Title: Lady Maude's Mania

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Chapter One.

A High Family.

"Con-found those organs!" said the Earl of Barmouth.

"And frustrate their grinders," cried Viscount Diphoos.

"They are such a nuisance, my boy."

"True, oh sire," replied the viscount, who had the heels of his patent leather shoes on the library chimney-piece of the town mansion in Portland Place. He had reached that spot with difficulty, and was smoking a cigar, to calm his nerves for what he called the operation.

"Tom, my boy."

"Yes, gov'nor."

"If her ladyship faints—"

"If what?" cried the viscount, bringing his heels into the fender with a crash.

"If—if—don't speak so sharply, my dear Tom; it jars my back, and sets that confounded gout jigging and tearing at me all up my leg. I say, if her ladyship faints when we come back from the church, will you be ready to catch her. I'm afraid if I tried I should let her down, and it would look so bad before the servants."

"Be too heavy for you, eh, gov'nor?" said Tom, grinning, as he mentally conjured up the scene.

"Yes, my boy, yes. She has grown so much stouter and heavier, and I have grown thinner and lighter since—since the happy day twenty-six years ago when I married her, Tom—when I married her. Yes, much stouter since I married her. How well I remember it all. Yes: it was an easterly wind, I recollect, and your poor dear mamma—her ladyship, Tom—had the toothache very badly. It made her face swell out on one side as we went across to Paris, and I had a deal of bother to get the waiter and chamber-maid to understand what a linseed-meal poultice was. Very objectionable thing a linseed-meal poultice; I never did like the smell."

"I should think not," said the son, watching his father seriously, the old man having a worn look, as if he had been engaged in a severe struggle with time.

"Peculiarly faint odour about them. Seems only last night, and now one girl going to be married—her ladyship looking out for a rich husband for the other. Er—er—does my wig look all right, Tom?" he continued, patting his head as he turned towards a mirror.

The speaker, who was a very thin, highly-dilapidated old gentleman of sixty-five, heaved a deep sigh, and then bent down to softly rub his right leg.

"Spiff," replied Viscount Diphoos, a dapper little boyish fellow of four-and-twenty, most carefully dressed, and looking as if, as really was the case, he had just been shampooned, scented, and washed by Monsieur Launay, the French barber. "I say, gov'nor, that tremendous sigh don't sound complimentary to your son and heir."

"My dear boy—my dear Tom," said the old man affectionately, as he toddled up to the back of his son's chair, and stood there patting his shoulders. "It isn't that—it isn't that. I'm very, very proud of my children. Bless you, my dear Tom; bless you, my dear boy! You're a very good son to me, but I'm—I'm a bit weak this morning about Diana; and that confounded fellow with his organ playing those melancholy tunes quite upset me."

"But he has gone now, governor," said Tom.

“Yes, my boy, but—but he’ll come back again, he always does. Grind, grind, grind, till he seems to me to be grinding me; and I do not like to swear, Tom, it’s setting you such a bad example; but at times I feel as if I must say damn, or something inside me would go wrong.”

“Say it then, gov’nor, I’ll forgive you. There, I have granted you my indulgence.”

“Thank you, Tom; thank you, Diphoos.”

“No, no, gov’nor. Tom!—don’t Diphoos me. I wish that confounded old wet sponge of a Welsh mountain had been ‘diffoosed’ before it gave me my name.”

“Ye-es, it is ugly, Tom. But they are family names, you see, Barmouth—Diphoos. Very old family the Diphooses. And now this wedding—but there, I’m all right now.”

“To be sure you are, gov’nor.”

“Yes, yes, yes; you are very good to me, Tom. Bless you, my boy, bless you.”

The weak tears stood in the old man’s eyes, and his voice shook as he spoke.

“Nonsense, gov’nor, nonsense,” said Tom, taking one of the thin withered hands. “I’m not much good to you; I think more of cigars and billiards than anything else. Have a cigar, guv’nor?”

“No, my boy, no thank you; it would make me smell so, and her ladyship might notice it. But, my boy, I see everything, though I’m getting a little old and weak, and don’t speak. You stand between her ladyship and me very often, Tom, and make matters more easy. But don’t you take any notice of me, my boy, and don’t you think I sighed because I was unhappy, for—for I’m very proud of you, Tom, I’m deuced proud of you, my boy; but it does upset me a bit about Diana going. India’s a long way off, Tom.”

“Yes, gov’nor, but old Goole isn’t a bad sort. The old lady wanted a rich husband for Di, and she has got him. Di will be quite a Begum out in India.”

“Ye-es, Tom; and I suppose all the female Diphooses marry elderly husbands and marry well. I am a bit anxious about Maude, now.”

“No good to be. The old girl will settle all that. But I say, gov’nor, what a set of studs! Come here; one of them’s unfastened. You’ll lose it.”

“I hope not, my boy—I hope not,” said the old man, anxiously as his son busied himself over the shirt-front. “Her ladyship would be so vexed. She has taken care of them these ten years, and said I had better wear them to-day.”

“Did she?” said Tom, gruffly. “There: that will do. Why, you look quite a buck this morning. That wig’s a regular fizzer. Old Launay has touched you up.”

“I’m glad I look well, Tom, deuced glad,” said the old man, brightening up with pleasure. “And you think Goole’s a nice fellow?”

“Ye-es,” said Tom, “only, hang it all, gov’nor, there’s no romance about it. They are both so confoundedly cool and matter-of-fact. Why if I were going to be married, I should feel all fire and excitement.”

“No, my boy, no—oh, no,” said the old man sadly; and he shook his head, glancing nervously at the glass the next moment to see if his wig was awry. “You read about that sort of thing in books, but it doesn’t often come off in fashionable life. I—I—I remember when—when I married her ladyship, it was all very matter-of-fact and quiet. And there was that poultice. But you will stand by and catch her if she faints, Tom?”

“Oh, she won’t faint, gov’nor,” said Tom, curling up his lip.

“I—I—I don’t know, my boy, I don’t know. She said that very likely she should. Mammas do faint, you know, when they are losing their children. I feel very faint myself, Tom: this affair upsets me. I should like just one glass of port.”

“No, no, don’t have it, gov’nor; it will go right down into your toe. Have a brandy and seltzer.”

“Thank you, Tom, my boy, I will,” said the old man, rubbing his hands, “I will—I will. Ring for it, will you, Tom, and let Robbins think it’s for you.”

“Why, gov’nor?” cried Tom, staring, as he rang the bell.

“Well, you see, my boy,” said the old man, stooping to gently rub his leg; “after that last visit of the doctor her ladyship told the servants—told the servants that they were not to let me have anything but what she ordered.”

Tom uttered an angry ejaculation, waited a few moments, leaped from his chair, and began sawing away furiously at the unanswered bell.

“He’s—he’s a fine bold young fellow, my son Tom,” muttered the old man to himself as he sat down, and began rubbing his leg; “I dare not ring the bell like that—like that.”

“Look here, gov’nor,” cried Tom, passionately, “I won’t have it. I will not stand by and see you sat upon like this. Are you the master of this house or no?”

“Well, Tom, my boy,” said the old man, feebly, and with a weak smile upon his closely shaven face, “I—I—I ought to be.”

“Then do, for goodness’ sake, take your position. It hurts me, dad, it does indeed, to see you humbled so before the servants. I’ll pay proper respect to her ladyship, and support her in everything that’s just, but when it comes to my old father being made the laughing-stock of every body in the house, I—I—there, damme, sir, I rebel against it.”

As Tom seized the bell again, and dragged at it savagely, the old man seemed deeply moved. He tried to speak, but no words would come, and rising hastily he limped to the window, and stood looking out with blurred eyes, trying to master his emotion.

“Thank you, Tom,” he said, speaking as he looked out of the window. “But after the doctor’s last visit her ladyship told all the servants—Todd’s very particular, you know.”

Tom said something about Doctor Todd that sounded condemnatory.

“Yes, my dear boy,” said the earl, “but—”

Just then the door opened, and a ponderous-looking butler, carefully dressed, with his hair brushed up into a brutus on the top of his head, and every bristle closely scraped from a fat double-chin which reposed in folds over his stiff white cravat, slowly entered the room.

“Why the devil isn’t this bell answered, Robbins?” cried Tom.

“Very sorry, my lord, but I thought—”

“Confound you! how dare you think? You thought my father rang, and that you might be as long as you liked.”

“Ye-yes, my lord. I thought his lordship rang.”

“Yes, you thought right,” cried Tom. “His lordship rang for some brandy and seltzer. Look sharp and get it.”

“Yes, my lord, but—”

“Only a very little of the pale brandy in it, Robbins—about a dessert-spoonful,” said the earl, apologetically.

“Fetch the spirit-stand and two bottles of seltzer, Robbins,” roared the young man. “And look sharp,” he added in a tone of voice which sent the butler off in post-haste.

“That’s a flea in his fat old ear,” cried the young man, laying his hand on his father’s shoulder. “And now look here, gov’nor, you would please me very much if you would stand up for your rights. You know I’d back you up.”

“Would it please you, Tom?” said the old man, gazing in his son’s face, and patting his shoulder, “Well, I’ll—I’ll try, Tom, I’ll try; but—but—I’m afraid it’s too late.”

“Nonsense, gov’nor. Come, it will make things more comfortable. Keep an eye, too, on Maude. I don’t want her to be married off to a millionaire whether she likes him or no.”

“I’ll try, my boy, I’ll try,” said the old man, in a hopeless tone of voice. “Her ladyship said—”

“Who’s that for, Robbins?” cried a deep masculine-feminine voice outside the door, just as the jingle of glasses on a silver waiter was heard.

“For Lord Diphoos, my lady,” was the reply, in a voice that seemed to come through a layer of eider down, and the door was thrown open; there was a tremendous rustling of silk, and Lady Barmouth, a stout, florid, well-preserved woman of forty-eight, swept into the room.

“Ah, my dear child,” she exclaimed in a pensive, theatrical tone of voice, as she spread her skirts carefully around her, and exhaled a peculiarly strong scent of eau-de-cologne, “this is a terribly trying time.”

“Awfully,” said Tom, shortly. “That will do, Robbins; I’ll open the seltzer.” Then, as the butler left the room—“Awfully trying—quite a martyrdom for you, mamma. Have a brandy and seltzer?”

“My dear child!” exclaimed her ladyship, in a tone of remonstrance, and leaning one hand upon a chair so as not to disarrange the folds of her costly moiré antique, she tenderly applied the corner of her lace handkerchief to her lips, and after gazing at it furtively to note a soft pink stain, she watched her son as he poured a liberal allowance of pale brandy into a tall engraved glass, skilfully sent the cork flying from a seltzer bottle, filled up the glass with the sparkling mineral water, before handing it to his father.

“There, gov’nor,” he exclaimed; “try that.”

“Tom, my dear child, no, no,” cried her ladyship. “Anthony! No! Certainly not.”

“Yes, there is too much brandy, my dear boy,” said the old gentleman, hesitating.

“Nonsense! Rubbish! You drink that up, gov’nor, like medicine. You’re unstrung and ready to break down. Come: have one, mamma.”

“My dear child!” began her ladyship, as she darted a severe look at her husband—“Ah, my darling.”

This last was in the most pathetic of tones, for the library door once more opened, and a very sweet-faced fair-haired girl, in her bridesmaid’s robe of palest blue, and looking flushed of cheek and red of eye with weeping, led in the bride in her diaphanous veil, just as she had issued from the hands of Justine Framboise, her ladyship’s Parisian maid, through which veil, and beneath the traditional wreath of orange-blossoms, shone as charming a face as bridegroom need wish to see.

“There,” exclaimed the bridesmaid in a tone of forced gaiety, “as Justine says, *ne touches pas*. You are only to have a peep.”

“Maude, you ridiculous child,” cried her ladyship, “you have been crying, and look dreadful, and—there, I declare it is too bad. You have been making your sister weep too.”

“I couldn’t help it, mamma,” cried the girl, passionately; and the tears that had been waiting ready burst out afresh.

“This is too absurd,” exclaimed her ladyship, impatiently. “Maude, you ridiculous girl: you are destroying that costly dress, and the flowers will be all rags.”

“Yes, why don’t you leave off—you two,” cried the brother, cynically, “playing at being fond of one another,” while the old man looked piteously on.

“Oh, Diana, Diana,” continued her ladyship, “here have I made for you the most brilliant match of the season—an enormously wealthy husband, who literally worships you—”

“I don’t believe he cares for her a bit,” cried Maude, flushing up, speaking passionately, and giving a stamp with her little white kid boot. “And if I were Di, I wouldn’t marry a snuffy old man like that for anybody. I’d sooner die.”

“Die game, eh?” cried Tom. “Do you hear, Di?”

“Silence!” exclaimed her ladyship in a tone of authority that seemed to quell the girl’s burst of passion. “How dare you!”

“Pray don’t be cross, mamma,” said the bride, quietly. “She could not help crying. The marks will soon pass away.”

“They will not,” cried her ladyship, angrily. “Sir Grantley Wilters is coming, and her nose is as red as a servant girl’s, while your eyes are half swollen up. After all my pains—after all my anxiety—never was mother troubled with such thankless children.”

“Poor old girl!” said Tom, taking a good sip of brandy-and-seltzer.

“Anthony!” cried her ladyship, “you must not touch her. You are crushing her veil and those flowers. Oh, this is madness.”

Madness or not, before she could check the natural action, the earl had taken his elder daughter in his arms, and kissed her lovingly, patting and stroking her sweet face, as, regardless of wreath and veil, she flung her arms round his neck and nestled closely to him.

“Bless you, my darling. I hope you will like India,” he said, “Rather warm, but they make delicious curries there. I hope you will be very very happy;” and the tears trickled down his furrowed countenance as he spoke.

“I’ll try to be, papa dear,” she whispered, making an effort to speak firmly.

“That’s right, my dear. The trains are very comfortable to Brindisi, and Tom says that Goole isn’t such a very bad fellow.”

“Anthony, are you quite mad!” cried her ladyship, wringing her hands till her diamonds crackled. “Are you all engaged in a conspiracy against me? Such a display is perfectly absurd. The child will not be fit to be seen at the church.”

“Yes, yes, mamma dear,” said the girl cheerfully. “There, there, Maude will put me straight in a few moments. Kiss me, dear, and I’ll go upstairs again; it must be nearly time.”

For the sake of the dresses of herself and daughter, her ladyship did not let the bride come too close, but brushed the cheek lightly with her lips; and then the girl turned to her brother, holding out her hands.

He took them, gazing at her at arm’s length with mingled pride and sorrow. Then the bridal dress was once more forgotten, and brother and sister were tightly locked in each other’s arms.

Her ladyship uttered a wail of dismay, but it was not heeded, as Tom said in a low tone—

“Keep up your pecker, Di, old girl. It’s all nonsense about love and that sort of thing. It’s duty toward your mother, catechism fashion, and you’ve done it. You’re sold into bondage, eh?”

“Yes, Tom dear,” she said, cheerfully. “I shall not mind.”

“With all Goole’s money to play with I should think not.”

“I did not mean that, dear,” said the girl, gravely. “I seem to be going right away from you, but there is Maude; don’t let her be married like I am, Tom.”

“What can I do?”

“I don’t know; only try to help her and papa. Be more at home for both their sakes—and Tryphie’s.”

Tom started, and looked sharply in his sister’s face.

“I will, Di, I will,” he said, earnestly. “I know I’ve been a reckless sort of beast, but I will try now.”

She smiled her thanks and kissed him again. Then Lady Maude of the red eyes and nose, took her sister’s hand,

coming up like a pretty tug to tow off some beautiful craft that had been shattered by a storm in her upper rigging, and bore her off into port for repairs.

Chapter Two.

No Cards.

The crossing-sweeper, in a special uniform of rags turned up with mud, had made liberal use of his broom wherever it was not wanted, and now stood in front of Lord Barmouth's house in an attitude as if to draw attention, like a label, to his work—as if in fact morally writing *fecit*.

Everything had been done to give *éclat* to the proceedings, while in addition to the presents which had been on view, fair Italia sent music to lend a charm to the wedding; for Luigi Malsano, the handsome dark performer upon the last newly-improved organ, stood at the edge of the pavement and ground, and smiled—smiled till his fine white teeth glistened in the midst of his great black beard, and every now and then took off his soft felt hat, displayed his long black curls, and rolled his eyes at Dolly Preen, the fair, fresh, country lassie—the young ladies' maid; for Dolly was looking out of the window in company with Justine, her ladyship's attendant, to see the return of the carriages, and the latter exclaimed—

"*Elles sont bêtes ces choses là*!" and then as Luigi ground and smiled, and raised his hat, Justine uttered a contemptuous—

"*Canaille*!"

While Dolly Preen sighed and thought the dark Italian very handsome. She had indulged in the same thought before.

"*Voilà*!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Justine, as the carriage with its four greys dashed up, and after a little manipulation at the side of the organ, Luigi Malsano rested a well-formed and dirty hand upon the green baize cover of his instrument, and turned out the old ballad—

"'Tis hard to give the hand where the heart can never be."

For after a great deal of scheming the work of the Countess of Barmouth was crowned. She had secured for her daughter a husband in the shape of the British Resident at the court of the Maharajah of Bistreskin, and to herself of selfs she had whispered like the revengeful gentleman in the French romance—

"ÀONEÙ!"

For it was all over.

The carriages had nearly blocked the street, and the crowd had completed the block. The church had been well filled by friends and those curious people who always attend weddings. The ceremony had been performed by a dean, assisted by a canon, and an honorary chaplain to Her Majesty. The bride looked lovely and calm as a statue, though the six bridesmaids in pale blue had sobbed softly, and mourned like so many doves, as they moistened their lace handkerchiefs with a briny dew of pearls, almost as bright as those of the handsome lockets they wore—all alike, and the presents of the bridegroom. They were bouquets of the choicest exotics inside the church, and without, for the servants were as liberally supplied as they were with favours; and at last the bridegroom's barouche with four of Newman's best greys had borne the happy pair back to the paternal mansion in Portland Place.

There had not been a single hitch, and even her ladyship had held up with a fine Niobe-like expression upon her noble features all through the service. Certainly she had turned faint once at the "I will," but by the help of strong aromatic salts she had recovered herself, and smiled sadly round as if to lend sweetness to the flowers. And now the large party were back in the drawing-room, and preparing to descend to the wedding breakfast.

The fashionable pastry-cooks had been ordered to do their best, and this they had done. There were more of those ghastly sugar plaster edifices on the table than usual; more uneatable traps for the unwary; more hollow mockeries, goodly to the eye, but strange to the taste—preparations that society considers to be *de rigueur* at a wedding. Still in addition there was all that money could procure; fruit and flowers flourished amidst handsome glass and family plate; the servants were in new liveries, and with plenty of aides stood ready; for Lady Barmouth hoped in marrying one daughter to help on the engagement of the second, saying pensively to herself, "And then I shall feel that I have not lived in vain."

"I say, how's the leg?" said a severe-looking gentleman present. "Twinges, eh? Yes, so I suppose. Easy with the good things, mind, or else—you know."

"Yes, yes, twinges, doctor," said his lordship, stooping to have a rub at the offending, or rather offended and resenting, limb. "But you are in such a doosed hurry; you always ask me another question before I've scarcely had time to answer the first. I remember, I remember—now, hang him! look at that. Confound that Lord Todd! I wish I was his doctor for a week or two."

For the family practitioner had passed on to talk to somebody else, leaving his lordship slowly passing his tongue over his lips, and trying to add another wrinkle to his forehead, as he wondered whether he could smuggle in two or three glasses of champagne without being seen by her ladyship or Doctor Todd.

"Ah, my dear Mr Melton," said the latter, "how are you?"

"Quite well, doctor," said the young man addressed, as he passed his hand over his crisp golden beard, and smiled pleasantly at the medical man, whose eyes were playing all over the room, and who now crossed to where the young bride was standing.

"I say," he exclaimed, "I did not congratulate you in the church. God bless you, my dear! may you be very happy. And only the other day you were a baby, eh?"

He nodded, smiled, and passed on to where a very elderly-looking fair young man, elaborately dressed, was talking to a stout mamma—the mother of two of the bridesmaids.

The withered-looking gentleman, who blinked a good deal, and seemed as if the light was too strong for him, turned to speak to the doctor as he approached.

“Well,” said the latter—“better?”

“Yas, I think so; yas, doctor, but you know I can’t think what ails my constitution.”

“I can,” thought the doctor, as he turned away looking sharply round the room; “luxury, late hours, too much money, and nothing sensible to do. *Blasé* fool! Oh, there she is.”

He crossed as quickly as the crowded state of the room would allow him to where Lady Maude was standing, and made her start as he said sharply—

“I say, when’s your turn coming?”

“Never, I hope, doctor,” was the reply, as a little hand was placed in his, “never, if it is to make me so wretched as poor darling Di. Do say something kind to her if you have a chance.”

“Hum—ha—yes,” he said thoughtfully, as he retained the little hand and seemed to be examining a patient. “Don’t seem bright, eh?”

“Oh, no, doctor,” whispered Maude. “But I’m so glad you’ve come.”

“That’s right, my dear; I would come. So I will when you are married—the same as I did when you were born,” he said to himself. Then aloud—“I say, when you marry, my dear, you marry for love.”

“I will, doctor,” cried the girl with her blue eyes flashing, and just then Luigi of the organ struck up a languishing waltz. “But I really am so glad you’ve come. Do talk to papa and cheer him up. He is so low-spirited. Couldn’t you give him a tonic?”

“Wish I could,” said the doctor. “Tincture of youth. No, my dear. I can’t make the old young. Glad I’ve come, eh? There’s my little friend Tryphie yonder. But they are going to move, I see.”

Her ladyship was still very pensive, and gazed appealingly round from one to the other of her guests; but her eyes were wonderfully wide open, and she moved about like a domestic field-marshal determined to carry out her social campaign with *éclat*.

“Sir Grantley,” she said, softening her voice down to a contralto coo as she laid her fan on the arm of the elderly young man, whose face on one side was all eye-glass and wrinkles, on the other blank, “will you take down my daughter?”

“Charmed, I’m shaw,” was the hesitating reply, as a puzzled look came over the baronet’s face; “but her husband, don’t you know?”

“I mean Lady Maude,” said her ladyship, with a winning smile.

“Yes, of course; beg pardon, I’m shaw,” said the baronet hastily, and he crossed the room with her ladyship in a weak-kneed fashion, and apparently suffering from tight boots.

But it so happened that a flank movement had been set on foot by Viscount Diphoos.

“Charley, old man,” he was saying to the visitor with the fair beard, who now, as he stood in one of the windows, showed himself to be a fine, broad-shouldered fellow of about eight or nine and twenty, with a fair Saxon forehead half-way down to his brows, where it became ruddily tanned, as if by exposure to the air. “Charley, old man, go across and nail Maude at once, or the old lady will be handing her over to that wretched screw, Wilters.—Have you seen Tryphie?”

“There she is, over in the far corner, talking to the doctor,” said the young man addressed—a bosom friend of the viscount: Charley Melton, the son of a country gentleman with a very small income and no prospects, unless a cousin in the navy should kindly leave this world in his favour, when he would be heir to a title and a goodly domain.

He crossed the room quickly to where Lady Maude was standing, and a curious, conscious look appeared on the girl’s face as he approached. There was a warm rosy hue in her cheeks as their eyes met, and then, happy and palpitating, she let her little fingers press very timidly the strong muscular arm that held them to the side within which beat—beat—beat, rather faster than usual, Charley Melton’s heart, a habit it had had of late when fortune had thrown him close to his companion.

Her ladyship saw the movement as she was approaching with Sir Grantley Wilters, and darted an angry look at her daughter and another at her son. Then, with her face all smiles, she brought up her light cavalry and took her son in the flank in his turn.

“So sorry, Sir Grantley,” she said sweetly; “we were too late. Will you take down my niece?”

“Yas, delighted,” said Sir Grantley, screwing the whole of his face up till it formed a series of concentric circles round his eye-glass. “But who is that fellow?”

“Friend of my son,” said her ladyship in the most confidential way. “Very nice manly fellow, and that sort of thing. Tryphie, my dear, Sir Grantley Wilters will take you down,” she continued, as she stopped before a little piquante, creamy-skinned girl with large hazel eyes, abundant dark-brown hair, and a saucy-looking little mouth. She had a well-shaped nose, but her face was freckled as liberally as nature could arrange it without making the markings touch: but all the same she was remarkably bright and pretty.

“Sold!” muttered Tom, spitefully, as he saw her ladyship beaming upon him after striking him in his tenderest part. But he was consoled a little the next moment as Maude gave him a grateful glance, looking as happy and bright as Melton himself, while as Tryphie took the proffered arm of Sir Grantley Wilters, whose face expressed pain above and a smile below, the sharp little maiden made a *moue* with her lips expressive of disgust at her partner, and gave Diphoos a glance which made him feel decidedly better.

“I don’t like that fellow, Tom, my boy,” said Lord Barmouth, sidling up to his son, and bending down for a furtive rub at his leg. “Damme, Tom, I don’t believe he’s forty, and he looks as old as I do. If her ladyship means him to marry little Tryphie there, I shan’t—shan’t like—like—Damme, it would be too bad.”

“Hang it all, gov’nor; don’t talk like that,” cried Tom, impatiently.

“No, no, certainly not, my boy, certainly not; but I say, Tom, that’s a doosed nice boy that young Charley Melton. I like the look of him. He’s a manly sort of a fellow. Your uncle and I were at Eton with his father years ago. I say, Tom,” he continued, rubbing his leg, “he wouldn’t make a bad match for our Maude. Yes, yes, my dear; I’m coming.”

“Anthony, for shame!” whispered her ladyship. “They are all waiting. Lady Rigby. I’ve been looking for you. Take her down at once.”

The earl crossed over to make himself agreeable to Lady Rigby, the stout mamma; and the hostess took counsel with herself.

“Either would do,” she said. “But Mr Melton’s attentions will bring Sir Grantley to the point.”

A few minutes later the guests were seated at the wedding breakfast, while Dolly Preen again leaned out of the window, having returned there after attending to the bride, to whom two fresh pocket-handkerchiefs were supplied. Luigi of the organ was still below, handsome and smiling as he scented good things, and he played on as Mistress Preen listened and thought of love and marriage, and music, and how handsome Italian men were, and ended by doing as she had done for many weeks, wrapping a three-penny piece up in many papers and dropping it into Luigi’s soft felt hat. For how could she offer coppers to such a man as that!

She was not the only one who dreamed of love, for Justine Framboise, her ladyship’s maid, was enjoying a pleasant flirtation with Monsieur Hector Launay, Coiffeur de Paris, from Upper Gimp Street, Marylebone, a gentleman whose offices were largely in request in Portland Place, and who that morning had left his place of business in charge of a boy, so that he might perform certain capillary conjuring tricks, and then stay and look in the eyes of the fair Justine—a French young lady, who would have been a fortune to her father if she had been a dentist’s daughter, so liberally did she show her fine white teeth.

The said flirtation took place upon the stairs, and Perkins, the bride’s new maid, took interest therein, to the neglect of her packing and the annoyance of Henry, the Resident’s man, with whom she was to ride in the rumble, and then second-class to Paris that day on the honeymoon trip. For Monsieur Hector, with all the gallantry of the fair city from which he hailed, had called Perkins, in Henry’s hearing, *une demoiselle charmante*.

“Like his furren imperdence,” as Henry said, and then the said Henry had to go in and stand behind his master’s chair. As soon after three parts of a bottle of champagne was passed upstairs with a glass by a kindly disposed waiter, the packing of the newly-married lady went on worse than ever, and several travelling-cases were left unfastened in the bedroom.

“I say,” whispered Tom, going behind her ladyship’s chair, “you are never going to let the gov’nor speak?”

“Yes, certainly. He must,” said her ladyship in a decisive tone; and she turned to the guest on her right.

“But he’ll break down as sure as a gun,” remonstrated the son.

“I have prompted him, and he knows what to say,” replied her ladyship. “Go back to your place.”

“Oh, just as you like,” grumbled Tom; and he returned to his seat, determined in his own mind to stand behind his father’s chair, and to prompt him to the best of his ability.

The breakfast went on amidst the pleasant tinkle of glass and plate, the conversation grew louder, there was the frequent pop of champagne corks, and the various couples grew too much engrossed to notice what took place with their neighbours.

“Maude,” said Charley Melton at last, “if you were put to the test, should you give up any one you loved, and accept a comparative stranger because he could do as that man has done—load you with diamonds?”

She turned her eyes to his with a reproachful look, and the colour suffused her face.

“No one can hear what I say,” he whispered, with his eyes fixed upon his plate. “But listen to me. I feel that it is almost madness, but I love you very, very dearly. You know it—you must know it. Ever since we met, six months since, you have been my sole thought. I ought not to speak, but I cannot keep it back waiting for an opportunity that may never come. And if some day I awoke to the fact that I had made no declaration and another had carried you off, I believe I should go mad. Give me one word of hope. I am very poor—terribly poor, but times may change, and money does not provide all the happiness of life.—Not one word? Have I been deceived? Was I mad to think that you met me these many times with pleasure? Give me one word—one look.”

“I mustn’t,” said Lady Maude, colouring. “Mamma is giving you one.”

Charley Melton gave an unintentional kick under the table, touching his opposite neighbour so hard that he turned reproachfully to the gentleman at his side.

“Oh, Lady Maude!” groaned Charley in tragic tones.

There was a hearty laugh here at some sally made by the doctor, and Maude whispered back in a husky voice—

“I dare not look at you;” and he saw that the colour was mounting to her temples.

“One word then,” he whispered, as the conversation waxed louder, but there was no reply.

“Maude,” he said, in a low deep voice, “I will not believe you to be cold—heartless.”

“Oh no,” she sighed.

“Then give me one word to tell me that I may hope.”

Still no reply, as the lady sat playing with the viands upon her plate; then her face turned slightly towards him; her long lashes lifted softly, her eyes rested for a moment upon his, and he drew a long breath of relief, turning composed and quiet the next moment as he leaned towards her, saying—

“I never felt what it was to be truly happy until now.”

“Nonsense?” said the doctor loudly, after just finishing a *very* medical story—one he always told after his third glass of champagne, “I can assure you it is perfectly true. Good—isn’t it? She really did elope with her music-master. Fact,—twins.”

Several ladies looked shocked, for Lady Rigby, the stout mamma, an old patient, had laughed loudly, and then wiped her mouth with her lace handkerchief as if to take off the smile of which she felt rather ashamed, for her countenance afterwards looked preternaturally solemn.

The earl had escaped the usual supervision, and he also had partaken of a glass of champagne or two—or three—and he thoroughly enjoyed the doctors story.

“It puts me in mind of one,” he said, with a chuckle. “You know it, doctor. If the ladies will excuse its being a little indelicate. Quite medical though, quite.”

“I am quite sure that Lord Barmouth would not say anything shocking,” said the stout mamma, and she began to utter little dry coughs, suggestive of mittens, and muffins, and tea.

“Of course not—of course not, I—I—I wouldn’t say it—say it on any consideration,” said his lordship, chuckling. “It—it—was about a friend of mine who built a house by Primrose Hill, he—he—he! It’s quite a medical story, doctor, over the railway, you know.”

“The old girl will be down upon him directly,” thought Tom.

“Capital story,” said the doctor, laughing, and glancing sidewise at her ladyship. “There’ll be an eruption directly,” he added to himself.

“He—he—he!” laughed his lordship; “her ladyship never lets me tell this story, does she, my dears?” he continued, smiling at his daughters, “but I assure you, ladies, it’s very innocent. I used to go and see him when he had furnished the place, over the railway, and every now and then there used to be quite a rumble and quiver when the trains went through the tunnel! Why, I said to him, one day—‘Why, my dear fellow, I—I—I’ eh?—eh?—eh? Bless my heart what was it I said to him, Tom?”

“Pain, father,” said Diphoos, grinning, for he had noticed the look of relief that appeared upon the ladies’ faces when the hope came that the dreadful old gentleman had forgotten the story. There would not have been much Tom left if their looks had been lightning, for his words set the old gentleman off again.

“Yes, to be sure: I said to him, ‘My dear fellow’—just after one of these rumbling noises made by the train in the tunnel—‘my dear boy, you must call in the doctor, or lay down some more good port wine.’—‘Why?’ he said.—‘Because,’ I replied, ‘your house always sounds to me as if it had got a pain in its cellar!’ Eh! He—he! devilish good that, wasn’t it?”

No one enjoyed that feeble joke as well as the narrator who used to recollect it about once a year, and try to fire it off; but unless his son was there to prompt him, it rarely made more than a flash in the pan.

It was observable that the conversation became very loud just then, and Charley Melton seized the opportunity to whisper a few words to Lady Maude—words which deepened the colour on her cheeks.

They were interrupted by the clapping of hands, for just then the host rose, and Tom stole gently behind him, taking the seat he had vacated, and preparing himself for the break down he anticipated.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said his lordship, gazing meekly round like a very old Welsh mutton, “I—I—I, believe me, never rose upon such an occasion as this, and—er—and—er.”

He gazed piteously at her ladyship at the other end of the table, and at whose instigation, a message having been sent by Robbins the butler, he had risen.

“I say I have never before risen upon such an occasion as this, but I hope that my darling child who is about to—to—to—to—eh, what did you say, Tom my boy.”

“Hang it, go on, governor. Quit your roof—paternal roof,” whispered Tom.

“Quit your paternal roof, will shine—yes, shine in her new sphere as an ornament to society, as her mother has been before her. A woman all love, all gentleness, and sweetness of disposition.”

“Oh, hang it governor; draw it mild,” whispered Tom.

“Yes, mild,” said his lordship, “mild to a fault. Eh? bless me, what is the matter?”

It was a favourable opportunity for a display of emotion, and her ladyship displayed it beautifully for the assembled company to study and take a lesson in maternal and wifely tenderness. Her beloved child was being handed over to the tender mercies of a man—was about to leave her home—about to be torn away.

Her ladyship burst into an agony of tears—of wild sobbing—for she was a model of all the virtues; but when virtues were made, nature selected another pattern and this one was cast aside.

A sympathetic coo ran round the table, tears were shed, and Tom winked at Charley Melton, who kept his countenance.

Then her ladyship declared that it was “so foolish,” and that she was “quite well now”; and other speeches good and bad were made. And at last the bridegroom’s carriage was at the door; the bride was handed in; there was the usual cheering; white satin slippers and showers of rice were thrown, and the carriage rolled away. For Lady Barmouth had achieved one of the objects of her life—a brilliant match for her elder daughter—leaving her free to execute her plans for Maude.

All had been *en règle* so far: the hall was filled with company; the sound of wheels was still to be heard rolling down the broad thoroughfare: when “I say, look out,” whispered Tom to his friend. “There she goes.”

It was a coarse way of expressing himself, but “there” “she” did go—to wit her ladyship. Sir Grantley Wilters, whom she hoped some day to call son, was close at hand. It was quite time for her maternal feelings to assert themselves again, and they did, for she sank heavily into the nearest arms.

They were not her husband’s but those of the baronet, most rotten reeds upon which a lady might lean. The result was that as Lady Barmouth gave way, Sir Grantley did the same, and both would have fallen heavily but for Doctor Todd, who seized the baronet in time, and with extraneous help her ladyship was placed in the porter’s great chair.

“Salts, and a little air: she has only fainted,” said the doctor.

By all the rules of family etiquette as observed in the best society, Maude should have run to her mother’s side, and made one in a pathetic group: but just at the same moment she encountered Charley Melton’s eyes, let her own rest upon them as a singular thrill ran through her, till she wrenched them away and encountered Sir Grantley Wilters’ eye-glass, and directly after she recalled a promise she had made to herself.

“Open that door a little,” said the doctor—“ajar. Some fresh air.”

Luigi Malsano was back in the street, and the organ struck up once more, “’Tis hard to give the hand where the heart can never be,” while at the same moment a dismal howl came from the doorstep and a head was thrust in, to be followed by a body rather out of proportion.

It was only Charley Melton’s ugly bull-dog Joby, who had followed his master to the house, and been waiting on step and in area for the said master to come. He had several times made an attempt to enter, but had been driven back by Robbins the butler, and thought of going back to his master’s chambers, but at last the opportunity had come, and he too found his way in, for Luigi’s music nearly drove him mad.

Meanwhile the Resident’s young wife was being carried towards Charing Cross *en route* for Brindisi—the Suez Canal—India—right away out of the country, and out of this story, leaving the stage clear for her sister’s important scene.

Chapter Three.

Down in the Country—The Angel.

“I’m afraid you are not serious, Mr Melton,” said Lady Barmouth; shaking her head at him sadly.

“Serious, Lady Barmouth; indeed I am,” said Charley Melton, who was Viscount Diphoos’ guest down at the Hurst, Lord Barmouth’s seat in Sussex; “and as to personal matters, my income—”

“Hush, hush! you bad, wicked boy,” exclaimed her ladyship; “what do you take me for? Just as if the union of two young hearts was to be made a question of hard cash and settlements, and such mean, wretched, sordid matters. I beg you will never utter a word to me again about such things. They are shocking to me.”

“I am very glad to hear you say so, Lady Barmouth,” said Melton, smiling frankly in her face, as in a gentle heaving billow style, she leaned, upon his arm, and undulated softly and tapped his fingers with her fan.

“I like to think of my darling Maude as a sweet innocent girl in whose presence such a sordid thing as money ought never to be mentioned. There, there, there, they are calling you from the lawn, Charley Melton; go to them and play and be happy while you have your youth and high spirits. How I envy you all sometimes?”

“Your ladyship has made me very happy,” said Melton, flushing slightly.

“It is my desire to make all belonging to me happy,” replied her ladyship. “I have seen Diana, my sweet child, settled, now it is my desire to see Maude the same. There, there, go away, for my eyes are weak with tears, and I feel half hysterical. Go away, my dear boy, go away.”

“But you will let me see your ladyship to a seat?”

“No, no, no; go away, go away.”

“Yo-hoy!” shouted a familiar voice. “Charley Melton!—*are* you coming!”

“Yes, yes, coming,” replied Melton, as her ladyship tapped him on the arm very significantly, and shook her head at him, while her eyes plaintively gazed at his. And she said to herself—“Yes, his expectations, Lady Rigby said, were excellent.”

The next moment he was on his way to the croquet lawn, where a gaily dressed party was engaged in preparing for a little match.

“I never expected it,” said the young man to himself; “and either I’m in luck’s way, or her ladyship is not the mercenary creature people say. She is evidently agreeable, and if she is, I have no fear of Lord Barmouth, for the old man likes me.”

“Come, old fellow,” cried Tom, advancing to meet him, with the biggest croquet mallet over his shoulder that could be found in the trade. “What have you and the old lady been chatting over? She hasn’t been dropping any hints about being *de trop*?”

Melton was silent, for he enjoyed the other’s interest.

“If she has,” cried Tom, “I’ll strike: I won’t stand it. It’s too bad;—it’s—”

“Gently, gently,” said Melton, smiling. “She has been all that I could desire, and it is evident that she does not look upon my pretensions to your sister’s hand with disfavour.”

“What—disfavour? Do you mean to say in plain English that the old girl has not cut up rough about your spooning after Maude?”

“Is that plain English?”

“Never mind. Go on. What did she say?”

“Called me her dear boy, and said her sole wish was to see her child happy.”

“Gammon!” said Viscount Diphoos. “She’s kidding you.”

“Nonsense! What a miserable sceptic you are!”

“Yes; I know my dear mamma.”

“I merely quote her words,” said Melton, coldly.

“Then the old girl’s going off her chump,” said Tom. “But there, never mind; so much the better. Charley, old man, I give you my consent.”

“Thank you,” said Melton, smiling.

“Ah, you may laugh, but ’pon my soul I should like you to marry Maudey. She’s the dearest and best girl in the world, and I was afraid the old girl meant Wilters to have her. Well, I am glad, old man. Give us your fist. I’m sure Maudey likes you, so go in and win. Make your hay while the sun shines, my boy. Only stow all that now. It’s croquet, so get a mallet. You and Maudey are partners, against Tryphie Wilder and me.”

He shook hands warmly with his friend, and they went down the path together.

“I say, old man, Wilters is coming down to-day. He’s been in a fine taking. Saw him in London. Day before yesterday. Said he’d lost his diamond locket. Just as if it mattered to him with all his thousands. But he’s as mean as mean. I should like to get him in a line at billiards, and win a lot of money off him. I will, too, some day. Now girls! Ready?”

They were crossing the closely shaven lawn now to where Maude, looking very sweet and innocent, stood talking to Tryphie Wilder, and she coloured with pleasure as the young men advanced.

