

"I am sure in your case," said Lord Danby, "but to any, Charles, I did not intend to offend him, although wishing to avoid being quarrelsome." Lord Danby when the ball was formed.

"No, my dear girl, that I hope he does not feel, and I will endeavour to smooth down this unpleasantness."

After the quadrille was concluded, Malcolm sought his friend, trying to persuade him to ask Blanche for another dance, which he hoped might be the means of reconciling this little difference.

"No, Malcolm," he replied, "I will see no farther, having done so three times in vain, and when positively in the right, to be postponed even for a Duke's son is not very palatable."

"Come, come, Beauchamp, don't give way to temper."

"No Malcolm, temper has little to do with my present feelings, which are acute enough without your accusing me of being bad tempered—that I am not, and never have been, although I can feel an insult from those I love more deeply than any man living. But now I am engaged, and must go in search of my partner."

As he turned away, Malcolm said, "Mind, Beauchamp, you are of our party to the supper-table," to which no answer was returned.

On Malcolm's seeking Blanche, whom he found sitting with her Aunt Gordon, she anxiously inquired, "Well, Charles, have you succeed in pacifying William?"

"No, dear girl, I am sorry to say I have not yet prevailed; he seems exceedingly hurt, and says you refused him three times, and that you ought at once to have taken his arm, instead of Lord Danby's, as being positively engaged to him before his lordship. This admits of no doubt, Blanche; and he also feels very much annoyed that you should have shown so distinguishing a mark of favor to Lord Danby, by accepting him for two dances so close upon each other, contrary to etiquette and his advice, and thereby placing him you have known so long in an inferior position to an acquaintance of few hours. This is too true, my dear girl, and Beauchamp, with all his warm, generous feelings, although most sensitive, is also most determined, and will put up with no slight or indifference from those he loves."

"Indeed, indeed, Charles," replied Blanche, with the tears standing in her eyes, "I did not intend, as you must know, either to offend or slight William; but I thought it would appear so very rude to Lord Danby to refuse dancing with him when he had taken our places."

"Yes, Blanche, that may be all very true; but recollect, it is far better to appear rude to a stranger than to act unkindly and unfairly to one of the dearest friends you will ever find in this world; and had Constance treated me as you have William Beauchamp, I don't know what would have been the consequence; for I tell you plainly it would have put me in a terrible passion."

"Oh, Charles, I am indeed miserable that you should also think so hardly of me," replied poor Blanche; "but pray, go and tell William I am sorry in having offended him, that I will hold myself bound to dance with him before any other person, and will sit down until I have first fulfilled my promise to himself."

At this moment Captain Melville approached to claim her hand, when she pleaded a bad headache, and begged to be excused dancing with him till after supper, when, if better, she would be happy to accept him as a partner. "Independent of which," she said, quietly yet firmly, "I have made a great mistake in the dances to-night, and was really engaged to Mr. Beauchamp before you asked me."

As Melville, with a low bow, withdrew, Malcolm applauded Blanche for her resolution in acting so firmly and honorably towards her lover, even at the risk of offending others, and said, "Now, Blanche, you are on even terms again; and should Beauchamp

only and her own, and I shall never from moment to moment in my affections or respect to her who is entitled to my esteem and confidence."

Soon after, Major Hammond came up, offering his arm to Blanche, and when they were alone, Mrs. Gordon said, "You have sufficiently punished dear Blanche for her trifling error, to-night, William, and you are now more severe to her than she deserves."

