False Evidence

by Edward Phillips Oppenheim, 1866-1946

Published: 1896
in »The Australian Town and Country Journal«,
and Ward, Lock and Co., London

Table of Contents

Prologue

The last sally had been, made and repulsed, the last shot fired; the fight was over, and victory remained with the white men. And yet, after all, was it a victory or a massacre? If you were a stay-at-home, and read the report from the telegrams in your club, or in the triumphant columns of the daily papers, especially those on the side of the Ministry, you would certainly have pronounced it the former. But if you had been there on the spot, and had seen the half-naked, ill-armed natives, with the fire of patriotism blazing in their eyes and leaping in their hearts—had seen them being shot down in rows by the merciless guns of the English batteries—another view of the matter might have presented itself to you. It might have occurred to you that these men were fighting on their own soil for their freedom and their country, and that the spirit which was blinding their eyes to the hopelessness of resistance, and urging them on to resist the stranger's progress with such passionate ineffectiveness, was, after all, a natural and a poetic one. But, after all, this has nothing to do with my story.

The battle was over and it was morning. Far away in the east a dull red light had arisen from over the tops of the towering black mountains, and an angry sun was sullenly shining on the scene of carnage. It was a low hillside, once pleasant enough to look upon, but at that moment probably the most hideous sight which the whole universe could have shown. The silvery streams, which had trickled lazily down to the valley below, now ran thick and red with blood. The luxuriant shrubs and high waving ferns were trampled down and disfigured, and, most horrible sight of all, everywhere were strewn the copper-colored forms of the beaten natives. There they lay apart and in heaps in all imaginable postures, and with all imaginable expressions on their hard, battered faces. Some lay on their sides with their fingers locked around their spears, and the rigid frown and convulsed passion of an undying hatred branded on their numbed features. Others less brave had been shot in the back whilst flying from the death-dealing fire of the European guns, and lay stretched about in attitudes which in life would have been comical, but in death were grotesquely hideous; and over the sloping fields the misty clouds of smoke still lingered and curled upwards from the battered extinct shells which lay thick on the ground.

High above the scene of devastation, on a rocky tableau at the summit of the range of hills, were pitched the tents of the victors. A little apart from these, conspicuous by the flag which floated above it was the general's tent; and underneath that sloping roof of canvas a strange scene was being enacted.

Seated amongst a little group of the superior officers, with a heavy frown on his stern face, sat the general. Before him, at a little distance, with a soldier on either side, stood a tall, slight young man, in the uniform of an officer, but swordless. His smooth face, as yet beardless, was dyed with a deep flush, which might well be

there, whether it proceeded from shame or indignation. For he was under arrest, and charged with a crime which, in a soldier, is heinous indeed—it was cowardice.

It was a court-martial before which he stood arraigned, although a hastily improvised one. But soldiers have prompt ideas of justice, and General Luxton was a martinet in all matters of discipline. Disciplinarian though he was, however, he liked little the task which was now before him.

He looked up from the papers, which were stretched out on the rickety little round table, with a sudden movement, and bent his frowning gaze upon the accused. The young man returned his gaze steadily, but the color in his cheeks grew deeper.

"Herbert Devereux, you stand accused of a crime which, in your profession, nothing can palliate or excuse. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"There will be no need for me to say anything, sir," was the prompt reply. "It is true that I turned my back upon the enemy, but it was to face a greater danger. The man whose life I saved can disprove this cruel charge against me in a moment. I admit that, from your point of view, appearances are suspicious, but you nave only to learn from my half-brother, Rupert Devereux, why I quitted my post, and what I effected by so doing, to absolve me at least from all suspicion of cowardice, however much I may be to blame as a matter of discipline."

General Luxton appeared surprised, a little relieved.

"I hope so," he said, not unkindly. "Roberts, send an orderly to Lieutenant Devereux's tent, and command his presence at once."

The man withdrew, and there was a few minutes' delay. Then the entrance to the tent was lifted up, and a tall, dark young man, with thin but decided features, and flashing black eyes, stepped forward. He was handsome, after a certain type, but his expression was too lifeless and supercilious to be prepossessing.

General Luxton looked up and nodded.

"Lieutenant Devereux, your half-brother, who stands accused of cowardice in the face of the enemy, appeals to you to give evidence on his behalf. Let us hear what you saw of him during the recent fighting."

Eagerly, and with a confident light in his fair young face, the prisoner turned towards the man to whom these words were addressed. But slowly and deliberately the latter turned his back upon his half-brother without noticing his glance of appeal, and with a scornful light in his eyes. There was a slight murmur and an interchange of looks amongst the few who were present at this significant action.

"I do not know, General Luxton," he said, slowly, "what the prisoner can expect me to say likely to benefit him. He can scarcely be so mad as to expect me to shield him in this matter on account of our relationship, or to preserve the honor of our name, and yet I do not see why else he should have appealed to me. I saw very little of the affair, and would rather not have seen that. I was riding to you, sir, with a message from Colonel Elliott, and, as I passed trench 4, I saw the prisoner suddenly leave his company and run towards me. He passed several yards to the left, and as he seemed to be hurrying along aimlessly, I called to him. He made no answer, but—"

"Liar!"

The word seemed hurled out with such a passionate intensity that every one started. General Luxton looked up angrily.

"Silence, sir! You will have an opportunity of saying what you have to say presently. Proceed, Devereux."

"As I was saying," Rupert Devereux continued calmly, without appearing to have noticed the interruption, "he made no answer, but seemed to wish to avoid me. As the message with which I was entrusted was an important one, I rode on and left him hurrying towards the rear."

With, a sterner air even than he had at first assumed, General Luxton turned towards the unfortunate young man who stood before him. He was standing as though turned to stone, with wide-open eyes, staring at the man who had just spoken, attitude and expression alike bespeaking an overpowering bewilderment.

"You are at liberty to ask the witness any questions," the General said, shortly.

For a moment there was a dead silence. Then the words came pouring out from his quivering lips like a mountain torrent.

"Rupert, what have you said? What does this mean? Good God, are you trying to ruin me? Did I not run to your assistance because you were beset by those three blackguards? Didn't I kill two of them and save your life? You can't have forgotten it! Why are you lying? Hilton saw it all, and so did Fenwick. Where are they? My God, this is horrible!"

The deep flush had gone from his cheeks, and left him pale as death. Great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead, and there was a wild look in his deep blue eyes. But the man to whom he made his passionate appeal kept his back turned and heeded not a word of it. Instead of answering he addressed the General.

"General Luxton," Rupert said, calmly, "the accused, in denying the truth of my statement, mentions the names of two men whom he admits were witnesses of this lamentable occurrence. Might I suggest that they be called to give their version?"

The General nodded assent, and the thing was done. But Hilton was the only one who answered the summons, and on reference to a list of the killed and wounded it was found that Fenwick was reported missing.

"John Hilton, the accused has appealed to you to give evidence on his behalf. Let us hear what you saw of him during the recent fighting."

The man, an ordinary-looking private, stepped forward and saluted.

"I only saw him for a moment, sir," he said, slowly, and with a marked reluctance. "I was riding behind Lieutenant Devereux when I saw him leave his company and pass us a few yards to the left. It struck me that he looked very pale, and I thought that perhaps he was wounded."

"He did not leave his company to come to your master's assistance, then?"