Soon after the match began, and for ten minutes the two couples played vigorously and well. Then the game languished, and the various players missed their turns, and were soon in a terrible tangle, forgetting their hoops, so that at last, Tom, who was standing under a hawthorn that was one blush of pink, was heard by a knowing old thrush, sitting closely over four blue speckled eggs, to whisper in a low tone—

“Don’t be hard on a fellow, Tryphie dear, when you know how fond he is of you.”

The thrush laughed thrushly, and blinked her eyes as she recalled the troubles of matrimony: how long eggs were hatching, and what a deal of trouble the little ones were to feed when the weather was dry and worms were scarce.

Just at the same time too Charley Melton and Maude had come to a stand-still where a great laburnum poured down a shower of rich golden drops, through which rained the rays of the sun, broken up into silvery arrows of light which forced themselves through the girl’s fair hair, as she stood trembling and palpitating that happy June day, while Charley Melton’s words grew deeper and more thrilling in their meaning.

For their theme was love, one that has never seemed tiring to young and willing ears, though it must be owned that folks do talk, have talked, and always will talk a great deal of nonsense.

This was in the calm and peaceful days of croquet, before people had learned to perspire profusely over lawn-tennis as they flew into wild attitudes and dressed for the popular work. This was croquet *à la Watteau*, and in the midst of the absence of play, Lord Barmouth came slowly down the path, stepped upon the soft lawn as soon as possible, and, choosing a garden seat in a comfortably shady nook, he sat down and began to tenderly rub his leg.

“Heigho!” he sighed; “they, they—they say an Englishman’s house is his castle. If it is, his wife’s the elephant—white

elephant. Why—why don't they go on playing? Ha, there's Tom starting," he continued, putting up his glasses. "I'd give five hundred pounds to be able to stoop and pick up a ball like that young Charley Melton—a strong, straight-backed young villain. And there's my son Tom, too. How he can run! I'd give another five hundred pounds, if I'd got it, to be able to run across the grass like my son Tom. It strikes me, yes, damme, it strikes me that my son Tom's making up to little Tryphie. Well, and he's no fool if he does."

The game went on now for a few minutes, and then there was another halt.

"I said so to Tom on the morning of Di's wedding," said the old gentleman, caressing his leg; "and that Charley Melton is making up to Maudey, damme that he is, and—and—and—damme, she's smiling at him, bless her, as sure as I'm a martyr to the gout."

There were a few more strokes, and as many pauses, during which the old gentleman watched the players in their laurel-sheltered ground with his double glasses to his eye.

"Let me see, her ladyship said he was one of the Mowbray Meltons, but he isn't. He belongs to the poor branch, but I didn't contradict her ladyship; it makes her angry. He, he, he, he! It's—its—it's very fine to be young and good-looking, and—and—damme, Tom, you young dog," he continued, chuckling, "I can see through your tricks. He's—he's—he's always knocking Tryphie's ball in amongst the bushes, and then they have to go out of sight to find it."

The old man chuckled and shook his head till a twinge of the gout made him wince, when he stooped down and had another rub.

"Why—why—why," he chuckled again directly after, "damme, damme, if young Charley Melton isn't doing the same. He has knocked Maudey's ball in amongst the laurels, and—oh—oh—oh—you wicked young rogues—they're coming to look for it."

He got up and toddled towards the young couple, patting Maude on the cheek, and giving Charley Melton a poke in the side.

"I—I—I—see through you both," he said, laughing. "Won't do—won't do. Both as transparent as glass, and I can see your hearts playing such a tune."

He crossed to another garden seat, and sat down, putting his leg up in a comfortable position.

"There," said Melton, earnestly. "You see we have both in our favour. Your father would not refuse."

"Pray say no more now," said the girl, gazing up in his face. "It is so new, it troubles me. Let us go on playing. Tom and Tryphie must be waiting."

"I think not," said Melton, with a quiet smile. "Maude, love, to-day I am so happy that it all seems too delightful to be real. Does it seem so to you?"

"I hardly know," she replied, turning her eyes to his for a few moments, and then lowering them; "but somehow I feel sad with it and as if I were too happy for it to last."

"Then you are happy?" he said, eagerly.

For answer she raised her eyes to his, and the game was resumed, for Tom and Tryphie came out of the shrubbery with the lost ball.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed his lordship. "Tom's a sad dog—a sad dog. I was just like him when I was young."

He glanced to the right and left, and, seeing that he was unobserved, drew out a d'oyley from his coat-tail pocket, and from within picked out a slice of tongue and a piece of bread and butter, which he ate with great gusto, but not without turning his head from side to side like some ancient sparrow on the look-out for danger.

He wiped his fingers carefully upon his handkerchief, put away the d'oyley, and smiled to himself.

"That was nice—and refreshing," he said. "I don't suppose Robbins would miss it, and mention the fact to her ladyship. Ah," he continued, raising his glass once more to his eye, "they are having a nice game there. Why, damme, they're all courting like birds in spring-time. But Tom's a sad dog. He, he, he! I was just like him. I was a sad dog too when I was young. I remember once when I was at Chiswick, at the Duke's—he—he—he! with Lady Ann Gowerby, I told her there was not a flower in the whole show to compare with her two lips, and I kissed her behind the laurestinus—damme, that I did, and—and—he, he, he! the old woman—the countess—came and caught us."

The old man chuckled over this recollection till he had to wipe the tears out of his eyes, and then he had a fresh look at the croquet players.

"Tom, you dog," he said, "the old lady will come and catch you, and then, he, he, he! there'll be a devil of a row, for she means my little Tryphie for some one else. Eh—eh—eh? What! Look there now, Maudey dropped her mallet, and Charley Melton picked it up and kissed her hand. Well, it's nice," he said, smacking his lips, "I was a devil of a fellow to squeeze and kiss the little girls' hands when I was a youngster, but now—"

He bent down to rub his gouty leg, and uttered a low groan as he continued—

"But they're all going wrong, the silly young lambs; I wish Charley Melton was well off. Her ladyship will come over it all like a cloud directly, for I know—she said so—she means Tryphie for old Bellman, and Maudey for that Sir Grantley Wilter. Well, well, well, little gnats, enjoy your bit of sunshine while you can."

"Now, Charley, are you going on?" shouted Tom in indignant tones, "two blue plays—two blue plays."

"There's a dog for you," chuckled Lord Barmouth, "any one would think he had been busy over the game all the time

instead of courting Tryphie."

"Coming, Tom," cried Melton; then turning to Maude he whispered, "Darling, you are mine, come what may—Maude, my love—my love!"

Their eyes met for a few moments, and from that look it was evident that the work so nearly completed on the morning of the wedding party had now received the finishing strokes, that the fresh young heart had placed itself in another's keeping, and that henceforth Charley Melton was lord of someone's will, and her duty only to obey.

"I ought to go and stop them," said his lordship, sadly, "but making love without thinking of money used to be nice; but—hallo!" he exclaimed, as a cold nose touched his hand; and looking down there was the ugly massive face of a bull-dog gazing up into his. "Charley Melton's dog, eh! Well, you're a very ugly dog, but you seem to like me. Eh, eh!" he added, as, after a quiet wag of his tail, Joby smelt at his lordship's tail pocket. "So you knew there was a little bit of game pie in there, did you!"

Joby uttered a low whine.

"Well, so there is, good dog," said his lordship, chuckling as he felt in his other pocket, and brought out something very unpleasant-looking crushed up as it was in a piece of paper.

"I'm afraid I have been sitting upon it, my dog," said his lordship, ruefully, "and the jelly and cold gravy have got into the crust. But you will not mind, will you?"

The dog gave a short bark, and evidently did not mind, for he and Lord Barmouth finished the last morsel of the game pie, and Joby ate the jelly-smeared paper afterwards as a kind of digestive pill.

"Ah," said his lordship, patting the dog's head. "I'm glad of that—good dog then—for I did not know what to do with that piece of paper. Eh, eh? whom have we here?" he continued, putting up his glasses. "Her ladyship and Sir Grantley Wilters. There, I told you young people that you were to enjoy your game as you could, for here comes the shadow."

He alluded to Lady Barmouth, who, like the good general she was, had made her plans, which were rapidly approaching fruition.

Chapter Four.

Cloudy.

Lord Barmouth was quite right, for the shadow was coming over the sunshiny portion of the young people's life in the shape of her ladyship, who could in turn assume the *rôle* of Fate or Fury.

Amongst the company expected at the Hurst was Sir Grantley Wilters, and for his own reasons he had made a point of coming. He had arrived that morning, and, learning from Robbins the butler that Melton was there, had hastened to obtain a quiet interview with her ladyship.

"Nothing like taking time by the forelock, don't you know," he said to himself. "Old girl evidently wants me for a son-in-law, and that fellow Melton is a doosed sight too attentive. I can see through it all, though. Old girl keeps him here to make play and draw me on. Artful, doosed artful, don't you know. But it don't matter; suits my book. Time I did marry and settle down. Maude Diphoos is a doosed handsome girl, and'll do me credit. I'll propose at once."

He mused thus in his bedroom, where he gave a few finishing touches to his morning toilet, and then descending to the drawing-room, he was most affectionately received by her ladyship, who took his arm, and they strolled out through the conservatory into the garden.

"Such delightful weather!" said her ladyship, leaning upon his arm more heavily than was pleasant to a man in tight boots, and rather weak upon his legs.

"Charming," said Sir Grantley. "By the way, Lady Barmouth, we are very great friends, you and I, don't you know."

"Indeed, yes," said her ladyship. "I always feel disposed to call you by your Christian name—Grantley—"

"Do," said the baronet, having a little struggle with his eye-glass—a new one of rather smaller diameter than the last—which he had lost—and which would not consent to stop in its place—"Do—like it. Fact is, Lady Barmouth, I have made up my mind to be married, don't you know."

"You have? Really!" cried her ladyship. "I am glad;" and she adroitly turned their steps down the lilac walk in place of going straight to the croquet lawn.

"Fact, I assure you," continued Sir Grantley. "It is only quite lately that I have seen any one whom I should like to make Lady Wilters; and now—"

"You are hopelessly in love," said her ladyship; showing him her hundred guinea set of teeth—patent mineral, and of pearly whiteness, her best set—down to the false gums. "Oh, you young people in the days of your romance. It is too delightful in spite of its regrets for us who are in the sere and yellow leaf."

Her ladyship, by the way, was very little older than Sir Grantley, and art had made her look the younger of the two, especially as, in spite of the allusions to the yellow leaf, her ladyship's plump skin was powdered into a state of peach bloom.

"Thanks, much," said Sir Grantley, wincing a little from tight boots, and greeting with delight their approach to a garden seat. "Shall we sit down?"

“Oh, by all means,” cried her ladyship; and they took their places under the lilac which bloomed profusely over their heads. “And now,” exclaimed Lady Barmouth, with sparkling eyes and another sweet smile to show her hundred guinea teeth, while the plump face was covered with innocent dimples, “tell me, who is the dear girl?”

“Yas,” said Sir Grantley, clearing his throat, and feeling decidedly better, “yas.”

He paused, and wiped his heated brow with a scented handkerchief.

“Now this is too bad,” said her ladyship, playfully. “You are teasing me.”

“No, ’pon honour, no,” said Sir Grantley. “Fact is, don’t you know, I feel a kind of nervous shrinking.”

“Ah, you young men, you young men,” said her ladyship, shaking her head. “But come: tell me. Do I know her?”

“Oh, yas,” said Sir Grantley.

“To be sure,” cried her ladyship, clapping her hands together. “It’s Lady Mary Mahon. There, I’ve found you out.”

“No,” said Sir Grantley. “Guess again,” and this time he secured the eye-glass with a good ring of circles round it, which did not add to his personal appearance.

“Not Lady Mary,” mused her ladyship. “Well, it can’t be the wealthy Miss Parminter?”

“No,” said Sir Grantley, calmly; “oh, dear, no.”

“Why, of course not; I know, it’s the Honourable Grace Leasome.”

“N-no,” said Sir Grantley, with the most gentlemanly *insouciance*. “Try again.”

“I give it up,” said her ladyship, smiling.

“Now, Maude, it’s your turn,” was heard faintly from the croquet lawn.

“Yas,” said Sir Grantley, bowing slightly. “That is the lady. My dear Lady Barmouth, will you allow me humbly and respectfully, don’t you know, to propose for your charming daughter’s hand?”

Lady Barmouth sank back in her seat as if struck with horror.

“Anything the matter?” said Sir Grantley, looking puzzled.

“Did—did I understand you aright, Sir Grantley?” faltered her ladyship.

“Aright? Oh, yas. Sorry to be so sudden and upset you, but thought you expected it, don’t you know.”

“My dear Sir Grantley; my dear young friend,” exclaimed her ladyship, laying her hand in a sympathising fashion upon his arm. “This is too painful.”

“Well, suppose it is,” said Sir Grantley, calmly. “Just lost one daughter too—charming girl, Diana—but it must come, Lady Barmouth. I’ve been a bit free and got rid of some money, but there’s about nine thou a year left, and then I shall have the Mellish estates by and by!—another three thou—might settle that on her, don’t you know.”

“Oh, this is dreadful,” panted her ladyship. “My dear young friend, I should have been too happy to give my consent, but dear Maude is as good as engaged to Mr Melton.”

“The doose she is,” said Sir Grantley, dropping his glass and looking blankly at his companion.

“Oh, yes,” exclaimed her ladyship, applying her scent bottle to her delicate nostrils. “I thought you must have seen it.”

“Humph! doosid provoking, don’t you know,” said Sir Grantley, calmly. “Made up my mind at last, and now too late.”

“I am so—so—sorry,” sighed her ladyship.

“Can’t be helped. I did mean to propose the week before last, but had to see my doctor. Melton, eh? Doosid poor, isn’t he?”

“Oh, really, Sir Grantley, I know nothing about Mr Melton’s prospects, but he is a Mowbray Melton, and a wealthy cousin is childless, and not likely to many.”

“What, Dick Mowbray? Married last week.”

“Mr Melton’s cousin?”

“To be sure he did, Lady Barmouth; and besides, Charley Melton is one of the younger branch. Poor as Job.”

He made as if to rise, but her ladyship laid her hand upon his arm.

“Stop a moment,” she exclaimed. “This is a serious matter, Sir Grantley, and it must be cleared up.”

“Don’t say a word about it, please,” he replied, with some trepidation.

“I shall not say a word,” replied her ladyship; “but you are under a mistake, Sir Grantley. Mr Melton has a handsome private income.”

“Where from?” replied the baronet. “His father has not a rap.”

“Then he has magnificent expectations.”

“Did he tell you this?” said Sir Grantley, screwing his glass very tightly into his eye.

“N-no,” said her ladyship. “There, I will be frank with you, Sir Grantley. You are a gentleman, and I can trust you.”

“I hope so,” he replied, stiffly.

“The fact is,” said her ladyship, “seeing that there was a growing intimacy between my daughter and Mr Melton, who is the son of an old Eton schoolfellow of Lord Barmouth, I made some inquiries.”

“Yas?” said Sir Grantley.

“And I understood Lord Barmouth to say that he would be a most eligible *parti* for our dearest child.”

“Oh, indeed,” said Sir Grantley, carefully examining the sit of one leg of his trousers.

Lady Barmouth stared at the speaker, and then shut her scent bottle with a loud snap.

“If she has deceived me—tricked me over this,” thought her ladyship, “I will never forgive her.”

“But has Mr Melton professed this to you?” said Sir Grantley, staring at the change which had come over his proposed mother-in-law. For the sweet smile was gone, and her thin lips were drawn tightly over her teeth: not a dimple was to be seen, and a couple of dark marks came beneath her eyes.

“No,” she said, shortly; and there was a great deal of acidity in her tone. “I must say he has not. But I must inquire into this. I trusted implicitly in what my husband, who knew his father intimately, had said. Will you join the croquet party, Sir Grantley?” she continued, forcing back her sweetest smile.

“Yas, oh yas, with pleasure. Charmed,” said Sir Grantley; and they rose and walked towards the croquet lawn.

“Dear Sir Grantley,” said her ladyship, speaking once more with her accustomed sweetness, “this is a private matter between ourselves. You will not let it influence your visit?”

“Not at all.”

“I mean, you will not let it shorten your stay?”

“Oh, no—not at all,” he replied. “Charmed to stay, I’m sure. Shan’t break my heart, don’t you know. Try to bear the disappointment.”

Five minutes later her ladyship had left Sir Grantley on the lawn, and gone off in the direction of Lord Barmouth, who saw her coming and beat a retreat, but her ladyship cut him off and met him face to face.

“Tryphie,” said Tom to his little cousin, “there’s a row cooking.”

“Yes,” she replied, sending her ball with straight aim through a hoop. “I saw it coming. I hope it is nothing about Maude; she seems so happy.”

“Hang me if I don’t think it is,” said Tom. “I’m going off directly, for the old girl’s started to wig the governor, I’m certain. I shall go and back him up after giving my mallet to Wilters. Don’t make me madly jealous.”

“Why not?” she replied, mischievously.

“And be careful not to hit his legs,” said Tom. “They’d break like reeds.—Wilters, will you take my mallet? I want to go.”

“Charmed, I’m shaw,” said Sir Grantley, bowing, and being thus introduced to the game, while Tom lit a cigarette and slipped away.

Meanwhile Lady Barmouth had captured her husband as he was moving off, followed closely by Charley Melton’s ugly dog, which no sooner saw her than he lowered his tail, dropped his head, and walked under a clump of Portugal laurel out of the way.

“Barmouth,” said her ladyship, taking him into custody, like a plump social policeman, “I want to speak to you.”

“Certainly, my dear,” he said, mildly. “What is it?”

“About this Mr Charles Melton. What income has he?”

“Well, my dear,” said the old gentleman, “I don’t believe he has any beyond a little allowance from his father, who is very poor.”

“And his expectations,” said her ladyship, sharply. “He has great expectations, has he not?”

“I—I—I don’t think he has, my love,” said the old man; “but he’s a doosed fine, manly young fellow, and I like him

very much indeed."

"But you told me that he had great prospects."

"No, my dear, you said *you* had heard that he had. I remember it quite well."

"Don't be an idiot, Barmouth," exclaimed her ladyship. "Listen to me."

"Yes, my dear," he said, looking at her nervously, and then stooping to rub his leg, an act she stopped by giving his hand a smart slap.

"How can you be so offensive," she cried, in a low angry voice; "it is quite disgusting. Listen to me."

"Yes, my dear."

"I went to see Lady Merritty about this matter, and Lady Rigby."

"About my gout, my dear?"

"Do you wish to make me angry, Barmouth?"

"No, my dear."

"I went to see her about this young man—this Melton, and Lady Merritty told me she believed he had most brilliant expectations. But I'll be even with her for this. Oh, it was too bad!"

"What's the matter?" said Tom, joining them.

"Matter!" cried the irate woman. "Why, evidently to gratify some old spite, that wretched woman, Lady Merritty, has been palming off upon us this Mr Melton as a millionaire, and on the strength of it all I have encouraged him here, and only just now refused an offer made by Sir Grantley Wilters. A beggar! An upstart!"

"Bravo, mother!" cried Tom, enthusiastically. "So he is, a contemptible, weak-kneed, supercilious beggar. I hate him."

"Hate him?" said her ladyship. "Why, you always made him your greatest friend."

"What, old Wilters?" cried Tom.

"Stuff! This Melton," retorted her ladyship.

"Bah!" exclaimed Tom. "I meant that thin weedy humbug, Wilters."

"And I meant that wretched impostor, Melton," cried her ladyship, angrily.

"Look here, mother," cried Tom. "Charley Melton is my friend, and he is here at your invitation. Let me tell you this: if you insult him, if I don't go bang out on the croquet lawn and kick Wilters. Damme, that I will."

"He's a brave dashing young fellow, my son Tom," said his lordship to himself. "I wish I dared—"

"Barmouth," moaned her ladyship, "help me to the house. My son, to whom I should look for support, turns upon his own mother. Alas, that I should live to see such a day!"

"Yes, my dear," said Lord Barmouth, in a troubled way, as he offered the lady his arm. "Tom, my boy, don't speak so rudely to your mamma," he continued, looking back, and they moved slowly towards the open drawing-room window.

As her ladyship left the garden, Joby came slowly up from under the laurels, and laid his head on Tom's knee, for that gentleman had thrown himself on a garden seat.

"Hallo, Joby," he said "you here? I tell you what, old man, if you would go and stick your teeth into Wilters' calf—Bah! he hasn't got a calf!—into his leg, and give him hydrophobia, you'd be doing your master a good turn."

From that hour a gloom came over the scene. Lady Barmouth was scrupulously polite, but Charley Melton remarked a change. There were no more rides out with Maude; no more pleasant *tête-à-têtes*: all was smiles carefully iced, and he turned at last to Tom for an explanation.

"I can't understand it," he said; "a few days ago my suit seemed to find favour in her eyes; now her ladyship seems to ridicule the very idea of my pretentions."

"Yes," said Tom savagely; and he bit his cigar right in half.

"But why, in heaven's name?"

"Heard you were poor."

"Well, I never pretended otherwise."

"No," said Tom, snappishly; "but I suppose some one else did."

"Who?" cried Melton, angrily.

“Shan’t tell,” cried Tom; “but mind your eye, my boy, or she’ll throw you over.”

“She shall not,” cried Melton, firmly, “for though there is no formal engagement, I hold to your sister, whom I love with all my heart.”

That evening Charley Melton was called away to see his father, who had been taken seriously ill.

“So very sorry,” said her ladyship, icily. “But these calls must be answered. Poor Mr Melton, I am so grieved. Maude, my darling, Sir Grantley is waiting to play that game of chess with you.”

The consequence was, that Charley Melton’s farewell to Maude was spoken with eyes alone, and he left the house feeling that he was doomed never to enter it again as a staying guest, while the enemy was in the field ready to sap and mine his dearest hopes.

Chapter Five.

Back in Town—the Demon.

Lady Maude Diphoos sat in her dressing-room in Portland Place with her long brown hair let down and spread all around her like some beautiful garment designed by nature to hide her soft white bust and arms, which were crossed before her as she gazed in the long dressing-glass draped with pink muslin.

For the time being that dressing-glass seemed to be a framed picture in which could be seen the sweet face of a beautiful woman, whose blue eyes were pensive and full of trouble. It was the picture of one greatly in deshabille; but then it was the lady’s dressing-room, and there was no one present but the maid.

The chamber was charmingly furnished, enough showing in the glass to make an effective background to the picture; and to add to the charm there was a delicious odour of blended scents that seemed to be exhaled by the principal flower in the room—she whose picture shone in the muslin-draped frame.

There is nothing very new, it may be presumed, for a handsome woman to be seated before her glass with her long hair down, gazing straight before her into the reflector; but this was an exceptional case, for Maude Diphoos was looking right into her mirror and could not see herself. Sometimes what she saw was Charley Melton, but at the present moment the face of Dolly Preen, her maid, as that body stood half behind her chair, brushing away at her mistress’ long tresses, which crackled and sparkled electrically, and dropping upon them certain moist pearls which she as rapidly brushed away.

Dolly Preen was a pretty, plump, dark girl, with a certain rustic beauty of her own such as was found sometimes in the sunny village by the Hurst, from which she had been taken to become young ladies’ maid, a sort of moral pincushion, into which Mademoiselle Justine Framboise, her ladyship’s attendant, stuck venomed verbal pins.

But Dolly did not look pretty in the glass just now, for her nose was very red, her eyes were swollen up, and as she sniffed, and choked, and uttered a low sob from time to time, she had more the air of a severely punished school-girl than a prim young ladies’ maid in an aristocratic family.

Dolly wept and dropped tears on the beautiful soft tangled hair at which Sir Grantley Wilters had often cast longing glances. Then she brushed them off again, and took out her handkerchief to blow her nose—a nose which took a great deal of blowing, as it was becoming overcharged with tears.

“Oh, Dolly, Dolly,” said her mistress at last, “this is very, very sad.”

At this moment through the open window, faintly heard, there floated, softened by distance, that delicious, now forgotten, but once popular strain—“I’m a young man from the country, but you don’t get over me.”

Dorothy Preen, Sussex yeoman’s daughter, was a young woman from the country, and was it because the air seemed *apropos* that the maiden suddenly uttered an ejaculation which sounded like *Ow*! and dropping the ivory-backed brush, plumped herself down upon the carpet, as if making a nursery cheese, and began to sob as if her heart would break? Was it the appropriate nature of the air? No; it was the air producer.

“Oh, Dolly, Dolly, I don’t know what to say,” said Lady Maude gently, as she gave her hair a whisk and sent it all flying to one side. “I don’t want to send you back home.”

“No, no, no, my lady, please don’t do that,” blubbered the girl.

“But her ladyship is thinking very seriously about it, Dolly, and you see you were found talking to him.”

“Ye—ye—yes, my lady.”

“But, you foolish girl, don’t you understand that he is little better than a beggar—an Italian mendicant?”

“Ye-ye-yes, my lady.”

“Then how can you be so foolish?”

“I—I—I don’t know, my lady.”

“You, a respectable farmer’s daughter, to think of taking up with a low man who goes about the streets turning the handle of an organ. Dolly, Dolly, my poor girl, what does it mean?”

“I—I—I don’t know, my lady. Ow! I am so miserable.”

“Of course you are, my good girl. There, promise me you’ll forget it all, and I’ll speak to her ladyship, and tell her you’ll be more sensible, and get her to let you stay.”

“I—I can’t, my lady.”

“Cannot what?”

“Forget him, my lady.”

“Why not?”

“Be-be-because he is so handsome.”

“Oh, Dolly, I’ve no patience with you.”

“N-n-no, my lady, because you—you ain’t—ain’t in love,” sobbed the girl with angry vehemence, as she covered her face with her hands and rocked herself to and fro.

“For shame, Dolly,” cried Maude, with her face flamingly red. “If a woman is in love that is no reason for her degrading herself. I’m shocked at you.”

“Ye-ye-yes, my lady, bu-bu-but you don’t know; you—you—you haven’t felt it yet. Wh-wh-when it comes over you some day, you—you—you’ll be as bad as I am. Ow! ow! ow! I’m a wretched, unhappy girl.”

“Then rouse yourself and think no more of this fellow. For shame of you!”

“I—I can’t, my lady. He—he—he’s so handsome, and I’ve tried ever so to give him up, but he takes hold of you like.”

“Takes hold of you, Dolly? Oh, for shame!”

“I—I d-d-d-don’t mean with his hands, my lady, b-b-but with his great dark eyes, miss, and—and he fixes you like; and once you’re like I am you’re always seeing them, and they’re looking right into you, and it makes you—you—you feel as if you must go where he tells you to, and—and I can’t help it, and I’m a wretched, unhappy girl.”

“You are indeed,” said Maude with spirit. “It is degrading in the extreme. An organ-grinder—pah!”

“It—it—it don’t matter what he is, my lady,” sobbed Dolly. “It’s the man does it. And—and some day wh-wh-when you feel as I do, miss, you’ll—”

“Silence,” cried Lady Maude. “I’ll hear no more such nonsense. Get up, you foolish girl, and go on brushing my hair. You shall think no more of that wretched creature.”

Just at that moment, after a dead silence, an air from *Trovatore* rang out from the pavement below, and Dolly, who had picked up the brush, dropped it again, and stood gazing toward the window with so comical an expression of grief and despair upon her face that her mistress rose, and taking her arm gave her a sharp shake.

“You silly girl!” she cried.

“But—but he’s so handsome, my lady, I—I can’t help it. Do—do please send him away.”

“Why, the girl’s fascinated,” thought Maude, whose cheeks were flushed, and whose heart was increasing its speed as she eagerly twisted up her hair and confined it behind by a spring band.

“If—if you could send him away, my lady.”

“Send him away! Yes: it is disgraceful,” cried Maude, and as if moved by some strange influence she rapidly made herself presentable and looked angrily from the window.

There was an indignant look in her eyes, and her lips parted to speak, but at that moment the mechanical music ceased, and the bearer of the green baize draped “kist of whustles” looked up, removed his soft hat, smiled and displayed his teeth as he exclaimed in a rich, mellow voice—

“Ah, signora—ah, bella signora.”

Maude Diphoos’ head was withdrawn rapidly and her cheeks paled, flushed, and turned pale again, as she stood gazing at her maid, and wondering what had possessed her to attempt to do such a thing as dismiss this man.

“Ah, signora! Ah, bella signora!” came again from below; and this seemed to arouse Maude to action, for now she hastily closed the window and seated herself before the glass.

“Undo my hair and finish brushing it,” she said austerely; “and, Dolly, there is to be no more of this wicked folly.”

“No, my lady.”

“It is disgraceful. Mind, I desire that you never look out at this man, nor speak to him again.”

“No, my lady.”

“I shall ask her ladyship to look over your error, and mind that henceforth you are to be a very good girl.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“There: I need say no more; you are very sorry, are you not?”

“Ye-yes, my lady.”

“Then mind, I shall expect you to do credit to my interference, for her ladyship will be exceedingly angry if anything of this kind occurs again. Now, you will try?”

“Ye-yes, my lady,” sobbed poor Dolly, “I’ll try; but you don’t know, miss, how hard it is. Some day you may feel as I do, and then you’ll be sorry you scolded me so much.”

“Silence, Dolly; I have not scolded you so much. I have only interfered to save you from ruin and disgrace.”

“Ruin and disgrace, my lady?”

“Yes, you foolish girl. You could not marry such a man as that. There, now go downstairs—no, go to your own room and bathe your eyes before you go down. I feel quite ashamed of you.”

“Yes, my lady, so do I,” sobbed Dolly. “I’m afraid I’m a very wicked girl, and father will never forgive me; but I can’t help it, and—Ow—ow—ow!”

“Dolly! Dolly! Dolly! There, do go to your room,” cried Maude impatiently, and the poor girl went sobbing away, leaving her mistress to sit thinking pensively of what she had said.

Lady Maude Diphoos should have continued dressing, but she sat down by her mirror with her head resting upon her hand thinking very deeply of the weak, love-sick girl who had just left the room. Her thoughts were strange, and it seemed to her that so soon as she began to picture the bluff, manly, Saxon countenance of Charley Melton, the dark-eyed, black-bearded face of the Italian leered at her over his shoulder, and so surely as she made an effort to drive away the illusion, the face disappeared from one side to start out again upon the other.

So constant was this to the droning of the organ far below that Maude shivered, and at last started up, feeling more ready now to sympathise with the girl than to blame as she hurriedly dressed, and prepared to go downstairs to join her ladyship in her afternoon drive.

“Are you aware, Maude, that I have been waiting for you some time?”

“No, mamma. The carriage has not yet come.”

“That has nothing whatever to do with it,” said her ladyship. “You have kept me waiting. And by the way, Maude, I must request that you do not return Mr Melton’s very particular bows. I observed that you did yesterday in the Park, while directly afterwards, when Sir Grantley Wilters passed, you turned your head the other way.”

“Really, mamma, I—”

“That will do, child, I am your mother.”

“The carriage is at the door, my lady,” said Robbins, entering the room; and soon afterwards the ladies descended to enter the barouche and enjoy the air, “gravel grinding,” in the regular slow procession by the side of the Serpentine, where it was not long before Maude caught sight of Charley Melton, with his ugly bull-dog by his legs.

He bowed, but Lady Barmouth cut him dead. He bowed again—this time to Maude, who cut him alive, for her piteous look cut him to the heart; and as the carriage passed on the remark the young man made concerning her ladyship was certainly neither refined nor in the best of taste.

Chapter Six.

Not at Home.

For Charley Melton’s father was better, hence his presence in town, where he had sped as soon as he found that the Diphoos family had left the Hurst, where Lady Barmouth hatched matrimony.

That cut in the Park was unpleasant, but nothing daunted in his determination not to be thrown over, the young man made his way next day to Portland Place, eager, anxious, and wondering whether Maude would be firm, or allow herself to be influenced by her ladyship to his downfall.

Robbins unclosed the door at the great family mansion looking very severe and uncompromising. So stern was his countenance, and so stiff the bristles on his head, that any one with bribery in his heart would have felt that silver would be an insult.

“Not at home.”

He left his card, and called next day.

“Not at home.”

He waited two days, and called again.

“Not at home.”

Another two days, and another call. The same answer.

“Not at home.”

Charley Melton turned away with his brow knit, and then thought over the past, and determined that, come what might, he would not be beaten.

The next day he went again, with his dog trotting closely at his heels. He knocked; the door was opened by Robbins the butler, and to the usual inquiry, that individual responded as before—

“Not at home, sir.”

As Melton left his card and turned to go away, Joby quietly walked in, crossed the hall, and went upstairs, while his master, who was biting his lips, turned sharply back and slipped half a sovereign into the butler’s hand.

“Look here, Robbins,” he said; “you may trust me; what does this mean?”

The butler glanced behind him, and let the door swing nearly to as he stood upon the step.

“Fact is, sir, her ladyship said they was never to be at home to you.”

A curious smile crossed Melton’s lip as he nodded shortly and turned away, going straight back to his chambers in Duke Street, Saint James’s, and walking impatiently up and down till he was fain to cease from utter exhaustion, when he flung himself impatiently in his chair, and sat trying to make plans for the future.

Meanwhile Joby, feeling himself quite at home in the Portland Place mansion, had walked straight into the dining-room, where the luncheon was not yet cleared away. The dog settled himself under the table, till, hearing a halting step, he had come slowly out to stand watching Lord Barmouth, who toddled in hastily, and helped himself to three or four slices of cold ham, which he was in the act of placing in his pocket as the dog touched him on the leg.

“Eh! I’m very sorry, Robbins—I—eh? Oh dear, how you frightened me, my good dog,” he said; “I thought it was the butler.”

He was hurrying out when, thinking that perhaps the visitor might also like a little extra refreshment, he hastily took up a couple of cutlets and threw them one by one to the dog, who caught them, and seemed to swallow them with one and the same movement, pill-fashion, for they disappeared, and Joby waited for more.

“I dare not take any more, my good dog,” said his lordship, stooping down and patting him; and then, feeling that there was nothing more to be done here, Joby quietly trotted upstairs into the drawing-room, where Maude was seated alone, with her head resting upon her hand, and the tears silently stealing down her cheeks.

She uttered a faint cry, for the dog’s great blunt muzzle was laid upon her soft white hand, when, seeing who it was, the poor girl, with a hysterical sob, threw herself down upon her knees beside the great ugly brute, flung her arms round his neck, and hugged him to her breast. “Oh Joby, Joby, Joby, you dear good dog,” she sobbed, “how did you come here?” and then, with flushed cheeks, and a faint hope in her breast that the dog’s master might be at hand, she paused with her head thrown back, listening intently.

But there was not a sound to be heard, and she once more caressed the dog, who, with his head resting upon her shoulder, blinked his great eyes and licked his black muzzle as if he liked it all amazingly.

Maude sobbed bitterly as she knelt by the dog, and then a thought seemed to strike her, for she felt its collar, and hesitated; then going to the table she opened a blotter, seized a sheet of note paper, and began to write.

At the end of a few moments she stopped though.

“I dare not—I dare not,” she sighed. “It would certainly be found out, and what would he think of me? What does he think of me?” she wailed. “He must believe me not worth a thought. I will send—just a line.”

She wrote a few words, folded the paper up small, and was taking some silk from her work-basket, when a cough on the stairs made her start and return to her chair.

“She will see the dog and be so angry,” thought Maude, as the rustling of silk proclaimed the coming of her ladyship, when, to her great joy Joby uttered a low growl and dived at once beneath the couch, where he curled himself up completely out of sight.

“Maude,” said her ladyship, in an ill-used tone, “you are not looking so well as you should.”

“Indeed, mamma?”

“By no means, child; and as I am speaking to you, I may as well say that I could not help noticing last night that you were almost rude to Sir Grantley Wilters. I must beg that it does not occur again.”

“Mamma!”

“There, there, there, that will do,” said her ladyship, “not a word. I am going out, and I cannot be made nervous by your silly nonsense.”

“Indeed, mamma, I—”

“I will not hear excuses,” cried her ladyship. “I tell you I am going out. If Sir Grantley Wilters calls, I insist upon your treating him with proper consideration. As I have told you, and I repeat it once for all, that silly flirtation with Mr Melton is quite at an end, and now we must be serious.”

“Serious, mamma!” cried Maude, rising; “I assure you—”

“That will do, child, that will do. You must let older people think for you, if you please. Be silent.”

Lady Barmouth sailed out of the room, and with a flush upon her countenance Maude returned to her work-basket for the silk, starting as she did so, for something touched her, and there was Joby’s great head with the prominent eyes staring up at her, as if to say, “Are you ready?”

Folding her note very small, she tied it securely to the inside of the dog’s collar, and then, laying her hands upon his ears, kissed his great ugly forehead.

“There, good dog, take that to your master,” she said. “Go home.”

The dog started up, uttered a low bark, and, as if he understood her words, made for the door.

“No, no,” cried Maude, who repented now that she had gone so far; “come back, good dog, come back. What will he think of me? What shall I do!”

She ran to the door, but the dog had disappeared, and to her horror she heard the front door open as the carriage wheels stopped at the door. Trembling with dread she ran to the window and saw that the carriage was waiting for Lady Barmouth; but what interested her far more was the sight of Joby trotting across the wide thoroughfare, and evidently making his way straight off home, where he arrived in due course, and set to scratching at the door till Charley Melton got up impatiently and let him in.

“Ah, Joby,” he said, carelessly; and then, heedless of the dog—“But I’ll never give her up,” he said sharply, as he rose and took an old pipe from the chimney-piece, which he filled and then sat down.

As he did so, according to custom, Joby laid his head in his master’s hand, Melton pulling the dog’s ears, and patting him with one hand, thinking of something else the while. His thoughts did not come back, even when his hand came in contact with the paper which now came off easily at his touch.

Melton’s thoughts were with the writer, and he had a pipe in the other hand; but his brain suggested to him that he might just as well light the pipe, incited probably thereto by the touch of the paper which he began to open out, after putting his meerschaum in his mouth; and he was then dreamily doubling the note, when his eyes fell upon the characters, his pipe dropped from his lips and broke upon the floor, as he read with increasing excitement—

“I am driven to communicate with you like this, for I dare not try to post a note. Pray do not think ill of me; I cannot do as I would, and I am very, very unhappy.”

That was all; and Charley Melton read it through again, and then stood looking puzzled, as if he could not comprehend how he came by the letter.

“Why, Joby must have stayed behind to-day,” he cried, “and—yes—no—of course—here are the silken threads attached to his collar, and—and—oh, you jolly old brute! I’ll never repent of giving twenty pounds for you again.”

He patted Joby until the caresses grew too forcible to be pleasant, and the dog slipped under his master’s chair, while the note was read over and over again, and then carefully placed in a pocket-book and transferred to the owner’s breast—a serious proceeding with a comic side.

“No, my darling,” he said, “I won’t think ill of you; and as for you, my dear Lady Barmouth, all stratagems are good in love and war. You have thrown down the glove in casting me off in this cool and insolent manner; I have taken it up. If I cannot win her by fair means, I must by foul.”

He walked up and down the room for a few minutes in a state of intense excitement.

“I can’t help the past,” he said, half aloud. “I cannot help what I am, but win her I must. I feel now as if I can stop at nothing to gain my ends, and here is the way open at all events for a time. Joby, you are going to prove your master’s best friend.”

Chapter Seven.

Down Below.

“If I had my way,” said Mr Robbins, “I’d give orders to the poliss, and every one of ’em should be took up. They’re so fond of turning handles that I’d put ’em on the crank. I’d make ’em grind.”

“You have not the taste for the music, M’sieur Robbins,” said Mademoiselle Justine, looking up from her plate at dinner in the servants’ hall, and then glancing side wise at Dolly Preen, who was cutting her waxy potato up very small and soaking it in gravy, as she bent down so as not to show her burning face.

“Haven’t I, ma’amselle? P’r’aps not; but I had a brother who could a’most make a fiddle speak. I don’t call organs music, and I object on principle to a set of lazy ronies being encouraged about our house.”

Dolly’s face grew more scarlet, and Mademoiselle Justine’s mouth more tight as a couple of curious little curves played about the corners of her lips.

“Well, all I can say,” said the cook, “is, that he’s a very handsome man.”

“Handsome!” exclaimed Robbins, “I don’t call a man handsome as can’t shave, and never cuts his greasy hair. Handsome! Yah, a low, macaroni-eating, lazy rony, that’s what he is. There’s heaps of ’em always walking about outside the furren church doors, I’ve seen ’em myself.”

“But some of ’em’s exiles, Mr Robbins,” said the stout, amiable-looking cook. “I have ’eared as some on ’em’s princes

in disguise."