"The happiness of life, dear aunt, depends on trifles apparently as light as air; and the disposition is shown as much in little things as in great events; and you see my anticipations about Blanche are being realised. I fear it will be some time before she really knows her own mind. What I ought Lord Danby, or a dozen lords, to influence her conduct towards one she profess to love, and make him insignificant in the presence of a perfect stranger! A woman cannot love the man she would help to humiliate. No, no, aunt; it harasses me to think more about Blanche's treatment, which has sunk deep in my heart. No sooner have I risked my life to save her from one lord than I am nearly involved in a quarrel with another, whom she thinks proper to patronize and place on an equal, if not a superior, footing to myself; but from this night Blanche is free to act as she pleases, without the least reference to me, as I will never presume to advise or influence her for the future; in fact, I believe she does not rightly yet understand her own feelings towards me, which, most probably, are those of sisterly regard only, as she appears to be much taken, at first sight, with Lord Danby."

"William, you are now not only severe but unjust also, and are magnifying a trifle into a serious offence. Blanche has atoned and suffered most severely for her error, and it was all I could do to console her. Will you make me also miserable, as well as herself?"

"No, dear aunt, I will say no more; perhaps I have said too much."

"Then you will be kind to her as usual, when she returns; and be once more my own dear William?"

"Yes, my kindest of friends; I would not pain you for the world, and you shall have no cause to find fault with me again to-night."

When Blanche returned with her partner, Beauchamp rose and received her with his usual kind manner, and taking her hand in his, whispered, "I have been too severe upon you, dear Blanche; will you forgive my excited feelings?"

"Yes, indeed, dear William, I do, for I know I have acted very wrong, and have dreaded lest I might involve you in a quarrel by my wavering conduct; but it shall never be repeated, if you will trust for the future; my experience of the world make me feel the want of your kind, friendly advice, which never shall be disregarded, to do what I feel to be right, not what it may be convenient to do. And now, to show you my contrition for treating you so cavalierly, I will, after fulfilling my engagement to Captain Melville, accept no other partner but yourself for the remainder of the evening."

"That, indeed, I cannot allow, Blanche." "But you cannot help it, William," she said, gaily, "my resolution is taken, and being a right one, it shall not be broken."

"Well, dear girl, we will talk of that presently, as Melville is approaching; but bear in mind you are of our party at the supper-table, where I have reserved places; so return to us immediately your dance is finished, or even before, if you see a movement in that direction."

Melville was rallying Blanche on her forgetfulness of her engagements that evening, in the last figure of the quadrille, when, seeing a rush towards the door leading to the supper-room, she hastily said, "I must join my party, Captain Melville, this moment, which is an engagement I made before enter-

attention, the toast of the evening succeeded. The wealth of the ladies was of course received with rapturous applause, for which Bob Conyers returned thanks on their behalf in a very humorous and gallant speech, being the oldest bachelor of the company, jocosely taking his date from the age of George the Second.

"You behold, ladies and gentlemen," said Bob, "in your humble servant a true specimen of the bashful man, who has had the misfortune to be in love ever since entering his teens, and who has now advanced very deep into the ties, without being tied up himself; the fact is, ladies, I never could muster courage to pop the question, for, when the time arrived for popping, the cork would never come out; in short, I am like a stale bottle of stout, there's no pop left in me; and then as to a choice—these lines are continually running in my head—

'How happy could I be with either,
Were't other dear charmer away!'

My sensitive and soft heart is ever receiving impressions, and the wax is always melting, for it ain't like cobbler's way, which keeps many a man in the saddle. 'This very night I have fallen in love ten times, at least; and were I offered the selection of all the beauty here assembled on this auspicious occasion to do us honor, for my life I could never make up my mind, ladies, which to choose, as you all appear so irresistibly bewitching. I see some men looking unutterably soft things, and others whispering exceedingly foolish ones to their fair partners, whilst I am standing by my unfortunate partner's side like an ass, twisting and twirling her fan (I believe I have broken half a dozen to-night); but the very attempt to make love absolutely chokes me; in short, unless some kind soul, pitying my distressed situation, does actually propose for me, Bob Conyers must continue a bachelor to the end of the chapter. It behoves me now, gentlemen, on behalf of the ladies, to express their thanks for the compliment paid them, and the married who have experienced the felicity of conjugal bliss offer their matronly advice to all their younger sisters to change their state as soon as possible; and my advice to young bachelors is to take warning by the fate of Bob Conyers, and to strike while the iron is warm and pliable."

