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A grand breakfast was prepared at Bampton, to which all the neighboring gentry had been invited, to conclude with a farmers' ball in the evening; at which some of the higher orders wished to be present also. Neither were the poor forgotten—tents being erected on the lawn for the whole population of Bampton parish, with the substantial fare of roast beef and plum pudding, supplied by the two principal innkeepers of the village, to which they sat down at two o'clock. Rustic games and pastimes succeeded, with dancing on the green sward in the evening.

The newly married couples, having changed their bridal attire for travelling costume, drove off immediately afterwards en route to the North, Lord Beauchamp and Blanche for Annandale Castle, and Malcolm and Constance for his seat in Scotland. The bitterness of parting with his only daughter was considerably mollified to the old earl by the promise of their returning at the end of a month or six weeks to spend the winter at Bampton; and Mrs. Gordon felt too happy in the attainment of all her wishes, to think so deeply as she otherwise would of the temporary separation from her affectionate niece and newly-made nephew, both of whom she loved as her own children. Her sister, Lady Malcolm, also, was now staying at the Priory, with Mrs. Fortescue, who accompanied her from town, where she intended to remain until the first week in September, by which time Beauchamp and Blanche were expected home again.

Bob Conyers, with his usual disinterestedness, to prevent his old friend feelings solitary after his children's departure, had invited himself to spend a week at Bampton; and for the present there was no lack of guests, Lord Henry Bayntun, Sir William Burnet, my name, and Melville having come expressly for the occasion. Fred Beauchamp was there also, who, in his son's absence, was of great service, as well as comfort, to the old earl. Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon, with the gay widow, having been invited to spend the day at Bampton, took a lively interest in all the proceedings in honor of their niece's marriage; and, accompanied by the earl, Bob Conyers, and Fred Beauchamp, visited all the tents in succession at the dinner hour, to see the arrangements made to regale so large a company, and were not less amused than gratified by the cordial meeting between the founder of the feast and some of his aged parishioners.

'Ah, squire,' said an old man, nearly bent double by years and infirmities, 'I never thought as how I should live to see the loike of this, but there—what's the darne want?'—(as an elderly female whispered in his ear)—'she do say, squire, as I be to call you my lord—but it don't seem natural loike. I've ha' know'd ye as Squire Beauchamp handy sixty years, and I be used to the name—so doant ye take it amiss, as I do love the old squire, and the young un too. God bless un, and prosper un, with that angel, Miss Blanche.'

'Hark ye, Job,' replied the earl, 'if you ever dare to 'my lord me,' I shall think you an arrant old hypocrite; so sit down and go to work with your knife and fork.'

Mrs. Gordon, who was known to all the neighboring poor for her benevolent and charitable disposition, was deservedly beloved by them, entering into their joys and sorrows with the most unaffected Christian feeling, and she had over a kind word to say, as well as a kind look to bestow, on the poor and humble, in addition to more substantial proofs of sympathy. In their drives about the country, Mrs. Gordon's and Blanche's visits were not restricted to their rich acquaintances; and in their rambles near home, their footsteps were constantly direct-

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Leaving our happy rustics to the full enjoyment of their festival, which did not terminate until darkness stole over the scene, which, as might be expected, had long previously stolen over the senses of many of the guests, so as to render them oblivious of time and the road home, we will now transfer our reader to the ball-room at Bampton House, which was crowded to overflowing with the bold yeomen, their wives and daughters, and a fair sprinkling of gentility. Of the latter were Sir Lionel Markham and family, the Comptons, Rollestons, all the bachelors of the lu t, with Mr. and Mrs. Winterbottom, who had particularly begged to be present. The earl opened the ball in a country dance with Mrs. Styles, a fine buxom-looking woman of fifty. The other gentlemen selected partners also among the farmers' wives and daughters, this being the rule to be observed in the first dance.