"My faith!" ejaculated Mademoiselle Justine, sardonically.

"Yes, ma'amselle, I ayve," said cook, defiantly, "I don't mean Frenchy exiles, with their coats buttoned up to their chins in Leicester Square, because they ain't got no washing to put out, but Hightalian exiles."

"Bah!" ejaculated Mademoiselle Justine, "that for you! What know you?" and she snapped her fingers.

"Pr'aps a deal more than some people thinks, and I don't like to sit still and hear poor people sneered at because they are reduced to music."

"But I don't call that music," said Robbins, contemptuously.

"Don't you, Mr Robbins?—then I do."

At this stage of the proceedings Dolly could bear her feelings no more, but got up and left the hall to ascend the back stairs to her own room, and sit down in a corner, and cover her face with her natty apron.

"Pore gell," exclaimed the cook. "It's too bad."

"What is too bad, Madame Downes?" said Mademoiselle Framboise.

"To go on like that before the pore thing. She can't help it."

"Bah!" ejaculated the French maid, "it is disgust. An organ man! The child is *affreusement stupide*."

"I have a heart of my own," sighed the cook.

"Yais, but you do not go to throw it to a man like that, Madame Downes."

"Hear, hear!" said the butler, and there was a chorus of approval.

"I say it is disgust—disgrace," continued Mademoiselle Justine. "The girl is mad, and should be sent home to the *bon* papa down in the country."

"I have a heart of my own," said Mrs Downes again. "Ah, you needn't laugh, Mary Ann. Some people likes footmen next door."

The housemaid addressed tossed her head and exclaimed, "Well, I'm sure!"

"And so am I," replied the cook, regardless of the sneers and smiles of the rest of the domestics at the table. "As I said before, I have a heart of my own, and if some people follow the example of their betters,"—here Mrs Downes stared very hard at the contemptuous countenance of the French maid,—"and like the furren element, it's no business of nobody's."

Madame Justine's eyes flashed.

"Did you make that saying for me, Madame Downes?" she flashed out viciously.

"Sayings ain't puddens," retorted cook.

"I say, make you that vairy witty jeer for me?" cried Mademoiselle Justine viciously.

"What I say is," continued the cook, who, having a blunter tongue, stood on her defence, but heaping up dull verbiage round her position as a guard against the Frenchwoman's sharp attack, "that a man's a man, and if he's a furrener it ain't no fault of his. I should say he's a count at least, and he's very handsome."

"Counts don't count in this country," said Robbins smiling, and waiting for the applause of the table.

"Count indeed!" cried Mademoiselle Justine. "Count you the fork and spoons, Mr Robbins, and see that these canaille music men come not down the air—*ree*. As for that green-goose girl Preen—Bah! she is a little shild for her mamma to vip and send to bed wizout her soop—*paire*. Madame Downes, you are a vairy foolish woman."

Mademoiselle Justine rose from her seat, and made a movement as if to push back a chair; but she had been seated upon a form which accommodated half a dozen more domestics, and in consequence she had to climb out and glide toward the door, through which she passed with a rustle like that of a cloud of dead leaves swept into a barn.

"You've put ma'amselle out, Mrs Downes," said Robbins with condescension.

"That's easy enough done, Mr Robbins. It's her furren blood. I don't like young people to be sneered at if they're a bit tender. I've got a heart of my own."

"And a very good heart too, Mrs Downes," said the butler.

"Hear, hear," said Joseph the footman.

"Hear, hear, hear, hear, hear!" cried the page-boy, a young gentleman who lived in a constant state of suppression, and consequently in his youthful vivacity was always seeking an opportunity to come to the surface. This appeared to him to be one. His chief had paid a compliment which had been cheered by the said chief's first-lieutenant Joseph, so Henry, the bearer of three rows of buttons, every one of which he longed to annex for purposes of play, cried "hear, hear,

hear," as the footman's echo, and rapped loudly upon the table with the haft of his knife.

A dead silence fell upon the occupants of the servants' hall, and Henry longed to take flight; but the butler fixed him as the Ancient Mariner did the wedding guest, and held him with his glittering eye.

"There, I knowed you'd do it," whispered the footman. "You're always up to some of your manoeuvres."

"Henry," said the butler in his most severe tones, and with the look upon his countenance that he generally reserved for Lord Barmouth, "I don't know where you were brought up, my good boy, and I don't want to know, but have the goodness to recollect that you are now in a nobleman's service, where, as there is no regular steward's room for the upper servants, you are allowed to take your meals with your superiors. I have before had occasion to complain of your behaviour, eating with your knife, breathing all over your plate, and sniffing at the table in a most disgusting way."

"Hear, hear," said Joseph in a low voice, and the boy thought it additionally hard that he was to be chidden while his fellow-servant in livery went free.

Mr Robbins bowed his head graciously to his underling's softly-breathed piece of adulation, and continued—

"Once for all, my good boy, I must request that if you do not wish to be sent into the knife place to partake of your meals, you will cease your low pothouse conduct, and behave yourself properly."

The butler turned away with a dignified air, while Henry screwed up his face as if about to cry, bent down his head, and began to kick the footman's legs under the table—a playful piece of impudence that the lofty servitor did not resent, Master Henry the buttons knowing too much of things in general appertaining to the pantry; sundry stealings out at night when other people were in bed, and when returns were made through the area door, and from good fellowship, for though there was a vast difference in years and size, Joseph's brain was of much the same calibre as that of the boy.

"Mrs Downes," said the butler, after clearing his voice with a good cough, "your sentiments do you credit. You have a heart of your own, and what is more, you are English."

"I am, Mr Robbins, I am," said the lady addressed, and she wiped her eyes.

"Furreners are furreners," continued the butler didactically; "but what I always will maintain is, that the English are so thoroughly English."

There was a murmur of applause here which warmed the imposing-looking butler's heart, and he continued—

"Your sentiments do you the greatest of credit, Mrs Downes; but you are too tender."

"I can't help it, Mr Robbins," said the lady pathetically.

"And I'm sure no one wishes that you should, Mrs Downes, for I say it boldly so that all may hear,—except the two lady's maids who have left the hall,—that a better cook, and a kinder fellow-servant never came into a house."

Another murmur of applause, and the cook sighed, shed two more tears, and felt, to use her own words, afterward expressed, "all of a fluster."

"Mr Robbins," she began.

"I beg your pardon, madam, I have not finished," said the butler, smiling. "I only wished to observe, and I must say it even if I give offence to your delicate susceptibilities, madam, that that furren papist fellow with the organ haunts Portland Place like a regular demon, smiling at weak woman, and taking of her captive, when it's well known what lives the poor creatures live out Saffron Hill way. I should feel as I was not doing my duty toward my fellow creatures if I didn't protest against such a man having any encouragement here."

"Hear, hear," said the footman again.

"Some impudent person once observed," continued the butler, "that when a footman married he took a room in a mews for his wife, and furnished it with a tub and a looking-glass."

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the buttons.

"Henry, be silent, or you will have to leave the room," said the butler, sternly. "A tub and a looking-glass, I repeat," he added, as he looked round, "so that his wife might try to get her living by washing, and see herself starve."

A murmur of approval rose here from every one but the footman, who looked aggrieved, and kicked Henry beneath the table.

"But what I say is this," continued the butler, "the pore girl who lets herself be deluded into marrying one of those lazy rony organ men may have the looking-glass, for Italians is a vain nation; but from what I know of 'em, the pore wives will never have the tub, let alone the soap."

The butler smiled, and there was a burst of laughter, which ceased as the cook took up the defence.

"Maybe," she said, "but what I say is this, as I've said before, I can feel for a woman in love, for I have a heart of my own."

It was self-evident, for that heart was thoroughly doing its work of pumping the vital current so energetically, that the blood flushed the lady's cheeks, rose into her forehead, and was beginning to suffuse her eyes, which looked angry, when a loud peal at the front door bell acted as a check to the discussion, Joseph going off to answer the summons as all arose, and the butler, to finish the debate, exclaimed—

“Mark my words, no good won’t come of it if that man’s allowed to haunt this house, and—Well, of all the impudence! there he is again. I shall have to call her ladyship’s attention to the fact.”

For Luigi was slowly grinding out the last new waltz, and it had such an effect on the more frivolous of the hired servants, that as soon as their elders had quitted the underground banquetting hall, two of them clasped each other, and began to spin round the place, proving that music had charms as well as the man.

Chapter Eight.

Family Matters.

Charley Melton made up his mind that he would behave honourably, and he called several times more at Portland Place, till it became evident that there was no prospect of his being admitted. He saw the carriage twice in the Park, and bowed, to obtain a cold recognition from her ladyship the first time, the cut direct from her the second time, and an agonised look from Maude.

“That’s the second time this week,” he muttered angrily; “I must end this.” He stopped short, leaning over the rails and watching the carriage as it was pulled up, and a fashionably-dressed gentleman went to the door and stood talking for some considerable time.

“My rival, I suppose. Sir Grantley Wilters, then, is to be the happy man? Here, come along, Joby, it is time to take to stratagem. I wonder what has become of Tom?”

The next day a special message was sent to that medical attendant, Doctor Todd, Lady Barmouth imploring him to come directly, as Maude was so ill that she was growing uneasy.

“Humph!” said the doctor, “poor girl. But she must wait her turn.”

He hurried through his interviews with his regular patients, and reached Portland Place just as lunch was going in; but it was put back while Lady Barmouth took him into the drawing-room, where Maude was seated.

“Ah, my dear!” he exclaimed, in his cheery way. “Why, I say, what’s the matter?”

He sat talking to her for some little time, wrote a prescription, and then rose.

“There, Lady Barmouth,” he said; “that is all I can do. Give her change *and* peace of mind, and she will soon be well.”

“Indeed, doctor,” cried her ladyship, “she shall have everything she can wish for. As to peace of mind, why what is there to disturb it? It is our peace of mind that suffers. Poor Sir Grantley Wilters is half distracted about her.”

“Is he?” said the doctor, bluntly. “Why, what has it got to do with him?”

“Hush, doctor! Fie!” exclaimed her ladyship, smiling. “There, you are making somebody blush. It is too bad.”

Maude darted an indignant glance at her mother, and with flaming cheeks and eyes full of tears left the room.

“Poor girl, she is so hysterical,” said her ladyship. “Ah, these young girls, these young girls! Of course you will stay lunch, doctor?”

“Yes,” he said shortly, “I intended to. I’m precious hungry, and you’ve put me out of my usual course.”

“I’m so sorry,” said her ladyship; “but it was very good of you to come,” as the door opened and the earl came toddling into the room.

“Ah, doctor,” he said, “doosed glad to see you. Did you hear my leg was threatening again?”

“No,” said the doctor, shaking hands. “We must have a consultation.”

“And forbid so many good things, doctor,” said her ladyship, with asperity.

“But, my dear, I—I—I’m pretty nearly starved; it’s poverty of blood, I’m sure.”

“Well, come and have a good lunch,” said the doctor. “I’ll see that you have nothing to disagree with you.”

“Thank you, doctor, thank you,” said the old gentleman, as the gong began to sound and they went down, Tryphie and Tom coming out of another room—Maude joining them, looking now quite composed.

“I remember when I was a boy,” said Lord Barmouth, suddenly.

“Yes, my love,” said her ladyship, stiffly; “but you’ve told us that before.”

“Have I, my dear?” said his lordship, looking troubled, and then there was a little pause.

“I may have a glass of hock, may I not, doctor?” said the old man, as the luncheon went on.

“Eh? Yes.—I say, what’s your name, bring me the hock, some seltzer and a glass,” said the doctor to Robbins. “Yes, my dear,” he continued to Tryphie, “I would rather any day go to the Tyrol than along the beaten track through the Alps.”

The butler brought the hock and seltzer, and a large tumbler, into which such a liberal portion of wine was poured

that Lady Barmouth looked horrified, and the old gentleman chuckled and squeezed Maude's hand under the table.

"Is not that too much, doctor?" whispered her ladyship.

"Eh? Much? oh no. Do him good," said the doctor, filling up the glass with seltzer. "There, take that to his lordship."

"I say, father," said Tom, giving her ladyship a mocking smile, "I watched the quantities. I'll mix your hock for you in future."

The luncheon went on, the doctor chatting merrily, while his lordship became, under the influence of so strong a dose of medicine, quite garrulous.

"I say, doctor," he said, chuckling, "did—did you hear that deuced good story about Lady Grace Moray?"

"No," said the doctor; "what was it?"

"Capital story, and quite true—he he, he!" chuckled the old gentleman. "She—she—she—begad, she was disappointed of one fellow, and—and—and, damme if she didn't run off with the butler."

"Barmouth!" exclaimed her ladyship, austerely, "I am glad that the servants are not in the room."

"It's—it's—it's a fact, my dear," said the old gentleman, wiping his eyes. "Bolted with him, she did, and—and—and, damme, I forget how it all ended. I say, Tom, my boy, how—how—how the doose did that affair end?"

"Got married and made a fool of herself," said Tom sharply.

"Do people always make fools of themselves who marry, Tom?" said Tryphie in a low voice.

"Always," he whispered back, "if they marry people chosen for them in place of those they love."

"I must request, Barmouth, my dear, that you do not tell such stories as that. They are loathsome and repulsive. Lady Grace Moray comes of a very low type of family. Her grandfather married a butterman's daughter, or something of that kind. They have no breeding."

"I—I—I think I left my handkerchief in the drawing-room," said his lordship, rising.

"Why not ring, my love?" said her ladyship.

"No, no, no, I would rather fetch it myself," said his lordship, who left the room, went up two or three stairs, stopped, listened, and then toddled back to where, on a tray, the remains of a tongue stood in company with an empty vegetable dish or two.

There was a great piece, too, of the point quite six inches long lying detached, for the doctor's arm was vigorous, and he had cut the tongue quite through. Such a chance was not offered every day, and it would not only make a couple or three pleasant snacks when his lordship was hungry, but it would keep.

He listened: all was still, and, cautiously advancing, he secured the piece of dry firm tongue. Then he started as if electrified. Robbins' cough was heard on the stairs, and his lordship dabbed the delicacy away in the handiest place, and turned towards the door as the butler appeared in the hall.

"What game's he up to now?" said Robbins to himself, as, with his memory reminding him of the trouble he had had to sponge and brush the tails of the old gentleman's dress coats, which used to be found matted with gummy gravies and sauces, so that the pocket linings had had to be several times replaced, he opened the dining-room door.

"I—I—I think I left my handkerchief upstairs Robbins," said his lordship humbly; and he toddled in again and retook his place.

The luncheon ended, the party rose and stood chatting about the room, while the doctor was in earnest conversation with Maude and her ladyship.

"Nothing at all," he said firmly, "but low spirits from mental causes, and these are matters for which mothers and fathers must prescribe."

"It's—it's—doosed hard to be so short of money," said his lordship to himself as he was left alone; and then thinking of the tongue, he tried to get to the door, but a look from her ladyship sent him back. "It's—it's—doosed hard. I shall have to go to little Tryphie again. He, he, he! her ladyship don't know," he chuckled, "I've—I've left her five thousand in my will, bless her. I wish she'd buy me some more Bath buns."

He crossed to where the bright little girl was standing, and she advanced to him directly.

"Can you lend me another five shillings, Tryphie?" he whispered.

"Yes, uncle," she replied, nodding and smiling. "I'll get it and put it under the china dog on the right hand cabinet."

"That's right, my dear; it's—it's—it's so doosed awkward to be so short, and I don't like to ask her ladyship."

"Well, I must go," said the doctor loudly. "Good-bye all. Good-bye, my dear," he continued to Maude. Then he pinched Tryphie's cheek, shook hands with the old man and was gone.

"So clever," sighed her ladyship, "that we look over his rough, eccentric ways. I believe that I should not have been here now if it had not been for his skill."

“Then damn the doctor,” said Tom to himself, for he was in a very unfilial mood.

“Oh, by the way,” said the gentleman spoken of, as he came hurriedly back, sending the door open so that it banged upon a chair, “Lady Maude, my dear, you are only to take that medicine when you feel low.”

As he spoke he hitched on his light overcoat that he had partly donned in the hall, and then, fishing in one of the pockets for his gloves, he brought out a piece of tongue.

“Oh, bless my soul!” muttered his lordship; and he toddled towards the window.

“What the dickens is this?” cried the doctor, holding out his find, and putting up his double eye-glass. “Tongue, by jingo! Is this one of your tricks, my Lord Tom?”

“No,” roared Tom, as he burst out laughing, and followed his father to the window, where the old gentleman was nervously gazing forth.

“I’m so sorry,” said her ladyship, quivering with indignation. “It must have been one of the servants, or the cat.”

“Well,” said the doctor, solemnly, “I’ll swear I didn’t steal it. I might perhaps have pocketed something good, but I hadn’t got this coat on.”

“Pray say no more, doctor,” said her ladyship. “Robbins, bring a plate and take this away.”

“Yes, my lady,” said the butler, who was waiting in the hall to show the doctor out; and he made matters worse by advancing with a stately march, taking a plate and silver fork from the sideboard, removed the piece of tongue from the doctor’s fingers with the fork; and then deftly thrusting it off with his thumb on to the plate, he marched out with it, the ladies all bursting into busy conversation to cover his retreat.

Then the doctor went, and a general ascent towards the drawing-room was commenced, his lordship hanging back, and Tom stopping to try and avert the storm.

“Such idiotic—such disgraceful proceedings, Barmouth,” exclaimed her ladyship, closing the dining-room door.

“There, that will do, mother,” said Tom, quietly. “Lookers-on see most of the game.”

“What do you mean, sir?” said her ladyship.

“Why this,” said Tom, savagely. “There, don’t faint; because if you do I shan’t stop and attend you.”

“If I only dared to face her like my son Tom,” said his lordship to himself; “damme, he’s as brave as a little lion, my son Tom.”

“Sir, your language is most disgraceful,” said her ladyship, haughtily.

“That’s what all people think when something is said that they don’t like. Now look here, mother; I don’t mean to stand by any more and see the old man bullied.”

“Bless him, I am proud of that boy,” thought his lordship. “Damme, he’s little, but he’s a man.”

“Diphoos!” cried her ladyship.

“I don’t say it was not stupid of the gov’nor to go and take that piece of tongue, and put it in the wrong pocket.”

“But, my dear boy, I—”

“Hold your tongue, gov’nor,” cried Tom. “It was stupid and idiotic of him perhaps, but not one half so stupid and idiotic as some things I see done here.”

“Tom, I do not know what you mean,” cried her ladyship.

“Well, I mean this. It was idiotic to marry Di to liver-pill Goole, as they call him; and ten times more idiotic to encourage that racing cad, Captain Bellman, here; while it was madness to cut Charley Melton adrift, and try to bring things to an understanding between Maude and that hospital dummy, Wilters.”

“Your language, sir, is frightful,” cried her ladyship, whose voice was rising in spite of herself. “Hospital dummy!”

“So he is; I could drive my fist right through his tottering carcase. He’s only fit to stuff and put in a glass case as a warning to young men.”

“I wish—I wish—I wish I could pat him on the back,” muttered Lord Barmouth. “He’s brave as a lion.”

“Sir Grantley Wilters has my consent to pay his addresses to your sister,” said her ladyship with dignity; “and as for your disgusting remarks about Captain Bellman, he comes here with my consent to see your cousin Tryphie, for whom he will be an excellent *parti*.”

“*Parti*—funeral party. An excellent corpse,” cried Tom in a rage, “for, damme, I’ll shoot him on his wedding morning before he shall have her.”

“You will have to leave home, sir, and live in chambers,” said her ladyship. “You grow too low for society.”

“What, and let you have your own way here, mother! No, hang it, that you shan’t. You may stop my allowance, but I

stop here; so don’t look blank, dad.”

“Don’t speak angrily to your mamma, my dear boy,” said Lord Barmouth.

“All right, gov’nor.”

“As to your friend and companion, whom you brought to this house, and who pretended, like an impostor as he is, to have good expectations—”

“He never did anything of the kind,” said Tom. “He always said he hadn’t a rap.”

“Such a person ought never to have been brought near your sweet, pure-minded sisters,” continued her ladyship; “I found out that he was an impostor, and now I hear that he gambles and is in debt.”

“Who told you that?” roared Tom.

“Never mind.”

“But I insist on knowing.”

“Hush, hush, my boy,” said his lordship, twitching Tom’s coat.

“Be quiet, gov’nor. Who told you that, mamma?” cried Tom.

“I heard it from good authority,” said her ladyship as Lord Barmouth beat a retreat.

“Then good authority is a confounded liar,” cried Tom, as her ladyship sailed out of the room, and after he had cooled down a little and looked round, he found his lordship had gone.

Tom went into the cloak-room, where he came upon his father sitting on a box, busily spreading a biscuit with some mysterious condiment which he dug out of a pot with a paper-knife.

“Poor old Charley,” said Tom, not heeding his father’s occupation, “he’s the soul of honour—a regular trump. Look here, gov’nor,” he cried, turning sharply on the old gentleman and making him jump.

“Don’t you bully me too, my dear boy,” said the old man, trembling. “I can’t bear it!”

“I’m not going to bully you, gov’nor,” cried Tom, laying his hands on the old man’s shoulders affectionately; “but are you going to stand up for your rights or are you not? Look here—that tongue!”

“Yes, my boy, I did take it—I own it. I thought I might be hungry to-morrow, I have such a dreadful appetite, my boy.”

“Then why not ring and order that pompous old fizzle Robbins to bring you up something to eat?”

“I daren’t, my dear boy, I daren’t. Her ladyship has given such strict orders to the servants, and I feel so humiliated when they refuse me.”

“Of course you do, gov’nor. Then why don’t you go down to the club?”

“I can’t Tom, my boy. There’s no credit there, and her ladyship keeps me so horribly short of money.”

“It’s too bad; but come, gov’nor. I’m not afraid of mamma, and I’m not nearly so big as you are.”

“But, my boy,” whimpered the old man? with a piteous look upon his face, “I look bigger than I am, but it isn’t all real: there’s a deal of padding, Tom, and that’s no good. That tailor fellow said I must have a lot of filling out.”

He drew out his pocket-handkerchief to wipe away a weak tear, while Tom looked at him, half sorry, half amused, laughing at length outright as the poor old man smeared something brown and sticky across his face.

“Why, gov’nor!” he cried reproachfully, as something round and brown and flat fell upon the carpet.

“It’s only a veal cutlet, my son,” said the old man, piteously, as he stooped and picked it up before wiping his face. “You see I didn’t know then that I should get the piece of tongue.”

“Oh, gov’nor, gov’nor!” cried Tom.

“Don’t scold me, my dear boy,” pleaded the old man. “I am so padded out. There’s much less of me when my coat’s off. But I’m nothing to what your dear mamma is. Really the way she makes up is a gross imposture. If you only knew what I know, Tom, you’d be astonished.”

“I know quite enough,” growled Tom, “and wouldn’t care if she were not so false inside.”

“Don’t say that, Tom, my boy. She’s a wonderful woman, and means all for the best.”

“But, my dear old gov’nor,” said Tom, “this is all so very weak of you.”

“Well, it is, my boy.”

“You must pluck up, or we shall be ruined,” continued Tom, taking up a napkin and removing a little tomato sauce from his parent’s brow.

“No, my boy—no, my boy, don’t say that; but I can’t bear to ask her ladyship for money. It does make her so cross.”

“It isn’t pleasant,” said Tom; “but there, you go up in the drawing-room, and watch over Maude like a lion; I don’t want to see her made miserable.”

“I will, Tom, my boy, I will.”

“And I say, gov’nor, you will stick up?”

“Yes, Tom, my boy, yes,” said the old man. “There, you shall see. Going out?”

“Yes, gov’nor, I want to hunt out Charley Melton. I haven’t see him for an age. He’s always away somewhere.”

“Give my kind regards, Tom. He’s a fine fellow—Damme, I like Charley. But I’m afraid he thinks me very weak.”

“Nonsense, dad,” cried Tom; “but, I say, what’s that in your pocket?”

“Oh, nothing, my son, nothing,” said the old man, in a confused way, as Tom pounced upon his pocket and dragged out something in a handkerchief. “Why bless my soul,” he cried, in a surprised tone of voice, as he raised his glasses to his eyes, “if it isn’t a patty.”

“Yes, gov’nor, and you’ve been sitting on it. Now, I say, old fellow, that is weak. Pah! why it smells of eau-de-Cologne from your handkerchief. You couldn’t eat that.”

“I’m afraid I couldn’t, my dear boy,” said the old gentleman, wrinkling up his forehead.

“Gov’nor, you’re incorrigible,” cried Tom. “Only this morning Joseph told me in confidence that you had borrowed five shillings of him, and I had to give it him back, leaving myself without a shilling. Hang me, if you do such things as this again, if I don’t tell the old lady.”

“No, no, my boy, pray don’t,” said the old gentleman, anxiously, “and I’ll never do so any more.”

“Till the very next time,” said Tom, sharply. “Gov’nor, you’re afraid of the servants, and you are always stealing something.”

“I—I—I am a little afraid of Robbins,” faltered the old man gently; “and that big footman Joseph rather looks at me; but, Tom, my boy, it ought not to be stealing for me to take my own things.”

“Well, I suppose not, gov’nor; but it really is absurd to see you send a chicken bone flying across a drawing-room when you take out your handkerchief and your coat-tails stiff with gravy.”

“It is, my son,” said the old man, hastily; “but about Charley Melton. I like him, Tom.”

“And so do I, father.—He’s my friend, and I’ll stick to him too.”

He said the latter words in the hall, as he put on his hat and took his cane, paused to light a very strong cigar of the kind her ladyship detested to smell in the house, and then, with his hat cocked defiantly on one side, sallied out, looking so small in Great Portland Place that he seemed lost.

As the door closed upon him, Lord Barmouth came out of the lavatory, and met Robbins the butler and a footman coming to clear away the lunch things.

Lord Barmouth looked up and down, and then took the pompous butler by the button.

“Robbins,” he said, “if her ladyship does not object, I shall not wear my second dress suit any more.”

“Thank you, my lord,” said the butler with solemn dignity.

“And, Robbins,” added his lordship, in a hurried whisper, “what did you do with that piece of tongue?”

“Took it down into the kitchen, my lord.”

“Ask Mrs Downes to give it back to you, Robbins—for me.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Wrap it up in paper, Robbins.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And by the way, Robbins,” continued the old gentleman, after a sharp look round, like a sparrow in fear of cats, “could you oblige me with five pounds?”

“Well really, my lord—you see you owe me—”

“Sixty-five, Robbins.”

“And interest, my lord.”

“Of course, Robbins, of course; and you shall have it all back; but you see, Robbins, it is not always easy to lay one’s hands on a few pounds to give to my son. You know it is quite safe.”

“Oh, of course, my lord.”

“I don’t like to be so situated that I cannot oblige him with a sovereign now and then.”

“Of course not, my lord. Will your lordship be good enough to write me an I.O.U.?”

“Certainly, Robbins, certainly. There—there—that’s it. I.O.U. five pounds—Barmouth. Thank you, Robbins; you are a most valuable servant.”

“Thank you, my lord.”

“I’ve put you down for something handsome in my will, Robbins, so that if I should die some day, as I probably shall, you’ll burn these I.O.U.s, Robbins, and pay yourself out of what I’ve left.”

“Certainly, my lord; but suppose—”

“The will is disputed? Oh no, Robbins, I can do what I like with my money then, and I shall not be ungrateful.”

The old man took the five pounds and went off, chuckling with delight at being able to supply Tom with a little hard cash next time that gentleman was short, which would be next day; while the butler said something to himself which sounded like—

“Poor old magpie. Well, he ain’t a bad sort, and that’s more than you can say of the dragon.”

Chapter Nine.

Love me, Love my Dog.

There was gravel to be ground in Hyde Park, but Lady Maude declined to assist in the operation, pleading a bad headache; so Lady Barmouth took her carriage exercise alone, while his lordship watched till the barouche had gone, when he went up and sat by his child in the drawing-room, and talked to her for a time, ending by selecting a comfortable chair and going off fast asleep.

He had not been unconscious five minutes before Maude heard a bit of a disturbance, and directly after there was a scratching at the drawing-room door.

She started and listened, with the colour coming and going in her cheeks, when the scratching was repeated, and on her opening the door Joby trotted in, looked at her, gave his tail a wag to the right and a wag to the left. When, catching sight of Lord Barmouth, his canine nature got the better of him, and trotting up to the easy-chair, he sniffed two or three times at his lordship’s pocket, ending by laying his massive jowl upon the old man’s knee.

Maude trembled as she watched the dog, and her face was flaming, but she dared not move.

The old gentleman half woke up, and realised the fact of the dog being there, for he put out his thin white hand, and patted the great head, and rubbed Joby’s ears, muttering softly, “Good dog, then; poor old fellow,” and then went off fast asleep.

Joby pushed his head a little farther up, and then had another sniff at the pocket. After this, giving his lordship up for a bad job, or roused to a sense of duty, he trotted over to Maude, laid his head in her lap, and stared up at her with his great eyes.

It seemed a shame to be so lavish of such sweet kisses, and on a dog’s forehead; but all the same Maude bestowed them there, and the ugly brute blinked and snuffled and whined softly. Suddenly a thought seemed to strike Maude though, and her little fingers began to busy themselves about the dog’s collar, to tremble visibly, and at last with a faint cry of joy she detached a note folded in a very small compass, and fitted in a little packet of leather the colour of the dog’s skin.

Trembling with eagerness she was about to open it, when the door was opened, and Robbins entered to announce—

“Sir Grantley Wilters.”

Maude turned from crimson to white, and Joby crept slowly under the couch, resenting an offer made by the butler to drive him out by such a display of white teeth that the pompous domestic said to himself that the dog might stay as long as he liked, for it wasn’t his place to interfere.

Sir Grantley’s costume was faultless, for he was a fortune to his tradespeople—the tightest of coats and gloves, the shiniest of boots, and the choicest of “button-holes,” displayed in a tiny glass of water pinned in the fold of his coat, as he came in, hat and cane in one hand, and a little toy terrier in the other—one of those unpleasantly diminutive creatures whose legs seem as if they are not safe, and whose foreheads and eyes indicate water on the brain.

“Ah, Lady Maude. Delighted to find you alone,” said the baronet, advancing and extinguishing the dog with his hat, so as to leave his tightly-gloved hand free to salute the lady.

“I am not alone,” said Maude quietly, and she pointed to his lordship’s chair.

“No: to be sure. Asleep! Well, I really thought you were alone, don’t you know.”

“Papa often comes and sits with me now,” said Maude, quietly.

“Very charming of him, very,” said Sir Grantley. “Quite well?”

“Except a headache,” said Maude.

“Sorry—very,” said the baronet, hunting for his glass, which was now hanging between his shoulders. “Bad things headaches, very. Should go for a walk.”

“I preferred staying at home this afternoon,” said Maude.

“Did you, though! Ah!” said Sir Grantley. “Sorry about the headache. Always take brandy and soda for headache I do, don’t you know. By the way, Lady Maude,” he continued, taking his hat off the little dog as if he were performing a conjuring trick, “I bought this beautiful little creechaw in Regent Street just now. Will you accept it from me?”

“Oh, thank you, no,” said Maude. “I’m sure mamma would not approve of my accepting such a present.”

“Oh, yes, I asked her yesterday, don’t you know, and she said you’d be most happy. Very nice specimen, not often found so small. May I set it down?”

“Oh, certainly,” said Maude, colouring with annoyance; and evidently very glad to get rid of the little animal, the baronet set it down and it began to make a tour of the room.

“Don’t be nervous about accepting presents from me,” said Sir Grantley, “because I shall bring you a great many.”

“I beg you will not, Sir Grantley,” said Maude, flushing. “You must really by now be quite sure that such attentions are distasteful to me.”

“Not used to them, you know,” said the baronet smiling; “but I have her ladyship’s full permission, and we shall understand each other in time. Old gentleman sleeps well.”

“Papa is getting old, and his health is feeble,” said Maude, rather indignantly.

“Yes, very,” said the baronet.—“I don’t want to be a bore, but I’ve said so little to you about our future.”

“Our future?”

“Yes; it’s all settled. I proposed down at Hurst, and thought it was all over; but her ladyship kindly tells me that I may hope.”

“Sir Grantley Wilters,” cried Maude, rising, “I am not of course ignorant of what mamma’s wishes are, but let me tell you as a gentleman that this subject is very distasteful to me, and that I can never, never think otherwise of you than I do now.”

“Oh, yes, you will,” said Sir Grantley, in a most unruffled manner. “You are very young, don’t you know. Think differently by and bye. Bad job this about poor Melton.”

Maude started, and her eyes dilated slightly.

“Thought he was a decent fellow once, but he’s regularly going to the dogs.”

“Mr Melton is a friend of mine, Sir Grantley—a very dear friend of mine,” cried Maude, crushing the stiff paper of the note she held in her hand.

“Say was, my dear Maude,” said Sir Grantley, making pokes at the pearl buttons on his patent leather boots with his walking cane. “Poor fellow! Was all right once, but he’s hopelessly gone now.”

“I will not believe it,” cried Maude indignantly. “It is cruel and ungentlemanly of you to try to blacken Mr Melton thus when he is not present.”

“Cruel perhaps, but kind,” said Sir Grantley; “ungentlemanly, no.” He drew himself up slightly, as he spoke. “Poor beggar, can’t help being poor, you know. They say—”

“Sir Grantley, I will not believe anything against Mr Melton,” cried Maude with spirit.

“Not till you have proved it, my dear child. I don’t want to pain you, but I know that the thoughts of Charles Melton have kept you from listening to me. Now, my dear Maude, if I were out of the race, you could not marry a man who is hopelessly in the hands of the Jews. Couldn’t do it, you know; and they do say.”

“Sir Grantley Wilters,” cried Maude, with her head thrown back, “these are cruel calumnies. Mr Charles Melton is a gentleman, and the soul of honour. I shall tell him your words.”

“I shall be very glad to retract them, and apologise,” said the baronet calmly; and then he busied himself in fixing his glass, for the little toy terrier had suddenly made a dead set at one end of the couch, where from beneath the chintz cover there peered out one very large prominent and peculiar eye, which kept blinking at the terrier in the calmest manner, its owner never attempting to move in spite of the angry demonstrations of the newcomer.

At last its demonstrations became so loud that, not seeing the great eye himself, the baronet rose slowly, drove the terrier into the back drawing-room and closed the door.

“A little new to the place, don’t you know,” he said. “There, I’m going now; I did not mean to blacken Mr Melton’s character, but ask your brother to inquire. Sorry for any man to go to the bad. Gone regularly. Good-day.”

He took Maude’s hand and kissed the tips of her fingers, while she was too much agitated to resist. Then backing to the door, he smiled, kissed his glove, and was gone.

“Oh, this is monstrous!” cried Maude in anguished tones, when she remembered the note and opened it hastily, to read a few lines full of manly love and respect; and as she read of her wooer’s determination never to give her up, her heart grew stronger in its faith.

“I knew it was false,” she exclaimed, proudly. “How dare he calumniate him like that!”

Then going to a writing table, she glanced at her father, saw that he still slept, and, blushing at her duplicity, she wrote a note, folded it so that it would go in the tiny leather pocket, and in a low voice called the dog.

Joby came out directly, and laid his great head in her lap, while the note was securely placed in its receptacle.

“Now go to your master, good dog,” she cried, kissing him once more, and at the word “master” Joby started to the door and looked back, when Maude followed and opened it. The dog trotted downstairs and settled himself under the porter’s chair in the hall till the door was opened. Then he trotted off to his master’s chambers.

Meanwhile, as soon as she had despatched her messenger, Maude seated herself upon the carpet by her father, and laid her cheek against his hand.

He opened his eyes directly, saw who it was, and laid his other hand upon her head.

“Ah, Maude, my pet,” he said. “I have, been sitting here with my eyes closed.”

“Yes, papa. Did you hear what Sir Grantley Wilters said?”

“No, my child. Has—has—he been here?”

“Yes, dear.”

“Then I suppose I must have been quite asleep.”

“Yes, papa—for quite an hour.—Papa, dear.”

“Yes, my love.”

“I cannot rest happy with any secret from you,” said the girl, with averted head, and her cheeks burning for shame at the clandestine correspondence she was carrying on.

“That’s right, my darling,” said the old man, patting the soft fair hair and smoothing it over her forehead.

“Papa, dear,” she continued, after a long pause, during which she fought hard to nerve herself for what she had to say.

“Yes, my child. There, you’re not afraid of me.”

“Oh, no, dear,” she cried, drawing his arm around her neck, and holding his hand with both hers to her throbbing bosom. “Papa, I’m afraid—”

“Afraid, my dear?”

“Afraid that I love Mr Melton very dearly.”

She hid her face upon the withered old hand, and the burning blood crimsoned her soft white neck at this avowal.

“Well—well—well! He—he—he!” chuckled the old man. “I—I—I don’t see anything so very shocking in that, Maude. Charley Melton is a doosed fine fellow, and I like him very much indeed.”

“Oh, papa, papa,” cried Maude joyfully; and she turned, flung her arms round his neck, and hid her face in his bosom.

“Yes, Maude,” he continued. “He’s a gentleman, and a man of honour, though he’s poor like the rest of us.”

“Thank God—thank God!” murmured Maude, as the words made her heart throb with joy.

“His father was a gentleman too and a man of honour, though a bit wild. He was my junior at Eton. I like Charley Melton, and though I should hate the man who tried to rob me of my little pet here, I don’t think I should be very hard on him.”

“Yap—yap—yap!” came from the back drawing-room, and the old gentleman looked inquiringly at his child.

“It is a pet dog,” she said contemptuously, “that Sir Grantley Wilters has brought as a present for me.”

“Don’t have it, my dear,” said the old gentleman, eagerly. “I wouldn’t. He’s a miserable screw of a fellow, that Wilters. I don’t like him, and her ladyship’s always trying to bring him forward. She’ll be wanting to make him marry you next.”

“Didn’t you know, papa?” cried Maude.

“Know, my darling? Know what?”

“He has proposed to mamma for my hand.”

“Then—then—then,” cried the old man, indignantly, “he—he—he shan’t have it. If my Maude is to be nurse to any

man, she shall be nurse to me. He—he don't want a wife."

The old man shook his head angrily, and then patted and caressed the fair young girl who clung to him for protection. What his protection was worth he showed when a carriage stopped at the door, and her ladyship's trumpet tones were heard soon after on the stairs.

"Maude, my darling," he said, "here's her ladyship. I—I think I'll slip off this way down to my study."

He went out by one door, timing himself carefully, as her ladyship came in at the other, and began praising the "lovely" little pet dog which Sir Grantley had left, to which the little brute replied by snapping at her fiercely as she approached her hand.

All the same though it had to make friends with her ladyship, who adopted it from the next day, Maude stubbornly refusing to have anything to do with the black and tan specimen of the canine race wrought by the "fancy" in filigree.

Chapter Ten.

Love's Messengers.

"How a young lady as calls herself a young lady can bemean herself by making a pet of a low-bred, ill-looking dog like that, I can't think," said Mr Robbins, laying himself out for a speech in the servants' hall. "That's a nice enough little tarrier as Sir Grantley Wilters brought, and she won't have none of it, but leaves it to her ladyship."

"Yes," said the footman, "and a nice mess is made, with sops and milk and cutlets all over the carpet."

"Joseph," said the butler with dignity, "it is not the place of a young man like you in livery to find fault with the acts of your superiors. Servants as do such things never rises to be out of livery."

"Thanky, sir," said Joseph, who, being a young man of a lively imagination *and* much whiskers, turned his head, squinted horribly at an under housemaid, and made her giggle.

"Such a dog as that ugly brute as comes brushing into the house every time the door is opened is only fit to go with a costermonger or a butcher."

"Well, I'm sure, Mr Robbins," said the cook, who for reasons of her own had a weakness for tradesmen in the latter line, "butchers are as good as butlers any day."

"Perhaps they are, Mrs Downes—perhaps they are not," said the butler with dignity; "but what I say is, Mr Melton ought to have known better than ever to have brought such a beast into a gentleman's house."

"That for your opinion, Mr Robbins," said Mademoiselle Justine, colouring up and snapping her fingers. "I know what you think," she said, speaking in a high-pitched, excited voice. "You think that a lady should admire scented men in fine tailor's clothes and flowers, and wiz zere leetle wretched dogs. Bah! Tish! A woman loves the big and ugly and ster-r-r-rong. She can be weak and beautiful herself. Is it not so, my friends? Yes."

Mademoiselle Justine shook her head, tightened her lips, and with sparkling eyes looked round the table, ending with heightened colour and patting her little *bottine* upon the floor.