"Certainly not, sir. We were not in any need of it. None of the enemy were near us."

"Thank you. You can go, Hilton."

The man saluted and went.

There was a dead silence for a full minute. Then there came a passionate, hysterical cry from the prisoner—

"Liar! Liar! General Luxton, upon my honor, either my brother and this man are under some hallucination or they have entered into a conspiracy against me.

Before God Almighty I swear that I only left my post because several of the enemy had crept down from the hill behind and had attacked my brother and his servant. I killed one of them, and the blood of the other is still on my sword. Why, Rupert, you know that you called out, 'Thanks, Herbert, you have saved my life.' Those were your very words!"

The man appealed to shook his head slowly and as though with great reluctance. The sight seemed to madden the prisoner, and he made a sudden movement forward as though to spring at him.

"Oh, this is horrible!" he cried. "Where is Fenwick? He saw it all. Let him be called."

General Luxton glanced again at the list before him and looked up.

"You are unfortunate in your selections," he said, dryly. "The evidence of Hilton and your brother, to whom you appealed, only strengthen the case against you. Fenwick is missing. Herbert Devereux," he went on sternly, "the charge against you has been proved. I, myself, at a most critical moment, saw you desert your post when it was the centre of attack, and it fell to another's lot to lead your men on to the pursuit. The reasons which you have brought forward to account for your unwarrantable action have been clearly disposed of. You are most certainly guilty of a crime for which, amongst soldiers, there is no pardon. But you are young, and I cannot forget that you are the son of one of the most distinguished officers with whom it has been my good fortune to be associated. For his sake I am willing to make some allowance for you—on one condition you may retain your commission, and, I trust, retrieve this well- nigh fatal mistake in the future. To the crime of cowardice yon have added the crime of lying; for that your account of the attack upon your half brother and your rescue is a pure fabrication I cannot doubt. The peculiar curve in the defile behind trench 4 unfortunately hid you from the field of battle and prevents further evidence as to the occurrence which, you say, took place. But that your story is false no one can possibly doubt. The place has been carefully examined, and there are no dead bodies within a hundred yards. It seems, from your appeal to your half-brother, that yon expected him to shield you at the expense of his honor. This lie and false statement of yours you must retract if you hope for any mercy from me."

There was a convulsive agony in the boy's white, strained face as he drew himself up, and looking half piteously, half indignantly at his judge. But when he tried to speak he could not, and there was a minute or two's dead silence whilst he was struggling to obtain the mastery over himself. All expected a confession, and General Luxton removed his eyes from the prisoner, and bent close over his papers, that none might read the compassion which was in his heart, and which was reflected in his face.

The words came at last; and shrill and incoherent though they were, there was a ring of genuine dignity in them.

"General Luxton, I have been guilty neither of cowardice nor falsehood. I swear before God, on the sword which my father himself put into my hands before I left England; by everything that is most holy to me I swear that my account of this awful occurrence is true. Ask the men of whom I was in command when I caught sight of of him—" and he pointed with a trembling finger and a gesture than which nothing could have been more dramatic to his half brother—"ask them whether I

bore myself like a coward when those spears were whistling around us, or when we were fighting hand-to-hand after the first repulse. God knows that I did not. I left my post to encounter a greater danger still. Bitterly do I regret that I ever did so; but it is the only indiscretion of which I am guilty. I swear it."

General Luxton raised his head, and what there had been of compassion in his face was either gone or effectually concealed.

"You have sworn enough already," he said, sternly. "Herbert Devereux, I am bitterly disappointed in you. I was willing to spare your father the disgrace which I fear will kill him; but you cut away the ground from under my feet. You are most certainly proved guilty of gross cowardice in the face of the enemy, found guilty, not upon the evidence of one man, but of two, and one of those your own relative. Circumstances, too, are strong against you, so are the probabilities. Most undeniably and conclusively you are found guilty; guilty of cowardice, guilty of falsehood. You will remain under arrest until I can find an opportunity of sending an escort with you to the Hekla. Your commission is forfeited to the Queen, whose uniform you have disgraced."

Never a sign, of guilt in the prisoner's countenance. Proudly and indignantly he looked his General straight in the face, his cheeks red with a flush, which was not of shame, and the wild fury in his heart blazing out of his eyes.

"It is not I who have disgraced the Queen's colors; but he—he who has fabricated and sworn to a false string of lies. Rupert, in your heart alone is the knowledge of why you have done this thing. But some day you shall tell me—or die."

There was something intensely dramatic in the passionate bitterness which vibrated in the shrill boyish tone, and, as though moved by a common impulse, every one in the tent followed that threatening gesture. But the face of Rupert Devereux was little like the face of a guilty man. He looked somewhat agitated, and a good deal pained; but although he was the cynosure of all eyes, he turned never a shade the paler, nor flinched once from the passionate fire which was leaping from the eyes of the young prisoner. He seemed as though about to make some reply: but the General raised his hand.

"Remove the prisoner."

There was a sudden, commotion, for, with a deep, despairing groan, and arms for a moment lifted high above his head, he had staggered backwards and sunk heavily to the ground in a dead swoon. What wonder! He was but a boy after all.

* * * * *

"Herbert! Why, Herbert! Good God! where did you spring from? Are you invalided?"

The moonlight was streaming in through the high oriel windows of the long picture gallery, glittering upon the armor and crossed weapons which hung upon the walls, and casting fantastic rays down the polished oak floor. Colonel Sir Charles Devereux dropped the cigar which he had been peacefully smoking, and brought to a sudden halt his leisurely perambulation of this his favorite resort. Before him, with drooping head, with sunken cheeks, and with deep black rims under his eyes, stood his son Herbert, who, only a few months ago, had departed

on his first campaign, a happy, careless young sub. Was it, indeed, his son, or was it a ghost that had stolen upon him out of the gloomy shadows of the vast gallery?

"Invalided! Would to God that I was dead!" broke from the boy's quivering lips. "Father, I have brought disgrace upon you—disgrace upon your name." And he stretched out his hands towards the long line of pictured warriors, who seemed to be frowning down upon him from the wall. "Disgrace that you will never forgive, never pardon."

Like a statue of stone the proud old soldier stood while he listened to his son's story. Then, with a half-smothered groan, he deliberately turned his back upon him.

"Father," he pleaded, "listen to me. Before heaven I swear that I am innocent. Rupert lied. Why, I don't know, but he lied. I never felt fear."

His father turned half round.

"You have been put on your defence. General Luxton would never have found your father's son guilty of cowardice had there been room for doubt. The charge was proved against you in court-martial."

"But, father, it was because they believed Rupert and his man. The only two other men who saw the struggle are dead."

Colonel Devereux turned away and buried his face in his hands.

"A Devereux guilty of cowardice!" he groaned. "My God! that it should have been my son!"

Then with a sudden movement he turned round. His son had sunk upon his knees before him, and the moon was throwing a ghastly light upon his haggard, supplicating face.

"Out of my sight, and out of my heart for ever, Herbert Devereux!" cried his father, his tones vibrating a passionate contempt. "You have brought disgrace upon a stainless name. Curse you for it, though you be a thousand times my son. You shall not sleep under this roof again. Begone! Change your name, I command you! Forget that you are a Devereux, as I most surely shall. Turn linen draper, or man-milliner, or lawyer, what you will so that I never see or hear from you again. Begone, and curse you."

