

Dear, kind Mrs. Barratt," exclaimed Blanche, sobbing and crying at her departure. "You must promise to come and live with me, when I am married, or become mistress of my own property—indeed you must. I shall never be happy without you."

"My dear child," replied Mrs. Barratt, "you know little now of the duties of married life; your husband would never consent to such an arrangement as you propose, and it would then be your duty to conform to his wish. I would not say commands—as every wife should obey her husband."

"Then, dear Mrs. Barratt, I will never marry till I can find one who will love me for myself alone, and love all those I love—kindly and affectionate like yours!—who will yield to all my reasonable desires, and endeavor to make me, as I should him, truly happy."

"Marriage is a great lottery, dear Blanche, and I would earnestly caution you against accepting any man, however handsome or agreeable—however rich, or talented, or tall—unless you have an opportunity of thoroughly ascertaining his true character. Never marry in haste, and repent at leisure. Your large fortune will attract many pretentious admirers, men of the world, to whom love, in its true meaning, is utterly unknown; and when once in possession of your fortune, they might treat you with indifference and neglect. Indeed, my dear, dear child, a young girl with a large fortune stands in a much worse position, in regard to her prospects of happiness in the married state, than one who has nothing beyond her own mental and personal attractions. Among all your neighbors, there is not any gentleman I know in the least degree calculated to make you happy, except one, and he, I fear, is too high-minded and fastidious in his ideas about money, ever to aspire to the hand of the heiress; that person, my dear

Blanche, is your cousin's companion, Mr. Compton, who is a very sensible and interesting man."

"I cannot, dear aunt," replied Blanche, still sobbing, refrain from grieving at the loss I have sustained in dear Mrs. Barratt, who has ever been to me a second mother, but if you will leave me, I will endeavor to be more composed."

"Well, my dear, make haste, and wash away all traces of your tears, for I expect some visitors this morning, and you must be in the drawing-room to help me to receive them."

Mrs. Harcourt was one of those cold, unapproachable beings, living within the fragile zone of respectability, and impervious to every general influence, in fact, she belonged to that numerous class denominated the imperturbables, who consider as a breach of decorum to be affected by those common occurrences which exercise so foolish an influence over the generality of the human race. Even the death of the friends and relations, the excess of joy at their recovery, the sorrows, the joy and weakness of mind in old age, she would indulge in such wayward fancies, and decidedly at variance with the rules of propriety and etiquette to be observed, with the exception, upon all occasions. She was one of those persons who would, if engaged in the Satanical pastime of table turning and table-rapping, have stood as a six-foot table wall to prevent any rotatory motion of the said table towards herself, possessing not one atom of electricity in her whole composition.

Blanche Douglas, it need scarcely be said, unfortunately for her own peace of mind and individual happiness, was a native of the torrid zone, and therefore the very opposite in disposition and character to Mrs. Harcourt. Like the young offshoot of a vine, stretching forth its tender and pliant tendrils for support, this young, warm-hearted girl (when bereft of the mainstay of her childhood, in the person of Mrs. Barratt) looked around for one to whom she could cling for comfort and sympathy in her feelings, and love with the intensity of her deep and ardent attachment. In Constance she had found a firm and warm friend, to whom, as a sister, she could communicate all her joys and sorrows; but her feelings towards William Beauchamp had become almost unmitigable to herself for some past. Mrs. Barratt's remarks occasioning a shyness and embarrassment in her manner towards him, not before experienced, when viewing him (which she had from an early age) as her brother only. The veil was now withdrawn—she knew that she loved, with the ardor of her first purest affections, him to whom she could cling through life, as women only can and do cling to the husband of their choice.

On returning to her room after her return from Mrs. Compton's ball, Blanche carefully examined her pretty little basket of flowers (Beauchamp's present), and every word and look of his was recalled to her mind, as, pressing at her lips, she unprinted a fond kiss upon its glistening surface.

"Yes, dear William," she exclaimed, "I will not deal treasurously this little trinket for your sake, although you are seldom absent from my thoughts, and your love to me is far beyond all earthly treasures."

CHAPTER IX.

The breakfast at Mr. Compton's, after the ball, presented a striking contrast to that of Marston Castle. All faces beamed with happy smiles and joyous good humor, induced by the kind reception they experienced from the master and mistress of Brockley House, who welcomed friends and strangers alike to partake of their hospitality. Opposite to the breakfast-room windows on the lawn were congregated about three hundred pheasants, called together by the keeper's whistle, and enjoying their breakfast also.

"It is indulgence is to cause this," returned Bob, "I think their mamma will have much more to answer for than Bob Conyers."

"Well, Mr. Conyers, we are all now impatient to begin our day's sport, which we can see from the terrace; so give a hint to William Beauchamp, or these increasing new comers will soon clear off our stock of old sherry brandy."