The next toast was fox-hunting, to which no one for some time appeared inclined to respond, each master expecting the other would rise; but Beauchamp, being the youngest, knew very well he could not be required to do so, out of respect to his seniors. The Honorable Mr. Manvers, master of the V— Hunt, at length stood up, and thus addressed the company:—

"Ladies and gentlemen, one would suppose, from the dead silence among the masters of fox-hounds, that not one of them could give tongue; whereas, to my certain knowledge, all possess stentorian lungs except myself, who am unfortunately a squeaker. The master of the C— Hunt is notoriously a very fast man across country, greatly my senior in years, and my superior in sporting achievements—quick enough to speak his mind in the field without much ceremony or circumlocution; and of course, therefore, the most proper person to return thanks on this occasion; but he is evidently a timid bashful man in ladies' society; and although looking as fierce as a lion at fences, I fear, like my friend Conyers, he will never muster courage to pop the question. Then there's the master of the S. W. Hunt, who, if he could be prevailed on to open his mouth, must be a speaker of great weight, his longitude and latitude being of the Anak order, and I may say, 'Oh, that this is too, too solid flesh would melt, and resolve itself into a speech.' (A murmur from Carrington, 'That's my infirmity, sir.') Lastly, there is the master of the hunt in whose district we have assembled, who, by all accounts, can fight, if he can't speak in defence of the ladies."

joined their party, and stood talking with Blanche, until the sets were again beginning to form.

"Really, Miss Douglas, this is the most delightful ball," Lord Danby observed, "I have ever attended, everything is so well arranged; and the great variety of beautiful and elegant costumes selected by the ladies renders it quite a fairy scene. The music also is so enlivening, one feels it almost impossible to resist its influence. Are you not, also, very fond of dancing, Miss Douglas?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "I enjoy a ball exceedingly."

"Then, as I perceive you have no partner, will you consider me too presuming in petitioning for the honour of another dance?"

"I must beg to decline, Lord Danby, being already engaged."

"Really," he continued, "I think your partner, whoever he may be, deserves severe punishment for his negligence or indifference, in preferring his friends' society in the supper-room to yours."

"He may, perhaps, be detained there against his inclination," she replied; "or, probably, is not aware that dancing has recommenced."

"You are very considerate and forbearing, Miss Douglas, where, perhaps, your clemency may fail to be appreciated; although I can scarcely believe it possible any gentleman could for a moment forget an engagement with yourself."

"Then, of course," she added, "my partner being unavoidably absent, I cannot think of punishing him unjustly by accepting another in his place."

"But if you will accept my arm conditionally, pleaded Danby, 'until he makes his appearance, I promise to resign your hand the moment he approaches.'"

Blanche still quietly declined, when Mrs. Harcourt overhearing her, interposed; "Surely, my dear, you will not refuse Lord Danby on such fair conditions; it is your partner's duty to be in attendance, if he wished to dance with you; and you are not to sit still to suit his convenience."

"I have danced twice with Lord Danby already this evening, Aunt Harcourt, and having experienced some unpleasantness in accepting one partner when engaged to another, I prefer sitting down to causing any further disagreement."

"Oh, that is the gentleman's affair, my dear; you have nothing to do with their differences."

"Indeed, but I think she has, Mrs. Harcourt," observed Aunt Gordon, "and Blanche is acting most wisely in declining to give offence to any one; and putting her niece's arm within her arm, she walked off to another part of the room."

"You have done quite right, my dearest girl," said Aunt Gordon, "in refusing Lord Danby; and I hope you will never follow Mrs. Harcourt's advice, who does not care what scrapes she may lead you into, or what annoyance you may suffer, when a lord is in the case; vain, foolish woman! one would think she had caused mischief enough already by trying to force Lord Vaucourt upon you; but here comes William. Well, sir," she said, "are you not ashamed of yourself, to be sitting drinking with your boon companions so long, when you knew you were engaged to Blanche?"

