. This, at least, was my indignant wife's version of the story, who knew those worthies, and declared that they had forced Addy into a marriage with old Percy about two years after her brother's death.

While these disclosures were being dragged to light at our house, I was nursing Banks' old horse in his stables with him. The pollution, or maul, or whatever it might be called, had such wonderful effect—probably because Addy had turned out the recipe—that, to my unspeakable relief, the excellent quadruped revived, and his master's joy and gratitude were so great that I thought he would have kissed us both, as well as the doctor and groom. He certainly did embrace the horse, whose name I afterwards discovered to be Milan—the groom having been wont to call him *Milium*? with a sort of interrogative doubt, as if ill informed of the orthography.

Banks accompanied me homewards, and was still pouring out his thanks when we met my wife. She greeted us with—

"We were so anxious about the horse that we could not rest. Addy was even more fussy than I, but I see, by your faces, that her recipe has been successful."

Banks stammered out something, while my wife came between us, and went on addressing him earnestly.

"I think you said that you met Mrs. Percy abroad?"

"Yes."

"Before her marriage?"

"Yes."

A pause, and I break in with, "She was wonderfully handsome."

"Was? Is, you mean. You men never think a woman good-looking after thirty-five," cries my wife.

"I should not dare to say that in your presence," I reply.

Banks smiled.

"It was too bad of them to marry her up to that old Percy," she continued.

"Them? Whom?" asked Banks involuntarily.

"Her parents. They were arbitrary and ambitious; and she was sacrificed, like the rest of us," she replied bowing to me.

"And he was got rid of, like the rest of us," I said, returning the mock salute.

Banks's face was a flame. I never saw any fellow change countenance so often in so short a space of time. At last he said grimly,

"No woman ever marries against her will."

"I am sure I did, and you know what a victim I am," said my wife; and he smiled again.

"You will come to dinner," she continued. "I haven't new moss, and my husband has made a discovery quite Darwinian."

"Not to-day—quite impossible," he said hurriedly off.

"We shall expect you," she cried, waving her hand.

It was nearly dinner-time when we got back, and we found Addy ready. She was calm, but the marks of her late emotion were visible enough. She told us that she had made arrangements to leave us the following morning, and that her maid was packing-up. We combated this resolution in vain.

We were late for dinner, and I hurried Addy off, saying to my wife, "It is no good to wait."

"Provoking man!" she exclaimed.

"Who? which?" I asked.

"Both! every man I ever saw!" she replied.

We had begun, when there was a sharp bark and ring, and Banks actually appeared. He had dressed hastily, yet with even more than the French "four pins" of care.

"I could not resist the new moss and the Darwinian discovery," he said, glancing at Addy, and bowing nervously.

She made no movement, but looked at my wife reproachfully. She was, however, resolved to hide all emotion, and began to talk as naturally as she could. By degrees the conversation became sufficiently easy, and my hopes of a quiet dinner—faint, at first—were realised. I had not, at that time, heard Addy's story, so I hazarded a remark at dessert which savoured more of the hyper-inquisitive than the prudent.

"So odd you two should have met abroad. Were you long acquainted?"

I watched the effects of this venture. Addy's cheeks were crimson, and Banks's eyes flashed as he saw it.

"We met, as people do on the Continent, by chance, and parted by chance also, I suppose," he said nonchalantly. "You remember our last encounter?"

A sudden pain must have struck at his heart, for his face turned deadly pale. He had said more than he intended.

"Yes, I remember," said Addy, with an entreating glance at my wife, who moved to leave the room.

When they were gone, Banks fell into a reverie, and I maliciously interrupted it, saying, "You do not know what an intolerable match-maker my wife is. I am charmed to see her circumvented for once. She was bent on bringing you together, and you hate one another beforehand. It surprises me; for Addy is generally much beloved, and you are not altogether odious."

"Did she—did Adelaide—did Mrs. Percy say she hated me?" he asked impetuously.

"Not in so many words; but her manner implies it much as yours does."

He smiled sadly, and said his manner was terribly awkward.

Addy played and sang well—divinely, my wife said; who uses exaggerated terms, like the rest of her sex—so when we were again assembled, we asked her for some music. She consented at once, as she always does; for she is neither nervous nor silly. I know I am terribly provoking, as my wife says; but I can no more help it than another man can help being amiable, so when Addy asked me what I should like, I said,

"Moore's melodies are all the fashion again, Banks, and I rejoice for I like the old songs. Mrs. Percy sings them so well. Let us have the one with the doubtful simile of the sunflower, Addy. You know which I mean. 'The heart that has truly loved never forgets;' though I have watched a hundred sunflowers, and never yet seen one turn to her god when he sets."

"Nor have I," said Banks, watching Addy's tremulous fingers as they tried to strike the first chords.

She sang the desired song with difficulty, but perfect sweetness and expression. Towards the end her voice trembled slightly, but she commanded it.

"Did you ever hear her sing before?" I asked of Banks.

"Never," he replied, moving his chair so that we could not see his face.

Addy had what is called a sympathetic voice, and I was sure that it had reached his heart. When she ended, and was about to rise, my wife detained her at the piano.

"Why do poets invent fables to rouse our feelings?" said Banks hoarsely. "You sing a song in which you cannot believe."

"I am not answerable for my songs; yet I believe in this one, in spite of the sunflower," said Addy, half sadly, half lightly, beginning another at our request.

"That strain again; it had a dying fall," we all said, or implied, by our significant silence, as she sang song after song.

Banks spoke never a word; but he quietly drew nearer and nearer the piano, until he was close to Addy. Was she conscious of the proximity? She gave no sign save in the tremble of that voice *sympathique*; and that might have been according to the modern school of singing, which is a perpetual roulade.

However, it was very sweet and touching; and when at length the clock struck one sharp reproachful stroke, reminding us that the small hours had begun, we all started in amazement. Banks rose hastily to wish us good-night. He took Addy's offered hand and held it a moment, gazing into her pathetic face. There were tears in her eyes, and, I believe, moisture in his.

"Thank you. Music was invented to humanise us," he said, and was gone.

To our surprise and annoyance Addy kept to her resolution, and we accompanied her to the station the next morning. She was profuse in her gratitude to us, but she persisted in repeating, "It is best, it is best." We put her into a first-class carriage, in which was no other passenger, at her particular request, for she said she wished to be alone. We were making our last adieux through the window, and my wife was extracting a promise of return, when I saw Banks fuming up the platform. I nudged my wife, who mastered the occasion intuitively. I went to meet him, saying, in the elegant language of the period, "Where are you off to?"

"I am going abroad—I will write," he said.

"Just in time; jump in here!" I exclaimed, pushing my wife aside, and opening the door of Addy's compartment.

He obeyed, not perceiving the lady.

"Take care of Mr. Banks. So glad you have an escort, Addy!" cried my wife, as the train steamed off instantly.

Addy looked after us with a pale, troubled, reproachful face; but there was no redress either for her or Banks.

"Suppose they leap out of the windows," suggested my wife. "A sentimental lover's leap!"

"The railway will be the best match-maker," said I.

And so it proved. A letter arrived by the next post from Addy, entreating us to go to her—for—she was engaged to Mr. Banks. She was so happy and it was all due to us. The following day Banks reappeared. He actually called my wife "My dear," when he announced the fact that he was not going abroad after all, but—but—was going to be married instead.

"Then we shall not only know Banks, but Mrs. Banks!" said I.

And so the curtain falls.