Scathing and vibrating with scorn though the words were, they seemed to touch a chord in the boy's heart, not of humiliation, but of righteous anger. He sprang to his feet, and held himself for a moment as proudly as any of his armored ancestors who looked down from the walls upon father and son.

"I will go, then," he cried, firmly. "It is right that I should go. But, after all, it is false to say that I have disgraced your name. It is Rupert who has done this."

He turned and walked steadily away, without a backward glance. Out of the swing doors on to the broad staircase, he passed along noble corridors, between rows of marble statues, down into the mighty dome-like hall, and out of the house which he had loved so well. And the servants, who would have pressed forward to welcome him, hung back in fear, for there was that in his face which they shrunk from looking upon. Out into the soft summer night, he stepped, heedless of their wondering glances, and down the broad avenue he hurried, never pausing once to breathe in the balmy night wind, heavy with the odor of sweet-smelling flowers, or to listen to the nightingale singing in the low copse which bordered the gardens. Through a low iron gate he stepped into the park, and walked swiftly along, never

glancing to the right or to the left at the strange shadows cast by the mighty oak-trees on the velvety turf, or at the startled deer, who sprung up on every side of him and bounded gracefully away, or at the rabbits who were scampering about all around in desperate alarm; once he had loved to watch and to listen to all these things; but now he felt only a burning desire to escape from them, and to find himself outside the confines of the home which he was leaving for ever. And not until he had reached the last paling, and had vaulted into the broad, white road, did his strength desert him. Then, faint and weary, and heartsick, he sank down in a heap on the roadside, and prayed that he might die.

* * * * *

A cloudless summer morning, with the freshness of dawn still lingering in the air. A morning which seemed about to herald in one of Nature's perfect days, on which to be sad were a crime, and to have troubles absurd. Already the dreamy humming of bees was floating in the atmosphere, and the lark had given place to noisier, if less musical, songsters. It was a glorious morning.

Over the low, iron gate of an old-fashioned garden a girl was leaning, her head resting lightly upon her hand, gazing across the pleasant meadows to the dark woods beyond, with a soft, far-away look in her grey eyes—for she was thinking of her lover. She was dressed in a blue print gown, which hung in simple folds around her straight, slim figure, and she had carelessly passed the long stalk of a full-blown red rose within her waistband. It was a very pleasant view that she was admiring; but any casual spectator would have declared that she was the most charming object in it.

And there was a spectator, although not a casual one. Suddenly, like a ghost, the figure of her dreams stood before her. Pale, haggard, and dishevelled-looking, he seemed to have risen out of the very ground; and it was very little to be wondered at that, at first, she shrunk back alarmed.

"Herbert! Herbert! can it really be you?"

He never answered her; but, as the first surprise began to fade away, she moved forward and would have thrown herself into his arms. But he stopped her.

"Keep back, Marian," he cried, hoarsely; "keep away from me! I have come to bid you good-bye."

A swift, sudden fear drove the color from her cheeks, and chilled her through and through; but she faltered out an answer.

"Good-bye, Herbert! What do you mean? Oh. tell me what has happened, quick!"

"The one thing worse than death, Marian—disgrace!"

And then, with his face turned away, and his eyes resting wearily on the picturesque landscape, he told her his story.

* * * * *

The last word had left his quivering lips, and he stood as though in a dream. The worst was over. He had told his father, and he had told her. It seemed like the end of all things to him.

Suddenly a pair of white arms were thrown around his neck, and a great red rose was crushed to pieces against his waistcoat.

"Herbert! oh, Herbert! how dreadful! Don't look like that, you frighten me!"

He was striving to free himself, but she would not let him go.

"Dearest, you do not understand! This is ruin to me. My father has turned me from the house, commanded me to bear another name, disowned me. Be brave, Marian, for we must part. I am here only to tell you this, and to bid you farewell."

Still she would not let him go.

"You will do nothing of the sort, sir. I'll not be thrown over in that fashion," she said, struggling to smile through her tears. "And Herbert, oh, Herbert! how ill you look! You've been out all night."

He did not deny it, but again he strove to disengage himself. But she would have none of it.

"Bertie, dearest," she spoke cheerfully, though her eyes were still swimming with tears, "you mustn't think that you're going to got rid of us in this way. You've just got to come in to breakfast with me, and afterwards we'll tell grannie all about it. Come along, sir, I insist."

He braced himself up for resistance, but he had still to learn that against a woman's love a man's will can prevail nothing. At first he was firm, then wavering, and finally he was led in triumph across the smooth lawn and along the winding path to the French windows of the morning-room. But when he found himself face to face with the kind old lady who had loved him as her own son, and saw the tears trickle down her withered, apple-red cheeks as she listened to the tale which Marian poured out, he felt that he had passed the limits of self-endurance. For more than twenty-four hours he had neither eaten nor drunk, and he was sick at heart. Gradually Marian felt the arm, which she had drawn tightly through hers, grow heavier and heavier until at last as she finished her tale with a little tremulous burst of indignation, he sank back in the arm-chair and slowly fainted. But through the mist which closed in upon him he saw nothing but kindly pitying faces bending over him, and heard Grannie's gentle whisper:

"I believe you, Herbert," and more emphatic but none the less earnest were her words, whose sweet, tear-stained face, so close to his, was the last he saw when unconsciousness was closing in upon him.

"So do I, Bertie. I hate Rupert," and sweeter than the most heart-stirring music were the faltering words she added:

"And I love you better than ever. Oh, Grannie, Grannie, he has fainted."

Chapter I

My Apology.

Fortune is the strangest mistress a man ever wooed. Who courts her she shuns, who deserves her she passes over, and on him who defies her and takes no pains to secure her she lavishes her favors. I am one of those to whom she has shown herself most kind. Many years ago I vowed my life away to one purpose, and that partly an immoral one. It was a purpose which held my life. I swore to seek no end

apart from it, and I put away from any thoughts all joys that were not included in its accomplishment. And yet, having kept my oath, I still possess in the prime of life everything which a man could wish for. I am rich, and well thought of amongst my fellows. I am married to the woman whom I love, and life is flowing on with me as calmly and peacefully as the murmuring waters of a woodland stream in the middle of summer. And, above all, my heart is at ease, for I have kept my vow.

She is a strange mistress, indeed! Nothing have I sought or deserved of her, yet everything I have. Whilst he who was far above me in his deservings, and whose sufferings none save myself thoroughly understood, passed through a gloomy life, buffeted by every wind, stranded by every tide of fortune; misunderstood, wronged, falsely accused, and narrowly escaped remaining in men's minds only as a prototype of a passionate, unforgiving, Quixotic man.

That the world may know him as he was, and form a better judgment as to his character, I have gathered together the threads of my life indissolubly connected with his, and have turned them inside out. I have never indulged myself with the feminine luxury of a diary, but with a surer progress than of pen over paper has the record of my strange life been written into my mind; and so I tell it just as it all comes back to me, not as a professed story-teller, with harmonious dates and regular evolution of plot, and neatly paged chapters, but in a bolder way, leaving much lo be guessed at, and some things untold. If there be any of whom I have occasion to speak still amongst the living (my life has so contracted of late that many have passed out of its horizon), let them remember for what purpose I write, and for his sake forbear to complain. If the sword were the pen, then would mine be the pen of a ready writer, and I might be able to touch lightly on their shortcomings, and gild over the black spots on my own life. But enough of excuses. I take up my pen a blunt Englishman, an athlete rather than a scholar, to write a plain story which shall serve not as a eulogy, but as a justification of the man to whom many years of my life have been ungrudgingly given. Let all those who may feel disposed to cavil at the disconnectedness of any loosely jointed story, remember this, and be silent.

