

"Come and sit down on the sofa by me," I said, resuming my usual drawing impertinent manner. Hitherto I had been unnotably polite.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," she said, drawing up her slight figure. "I hate your English ways! If you want to talk to me, go and sit on that chair and give me the sofa."

Was language like this ever addressed to an "eligible" with forty thousand a year? I was so surprised that I forgot to be angry.

"But we are cousins, Effie," said I. "Does not that make any difference?"

"Yes, generally," she replied; but then—"She blushed intensely, and stopped in great confusion."

"But then—what?" I repeated.—"O nothing!" said Effie.

"But I want to understand this mysterious, 'nothing,'" said I.

"Well then," said she, speaking with an effort, "perhaps it is better that I should tell you at once. Before you came, I heard that you were one of those men who fancy that every woman they meet has designs upon them, and I detest men of that sort. You may be quite sure that you are safe with me."

For the first time for years I crimsoned with shame. What a fool I must appear in the eyes of the world, when a mere child could talk to me in this way!

"I am sorry you think so badly of me," I said. "What can I do to induce you to change your opinion?"

"Well, if you like, we will be friends," she replied, and with a charming mixture of childish hesitation and womanly dignity she held out her hand. "To tell the truth," she continued, laughing, "it is no use your doing 'the grand' with me; for ever since I saw you asleep with your mouth wide open I nearly die of laughter every time I look at you."

Breakfast appeared, and Effie busied herself with the coffee; she evidently wished to be a friend by deed as well as word.

I had not felt so free from ennui for a long time, and I mentally compared my solitary bachelor breakfasts in London with the pleasantness of my present quarters. I do think that, confiding in Effie's youth and consequent freedom from designs on my person and property, I should have proposed on the spot, had not the entrance of my aunt changed the current of my thoughts. Her ladyship entered with the contents of the rouge-pot fresh upon her cheeks. I cannot imagine why she persisted in that vile fancy. She was pretty enough for her age, had a finer figure than either of her daughters, and was altogether an elegant-looking woman. She greeted me most affectionately, and praised Euphemia for being such a good little housekeeper.

About a week after my arrival I escorted the ladies to the Opera. Effie loved music, and on her account I had been at some trouble to procure the best available box in the house. Cillag sang, and the whole of the music was admirably rendered. I noticed a crowd of classes turned towards our loge, and looked at Effie, expecting to see the usual young ladyish conscious unconsciousness on her face. To my surprise I saw that the piece had entered as her whole attention. She leant forward on the scarlet cushions, her lips apart with eagerness; one little hand supported her glowing cheek; the other, ungloved, lay on her lap; and ever and anon, as the heroine passionately reproached her false lover, or bemoaned his desertion, she clinched her slight fingers or let her arm fall listlessly to her side. At the end of the second act, she drew a long breath.

"What do you think of it, Courton?" she asked; "is it not beautiful?"

"Beautiful indeed!" I repeated abstractedly, for I had been watching her and not the heroine on the stage.

Effie turned from me impatiently. Had she expected some more sensible remark? A knock at the door of the box, and a tall slight man entered. He was remarkably handsome, and I felt furious when my aunt and cousin greeted him with every appearance of pleasure. He was introduced to me as Count Stabletski.

I hated the man before I saw him; for ever since I had been in Vienna I had heard of nothing but these confounded Stabletskis, first the count and then the countess. I instantly set him down as some rascally Pole, who imagined my little cousin a millionaire. Fearing he might be successful made me perfectly savage, and turning my head towards the stage, I left him undisputed possession of the two ladies.

"But where is Pauline?" asked Effie in French.

"She was obliged to remain with my uncle tonight," was the reply. "He is called—"

The rest of the sentence was lost, for the count leant forward till his long moustaches almost touched the flowers in my cousin's hair, and I longed to knock the fellow down.

The opera was over, and I was obliged to offer Lady Castle-Connell my arm to the carriage, while the horrid Pole escorted Effie. That night I was nearly in love with my brain. I perceived that my aunt and cousin had combined, and laid a deep plot (in which the Pole had a part) to entrap me, and I was determined not to be entrapped.

I would not, however, expose myself to Effie's sly attempts at fascination. That childish manner was all put on. Women are actresses from beginning to end, and Effie was an unusually practiced one. I would not avoid society, as I had intended; I would rather seek it, and, if possible, I would fall in love with, and marry some foreigner; that would be the best punishment for Effie's duplicity. I would begin that very day. I had arranged to ride with Effie to the Prater, and would there fix on some object worthy of my affection. I remained on the defensive all the morning. Lady Castle-Connell

tried in vain to draw me into conversation. Effie laughed, and said that I had fallen in love with some unknown fair one at the Opera, and was unreasonably cross in consequence.