"Well, that dog's ugly enough anyhow," said Robbins, smiling faintly, and making a second chin above his cravat. "As for that Mr Melton—"

"Ah, bah! stop you there," cried Mademoiselle Justine. "I do not say he is ugly, but he is big and sterong and has broad shouldaire. He is all a man—*tout-à-fait* all a—quite a man."

There was another sharp burst of nods and jerks at this.

"You think, you, that my young lady will marry this Sir Wilters? That for him! He is a man for the *Maison Dieu* or the *Invalides*. He marry! ha, ha, ha! I could blow him out myself. Poof! He is gone."

Mademoiselle Justine blew some imaginary bit of fluff from her fingers as she spoke, apparently shook her head into a kind of notch or catch in the spine, and then sat very upright and very rigid, while the butler said grace and the party broke up.

Lunch had been over in the dining-room some time, and her ladyship was going out for a drive. Maude had again declined, and her ladyship had smiled, knowing that Sir Grantley Wilters would probably call. Her ladyship was wonderfully made up, and looked her best, for Monsieur Hector Launay from Upper Gimp Street had had an interview with her that morning. There had been a consultation on freckles, and a large mole which troubled her ladyship's chin had been condemned to death, executed with some peculiar acid, and its funeral performed and mourning arranged with a piece of black court plaster, which now looked like a beauty spot upon the lady's chin.

Her gloves, of the sweetest pearl grey, fitted her plump hands to perfection, and she was quite ready to go out.

"Where is your papa, dear Maude," said her ladyship, stopping to smell a bouquet. "Ah me, how sweet! How kind Sir Grantley is, and what taste he has in flowers."

"Papa is in the library," said Maude, quietly, and she glanced nervously towards the door.

"Come then, a sweet," cried her ladyship; "and he shall go and have a nice ride in the carriage, he shall, and look down and bark at all the dirty dogs in the road."

As she showed her second best teeth in a large smile, the little terrier took it to be a challenge of war, and displayed

his own pigmy set; but after a due amount of coaxing, and the gift of a lump of sugar, he permitted himself to be caught and placed beneath her ladyship's plump arm, presenting to a spectator who had a side view a little head cocking out in front, and a little tail cocking out behind—nothing more.

"I shall be back by five, I dare say, Maude. Where is Tryphie?"

"I am here, aunt, quite ready," said a cheerful voice, and the bright little girl appeared at the door.

"You are not quite ready: you have only one glove on. Tryphie, you might pay some respect to those who find you a home and protection."

The girl coloured slightly but made no answer, only exchanged glances with Maude, and kissed her hand to her.

"Dear me!" exclaimed her ladyship, "where did I put my *flaçon*? Oh, I remember."

She marched in a stately manner with the roll of a female beadle, or an alderman in his gold chain of office, to an Indian cabinet, opened a drawer and inserted her hand.

"Why, what is this?" she exclaimed, drawing out something whitey brown and throwing it down with an ejaculation of annoyance. "Disgusting!"

The toy terrier uttered a sharp yelp of excitement, leaped from her ladyship's arms on to a table, upsetting a china cup and saucer, bounded on to the floor and seized that which her ladyship had rejected—to wit, a savoury-looking chicken bone, and proceeded to denude it of its flesh.

"I declare your papa grows insufferable," cried her ladyship. "His brain must be softening. I shall consult the doctor about him."

Certainly it was very annoying, for her ladyship's pearly grey Parisian glove had a broad brown smear of osmazome across it, and all due to Lord Barmouth's magpie-like trick of hiding scraps of food away for future consumption, in Indian cabinets and china jars, and then forgetting the *caché* he had made.

Mademoiselle Justine was summoned, a fresh pair of gloves obtained and put on with the maid's assistance, by which time the dog had polished the bone, and probably in his own tongue, being a well-bred animal, said a grace and blessed Lord Barmouth. Then he was once more taken up, his mouth and paws wiped by Justine on one of her ladyship's clean handkerchiefs; Tryphie nodded a good-bye to her cousin, to whom she had hardly dared to speak, and then followed her ladyship downstairs.

Maude rose, trembling and in dread lest something she feared should occur, for her ladyship was later than usual in going out, and this was a Wednesday, which day was sacred to the canine post.

In fact, as Maude heard the steps of the carriage rattled down with a great deal of noise—her ladyship encouraged her servants to bang them down well, for it let the neighbours know she kept a carriage and was going out—there was a pattering of feet, and as she opened the door, Joby came trotting in, with his great eyes full of animation, and the grinning smile in which he indulged a little more broad, for he had rushed in between the footman's legs nearly upsetting him as the door was opened, in his eagerness to play postman for his master.

"Good dog, then!" whispered Maude, and then her heart seemed to stand still, for the carriage did not drive off, there was a rustling of silks on the stairs, and her ladyship came panting up.

Maude threw herself, colouring vividly, into a *bergère* chair, and Joby dived under the couch, not leaving so much as the point of his tail visible as her ladyship sailed into the room and looked hastily round.

"Maude," she cried, "there is some mystery here. I insist on knowing what this means."

There was no reply, but Tryphie came in, and darted a sympathetic glance at the poor girl, mentally wishing that Tom were at home.

"I—insist upon knowing what this means."

"What, mamma?" said Maude, huskily.

"That dog; where is he? Mr Melton's hideous wretch. Here: dog, dog, dog!" she cried.

She might have called till she was speechless, for Joby would not have moved. All the same, though, he was to be stirred, for her ladyship, now in a towering passion, set down the toy terrier upon a chair, when it immediately leaped to the carpet, barking furiously, and made a dead set at the sofa.

"It is yonder! You have hidden the wretch there!" cried her ladyship, "and I am certain that that dog has been made the bearer of clandestine correspondence. I have read of such things. But there's an end to it now, and it is only just and fit—false, abandoned girl!—that it should be discovered by the faithful little dog of the gentleman who is to-be your husband. Good little pet, then, to protect your master's interests. Fetch him out, then."

This was rather unwise of her ladyship, but she was excited, and she excited the little terrier in turn, for he had contented himself up to this time with snapping and barking furiously at the chintz valance hanging from the sofa, but keeping about a yard distant, as he leaped up with all four feet from the carpet at once and came down barking.

Encouraged though by her ladyship he went a little closer, barking and snarling so furiously that Joby could not contain himself any longer but softly pushed his short black nose and one eye beneath the chintz, had a look at the noisy intruder, and then, withdrew once more.

"There! I knew it," cried her ladyship, angrily. "Oh, shame on you, shame, shame! Good little dog, then! Drive him out!"

The terrier barked again furiously, and glanced up at her ladyship, who uttered fresh words of encouragement.

Sir Grantley Wilters gave fifteen guineas for the beast, and another for his morocco and silver collar!

“Drive him out, then, good little dog!” cried her ladyship, and with a fierce rush, the terrier ran under the sofa.

There was a sharp bark, a bit of a scuffle, a worrying noise, a loud yelp cut suddenly in half, and then, frowning severely, Joby crept out from the foot of the sofa, with the hair about his neck erect, his eyes glowering, and the limp corpse of the wretched terrier hanging from his jaws.

It was all plain enough—that invisible tragedy beneath the chintz. The enemy had fastened upon one of Joby’s cheeks with his keen little teeth, and made it bleed, when, with a growl, the big dog had shaken his assailant off, caught him by the back, given him a shake like a rat, and the terrier’s head, four legs, and tail hung down together. Sir Grantley Wilters’ guineas were represented now by some inanimate skin and bone.

It was all over!

“Oh, this is dreadful!” cried her ladyship, as, with a cry of horror, Maude made for the dog.

But no: Joby was amiability itself at times, and well educated; still, rouse the dog that was in him, and his obstinate breed began to show. Maude called, but he took no notice, only walked solemnly about the room with his vanquished enemy pendent from his grinning mouth.

“He’ll kill it—he’ll kill it,” cried her ladyship, wildly, but not daring to approach; and just then Tom entered the room. “Oh, Tom, Tom, quick!”

“What’s the row?” cried Tom, “eh? Oh, I say! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! what a jolly lark!” and he slapped his leg and roared with laughter.

“Tom!” shrieked her ladyship.

“That’s just about how Charley Melton could serve Wilters,” cried Tom, wiping his eyes.

“For shame, sir!” cried her ladyship. “Pray, pray save the poor dog.”

“What for?” said Tom, grinning, “to be stuffed?”

“Oh, don’t say it’s dead!” wailed her ladyship.

“I won’t, if you don’t wish me to say so,” said Tom, “but it is as dead as a door nail. Here, Joby, Joby,” he cried, walking up to the dog.

But there was a low growl and Joby hung his head, glowered, and walked to the far end of the drawing-room, seeming to take a pleasure in making his journey as long as he could in and out amongst chairs and tables, giving Tom, who followed him, significant hints that it would not be safe to interfere with him at such a time.

“There, let’s open the door, and he’ll go,” said Tom.

“Oh, no, no, Tom,” cried her ladyship. “Sir Grantley’s present.”

Just then the dog seemed to have satisfied his anger upon his rival, and crossing the room to where Maude sat trembling in her chair, he dropped the defunct terrier at her feet, and stood solemnly wagging his stump of a tail as if asking for praise.

“Ring the bell, Tryphie,” cried her ladyship.

“All right,” said Tom, forestalling her, and Robbins came up with stately stride.

“Take this down, Robbins,” said her ladyship, with a shudder.

The butler looked ineffably disgusted, but he merely turned upon his heel, strode out of the room, and returned at the end of a minute or two with a silver salver and a napkin, picked up the sixteen guineas with the latter, placed it upon the former, covered it with the damask, and bore the dead dog solemnly out, Joby following him closely, as if turning himself into chief mourner, and then seeing the hall door open trotting slowly out.

“That I should have lived to be the mother of such—”

Her ladyship did not finish her sentence but rose with dilating eyes, made a sort of heavy rush and bound across the room, pounced upon something and began eagerly to inspect it, tearing open a little narrow pocket and extracting a note.

Poor Joby! he did not mean to be so faithless to his trust, but the excitement consequent upon the attack had made the muscles of his throat swell to such a degree that his collar fastening had snapped, and the collar with its valuable missive had fallen upon the carpet, while poor Maude had sat wondering where it had gone.

“Yes, of course,” said her ladyship, sarcastically. “Well: that trick is detected,” she cried, viciously tearing up the note. “Letters sent by a dog, by one of the vilest of the vile; and this, Diphoos, is the man you called your friend.”

“Oh, aunt, pray be silent,” cried Tryphie, running to her cousin’s side. “Maude has fainted.”

Chapter Eleven.

The Exile.

That morning Monsieur Hector Launay was happy. He had been to Portland Place, acted as executioner to the mole upon her ladyship's chin, buried it beneath the court plaster, been paid his bill, and in going out squeezed Justine's hand, and—*Ah, oui mes amis*—she had squeezed it again.

"Yes, yes," he had cried, joyously, as he returned, with the recollection of Justine's bright eyes making his own sparkle, "encore a little more of this isle of fogs and rheums and spleen, encore a little more of the hard cash to be made here, encore a little too much more wait, and then *cette chère* Justine and la France—la France—Tralla-la—Tralla-la—Tralla-la."

From this it will be seen that Monsieur Hector Launay was joyous. It was his nature to be joyous, but he suppressed it beneath a solemn mask as of wax. He was as immovable as a rule as his own gentleman; that is to say, the waxen image of his craft which looked down Upper Gimp Street from the shop window—the gentleman who was married to the handsome lady with the graceful turn to her neck, who always looked up Upper Gimp Street from morning till night, saving at such times as Monsieur Hector Launay hung old copies of the *Figaro* or *Petit Journal* before them, lest the heat of the summer sun should visit their cheeks too roughly. In fact, a neglect of this on one occasion had resulted in the wax "giving" a little, and the lady having a slight attack of mumps.

These dwellers in a happy atmosphere behind glass were the acmé of perfection in the dressing of their hair, the lady's being the longest and the gentleman's the shortest possible to conceive. So short was the latter's, in fact, that it might have been used to brush that of the former; and so occupied were they in gazing up and down the street that they might have been the spies who furnished Monsieur Hector Launay with the abundant information he possessed respecting the *élite* who lived in a wide circle round his dwelling in that most strange of London regions—mysterious Marylebone.

He was a slim, genteel, sallow gentleman, polite in the extreme, always the perfection of cleanliness, and, as Lord Barmouth said, smelling as if made of scented soap. His eyes were of the darkest, so was his hair, which was cut to the pattern in the window. He had a carefully-waxed and pointed moustache, but shaved the rest of his face as religiously as he did that of Lord Barmouth, every morning, passing his hand over the skin and seeming to be always hunting for one particular bristle, which evaded him.

It has been said that he might be supposed to have gained his information about the various people around by means of his two wax figures, who afterwards communicated their knowledge to him in some occult way, though the theory might hold water that the thoughts of people's brains radiated to the ends of their hairs which were often cut off and remained in the possession of the barber for distillation, sale, or the fire.

Monsieur Hector Launay, it must be owned, was, though a lover of his country, not patriotic from a Communist, Imperialist, Royalist, or Republican point of view. Friends and compatriots often wanted him to join in this or that conspiracy.

"No," he would say, "it is ignoble, nor is it pleasant to live here, and shave and cut and dress, but it is safe. *Ma foi*, no," he would say, "I should not like to be guillotined and find myself a head short some morning; neither should I like to be sent to New Caledonia, to be cooked by the cannibals of that happy land."

Certainly he had periodic longings sometimes, but they took the form of *eau sucrée* or a little cup of coffee with Justine at Versailles, on the Bois de Boulogne: so he waited, stored up knowledge, sang *chansons*, and invented wonderful washes for the skin or hair.

"Yes," said Monsieur Hector, "I know what is immense. Ladies place themselves in my hands, and would I betray their confidence? Never, never. A *coiffeur* in a good district is the repository of the grandest secrets of life. I could write a book, but, *ma foi*, no, I never betray. I am a man of trust."

Charley Melton came into his shop that morning for a periodical cut and shampoo, after sending Joby on his regular mission, and Monsieur Hector smiled softly to himself as he played with the young man's hair.

"That good dog, monsieur, will he find his way-back?"

"What do you mean?" said Melton sharply.

"Pardon, monsieur, a mere nothing; but I should not trust a dog. They suspect yonder."

Melton turned and gazed at him angrily.

"Yes," said Monsieur Hector, "it is a tender subject, but I go so much that I come to know nearly all."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"Monsieur forgets that I dress Lady Barmouth's hair; that the Miladi Maude often goes to the opera with her beautiful fair tresses arranged in designs of my invention. But, monsieur, they talk about the dog."

Something very like an imprecation came from the young man's lips, but he restrained it.

"Monsieur may trust me," said the hairdresser. "Mademoiselle Justine is a great friend of mine. Have you not remarked her likeness to my lady of wax? She is exact. It is she—encore."

"Oh, indeed," said Melton, drily.

"Yes, monsieur; some day we shall return to la France together, to pass our days in simple happy joys."

“Look here,” said Melton, bluntly, “I am an Englishman, and always speak plainly. You know all about me—about the house in Portland Place?”

“Everything, monsieur,” said the hairdresser, with a smile and a bow. “Mademoiselle Justine is *désolée* about the course that affairs have taken; she speaks to me of Sir Wilter as the enemy. Pah! she say he is old, *bête*, he is not at all a man. We discourse of you, monsieur—we lovers—and we talk of your love. We agree ourselves that it is foolish to trust a dog.”

“How the devil did you know that I trusted a dog?” said Melton furiously.

“*Ma foi*, monsieur is angry. Why so, with one who would serve him? Justine loves you—I then love you. How do I know?”—a shrug here—“monsieur is *indiscrét*. Justine could not fail to see.”

“Confusion!” ejaculated Melton.

“And yet it is so easy, monsieur—a note—a cake of soap—a packet of bloom—a bottle of scent—it is wrapped up—for Miladi Maude with my printed card outside—*Voilà*! who could suspect?”

“Look here,” said Melton, turning sharply round.

“Pardon, monsieur, I use the scissor; there is a little fresh growth here.”

“What do you expect to be paid for this, if I trust you?—and perhaps I shall not, for it is confoundedly dirty work.”

“Pardon, monsieur,” cried the Frenchman, laying his hand upon his breast, “I am a gentleman. Pay? Noting. Have I not told you that Justine, whom I have the honour to love, adores her young mistress. She adores monsieur, and would serve him. I in my turn adore Mademoiselle Justine. I am her slave—I am yours.”

“Let’s see—Justine? That is her ladyship’s maid?”

“True, monsieur. But this morning she say to me—‘Hector, *mon enfant*, I’m *désolée* on the subject of those two children. Help them, *mon garçon*, and I will be benefactor.’”

“It is good, I say to her, and I place myself at monsieur’s disposition.”

Charles Melton frowned, and Monsieur Hector went on with his shampooing, till the head between his hands was dried, polished, and finished, when the hairdresser took up a little ivory brush, and anointed it with some fragrant preparation to be applied in its turn to the patient’s beard, till the fair hair glistened like gold, and Monsieur Hector fell back and looked at him in admiration.

“But monsieur is fit now for the arms of a goddess,” he exclaimed. “Does he accept my assistance?”

Melton looked at him for a moment, as he paid the fee usual upon such occasions, and then said bluntly—

“Monsieur Launay, I am obliged to you, and you mean well. Doubtless Mademoiselle Justine means well, and she has my thanks, but I cannot accept your assistance. Good mom—Ah, Joby, old fellow.”

He drew back into the little room as the dog came hastily in, and placed his head against his master’s leg.

“Why, Joby,” exclaimed Melton, in a low excited tone, “where is your collar? Blood too! You have been fighting. Good heavens! what shall I do!—If that note is found!—Oh, my poor darling!” he muttered, and he hurried from the place.

Chapter Twelve.

La Belle Alliance.

“It’s enough to drive a man to do anything,” exclaimed Melton, as he dashed down the fashionable newspaper he had been reading, where in a short paragraph he had found that which he told himself would make him wretched for life. The paragraph was as follows—

“We understand that an alliance is on the *tapis* between Sir Grantley Wilters, of Morley Hall, Shropshire, and Eaton Place, and Lady Maude Diphoos, daughter of the Earl of Barmouth.”

“I seem to be crushed,” exclaimed the young man, rising and walking hastily up and down the room. “Everything goes wrong with me, and I believe I am going mad. Perhaps it is fate,” he said, gloomily, “and how to save that poor girl from wretchedness! Heigho! Joby, old fellow, I wish I could forget the unpleasant things, and then perhaps there would be some comfort in life.

“Now, what’s to be done?” he cried, as his eyes fell again upon the newspaper. “I cannot bear this. Here’s a whole month since I have heard from or seen poor little Maude, for I haven’t the heart to try any more of those clandestine tricks.”

He sat down and thought over the past month and its incidents, taking out and re-reading a note with Lady Barmouth’s crest upon it, in which her ladyship very curtly requested that Mr Melton would refrain from calling in Portland Place, for after what had occurred she could only look upon his visits as an insult. She wrote this at the request of Lord Barmouth.

“That is a monstrous fib,” said Charley Melton, angrily, “for the amiable little old man was always most friendly. But what shall I do? I must see her; I must hear from her. They are forcing this on with the poor girl, and it is like blasting her young life.

“Tom!” he ejaculated, after a pause. “No; he has not answered either of my last letters. There is something wrong there.”

He sat thinking again.

“Confound it all! It is so contemptible. I hate it, but what can I do? I must send a note through that Frenchman. Pah! how I loathe this backstairs work, but what can I do? I am debarred the front stairs, which are open to that confounded *roué* Wilters.”

He stamped up and down the room again till there was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” he cried, and a groom entered.

“Please, sir, master’s compliments, and—and—I beg your pardon, sir, he’d be much obliged if you wouldn’t stamp up and down the room so. He’s got a bad headache, and you’re just over him.”

“Was that the message your master sent?” exclaimed Melton, for the groom was the servant of an acquaintance who had chambers on the floor below.

“Well, sir—no, sir—not exactly, sir,” said the man, suppressing an inclination to smile.

“What did he say then?”

“Please, sir, he said, ‘Run up and ask Mr Melton if he’s going mad,’ and he shied one of his boots at me.”

“Tell him yes, raving mad,” said Melton savagely; and the man went down.

“It’s fate, I suppose,” he said at last: “and it seems as if I am to give her up.”

For from that fatal day when the toy terrier had been slain Joby had stood in the same category as his master—Lady Maude was not at home to the canine caller, and after many efforts to obtain access to his mistress, Charley Melton was nearly in despair.

He had tried the post, and his letters had been returned. He had tried the servants and mutual friends, but given up both in disgust for Maude’s sake, being unwilling to cause her fresh anxieties and pain.

“It is so confoundedly undignified,” he said to himself. “I can’t think of a plan that is safe. But never mind, patience—and something will turn up. We must wait. I can get a look at my darling now and then, and that must do till better days arrive.”

But human nature has its bounds of endurance, and after seeing Maude one day in the Park in company with washed-out, overdressed Sir Grantley Wilters, Charley Melton could bear it no more.

“What’s the good of living in this confounded England,” he exclaimed, “where a man cannot wring his rival’s neck or knock out his enemy’s brains without there being a row. I must do it, there is no other means that I can see but I’ll have one more try first.”

He went off straight to Portland Place, and as he came within sight of the house, to his great delight he caught sight of Maude in the large covered space with its huge pots of evergreens over the portico. She was leaning on the railing and gazing pensively down, and as Charley Melton drew nearer he found that she was listening to the music of a loud-toned organ played by a tall, broad-shouldered, swarthy Italian, who waved his hand and raised his hat, and smiled and bowed till the lady dropped something white into his extended felt broad brim, in response to which he kissed his hand, and the lady still looked down.

Charley Melton thought little of it at the moment as he crossed the road, when just as he was half-way across the broad way Maude raised her head, saw him, and fled quickly into the house.

“She needn’t have been in such a precious hurry,” said Melton to himself; “but never mind, I’ll make a big effort to see her this time, at all events.”

He went boldly across the pavement to reach the front door and ring, and as he did so Luigi Malsano followed him, turning his handle the while.

“Ah, signore!” he whined, as he smiled and showed his white teeth, “povero Italiano.”

“Yes, you handsome scoundrel,” said Charley Melton to himself, “I should like your poverty. Allowed to come here, and rewarded by her in her gentle love and kindliness. What is the scoundrel glaring at?”

For Luigi’s eyes seemed to him to emit a peculiarly sinister or baleful glare that was not pleasant.

“No, no, go away!” said Melton impatiently.

Just then the door opened, and Robbins the pompous appeared.

“Not at home, sir,” he said, before he was asked.

“Take my card, Robbins, and ask Lord Barmouth to see me.”

“I dursen’t, sir; I dursen’t indeed,” said the butler in a whisper. “It’s more than my place is worth, sir, and his lordship couldn’t see you, he couldn’t indeed.”

“Why not?”

Robbins “made a face” which was quite expressive enough, for Charley Melton read it to mean “the dragon wouldn’t let him,” and with a feeling of bitterness and rage which nearly tempted him to kick the organ-grinder into the gutter, he turned and walked away, to go straight from thence to Upper Gimp Street, where he found the handsome hairdresser rearranging the costume of his waxen lady dummy.

“Ah, m’sieu; yes, I am quite at liberty. *Entrez*, m’sieu.”

Charley Melton confounded his “Ah, monsieur” with the Italian’s “Ah, signore,” and he walked into the saloon, and stood for a few minutes in silence thinking, while Monsieur Hector suggested hair-cutting, shampooing, scent, singeing, and other matters connected with his profession.

“Look here, Mr Launay,” he said at last.

“M’sieu, *s’il vous plait*, m’sieu, it is the only pleasant reminder of my own clime.”

“Monsieur Launay then—”

“I am at your service, m’sieu.”

“Some time back, when I was here, you were good enough to make me the offer of your services.”

“*Certainement*, m’sieu.”

“Monsieur Launay, what you have said is a profound secret between us? As a French gentleman, I trust to your honour.”

“Sare, I am the repository of the secrets of the aristocratic classes.”

“Then perhaps I shall trust you.”

“And monsieur accepts the offer of my services?”

“I cannot say yet—I will call again.”

Charley Melton left the place and went along the street, for he could get no farther that day. He felt degraded, and the words choked him; but Monsieur Launay snatched a copy of *Le Petit Journal* from over the head of his gentleman, whose fixed eyes followed the young man as he went slowly along the pavement with Joby close at his heels.

“*C’est fait*?” exclaimed Monsieur Launay. “Justine, *mon ange*, I shall obey you and save Monsieur Melton—*Ma foi*! what a name! They will be happy, and then I—Ah, la France—la bel-le,” he sang, “at last I shall return to you a rich man. Oh, but it was quite plain: he had sent a note by the dogue, and the boule-dogue had lost it and his collar. But what it is to be ingenious—to have of the spirit! If I rase and cut hair, I starve myself, but if I make myself of great use to all around, I grow rich. Live the secrets! Justine, you will be mine at last.

“Aha!—it is good,” he continued, “I have another secret to keep... This is the bureau aux secrets. He had not remarked the likeness to my adorable. It is beautiful, and she was *jalouse* when I say I love my lady of wax. *Cette chérie*. But, *ma foi*! I must be busy over my other affairs; there is the coiffure of the Grande Barmouth to prepare. Aha, Milady La Grande, you will call *ma chérie bête, chouette*, stupide, and trouble her poor sweet soul. Now I shall have my revenge, and be on ze best of terms as you say all ze time. La—la—la—la—la—la. Par-tir pour la guer-re—la guer-re. Ces braves soldats.”

He sang on in a low tone, and began to comb some of Lady Barmouth’s falsities, and while he combed he smiled, and when Monsieur Hector smiled he was making plans.

“*Vive les conspirateurs*!” he cried; and then prepared for his primitive repast.

Being a bachelor at present, he cooked for himself behind a little screen over a gas-stove; sometimes it was food, sometimes strange cosmetiques and chemical preparations for beautifying his clients. This day it was food preparation, and, manipulated by Monsieur Hector, one kidney became a wonderful dish, swimming in gravy. Tiny bits of meat reappeared brown and appetising: and he was great upon soup, which he made with half a pint of water, some vegetables, and a disc cut off what seemed to be so much glue in a sausage skin.

But he lived well upon a small income, and partook of grand salads, water *souchées* made of one herring, *biftek-aux-pommes, café, eau sucrée*, and cigarette.

One gas-burner cooked, boiled, and stewed, and his cleanliness and saving ways enabled him to afford his game at billiards; and to pass for a Parisian of the first water under a political cloud.

“Ah!” he said, as he smoked his one cigarette, “when will he return with a letter for his beloafed? Soon. But stop—what is a letter to a meeting? Ha, ha! I have a plan. Wait till he come once more, and then—ha, ha! how la Justine will laugh! *Vive l’amour*.

“Yes, the ruse, one that your foggy head, ros-bif Anglais could never devise, but which I, Hector of the sunny France, threw off at once. Oorai, as we say in thees deesmal country. *Vive l’amour*. One—two—three days; when will he come? Any veek, and then—*vive l’amour*.”

Chapter Thirteen.

Sir Grantley is Agitated.

Lady Barmouth was in great trouble, and resembled more strongly than ever the heaving billows. She had been so

agitated several times lately that she had found it necessary to take medicinally red lavender drops, or else eau de Cologne, the latter by preference for its fragrance.

She was terribly troubled, for matters had not gone so satisfactorily as she could wish. There had been a death in Sir Grantley Wilters' family, and that gentleman had been unwell too, thanks to a fresh medicine man he had tried.

"And really," said her ladyship, "that ungrateful child Maude does not show the slightest sympathy."

"Fool if she did," said Tom, who was in the drawing-room. "What's that fellow Bellman been here for again?"

"To see Tryphie, of course," said her ladyship.

Tom was about to make some angry reply, when Maude came in with Lord Barmouth leaning upon her arm, fresh from a walk, and Sir Grantley Wilters, most carefully got up in deep mourning, following behind with Tryphie.

"Now I appeal to your ladyship," said Sir Grantley, as soon as the door was closed.

"There, there, there," said Lord Barmouth, "let me tell it to her ladyship. It was all nothing, damme, it was all nothing, and—and—and," he continued, sitting down to have a rub at his leg, "I won't have my little girl here troubled about it."

"For Heaven's sake, behave like a gentleman if you can," whispered her ladyship.

"Yes, yes, yes, my dear, I will, I will," said his lordship, while, evidently greatly agitated, Maude moved towards the door.

"No, 'pon honour, I must beg of you to stop, Lady Maude," said Sir Grantley. "It concerns you so much, don't you know. Fact is, Lady Barmouth," he continued, as Maude stood looking very pale before them—"fact is, we were in the Square walking, when that demmed dog came slowly up and snatched Lady Maude's handkerchief, and made off before he could be stopped."

"Well, suppose a dog did," said Tom coming to his sister's rescue; "I suppose he was a very decent dog, who preferred cleanliness to honesty, so he stole a pocket handkerchief to wipe his nose."

"He, he, he!" chuckled his lordship; "that's not bad, Tom;" while her ladyship looked daggers.

"Doosed good—very doosed good," said Sir Grantley, ramming his glass tightly in his eye, and standing, holding his hat behind him, to keep up the balance as he bent forward and stared at Tom. "If it had been another dog, it wouldn't have mattered, but it was—er—er—er—a very particular dog."

"Just as I said—over his nose," said Tom.

"It—it—it was Charley Melton's dog," said Lord Barmouth, and Maude's face became crimson.

"Yes, and that's the dayvle of it," said Sir Grantley, angrily. "I don't choose for that fler's dog to come and take such a liberty. He was—er—hanging about for some time, and smelling at his lordship's pocket, here, don't you know, and then he presumed to steal that handkerchief. Lady Barmouth, I feel as if I could poison that dog, I do—damme!"

Just before this Lord Barmouth, who had looked terribly guilty at the mention of the dog smelling his pocket, drew out his handkerchief to hide his confusion, and brought forth with it a very brown and sticky Bath bun, one that his little niece Tryphie had purchased for him. This bun fell with a dab upon a little marqueterie table, behind where Sir Grantley was balancing himself, and, knowing that her ladyship must see it at the next turn of her head, the old man looked piteously across at Tryphie, who was nearest, for he dared not go across to pick it up.

Tryphie saw the direction of his gaze, caught sight of the bun and coloured, when Tom, who was always jealously watching her every look, followed her eyes, saw the bun sticking to the table, and divined at once whence it had come. So nonchalantly crossing the room while Sir Grantley was delivering his speech, he deftly lifted the bun and let it glide down softly into the hat the baronet was balancing behind, he being too excited to notice the difference in weight.

"Really, Sir Grantley, it was very tiresome," said her ladyship.

"He, he, he!" laughed his lordship, putting his handkerchief to his mouth, and bending down in his chair to laugh with all the enjoyment of a schoolboy at Tom's monkeyish trick.

"My dear!" exclaimed her ladyship.

"I—I—I was laughing at the con—con—confounded impudence of that dog," said his lordship, mendaciously; and her ladyship mentally promised him one of her lectures.

"It was an accident that cannot possibly occur again," continued her ladyship. "Maude, my darling, pray go and take off your things. Sir Grantley, you will stay lunch?"

"Thanks, no," said the baronet, changing his position, giving his hat a turn, and flourishing out the Bath bun, which fell upon the carpet before him.

Her ladyship put up her eye-glass and stared at the bun; Sir Grantley gave his an extra twist and also stared at the bun, poking at it with his stick; and Maude and Tryphie escaped from the room.

"Didn't know you were so fond of buns, Wilters," said Tom. "You should have them put in a paper bag. They make your hat lining sticky."

"That's doosed funny, Diphoos," said Sir Grantley. "Very fond of a joke. By the way, the amateurs are going to get up a pantomime next season. Won't you join them? I'll put in a word for you. Make a doosed good clown, don't you know.—I

think I had him there," said the baronet to himself.

"I will, if you'll play pantaloon," said Tom sharply. "You'd look the part to perfection."

"Yas, doosed good," said Sir Grantley. "Day, Lady Barmouth; must go. Day, Lord Barmouth;" and with a short nod at Tom, he left the house.

"Tom," exclaimed her ladyship, "if you insult Sir Grantley any more like that you shall suffer for it. If you behave like that, you will be the means of breaking off a most brilliant match."

"Thanks," said Tom, quietly, as her ladyship was sailing out of the room. "You can't make things worse for me."

"Tom, my boy," said his lordship, "you are—are—are—a regular lion, that you are. I don't know what I should do without you."

"Fight for yourself, father, I hope," said the viscount, smiling, "I'm afraid I do more harm than good."

Meanwhile, Sir Grantley Wilters, who had not the slightest thought of breaking off the match, let Diphoos behave as he would, went to keep a particular engagement that he had with Monsieur Hector Launay, who was singing away to himself about "La—Fran-ce—et—la—guer-re," and standing before a glass with a pair of scissors cutting his black hair close to his skull.

He was ready on the instant, though, as Sir Grantley entered, showed him into his private room, and upon the baronet stating his case, to wit, his uneasiness about his hair, which he said was getting thin on the crown, gave the most earnest attention to the subject.

"I shouldn't mind so much," said Sir Grantley; "but I'm—er—going to be mar'd shortly, and I want to look my best."

Monsieur Hector took a magnifying glass from a drawer, and gravely inspected the crown before him, ending by assuring the baronet that by the use of certain washes prepared by himself from peculiar and unique receipts he could restore the hairs that made him slightly thin upon the crown.

Sir Grantley, in full faith, resigned himself to the coiffeur's hands, and was sponged and rubbed and scented during a space of about an hour, when he rose and paid a liberal fee, which made Monsieur Hector smile and bow.

Then he turned to go, but stopped short at the door and came back.

"Oh, Monsieur Launay, I'm told that you are a great friend of Mademoiselle Justine, Lady Barmouth's maid."

"I have that honour, monsieur," said the hairdresser, bowing low.

"Ah, yes," said Sir Grantley, hesitating. "By the way, I am Sir Grantley Wilters."

"I have heard mademoiselle mention Sir Vilter," said the hairdresser, bowing.

"Yes, of course," said the baronet. "Look here, don't you know, I'm engaged to Lady Maude Diphoos, and I want to save her from pain. No spying—*moucharder*—but I should be glad to hear of anything that you think might interest me. Mademoiselle Justine will tell you better what I mean. Good-day."

"Bah!—Phit!—Pst! Big John Bull, fool!" cried Monsieur Hector as soon as he was alone; and he indulged in a peculiar saltatory exercise, indicative of kicking his client in the chest, and making derisive gestures with pointed fingers. "You think I tell you what I know. Pst! Grand bête. Big thin beast. Cochon. Peeg! Come and be shampooed, and I had you by the nose and tell you noting. Aha! Be your spy? No. Justine tells me all, and I know so much that my head is full. But wait you. Aha! Sir Vilter! wait you. *Vive l'amour*."

He folded the cloth that had been spread over Sir Grantley's shoulders with a jerk, and was in the act of putting it away, when something touched his leg, and looking down, it was to see Joby, and directly after Charley Melton entered the room.

Chapter Fourteen.

Lady Maude's Hair comes off.

It was very singular, and showed weakness, but Maude Diphoos, who had hitherto looked with contempt upon her ladyship's dealings with Monsieur Hector, laughing at the idea of using washes, powder, and the like, as pure water made her beautiful fair hair cluster about her clear white temples, and hang round a neck whose skin put the most cleverly concocted pearl powder in the shade, now seemed to become somewhat of a convert to his powers.

Justine confided to her mistress that Miladi Maude's hair was coming off in great patches, horrifying her ladyship so that she gave Lord Barmouth no sleep all one night, and the next morning when she drilled the servants, and inspected them as to smartness of livery, amount of hairpowder used, and the rest, they confided to one another that the old girl's temper was not to be borne.

"What would dear Sir Grantley say if he knew?" she exclaimed; and hurrying to her secret chamber, she rang for Justine, when a long consultation ensued.

"Cer-tainly, milady, if you like," said the dark Frenchwoman; "but that is the way to make the servants in the hall talk—they are so low—and do tattle so. Then it come to Sir Grantley's groom's ears, and Sir Grantley's groom tell Sir Vilter, and ze mischief is all made."

"Yes, Justine; but what can I do, my good soul? I would not care if they were married; it would not matter a bit. Now,

don’t exaggerate, Justine—great patches do you say?”

Justine tightened her lips and plunged one hand into the pocket of her apron to draw forth a tuft of soft fair hair and hold it up before her ladyship.

“Oh, Justine!” she half shrieked, sighing and heaving billowy, “this is dreadful. Poor child, she will be nearly bald. Oh, Justine, whatever you do, preserve your hair. I know of a case where a lady of title became an old maid when she might have had a great establishment, all through losing her hair.”

“I will take the greatest care, milady.”

“My drops, Justine, my drops. This is really too much for my nerves.”

Justine hurried to a case, and brought out a *flaçon* of spirits of red lavender, a goodly portion of which her ladyship took upon lumps of sugar, sighed, and felt better.

“What is to be done, my good Justine? It must be a profound secret.”

“What more of ease, milady, than for Miladi Maude to go out for ze health promenade every morning, and call upon Monsieur Hector Launay. I tink he might be trusted if he is well pay.”

“Oh, no, no,” exclaimed her ladyship, sharply. “I could not trust her; she is too weak.”

“Wis her faithful attendant, milady?”

Her ladyship turned sharply round upon the maid, and gazed full into the dark shining eyes that met hers without a wink.

“Can I trust you, Justine?” she exclaimed.

“Who knows better than milady?” retorted the maid. “Is it I who go below to the servants and betrays all miladi’s secrets? *Ma foi*! no: I sooner die. And,” she added, nodding sharply, “I know two, tre, many secret of her ladyship.”

“Yes, yes, you do, my good Justine. It shall be as you say: Monsieur Launay shall have a very high fee for his pains if he checks it. A silly, weak girl; it is nothing but fretting after that nasty, vulgar wretch and his dog. Ah, Justine, if ever you become a mother, you will know what a mother’s troubles really are.”

Her ladyship rolled in her *fauteuil* more like the heaving billows than ever, and shed a couple of tears, either the tears or her breath smelling strongly of lavender.

“Poor milady!” said the confidential maid, compassionately. “Then milady trusts me to see that Miladi Maude goes safely to the coiffeur’s?”

“Oh, yes, Justine, my good soul, I will. Justine, I shall not wear that black satin, nor the ruby moiré again. Alas, who would be a mother! I have but one idea, Justine, and that is to see my children settled with good establishments, and they seem to do nothing but rebel against me.”

“It is vairy terrible, poor milady.”

“Yes, it is dreadful, Justine,” said her ladyship who was now shedding tears copiously. “Even my son goes against me.”

“It is vairy shocking of him, milady,” said the sympathetic maid, holding salts to her mistress’ nostrils, and having her hand gratefully pressed in return.

“Ah, me; I am a great martyr,” said her ladyship, sobbing softly, and growing more confiding. “I don’t know what I should do without you, Justine. Every one fights against me.”

“Poor, poor milady,” cried Justine, sympathetically.

“Does Miss Tryphie ever talk to you about Captain Bellman?”

“She said once he was vairy handsome,” said Justine.

“Yes, yes, very, and so well connected, Justine. They say he has been rather wild; but a man of birth may make mistakes, Justine; they are never the serious errors of a plebeian.”

“No, milady, never,” said the maid. “Just a few more drops, milady.”

“Thanks, Justine, thanks,” sighed her ladyship, partaking of some more lavender upon sugar. “That Mr Melton never calls now, I think?”

“No, milady, never.—*Ah, quel mensonge*!” she added to herself.

“And his dog does not come?”

“No, milady, I have not seen it for a month.”

“Ah,” sighed her ladyship, whose noble bust rose and fell from the excess of her emotions; “mine is far from a happy life; but go, Justine, go now: I feel as if I could sleep. A nap might do me good. I trust you, Justine. You shall have a gold watch and chain the day my daughter becomes Lady Wilters. Let her go at once.”

“Thank you, dear milady; *merci beaucoup*,” cried the Frenchwoman, bending down and kissing her ladyship’s extremely white and beringed plump hand.

A minute later she was in Maude’s room.

“Go!” faltered the girl, trembling. “No, no, Justine, I cannot—I dare not.”

“How—miladi is timide,” said the Frenchwoman, laying her hand upon the girl’s soft tresses. “Would she have all this fall, so that when Sir Wilter, your dear husband, would pass his hand through and say, ‘Ah, *ma belle ange*, your fair tresses are adorable,’ and kiss them, and become *fou* with delight as he pass them over his face, would you have them thin and come out in his fingaire?”