"Indeed, dear aunt, I was not aware that such was the case, or nothing should have prevented me leaving the room earlier; although as it is, I have given great offence by resigning my presidential chair so soon."

"Well, William, I was only joking, but, as this quadrille is now half finished, sit down with me and Blanche in this snug corner, and tell us what that shouting was about."

Blanche gladly complied; and his fair listeners laughed exceedingly at his description of the Master of the C— Hunt's attempt to return thanks.

When Beauchamp stood up with Blanche

Danby, should he ask me again? Mrs. Harcourt will take offence, I suppose, if I refuse him."

"You are not to consult Mrs. Harcourt, but your own feelings, Blanche, in such cases; and knowing the general opinion on this point, you, of course, are the best judge, whether you feel inclined to give further encouragement to Lord Danby by such a very particular mark of favor, as accepting him three times for your partner, on the first night of your acquaintance. Lord Danby and lookers-on will of course draw the natural conclusion that you approve those marked attentions; but if you do not intend to give him encouragement, you can plead fatigue, or other engagements." Beauchamp, having thus expressed himself, consigned Blanche to Mrs. Gordon's care, who was soon relieved of her charge by a succession of applicants for the honour of her niece's hand, which was not permitted to remain idle until the dawn of morning put an end to further exertions.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The next day, a grand muster of fox-hunters took place about four miles from Cherrington, where the young squire made his appearance about twelve o'clock; and his usual good fortune having attended him, resulting in a good day's sport, all retired from the field well satisfied. The third morning, Beauchamp rode over to the Priory, and remained until after luncheon; when, sitting with Blanche in the drawing-room, to his surprise Captain Markham was announced, accompanied by Lord Danby.

"Ah, Beauchamp, old fellow, good day's sport, yesterday—'pon honour. Danby thinks first-rate. Called to inquire how the ladies were after the bull. Capital ball, Miss Douglas; lots of partners; grand affair—don't you think so?"

Lord Danby, although received rather formally by Beauchamp, was very courteous in his address to Blanche; hoping she did not feel over-fatigued by her great exertions, with many other little speeches of this nature, usual on such occasions; soon after which the visitors took their leave.

"Beauchamp again!" remarked Lord Danby to his friend, during their ride home; "there must be something more in his constant attentions to Miss Douglas than Mrs. Harcourt imagines."

"Can't say, Danby, 'pon honour—don't concern me—mind my own business—every fellow must take care of himself; but Harcourt is a crusty old customer—very, won't give in—swears Beauchamp shan't have her—can't be had without his consent—ward, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, I hardly know what to think, Markham."

"Take my advice, Danby—think nothing about it, but act as you feel inclined—field open to all—no poaching—win her, if you can—worth having—lots of tin—capital chance—Marchioness of Danby—sure to take."

"I do not regard her fortune, Markham, and believe she would not marry me for my title, unless my first impressions of her character are very erroneous. But it is quite premature my talking in this manner upon so short an acquaintance."

A few nights after, Mrs. Gordon, Lord Malcolm, and Blanche, with the Beauchamp family, dined at Barton Court, and after dinner Lord Danby paid particular attention to Miss Douglas, sitting near her the greater part of the evening, evidently fascinated by her unaffected manners and exceeding loveliness; in fact, from that time he fell really in love with her. Beauchamp, guessing what was passing in Lord Danby's mind, kept at a distance, from that feeling of hauteur which jealousy engenders; and Mrs. Gordon witnessed with alarm his contracting brows and compressed lips, Selina Markham, also, noticing his grave deportment and thoughtful looks, whispered—

When Beauchamp stood up with Blanche

Te to be Continued.