Now I never liked being laughed at; I was not at all accustomed to it; and I thought it extremely strange and uncomfortable to be made a butt for Effie's amusement. It was no good trying to stop her, and my only resource was to inform her that the horses would be kept waiting. She did not detain me, but came down in good time—looking lovely in her dark blue riding-habit and little plumed hat. I was not to be content though by this attention to my wishes; so I assisted her into the saddle without a word. I remember that my heart beat when I held her tiny foot in my hand. At the time I wondered why—I know now.

Our ride was delightful. Effie, like all Irish girls, rode well and fearlessly. Nearly every one we met turned round and looked at her admiringly. I thought her very pleasing that afternoon. The Pole (I hate the man's name) had been calling on the ladies that morning, and I felt sure that his visit accounted for Effie's extreme amiability towards me. The brute wants to induce me to marry Effie, that he bids if I may make an easy victim of my aunt. He doubtless thinks "maladi" a rich joke.

A few nights after our ride in the Prater the long-talked-of ball at the British Embassy came off. Euphemia was wild with delight, and for two or three days beforehand expressed such childish pleasure at the thought of coming formally out, that I was almost thrown off my guard; not that, though, Lady Castle-Connell was too knowing—she over-ruled herself. She talked so much of her daughter's innocent delight that my old suspicion of the Polish plot was revived.

On the night of the ball I managed to get Mr. C—, the secretary of the legation, to give his arm to my aunt, and thus secured Effie for myself.

I am not fond of being encumbered with middle-aged females; they bore one even more than girls; and besides, notwithstanding her duplicity, I had some regard for my cousin, though I had not given up my idea of falling in love with some one else to suit her.

I was looking about me for a chair whereon to deposit my cousin, when I discovered so extremely beautiful, that a sort of bushy murmur of admiration arose. Imagine the most exquisite Grecian statue, its face illumined by a pair of wondrous eyes, its long waves of hair bound by golden fillets and bright jewels; clothe it in crimson, and in other respects, modern and free, and you have before you the figure I was looking at.

"Go, Heaven!" I exclaimed, touching Effie's shoulder, "how surpassingly lovely! Who is she?"

"Why that is Count Stabletski's sister," she replied. "She is thought the greatest beauty in Vienna. Perhaps you would like to be introduced," she added; rather sarcastically I thought.

I hurg back; I was annoyed at finding my Grecian divinity was sister to the odious Pole; however, a pretty woman is worth knowing anywhere, so I went through the ceremony of presentation. The nymph with the wondrous eyes slightly lifted them, and bowed indifferently; then, seizing on Effie, pronounced a long speech in the purest French.

"I only returned yesterday," she said, "for I should have paid you a visit before now. I caught a glimpse of you on horseback from my window. You were with your cousin, I think?"

I had partly withdrawn from the immediate circle round the countess, but she so directed her question that I could not but advance and reply.

"You are very fortunate in having such a lovely cousin," she remarked, as Effie went off under her partner's charge.

The countess did not dance; it was not her style, and she knew it.

I muttered some rapid compliment "that my cousin's beauty was as completely eclipsed by the speaker's own charms as the sun outshines the moon;" and I did but express my thoughts. Countess Stabletski was the very perfection of loveliness—form, contour, and coloring. She must have been beautiful anywhere; and, attired as she was with almost regal magnificence, her head and bust blazing with jewels, she completely dimmed Effie's ideal face; for my cousin's charm consisted far more in refined delicacy of expression than in her really pretty features.

I am not fond of dancing, so I took up my station near the fault-fail in which the Grecian goddess was worshipped and rejoiced like a demon when I observed the desecrating glances with which my lady aunt cast at me from time to time. I can't flatter myself that I enjoyed much conversation with the beautiful Pauline; there were far too many candidates for words and smiles for me to obtain more than a scanty portion, and the principal part of my evening was spent in watching her profile.

The guests were departing; and I, forgetting my suspicions, advanced to hand my cousin to the carriage. I had almost reached her, when I saw the Pole, who had made himself so actively obnoxious ever since my arrival in Vienna, offer his arm. I angrily stood aside to let them pass.

"What a consummate flirt!" I thought, as Effie passed me without recognition. I could not bring myself to believe then that any woman from fifteen to forty-five could be oblivious to my presence.