Maude’s face was a study as she gazed at the maid while she spoke. She shuddered, and her features assumed a look of unutterable loathing.

“Quick, give me my hat and scarf. I will have a veil.”

“You shall, my sweet young lady. Her ladyship wills that you go often to save your beautiful hair. Ah, I would that Monsieur Hector could attend you himself, but he will be busy. You must be content wis ze assistant.”

“Justine,” said Maude quietly, “do not forget our positions.”

“*Ma chère* young lady, I will not,” said the French woman. “Pardon, I was foolish. I do not forrgette. Miladi will let me put on the tick veil.”

Full of respectful solicitude now, Justine helped her young mistress to dress, when she again began to tremble.

“Justine, I dare not,” she faltered.

“Would miladi prefer to be accompany by her own maid Preen?”

“No, no, Justine,” cried Maude, hastily, “I dare not trust her.”

“*Ma foi, non*! miladi is right. She will trust Justine, her ladyship’s confidential maid, who keep her ladyship’s secret, and will be so silent and secret as never was for *cette chère* young mistress in her big trouble.”

“I will trust you, Justine; I am obliged,” sobbed Maude.

“And not trust, ze foolish girl goose who fall in love wis ze mis-er-rable organ grind. My faith, it is so foolish, though ze man is beau.”

“Yes, very handsome,” sighed Maude, thoughtfully.

“Ah, Justine, I cannot be angry with the poor girl for being in love.”

“*Ma foi, non*, miladi, it is our nature to have our weakness there. I too, I confess to it all. Yais.”

“You, Justine! you?” cried Maude, staring hard at the dark shining eyes of the Frenchwoman, who looked too hard to have had a soft sensation in her life.

“*Oui*, miladi. It is my secret, and I hide him. But I too love with a grand ardour that cannot be what you call him in your tongue.”

“Appeased, Justine,” sighed Maude.

“*Non, non*, miladi. Ah, yais, I have him, squench, which can nevaire be squench.”

“Poor Justine!” sighed Maude; and then recovering herself, and shrinking from being so intimate with her mother’s maid. “But no, no, I could not go.”

“Why not, miladi?” said the wily Frenchwoman. “Monsieur Hector is a gentleman that an empress might trust.”

“Yes, yes; but—oh, this is dreadful.”

“Her ladyship does not think of Sir Wilters’ great sorrow if he find my young lady has lose all her hair,” said Justine, smiling as she watched the effect of her words; and a few minutes after she was attending Maude on her way to Upper Gimp Street.

The waxen lady had her head turned in the opposite direction, but the waxen gentleman watched her coming, and looked a combination of the mysterious and admiring as, closely veiled, Maude walked swiftly by Justine’s side, trembling the while, and feeling certain that every one she passed knew her errand and was watching her.

Dreading the visit as she did, it was with something like relief that she stood within the curtained door, face to face with bland, chivalrous Monsieur Hector, who rose, laid down his three days’ old copy of the *Petit Journal*, and bowed profoundly.

“Miladi will excuse that I do not attend her myself?” he said, respectfully. “Monsieur my assistant is at miladi’s service.”

As Maude bowed, he opened the inner door that led to his private consulting room, and returned to the front, to indulge for the next two hours in pleasant converse with Justine.

At last Justine rose to go.

“One instant, my beautiful,” whispered Monsieur Hector. “When do I come to see La Grande Chouette?”

“Oh, I had forgotten,—to-morrow,” said Justine.

“*Cette chère* picture!” said Hector, taking a photograph from over the little stove and kissing it, “remains with me for ever. But stay,” he said, addressing the real instead of the image. “Behold a little packet which I prepare for my beautiful —tooth-powder for her beauteous teeth; scent of the best, but not so sweet as her gentle breath; soap for her soft skin. Ah, sweet soap, sweet soap! if I were only you to be pressed in her hands,” he added, kissing it, and then presenting his offerings to his goddess, who received them like a deity, and held out one hand for him to kiss, with which he was apparently quite content.

Then he struck a table gong, and evidently conveyed by it due notice to his assistant that he had devoted sufficient time to the new client, who shortly after came out, closely veiled, took Justine’s arm, and the waxen lady had one glance at her, while the waxen gentleman looked more mysterious than ever, as he watched her till she was out of sight.

Chapter Fifteen.

Lady Barmouth receives Information.

“Maude, I will not allow it,” cried Lady Barmouth, one morning. “That wretched organ man is always haunting this house, and you are constantly giving him money.”

“The poor fellow is a foreigner and in distress, and he does no harm,” said Maude.

“No harm? He distracts me with his dreadful noise.”

“Plays that tune from *Trovatore* where the fellow’s shut up rather nicely,” said his lordship, rubbing his leg.

“Barmouth!”

“Yes, my dear.”

“Be quiet. And mind this, Maude, I have given instructions to the servants that this dreadful Italian is to be sent away.”

“Very well, mamma,” said Maude, coldly, “only be fair—send every man away who comes to the house. Be consistent in what you do.”

“Is the girl mad?” exclaimed Lady Barmouth. “What does she mean?”

“I mean, mamma,” cried Maude, with spirit, “that I will not—I cannot marry Sir Grantley Wilters.”

“Maude, you’ll break my heart,” cried her ladyship.

“Tom, this is your fault for bringing that wicked young man to the house.”

“What—Wilters?”

“No, no, no, my boy,” said his lordship, rubbing his leg. “Your mamma means Charley Melton, and I—I—I—damme, I can’t understand it all about him. I’m sure I—I—I—don’t think he’s so bad as he’s being painted.”

Maude darted a look of gratitude towards him, and then one of reproach at her brother, who stood biting his nails.

“Barmouth, will you leave that leg alone,” cried her ladyship. “You give me the creeps; and if you cannot talk sensibly, hold your tongue. Everybody knows, even Tom, if he would only speak, that this man—pah! I cannot utter his name—is degraded to the utmost degree; but he has managed to play upon a foolish girl’os heart, and she is blind to his wickedness.”

“Mamma,” cried Maude, “I am not blind; and I will not believe these calumnies. Mr Melton never professed to be rich, and I do not believe he either gambles or drinks.”

“Believe them or not, Maude, my word and your papa’s are passed to Sir Grantley Wilters, and you will be his wife. So no more folly, please.”

Maude turned pale, and glanced at Tom, who stood biting his nails, and then at her father, who grew more wrinkled, and rubbed his leg. She then turned to Tryphie, whose look was sympathising, but meant no help. For poor dependent Tryphie hardly dare say that her soul was her own. Maude felt that she was alone, and, even in these nineteenth century times, being as helplessly driven into marriage with a man she detested as if in the days of old chivalry, when knights and barons patronised ironmongery for costume, and carried off captive maidens to their castles to espouse them before shaven friar, or else dispense with his services.

“Maude,” said her ladyship then, “I wished to spare your feelings, and if you had been less recalcitrant”—that was a word that her ladyship had been hoarding up for the occasion, and it rather jarred against her second best set of teeth as she used it; it was such a hard, stony word, and so threatening to the enamel—“I should have kept this back, but now I must tell you that for your papa’s and my own satisfaction, we have had inquiries made as to this—this—Mr Melton’s character, by an impartial person, and you shall hear from his lips how misguided you have been.”

Maude turned pale, but, setting her teeth, she threw up her head and remained defiant and proud.

“After hearing this, I trust that your sense of duty to your parents will teach you to behave to Sir Grantley Wilters more in accordance with your relative positions. He does not complain, but I can often see that he is wounded by your studied coldness.”

“Not he; damned sight too hard.”

“Diphoos,” said her ladyship, “I had hoped that your visit to purer atmospheres taken at the expense of your papa would have had a more refining influence upon you.”

“So it has,” said Tom, sharply; “but if you keep on making use of that worn-out cad’s name, I must swear, so there.”

Her ladyship did not reply, but pointed to the bell, and Lord Barmouth dropped the hand with which he was about to caress his leg, toddled across the room and rang, surreptitiously feeling in one of his pockets directly after to see if something was safe.

Tryphie Wilders crossed to her cousin and took her hand, whispering a few consolatory words, while her ladyship played the heaving billow a little as she settled herself in her chair in a most magisterial manner.

“Robbins,” said her ladyship, as the butler entered, “has that gentleman arrived?”

“Been here five minutes, my lady. He is in his lordship’s study.”

“Show him up, Robbins, and we are at home to no one until he is gone.”

The butler bowed, went out, and returned with a tall, rather ungainly man in black, who had something of the appearance of a country carpenter who had taken to preaching. He had a habit of buttoning his black coat up tightly, with the consequence that it made a great many wrinkles round his body, and though he was fully six feet high, you felt that these wrinkles were caused by a kind of contraction, his body being of the nature of concertina bellows, and that you might pull him out to a most amazing extent.

He favoured this conceit, too, by being very cartilaginous in the spine, and softly pressing his hands to his breast, and bowing and undulating gently in different directions to the party assembled in the room.

“Hang him!” muttered Tom, scowling at the new comer. “He looks, as if he were in training for a spiral spring. Who the deuce is he?”

“Tom,” whispered his lordship, “that man makes me feel queer; get some brandy and soda in your room after he has gone.”

Tom favoured his father with a peculiar wink, and the old gentleman felt in his pockets once more, to be sure that he had not flung something out with his handkerchief.

“Mr Irkle, I think?” said her ladyship, blandly.

“Hurkle, my lady,” said the new arrival, bowing. “Hurkle and Slant, Murley Court, Obun.”

“Oban?” said her ladyship; “I thought your place of business was in town.”

“Yes, my lady, Obun, W.C., near top o’ Charn-shery Lane.”

“Go it, old chap,” said Tom; “never mind the H’s.”

“Tom, be silent.”

“All right!”

“I think we need no preliminaries, Mr Hurkle,” said her ladyship. “Perhaps you will favour me by reading a few notes from your diary.”

“Thank you, my lady, yes, certainly,” said the new arrival, taking out a large flat pocket-book, and then getting into difficulties with his gloves and hat, setting the latter down upon a chair and putting the former in his pocket, then altering his mind, and taking the gloves out of his pocket, dropping one, and putting the other in his hat, which he took up and placed under the chair instead of upon it. Then he had to pick up the stray glove and put it in his pocket, evidently feeling uneasy directly after because he had not put it in his hat, but not liking to make a fresh alteration.

He now coughed behind the pocket-book very respectfully, opened it, turned over a few leaves, drew out a pencil, and laid it across, so as not to lose the place, coughed again, and said—

“Your ladyship would like me to begin at the beginning?”

“Certainly, Mr Hurkle,” said her ladyship with dignity; and then with Maude sitting with her eyes half-closed, Tom walking up and down the room, and Lord Barmouth looking very much troubled and caressing his leg, the visitor coughed again, and began in a low subdued tone indicative of the secrecy of his mission.

“‘Thursday, twelft. Called into Lady Barmouth’s’”—no mention was made of Lord Barmouth whatever—“‘Portland Place. Private inquiry. No expense to be spared.’”

“I think you may omit all that part, Mr Hurkle,” said her ladyship, graciously.

“Thank you, my lady. Hem!” said the visitor, going on reading. “‘Decided to take up case myself, Mr Slant being in Paris’—That is the end of that entry, my lady.”

“Thank you,” said her ladyship, bowing, and Tom began to whistle softly, and to wonder what the man would say if he kicked his hat across the room like a football.

“‘Friday, thirteent,’” continued the visitor, turning over a leaf. “Hem!” His cough seemed to be brought on by the fact that he was in the presence of the nobility, and it troubled him slightly as he went on—“‘Melton, Charles, Esquire, 150 Duke Street, Saint James. Went out with bull-dog, 10:50, Burlington Arcade, Gardens, Vigo Street, Regent Street, Portland Place, Upper Gimp Street. Must have got into house there. Missed. Took up clue in Duke Street 2:30. Came back. Admiration Club. Back home at 11:30,’—That is the second entry, my lady.”

“Thank you, Mr Hurkle—proceed,” said her ladyship; and Lord Barmouth yawned so loudly that her ladyship turned upon him with a portentous frown.

“‘Saturday, fourteent,’ Hem!” said Mr Hurkle. “‘Met C.M. in Strand. Followed to hosier’s shop; stayed ten minutes—gloves. Went west. Cosmo Club. Stayed an hour. Came out. Walked to Barker’s, Jermyn Street,’ Hem!”

Mr Hurkle looked up after coughing apologetically.

“Barker’s—notorious gambling house, my lady.”

“Bosh!” said Tom. “Fellows play a friendly game of pool sometimes.”

“I must request that you will not interrupt, Lord Diphoos,” said her ladyship, sternly.

“Time to interrupt when I’m called upon to listen to a cock-and-bull story like this,” cried Tom. “Barker’s isn’t a notorious gambling house.”

Mr Hurkle raised his eyebrows and then his hand to his lips, and said “Hem!”

“May I ask how you know?” said her ladyship.

“Been there myself, hundreds of times,” said Tom, sturdily.

“Oh!” ejaculated her ladyship; and that “Oh!” was wonderful in the meaning it expressed. For it seemed to say, “I thought as much! That accounts for the amount of money squandered away!” and her ladyship gazed at her son from between her half-closed lids as she said aloud, “Go on, Mr Hurkle, if you please.”

“Hem! ‘Left Barker’s at eleven Pee Hem. Returned to Duke Street.’ That is the whole of the third entry, my lady.”

“Thank you. Proceed.”

“Eleven o’clock, eh?” said Tom. “Well, very respectable time.”

“Be silent, if you please, sir. Continue, Mr Hurkle.”

“‘Sunday, fifteent. Went out at three. To Barker’s, Jermyn Street.’”

“Hum! Gambling house on a Sunday,” said her ladyship, sarcastically. “Continue, Mr Hurkle.”

“Here, shall I finish for you?” cried Tom. “Went to Barker’s, and had a chop for lunch, read the papers till dinnertime—a wicked wretch, on a Sunday too; then dined—soup, fish, cutlet, cut, off the joint, pint o’ claret, and on a Sunday. Is that right, my hawk-eyed detective?”

“No, my lord. Hem!”

“Will you be silent, Lord Diphoos?” cried her ladyship.

“That is the whole of the fourt entry, my lady.”

“And cheap at the money, whatever it is,” cried Tom. “I say,” he added, scornfully, “do you know where I was on Sunday, you sir?”

“Beg pardon, my lord,” said Mr Hurkle, undulating. “You are not on my list, and I have no client making inquiries about you.”

“That’s a blessing,” said Tom, “for them and for you.”

“Pray go on, Mr Hurkle,” said her ladyship. “Lord Diphoos, I must beg that you do not interrupt.”

To address her son as “Lord Diphoos” was in her ladyship’s estimation crushing, but Tom did not seem crushed.

“‘Monday, sixteenth Hem!’” said Mr Hurkle. “‘Saw Mr Melton come out, followed by large-headed bull-dog, short tail, closely-cut ears, one white leg, and—’”

“Left canine tooth in lower jaw knocked out, and lip torn in a fight,” cried Tom. “Enter that, please.”

“Lord Diphoos.”

“Oh, all right,” cried Tom, savagely. “Here, I say, you sir, get on and finish. This grows interesting.”

He glanced across to his sister, who was holding Tryphie’s hand, her head erect, lip curling, and a warm flush in her cheeks as she listened to this diary of her lover’s doings.

“That is the fift entry,” said Mr Hurkle, glancing from one to the other; and then, as a dead silence reigned, he went on—

“‘Tuesday, seventeent. Blank. C.M. did not go out,’—That is the sixt entry, my lady.

“‘Wednesday, eighteent. Blank. C.M. did not go out.’—That is the sevent entry, my lady.

“‘Thursday, ninetent. Watched at Duke Street. Found C.M. was out. Waited. C.M. returned by north of street and met Lord Barmouth.’”

“Eh, what?” exclaimed her ladyship.

“‘His lordship entered Duke Street from the south, after stopping some time to look in picture-dealer’s at full-length portrait of a goddess.’”

“Why, governor!” cried Tom.

“Go on, Mr Hurkle, please. Lord Barmouth, I beg you will not leave the room.”

“Certainly not, my dear,” said his lordship, rubbing his leg.

“Proceed, Mr Hurkle,” said her ladyship, sternly.

“Hem! Yes, my lady. ‘C.M. and his lordship went together to Regal Café, Regal Street. Dined there.’”

“Oh!” ejaculated her ladyship, with eyes growing very tight. “Proceed.”

“But I say, you sir,” cried Tom, “wasn’t I there?”

“No, my lord. Hem!”

“Wish I had been. I say, gov’nor, it was shabby of you.”

Lord Barmouth squirmed—to use his son’s words.

“Go on, Mr Hurkle,” said her ladyship, patting the carpet with her boot, while his lordship rubbed his leg.

“‘Long dinner of many courses. Several kinds of wine, sodas, brandies, and cigars. Gentlemen returned to chambers in Duke Street, smoked cigars till ten; then to Barker’s.’”

“Let me see, Lord Barmouth, you said you were unwell last evening?”

“And I was not there,” cried Tom.

“That, my lady—hem!” said Mr Hurkle, undulating and threatening to draw himself out—“carries us up to midnight.”

“Yes—yes—yes,” cried his lordship, rising in great excitement; “and—and—and it’s, damme, it’s too much. Tom, Tom, my son, if you don’t kick that fellow out of the house, damme, I will, for it’s all a piece of—of confounded humbug. I won’t have it—I didn’t order this to be done—it’s—it’s—a confounded, damme, it’s a cruel insult to me and my family, and I won’t—I won’t—Tom, my boy, send that fellow away, or I shall—damme, I shall kill him.”

“Yes, yes, go now,” moaned her ladyship. “I will send to you, Mr Hurkle.”

The private inquirer bowed very low, took up his hat and gloves, and, replacing his pocket-book without unbuttoning himself, backed out of the room, as Tom stood with his hands in his pockets, his little waxed moustache sticking out in two sharp points, and grinding his teeth, while poor Lord Barmouth limped about the room trembling with excitement.

“Oh!” moaned her ladyship. “My salts—my drops, Tryphie; this will be the death of me.”

“Serve you right,” said Tom, savagely. “You brought it on yourself.”

“It’s—it’s too bad. Little innocent amusement. Bit o’ dinner and glass o’ wine. Charley Melton is all right.”

“Yes,” said Lady Barmouth, “a gambler, a *roué*. But what wonder. Ah, me! Oh, my poor children. That Melton debauching my husband!”

“And—and—and devilish nice fellow too. I—I—I—I liked it, and—and—and I wished that you had been there, Tom.”

“Thanke, governor.”

“Oh, that I should live to hear all this!”

“You—you ought to have kicked that fellow out, Tom.”

“Be silent, Barmouth, be silent. Tryphie, ring for Justine to help me to my room. My heart is nearly broken now,” she added, in a tone of voice that seemed to indicate that it was only holding together by a little bit of ligament which was ready to go at any moment. “Maude, ungrateful girl, you have heard all. The horrible, dissipated gambler who is dragging my son into his dreadful vortex, and even spreading his meshes around your weak father.”

“Weak!” cried Lord Barmouth; “not at all.”

“I have heard no harm of Mr Melton, mamma,” said Maude. “He—” She checked herself on the point of saying, “He told me he was going.”

“But a gambler, my child—a gambler.”

“Who pockets sixpenny lives at pool when he isn’t losing,” said Tom—“a wretch, a demon. Vot a larks!”

“Good game, pool, when your hand is steady. Yes, my boy, yes,” said his lordship, who was now rapidly calming down, and looking frightened.

“Thank heaven,” cried her ladyship, in tragic tones, “civilisation has introduced the private inquirer. I know all now, and my course is clear.”

“Know all, eh?” said Tom, “Why, mamma, you’ve had a splendid pen’orth. All that about Charley Melton, and the private information about the governor chucked in.”

“‘Chucked!’” ejaculated her ladyship, in tones which sounded as if she were forming an enormous “poster” for a hoarding. “‘Chucked!’ And this is my expensively-educated son. Justine, help me to my room.”

“Funnee lil mans,” said Justine to herself as Tom gave her a peculiar look.

Chapter Sixteen.

Music hath Charms.

The private inquiry trouble was cooling down, but there was so much excitement and trouble at Portland Place, that Maude’s hair had to go untended on one occasion, and Monsieur Hector and his assistant waited in vain for the lady’s coming. Short as was the distance, Mademoiselle Justine was unable to run round and say that they need not wait.

For Sir Grantley Wilters was to dine in Portland Place that evening, and he arrived in good time.

The baronet was quite bright in spirits and youthful in appearance, having got the better of his late ailment, and Lady Barmouth smiled pensively at him when she was not watching Lord Barmouth, and seeing if he was surreptitiously supplied with wine.

Tom dined at home, and was morosely civil, being puzzled how to act towards his future brother-in-law.

Sir Grantley knew of the trouble between her ladyship and her lord, but religiously avoided all allusion thereto; he, however, found time and opportunity to mention to her ladyship the last scandal that he had heard concerning Melton.

“No?” exclaimed her ladyship, laying her plump hand upon his arm.

“Yas; fact, I assure you,” he said. “I had it from three fellows at the club, and they were present. It was at a place in Jermyn street.”

“How dreadful!” exclaimed her ladyship in a low tone.

“They are retailing scandal about poor old Charley, Maude,” said Tom, leaning over the back of her chair in the drawing-room. “You think he’s quite square, eh?”

“If you mean by that, Tom, that I think him an honourable gentleman; yes, I do,” said Maude quietly.

“That’s right. He’s fond enough of you to keep him right, so never you mind what scraggy Wilters says.”

Maude did not reply, but her face flushed, and she sat looking proud and content in her faith.

Meantime her ladyship had been furnished with the last new piece of gossip regarding the young man who had gone to the bad, and was supremely happy.

In spite of her ladyship’s watchfulness Tom managed that his father should have a little wine, and the consequence was that he became very garrulous, making some personal remarks to Sir Grantley about matters of the past which the baronet wished to be considered too youthful to remember, and suffering at last from such decided twinges of his old complaint that he had to leave the table. Maude at once seized the excuse to be freed for the rest of the evening from a presence she detested, and went to attend upon her father, while Tom started to have a quiet cigar and a game of billiards, leaving her ladyship and Sir Grantley together to discuss a few more of the preliminaries of the wedding; Sir Grantley going so far, when he left, as to say that this was about the pleasantest evening he had had at the house in Portland Place, “don’t you know.”

But those below stairs were not above talking at dinner and supper in the servants’ hall, while Mademoiselle Justine sat like a smiling sphinx and listened, but said nothing.

“For my part,” said Robbins, “I think her young ladyship bears it admirably, as a well-bred lady should. She’s getting to know that people in the upper classes can’t marry as they like, and behaving quite right.”

“Ah, poor girl,” said Mrs Downes; “but under that there quiet look who knows what a volcano is a-busting in her breast. Ah, I have a heart of my own.”

“It seems to me,” said Dolly Preen, who during the past few weeks had been growing thin and acid consequent upon slighted love, much banter, the threatened loss of her situation, and genuine feminine jealousy of Justine, who had been intrusted with the task of accompanying her young mistress in her walks—“it seems to me that Lady Maude is finding

consolation somewhere."

Justine, who had been sitting *so* sphinx-like, suddenly flashed into life.

"You—you lil *bébé* of a girl, say what you mean," she cried angrily.

"I was not talking of her ladyship, ma'amselle," retorted Dolly, who had aptly picked up the London ways of her fellows. "It only seemed to me that Lady Maude had taken to liking music very much."

"Ah, yes!" said Robbins. "Miss Preen is right there."

"Some people found fault with me for liking to listen to the organ," said Dolly, spitefully, "but nobody says nothing about my betters."

"Lil *bébé*!" ejaculated Justine scornfully.

"Not quite such a little baby as you think for, ma'amselle," retorted Dolly, tossing her head. "I'm not blind."

"But you are lil miserable," said Justine, scornfully. "What can you see, pray say?"

"Lady Maude giving money to that Italian musician, and listening to him very often from the balcony."

"Ah," said Mrs Downes, "but it's different there, Miss Preen. Some one I know used to look out of the window at the man, Lady Maude looks out to console herself with the music, and you knows music *hath* charms."

"See how right is Madame Downes," said Justine, smiling and nodding. "My faith, Dolly Preen, but how you are *bête*."

"I don't know French," said Dolly, rising, "but I did look in Lady Maude's dictionary to see what that word meant, and I won't sit here to be called a beast by a foreigner, so there."

"Lil *bébé*," said Justine, as Dolly moved toward the door.

"One moment, Miss Preen," said the butler, speaking in an elderly, paternal tone. "Just you take my advice."

"I don't want anybody's advice, Mr Robbins," said the girl with asperity.

"Yes, you do, my dear, and what I wanted to say was, don't you talk so free. You've had one narrow escape of losing a good situation through looking weak on Italian lazy ronies, don't go and run another risk by hinting as a young lady of the highest aristocracy is giving her attention to such a thing as a black-bearded, plaster image selling man who grinds tunes in a box, because if you do you'll find yourself wrong."

"Thank you, Mr Robbins," said Dolly, tartly. "I only know what I see, and I'm not afraid to speak my mind, whatever other people may be. I'm English, I am, and not French, and if I am from the country, as I said before, I'm not blind."

Exit Miss Dolly Preen as Justine exclaimed once more, "Lil *bébé*," and became so sphinx-like that she appeared deep as a knowledge mine.

"Well, such things have happened," said Mrs Downes, sighing.

"Mrs Downes, don't make me blush for you," said the butler, sternly. "I'm ashamed to sit here and listen to such hints."

"Ah, well, I'll say no more," said the cook, oracularly; "but I have a heart of my own, and I know what hearts is."

"Trumps," exclaimed the buttons.

"Henery! silence!" cried the butler sternly. "You go and see to the things in the pantry. Mrs Downes, as the oldest servant in her ladyship's establishment, I have a right to take the lead. Such remarks as these are not seemly."

"I only want to say, Mr Robbins," cried the stout lady, with her heart doing its work well, "that if you check true love in one direction, out it comes in another. It will have its way. There, look at that."

The demon of Portland Place was at the edge of the pavement turning the handle of his organ, and as a matter of fact, Maude Diphoos stepped slowly out of the French window in the drawing-room, and stood looking down at the Italian's swarthy, smiling face.

Chapter Seventeen.

Lady Barmouth puts down her foot.

Lady Maude sat in her dressing-room once more with her back hair down, listening to the strains of Luigi's organ as it discoursed a delicious waltz, while Dolly Preen, who was rapidly developing a vicious-looking mouth, brushed away at the beautiful golden cascade, which rippled quite to the ground. The lady's head swerved softly to the rhythm of the music, and it proved infectious; for though Dolly knew little of dancing, the music was pleasant to her soul, and she swayed her head and brushed softly with an accentuated beat at the beginning of every bar.

Just in the middle of the most sostenuto strain, and just as the ivory-backed brush was descending low, its long bristles dividing the golden threads, which crackled again in the warm air of that gloriously sunshiny day, there was a sharp tap at the dressing-room, and her ladyship entered.

“Ah, just in time,” she exclaimed, raising her gold-rimmed eye-glass. “I wanted to see your hair, Maude.”

“My hair, mamma?”

“Yes, child. Let me see; you went to Monsieur Launay’s yesterday?”

“Yes, mamma.”

“I have been telling Justine that I shall not go to any further expense over it. I have just sent him a cheque for his account, and your head looks so much better that I think we may be satisfied now.”

Maude’s cheeks turned scarlet, and so did her temple and neck, but her beautiful hair made a magnificent veil, and hid her confusion from her ladyship’s view as she examined the parting, drew it away from the temples and poked it about just at the poll.

“Don’t you think, mamma, I had better keep on for a little longer?”

“No,” said her ladyship, peremptorily. “Your hair is in beautiful condition. I grudged paying that man; but he has saved your hair, and he deserves what he has received. He is very clever.”

“I should like to continue a little longer, mamma.”

“You’ll do nothing of the sort,” said her ladyship tartly. “Your hair is perfect.”

“I must go and say that I am not about to continue his course of treatment.”

“No, you must not. I shall write to Monsieur Launay myself and tell him. I cannot afford these expenses, the demands for money are dreadful. I am always spending. Go away, Preen.”

“Yes, my lady,” said the little maid, and she “made a face” as she left the room.

“The preparations for your marriage will be more than I can afford.”

“Oh, mamma, must that go on?” cried Maude.

“Now, now, now, Maude, no more of that, please. I will not have it. Silence. The expenses will be terrible, and I shall be very glad when it is over, and so will you be, and I must say I am pleased to find you are coming more to your senses. Oh, that odious wretch. Go away, do!”

Her ladyship crossed to the window and shut it down with a crash, deadening the sound of Luigi’s minstrelsy as she returned to her daughter’s side.

“Really the expenses of our establishment are maddening. I have had the wine merchant’s bill in this morning, and it is outrageous. The man must be a swindler. Case after case of dry champagne charged for that I cannot remember having. But I must see into it at once; and, yes: I am quite satisfied there is no need for you to go to the hairdresser’s any more.”

Her ladyship gave a quick glance round the room—a glance that took in everything, the furniture, the davenport at which her daughter wrote, the books she had been reading, even to the tiny cobweb left by a careless housemaid in one corner, and then in a very dissatisfied frame of mind she descended to write to Mr Launay, leaving her daughter looking speechless with misery, and gazing wildly at the closed window.

“Shall I finish your hair, ma’am?” said a voice which made her start, for she had not heard the door opened.

“If you like, Dolly,” said Maude despairingly; and with a curiously furtive glance at her mistress, caused by her wonder what her ladyship had said, the girl went on with her interrupted work till she had done; and then when certain hooks had been persuaded to enter certain eyes, and as many buttons to pass through their button-holes, as she could obtain no further orders, Dolly left the room, and Maude walked to the window, opened it, and sat down with her elbow on the sill to listen to the distant strains of music which came from the top end of the place near Park Crescent, and as she listened the tears stole down her cheeks, for the fiat must be obeyed. There would be no more pleasant visits to the coiffeur’s—those little trips which relieved the monotony of her life so deliciously, and made her better able to bear the coming of Sir Grantley Wilters.

No more—no more! she was to be a prisoner now till she was to be decked out with garlands, and sent like a lamb to the sacrifice, and served up with mint sauce, for Sir Grantley was going to be very rich. Life was becoming an empty void with nothing to fill it. No Charley Melton allowed to visit; no assistant to arrange her hair—and Monsieur Hector Launay’s aide was so very, very nice.

Maude’s sad musings were interrupted by the door being opened quickly, and the head of Justine thrust in.

“Oh, mademoiselle—*chère* miladi, have you heard?”

“Yes, Justine. It is all over.”

“All ovaire, miladi? *c’est atroce*, but not ovaire; I will take counsel wiz M’sieu Hector, and all will be well.”

“Justine! Justine!”

“Coming, milady; I descend directly. Have a good heart, still yet, and all shall be well. *Oui*, milady, I come.”

Justine descended, and Maude melted into tears.

Chapter Eighteen.

The Chance looks bad.

That same afternoon Monsieur Hector Launay's assistant entered the business place hurriedly, followed by Joby, and exclaimed—

"I am rather late. Has she come?"

"Come, *non*, M'sieu; she comes no more."

"What?"

"I have a letter from my lady in which she say I have done her daughter's hair so much good that the visits will cease. I am paid, and *voilà tout*."

"Good heavens! Does she suspect?"

"*Non*, M'sieu," said the Frenchman, smiling. "You have been too capable an assistant, and the occasion has ceased; but I will think, and M'sieu shall see the lady again. I will take counsel with Justine, and we will have a new plan. I am a Frenchman, and spirituel. I cannot live wizout I see *ma chère* sometimes. Justine must come, so be of good hope; we must wait."

Charley Melton walked out of the reception-room, followed by Joby, who kept looking up at his master in a curious manner, as if half-pitying and wholly divining his feelings. There was a curious leer too in one eye, which seemed to look maliciously at his proprietor, who took the greatest care that he, Joby, should not form any canine intimacies of a tender nature, and Joby's leering eye seemed to say, "How do you like being morally chained up, my boy?"

Charley Melton went homeward, turned, and walked right up to the Euston Road, where he made for Park Crescent, and then walked straight down Portland Placc, so as to try and catch a glimpse of his *inamorata*.

He was blessed and yet annoyed, for Maude was at one of the windows with a book in her hand, apparently reading, but really looking down at Luigi, the Italian, who was turning the handle of his baize-covered chest in the most diligent manner, producing sweet sounds according to taste, and smiling and bowing to the lady.

"Lucky brute!" muttered Charley, as he went by without venturing to salute. For as he passed he saw a white packet drop from the window and fall upon the pavement, where it burst like a shell, scattering bronze discs in all directions, so that the organ-grinder had hard work to collect them laden as he was, while the tune he played was broken up into bits.

"Lucky brute!" sighed Charley Melton again, "allowed to stand upon the edge of the pavement to gaze up at her, and then paid for so doing. Ah, I'd better give it up. She won't bolt with me. I seem as if I can get no help from Tom, and I cannot go there. Hang it all, I shall do something desperate before I've done. She was yielding, but the game's up now."

Poor Joby in the days which followed was far from happy, for his master was a great deal away from home, and the dog was shut out often enough from his rooms as well as from his confidence.

People said that Charley Melton, being crossed in love, was going to the bad—taking to drink and gambling, and steadily gliding down the slide up which there is no return; and certainly his habits seemed to indicate this to be the case, so much so that Joby thought a good deal in his dense, thick-brained fashion upon the problem that puzzled his head as well as several wiser ones—a problem that he was to solve though for himself when the due time came, for Joby could not make out his master.

Time glided on, and Charley Melton's case seemed to grow more and more hopeless, while Maude appeared to be going melancholy mad, and passed a great portion of her time gazing dreamily down at the purveyor of tunes set afloat upon the air by the mechanical working of a large set of bellows, and the opening and shutting by a toothed barrel of the mouths of so many graduated pipes.

Everybody was miserable, so it appeared, saving Sir Grantley Wilters, whose joy approached the weird in the peculiarity of its developments. He took medicine by the bucketful, so his valet told Mr Robbins in confidence, "and the way he talks about your young lady is wonderful."

It was wonderful, for in his amatory madness he chuckled and chattered and praised the lady's charms, and he even went so far at times as to sing snatches of love songs in a voice that suggested the performances of a mad—or cracked—clarionet in a hilarious fit, during which it was suffering from a dry reed.

Love ruled the day at Portland Place, and Sir Grantley came and made it in the drawing-room as often as he liked, while when she could escape to the balcony, Maude stood and listened to the strains of *Trovatore*, and, "poor dear, seemed to get wuss and wuss."

The last was cook's remark, and it was received with a feminine chorus of "Ah's!"

"Oh, that wretched Italian, why does he persist in coming here?" cried her ladyship one day. "Maude, you'll drive me mad if you keep on encouraging him so."

Maude looked at her mother dreamily and said nothing, but the next time the man came she wrapped some coppers in a piece of paper, and dropped them out, to be caught deftly in the soft felt hat.

"Poor fellow," she sighed, "it may make him happy."

"Ah, bella signora," cried Luigi in mellifluous tones, and he ground, and smiled, and showed his white teeth till the lady retired.

But if there was love-making in Portland Place there was despair in Duke Street, human and canine, for Joby more than once proved himself to be a terrible nuisance at the chambers by uttering low snuffling whines upon the stairs and landings, which, being interpreted, meant, “Why doesn’t master come home?” But by degrees he smothered his feelings on finding that an open avowal of his trouble only resulted in boots, boot-jacks, empty soda-water bottles, and other missiles being flung at him from open doors, while he was reviled as being a beast.

His retort upon receiving such forcible salutations was very often a display of his teeth, and so threatening an action in the direction of legs that he generally caused his assailants to beat a retreat; but at last he performed the same strategic evolution himself, consequent upon having to deal with the unknown. In fact, science conquered him. He stood shot, and dodged them bravely. So clever was he indeed upon this point, that it was almost impossible to hit him with hair-brush, boot, or lump of coal; but one day an angry occupant of the chambers, upon hearing a very long-drawn howl, opened his door suddenly and hurled a bottle at the dog.

It was this bottle which puzzled Joby, for instead of being empty, it was full of the water known as soda, highly charged with gas by one Schweppe, and though it missed the dog, it struck upon a partly filled coal-scuttle, and exploded with such violence, and so great a scattering of fragments, that for two days Joby preferred to sleep in the park, and had a very narrow escape from a dog-stealer, who tried every blandishment he knew to get the animal to follow him, but without effect.

Sometimes he would go and hang about the great house in Portland Place, but there was no admission. Attempts to glide past or between the legs of the servants dismally failed; but he had a look or two at Lord Barmouth, and followed him when he went out, giving sundry sniffs at his pocket, and more than once coming in for a bone. But this was very exceptional, and Joby’s was just now a very unsatisfactory and useless life.

His lordship swore a little softly and in private about the organ, but ceased as he saw that his daughter took a little interest in the music.

“But it’s doosed bad taste, Tom, doosed bad taste, my boy; and dear me, how I do long for a glass of port.”

“Yes, and you’ll have to long, governor.”

“Yes, my boy. Seen Charley Melton lately?”

“Yes, looking as if he were going to be hung.”

“Did he though, my boy? What did you say to him?”

“Told him he was a fool.”

“Oh, Tom, my boy, you shouldn’t have done that. I hope he don’t think that I’m behaving badly to him. I’d go and see him, but her ladyship would be sure to know. Be civil to him, my boy, for my sake. His father was such an old friend.”

“Humph, don’t seem like it,” growled Tom.

“But why did you call him a fool, Tom?”

“For not making a bolt of it with Maudey.”

“Oh, no—no—no—no, my boy, that would be very wrong. But what did he say?”

“Nothing. Shook his head and walked off.”

“Yes, yes. Quite right, my boy, quite right. Charley Melton would not do anything to degrade our Maudey like that.”

“Well, I would if I had a chance,” said Tom, “and if I hadn’t I’d make one.”

Chapter Nineteen.

Tom and the Tartar.

All the same though, consequent upon thinking so much about his sister, Tom made very little progress with his own love affairs.

Tryphie Wilder’s was not a very pleasant life at Lady Barmouth’s. She felt that she had been adopted out of charity, and in her bitterness she would sometimes call herself her ladyship’s abuse block, for that lady would call her “little wretch” in private with as much vigour as there was sweetness in the “my dear” of public life. Her ladyship had before now gone so far as to strike her. That very day Tryphie had her revenge, for, going into the drawing-room, she found Tom fast asleep on the sofa, and snipped off the ends of his moustache, wax and all. Tom awoke, and caught and kissed her, and she flew at him, boxed his ears, and then ran out of the room and upstairs, to strike her hand against the wall for being so cruel.

The girl’s bright spirits and unvarying tenderness to his father, for whom she was always buying Bath buns or finding snacks, made Tom desperately in love with her, but he had only received chaff as his amatory food in return. Tryphie meantime went on as a sort of upper servant, with the *entrée* of the drawing-room; and while Justine was the repository of much that was false in Lady Barmouth, she alone was admitted to the secrets of her aunt’s first and second sets of teeth, which she had to clean in her own room with the door locked, it being supposed that it was her ladyship’s diamond suite then undergoing a renovating brush, while poor Tryphie all the time was operating upon what looked like a ghastly grin without any softening smile given by overhanging lips.

“I tell you what it is, Tryphie,” said Tom one day, as he met her on the stairs—“but I say, what’s that?” and he pointed to a little case which she tried to conceal.

“Don’t ask impertinent questions, sir,” was the reply. “Now then, what is it?”

“Well, I was going to say—oh, I say, how pretty you look this morning.”

“You were not going to say anything of the kind, sir.”

“Well then, I was going to say if I am worried much more, I shall hook it.”

“Slang!” cried Tryphie.

“Well, I must slang somebody. I mustn’t swear. I’m half mad, Tryphie.”

“Poor fellow! you have been smoking yourself so.”

“Nonsense!” he said, “a fellow must do something to keep off the blues.”

“Yes; smoke in bed.”

“I shouldn’t if I was married. If I had a wife now—”

“Married!” said Tryphie, “without any money, sir! What would you do? Keep a billiard table or open a cigar shop? I suppose I might sit behind the counter—”

“Go it,” said Tom. “How down you are on a fellow.”

“While my little liege lord wore his elegant shawl-pattern smoking trousers, dressing-gown and cap, and showed his prowess to customers at the billiard table.”

“Little, eh?” said Tom. “Well, I am little, but you must have some little fellows in the world, to sort up with. We can’t all be great handsome black chaps like Captain Bellman.”

“Captain Bellman is not always smoking.”