"Thank you for the hint," replied Conyers, "as I have not yet had my glass of jumping powder."

The hounds having arrived, Mr. Compton's guests quickly dispersed in search of their steeds; the lion of the day, on whom all eyes were turned, being a great Leicestershire squire, who had for many years hunted that country with a splendid pack of hounds, but was now settled down on his own paternal estate. It being one of his maxims, that every fence was practicable with a fall, it is almost needless to say, he was a bold and fearless rider, and that no obstacle ever stopped him. In stature, he was about the general standard, with a broad, expansive chest, and features, if not handsome, yet manly, reflecting the spirit, which was working within, of cool determination and undaunted courage. His seat on horseback was neither staid nor graceful, but easy and careless as his manner of riding across country, to which may be attributed many of the severe falls he encountered, which were of such continued occurrence, that he never appeared quite satisfied without his general allowance of half-a-dozen per diem.

"Oh, demmit!" exclaimed Markham, who had been listening to a recital of the great squire's exploits, retailed by Vernon, "what a confounded fire-eating monster he looks! he'll pound us all to-day, and ride away from Burnett and Beauchamp too."

"I hope so," replied Vernon, "and that both of them may break their necks in trying to catch him."

"Eh! indeed, Dick, you're a nice member of the hunt, ain't you, to wish every man of us to be beaten by a stranger? but I'll bet an even five pounds he don't beat Will Beauchamp or Burnett."

"Done, Markham, and I'll make it ten, if you like."

"Take him at his word," cried Sir Lucius Gwynne, who overheard the conversation, "and I'll go halvet with you."

"Done, then, Vernon," exclaimed the Captain; "Gwynne's witness to the bet."

"And now," said Sir Lucius, "I'll bet you two to one on Beauchamp against the great Leicestershire man. Will you have it, Vernon?"

"No, I thank you," was the reply; "I shall take no more on that event to-day; but who is to decide?"

"We will have Burnett," said Gwynne; "you can choose Tyler, or any other first-flight man you prefer to him."

All being now mounted and ready for action, the hounds were thrown into the evergreens near the house, and in a moment the ox broke across the lawn. Dashing through the stable-yard below and some out-buildings, which screened him from view, he immediately sank into the valley, taking his line through the most round the fences of the whole country. Will Beauchamp and his whippet-in Charley were with the hounds, as usual, but had not crossed more than three fields before the great hero was down upon them, at full speed, and going at a small brook as a river were in his way.

"He'll catch it there," cried Charley to his master, as the great squire and his horse went floundering into the stream. "I should have thought, sir, a man of his business habits had know'd what boggy ground meant afore to-day; but come along, sir, there's plenty to help him out; and, sooth to say, there were about a dozen of the finest fellows in the world in the same predicament, with their horses up to their hocks, struggling in the mire. Sir Francis, however, had the sense to avoid the trap, and followed

Francis, that there we can take our fences at a fly; here it cannot be done, with a wide ditch on both sides, and a big, thundering bank and quickset in the middle."

"I shall try, it, notwithstanding," rejoined the squire.

"Then you don't see our second fox killed, that's stilled; but, hark! by Jove! they have found him. And with a scream, were hurried through the hearts of all, Will Beauchamp waved him over the river. In a moment the whole pack was at work, rattling him round the covert."

"Beautful!" exclaimed the great squire; "how those big brut stacks to him! Gad, sir, they squeak like t-r-r-rs, light enough in their tongue—eh, Burnett?"

"Yes, then, sir, cry with them, and when they run hard, you can scarcely hear them at all, tip and go is their motto, and I've seen them run half a mile with their fox in view, without a bound giving tongue. But, look! they are away at the bottom of the covert, while we are standing here."

"Now for it, then," cried Sir Francis, as, sticking his spurs into his horse he dashed down the nearest drive; but Beauchamp, with his waip Charley, had got the start, and kept the lead for three miles of very severe country, until the hounds were brought to a check on the banks of a deep brook, where the fox, having been headed by a man at work in the field opposite, had doubled back, and thrown them into some little confusion. At this moment the Leicestershire squire made his *entree* into the field, in rather an unceremonious manner, by being thrown head foremost from his saddle over a high bank, with his horse scrambling after him. Beauchamp, hearing the crash behind him, turned and asked if he was hurt.

"Hurt!" he exclaimed; "no, I am not often hurt by a fall; but now we are even, sir, addressing Beauchamp, as the hounds settled again on the scent; 'so come along,' and he rode savagely at the brook, cheering Beauchamp to follow. Our young master, with Charley, were quickly by his side, when the great man, thinking to pound them, rode at some stiff post and rails against the hill, which his horse, having the wind knocked out of him already, was unable to clear, and, breaking the top rail, again gave his master a severe fall."