Chapter II

The First Cloud.

About a mile seaward from Porlock, separated from it by a narrow strip of the most luxuriant meadowlands in Devonshire, lies the village of Bossington. Perhaps it were better called a hamlet, for at the time when I knew anything about it (which, let the tourist remember, is many years ago) it consisted but of six or seven cottages, a farmhouse, and a half-ruined old manor house, for the privilege of living in which my father paid ten pounds a year, or some such trifling sum, to the neighboring clergyman whose property it was.

But what the place lacked in size was certainly atoned for—and more than atoned for—by the beauty of its situation. High above it, like a mighty protecting

giant, rose Bossington Headband, covered always with a soft, springy turf, and glowing in midsummer with the brilliant coloring of rich purple heather and yellow gorse. Often have I stood on its highest point, and with my head bared to the strong fresh breeze, watched the sun rise over the Dartmoor Hills and Dunkerry Beacon, and waited until it shed its first warm gleams on the white cottages and queer old church-tower of Portlock, which lay clustered together in picturesque irregularity at the head of the little bay. And almost as often have I gazed upon the same scene from the same spot by the less distinct but more harmonious light of the full harvest moon, and have wondered in which guise it seemed the fairest.

Behind Bossington lay Allercombe Woods, great tree-covered hills sloping on one side down to the road which connected, and still connects, Porlock with Minehead and the outside world, and on the other, descending precipitously to the sea; so precipitously indeed that it seemed always a wonder to me how the thickly growing but stunted fir trees could preserve their shape and regularity. The descent, from Bossington Headland into Porlock was by a steep winding path through Allercombe Woods, and many a time I have looked through the thin coating of green leaves upon the fields which stretched like a piece of patchwork below down to the sea, and wondered whether any other country in the world (I had never been out of Devonshire then) could be more beautiful than this.

Within a stone's throw of where the blue sea of our English Bay of Naples rippled in on to the firm while sands, was the tumbledown old building in which we lived. What there had been of walls had long before our time been hidden by climbing plants and ivy, and in summer-time the place from a distance somewhat resembled a gigantic nosegay of cottage roses, jessamine, and other creeping flowers. There was but a small garden and no ground, for Bossington Headland rose precipitously close to the back of the house, and in front there was no space for any. A shed served as a stable for one or two Exmoor ponies, and also as a sleeping place for the lanky, raw-boned Devonshire lad whom we kept to look after them.

There were but few habitable rooms in our mansion, but they were sufficient, for our household was a small one. My father, mother, sister, myself, and a country servant comprised it. We never had a visitor, save occasionally the clergyman from Porlock. We never went anywhere. We knew no one, and at seventeen years of age an idea which had been developed in me for a long time, took to itself the tangible shape of words.

"Father," I said to him one evening when we were sitting out upon our little strip of lawn together, he smoking, I envying him for being able to smoke, "do you know that I have never been out of Devonshire—never been further than Exeter even, and I am seventeen years old?"

It was long before he answered me, and when, at last, he turned round and did so, I was distressed to see the look of deep anxiety in his worn, handsome face, and the troubled light in his clear eyes.

"I know it, my boy," he said, pityingly. "I have been expecting this. You are weary of the country."

I stood up, with my hands in my pockets, and my back against the latticed wall of the house, gazing over the sparkling, dancing sea, to where, on the horizon, the stars seem to stoop and meet it. Was I tired of this quiet home? I scarcely knew;

country sports and country sights were dear to me, and I had no desire to leave them for ever. I thought of the fat trout in the Exford streams, and the huntsman's rallying call from "t'other side Dunkerry," and the wild birds that needed so much getting at and such quick firing, and of the deep sea fishing, and the shooting up the coombs from Farmer Pulsford's boat, and of the delight of stripping on a hot summer's day and diving deep down into the cool bracing water. Why should I wish to leave all this? What should I be likely to find pleasanter in the world of which, as yet, I know nothing? For a moment or two I hesitated—but it was only for a moment or two. The restlessness which had been growing up within me for years was built upon a solid foundation, and would not be silenced.

"No, I'm not tired of the country, father," I answered, slowly. "I love it too much ever to be tired of it. But men don't generally live all their lives in one place, do they, without having any work or anything to do except enjoy themselves?"

"And what should you like to be?" my father asked, quickly.

I had long ago made up my mind upon that point, and was not slow to answer.

"I should like to be a soldier," I declared, emphatically.

I was very little prepared for the result of my words. A spasm of what seemed to be the most acute pain passed across my father's face, and he covered it for a moment with his hands. When he withdrew them he looked like a ghost, deathly pale in the golden moonlight, and when he spoke his voice trembled with, emotion.

"God forbid that you should wish it seriously!" he said, "for it is the one thing which you can never be."

"Oh, Hugh, you do not mean it really; you do not wish to go away from us!"

I turned round, for the voice, a soft and gentle one, was my mother's. She was standing in the open window; with a fleecy white shawl around her head, and her eyes, the sweetest I ever saw, fixed appealingly upon me, I glanced from one to the other blankly, for my disappointment was great.

Then, like a flash, a sudden conviction, laid hold of me. There was some great and mysterious reason why we had lived so long apart from the world.

Chapter III

The Boy Must Be Told.

That was quite an eventful night in our quiet life. Whilst we three stood looking at one another half fearfully—I full of this strange, new idea which had just occurred to me—we heard the latch of our garden gate lifted, and Mr. Cox, the vicar of Porlock and my instructor in the classics, followed by no fewer than four large-limbed, broad shouldered, Porlock men, entered.

They made their way up the steep garden path, and my father, in no little surprise, rose to greet them. With Mr. Cox he shook hands and then glanced inquiringly at his followers, who, after touching their hats respectfully, stood in a row looking supremely uncomfortable, and each betraying a strong disposition to retire a little behind the others. Mr. Cox proceeded to explain matters.

“You are pleased to look upon us as a deputation.” he said, pleasantly, waving his hand towards the others, “of which I am the spokesman. We come from the Porlock Working Men’s Conservative Club.”

My father bowed, and bidding me bring forward a garden seat, requested the deputation to be seated. Then he called into the house for Jane to bring out some jugs of cider and glasses, and a decided smile appeared on the somewhat wooden faces of the deputation. I was vastly interested, and not a little curious.

When the cider had been brought and distributed, and a raid made upon the tobacco jar, Mr. Cox proceeded with his explanation.

“We have come to ask you a favor, Mr. Arbuthnot,” he said. “We are going to hold a political meeting in the schoolroom at Porlock next week. A gentleman from Minehead is going to give us an address on the land question which promises to be very interesting, and Mr. Bowles here has kindly promised to say a few words.”

The end man on the seat here twirled his hat, and, being nudged by his neighbor, betrayed his personality by a broad grin. Finally, to relieve his modesty, he buried his face in the mug of cider that stood by his side.