“I don’t care, I’m getting reckless. I own it all: I do go to sleep with a cigar in my mouth. I can smoke as many cigars for my size as any man in London and there are not many men who can beat me at billiards.”

“How is the new cue, Tom?” said Tryphie, mockingly.

“All right,” he said. “I tried it last night at the rooms, and played a game with an uncommonly gentlemanly Frenchman, who made the most delicious little cigarettes. I thought I’d met him before. Who do you think it was?”

“Don’t know, and—”

“Don’t care, eh? Well, it was Launay the barber.”

“Tom!”

“Well, I don’t care; home’s wretched and I’m miserable. Besides, other people enjoy seeing me so. Maude is always going about the house like a ghost, or listening to that organ man. She’s going mad, I fancy. Then Charley Melton has turned out a fool to cave in as he has done, and Tryphie cuts me—”

“As you deserve.”

“That’s right, go it. The governor’s miserable, and that mummy Wilters is always here. Nice place to stop in. Perhaps I ought to aim higher than billiards, and keeping one’s cue in a japanned case hanging up in a public room. But look at me; hang it, I hardly get a shilling, if I don’t have some fellow at billiards. What have I to look forward to?”

Tryphie made a movement to continue her way, but Tom spread his hands so as to stop her descent.

“Will you have the goodness to allow me to pass, Lord Diphoos?” she said, demurely.

“*Lord*!” he cried, peevishly.

“Very well, then, most spoiled child of the house,” said Tryphie, maliciously, “Master Diphoos.”

“You make my life quite miserable, Tryphie, you do, ’pon my honour. You’re the most ungracious—”

“There’s pretty language to use to a lady, sir,” cried Tryphie, speaking as if in an angry fit. “Say I’m the most disgraceful at once, sir.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that,” said Tom; “I meant ungracious and unyielding.”

“Of course, sir. Pretty words to apply to a lady.”

“Bother!” cried Tom. “I never looked upon you as a lady.”

“Thank you, sir,” she said, making him a most profound curtsey.

“Well, you know what I mean,” grumbled Tom; “I always think of you as Cousin Tryphie, whom I—there,” he whispered, “I will say it—I love with all my heart.”

“Bosh!” exclaimed Tryphie.

“There’s pretty language to use to a gentleman,” retorted Tom.

“I never look upon you as a gentleman,” said Tryphie in her turn; and she darted a mischievous look at him.

“Thank you, ma’am,” said Tom, who was now quite out of heart and temper. “And so you go on snub, snub, peck, peck, till a fellow feels as if he would like to make a hole in the water, he’s so sick of his life.”

“But he only makes a hole in his manners instead,” cried Tryphie.

“I say, Tryphie, you know,” cried Tom, now appealingly. “Don’t be so jolly hard on a fellow who loves you as I do. I can’t bear it when you snub me so. I say, dear,” he continued, taking her hand, “say a kind word to me.”

“Let go my hand, sir, and don’t be stupid,” she cried.

“Tryphie!”

“Well, Tom! Now look here, I’ve got to be so that I can hardly believe in there being such a thing as sincerity in the world, after what I’ve seen in this house: but all the same I do think you mean what you say.”

“Thankye, Tryphie; that’s the kindest thing you’ve said to me for months,” said Tom.

“Stop a bit, sir, and listen. I was going to say—”

“No, don’t say any more, dear,” cried Tom, imploringly. “You’ve said something kind to me, and I shall go and get fat on that for a month.”

“Listen to me, sir,” cried Tryphie, unable to repress a smile—“I was going to say—Do you think I am going to promise to marry an idle, thoughtless, selfish man, with only two ideas in his head?”

“Two?” said Tom, dolefully. “No, you’re wrong. I’ve only got one.”

“I say two, sir—cigars and billiards. Do you think I want to marry a chimney-pot, or an animated cue?”

“Chimney-pot! Animated cue!” said Tom, with a groan, as he took off his little scarlet smoking-cap, and wrung it in his hands as if it were wet.

“Let me see, sir, that you’ve got some energy in you as well as good sincere feeling, before you speak to me again, if you please.”

“I may speak to you again, then?” cried Tom.

“Of course you may,” said Tryphie, tartly.

“And then?” cried Tom.

“Well, then we shall see,” replied the sarcastic little lady.

“Energy, eh?” said Tom. “Well, I will: so now to begin again. You know I have been energetic about Maude?”

“Ye-es, pretty well,” said Tryphie. “Not half enough.”

“Well, now then, dear—may I say dear?”

“If you please, Lord Diphoos,” said Tryphie. “I can’t help it.”

“Well, I’m going to be energetic now, and see if I can’t do something for Maude.”

“What are you going to do?”

“See Charley Melton and stir him up. Then I shall stir up the gov’nor and Maude, and if none of these things do any good I shall have a go at Wilters.”

“Ah,” said Tryphie, “now I’m beginning to believe in you, and there is some hope that I shall not be forced into a marriage with that odious Captain Bellman.”

“Tryphie,” whispered Tom, as he stared, “just say that again.”

She shook her head.

Tom looked upstairs and then down, saw nobody, and hastily catching the little maiden in his arms, stole a kiss before she fled, when, giving his head a satisfied shake, he went down to the hall, saw that his hat was brushed, and went off to Duke street, in utter ignorance of the fact that his father had been sitting in the curtained recess on the landing, where the flowers dwindled in a kind of conservatory, calmly devouring a piece of Bologna sausage and half a French roll.

“He, he, he,” chuckled the old gentleman, “that’s how they make love when they’re young. I was—was—was a devil of a fellow among the ladies when I was Tom’s age; but somehow now I never want to meet her ladyship on the stairs and kiss her. I’d—I’d—I’d a doosed deal rather have a nice piece of chicken, or a bit of tongue.”

Chapter Twenty.

Tom Expresses his Opinion.

Charley Melton was not at home.

Tom went again. Not at home.

Three weeks passed before he could meet him, and then it was by accident at one of the clubs, and during all this time Tryphie had grown colder, and the wedding-day was approaching. But at last the two young men encountered, and Tom went straight to the point, “Hit out,” as he termed it.

“Charley Melton,” he said, “are you going to let this cursed marriage come off?”

“What can I do?” said Charley, lighting a cigar. “I have tried everything, and am forbidden the house.”

“Why not coax Maudey to come and meet you somewhere?”

“I have tried,” said Melton, quietly, “but it is hopeless now.”

“Why?”

“Her ladyship never lets your sister go out of her sight.”

“Then make a bolt of it, Charley.”

“You proposed that before. Oh, undutiful son.”

“There, don’t talk like a Turk,” said Tom.

“I feel like one, Bismillah! It is Kismet,” said Charley Melton, grimly.

“Fate’s what a man makes himself.”

“Yes, but you can’t make bricks without straw. O! my Diphoos,” said the other, mockingly, “I have so little golden straw that her ladyship refuses to let me make bricks at all, and—There, let the matter slide, old man.”

“By George!” cried Tom, savagely. “And this is my old friend Charley Melton! Where’s your spirit?”

“Ah! where indeed.”

“I’d shoot Wilters if I were in your case.”

“It would be agreeable, but the consequences are so precious unpleasant, Tom. I’ve had one awful drop: I don’t want another.”

“You’re a coward, Charley, big as you are.”

“I am, Tom, if it comes to being hung for shooting a baronet dead. No, Tom, I love Maude very much, but I am not chivalrous enough to risk the rope.”

“Bah!”

“Yes, if you like, I am willing for the matrimonial noose, but that prepared for homicides—no: I would rather remain a bachelor.”

“Then I cut you henceforth,” said Tom, angrily. “I’ve done with you.”

“No, you haven’t, old fellow; some day after Maude is married we shall be quite brothers again.”

“Never.”

“Nonsense. Have a B. and S.”

“With you? No, sir; I have done. Good-day.”

“Good-bye, Tom, for I’m going off shortly.”

“And pray where?”

“Italy, I think,” said Melton, smiling.

“Won’t you stop and see Wilters married?”

“No; I will not. Have a B. and S., old fellow.”

Little Tom looked his friend over from top to toe, and then, with an ejaculation full of contempt, he stalked out of the club, and went straight to Portland Place, where the first person he met was Tryphie alone in the drawing-room.

“Well,” she cried, “have you seen Mr Melton?”

“Yes.”

“And—”

“And? Bah! he’s a miserable sneak. I haven’t patience with him. Here, Tryphie, don’t go.”

The little maiden made no answer, but sailed out of the room, just as Lord Barmouth came in.

“Ah, Tom, my boy, any news?”

“Yes, governor—the world’s coming to an end.”

“Dear me! Is it, my boy? I was in hopes that it would have lasted my time. But perhaps it’s for the best. Will it stop poor Maudey’s marriage?”

“I hope so, gov’nor. Here, come along with me.”

“Certainly, my boy, certainly; but, by the way, I’m very hungry. Can we get something to eat?”

The old man looked very haggard, for his internal wolf was gnawing.

“Come and see, gov’nor.”

“Yes, my boy, I will. But, by the way, have you noticed anything particular about Maudey?”

“Looks precious miserable.”

“Yes, my boy, she does; but I mean about her standing out in the balcony so much of an evening. You don’t think—”

“Think what, gov’nor?”

“It’s—it’s—it’s a devil of a way down into the area, Tom; and if she were—”

“To jump over and kill herself? Pooh! nonsense, old fellow. Here, come up to my room.”

“I’m—I’m glad to hear you speak with so much confidence,” said Lord Barmouth. “Yes, certainly, my boy, certainly. Dear me, I feel very faint.”

Tom took his father’s arm, and led the way to his bedroom, where he placed an easy-chair for the old man, and then stooping down, drew a case from beneath the bed and a glass or two from a cupboard.

“Why, Tom, my boy—wine?”

“Yes, gov’nor, wine. Fizz. Pfungst’s dry fruity.”

“But up here, Tom!”

“Yes, up here, gov’nor. A man must have something to take the taste of this nasty wedding out of his mouth.”

“But how came it to be here, Tom?”

“I ordered the wine merchant to send it in, and here it is.”

“But does her ladyship know?”

“Skeercely, gov’nor, as the Yankee said.”

“But did—did you pay for it yourself, my boy?”

“No; I told ’em to put it down in the bill. Here, tip that off.”

Tom filled a couple of small tumblers, and handed one to his father, who took it with trembling fingers.

“But really, my boy, this is very reprehensible. I—I—I—I—as your father, I feel bound to say—”

“Nothing at all, gov’nor. Tip it off. Do you good.”

“No, no, Tom, it’s champagne, and I—I—really, I—Now if it had been port.”

“Tip it up, gov’nor.”

“I shall investigate the whole matter, Robbins,” said a strident voice outside, and the door-handle began to turn.

“Hi! Stop! Dressing!” cried Tom, frantically.

“Do not tell untruths, sir,” exclaimed her ladyship, sternly, as she entered without the slightest hesitation. “Ah, as I expected. Wait, till the servants are gone. Robbins, take down that wine.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Not this, you don’t,” said Tom, seizing the gold-foiled bottle by the neck.

“You knew that Lord Diphoos was having cases of wine up in his bedroom, Robbins?”

“No, my lady.”

“You brought it up?”

“No, my lady—Joseph.”

“Then Joseph knew.”

“He said it was cases of modelling clay, my lady.”

“That’s right,” said Tom, “modelling clay. Try a glass, mamma, to moisten yours.”

“Take away that case.”

“Yes, my lady.”

Robbins stooped with difficulty, picked up the case, and slowly bore it out, her ladyship standing in a studied attitude pointing the while.

“Another time,” said her ladyship, turning tragically to her son, and then withering her lord. “I have too much on my mind at present to trouble about this domestic mutiny.”

“Domestic grandmother,” cried Tom. “There, you needn’t make so much fuss about it. It was all your fault, mamma.”

“My fault, sir?”

“Yes, I was driven to drink by trying to obey you, and being civil to Wilters. Hang him, he makes one a regular laughing-stock.”

“Explain yourself, sir.”

“Well, you gammoned me into going to Hurlingham with your pet poodle.”

“My pet poodle!” exclaimed her ladyship.

“Bah! yes, your pet baronet; but never any more. Hang him, he came there dressed up like a theatrical super, in grey velvet, and with a soft hat and a rosette. I felt so mad that I could have punched his head, for all the fellows there were sniggering. But you should have seen him shoot.”

“Sir Grantley told me that he was a very good shot,” said her ladyship.

“Oh, he did, did he?” roared Tom. “Bless his modesty. Well, I’m going to tell Maude that when she’s married she had better look out, and if ever she sees her lovely husband take up a gun she had better bolt—out of town—the seaside—or come home. She won’t be safe if she don’t.”

Lord Barmouth tittered at this, but his lady looked round at him so sharply, that he turned it off, and stared stolidly straight before him.

“It was a regular case of fireworks,” continued Tom. “His attitudes were grand, and he looked as if he were rehearsing something for a circus. You should have seen the fellows laugh.”

“I sincerely hope that you did not laugh,” said her ladyship, sternly.

“Oh, dear, no,” said Tom, “not at all. Didn’t even smile.”

“I’m very glad of it,” said her ladyship.

“Oh, you are? That’s right,” said Tom; “but somehow one of the buttons flew off the front of my coat, and my ribs ached, and I lay back in a chair in a state of convulsion. I nearly had a fit.”

“Diphoos!” ejaculated her ladyship.

“And when dear Grantley came up he gnashed his teeth at me. He did, ’pon my word, till I roared again. I say, gov’nor, it’s the funniest thing out to see him in a passion.”

“It seems to me,” exclaimed her ladyship, hysterically, “as if the whole of my family were leagued against me, and determined to try and break off this match. From what I can gather, it seems to me, Tom, that you have grossly insulted Sir Grantley.”

“Bosh!” said Tom. “He made such an ass of himself that I roared with laughter, and served him right.”

“Fresh insults,” cried her ladyship; “but I can wait. At present, as I before observed, I shall take no steps to check this domestic mutiny on the part of my husband and my son.”

“Mutiny?”

“Yes, sir, I said mutiny; but after Maude is married—then!”

The door closed behind her, and Lord Barmouth looked piteously up at his little son.

“You have got me into a devil of a scrape, Tom, my boy,” he faltered.

“Never mind, gov’nor. Tip that up. The old girl left us this.”

“But—but it *is* champagne, Tom.”

“All the better, gov’nor. Here’s to you.”

Lord Barmouth hesitated for a few moments, and then raised his glass.

“Your health, my dear boy,” he said.—“Yes, that’s a very nice glass of wine. I haven’t tasted champagne for a couple of months.”

“Then you shall taste it again,” said Tom. “Now, I mean to go it. Gov’nor, you should come and dine with me to-night, and we’d try and forget all about old Maude, only I have no money.”

“But I have, my boy—ten pounds.”

“You have, gov’nor?—Yes so you have.”

“Take—take it, my boy.”

“But where did you get it, gov’nor?”

“Well—er—never mind that, Tom. I—er—I borrowed it; but I shall pay it again some day.”

“But, gov’nor—”

“Take the money, Tom, my boy. You need not mind, and if I can get away to-night I should like to dine with you.”

“Then you shall, old fellow; I’ll manage that.”

“But her ladyship?”

“Leave it to me, gov’nor.”

“And about Charley Melton, Tom, my boy—is there any hope?”

“Not a bit, gov’nor. He’s a poor thing, and not worthy of her.”

“Oh, dear, dear, dear,” sighed Lord Barmouth. “But I’m afraid I couldn’t get away.”

“You leave it to me, and we’ll dine at nine, gov’nor. Don’t take anything at ours.”

“No, Tom, no.”

“Now go down.”

The old man finished his champagne, thinking of her ladyship’s word—*then*.

After that he went downstairs, and that night, as good as his word, Tom shuffled him out as soon as the ladies had left the dining-room.

It was easily done, and the door was just being quietly closed as they stood under the portico, when from just outside and beyond the pillar there came the sudden burst of music from an organ, as the man who had been playing changed the tune, and as the pair hurried away they brushed against the player, who stood by the area railings in his slouched hat and ragged attire.

“What the—”

“Devil” his lordship was going to say, for something struck him on the top of his *gibus* hat.

“Copper,” said Tom, as the object fell with a pat on the pavement. “Come along.”

“Yes, halfpence,” whispered his lordship, nervously, as he tottered on; “but I do wish Maudey wouldn’t be so free with her money to those vagabonds. That scoundrel makes quite an income out of our house.”

“Never mind, gov’nor, it won’t last long. Poor girl, the game’s nearly up. Now for what the Yankees call a good square meal.”

“With a drop of port, Tom, my boy.”

“Yes; you shall have a whole bottle. Barker’s, Jermyn Street,” he cried to the cabman, who drew up; and then as the cab drove off—“There, gov’nor, we’ll forget home troubles for one night.”

“Yes, my boy, we will,” said the old man, eagerly.

“I do wish Tryphie wouldn’t be so hard again,” sighed Tom, “and just too when she was growing so soft. Sympathy for Maudey, I suppose.”

“What say, Tom, my boy?”

“Thinking aloud, gov’nor.”

“What about, Tom?”

“Charley Melton, gov’nor. He’s a regular flat.”

Chapter Twenty One.

Sad Proceedings.

All the servants remarked that “the poor dear” from the very first bore up like a suffering martyr, and then discoursed upon the vanity of human hopes; and Mrs Downes, who was of a pious turn of mind, and went miles “per ’bus” on Sundays to be present at religious services in theatres, said that it was a “vale of tears,” and wiped one tear out of her eye, looked at it, wrapped it up very carefully in her handkerchief, and put it in her pocket, as if fully aware of the fact that it was a sympathetic pearl.

“They might well call it the last day,” sighed the same lady, for to her mind it was as if heaven and earth had come together.

“She is *bête*, this woman,” said Mademoiselle Justine, who had descended for hot water; and she stood and purred softly to herself, and looked so like a cat that she only needed to have squatted down upon a chair, and begun licking her trim dress, to have completed the likeness.

It was the last day of Maude’s girlhood; the next was to see her what the fashionable gossips would call a happy wife. The previous fortnight had been spent in a whirl of busy doings. Dressmakers had been to and fro, milliners consulted, Justine and Dolly had been kept up late at night to see to packing, and so anxious was her ladyship that her child should look her best that she insisted upon Maude visiting her dentist, and seeing Dr Todd again and again. Maude tried to expostulate, but her ladyship was inexorable, and spared herself no pains. The consumption of spirits of red lavender was startling, but she bore up wonderfully; went with that dear Sir Grantley to the coachmaker’s in Long Acre, and herself selected the new brougham that was one of the baronet’s wedding presents, and declared the horses which she twice over went into the stable to see were “loves.”

Then, too, she aided in the re-decorating of her daughter’s new home; in fact, spared herself in no way to bring about the happy event, while “that wretched Lord Barmouth prowled about the house doing nothing but thinking of gluttony.” In fact, she found him one day sitting behind the curtains in the drawing-room spreading potted tongue upon an Abernethy biscuit, with a pearl paper-knife, when he ought to have been helping her, for in these days his lordship’s wolf, which constantly bade him feed, was unusually active.

Perhaps it was a natural instinct similar to that which directs wild animals to seek certain places at times to lick salt. At all events, tongue had a wonderfully attractive effect upon Lord Barmouth: he would steal or buy tongue in any shape to eat surreptitiously, and evidently from a natural effort to provide homoeopathically against that from which he suffered so much.

Tom gave her ladyship a great deal of trouble by his opposition to the very last, but his efforts were in vain.

“I might perhaps have done more, Maude,” he said, “but, hang it all, what more can I do? A fellow can’t hardly say his soul’s his own in this house. I’ve tried all I can to get the governor to take the lead, but the old woman sits upon him so heavily that he hasn’t a chance.”

Maude only wept silently and laid her head upon his shoulder.

“There, there, little girl,” he said, “cheer up. It’s fashion, and you mustn’t mind. Old Wilters is very soft after all, and you must take a leaf out of the old girl’s book, and serve him out for it all. Hang me, if I were you, if I wouldn’t make him pay dearly for all this.”

“Hush, Tom, dear Tom. Pray, pray don’t talk about it. Tom, dear, when I am gone—”

“There, I say, hang it all, don’t talk as if you were going to pop off.”

“Listen to me, Tom dear,” said Maude, firmly. “I say when I am gone, be as kind as you can to poor papa. I may not be able to speak to you again.”

“All right,” said Tom; “but I say, you will try and hold up.”

“Yes, Tom dear, yes.”

“That’s right, old girl, make the best of a bad bargain. You won’t be much worse off than Diana. Fashionable martyrs both of you.”

“Yes, Tom dear.”

“And you will try to be happy?”

“Yes, dear, I’m going to be happy. But you’ll think the best of me, dear, and take care of poor papa?”

“Of course I will. The old man will be better off when you are gone. Her majesty won’t be so stingy when she has got you both off her hands, and married to rich men.”

“No, dear. I will try and cheer up.”

“That’s right, old girl. I wish some one would make me happy.” This was accompanied by a look at Tryphie, who was in the room.

“I don’t see how you can expect any lady to make you happy, Tom,” said the little girl, sharply. “A gentleman who worships two idols, cigars and billiards, cannot have room for a third love.”

“There she goes,” said Tom, disconsolately. “Maude, I’ve told her I loved her a score of times, and she pooh-poohs me, and looks down upon me.”

“Of course,” said Tryphie, pertly. “Is it not settled that I am to be Mrs Captain Bellman?”

“Mrs Captain Bellman!” cried Tom, savagely. “Look here, Tryphie, I thought we had settled him, and now you bring him up again like an evil spirit in a play. I tell you what it is, if somebody does not shoot that great moustached scoundrel, I will.”

“What, such a handsome, gentlemanly man?” said Tryphie, sarcastically.

“Handsome? Gentlemanly? The narrow-minded scoundrel! Look here, Tryphie, a man may do worse things than smoke cigars and play billiards. Damme, I can say I never caused a woman the heartache, or deceived my friend.”

“Are you sure, Tom?” said Tryphie, looking up at him with a melancholy droll expression upon her countenance.

“Tryphie!” he cried, running to her, and catching her hand.

“Get along, you silly boy,” she cried, laughing; and he turned away with a look of annoyance, but Maude caught his arm.

“Tom, dear,” she said, laying her head upon his shoulder, “come what may, you will always think kindly of me.”

“Why of course, my dear,” he said, “always. I shall think of you as the dearest and best of sisters, who always stuck up for me, and kept herself poor by lending me—no, hang it, I won’t be a humbug—giving me nearly all her allowance. Maude, old girl: I’m afraid we young fellows are terribly selfish beasts. Look here,” he cried, excitedly, to hide the tears that would come into his eyes, “I tell you what; I can get half a dozen fellows together who’ll help me burke old Wilters if you’ll say the word.”

“Don’t be foolish, Tom dear,” sighed Maude. “I must go now to papa. I want to stay with him all day. Thank you, dear Tom; be kind to him when I’m gone.”

“That I will, dear,” he said; and, embracing him fondly, Maude hurried away out of the room.

“Tom,” said Tryphie, coming behind him as he stood, rather moist of eye, gazing after her.

“Tryphie,” he cried excitedly, facing round, “I feel such a scoundrel; and as if I ought to put a stop to this cursed marriage. Here’s a set out: she detests him, that’s evident; and if Charley Melton had been a trump, hang me if he shouldn’t have had her. Curse it all! her ladyship’s too bad. There, I can’t stand it, and must be off. This place chokes me—What were you going to say!”

“I was only going to say, Tom,” she said, softly, “that I’m very sorry I’ve behaved so unkindly to you sometimes, and snubbed you, and been so spiteful.”

“Don’t say any more about it, Tryphie,” said the little fellow, sadly. “I’d forgive you a hundred times as much for being so good to the old man. Good-bye, Tryphie, I’m off.”

“But you’ll come back for the wedding, Tom!”

“I’ll be there, somethinged if I do,” he said.

“What! See a second sister sold by auction?—Knocked down by my lady to the highest bidder? No, that I won’t. I can’t, I tell you. Hang it all, Tryphie, you chaff me till I feel sore right through sometimes. I’m a little humbug of a fellow, but I’ve got some feeling.”

“Yes, Tom,” said Tryphie, looking at him strangely, though he did not see it. “But I was going to say something else to you.”

“Well, look sharp then,” he said. “What is it!”

“Only, Tom, that I don’t think I ever quite knew you before; and you have pleased me so by what you said to poor Maude.”

“Tryphie!” he cried, with his eyes sparkling.

“Yes, Tom, dear,” she said, looking up in his face. “Don’t let aunt marry me to any one.”

“If I do!” he cried, clasping her in his arms, and her pretty little rosebud of a mouth was turned up to his for the kiss that was placed there, just as the drawing-room door opened, and her ladyship sailed in to stand as if petrified.

“Lord Diphoos! Tryphie!” she cried in a deep contralto. “What are you doing?”

“Kissing,” said Tom. “It’s done this way,” and he imprinted half a dozen more kisses upon Tryphie’s frightened little face before she struggled from him, and ran out by another door.

“Have the goodness, sir, to ring that bell,” said her ladyship, laying her hand upon her side, and tottering to an easy-

chair. “I cannot talk to you about your conduct now—your wickedness—your riot and debauchery—my mind is too full of what is about to take place; but as you are going away to-day, I must tell you that you can return here no more until Tryphie is married. I will not have her head filled full of wicked nonsense by so unprincipled a young man.”

“Yes, I am a very bad one, mother,” said Tom, quietly; “but don’t make yourself uncomfortable. I am not going away.”

“Not going away?” shrieked her ladyship. “Ah, who is that?” she continued, without turning her head.

“Robbins, my lady.”

“Oh, Robbins, send Justine to me.”

“Yes, my lady,” said the butler, retiring.

“I’m going to stop and see Maude turned off, if old Wilters don’t have a paralytic stroke on his way to church.”

“Tom!”

“Well, it’s likely enough. He’s only about forty, but he has lived twice as fast as most fellows ever since he was fifteen, so that he’s quite sixty-five.”

“I will not listen to your insults, sir. As your mother, I should at least be spared.”

“Oh, ah, of course,” said Tom, “duty to grey hairs and that sort of thing—Beg pardon though; I see they are not grey. I’m going to stop it all out now, and I shan’t go—and what’s more, mamma,” he cried, nursing one of his little patent leather shoes as he lolled back, “if you are cantankerous, hang me if I don’t contrive that the governor has the full run of the wine at the wedding breakfast, there.”

“If you dare, Tom!” cried her ladyship. “Oh, Justine, my drops.”

“Yes, milady,” said that damsel. “Ah! bold, bad lil man,” she added to herself, as she glanced at Tom, who very rudely winked at her when she closed the door after Lord Barmouth, who crept in and went timidly to an easy-chair.

“Your drops!” said Tom. “Ha—ha—ha! why don’t you take a liqueur of brandy like a woman, and not drink that stuff.”

“Tom,” said her ladyship, “you are too coarse. You will break my heart before you have done. Only to think of your conduct,” she cried, glancing at the chair in the farther room, where Lord Barmouth lay apparently asleep, as being his safest course when there was trouble on the way, “that too of your dozy, dilatory father, when one of you might make a position in Parliament, the other a most brilliant match.”

“Why, you don’t want the old man to take another wife, do you?” said Tom. “I say, dad! Here, I say: wake up.”

“Silence, sir, how dare you!” exclaimed his mother. “You wicked, offensive boy. I was, for your benefit, trying to point out to you how you might gain for yourself a first-rate establishment, when you interrupted me with your ribald jests.”

“Hang the establishment!” said Tom; “any one would think you were always getting your children into trade. I shall marry little Tryphie, if she’ll have me. I’m not going to marry for money. Pretty sort of a fellow I look for making a brilliant match, don’t I?”

“Oh, Tom, Tom, Tom,” said her ladyship, bursting into tears, “you will break your poor mother’s heart.”

“Not I,” said Tom, cynically; “it’s not one of the heart-breaking sort. But I say, you’ve made Diana miserable, and Maude half crazy, and now I hope you are happy. Tell you what, I shouldn’t be at all surprised now if it’s through you that Charley Melton is going to the bad. If so, you’ve done it and no mistake.”

“I am surprised that your father allows you to talk to me like this,” said her ladyship. “I never knew a son so wanting in respect.”

“Dad’s asleep; don’t wake him,” said Tom; “the old man’s about tired out.”

A snore from the easy-chair endorsed Tom’s words, and he sat smiling at his mother, knowing from old experience that she would not go away till he had done criticising her conduct in his rough and ready style.

“I shudder when I think of poor Maude’s escape,” said her ladyship. “Nothing could be more disgraceful than that young man’s conduct. He sees at last though that he cannot marry Maude, and that it would be little short of a crime, so he—”

“Stands out of it,” said Tom. “Hang me if I would, if any one was to try to cut in after Tryphie.”

“Once for all, Tom,” said her ladyship, “I desire that you cease that nonsensical talk about your cousin. Tryphie will marry when I select a husband for her.”

“Oh, of course!” said Tom; “but look here—two can play at that game.”

“Will you have the goodness to explain what you mean, sir?”

“Yes,” said Tom, taking out and counting his money. “Let me see,—about two pounds ten, I should say. I dare say old Wilters would lend me a fiver, if I asked him.”

“Tom,” cried her ladyship, excitedly, “if you dared to do such a thing I should never survive the disgrace. For my sake don’t ask him—at all events not yet. There, there,” she cried hastily, “there’s a five-pound note. Now, my dear boy, for

your mother's and sister's sake, do not do anything foolish for twenty-four hours. Only twenty-four hours, I implore you."

"Thankye," said Tom, taking the note and crumpling it up, as he stuffed it into his trousers pocket. "All right, then: I'll wait twenty-four hours."

"What—what do you want the money for?" said her ladyship, adopting now the *tremolo* stop to play her son, as the *furioso* had proved so futile.

"I'm going to buy a revolver," said Tom, kicking up one leg as if he were dancing a child upon it.

"A revolver, Tom? You are not going to do anything rash—anything foolish?"

"What! Operate on myself? Not such a fool. I'd sweep a crossing to live, not blow my brains out if I were what people call ruined. I'm philosopher enough, mother, to know the value of life. Do you wish to know what I want that revolver for?"

"Yes," said her ladyship, faintly; "but pray mind that your poor papa does not get hold of it."

"Oh, yes," said Tom. "Well, mother, I'm going to stick up a lot of playing cards in my bedroom, and practice at the spots till I'm a dead shot."

"Great Heavens, Tom! what for?"

"So as to be able to make it warm for the man who comes after Tryphie. Ah, Justine, got the drops? Why, you grow handsomer than ever."

"Go, impudent little man," said Justine, shaking her head at him, and then running to her ladyship, who was lying back with closed eyes. "Ah, poor, dear milady, you are ill."

"My drops, Justine, my drops," sighed her ladyship. "Ah, Justine, what comfort you are to me in my sorrows. My good Justine, never pray to be a mother;" and she showed her best teeth in a pensive smile of sadness by way of recompense for the attention.

"*Ma foi*! no, milady, I never will," said Justine, turning very French for the moment, and her ladyship's drops produced more tears.

Tom "made a face" at the maid while her ladyship's eyes were buried in her scented handkerchief, and Justine gave him a Parisian smile as he rose, winked once more, and left the room.

Then Lady Barmouth took up her lament once more.

"Ah! Justine, when the gangrene of the wounds in my poor heart has been cicatrised over, I may perhaps breathe forgiveness into the ears of my children; but now—oh now—"

"Ah, poor milady! what you do suffer," said the sympathising Justine; "you make me so much to think of that poor Job, only he was a great lord and not a lady, and you have not the boil."

"My poor Justine," sighed her ladyship, as she smiled patronisingly at the innocence of her handmaiden, "there are moral and social boils as well as those external, and when I sit here alone, forsaken by my children—by my husband—by all who should be dear, left alone to the tender sympathies of an alien who is all probity and truth—"

"Yes, poor milady, I suffer for you," said Justine.

"Thanks, good Justine, you faithful creature," said her ladyship, sighing; "I could not exist if it were not for you."

And Justine said to herself maliciously, "I am what that wicked young man calls a hom-bogues."

Chapter Twenty Two.

Lady Maude goes Mad.

Meanwhile Maude had sought Lord Barmouth, whom she surprised in a corner of the library, feeding his wolf and studying the wing of a chicken, which he was picking with great gusto. He did not hear her entry, and he was talking to himself as he lifted up and smelt his pocket-handkerchief.

"Yes," he muttered; "damme, that's what it is. I could not make out what made the chicken taste so queer. He—he—he! it's eau de Cologne. He—he—he—*Poulet à la Jean Marie Farina*. Damme, that'll be a good thing to say at the next dinner-party, or to-morrow morning. No," he said sadly, "not then. Oh, dear, it's very hard to see them taken away from me like this, and I must get my strength up a bit. Who's that?"

"It is only I, papa," said Maude, seating herself on the hearthrug by his side, as the old man hastily popped the chicken bone out of sight.

"I'm glad to see you, my dear, glad to see you," said Lord Barmouth, patting her soft glossy head. "Maude, my pet, I can hardly believe that you are going away from me to-morrow."

"Pray, pray don't talk of it, dear papa," she faltered. "I've come to stay with you and talk to you; and you must tell me what to do, papa."

"Yes, yes, yes, my dear," he said, "I will; and you must be strong, and brave, and courageous, and not break down.

Her ladyship would be so upset, you see. Maudey, my darling, matrimony's a very different sort of thing to what we used to be taught, and read of in books. It isn't sentimental at all, my dear, it's real—all real—doosed real. There's a deal of trouble in this world, my darling, especially gout, which you women escape. It's very bad, my dear, very bad indeed, sometimes."

Maude's forehead wrinkled as she gazed piteously at her father, for her heart was full to overflowing, and she longed to confide in him, to lay bare the secrets of her laden breast; but his feeble ways—his wanderings—chilled the current that was beating at the flood-gates, and they remained closed.

"What can I do—what can I do?" she moaned to herself, and laying her head upon the old man's knee, she drew his arm round her neck, and wept silently as he chatted on.

"I—I—I remember, my dear, when Lady Susan Spofforth was married, she was the thinnest girl I ever saw, and they said she hated the match—it was Lord Barleywood she married—Buck Wood we used to call him at the club. Well, next time I saw her, about three years after, I hardly knew her, she had grown so plump and round. It's—it's—it's an astonishing thing, Maudey, how plump some women do get after marriage. Look at her ladyship. Doosed fine woman. Don't look her age. Very curious, damme, yes, it is curious, I've never got fat since I was married. Do you know, Maudey, I think I'm thinner than I used to be."

"Do you, papa?" she said, smiling up at him.

"Yes, my dear, I do indeed; but it don't matter much, and I don't think her ladyship minds. Let me see, Sir Grantley's coming to dinner to-day, isn't he, my dear?"

"Yes, papa."

"Ha! yes! A good dinner's a nice thing when you can enjoy it free and unfettered, but it's like matrimony, my dear, full of restrictions, and very disappointing when you come to taste it. Well, there, there, there, now we have had our little talk and confidences, we will go upstairs to the drawing-room. It will be more cheerful for you."

He rose, taking his child's hand, kissing it tenderly, and holding it before he drew it through his arm, while Maude sighed gently, and suffered herself to be led upstairs.

Her ladyship was better, and she smiled with a sweetly pathetic expression in her countenance as Maude entered with her father, rising, and crossing to meet them, and kissing her child upon her forehead.

"Bless you, my darling!" she said; "pray be happy in the knowledge that you are doing your duty. Go now, Justine."

"Yes, my lady," said that sphinx; and as soon as they were alone her ladyship continued—

"Yes, in the thought that you are doing your duty. At your age I too had my little love romance, but I was forced to marry your poor papa."

"Oh, damn it, my dear!" cried his lordship, looking at his wife aghast; "I was forced to marry you."

"Barmouth! That will do! Maude, my child, I begged Sir Grantley to come and dine with us *en famille* this evening."

"Oh, mamma!" cried Maude, "was that wise?"

"Trust me, my dear, for doing what is best," said her ladyship.

There was a great bouquet of flowers on the table, which was littered with presents from the bridegroom elect, and family friends; but Maude did not seem to heed them, only the flowers, which she picked up, and as Lady Barmouth smiled and shook her head at her husband, Maude went and sat down by the open window, to begin picking the petals to pieces and shower them down. Some fell fluttering out into the area; some littered her dress and the carpet; and some were wafted by the wind to a distance; but Maude's mind seemed far away, and her little white fingers performed their task of destroying her present, as her head sank down lower and lower, bowed down by its weight of care.

It was autumn, and the shades of evening were falling, and so were Maude's spirits; hence a tear fell from time to time upon the flowers, to lie amidst the petals like a dew-drop; but they fell faster as her ladyship uttered an impatient cry, for just then the black-bearded Italian stopped beneath the window, swung round his organ, and began to grind out dolefully the *Miserere* once more and its following melody from *Trovatore*, the whole performance sounding so depressing in her nervous state that the poor girl's first inclination was to bury her face in her hands, and sob as if her heart would break. She set her teeth though firmly, glanced back in the room, and then, smiling down at the handsome simple face beneath her, she threw a sixpence which the man caught in his soft hat.

"Grazie, signora," said the Italian, smiling and showing his white teeth.

"Maude, how can you be so foolish?" cried her ladyship. "You have encouraged those men about till it's quite dreadful: we never have any peace."

"Poor fellows!" said Maude, "they seem very glad of a few pence, and they are far away from home."

"Yes," said her ladyship, "where they ought to be sent back."

"I remember once," said Lord Barmouth, "in the old days when they used to have moving figures dancing in front of their organs, one of Lady Betty Lorimer's daughters actually got—he, he, he! carrying on a clandestine correspondence with one of those handsome vagabonds."

Maude looked at her father in a startled way.

"Barmouth, be silent," cried her ladyship, as the butler entered the room with a fresh present upon a tray. "Robbins," she said, "go downstairs and tell that man that he will be given into custody if he does not go away directly. Tell him

some one is ill,”—for just then a fresh strain was ground out in a most doleful fashion, and Maude began softly humming the air to herself as she gazed down, still in the man’s handsome face.

“Some one ill, my lady?”

“Yes; I am ill. You should have sent him away without orders.”

“I did try to dismiss him, my lady, when he came,” said the butler.

“Well, and what did he say?”

“Only smiled, my lady.”

“But did you say that the police should be sent to him?”

“Yes, my lady, but he only smiled the more; and then,” continued the butler, lowering his voice as he glanced at where Maude stood outside, “he pointed up to the drawing-room window here, and wouldn’t go. If you please, my lady,” he continued in an undertone, “he never will go while Lady Maude gives him money.”

“That will do: go away,” said her ladyship, sighing; and Lord Barmouth got up and toddled towards the window to look down and elicit a fresh series of bows from the Italian, who kept on playing till the window was closed, when he directed his attention to the area, where a couple of the maids were looking up at him, ready to giggle and make signs to him to alter the tune.

Tom came back into the drawing-room just as her ladyship had closed the window and sent Lord Barmouth back to a chair, where he sat down to rub his leg. Tryphie came back a few minutes later to glance timidly at her aunt, who, however, thought it better to ignore the past for the time being, fully meaning, though, to take up poor Tryphie’s case when her mind was more free.

“Will you come and see the dress that has just come in?” said Tryphie to Maude, who was sitting gazing dreamily out of the window.

“No,” she said, “no.”

“My dear child,” cried her ladyship, “pray, pray take a little interest in your dresses.”

“I cannot, mamma,” cried Maude, passionately. “I have not the heart.”

“Bah, Maude!” cried Tom, “be a trump, I say. When you are married and have got your establishment, I’d jolly soon let some one know who was mistress then.”

“Tom, your language is disgraceful,” cried her ladyship. “It is as low and disrespectful as that of the people in the street.”

“I wish your treatment of your children were half as good. Here’s every shilling a fellow wants screwed out, till I feel as if I should like to enlist; and as for Maudey here, you’ve treated her as if she were a piece of sculpture, to be sold to the highest bidder. I suppose she has not got a heart.”

“Lord Barmouth!” exclaimed her ladyship, faintly, as she lay back in her chair, and lavishly used her smelling-salts, “if one of my brothers had spoken to dear mamma as that boy speaks to me, dear papa would have felled him to the earth.”

“There you are, gov’nor, there’s your chance,” said Tom, grinning. “Come and knock me down, but don’t bruise your knuckles, for my head’s as hard as iron.”

Lord Barmouth took out his pocket-handkerchief, and wiped his hands upon it, not noticing that it was stained with gravy, gazing in a troubled way from wife to son, and back, and then crossed to the former to say something in a whisper, to which her ladyship replied—

“Pshaw.”