I returned towards the Countess Stabletski, who had risen to depart. A whole crowd of adorers and admirers stood waiting, in hopes of being permitted to hold her bouquet, to cloak her, or to hand her down the staircase. I stood sulkily aloof; I had had enough for one evening, and was determined to make no more advances. To my joy, or rather

to the gratification of my wounded vanity, the lovely Pole leant forward and said, "Lord Courton, if you have no duties to perform," and she glanced towards my aunt, who stood talking to the Princess.

"I would beg you to hand me to my carriage. My chaperon deserted me, leaving me in my brother's charge, and he, too, has played truant and left me alone."

I could not but be sensible of the honor intended me, and with a triumphant glance at the disappointed swains around me, led the countess from the room. I fancied that she leant on me rather more than was absolutely necessary, and in return for the discrimination she had shown in choosing me from among the common herd, I begged permission to call the next morning, which request was graciously granted.

"I want so much to have a long talk with you," she said, with her bewitching smile; "I love our nation; Englishmen alone truly sympathise with my unhappy country."

Her beautiful eyes filled with tears as she spoke; then, mastering the momentary emotion, and fixing them, bright and glowing, on me, as though she would read my very soul, she exclaimed passionately, "Tell me that you too love Poland."

I don't know what the deuce was the matter with me that night; I am almost ashamed to own it; but it is a fact that I, who had withstood the most desperate efforts of the most rabid husband-hunters living—the mothers of Belgravia and Mayfair—became spooney under the ardent gaze of the Polish Circé, and like any love-sick boy fresh from college, told her "I could love anything for her sake."

The next morning I breakfasted in my room. I had resolved to fall in love with the Countess Stabletski, and thus destroy Effie's schemes for an establishment. Fully did I realize the awful change which would take place if I transformed the penniless daughter of an Irish earl into an English peeress. Farewell, then, to that soft brown dress and plain white collar, bought and put on for the express purpose of winning not me, but my broad acres. Farewell to the *telé-a-télé* breakfasts, which I had found so dangerously pleasant. The simple dress, the domestic habits, the winning smiles, would be discarded like a masquerade dress on the very day in which I led my newly-made bride from the altar.

That day and every succeeding one found me with the beautiful Pauline. She was quite free, for she lived with an aunt who was never off the sofa, and her obnoxious brother had taken himself off somewhere. I had had to give satisfaction more than once on her account—to an Hungarian officer, to whom she had been rather gracious before my arrival, and to a fiery Roman Prince. I enjoyed the supreme pleasure of winging both these adversaries.

My aunt was in despair at my infatuation, and actually took upon herself to call me to account for my devotion to "that foreign adventuress," as she presumed to call Pauline. To her horror, I informed her that I should consider myself the happiest man on earth the day that I presented Pauline to her as a niece. Lady Castle-Connell positively shrieked when I made that avowal, and Effie turned very pale. I suppose she did not like to think of the Courton diamonds on Pauline's brow. She had probably accustomed herself to think of them as in her own possession.

Several months thus passed away. I had made the countess a formal offer, and had met with such an undecided refusal, as induced me to remain hanging on in Vienna.

One evening, hastening as usual to Pauline, I found her fearfully agitated. Her breath came by hard, labored gasps, her bosom heaved with emotion, while her glittering eyes and clenched hands showed the volcano about to break forth. I inquired the cause of her sorrow.

"Lisez," she replied, in a choked voice, and tossed a newspaper towards me.

I took it up, in hopes of an explanation, but it was in Polish.

Pauline's aunt explained the cause of her niece's agitation. The paper contained the first news of the Warsaw massacres, and my Pauline, with her noble heart, felt every blow struck against her unhappy country like a dagger piercing her own breast.

My admiration and love went on *crescendo*; and, as Spring advanced, and the tiny spark of just indignation wrung from a few agonized hearts, was fanned into a mighty insurrection, I grew almost as enthusiastic as Pauline, and would at one time have freely given my whole fortune for Poland.

Countess Stabletski seemed at last to understand and appreciate my entire devotion to her; and when I again implored her to be my wife, she accepted me, making only one condition—I must win her with the sword's point; in other words, I must join a band of insurgents then waiting in Galicia to cross the frontier. In a moment of infatuation I actually consented. Pauline arranged everything for me. She wrote to some relations in Austrian Poland, with whom I was to remain until the detachment was ready to set out, and even consented to forward about five thousand pounds, which I devoted to the cause of my immorata's country, to the proper authorities.

The night before I started on my wild-goose chase, I returned to the hotel earlier than usual. I considered it my duty to inform my relations of my departure, and gloated in advance over Lady Castle-Connell's anguish when she should find her fine schemes so entirely frustrated; for, in spite of my devotion to Pauline, I think the fair lady still had hopes of my estates, entailed and unentailed.