Selina Markham seized upon young Hazel for her partner; and Fred Beauchamp introduced Mrs. Fortescue to the brother of Miss Fairacre, the prettiest girl in the room, whom he had engaged for himself. Bob Conyers, undertaking the part of master of the ceremonies, soon provided for all the dancing youngsters by mutual introductions. Captain Markham, who was playing fierce attention to Miss Honoria, voted it 'a demmed bore' to be pulled nearly off his legs by a strong young damsel, through every couple, down to the bottom of the room. 'I say, Fred,' he whispered, when left at ease for a few seconds, 'I sha'n't have any more of this fun—don't pay, old fellow—just see my Phillis, a full blown peony's a fool to her—demmit! makes one hot to look at her—heavy in hand as a four-year-old. Cut and run, by Jove, Fred.'

'Can't be done, Markham—orders from head quarters for one dance with the rustics; then please ourselves afterwards. So here we go at it again—cross hands, down the middle and up again,' with which the captain was whirled away by his Amazonian partner. On crossing hands with his sister, she asked, 'Cool and comfortable, Ned, eh?'

'Demmed uncomfortable, Selina; but you don't catch me doing drill work of this sort again.' Immediately after, his partner making a false step, could not recover her equilibrium, and holding the captain tight in hand, dragged him down with her, giving him a rattling fall, Fred and his partner rolling over him.

'My gracious!' exclaimed Selina, 'the life-guardsmen floored at last! quick, Hazel, pick him up, or he'll be smothered by that Amazon, who is as heavy as a sack of grain. Oh, me! what will Miss Honoria say to her darling captain being smashed in that fashion?'

Both Hazel and Fred Beauchamp laughed so immoderately as to be incapable of rendering any assistance, for the captain's leg being crooked under him, his ankle was severely sprained, so that he could with difficulty raise himself; but Conyers hastened to assist him, inquiring where he was injured.

'Eh! aw! Bob, queer about the ankle—pains fearfully; give me your arm, old fellow; hobble away to a chair—deuced awkward affair, floored by a woman! 'pon honor.'

As the captain limped across the room in search of a seat, Mrs. Winterbottom, pitying his distressed looks, with anguish pictured on his brow, rose from her most comfortable chair, and insisted on his taking possession of it.

'Oh, captain dear, this comes of romping in those nasty country dances; and there's my Honoria been nearly torn to bits by that young farmer-chap, whisking and whirling her about till she's not fit to be seen, with her hair all about her face, and her dress rum-

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Selina, who had been casting searching glances toward the happy pair, felt assured, by the young lady's behaviour, that the die was cast. 'Here, Bob,' she exclaimed to her partner, 'that fool, Ned, has fallen into the mash-tub at last, and I'll bet a pony, as Lord Henry says, that Miss Honoria has booked him. My gracious! what a row there will be, when mamma finds we are to have Mrs. Winter for a mother-in-law.'

'Any way, my dear, hers is a better name than Hogsflesh, and I know Ned had serious ideas about a young lady of that name in London, this season, the daughter of a retired soap-boiler. Honoria herself is very well—a pretty, unassuming, well-educated girl; and, I can tell you, a brewery is a very lucrative, safe investment, with large returns, and the business itself quite respectable; so, on the whole, Ned has decided wisely, and we must put up with the old lady's vulgarities, if indeed she is disposed to trouble us with them, which I very much question.'

'Ah! Bob, you are ever making the best of things.'

'And so, my dear, I hope you also, for the future, will look always on the sunny side, which is the wisest thing to do.'

## CHAPTER L.

We must now turn our attention to Mrs. Fortescue and Fred Beauchamp, who were lounging (the latter at least) through a quadrille.

'What do you think,' he was asking her, 'of our country practices at a wedding? our rustic games and dances?'