“Thank you, Tom,” whispered Tryphie, as he went to the window where she stood. “I did not think you could stand up so bravely for your sister, and be so true.”

“Didn’t you?” said Tom, sulkily. “It’s a good job I can be true, for I don’t believe there’s a spark of truth anywhere else in the world. If Charley had had the spirit of a fly, he’d have come and walked her off. Hang it all! I’m mad and savage. Pretty sort of a husband you’ve got for her. Pretty sort of a brother-in-law to have! I’m ashamed of him. I’m only a little one, and nothing to boast of, but he’s no better than a pantaloon. Truth indeed! There isn’t such a thing in the world.”

“Oh, Tom!” whispered Tryphie.

“More there isn’t,” cried Tom. “Pretty brother-in-law indeed!”

“Maude,” exclaimed her ladyship, “I think you might have a word to say on behalf of your intended husband.”

The girl glanced at her in a stony way, and turned once more to the window, where she had been looking out with Tryphie, listening with aching heart to the encounter between mother and son.

“Such a brilliant match as I have made,” cried her ladyship, harping on her old string. “And such opposition as I have from the girl who owes me so much.”

“Indeed, mamma, I have yielded everything. You are having your own way entirely,” said Maude passionately.

“Have I not saved you from throwing yourself away upon a disreputable creature?” sobbed her ladyship.

“Tryphie,” whispered Maude, “I cannot bear this. It is dreadful. I feel as if I should go mad.”

“He saw plainly enough,” whined her ladyship, “that it could not be—that it would have been a complete *misalliance*.”

“This is unbearable,” whispered Maude, clasping her cousin’s hand, which pressed hers warmly and encouragingly, as they stood in the window recess, half screened by the heavy curtains.

“Try not to listen, dear,” whispered Tryphie.

“It nearly maddens me. I feel as if I could do anything wicked and desperate.”

“Oh, hush, hush, dear,” whispered Tryphie; and Lady Barmouth maundered on in tones asking for sympathy, as she set herself up as the suffering ill-used mother whom no one tried to comfort in her distress.

“Saved you as I did from a life of misery,” continued her ladyship, whimpering. “Oh, dear! oh, dear! how children strive to throw themselves away.”

Maude moaned, and held her hand to her side.

“Are you ill, dear?” whispered Tryphie.

“No, no,” was the reply. “It is past now—past.”

“I shall be sorry when you are gone, Maude,” said her father simply.

“Oh, papa, papa,” she cried, running to him and throwing her arms round his neck; for the tenderly-spoken sympathetic words brought the tears to her eyes. Then, unable to bear it, she turned to leave the room, but just then the door opened and the butler announced Sir Grantley Wilters.

“Ah, how do!” he said in a high-pitched voice, saluting all in turn, and bending low over Maude’s hand. “Thought I’d come soon, don’t you know, *sans cérémonie*, eh, mamma!” he said with a smile to Lady Barmouth, and then gave his glass a screw, and brought it to bear on all present.

“I am so glad,” said her ladyship; “so is Maude; but don’t take any notice,” she whispered. “Poor child, she is *distrait*, and seems cold. So deeply attached to Lord Barmouth. Ready to break her heart at leaving him.”

“Yas, oh, yas,” said Sir Grantley; and he took his seat beside Maude.

“Tryphie,” said Tom, “I can’t help it. I must be off. This fellow makes me ill. May I go?”

She gave him a nod of intelligence, and he said something about being ready for dinner, and left the room to go out, take a hansom, and bowl down to one of the clubs, where he was soon so busily engaged in a game of pool that he forgot all about the dinner.

Very shortly after, Maude rose, bowed to Sir Grantley, and left the room with Tryphie, when the baronet crossed to Lady Barmouth’s side, and was soon engaged in a most interesting conversation, whose murmur sent Lord Barmouth into a pleasant slumber, out of sight in a lounging chair, where he was quite forgotten, when her ladyship suggested that Sir Grantley should go with her to her boudoir to see the last new presents sent in for Maude.

“And you would like to wash your hands, too, before dinner,” said her ladyship. “We will not trouble about dressing to-night.”

Sir Grantley opened the door, and the old gentleman was left alone to wake up about a quarter of an hour later to find it was dark, and sit up rubbing his leg.

“Oh, damme, my leg,” he said, softly. “Where—where are they all gone? Why it’s—it’s past dinnertime,” he said, looking at his watch by the dim light. “I shall be doosed glad when everybody’s married and—and—and—why the doose doesn’t the dressing-bell ring? Heigh—oh—ha—hum!” he added, yawning. “There’s—there’s—there’s another of those abominable organs. I—I—I wish that all the set of them were at the bottom of the sea, for I lie at night with all their tunes coming back again, and seeming to grind themselves to fit the pains in my leg. Poor girl! she was always encouraging the fellows. Why dear me! Damme, haven’t I got a single sixpence left to give him, to go away. No, that I haven’t,” he continued fumbling, “not a sou. She—she—she does keep me short,” he muttered, opening the French window and looking out. “Oh, he’s done playing now, so I shan’t want the money. Why eh—eh—eh? Why—he—he, he! the fellow’s talking to one of the maids. He—he—he! Hi—hi—hi! They will do it. I—I—I was a devil of a fellow amongst the girls when I was a young man; but now—oh, dear, oh dear! this wind seems to give me tortures, that it does.”

He closed the window, but stood looking out.

“You’d better take care, you two, that my lady don’t catch you, or there’ll be such a devil of a row. He’s—he’s going down into the area. Well, well, well, I shan’t tell tales. He—he—he! Hi—hi—hi!” he chuckled, sitting down and nursing his leg. “I remember when I was about twenty, and Dick Jerrard and I—he’s Lord Marrowby now, and a sober judge!—when we got over the wall at a boarding-school to see pretty Miss Vulliamy. Oh, dear, dear, dear, those were days. They preach and talk a deal now about being wicked, but it was very nice. I used to be a devil of a wicked fellow when I was young, and—and flirted terribly, while lately I’ve been as good as gold, and, damme, I haven’t been half so happy.”

He stopped rubbing his leg for a while.

“Everything’s at sixes and sevens, damme, that it is. I’m nearly famished, that I am. If it hadn’t been for that bit of chicken I should have been quite starved. Her ladyship’s too bad, that she is. Cold boiled sole, rice pudding, and half a glass of hock in a tumbler of water. I can’t stand it, that I can’t. Damme, I’ll make a good dinner to-night, that I will, if I die

for it. I'll—I'll—I'll, damme, I'll kick over the traces for once in a way. Tom will help me, I know. He's a good boy, Tom is, and he'll see that I have a glass of port, and—damme, where's Maude and her ladyship, and why isn't dinner ready? and—eh—what?—what the devil's that. There's something wrong."

For at that moment a piercing shriek rang through the house, and there was the sound of a heavy fall upon the floor.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Tom Diphoos stays out Late.

"Half thought I should have seen Charley Melton here; perhaps he has started for Italy after all," said Tom, who had gone straight to Barker's and engaged in a game of pool. "Might have stirred him up, but he don't seem to mind it a bit. Well, no wonder, seeing how he was treated."

"Red upon white; yellow's your player," said the marker, and Tom went up to make the stroke required of him; then he turned once more to glance at the table next to him, and watched two or three of the bets made.

"Past ten," he said to himself, glancing at his watch. "That's getting back to dinner. Never mind, I'm not the party wanted by her ladyship. Charley must have known she was to be married to-morrow. I liked him too," he said, gazing at the players. "He's a big, strong, noble-looking fellow. Ah, well! I suppose that's because I'm little. One mustn't go by outside appearances. Perhaps it's all for the best."

Just then a friend proposed that they should drop in at one of the theatres and see the new burlesque; and after a little hesitation Tom consented to go. After this a kidney had to be eaten at a tavern; so that it was one o'clock when he reached home, to find the lights burning, and a cluster of servants in the hall.

"Hallo, Robbins, what's up? House on fire?" he cried, as the butler admitted him, looking very solemn and troubled.

"No, my lord. Oh, dear no."

"Don't be an old image. What is it? Sir Grantley had a fit?"

"My young lady, my lord," said the butler in a solemn, mysterious whisper.

"Not ill—not ill?" cried Tom, excitedly.

"No, my lord," said the butler, "not ill, but—"

"Confound you, you great pump. Speak out," cried Tom, angrily.

"Gone, my lord—been missing hours. Her ladyship has been having fit after fit, and his lordship is 'most beside himself."

"Bolted!" exclaimed Tom; and, running into the dining-room, he threw himself into a chair and laughed till his sides ached.

"Poor Wilters! oh, Lord, what a game! Cut!—skimmed!"

He got up, and stamped round the room in the very ecstasy of delight, "The little smug hypocrite!" he said. "That's why she was so sanctified and sad to-day. Well, bless her, I like her pluck. Sold, my lady, sold!"

He suddenly woke up to the fact that he ought to go upstairs, and, turning serious, he walked into the hall.

"Where's her ladyship, Robbins?" he asked.

"Upstairs, my lord."

"Where's Sir Grantley?"

"Went out, my lord, about ten, to find that tail, straight man, sir, as came—Mr Hurkle."

"And he hasn't found him?"

"No, my lord, I s'pose not."

"Good job too," said Tom, shortly, and running upstairs he entered the drawing-room so suddenly that her ladyship, who was lying upon a sofa, being fanned by Tryphie, began to shriek.

"There, don't make that row, mother," said Tom, coarsely. "Hang it all, what a smell of lavender!"

"Is that you, Tom?" sobbed her ladyship, as Justine came in with a bottle of hot water to apply to her mistress' feet.

"I suppose so, unless I was changed at my birth," he said, laughing at Tryphie, and then giving his father a free-and-easy nod. "Spirits and water—internal and ex."

"Oh, my boy, your wicked, wicked sister!" sobbed her ladyship.

"Serve you right," said Tom.

“Such a wanton disgrace to her family.”

“Of course,” said Tom.

“I shall never get over it.”

“Shouldn’t have tried to make the poor girl marry a man that she did not care a curse for.”

“Oh, but, Tom, Tom!” sobbed Tryphie, “this is too dreadful.”

“Stuff!” cried Tom. “I’ll be bound to say that you were in the secret.”

“Indeed, no,” cried Tryphie, reproachfully. “I did not know a word. I had left her in her room, as I thought, to dress, and when I went to fetch her because dinner was waiting she was gone.”

“Tell him, Justine, for mercy’s sake tell him,” wailed her ladyship.

“Yes, poor milady, I will,” said the Frenchwoman. “Miss Tryphie knocked many time, and I ascend the stairs then, and she say she begin to be alarmed that mademoiselle was ill. We enter then togezzer, and we find—”

“Nothing,” said Tom, coolly.

“Oh, no, monsieur, all her beautiful dresses, ze trousseau magnifique, lying about the room, but she is not there. Then I recollect that I see somebody pass down ze stair, in a black cloak and veil, but I take no notice then, though I think now it must have been my young lady.”

“But you knew she was going,” said Tom, gazing straight into her eyes, which only shone a little brighter, for they did not shrink.

“I know, monsieur?” she replied. “I know, I come straight to tell milady of ze outrage against ze honour of her family. *Parole d’honneur* no, I know nozing as ze lil *bébé* which come not to be born.”

This was said at a tremendous pace, and with a very strong French accent, for, as Mademoiselle Justine grew excited, so did she forget her good English, and began to return towards the language of the land of her birth.

“What’s been done?” said Tom, shortly.

“Aunt sent directly for Mr Hurkle, and then Sir Grantley went after him as well.”

“Curse Mr Hurkle,” cried Tom, and he hurried out of the room, and dashed, two steps at a time, downstairs, and nearly tumbled over one of the footmen, who looked quite scared.

“You’re always in the way,” cried Tom, savagely, and he dashed into the library, where he found Lord Barmouth busy with trembling hands examining a very old pair of flintlock duelling pistols.

“Hallo, dad!” cried Tom, “none of that. You’re not tired of life?”

“No, no, my son,” said the old gentleman; “damme, no, Tom, though it does get very hard sometimes. Tom, my boy, I’m going to find him out and shoot him.”

Tom slammed down the lid of the case, and pushed the old gentleman unresistingly back into an easy-chair.

“Now, look here, gov’nor, let’s talk sense,” he cried.

“Yes, my dear boy, I—I—I’m doosed glad you’ve come. We will—we will.”

“It’s true then, gov’nor, that poor Maude has bolted?”

“Well, yes, my boy, I don’t think there’s a doubt about it.”

“Then that’s all your fault, gov’nor,” said Tom.

“My dear boy, don’t you turn upon me and bully me too. I—I—I’ve lost my poor little girl, and I—I—I can’t bear much. It’s such a disgrace. I know I ought to have stood up for her more, Tom, my boy, but her ladyship is so very strong-minded, you know.”

“Yes, I know,” said Tom. “She was too much for both of us, gov’nor. Well, it’s no use to fret about it that I see. The little filly’s taken the bit in her teeth, topped the hedge, and away she’s gone. And she so sly over it too!”

“She was very sorry to go, Tom, I’m sure. She was in such trouble to-day.”

“Yes,” said Tom, quietly, “we ought to have suspected something. How about old Wilters?”

“He’s nearly mad, my boy. He has—has—has been running round—round the drawing-room like—like—like—”

“A cat on hot bricks, father.”

“Yes, my son. He’s furious—he’s going to kill him.”

“Yes, of course,” said Tom, grinning. “I should like to see him do it.”

“But—but—but, Tom, my boy, don’t take it quite so coolly.”

“Why not, father? Hallo? who’s this, eh? Oh, of course,” he said, “here are the women now.”

For her ladyship came in leaning upon Tryphie’s arm, to immediately shriek and fall back in a chair.

“Oh, Tom! oh, Tom,” she cried, “I shall never survive. The disgrace—the disgrace.”

“Nonsense. Here, father, Tryphie, Maude has gone off with Charley Melton, I suppose?”

“No, no, no!” shrieked her ladyship. “Oh, horror, horror, horror!”

“Tryphie, cork her mouth with a handkerchief, or they’ll hear her across the street. Here, father, what’s the row. Charley Melton, eh?”

“No—no—no, my dear boy,” stammered Lord Barmouth, “I—I—I—damme, though her ladyship’s here, I say it in her presence, I wish she had. It’s too dreadful to tell.”

“My God, father!” cried Tom, excitedly, as he turned pale, and the cold sweat stood upon his forehead, for like a flash came upon him the recollection of his sister’s words that day, and brought up such a picture of horror before his eyes, that he trembled like a leaf. “Don’t say—don’t tell me—”

He could not finish, but stood panting, and gazing at the horror-stricken face of his mother.

“No, my boy, I won’t if you don’t want me to,” said the old man, feebly; “but it’s—it’s—such a terrible disgrace.”

“Father,” faltered Tom, in a hoarse whisper, “has she—has she drowned herself?”

“Oh, no, my boy, no—no—no,” cried the old man, with the tears streaming down his cheeks. “She has eloped under disgraceful circumstances.”

“Not with one of the servants, father?” cried Tom.

“No, no, my boy, worse than that.”

“Hang it, father,” cried Tom, savagely, “there is no worse, without she has gone off with a sweep.”

“Yes, yes, my boy,” cried the old man. “She has gone off with an organ-grinder and a monkey!”

“Which?” roared Tom, seizing the poker; “it isn’t murder to kill an ape.”

“No, no, my boy, it’s the organ man. I saw him from the window to-night. I don’t think there was a monkey.”

Tom threw the poker into the fire-place with a crash, and stared blankly at his mother.

“Oh, Tom! oh, Tom!” she cried, hysterically, “the disgrace!—the disgrace!—the disgrace!”

“I—I—I don’t know what to do,” cried Lord Barmouth. “I can never stand it. It will be all the talk of the clubs. It’s—it’s—it’s—it’s—”

“It’s all damned nonsense, father!” cried Tom; “my sister isn’t such a fool.”

Chapter Twenty Four.

Tom assumes Command.

Ten minutes after Tom was busy trying to obtain some further information, after seeing his father comfortably settled down in the study with a good cigar and a pint bottle of port.

“May—may I have ’em, Tom, my boy?” he asked.

“Yes, yes, old gentleman,” said Tom. “Mamma really is ill now, and won’t interfere, and if it gives you a few twinges of the gout, hang it all, it will be a counter irritant.”

This was after Lady Barmouth had been assisted off to bed.

“Hold up, my little lassie,” Tom said, pressing Tryphie’s hand. “Hang me if you aren’t the only one left with a head upon your shoulders. You must help me all you can.”

“I will, Tom,” she said, returning the pressure; and he felt that any one else’s pretensions from that moment were cast to the winds.

“One moment,” whispered Tom, as Lady Barmouth was moaning on the stairs, half-way up the first flight of which she was seated, with her head resting on Justine’s shoulder. “You think there’s no mistake—Maude has bolted?”

“Yes, I have been to her room, and she has taken her little Russia bag.”

“But you don’t believe this absurd nonsense that they have got hold of?”

“I can’t, Tom,” she said; “but she has been very strange in her ways for some time past.”

“Enough to make her,” said Tom. “The old lady would drive me mad if she had her own way with me. There, be off and get her upstairs to bed while I see what’s to be done.”

Tryphie went up, and Tom entered the dining-room, developing an amount of firmness and authority that startled the butler into a state of abnormal activity.

“Now, Robbins,” he said, “look here: of course you know this absurd statement that has been going round the house, and that it’s all nonsense.”

“Well, my lord,” said, the butler, “Lady Maude has encouraged that sort of man about the place lately.”

“Confound you for a big pompous, out-of-livery fool!” cried Tom, bringing his hand down with a crash upon the table. “There, fetch all the servants in, quick.”

Robbins stared, and felt disposed to give notice to leave upon the spot, but Tom’s way mastered him, and, feeling “all of a work,” as he confided afterwards to the cook, he hurried out, and soon after the whole staff was assembled in the dining-room, Justine having been fetched from her ladyship’s side.

“Now then,” cried Tom, opening his informal court. “Who knows anything about this?”

“Please, m’lord,” said Henry, the snub-nosed little foot page, florid with buttons, and fat from stolen sweets, “I see a man playing the organ outside to-night.”

“So you did yesterday, and the day before.”

“Yes, m’lord,” said the boy, eagerly; “and I heard somebody go out.”

“Did you?” said Tom, politely. “Now, look here, my boy! If you dare to open that mouth of yours and get chattering to people this monstrous piece of nonsense, I’ll—I’ll, hang me, I’ll cut your ears off.”

The boy ducked and held one arm up, as if he expected to be attacked at once, and ended by taking refuge behind his best friend and greatest enemy—to wit, the cook.

“Speak, some of you, will you?” cried Tom. “Did any one see my sister go out?”

“If you please, my lord,” said the housemaid, “if I may make so bold—”

“Yes,” said Tom, with sarcastic politeness, “you may make so bold. Now go on.”

“Well, I’m sure,” muttered the woman. “Well, my lord, I was going upstairs to-night, and I heard my young mistress sobbing bitterly in her room.”

“Well,” said Tom, “and you stopped to listen.”

“Which I wouldn’t bemean myself to do anything of the kind,” said the woman with a toss of the head; “but certainly she was crying, and soon after I was a-leaning out of the second floor window, it being very ’ot indoors, as we’ve been a good deal ’arrissed lately by her ladyship.”

“Go on,” cried Tom, impatiently.

“Which I am, my lord, as fast as I can,” cried the woman; “and there was that tall handsome Italian gentleman, as cook thinks is a furrin’ nobleman in disguise, playing on his hinstrument.”

“Yes,” said Tom, sarcastically.

“And all of a sudden he stops, and I see him go into the portico.”

“Oh, yes, of course,” said Tom.

“And then there was a lot of whispering.”

“Yes, yes,” said Tom; “oh, yes, of course.”

“And that’s all, my lord, only my young mistress wasn’t in the room when I came back.”

“Now then, all of you,” cried Tom, “once for all, this absurd rumour is one of the most ridiculous—What’s that you say?” he cried sharply, as he heard a whisper.

“I was saying to Ma’amselle Justine that my young lady was always encouraging them men about, my lord,” said the housemaid, “and that if I’d been one of the spying sort I might have seen her.”

“Poor thing,” said the cook, loudly. “She has been drove to it. I have a heart of my own.”

“Silence!” roared Tom. “How dare you? Here, has any one else got anything to say? You? Oh yes, you are my sister’s maid.”

“Yes, my lord,” said Dolly Preen, spitefully.

“Well, what do you know?”

“I know that my mistress was always listening at first to that dreadful Italian,” said Dolly.

“No, no—you, you,” cried Justine.

“I fought against it, and mastered it,” said Dolly proudly; “Lady Maude found it too much, I suppose.”

“Well, I never!” ejaculated Mrs Downes.

“Go on,” cried Tom.

“And then she got to dropping notes to him out of the window, my lord.”

“It isn’t true,” cried Tom. “Woman, you ought to be turned out of the house.”

“Oh, it’s true, though,” said Mrs Downes.

“Silence, you silly old meat murdress,” raged Tom.

“Meat what?” cried the cook. “There are times, my lord, when one must speak. I’ve seen a deal in my time, and there’s no doubt about it. We’re all very sorry for you, but we all knows that my young lady’s been drove to go away with that dark young man.”

“It is not true,” said a sharp voice; and Justine stepped forward to the table, with her dark eyes flashing, her white teeth set, so that she cut the words as they came through, and in her excitement and championship of her young mistress becoming exceedingly French. “I say it is not true. You *canaille* you, vis your silly talk about ze organiste. It is all a lie—a great lie to say such vicked, cruel thing of my dear young lady. Ah, bah! that for you all,” she cried, snapping her fingers, “you big silly fool, all the whole. What, my young mistress go to degrade herself vis one evasion, *comme ça*! She could it not do. Sare, I am angry—it make me *folle* to hear you talk. I say it is not true.”

“Damme, you’re a trump, Justine,” cried Tom, excitedly, as he caught her hand and wrung it. “You are right. She would not degrade herself like that.”

“They are so *stupide*.”

“Yes,” cried Tom; “and mind this—any one who dares to put about such a disgraceful scandal—hallo! who’s this?”

There was a loud ring just then, and the butler looked in a scared way at Tom.

“Well, go and open it,” he said.

The next minute there were voices and steps heard in the hall, and directly after Sir Grantley Wilters came in, followed by a policeman, and a ragged, dirty looking little man, whose toes peeped out in rows from his boots, and who held in his hand a very battered brimless hat, which he kept rubbing when he was not engaged in pulling his forelock to first one servant and then another.

“Oh, here you are,” said Tom, sharply, as the baronet advanced. “She’s gone off with Melton, hasn’t she?”

“N-no,” said the bridegroom elect, dejectedly. “I believe it’s as they say.”

“Then you’re a bigger fool than I took you for,” said Tom, sharply. “Now then, what do you know about it?” he cried to the policeman. “But stop a moment. Here, the whole pack of you, clear out. And mind this—Mademoiselle Justine is right. Thank you, Justine. Go to her ladyship now. I shan’t forget this.”

The Frenchwoman bowed and smiled, and drew her skirts aside as she swept out of the room, while the rest of the servants shuffled out in an awkward fashion, as if every one was eager not to be the last.

“Now then,” cried Tom to the policeman, as the baronet went to the chimney-piece to rest his head upon his hand, “why are you come?”

“This gentleman, sir,” said the constable, nodding his head at Sir Grantley, “asked me to take up the case. Been investigating, and I’ve got some evidence.”

“What is it?” cried Tom.

The constable led the way into the hall, where there was a rush, for the servants had been standing gazing at something near the door.

“Well?” said Tom.

“Thought I’d take a look round, sir,” said the constable, “to see if there was anything in the way of a clue, and I found this.”

He pointed to an oblong chest, covered with green baize, and with a couple of broad leather straps across it.

“Well, it’s an organ,” said Tom.

“Yes, sir,” said the constable nodding. “That’s just about what it is.”

Tom stared at the man, and the man stared at Tom, and then they returned to the dining-room.

“Where was it?” said Tom shortly.

“Just underneath the area steps, sir, close agin the dust-bin,” said the constable.

“Ought to have been in it,” cried Tom, sharply. “Now, who’s this fellow?”

The ragged man, who had been standing on one leg with the foot of the other against his knee, looking like a dilapidated crane, put his foot down and began to make tugs at his hair.

“Beg parding, sir, on’y a poor man, sir. Been pickin’ up a job or two, fetching up kebs and kerridges, sir—party, sir, over at three ’undred and nine, sir. I was a waitin’ about afore the swells began to come, when I sees a big tall man a-hangin’ about, lookin’ as if there was something on, so I goes into the doorway lower down and watches on him.”

“Had he got an organ with him?” said Tom excitedly.

“I heerd one a-playin’ just before, sir, and then I see him a-leaning agin the hairy railings, and arter a bit he seemed to chuck somethin’ up agin the winder and then walks off.”

“Well, go on, my man,” said Tom, eagerly.

“Then I didn’t think no more on it, sir, till all at once I sees a hansom come up and stop at the corner, and this same chap gets out, and that made me feel wild-like and take notice, ’cause it seemed as if I ought to have looked out sharper, and got the job.”

“All right; go on,” cried Tom.

“Well, sir, then he goes away and the keb waits and he walks by this here house, and begins whistling this chune as I’ve often heerd them orgin grinders play.”

The man sucked in his cheeks, and whistled three or four bars of the prison song in *Trovatore*.

“Then, as I kep my hye on him, I sees the front door open quietly, and a lady come out in a long cloak; and she seemed as if she was a-goin’ to faint away, but he kitches her tight, and half runs her along to wheer the keb was a-standin’, and I was ready for him this time, holding my arm over the wheel so as to keep the lady’s dress outer the mud.”

“Yes, yes,” cried Tom, for the man, who had kept on polishing his hat, dropped it and picked it up hastily, to begin repolishing it.

“Well, sir, she was a-cryin’ like one o’clock—in highsteriks like—and he says something to her in a furren languidge, and then, as she gets in he says, ‘Take keer,’ he says, called her by her name, like.”

“Name? What name?” cried Tom, eagerly.

“Well, you see, gov’nor, it sounded like Bella Meer, or Mee-her. ‘Take keer; Bella Mee-her,’ he says just like that.”

“Bella mia,” muttered Tom.

“Yes, sir, that’s it, sir; that were the young lady’s name; and then he jumps in, and I shoves down the apron, and he pokes the trap-door open, and away they goes down the Place like one o’clock.”

“Well?” said Tom.

“That’s about all, gov’nor,” said the man, looking into his dilapidated hat, and then lifting and peeping inside the lining, as if he expected to find some more there.

“No, it ain’t,” said the constable, “come now. He give you something, didn’t he?”

“Well, s’pose he did,” said the man, sulkily; “that ain’t got nothing to do with it, ’ave it? The gent don’t want to rob a pore man of his ’ard earnin’s, do he?”

“What did he give you, my man?” said Tom, eagerly, “There, there, show me. Not that it matters.”

“Yes, sir, excuse me, but it does matter,” said the constable. “Now then, out with it.”

The man thrust his hand very unwillingly into his pocket, and brought out what looked like a small shilling, which was eagerly snatched by Tom.

“Vittoria Emanuele—Lira. Why, constable, it’s an Italian piece!”

“That’s so, sir,” said the constable.

“There, be off with you; there’s half a crown for you,” said Tom. “Constable,” he cried, as the latter closed the door on the walking rag-bag, “quick, not a moment to be lost. That cabman’s number, and as soon as you can.”

“Right, sir; that’s first job,” said the constable. “You’ll be here?”

“Yes, till you come back. Spare no expense to get that number.”

The constable was off almost before the words had left his lips, and as the door closed Tom turned to Sir Grantley, who still stood with his head leaning upon his hand.

“Now then,” he said, “what are you going to do?”

“Don’t know,” was the reply.

“It looks bad,” said Tom, “but I won’t believe it yet.”

“No—poor girl,” said the baronet, sadly—“I’m beginning to think she didn’t care for me, don’t you know.”

Tom stared at him wonderingly.

“Are you going to help me run them down?”

“Yas—no—I don’t know,” said the baronet. “I suppose I ought to shoot that fellow—Belgium or somewhere—if there is a fellow. But I don’t think there is.”

“You don’t?” said Tom.

“No,” said the baronet, slowly.

“But you heard? She must have gone off with somebody. You know what the people think. If it is so, she must be saved at all costs.”

“Yas—of course,” said the baronet, slowly; “but—don’t think it. Poor girl, she was a lady—she couldn’t stoop to it—no—couldn’t—she’d sooner have married me.”

“Wilters,” said Tom, holding out his hand and speaking huskily, “thank you for that. We never liked one another, and I’ve been a confounded cad to you sometimes; but—but—you—you’re a gentleman, Wilters, a true gentleman.”

They shook hands in silence, and then Tom said eagerly—

“You’ll come with me?”

“Yas—no,” said the baronet, quietly. “It’s best not. All been a mistake, poor girl. I’ve been thinking about it all, and it wasn’t likely she’d care for me. Lady Barmouth is very flattering and kind; but I’ve driven your sister away.—I think I’ll go home now.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Tom, quietly.

“It’s very awkward,” continued the baronet, “things have gone so far. But I ought to have known better. Could you—a soda and brandy, Tom—this has shaken me a bit—I’m rather faint.”

The cellaret was open, stimulants having been fetched from it for her ladyship’s use, and Tom hastily poured out some spirit into one of the glasses on the sideboard, and handed it to the baronet.

“Thanks,” he said—“better now; I think I’ll go home;” and bowing quietly to Tom, he slowly left the house.

Chapter Twenty Five.

In Pursuit.

“Poor old Wilters,” said Tom, as he heard the door close. “I didn’t think he was such a thorough gentleman. But this won’t do.”

He was so wound up by the excitement, and the feeling that everything now depended upon him that he seemed to forget that there was such a thing as fatigue.

“Now, gov’nor,” he said, hurrying into the library, where the old man had finished his port and cigar, and then laid his head upon his hand to sit and think of the little fair-haired girl who had played about his knees, and who had, as it were, been driven from him, to go—whither? who could tell?

“Eh? yes, Tom,” said the old man.

“Quick as lightning, father. Clean linen and socks, brush and shaving tackle in a small bag, and we’re off—pursuit.”

“Pursuit, Tom, eh? Do you mean me?”

“Yes, you, of course,” said Tom.

“Hadn’t—hadn’t her ladyship better go, Tom?” said his lordship, feebly.

“Hang it, no, father. You and I go together.”

“But—but—but, Tom,” faltered the old man; and there was a lingering look of hope in his pathetic face; “it isn’t so bad as I thought, is it?”

“I don’t know, father, ’pon my soul, I can’t say, really. We’ll see. Poor Maude has been driven to this mad step by her ladyship, and it is possible—mind, I only say possible—that she may have preferred to accompany—no, damn it all, I’m as mad as she is, even Wilters don’t believe it. Father, no! no!! no!!! Wilters is right—my sister would not stoop to take such a step. She is a true lady.”

“Yes, Tom, God bless her, she is,” faltered the old man, “and I shall—shall about break my heart if I’m to lose my

darling.”

“Come, father, come, father,” cried the young man huskily. “This is no time for tears, you must act. Yes, and in future too. You see what giving way to her ladyship has done.”

“Yes, yes, my son,” said the old man. “I’ll rebel—I’ll strike for freedom.”

Tom smiled sadly as he gazed at his father; and then he rang the bell, which was responded to promptly by Robbins.

“Send up and ask her ladyship if she can see us. Then put a change of linen in one valise for his lordship and myself.”

The butler bowed, and returned at the end of five minutes to say that her ladyship was sitting up in her dressing-room if they would come.

Her ladyship looked really ill as she sat there, tended by Tryphie and Justine, and the latter moved towards the door.

“You need not go, Justine,” said Tom, quietly, and the Frenchwoman’s eyes sparkled at this token of confidence as she resumed her seat at her ladyship’s side.

Tom marked the change in his mother, and he was ready to condole with her, but she swept his kind intentions to the winds by exclaiming—

“Oh, Tom, I can never show my face in society again. Such a brilliant match too. My heart is broken.”

“Poor old lady!” said Tom, bursting into a sarcastic fit in his rage at her selfishness and utter disregard of the fate of her child. “But we want some money to go in search.”

“Money?” cried her ladyship. “Search? Not a penny. The wicked creature. And to-morrow. Such a brilliant match. Oh, that wicked girl!”

“No, no,” said Tom, “it was to be to-day. But don’t fret, *mia cara madre*, as we say in Italian. It is only a change. A fine handsome son-in-law, Italian too. You ought to be proud of him.”

“Tom!” cried her ladyship.

“Oh, milord Thomas, it is not so,” cried Justine, shaking her head.

“Oh yes,” cried Tom, sarcastically. “Such a nice change. You adore music, mamma, and the signor can attend your reunions with his instrument.”

“Tom, you are killing me. Oh, that I was ever a mother.”

“It will be grand,” cried Tom, rubbing his hands. “Maude can sing too, and take a turn at the handle when the signor gets tired.”

“Take what money you want, Tom,” sobbed her ladyship, and she handed her keys.

Tom smiled grimly, took the keys, and did take what money he wanted—all there was—from a small cabinet on a side table.

“Where—where are you going?” sighed her ladyship.

“Where!” said Tom, “everywhere. To bring poor Maude home.”

“No, no, Tom, impossible—impossible,” cried her ladyship.

“We’ll see about that,” said Tom. “Now, father, come along;” and the couple descended to the dining-room.

“Here, Robbins,” cried the young man, as the butler came to answer the bell, “what time is it?”

“Harpus four, my lord,” said the butler, who looked haggard and in want of a shave.

“Humph! Well, look here, we’ve gone on to Scotland Yard if that policeman returns.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And then—well, never mind about then. Here, go up and ask Miss Wilder to come and speak to me, and send Joseph for a cab. Not gone to bed, has he?”

“No, sir; they’re all having a cup o’ coffee in the kitchen, sir.”

“Trust ’em, just the time when they’d like a feed,” growled Tom. “There: Miss Wilder. Look sharp.”

Five minutes after Tom stood at the door holding Tryphie’s hand, while his father went slowly down to the cab.

“Good-bye, little one,” he said.

“But, Tom, what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to bring my sister back, and then—”

“And then, Tom dear,” whispered Tryphie, throwing her arms about his neck—“There, do you believe I care for you now?”

“My little pet,” he whispered hoarsely, and rushed away just as Mr Hurkle came up undulating, and looking more like a pulled out concertina than ever.

“Sorry I’ve been so long, sir,” he panted; “but I understand I am required to—”

“Go to the devil,” cried Tom, brushing past him; and as the daylight was growing broader the cab drove into Great Scotland Yard, where there was a certain conversation, and wires were set to work, after which there was an adjournment for breakfast to an hotel at Charing Cross.

“Are—are we going in pursuit, my dear boy?” said his lordship, feebly.

“Yes, certainly, and in earnest.”

“When, my dear Tom?”

“Now directly, father,” said the young man sternly. “The poor girl has been driven mad by her mother’s cruelty; and in a wild fit of infatuation she has preferred to share the fortunes of this handsome foreign vagabond to marrying a worn-out *roué*.”

“But, my dear Tom, it is impossible.”

“Look here, father,” said the young man, “the poor girl’s future is at stake. She has been cruelly treated. Our behaviour to Charley Melton was simply disgusting—one day he was worshipped, supposed to have money; the next he was forbidden the house, because he was poor. As for Maude’s feelings—of course, poor girl, as a young lady of fashion, she ought to have had none. I hope mamma is satisfied with her new son-in-law.”

“But—but where are we going?”

“Don’t know yet,” said the young man, harshly. “To Paris certain—probably to Italy. Maybe, though,” he said, with a bitter laugh, “only as far as the padrone’s at Saffron Hill.”

By the time father and son had made a very poor breakfast, a sergeant was ushered in by the waiter.

“We’ve got the cabman, sir.”

“Well, where did he take them?”

“Charing Cross station, sir.”

“Of course,” said Tom—“they would just catch the night train for the tidal boat. Come along, father.”

“Too soon for the train yet, sir,” said the sergeant; “but I dare say they’ll have been stopped at Folkestone or Dover, unless it was a dodge, and they haven’t left town.”

“You see to that,” said Tom; “I’ll go on to Folkestone.”

“Right, sir,” and in due time the pair—father and son—were in pursuit, with the wheels of the fast train seeming always to grind out a tune such as is played by an organ whose handle is turned by a dark-eyed, olive-skinned Italian; while when the engine stopped, instead of calling out the name of the station, the men seemed to whine—“Ah, signora—ah, bella signora,” and in his irritation Tom lit a cigar, and yelled forth the word condemnation in its most abbreviated form.

Chapter Twenty Six.

On the Track.

Telegram—

> “From Barmouth, Folkestone, to Lady Barmouth, 999 Portland Place, London.
>
> “No news as yet.”

This was the first sent during the chase.

> “From Barmouth, Beurice’s, Paris, to Lady Barmouth, 999 Portland Place, London.
>
> “No news as yet.”

Fresh messages were despatched at intervals of twelve hours, and in addition Tom sent long letters to “My dearest Tryphie.”

But all the same he was in a state of feverish excitement, while Lord Barmouth was reduced to imbecile helplessness, but ready to obey his son to the very letter, and trotting about after him through Paris like a faithful dog. They had been most unfortunate in their quest: they had succeeded in tracing the fugitives to Paris, and there they had been at fault. Twenty times over Viscount Diphoos had declared that they must have gone on somewhere; but the police said no, it was impossible. And so they went on wearily searching Paris, until his lordship declared his heel to be so sore that he could go no farther.

“They must have left Paris,” vowed Viscount Diphoos in one of the bureaux.

“But, monsieur, it is not possible. Our cordon of spies is too perfect. No, my faith, they are still here. Have patience, monsieur, and you shall see.”

So the chief at each bureau; and so the days passed on, till the young man felt almost maddened and rabid with despair. These were the descriptions—“Young lady, fair, brown hair, blue eyes, pale, rather thin face, tall and graceful; her companion, a tall, swarthy Italian, with black curly hair and beard.” But descriptions were all in vain, and when, regularly fagged out, Viscount Diphoos sat at his hotel, smoking his cigar, he would let it go out, and then heedless sit on, nibbling and gnawing at the end till he had bitten it to pieces, and still no ideas came.

“I’ll shoot the scoundrel, that I will,” he muttered aloud one evening.

“No, don’t do that, Tom,” said Lord Barmouth, feebly. “But don’t you think we had better go home?”

“No,” said Tom, snappishly; “I don’t, sir. Let’s see what to-morrow brings forth.”

“Letters for messieurs,” said a waiter, handing some correspondence from London; but there was no news worthy of note.

“Here, stop a minute, *garçon*,” said Tom, drawing a note and his sister’s photograph from his pocket-book. “Look here, this is an English five-pound note.”

“Oh, yais, monsieur, I know—*billet de banc*?”

“And this is the carte of a lady we wish to find in Paris, you understand?”

The man nodded his closely cropped head, smiled, and, after a long look at the carte, left the room.

“You seem to pin a good deal of faith to five-pound notes, Tom,” said Lord Barmouth.

“Yes,” said his son, shortly. “Like ’em here.”

The next day he sent for the waiter, but was informed that the man had gone out for a holiday.

“I thought so,” said Tom, enthusiastically, as soon as they were alone. “That fellow will go and see all the waiters he knows at the different hotels, and find out what we want.”

Viscount Diphoos was quite right. About ten o’clock that evening the waiter entered, and beckoned to them, mysteriously—

“Alaright,” he said, “ze leddee is trouvée. I have ze fiacre at ze door.”

Tom leaped from his chair, and was going alone, but Lord Barmouth persisted in accompanying him, and together they were driven to a quiet hotel in the Rue de l’Arcade, near the Madeleine.

“You think you have found the lady?” queried Tom.

“Oh, yais m’sieu; and ze milord vis she.”

“Bravo!” cried Tom, “a big black-bearded, Italian scoundrel!”

“Scoundrail, vot is you call scoundrail, sare?”

“There, there, never mind,” said Viscount Diphoos—“a big, black-bearded Italian!”

The waiter shrugged his shoulders.

“Zere is no beard, m’sieu, and ye zhentlemans is not black. He is vite; oh, oui, yais, he is vite.”

“Another disappointment,” growled Tom.

“M’sieu say, ze *billet de banc* if I find ze lady. I not know noting at all of the black shentailman.”

They were already in the hall, where they were encountered by one of the *garçons* of the establishment, whose scruples about introducing them to the private rooms of the gentleman and lady staying there were hushed with a sovereign.