“The difficulty we are in is this,” continued Mr. Cox; “we want a chairman. I have most unfortunately promised to be in Exeter on that day and shall not be able to return in time for the meeting, or else we would not have troubled you. But as I shall not be available, we thought that perhaps you might be induced to accept the office. That is what we have come to ask you.”

My father shook his head.

“It is very kind of you to think of me,” he said, hesitatingly, “but I fear that I must decline your offer. Politics have lost most of their interest for me—and—and, in short, I think I would rather not.”

“I hope you will reconsider that,” Mr. Cox said pleasantly, “It will be a very slight tax upon you after all. You need only say a very few words. Come, think it over again. We really are at our wit’s end or we would not have troubled you.”

“There is Mr. Sothern,” my father protested.

“He is in bed ill. An attack of pleurisy, I think.”

“Mr. Brown, then?”

“A rank Radical.”

“Mr. Jephcote?”

“Away.”

“Mr. Hetton?”

“Gene to London for a week.”

“Mr. Smith, then?”

“Will be at Exeter cattle fair.”

My father was silent for a moment or two. Then he suggested some more names, to each of which there was some objection.

“You do seem to have been unfortunate,” he declared, at last. “To tell you the truth, Mr. Cox,” he added, thoughtfully, “I scarcely know what to say. I had made up my mind, for certain private reasons, never to have anything to do with public life in any shape or form.”

“This isn’t a very formidable undertaking, is it?” Mr. Cox urged, smiling.

“It isn’t. But the principle is the same,” my father answered. “However, leave it in this way, if you like. Give me until tomorrow evening to think the matter over,

and in the meantime see if you can't find some one else. I'm afraid I can't say more than that."

The deputation thought that nothing could be fairer than this, and nothing more satisfactory except an unqualified assent. I think my father imagined that having promised so much they would take their departure. But nothing of the sort happened. Perhaps they found the cider too good, or perhaps they were tired after their day's work and the walk from Porlock. At any rate, there they sat for more than an hour, taking occasional gulps at their cider, and puffing incessantly at their blackened pipes with a stolid vacuous look on their honest faces, whilst my father and Mr. Cox talked a little aside in a low tone. I fancied that I was the subject of their conversation, but though I strained my ears in the attempt to catch some part of it, I was unsuccessful. Once or twice the sound of my name reached me, but directly I leaned forward they dropped their voices, so that I could hear no more. I have always believed, however, that my father was asking advice from Mr. Cox concerning me, and that Mr. Cox was urging him to send me to the University. But I never knew for certain, for events were soon to occur which swept out of my mind all minor curiosity.

At last Mr. Cox rose to go, and the deputation, with manifest reluctance, did the same. My father courteously accompanied them to the garden gate, and shook hands with them all, thanking them for their visit. When he returned there was a slight sparkle in his eyes, and an amused smile on his lips. So monotonous was our life, that even such an event as this was welcome, and I could tell from his manner that he was pleased at the request which had been made to him, and disposed to accept it. I determined to encourage him in it.

"Governor," I remarked, leaning over the wall and watching the retreating forms of our visitors, "I hope we're not going to have many political deputations here, especially if they're all going to be as thirsty as this one was. Did you ever see such fellows for cider! We shan't have a drop left for the hot weather if you encourage this sort of thing. But you'll do what they want you to, won't you? I should! It'll be capital fun, and I'm sure you'd make a rattling speech. You're up on the land question, too. I heard you giving it to Old Simpson the other morning."

My father smiled, and stood by my side watching them make their way down the coombe.

"I shall have to consult your mother about it," he said. "I almost think that I may venture it," he added, in a lower tone and thoughtfully, as though to himself.

"Venture it! What could there be adventurous in it," I wondered, "to a well-read, scholarly man such as I knew him to be!"

But I did not dare to ask.

Presently he turned to me with a much graver look in his face.

"Hugh!" he said, "these people interrupted our conversation. There is something which I must say to you at once. I do not wish you to become a soldier. When you feel that you can stay here no longer, and that this country life is too quiet for you, you must choose some other profession. But a soldier you can never be."

I was bitterly disappointed, and not a little curious, and an idea which had often occurred to me swept suddenly into my mind with renewed strength.

"Father, may I ask you a question?"

He hesitated, but did not forbid me.

“I have heard it said down in the village-every one says that you must once have been a soldier. You walk and hold your head like one, and—father, what is the matter?” I broke off all at once, for his face had become like a dead man’s, and he had sunk heavily on to the seat.

I would have sprung to his side, but my mother was there before me. She had passed one arm around his neck, and with the other she motioned me to go into the house.

“It isn’t your fault, Hugh,” she said, “but you mustn’t ask your father questions; they distress him. Leave us now.”

I turned heavily away, and went upstairs to my room. About an hour afterwards, when I pushed open my window before getting into bed, there stole into my room together with the sweet scent of jessamine and climbing roses the sound of subdued voices.

“He must be told,” I heard my father say solemnly. “God give me strength.”

Then the voices ceased for a while, but I still lingered, and presently they began again, but in a more cheerful key.

I moved away and got into bed, but I left the window open as I always did, and some fragments of their conversation still reached me.

“I am sure that you need have no fear, Herbert. No one in these parts can have the slightest idea of … I hope you will … It will be a change … Now promise.”

I could hear nothing of my father’s reply, but from its tone he seemed reluctant, though wishful. Then the voices dropped again, and I think that I must have dozed for some time. But suddenly I awoke and sat up in bed startled, for my father’s voice was ringing in through the window.

“You are right, Marian; you are right. I will do my duty. The boy must be told. The time has come when I must dig up any trouble again. The boy must be told.”

Then I heard them enter the house (leaving the door wide open, as was our common practice), and come up to their rooms. Afterwards there was silence, but there was no more sleep for me that night.

Chapter IV

A Mysterious Meeting.

On the morrow my father, not a little to my surprise, appeared to be in a particularly cheerful frame of mind. At breakfast time he remarked that the day looked well for fishing, and asked me whether I would not like to go. Of course I consented willingly, and William, our man, or rather boy of all work, was sent down to Mr. Cox, with whom I used generally to read in the morning, with my father’s, compliments and my excuses.

What sport we had all day long! We waded knee deep, sometimes waist high, down the Badgeworthy stream, following its gleaming course past Loma’s tower, past waterslide, which I never looked upon without thinking of John Ridd’s

description, and round the green hills of the Doone, valley as far as the bend of the stream.

It was a long ride home, and across a desolate country. I think that I should have gone to sleep in the saddle I was so tired, but for the stern necessity of picking our way carefully along what was nothing better than a sheep walk. I remember that night ride well.

Suddenly my father pulled his pony almost on its haunches, and instinctively William and I did the same.

"Listen!" he cried.

I bent down and listened intently.

"I hear nothing," I remarked, gathering up my reins, for I was desperately hungry and cold.

My father held up his hand to bid me stay and then turning towards the inland stretch of moor shouted, "Hulloa there! Hulloa! Hulloa!" We listened, and, to my surprise, we heard almost immediately an answering shout, faint, and evidently a long way off, but distinctly a man's hail.

It was scarcely safe to leave the track, so we stopped where we were, and all three shouted. And, sure enough, in less than five minutes we heard the sound of galloping hoofs, and a tall, stately-looking man came riding out of the mist mounted on a fine bay horse which seemed to have been up to its girths, in a morass, and which was trembling in every limb.