'To me,' she replied, 'everything I have witnessed to-day has been most delightful. The dear old earl's unaffected, almost parental kindness to his poor neighbours, and their joyous looks, beaming with gratitude, in return, awaken kindred feeling in my own heart, and recall the associations of my earlier years, when I was a country girl. Happy as they, indeed (if they could estimate truly that happiness), who live a country life, far removed from the bustle and turmoil of the city; and I can truly say—

'From the court to the cottage convey me away,  
For I'm weary of grandeur and what they call  
GAY.

Where pride without measure,  
And pomp without pleasure,  
Make life in a circle of decay.'

I'm tired to death of London dust and smoke—I have never seen a more united family than yours appears to be; and really have serious thoughts of taking some place in the neighborhood, to be near your excellent uncle, with whom I confess to have fallen desperately in love.'

'Well, then,' said Fred, lowering his voice, 'as you cannot be earl's wife, will it content you to be his niece?'

For a moment she gazed steadfastly on her partner's face; and in the serious look which met her inquiring eyes, she read his meaning, but made no response.

'Have I offended you,' he asked, in a quiet subdued tone, 'by my abrupt question?'

'No,' she replied, as the colour rose to her very brow; 'I will not pretend to misunderstand you, but—'

'Stay one moment, ere you pronounce my doom,' he said, earnestly. 'Remember your promise at Almack's which I have pondered on ever since—how fondly how fatally none will ever know; for I see my fate hangs on a thread, which one more word will sever. Oh, speak it not,' he added; 'and forgive my presumption in having ventured thus far.'

'Frederick,' she said, gently, 'I will spare your feelings as much as I can, in justice to my own; but you must not misunderstand

'It will be your own fault if you are, my boy—and don't forget your duties to-night, in seeing that our guests are well cared for.'

'No fear of that, uncle. Bob and myself don't intend to be idle.'

Neither were they, either before, at, or after supper. At twelve precisely, the large dining-room and library, joined together by wide folding doors, were thrown open, displaying a long table, reaching down the centre, and two cross tables at each end, on which a profusion of good things was spread out, with wines of every description; and it were needless to remark that, the evening being very sultry, Conyers and Fred caused the champagne corks to pop about like irregular musket discharges of infantry. The company had fully discussed the merits of the good things provided for them, when Bob Conyers, as Vice-Chairman, proposed the toast of the evening in a short, appropriate speech:—'Health and happiness to the newly-married couple!' which was received with deafening cheers, lasting for several minutes; and as they were dying away, the stentorian voice of Farmer Stiles was heard: 'Now, gentlemen, one cheer more, as you love him, for the young squire; and may God bless them both.'

The shout which answered this short address may be imagined, and the Earl, seeing the ladies almost overpowered by the thunder of voices, rose to return thanks, which stilled immediately the raging storm into breathless silence. The short, energetic speech of the old peer again elicited rounds of applause, although more subdued, from a hint passed up the long table by Conyers 'The Ladies,' and 'The Earl's' health then followed in quick succession, after which dancing recommenced, and continued with unabated strength and resolution until four o'clock in the morning.

With the termination of these festivities and the departure of his guests from Bampton, the Earl relapsed into his usual quiet habits; but as Fred spent the greater part of his time at the Priory, often dining there, the loss of his children's society, and the solitary fireside in the evening, began to produce the effects which might have been expected upon one whose chief happiness depended on domestic ties and cheerful faces around his table. Fred, noticing his uncle's low spirits, induced him to ride over occasionally to the Priory, where his usual cheerfulness returned, and it was about three weeks after his children's marriage, that when walking with Mrs. Gordon through her grounds, he surprised that lady by suddenly saying, 'My dear Mrs. Gordon, it is no use my attempting to conceal the matter any longer; but the fact is, that I have become so melancholy and feel so lonely in that large house since Will and Con have left me, that I must either come and live at the Priory, or you must come, in pity to my forlorn situation, and live at Bampton.'