"Thank you," said Beauchamp, as he passed the prostrate squire, "for letting me over so easy."

"I am not beaten yet," was the retort, as he once more jumped into his saddle; and, riding furiously by the fall, he rode desperately at a new five-barred gate, over which he fell heavily into a hard turnpike road, his horse also lying stunned on his back.

"Now, sir," said Beauchamp, jumping from his saddle, "you are hurt, or ought to be; pray let me assist you."

"Oh, never mind me," faintly ejaculated the squire; "this is damned hard falling ground; but confound it at rascally groom of mine, for mounting me on a horse not fit to go. I'll discharge him this very night. Thank you, Mr. Beauchamp, for your attention. I am all right again now; pray go on with your hounds. I will soon be with you."

Bob Conyers and others now coming up, Beauchamp whispered to him a few words about the great man's fall, and rode away to catch his hounds, which, by the way, he never could, until, with Charley alone, they had killed their second fox among the laurels on Mr. Compton's lawn, on the very spot where they had found their first in the morning. Beauchamp, with his horse quite fresh from his short respite, when assisting the fallen hero, went rapidly away from the rest (whose horses were already in distress from the pace up to the road), and was standing on the lawn with the hounds (the fox being suspended in a tree) baying around, at least five minutes before any other horseman made his appearance; Mr. and Mrs. Compton, with the children and all the domestics enjoying the scene.

To Beauchamp's surprise, the first man up was Markham, who exclaimed, "Eh!

with sundry anathemas for his want of condition, the great man walked on to the lawn, where he stood for a few moments talking with Mrs. Compton, and then retired to his own room for the luxury of a warm bath.

The fox was now thrown to the hounds, as the heavy weights, including Sir Lucius, Squire Beauchamp, and others, with whom Vernon had been in company, arrived on the scene, and many and hearty were the congratulations on their capital day's sport.

"Ah, Compton!" exclaimed Conyers, "we have always luck on our side when we meet at your place—no bagmen or three-legged ones here; and now for a glass of sherry to drink your health and a merry Christmas to all your family, with fifty new ones to come, and may they find you still living as heretofore—the friend of fox-hunters."

"And a right hearty welcome to you all," replied Mr. Compton, who led the way into the house, followed by a goodly company of pink jackets, who gladly availed themselves of his proffered hospitality. Markham whispered Gwynne, "A hollow thing, eh? No mistake about first man."

"None whatever—Vernon must pay."

"All right, old fellow—tell him what you say."

The losing man did not relish the Captain's hint; but knowing his good nature, put him off by saying they would settle that another day.

"Play and pay, Vernon, is the rule on such occasions," said Markham; "so you must fork out; had I lost, you would have made me pay quickly enough."

"Oh, very well, I'll send you a draft tomorrow or next day," with which he turned aside.

On their way home, a comparison was instituted by Sir Francis and Conyers, between the riding of the two rival masters of fox hounds, Rushton and Will Beauchamp.

"In Leicestershire," remarked Burnett, "I think Beauchamp would give way to the great squire."

"I don't think he would," retorted Conyers; "for this reason: Will rides with equal science and superior judgment to the other; he is always with hounds, in and out of covert, and is exceedingly quick, without ever being in a flurry. See how quickly he creeps along, always selecting the best ground for his horse, whose resources he husbands to the utmost, with neither whip nor spur to harass or frighten him. Again, when approaching a large fence, he pulls his horse into a trot, if necessary, to give him wind and strength to clear it, easing or lifting him, as occasion may require. The falls he gets are very few and far between, yet he is, as a huntsman ought to be, always with his hounds; and as to his seat in the saddle, he is a perfect centaur—man and horse appear as one animal."

"That's all very true, Conyers," replied Burnett; "Will Beauchamp is a difficult man to beat in his own country, with his horse so thoroughly made to their master's hand, and at banks and stiff fences they are perfectly at home; but in Leicestershire those horses would cut a poor figure, where it is going from first to last without the hope of pulling up for a second; nothing but thorough-bred ones can live with hounds there."

"Very likely, Burnett; I don't dispute that point; but this I will maintain, that Will Beauchamp, equally well horsed, shall beat your hero in his own country six days out of ten throughout the season. Your man is fast and furious, but in my opinion not a thorough good rider, which no one ought to be called who gets such an extraordinary number of falls in a season; this, although a proof of daring, bull-dog courage, is no proof, but just the reverse of good horsemanship."

"Well, Conyers, there is a good deal of sterling truth in your remarks, and, I must add, no man entertains a better opinion than I do of Will Beauchamp; so now, as our roads diverge, good night."

To be Continued.