"I'm uncommonly glad to see you, gentlemen, whoever you are," he exclaimed, riding up to us. "For close upon three hours have I been trying to come upon a path, or a road, or a track, or something that led somewhere, and have only succeeded in losing myself more completely. Curse these mists! How far am I from Luccombe Hall?"

To my surprise my father made no answer, and when I looked towards him he was sitting bolt upright in his saddle, with his eyes riveted upon the stranger. So I answered his question.

"If you mean Sir Frederick Lawson's place, it's about nine miles off. We are going that way."

The stranger thanked me heartily, and moved his horse to the side of mine. And then happened the strangest thing which I had ever seen. My father, who was the most courteous and gentlest mannered man I ever came near, rose suddenly in his stirrups, and, without a word, struck the stranger full in the mouth with the back of his hand.

It seemed for a moment as though he must fall from his horse; but by a great effort he recovered himself, and, with the blood streaming from his mouth, grasped his riding whip and dug spurs into his horse as though to spring at my father. What followed was the strangest part of all. Although his assailant was within a yard of him, with his heavy riding whip lifted high in the air to strike, my father never moved a muscle, but simply sat still as a statue upon his pony. But at the last moment, when the whip was quivering in the air, he quietly raised his hand and lifted his hat from his head. There he sat motionless, with the faint moon which had just struggled out from a bank of clouds shining on his handsome, delicate face, and with his clear, firm eyes fixed steadily upon the

stranger. Like a tableaux vivant, burnt into my memory, I shall carry that scene with me until I die.

The moment my father removed his hat his would-be assailant evidently recognised him. His whip dropped heavily to the ground, and into his ghastly face there leaped such an expression of horrified surprise as my pen could never dissect and set down in words.

"My God! Herbert! Is this possible!"

"Keep back, keep away from me," muttered my father, in a low, suppressed tone, as though he were striving to control some violent passion. "Keep out of my reach lest I do you a mischief. Thank God, we are not alone. Speak! What are you doing here?"

The fierce restraint which he seemed to be putting upon his words made them come forth slowly with a monotonous sing-song which sounded more terrible than the wildest outburst. I was shivering all over with dread of what might come of this.

The stranger answered hoarsely, and I could tell that he, too, had felt the peculiar affect of my father's strange tone.

"I am staying with Sir Frederick Lawson at Luccombe Hall for a few days only. I had no—"

My father raised his hand.

"Swear on what remains of your honor-swear by anything that is dearest to you-that you do not seek to discover my dwelling-place, or the name under which I choose to live. Swear that you never mention this meeting to living man or woman."

The stranger raised his hat.

"I swear," he said.

There was a dead silence for a full minute. Then my father gathered up his reins, and motioned us to ride on.

"You are fortunate as ever, Rupert Devereux," were his last words, as he turned to follow us, "for, sure as there is a God above us if I had met you here alone to-night, nay, if any other had been with me than my son, I should have killed you."

We rode home almost in silence, and, though I listened often, I never once heard the sound of horse's hoofs behind us. Whoever this man might be whom we had so strangely met, he evidently preferred to risk losing his way again, rather than chance another meeting with us.

As we walked our ponies down Porlock Hill, and came in sight of Bossington headland, standing gloomily out into the sea, my father called William to him.

"William," he said shortly, "I desire that you keep strictly to yourself what happened to us just now. If I hear of your mentioning so much as a word of it, you will leave my service at once."

William touched his hat awkwardly, but sincerely.

"There bean't no fear of me, maester," he answered. "I bean't no gossip, I bean't, and I never zeed no zense in talkin' 'bout other folks' avvairs; zepecially yer betters. I'll no mention that ther'er chap to no one."

My father nodded, and not another word was spoken until we had passed through Porlock and our ponies had freshened up into the home canter. Then he leaned over and spoke to me.

“I need say nothing to you, my boy; you know your mother must hear about this from me, and from me only.”

“I promise, father,” I answered simply, having hard work to keep my voice from trembling, for I was still excited and uneasy; and something made me suddenly hold my hand out to him as a pledge of my silence. Many a time since I have been glad that I did so, for he seemed to take it kindly.

“God bless you, my boy!” he said, and I could almost have fancied that there were tears in his eyes.

Chapter V

On Bossington Headland.

A very demon of unrest laid hold of me that might. I ought to have been sleepy, for we had had a long fatiguing day in the open air, but, as a matter of fact, I was nothing of the sort. I have always been a rigid materialist, but never since that night have I been without some faint belief in that branch of superstition known as presentiments.

I had led a strange life for a boy of my age. I had never been to school, and I had no companions of my own station save my father. As regards my education, that had been entrusted to Mr. Cox, our nearest clergyman. He did his best with me, poor man; but he must have found it terrible work, for I was anything but brilliant. There was another part of my education, the part undertaken by my father in which I was not so backward, and, with all due respect to the classics, I found it of infinitely more use to me in my after life. I could ride, fish, shoot, fence, box, or row as well as most men, and, though I was slight, I was tall and strong, as who would not have been, leading the healthy life which we did?

It had never troubled me that I had no friends of my own age. Indeed, I never had need of any, for when I had finished for the day with Mr. Cox, or on holidays—which came not unfrequently—my father was always ready to do any thing I desired; and what better companion could I have had? He was a better shot and a far better fencer than I, and, at a distance, no one would have taken him for more than my elder brother. He was over six feet in height, and as slim and upright as a dart. His slight moustaches and hair were, indeed grey, but they were the only signs of age, save, perhaps, a weary, troubled look which sometimes came into his face and dwelt there for days. But a good hand-gallop or an hour or two shooting from a boat round the coombe, used generally to drive that away; and then his blue eyes would flash as eagerly and his interest in the sport would be as strong as ever mine was. But, though we were out in all weathers, sometimes for the whole day together, it seemed as though neither sun nor wind could do more than very slightly tan his clear, delicate skin; and his hands, although they were as tenacious and strong as a bargeman’s, remained almost as white and shapely as a lady’s. I used to think him the handsomest man in the world, and I have certainly

never seen a handsomer. To be told that I was growing like him was to make me supremely happy—and people often told me so in those days.

No wonder that I grew to love him with more even than an ordinary filial love. The ties between us were so various, that it would have been strange had it not been so. To the love of a son for his father was added the love which springs from constant companionship whilst engaged with kindred tastes in following a common object. My mother, too, claimed a large share of my affection, and so did Marian, my sister. But neither of them came any where near him in my heart.

I was not of a speculative nature, but gradually it had begun to dawn upon me that we were somehow different from other people—that there must be some reason for the absolute and unbroken solitude in which we lived, and the events of the last two days had now made this certain. "The boy must be told." What was it that I must be told? I had thought that I should have known this very evening, for just as I was going to bed my father had called me to him.

"Hugh," he had said kindly, "you were saying something last night about never having been away from this place. You were quite right. You must not live here always. There has been a reason, a very grave reason, for our having lived here so long and in such solitude. You must be told that reason."

I could see that he was agitated, and a vague yet strong sense of trouble filled me.

"Do not tell me now, father," I cried, "do not tell me at all if it distresses you. I will ask no more questions. I will be content to live on here always as we are doing now."

He shook his head slowly.

"No, Hugh, my boy, you must be told. It is my duty to tell you. But not to-night. I have gone through enough to-day," and he sighed.