“Pray take care, my dear boy,” said Lord Barmouth; “don’t be violent.”

“We must get her away, father, at any cost,” said Viscount Diphoos, sternly. “What I want you to do is this—take charge of Maude, and get her to our hotel. Never mind me. I shall have the police to back me if the Italian scoundrel proves nasty.”

“But mind that he has no knife, my dear boy. Foreigners are dangerous.”

“If he attempts such a thing, dad, I’ll shoot him like a dog,” exclaimed the young man, hotly.

And then the door was thrown open, and they entered.

The room was empty, and upon the proprietor being consulted, it was announced that the gentleman and lady had

left that evening by the Lyons mail.

Telegraph communication failed.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

An Encounter.

Sunny Italy, the home of music.

The sun was shining as it can shine in Naples, but the courtyard of the Hotel di Sevril was pleasantly shady, for there was a piazza all round, and in the centre a cool and sparkling fountain played in its marble basin, while evergreen trees spread dark tracery on the white pavement.

In one of the shadiest and coolest spots sat Maude, daughter of The Earl of Barmouth, looking exceedingly pretty, though there was a certain languid air, undoubtedly caused by the warmth of the climate, which seemed to make her listless and disposed to neglect the work which lay in her lap, and lean back in the lounging chair, which creaked sharply at every movement.

“I do wish he would come back,” she said softly, and as she spoke her eyes lit up with an intense look of happiness, and a sweet smile played about her lips. “But he will not leave me alone long.”

Here she made a pretence of working, but ceased directly.

“I wonder what they are all doing at home. How dear Tryphie is, and papa, and darling Tom. Will Tom marry Tryphie? Yes, he is so determined, he will be sure to. Heigho! I shall be so glad when we are forgiven, and Tom and he are friends. I can feel sure about papa, but Tom can be so stern and sharp.”

There was no allusion made to Lady Barmouth, for she seemed to have dropped out of her daughter’s thoughts, but Sir Grantley Wilters was remembered with a shudder, which was cleared away by the coming of a smiling waiter.

“Would the signore and signora dine at the *table-d’hôte*?”

Maude hesitated for a few moments, moved by monetary considerations, and then said—“Yes. Has the signore returned?”

“No, signora,” said the waiter, and he bowed and went back into the old palazzo.

“I wanted to go to a cheap hotel,” said Maude, dreamily, and with a happy smile upon her face—somewhat inane, it is true, for it was the young married lady’s smile—“but he said his *cara bella sposa* must have everything of the best. Oh, my darling! my darling! how he loves me. Poor? What is poverty? I grow more proud of him every day. What do we want with society? Ah, how I hate it. Give me poverty and love. Oh, come back, my darling, come back. That’s what my heart keeps beating whenever he is away.”

It was certainly a very pleasant kind of poverty, in a sunny land with a delicious view of the bay, and a good *table-d’hôte*; and a loving husband; and as Maude, the young wife, dreamed and adored her husband in his absence, she smiled and showed her white teeth till a sound of voices made her start and listen.

“Oh, how I do tremble every time any one fresh comes to the hotel. I always fancy it is Sir Grantley Wilters come to fetch me back. But he dare not try to claim me now, for I am another’s. But what are we to do when the money is all gone?”

She thought dreamily, but in a most untroubled fashion.

“I can sing,” she said at last, “so can he, and he plays admirably. Ah, well, there’s time enough to think of that when the money is all gone. Let me be happy now after all that weary misery, but I must write home. There, I’ll go and do it now before he returns.—Oh!”

She had risen to go, but sank back trembling and half-fainting in her seat as a pallid, weary-looking, washed-out elderly gentleman tottered out of the house into the piazza, and dropped into a chair just in front of the door.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” he sighed, as he let his walking-stick fall clattering down. “How tired out I do feel.”

“Oh!” sighed Maude, as she saw that her only means of exit was barred.

“I with—I wish—damme, I wish I was back at home with my legs under my own table, and—and—and a good glass of port before me. Hang that Robbins, a confounded scoundrel; I—I—I know I shall finish by breaking his head. Four days before I left England I asked him to put one single bottle of the ’20 port in my dressing-room with the cork drawn, and he threw her ladyship at my head, and, damme, I didn’t get a drop. And my own port—a whole bin of it—my own port—my own port. Hah! how comfortable a chair is when you’re tired. He was a good fellow who first invented chairs.”

He shuffled himself down, and lay right back.

“Shall I never find my little girl?” he sighed.

“What shall I do?” murmured Maude. “Why isn’t he here?”

“I’m not fit to come hunting organ men all over the continent,” continued the old gentleman; “but Tom insisted, you see. Oh, my poor leg! It’s worse here than it was in town.”

He rubbed his leg slowly, and Maude made a movement as if to go to his side, but something seemed to hold her back.

“Tom is sure to be near,” she thought, “and they must not meet yet. Tom would not forgive him. If I could only get away and warn him.”

“Why don’t Tom come and order something to eat? I’m starving. Oh, dear: London to Paris—Paris to Baden—Baden to Nice—Nice to Genoa, and now on here to Naples. Poor Tom, he seems to grow more furious the more we don’t find them. Oh, hang the girl!” he added aloud.

Maude started, and had hard work to suppress a sob.

“They’ll separate us; they’ll drag me away,” she sighed.

“No, no, no, I will not say that,” cried Lord Barmouth, aloud. “I am hungry, and it makes me cross. My poor leg! I should like to find my poor darling,” he said, piteously. “Bless her! bless her! she was a good girl to me.”

“Oh! oh! oh!” sobbed Maude, hysterically, for she could contain herself no longer.

“Eh! eh! eh!” ejaculated Lord Barmouth. “What the deuce! A lady in distress. Doosed fine woman too,” he added, raising his glass as he tottered to his feet. “I was a devil of a fellow among the ladies when I was a youngster. Can I, madam—suppose she don’t understand English—can I, madam, be of any service? What, Maudey, my darling? Is it you at last?”

“Oh, papa! papa!”

There was a burst of sobbing and embracing, ended by the old man seating himself in Maude’s chair, and the girl sinking at his feet.

“And—and—and I’ve—I’ve found you at last then, my dear, or have you found me? Is—is it really you?”

“Yes, yes, yes, my own dear darling father,” sobbed Maude.

“Yes, it is—it is,” he cried, fondling her and drawing her to his breast, till he seemed to recollect something.

“But, damme—damme—damme—”

“Oh, don’t—don’t swear at me, papa darling!”

“But—but I must, my dear. Here have I been searching all over Europe for you, and now I have found you.”

“Kiss me, papa dear,” sobbed Maude.

“Yes, yes, my darling, and I am so glad to see you again; but what a devil of a wicked girl you have been to bolt.”

“Oh, but, papa darling, I couldn’t—I couldn’t marry that man.”

“Well, well, well,” chuckled Lord Barmouth, “he was a miserable screw for a girl like you. But I—I hear that he’s going to shoot him first time he sees him.”

“Oh, papa! Then they must never meet.”

“But—but I’m not saying what I meant to say—all I’d got ready for you, Maudey. How dare you disgrace your family like that?”

“Don’t—don’t blame me, papa darling. You don’t know what I suffered before I consented to go.”

“But, you know—”

“Oh, papa, don’t blame your poor girl, who loves you so very dearly.”

“But—but it’s such a doose of a come down, my darling. It’s—it’s—it’s ten times worse than any case I know.”

“Papa, for shame!” cried Maude, indignantly.

“Now—now—now, don’t you begin to bully me, Maudey my dear. I get so much of that at home.”

“Then you will forgive me, dear?” said Maude, nestling up to the poor weak old man.

“But—but I oughtn’t, Maudey, I oughtn’t, you know,” he said, caressing her.

“But you will, dear, and you’ll come and stay with us often. We are so happy.”

“Are so—so happy!” said the old man, with a look of perplexity on his countenance.

“Yes, dear. He loves me so, and—oh, papa, I do love him. You will come? Never mind what mamma and Tom say.”

“But Tom is like a madman about it, Maudey. He says he’ll have you back if he dies for it.”

“Oh, papa!”

“Yes, my pet, he’s in a devil of a rage, and it comes out dreadfully every time he grows tired.”

“Then *they* must not meet either.”

“No, my dear, I suppose it would be best not,” said the old man; “but—but do you know, Maudey, I feel as if I was between those two confounded stools in the proverb, and—and I know I shall come to the ground. But—but where—where did you get married?”

“At a little church, papa dear, close to Holborn.”

“Of course,” groaned the old man to himself. “Close to Saffron Hill, I suppose.”

“I don’t know the street, papa dear.”

“That’s right, my pet. I mean that’s wrong. I—I—really, Maudey my pet, I’m so upset with the travelling, and now with finding you, that I—I hardly know what I ought to say.”

“Say you forgive your own little girl, dear, and that you will love my own darling husband as if he were your son.”

“But—but, Maudey, my dear, I don’t feel as if I could. You see when a poor man like that—I wish Tom would come.”

“Tom!” cried Maude, springing up and turning pale.

“Yes, yes, he’s coming to join me, my pet. Would you like to see him now, or—or—or wait a bit till he isn’t so furious?”

“Oh, papa dear, I dare not meet him. They would quarrel, and what shall I do? We must escape—”

“But are you staying in this hotel?”

“Yes, papa dear.”

“That’s—that’s doosed awkward, my pet, for I shouldn’t like there to be a row.”

“No, no, pa dear. Don’t say a word to Tom, or there will be a horrible scene.”

“But, my pet, we’ve come on purpose to find you, and now you’re going away.”

“Only for a time, dear,” cried Maude, embracing the old man frantically. “Don’t, don’t tell Tom.”

“But I feel as if I must, my darling. Tom is so angry, and we’ve spent such a lot of money trying to find you. It would have paid for no end of good dinners at the club.”

“Yes, yes, but we will escape directly, and Tom will never know.”

“But what’s the good of my finding you, my darling, if you are going to bolt again directly?”

“Only to wait till Tom has cooled down, dear.”

“Well, well, I suppose I must promise.”

“My own darling papa,” cried Maude, kissing him. “I’ll write to you soon, dear; and as soon as Tom is quiet and has forgiven us, we shall all be as happy as the day is long.”

She kissed him again quickly on either cheek, and then, before he could even make up his mind to stay her, she had hurried into the hotel, leaving her father scratching his head and setting his dark wig all awry.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

The Reinforcement.

“This—this is a pretty devil of a state of affairs,” muttered the old man. “How can a man in my position make friends with a confounded fellow who goes about turning a handle in the street? The girl’s mad—mad as can be, and—Ah, Tom, my boy.”

“Hallo, governor,” said that personage, sharply. “What’s the matter?”

“Doosed tired, my boy.”

“Why, you look as if you’d seen the chap who drew what’s-his-name’s curtains in the dead of night.”

“Do I—do I, my boy?” stammered the old man; and then to himself, “I feel sure he’ll find me out.”

“Get up, and you shall have a feed, and a glass of good honest wine. That’s the thing to brace you up, dad.”

“Yes—yes, my son. I—I feel—feel as if I’d give anything for a glass of good wine.”

“Come along.”

“I know he’ll find me out,” said his lordship to himself.

“I say, gov’nor,” cried Tom, “here’s a go.”

“Have—have you found them,” said the old man, starting.

“Wait a bit. Perhaps I have. But I say, I’ve found telegrams waiting to say that the old lady is on the way to meet us here.”

“Here, Tom, my boy?”

“Yes, gov’nor, here, in Naples.”

“But—but don’t you think we had better go on at once?”

“What with you so tired?” said Tom with a twinkle in his eyes.

“I—I don’t think I’m quite so tired as I was, Tom, my boy,” said the old man nervously. “After a glass of wine or two, I—I think I could manage to go on again.”

“But don’t you understand? The *mater* is coming here with Tryphie and Justine.”

“Then—then I think we had better get on, Tom, my boy—away from here. Her ladyship would hinder us, and stop us from finding Maude. Let’s go on to Rome or Constantinople, only let’s be *off* at once.”

Tom laughed silently.

“No, father,” he said, “I think we’ll go no further. I’m going to have a thorough good look round, and from hints I have heard, I think we are once more on their track; but if they are not here we’ll go back home, for I’m sick of all this journeying. Poor girl, she has chosen her lot.”

“Yes—yes, Tom, my boy,” said the old man dolefully.

“And I’ve done my duty as a brother to try and find her.”

“Yes, Tom, my boy, you have—you have.”

“Some day she’ll wake up out of her mad dream, and come back to us, and then, no matter what is said, she must find a home.”

“Of course, my boy, of course.”

“Poor girl! It’s all our fault, governor. If we had been firm she might have married Charley Melton.”

“Eh,” said Lord Barmouth, “Charley Melton? Yes, my boy, I wish she had. I—I wonder whether she has gone,” thought the old man. “Oh dear me, I’m very tired.”

“Did you speak, gov’nor?” said Tom.

“Yes, my boy, I said I was very tired.”

“Then come along and let’s feed. We’ll have a bottle of that red wine, and enjoy ourselves till the old lady comes, and then, governor—”

“You think we shan’t enjoy ourselves any more, Tom?”

“What do you think?”

“Well, my boy, I hardly know what to say. Her ladyship is very particular, but then, you see, my boy, she studies my health more than I do and I’ve no doubt it is quite right.”

“I dare say it is, dad, but come along.”

“Yes, my boy, yes,” said Lord Barmouth, taking his son’s arm; “but really, Tom, I begin to wish I was back within reach of my club.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” he added *sotto voce*, “I wonder whether they have gone.”

“What say, governor?”

“Nothing, my boy, nothing. Talking to myself.”

“Bad habit, gov’nor.”

“Yes, my boy, yes,” he said in acquiescence. But bad as was the habit, he kept on, as he told himself that he hoped Maudey had gone, and yet he hoped she had not; and he kept on getting deeper and deeper into a bog of bewilderment, till he found himself seated at a little table opposite his son, listening to the gurgling of wine in a glass, and that brought him back from his maze of troubled thought at once.

“What—what could have induced her ladyship to come out here?” he said, with a piteous expression upon his countenance.

“Old game,” said Tom gruffly—“to look after us.”

“I—I—I should be sorry to speak disrespectfully of her ladyship,” said Lord Barmouth, now under the influence of his third glass of wine, “but—but I’m afraid there’ll be no more peace now, Tom, my boy.”

At that moment a waiter entered.

“Visitors for milor,” he said.

“Here they are, governor. Now comes the tug of war.”

For at that moment her ladyship entered and tottered to a seat, wiping her brow, and making signs to Tryphie, who half supported her, for her salts. That young lady had to turn to Justine, who was supposed to be carrying the bag, but who in turn had to take it from Robbins, who looked as if he had been in a bath, and had dressed himself without a prior reference to a towel. For his fat face was covered with drops and runlets, and his grey hair hung wetly upon his brow. The smelling-bottle was, however, found, and her ladyship took a long inhalation, and said, “Hah!”

Chapter Twenty Nine.

On the Brink.

“I’ve found you then at last,” said her ladyship, recovering fast. “Robbins, go and tell that wretched Italian porter creature I will not pay him another penny. No, say *soldi*, or *scudi*, which you like. It’s a gross imposition.”

“Yes, my lady.”

“Justine,” continued her ladyship, “you understand the language?”

“No, my lady, not Italian.”

“Then speak to him in French, it will impress the man. Go and see that Robbins is not imposed upon. Now, Robbins, mind and be firm. This is not London.”

“No, milady.”

“And don’t lose any more luggage.”

“No, my lady,” said Robbins; and he left the room with Justine.

“Luggage, indeed,” he growled; “all this row about a sandwich-box, and she left it in the rack herself.”

“Nevaire mind her, Rob—bain,” said Justine; “take him coolly.”

“Take *him* coolly. Yes, ma’amselle, I can the governor; but her ladyship.”

“Ah, yais, she is a womans. But see me, I do not complain; I am drag all ovaire Europe by her ladyship, who have rob me of my loaf till I return and see him once again. I do not complain.”

In the coffee-room her ladyship button-holed Lord Barmouth directly, and then took Tom’s seat at the table, while that gentleman grasped Tryphie’s hand.

“Oh, Tom,” she said, “what news?”

“You’ve both come,” he said shortly. “Is that all you have to say?”

“All? Ah, Tom dear, if you only knew how much.”

This was accompanied by so pleasant a pressure of the hand that Tom’s acidity began to evaporate in gas, and he turned to help his father, who was giving way under a vigorous attack. For as he approached the table her ladyship exclaimed, with a warning motion of her index finger—

“Now, Barmouth, your gout is much worse.”

“Ye-yes, my dear,” said his lordship, “I’m—I’m afraid it is.”

“Of course! You’ve been taking port wine recklessly.”

“No, no, really, my dear: the port is so horribly bad that—”

“Then you’ve had Burgundy.”

“Well—well, yes, a little, my dear.”

“I knew it! What’s this?” cried her ladyship, seizing the bottle on the table. “Burgundy, of course.”

“No, Barolo,” said Tom. “Regular physic for gout, isn’t it, gov’nor. Take another glass.”

“Shall I, my boy?” said the old man, hesitating.

“Of course,” cried Tom, pouring one out, which his lordship eagerly drank.

“Tom!” ejaculated her ladyship, whose breath seemed to be taken away by the daring displayed.

“Physic,” said Tom, sharply.

“Have you secured rooms for us?”

“Of course not. Only just knew you were coming.”

“Then ring for the landlord; I shall now continue the search myself. I have been much to blame in leaving it in other hands so long. But a weak woman—”

“Who is?” said Tom, innocently.

“I am, sir,” replied her ladyship. “I was not aware, when I entrusted the search to my husband and son, that it was to be made an excuse for a pleasant and expensive continental tour, with no results whatever but the shrinking of a good balance at the bank, and a fit of gout?”

“Oh, bosh!” ejaculated Tom.

“No more gadding about; no more Burgundy and strong drinks. I mean to find that wretched girl myself; the authorities shall intervene, and I will do my duty as a mother.”

“What shall you do?”

“Place her in a madhouse as sure as I stand here.”

“Then you will not,” said Tom, “for you’re sitting.”

“Reserve your ribald jestings, sir, till we return to town.”

“All right,” cried Tom; “then let me speak in a downright manner, my dear mother. You can do just as you please, but I am now on the scent, which I shall keep to myself; and I tell you this, old lady, I will not have Maude—whatever her faults—ill-used.”

“Hear, hear!” cried Lord Barmouth; but then he had had four glasses of wine.

“Barmouth!”

“*Yes*—yes, my dear.”

“Oh, what language, and to a mother!”

“There, there, stop that,” cried Tom. “We are not at home, but at an hotel, and the people won’t understand tragic amateur acting.”

“Tryphie, my child,” cried her ladyship, after giving her son an annihilating look, “come with me to our own apartments. Lord Barmouth, summon the waiter, or no, come with me. Tryphie, you can ring and order *déjeuner*, I wish to speak to these people in the hotel. I think I can obtain some information here.”

Lord Barmouth cast a despairing look at his son, and followed her ladyship into the hall, while Tom had just seized the opportunity, and Tryphie at the same moment, to embrace her in spite of a certain amount of resistance, when there was a loud “Oh!” and he turned to find that Charley Melton had entered the room.

“You here, Charley! Why, my dear old chap!”

They shook hands warmly, Tryphie following suit, and the pretty little face flushed with pleasure and confusion.

“Why, Charley, you here!” cried Tom. “Stop, I know; you need not say a word.”

“You know?”

“Yes. How long have you been on the continent? Stop, you need not answer. Ever since my sister eloped.”

The young man bowed his head.

“And you’ve been after her all the time.”

Melton bowed again.

“Then it was doosed good of you, Charley; but I don’t see what we are to do, old man. It’s very horrible for all of us, but I can’t see what is to be done. I came out with the intention of dragging her home, but if the poor girl is infatuated with the fellow our cause is lost.”

“What do you propose doing then?” said Melton, hoarsely.

“Seeing her, and letting her know that when she likes to return home there is a place for her, either there or with me. That’s all.”

“And you mean to let her stay with this—this scoundrel.”

“Yes, Charley; I suppose he is her husband. We can do nothing.”

“Have you any suspicion of where she is?”

“Yes, old man. In this town, and I have set a waiter to work to bring me news. They’re ten times better than detectives. But it’s very good of you, Charley, and I’m sorry I abused you so.”

“You have been abusing me, then?” said Melton with an amused look.

“Yes, for giving up so easily,” said Tom. “Oh, here’s my man. I suppose,” he added hastily, as the hotel waiter entered, “some one for me.”

“Yes, milor, the head waiter from the Vesuvio.”

“Show him in. Now, Charley, there’ll be news.”

“All right, get it then,” said Melton, and he walked to the window, while Tom turned to face a little dark Italian, with a face suggestive of his being developed from a shaven rat.

The interview was short and decisive, and accompanied by much gesticulation, terminating in a chinking of coin as the man left.

“There, old fellow,” cried Tom, excitedly, “I’ve done more than you have. I’ve run them to earth.”

“You have? They are in Naples?”

“They are *here*!” cried Tom, excitedly. “In this very hotel, where I’ve been drawn by a sort of filial—no, that’s not it—fraternal magnetic attraction, and now.”

“Stop,” cried Melton. “I thought you were not going to interfere.”

“That’s what I thought,” said Tom, “a little while ago; but hang it all, now I am under the same roof with the scoundrel who deluded my poor sister away, curse his Italian blood, I’ll strangle him.”

“But you must be wrong, Tom; such a man as you suspect would not stay in an hotel like this. What do you say, Miss Wilder?”

“I say,” cried Tryphie, with a malicious look, “that there seems to be some mistake.”

“Tryphie—Tryphie, my child!” came from without.

“Coming, aunt,” said the girl, rising.

“Not a word to the old girl, Tryphie,” cried Tom.

“Not tell her?”

“Not a word. There, I beg of you.”

“Very well,” she said with another peculiar look and tripped out of the room.

“That’s better,” cried Tom. “Now come along.”

“Where are you going?”

“To *dieci otto*. That’s where the man said they were—not *they*, he said she was alone now. Come on: I’ll get her away, and if he comes to claim her, why then, damn him!”

“No violence, Tom, for your sister’s sake. He may be there. Let me go and see her.”

“You? Not me, my boy. Why, I might mark the scoundrel, but you would kill him.”

“No,” said Melton, thoughtfully, “I don’t think I should do that to the man she loved.”

“You’re a good fellow, Charley. There, I’ll go. I haven’t hunted them all this time to give up at the last. Don’t hinder me, old chap.”

“But look here, there has been *exposé* enough. Had it not all better be settled quietly?”

“But you can’t settle matters quietly with an organ-grinder, Charley. Look here, my plan is simple. I’ll get Maude away, then it’s a question of pounds, shillings, and pence.”

“In any case then, from respect to your sister, let the affair be arranged quietly.”

“Very well,” said Tom, sulkily.

“You will let me go first—say, to prepare her for your coming?”

“No. I’ll go.”

“You do not wish to inflict pain upon the poor girl?”

“No. I want her home again, and free from this degrading tie.”

“But suppose—”

“No, no—don’t say that, Charley, old fellow. You couldn’t look over it. Impossible now, old chap. Poor Maudey, she’ll have to be like a widow to her very end. There: we shall have the old woman here directly.”

“Then you’ll let me go and prepare your sister?”

“No; it’s my business, sir. I’ll do it myself.”

“But you’ll forgive her, Tom?”

“Perhaps. Now leave me alone. Stop, where’s *dieci otto*?”

“Ask the waiter,” said Melton, coldly, and he left the room.

“He needn’t have turned rusty,” grumbled Tom, crossing to reach the bell: but at that moment her ladyship came in, hurriedly followed by Tryphie and Lord Barmouth.

“No, no, my dear,” said Lord Barmouth, who seemed to have been strung up to resistance by some stirring news, and at a glance Tom saw that her ladyship knew as much as he.

“Silence, Barmouth. Tryphie, ring the bell. I suppose there are police of some kind in a benighted place like this. What number did he say, Tryphie, *dieci otto*?”

“Yes, aunt dear, eighteen,” said Tryphie, whose face was working and eyes twinkling in a peculiarly malicious manner.

“Eighteen! That will do,” cried Tom. “Here, governor, come with me.”

“Tom! stop! Barmouth, I forbid—”

Her ladyship did not finish her speech, but hurried to the door, followed by her niece—the door through which her husband had passed, followed by her son.

Chapter Thirty.

Light on the Scene.

First floor only. *Dieci otto*—a door in a corridor whose rooms looked out upon the tranquil sea.

A lady and gentleman started from their seats as the couple rushed in; and in a moment Viscount Diphoos had seen that they were right—that he was in the presence of his sister and the man with whom she had eloped. He saw too in the same rapid glance why they had been so long off the scent. For there was no black curly hair, no long black beard, but all was brown, and flashed as it were with gold.

This was all seen as the young man literally hurled himself upon the tall, sturdy man, who rose to meet him, and in a twinkling they had one another by the throat.

“Take her away, father, quick, quick,” cried Tom; and the next moment, in choking tones—“No, stop!” as he loosed his hold, staggered back to a chair, and uttered a shriek.

Wounded? Stabbed by the treacherous Italian?

Oh, no; it was a shriek of the laughter with which his frame was convulsed, as he rolled from side to side, while Lord Barmouth stared from one to the other.

“Tom, my son—are you hurt?”

“Hurt!” shrieked Tom, in inarticulate tones. “Sold—sold—sold!”

“But what does it mean?” stammered Lord Barmouth.

“Mean!” shrieked Tom—“why, that that confounded old humbug Charley has stolen a march on us.—Charley, old fellow, God bless you—I never felt so happy in my life. Here, Maudey, give us a kiss.”

Before the young man had commenced hugging his sister, Charley Melton had moved to the door, closed and locked it against the inquiring looks of waiters, and taking Maude’s hand in his he then asked Lord Barmouth in a few manly words to forgive him and his wife their clandestine proceedings.

“Forgive you, Charley,” cried the viscount, “of course he will—won’t you, dad?”

“Well—well—yes, my boy, I think so,” said his lordship feebly, as he shook his new son-in-law’s hand. “I think I’m very glad, for I never liked that Sir Reginald.”

“Grantley, father—Grantley Wilters,” cried Tom.

“To be sure, my boy; yes, of course, Sir Grantley.”

“But why the dickens didn’t you write to us, and let us know?”

“Well, we were going to write every day,” said Charley, with a peculiar look at Maude; “but we could never agree as to whose duty it was. We should have written though.”

“But—but—I think you ought to have written, Charley Melton. You see I’ve been very anxious about my darling Maude.”

“It was very cruel, papa dear; but really I did mean to write, soon.”

“I’m very glad of that,” said Lord Barmouth; “for really, Maude, my darling, you have frightened me so. I shall have a horrible fit of the gout after this.”

“Never mind, dad; stop and have it here, and Maudey and I will nurse you—won’t we, old girl?” cried Tom. “For gout at home just now would be awful. Oh!” he shrieked, once more going off into convulsions, “won’t the old girl be mad!”

“Yes, my dears,” said Lord Barmouth, shaking away very heartily at Charley Melton’s hands, “I’m afraid she’ll be very cross. But do you know, I fancy I’ve caught a bit o’ cold.”

“Never mind, father, we’re going to catch it hot,” said Tom.

“Yes, my boy; but—but I feel a little deaf, and my head is rather thick.”

“Never mind, old fellow, we’ve found her.”

“Yes, my boy, yes, we’ve found her; but do you know I feel rather confused and puzzled. I—I thought our Maude had gone off with that handsome looking scoundrel who played the organ outside our house.”

“Well, so she did,” cried Tom; “I see it all now. Here he is, dad.”

“No, no, my boy; don’t be so foolish. I want to know why it’s Charley Melton, and not that Italian fellow?”

“Why, governor, can’t you see through it?”

“No, my boy. It’s all a puzzle to me.”

“Nonsense, dad, Charley made a postman of that organ-grinder. Now do you twig?”

“And—and a post-office of the organ? I think I am beginning to see.”

“What was I to do?” said the young husband, appealingly. “I had been abroad, and tried to forget her, but it was of no use. I was forbidden the house, and at last I learned that this marriage was to come off. I dared not trust the servants, so I practised this ruse. But there, it’s all over now. You forgive me, sir, do you not?”

“Well, yes, my boy,” said Lord Barmouth, who was sitting fondling his daughter’s hand. “I think you are quite right. I should have done the same, for I was a devil of a—Don’t fidget, Maude, my darling. I’ll talk her ladyship round.”

“She’d rather it had been the organ-grinder,” choked and coughed Viscount Diphoos, while his sister, blushing and happy, kept shaking her finger at his mirthful face.

“But I will talk her round,” said Lord Barmouth, rather pompously, to the infinite risk of sending his son once more off into convulsions.

“But I say, Charley,” cried Tom, who kept showing his delight by slapping his brother-in-law on the back; “I want to know one thing though; did the signore come that night to fetch Maude, and leave his organ in the area?”

“No, of course not,” cried Charley, eagerly; “I bought the organ, and came myself.”

“With the organ?”

“For this time only on any stage.”

“As they say in the play-bills,” cried Tom. “Hooray!”

At that moment the door was tried, and then shaken by her ladyship, who had been waiting till the first part of the storm was over, after which she ascended with Tryphie, whose face wore a peculiarly mocking look as she stood behind her aunt.

“Open this door,” cried Lady Barmouth.

A dead silence fell upon the group.

“Oh, papa!” cried Maude.

“Yes, my dear,” said his lordship, looking round for a way of escape. “I—I—I think it is her ladyship.”

“Not much doubt about it,” said Tom. “Now, Charley, old chap, take your header and get out of your misery.”

“Yes,” said Charley, “I suppose I must get it over.”

“Open this door!” cried Lady Barmouth, shaking it furiously.

“It isn’t a hanging matter,” said Tom, laughing.

“No,” said Charley, rather uneasily, “it isn’t a hanging matter.”

“And her ladyship can’t undo it.”

“No,” said Charley firmly, as he crossed the room to where the door was being shaken violently, “her ladyship cannot undo it.”

“Would—would you like to take hold of my hand, Maudey, my dear?” said Lord Barmouth in a faltering voice.

“Yes, papa, dear; and you will intercede for my dear husband,” said the young wife, clinging to him affectionately.

“I will, my dear, I will. I feel as brave as a lion now. I—I—oh, here she is.”

“What is the meaning of all this?” cried her ladyship, staring round at the scene, as Tryphie rushed at Maude, kissed her, and then at Charley Melton, and jumped up and kissed him.

“I always fancied that’s how it was,” she whispered.

“What’s the meaning of it?” cried Tom. “Why, we’ve found them. Here, allow me to take round the hat for the coppers; or will you do it now, Maude?”

“I repeat,” cried Lady Barmouth, “what is the meaning of this? Mr Melton, what are you doing here?”

“Asking your ladyship’s pardon for myself and my dear wife,” said Charley, taking Maude’s hand.

“Wife? Then! You! Oh, Maude, you wicked, wicked girl!”

“But, my dear,” said Lord Barmouth.

“Silence!” cried her ladyship, “Maude, you have utterly broken my heart, and—”

“Don’t you believe it, Maudey,” said Tom, grinning. “She’s only saying that to keep up appearances.”

“Tom!”

“All right! but you know you are. There, Charley, old boy, kiss your dear mother. Come, gov’nor, say Bless you, my children!”

“Certainly, my dear boy,” said the old man, earnestly. “Bless you indeed, my dear children. Charley Melton, you can’t tell how glad I am, my boy.”

“Barmouth!”

“Yes, my love, but I can’t help it. I do feel very glad; but oh, you young dog, to come playing us a trick like that!”

“Barmouth!”

“There, hang it all, mother,” cried Tom, “what’s the good of holding out. You’ve behaved very nicely, but, as we say in refined circles—I mean rings—it’s quite time you threw up the sponge.”

“Mamma, dear, I would sooner have died than marry Sir Grantley.”

“Such a cruel *ruse*,” sobbed her ladyship, in hystero-tragic tones. “Maude! Maude!”

“Don’t blame her, dearest mother,” said Tom, in mock-heroic style, “it was the troubadour. *Il trovatore*! and his playing was magnificent. It would have won the heart of a female saint, or charmed a nun from her cell, let alone our Maude.”

“Justine, my drops, my drops.”

“She caves in! Charley, old chap, you may kiss her now,” cried Tom, “she won’t bite. There, take him to your heart, old lady; and I say, mamma, some day if you do faint, Charley could carry you to a sofa: Grantley Wilters would have doubled up like a two-foot rule.”

“I can never show my face in society again,” said her ladyship, “never, Mr Melton.”

“What!” cried Tom, who grinned with delight as he saw his mother seated upon a couch between Charley and Maude. “What? why, it’ll be no end of a game. It’s all right, Maudey; you’ve won.”

“Ah,” sighed her ladyship, “let Justine bring my drops.”

“Drops be hanged! Champagne,” cried Tom. “Here, ring the bell, gov’nor; no *table-d’hôte* to-day, mamma’s going to order a wedding dinner—a screamer.”

“No, no, Tom!”

“Yes, yes, my dear mother.”

Her ladyship sighed, smiled, ordered the dinner, and Lord Barmouth rubbed his leg.

“Tom, my boy,” he whispered, “you really are a wonder.”

“Am I, gov’nor? Then you tell Tryphie so, and back me up, for I mean, as the old song says, ‘to marry she.’”

“Do you, my boy?”

“Yes, gov’nor. Do you consent?”

“Certainly, my dear boy, certainly. When is it to be?”

“Barmouth,” said her ladyship in her deep contralto, “would you be kind enough to ring for Justine?”

Chapter Thirty One.

Tom picks a Bone.

“Stop a moment,” said Tom, who had slipped out and intercepted the French maid in the corridor. “Here, I’ve got a bone to pick with you.”

“No, no, Milor Thomas, nevaire now,” cried Justine, “*pas de petites soupers*. I am engage.”

“Engaged, are you? What, to be married?”

“Yes, milor, to be married.”

“Then good luck to you, ma’amselle. But I say, you are a nice one, you are.”

“I do you not understand, sir.”

“Not understand?” cried Tom, catching her by the wrist. “None of your nonsense. Come now, you were in the secret.”

“Sir, I will never divulge the secret of her ladyship; no, not even to milor.”

“Get out!”

“You loose my arm, milor. Her ladyship wait for me.”

“So do I,” said Tom. “Hang her ladyship’s hair-dye and all her other secrets; I mean about the organ—Mr Melton. Ah, you’re a nice one, Justine.”

“Milor, you think I know about that tair-rible affaire?” cried Justine very Frenchly.

“Yes, and so you did.”

“Faith of a woman, sir; it is not ter-r-rue,” cried Justine, excitedly.

“Gammon! Come, Justine, the game’s up, and I know you were at the bottom of it all.”

“*Non—non—non—non—non—non*,” cried Justine, shaking her head quite dangerously.

“*Oui—oui—oui—oui—oui*,” said Tom. “Now come, confess.”

“And you go tell her ladyship, you bad, weeked lil man.”

“Not I. I’m only too glad things have turned out so right.”

“You deed not like Sir Viltaire?”

“Like him!”

“You will not tell her ladyship, I confess,” said Justine in a mysterious, whisper. “You will not what you English call ze peach.”

“Peach? not I, old girl. Come, you did know?”

Justine screwed up her eyes, and made her mouth a tight line as she laughed silently.

“Then you put Mr Melton up to the dodge?”

“*Parole d’honneur*, no, Milor Tom. Ze plot was hatch by Monsieur Shairlie himself. I say noding about ze hair come out,” she added to herself.

“Well, all I can say is, that Charley Melton was a plucky one. And you knew this all the time?”

“Yes, milor.”

“You’re a deep one, Justine.”

“I love ze secret, monsieur, and I cannot bear to see Miladi Maude soffaire.”

“So you helped, eh?”

“Faith of a woman, no, sare; I only look on, and see and say noding at all.”

“By George, Justine, you’ve been a trump! and I’ll give you a ring for this.”

“Then give me dat one now, sare,” said Justine, sharply, as she pointed to the signet on Tom’s finger.

“But that’s too big and ugly for you, my girl. It is a gentleman’s ring.”

“*Ma foi*, Milor Thomas, do I not tell you I have a gentleman?”

“Then you’re going to marry old waxworks.”

“No, no, sare, I go to be Madame Launay when we return; and if Milor Tom do require my help—a thank you, ze ring is *charmant*—you shall say to me, ‘Justine, her ladyship go to marry *la belle* Ma’amselle Tryphie to Sir Viltaire,’ I am at your sairvice, for I am the guardian of her ladyship’s secret, but *vive l’amour*.”

“*Vive l’amour*, Justine,” cried Tom, giving her a kiss.

“Bad, weeked lil mans. But I forgive you. I go to her ladyship. *Au revoir*.”

“Charley, old fellow,” said Viscount Diphoos before they parted for the night, “hang me if I don’t stick to that organ, and have it on a stand in my room; and so long as I am at home, every time the old girl gets in one of her tantrums, I’ll go and turn the handle till she comes and makes a truce.”

Viscount Diphoos did not kep his word about that organ, being at the time in profound ignorance of the fact, that two days after he left town, and while the house was still in a state of turmoil, an Italian gentleman with very dark eyes, very black beard, and a smile that reached from one ear-ring to the other, called for the organ that had been left in the area; slinking down to the kitchen door, and wheedling the page a little. That young gentleman thought it rather fun to put the strap over his shoulder, and carry the instrument to the door, when it was borne off, and, in truth, entirely forgotten by all concerned.

But on the return to town her ladyship seemed to recover her elasticity somewhat, and Tom began to find that he was to have a fight yet to win his game.

“Seems precious hard,” he said, “and perhaps I shall have to make my plans, but no organ, thank you—the accordion, white mice, or guinea pigs would be more in my line.”

Just in the worst time of his trouble he called upon Monsieur Hector one morning, to have his weary brain relieved by a course of hair-cutting, and the refreshing shampoo.

Monsieur Hector was delicacy itself in his manipulations, and as delicate in his diplomacy.

“Ah bah!” he said, “what is cutting and shaving and dressing the hair? It is not by them that I must live and save for *ma chère* Justine. Why was I not in the bureau of the police? I am a great student of life—a very receptacle for the secrets of the aristocracy.”

“Monsieur suffers,” he said, softly, as he held Tom’s head, lathered all over with soap; “I am troubled to see monsieur look in such bad health.”

“Bother!” said Tom.

Monsieur Hector waited a few moments until the shampooing should begin to soften down some of the hard crystals of brain trouble from which Tom was suffering, and then he tried again.

“I trust milady recovers herself from the dreadful shock.”

Tom screwed his soapy head round, to stare in the bland, unruffled countenance of Monsieur Hector, who bowed, and gently returned his client’s head to its proper position.

“What the deuce do you know about my lady’s shock?” growled Tom.

“Monsieur forgets that I am the confidential attendant of the family,” said Monsieur Hector with dignity.

“So I did, and of Mademoiselle Justine too. But I smell a rat. You hatch plots here.”

“Aha, monsieur knows?”

“Yes,” said Tom, “I know. Could you manage me an organ if I wanted to go to play to a lady—say in Portland Place?”

Monsieur Hector smiled and tripped to a drawer, out of which he took a black wig and full beard to match.

“If monsieur will entrust himself to my care, I will in ten minutes change his complexion and his appearance so that her ladyship should not know him.”

“And find me an organ?”

“A thousand, if monsieur wishes,” said the Frenchman. “I am at his service when he say.”

“Then give me a clean towel;” said Tom, “my left ear is bunged up with soap.

“I’ll come if ever I want your help,” he added as he ran a covered finger through the intricate mazes of his ear.

“I am to monsieur,” said the Frenchman, bowing.

But Tom had no occasion to proceed to musical extremities, for as time went on, and no suitable match offered itself for Tryphie, her ladyship gave way.

“I never could have believed it, Tom, my boy,” said his lordship one night at the club, “you always do get the better of her ladyship. This is a doosed nice glass of port.”

“Yes, gov’nor, have another.”

“Eh? Well, I will just one, Tom, in honour of your wedding, Tom, and—damn the gout, eh?”

“To be sure, gov’nor.”

“Bless little Tryphie,” continued the old man; “she never had much money, but she lent me all she had when I was short, and she’s down for a thousand times as much in my will. Her ladyship can’t touch that; and—”

Just then an organ sounded in the square, and his lordship stopped his ears.

“No, no, gov’nor, it’s only music, and I like that. Here’s Maude,” he said, filling his glass, “and may she never be more mad.”

“Yes, my dear boy, our darling Maude!”

“And never,” continued the viscount, “find a worse strait waistcoat than her husband’s arms.”

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