Mrs. Gordon, scarcely knowing whether the Earl was serious, or only in one of his joking humors, attempted to rally him for giving way to despondency on account of his children's short absence—but in vain. He assured her that his proposition had been well considered, and although now past the age for romantic passion, he had long entertained towards her the deepest regard and affection. 'In short, my dear madam,' he added, 'your interest in my children is almost as dear as my own; and in return they regard you as their mother. What a joyful surprise it would be to them all, to find their hopes realised on their return home!'

'My dear friend,' replied Mrs. Gordon, 'your proposition has come so unexpectedly upon me, that I must have time for reflection before I can give you a decisive answer; but, believe me, I am not insensible to your many excellent qualities of heart and disposition.'

Fred Beauchamp and the gay widow approaching, put a stop to the further efforts of the Earl in pressing his suit, and he had only time to entreat she would write him a favourable reply in a day or two, as

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Mrs. Gordon, thinking her sister had spoken very sensibly on this subject, without alluding to rank or worldly advantages, thanked her for her good advice, which she agreed to follow, and a neatly-written note was, in accordance therewith, despatched to Bampton, which brought the Earl to the Priory within an hour of its delivery, in high spirits. To those interested in love scenes between the youthful and ardent, the meeting of these two old friends on this important matter, might appear too tame and sedate to be rehearsed; we will, therefore, pass over *sub silentio*, and merely relate the result, that in a fortnight from that day, the Earl and Mrs. Gordon underwent the ceremony of being joined together in holy matrimony at the altar in Bampton Church, next save Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Fortescue, Fred Beauchamp, and Conyers being present, and returned afterwards to Bampton House as if nothing extraordinary had happened, when Aunt Gordon assumed her new dignity of Countess of Annandale, without in any way changing her habitual cheerfulness and savviness of temper. There was not one of the old domestics in the Earl's establishment (old servants being generally captious and impassive of innovations in their departments) who did not receive with unfeigned pleasure their new mistress, whose kindness of heart and generous disposition was so well known to all her inferiors. Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Fortescue returned the same day to London for a short time, promising to be at Bampton again the second week in September.

The news of the Earl's marriage with Mrs. Gordon caused very little surprise in the neighbourhood; the general opinion being the reverse of that so often pronounced on elderly persons 'making fools of themselves.' Here it was admitted to be the wisest thing they could have done, by all save our not over-esteemed friend, Mrs. Harcourt, who was of course prepared with an ill-natured speech for the occasion, envenomed, no doubt, by the consideration of her quondam opponent taking precedence of her in all their country parties.

'Only think,' she observed to her husband, 'of Mrs. Gordon imposing upon that silly old man, and playing her cards so cleverly as to become a Countess? What extraordinary tact some widows have in match-making for themselves as well as others.'

'Well, my dear, I do not blame her for making so good a bargain, although I have long suspected this event would take place sooner or later; and, in my opinion, the Earl has made a most judicious selection.'

'Oh, yes, of course,' retorted the lady; 'the Bampton squire can do no wrong since his elevation to the peerage.'

Mrs. Gordon had immediately, on accepting the Earl, written to apprise Blanche of her contemplated change of name, and on reading her aunt's letter, she exclaimed, 'Oh, William! what do you think has occurred during our short absence from home?'

'Something, my darling, of a joyous nature, I can gather from your sparkling eyes. Perhaps Bob is married?'

'No, not yet.'

'The widow has accepted Fred?'

'No, dear William; guess again.'

'Then the governor has popped the question to aunty?'

'Oh, William,' she said, demurely, 'how could you fancy such a thing?'

'Because, my love, I have fancied it for some five or six months past, and was quite convinced it must soon happen.'

'You were a true prophet, Master Will. Dear aunty will soon be in name what she has ever been in love and affection to us both—a mother.'

'My own dear girl,' said Beauchamp, catching her in his arms, 'this is indeed delightful intelligence; for I often think with pain how melancholy my dear father must feel without his children, and we cannot now be always with him.'

'And why can we not, dear William?'

(To be Concluded next week.)