I thought of the terrible scene on the moor, of my father's wild words and passionate action, and I asked him no questions. But when I left him for the night and went to bed, there was in my heart a strong sense of some approaching trouble. I tossed about from side to side in my bed till sleep became hopeless. Then I rose, and, hastily putting on my clothes, slipped out of the house.

Even outside I found it warm and oppressive. The sky was black with clouds, and without the moon's softening light the sea looked sullen and uninviting. The air seemed heavy, and, even when I stood on the headland after half an hour's climbing, there was no cool breeze to reward me, and, although I had thought myself hard and in good condition, the perspiration came streaming from every pore in my body, and I found myself panting for breath.

I stood upright, and tried to look around me, but everything was wrapped in a thick pall of darkness. I had never known so dark a night, and after standing there for a moment or two, I grew afraid to move lest I should make a false step. To the right of me I could hear the wind moaning amongst the pine trees of Allercombe Wood, which the slightest breeze, when in a certain direction, always seemed to cause, and, many hundred feet below, there was the roar of the sea, unusually loud for such a quiet night, as it swept round the sharp corners of the headland.

Never had I stood there before on such a night, or with such a heavy heart. I wished that I had not come, and yet I was afraid to go. The darkness had closed in upon me till I could almost feel it, and knowing that a single step in the wrong

direction might cost me my life, I dared not move. Suddenly the heaviness of the atmosphere was explained. The sky above me seemed to be rent aside to let out a great blare of vivid light which flashed, glittering and fiercely brilliant, right across the arc of the heavens, sinking at last into the horizon of the sea, which it showed me for a moment with a lurid light, green and disturbed. Almost on its heels came the thunder, and I trembled as I listened. It seemed as if the hills were one by one splitting open with a great crash all around me, and the ground on which I stood shook. Again the lightning was scattered all over the inky sky, giving me ghastly peeps at sections of the patchworky landscape below, and once it flashed down the conductor of Porlock steeple, snowing, me the little town as distinctly as I had ever seen it. A gale sprung up with marvellous suddenness; the moaning of the pine trees became an angry shrieking, and the roar of the sea far away below, became a deafening thunder. Black clouds and grey mists came rolling along, sometimes enveloping me, and sometimes passing so close above my head that I could feel their moisture, and, by stretching out my hand, could almost have touched them. Every how and then above the storm I could hear the piteous bleating of the mountain sheep, as they rushed frantically about seeking in vain for shelter which the bare hill-side could not afford them. For the rain was coming down in sheets, blinding, driving, sheets and already the swollen mountain streams were making themselves heard above all the din, as they swept down into Porlock valley.

Before the storm had even commenced to die away I had thrown myself face downwards on the wet grass, and was praying. A strange idea had flashed into my mind, and had suddenly become a conviction. This storm had somehow associated itself in my mind with the sudden sense of gloomy depression which had laid hold of me, and driven me out into the black night. As one ended, so would the troubles which the other foretold. It was a strange idea, but it was stranger still what a mastery it gained over me. I dared not look up lest I should still see a threatening sky and an angry sea. If such had been the case, I am convinced that I should have been strongly tempted to have thrown myself from the cliffs into the arms of certain death. But when at last I summoned up courage to rise, and gaze fearfully around, it was a very different sight upon which my eyes dwelt. So strangely different that at first it seemed almost as though the hideous storm which, had been raging so short a while ago must surely have been a wild nightmare. The dark line of the Dartmoor hills was betopped with rosy-colored clouds, and the sun was shining down from a clear sky, gilding and transforming the whole landscape like some great magician. The white cottages of Porlock seemed basking in its pleasant warmth, whilst the fields between it and the sea seemed to be stretching themselves out smiling and refreshed. Here and there scattered about amongst them, and on the white sands, were long sparkling streaks of silver, which bore witness of the violence of the rainfall; and the tops of the pine trees seemed encrusted with a mass of diamonds; but strangest of all seemed the altered aspect of the sea. It stretched away below me like a great lake, with only the gentlest ripple disturbing its placid surface, a mighty playground for myriads of sparkling sunbeams. Never had I seen the hills so green or the sea such on exquisite deep, clear blue. Everything seemed to speak of peace and calm and happiness after suffering. It struck an answering chord in my heart, and I could have cried out with joy. The hideous depression seemed rolled away from' me, and

I could breathe freely again. My spirits leaped up within me, and I threw my hat into the air and shouted for joy till Allercombe Wood rang with the echoes! Then I turned away and strode down the narrow, winding path, suddenly conscious that I was stiff and wet and tired. If I had known then when and how I should next stand on Bossington Point, should I ever have come down? I cannot tell.

Chapter VI

An Interrupted Address.

Imagine a long, bare-looking apartment with white-washed walls and generally cheerless appearance, in one corner of which had been pushed aside black boards, piles of maps, and other evidences of the school-room. Scatted on benches which reached to the entrance door was a very fair sprinkling of the Porlock laborers and tradespeople, whose healthy red faces were shining with soap and expectation, and whose whole appearance denoted a lively and creditable desire to be enlightened on the very Important subject which they had come to hear discussed. If any one was interested in the land question surely they were, for they all lived either upon it or by it, except a few whose nautical garb betrayed another occupation, and whose presence was the subject of a great deal of good-humored chaff before the proceedings opened.

"Eh, Bill," cried one of the land toilers whom I knew well, for he worked at Farmer Smith's up at Bossington, "what dost want know about t'land, eh? This'll noa teach thee to catch fishes."

"Never thee moind aboot that, Joe," was the good-humored answer, "we want noabody to teach us to catch fish, we' don't. I ha' come t' hear what the bloke from Minehead's got to zay 'bout you poor de'ils o' landsmen just out o' curiosity like."

"Coom, Bill, I like that," returned the first speaker. "Poor de'ils, indeed! Bean't we as well off as you vishers, eh?"

"Noa, of course you bean't. How can yer be when every voot of land yer tread on belongs to your maesters? Why, we can go sailing away vor days on the zea, lads, and we've as much right the'er as any voine gentleman in his steam yacht. T' zea belongs to us, zall, yer zee, and we as goes vishing ha' got as much roight the'er as any one. I reckon we've got the best o' you landsmen there, eh, Bill. Ha, ha, ha!"

To my deep regret this interesting discussion was here brought to a sudden termination by the appearance of my father, the lecturer, and the committee upon the platform. Instantly there was a deep silence, for country audiences, in that respect, are far better bred than town ones, in the midst of which my father, in a few kindly, well-chosen words, introduced the lecturer to them.

When he resumed his chair there was a burst of applause (Devonshire men are generous with their hands and feet), at the conclusion of which the lecturer, a retired linen draper from Minehead, stepped forward. Of course his doing so was the signal for another little round of cheering, during which he stood rustling his papers about, edging down his cuffs, and making desperate efforts to appear at his

ease, which he most certainly was not. At last he made a start, and in less than five minutes I found myself devoutly wishing that he would look sharp and finish, The land question may be an immensely interesting one—no doubt it is; but when it consists in having long strings of depressing statistics hurled mercilessly at you by a nervous little ex-vendor of calico, who made a point of dropping his h's, you can very soon have enough of it. Before long I saw my father politely stifle a yawn—a piece of delicacy which I, not being upon the platform, did not think it necessary to imitate. The audience behaved admirably. The painful efforts written on the faces of most of them to appear intelligently interested were quite affecting, and at exactly the proper moments they never failed to bring in a little encouraging applause. I'm quite sure there wasn't one of them who understood a word of what the man was saying, but they were evidently charitably inclined to put this down to their own stupidity rather than to the incompetence of the lecturer.

He had been droning on for about half an hour, when a slight commotion caused by the noisy entrance of some late-comers led me to turn my head. Instantly my spirits rose, for I foresaw a row. The new-comers were all Luccombe men, and between the men of Luccombe and the men of Porlock there existed, a deadly enmity. They were rivals in sport and also in politics, for whilst Luccombe boasted a Radical club, Porlock was distinctively Conservative. The arrival of these Luccombites, therefore, was most promising, for they certainly had not come out of compliment to their neighbors, and I took an early opportunity of changing my seat for one nearer the back of the room, so as to be in the fun in case there should be any.

It certainly seemed as though something would come of it. There were several strangers among the new-comers, and one of them in particular attracted my attention. He was a big, white-faced man, with continually blinking eyes and stupid, vacuous face, and every now and then he gave vent to his feelings by a prolonged animal cry which afforded the most exquisite amusement to his companions, and never failed to produce the utmost consternation in the lecturer's startled face. I don't know why it was so, but I took a violent dislike to that man the moment I saw him. He was so ugly, so like an animal, besides which, he was evidently half drunk. He seemed of a different species altogether to the broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced, good-humored Devonshire men by whom he was surrounded, and a very inferior species, too.

After a while my attention was distracted from him to the other Luccombites, who were evidently bent upon breaking up the meeting. The lecturer was by no means the sort of man to defy the uproar, and insist upon finishing what he had to say. After a very mild protest, the meekness of' which caused a howl of derision from the peace-breakers, he brought his lecture to an abrupt close and sat down.

Then my father rose, and spoke a few stern, reproving words which had an infinitely better effect. But I was too occupied in watching the extraordinary behavior of the white-faced man from Luccombe to listen to them. He had half risen to his feet, and was leaning over the back of one of the benches with his eyes and mouth wide open, staring with a stupidly bewildered look at my father. Suddenly he turned round to his companions.

"Say, lads, should you like to see me shut that joker up?"

I felt hot with indignation, but I kept still.

"Ay, Jack, or Thomas, or whatever your name is," answered one of the Luccombites, "give him a cock-a-doodle-do."

The man smiled, an ugly, sickly smile.

"I'll do better nor that," he muttered. "Listen, you 'ere," and, leaning forward, he shouted out one word at the top of his voice—"Yah! coward!"

I saw my father reel backwards as though he were shot, and the word he was uttering died away upon his lips. For a moment I hesitated whether to rush to him or at the man who had yelled out that word. But one glance at his ugly, triumphant face decided me. With two rapid strides I was across the room, and my hand was on his collar.

"Come on!" I snouted, "come along!"

He turned his fishy eyes up at me in amazement.

"What d'ye want? What d'ye mean?" he called out. "Let me go, you young cub, you! You're choking me."

"I'll do worse than choke you before I've done," I cried passionately. "Come outside and fight, you great beast," and I dragged him half across the floor, for he was striving to free himself, and shaking like a jelly-fish.

The audience had sat quite still in their places until now, only half realising what was going on. But at my words it seemed suddenly to dawn upon them, and they crowded around us with a full appreciation of' my intended action.

"Let him be, maester Hugh; we'll bring him along," they cried heartily, for there was not one whom I did not know. "We won't let him go, no fear. Who be 'e to call Maester Arbuthnot names?"

The man whom I jealously released shook himself sulkily and slouched along in the middle of the crowd towards the door.

"I don't want to be let go," he sneered. "If the boy wants a whipping I'll give it 'im. Most like he's a coward like his father though; and won't stand up to it."

My blood was boiling, but I would not answer, there were others to speak for me, though.

"You'd best keep that d—— tongue of yours fro' wagging in yer ugly mouth," cried Jim Holmes the blacksmith. "The lad's 'l the right to stand up for his father, and, boy or no boy, he's like to make a jelly-bag o' you. Bring him on the green, lads."

They brought him on the green, and quickly formed a ring. The policeman, who was present as a delighted spectator, and who never dreamt of interfering, was good enough to hold my coat and waistcoat, whilst my adversary, unable to find any one willing to perform the same kind office for him, had to deposit his on the ground. He seemed in no hurry to declare himself ready, but at last the word was given, and we stood face to face. Even then he held up his hand for a minute's longer grace, and stared at me as though I were a ghost.

"My God!" he muttered to himself, "it's Mr. Herbert's own self! It's just as he looked at me in the tent;" and he stared at me as though frightened, yet fascinated.

Then we began. Of course I am not going to describe the fight. If we had been alone I should probably have killed him. As it was, they held me off by sheer force when they thought that he had had enough, and there was life still in him when I turned away, followed by an enthusiastic little crowd—but not much.

I went straight to the schoolroom. It was deserted, and the gas was turned down. From one of the loiterers outside I heard that my father had gone home, and hastily bidding good night to the little crowd who still hung about my heels, I followed in the same direction.

I had thought that I should have overtaken my father, and at every turn of the lane I looked forward to catching sight of him. But I was disappointed, and when I at last reached home without having done so, I began to feel nervously uneasy. I did not at once enter the house, but looked in at the window. My mother and Marian were alone, working. I looked through into the hall. Neither his hat nor coat were there.

He could not have yet returned. And when I realised this I stepped back on to the lawn, pale and shivering, for a horrible foreboding had laid hold of me. What could have become of him? Where could he have gone? I could not imagine, I dared not conjecture.

Chapter VII

I Am Told.

"Master Hugh!"

I had been leaning against a tree on the lawn, afraid to enter the house, yet knowing there was nothing else for me to do. At the sound of a voice close to my elbow I turned quickly round, and found myself face to face with our solitary man-servant, a raw country yokel with the garb and manners of a ploughboy.

"Maester Hugh, dos't thee want t' master?"

"Ay, William; have you seen him?" I cried.

"That I have, Maester Hugh, and it zeemed to me that he had gone off 'is chump like. Ho coom down the lane 'bait quarter of an hour ago, and insteat o' cooming t' house, blamed if he didna turn in at Varmer Zmith's gate, and be a gone up theer," and the boy pointed to the dark outline of the headland which towered up above us.

I sprang away from him, over the low wall, and up the steep winding path, with a reckless speed which frightened William out of the very few wits with which nature had endowed him, and bereft him of all words.

I had but one idea, to get to the top as quickly as possible, and but one hope, that I might find him there when I arrived. I was a trained climber, and I did that night what I had never done before—I forsook the path and clambered right up the precipitous side of the hill, helping myself with hands and feet, heedless that a slip must cost me my life, and between my short, quick gasps for breath faltering out a prayer that I might be in time.

It was granted. As I reached the last ridge, and swung myself on to the summit, grasping with my bleeding hands a friendly heather bush, I saw my father kneeling on the ground close to the edge of the cliff, with his coat and hat thrown on one side and his arms stretched out to the sea. In a moment I was beside him,

and as my hand descended on his shoulder and closed upon him with a firm grasp, I drew a long sigh of relief.

"Father, what does all this mean?" I cried. "What, are you doing here? Thank God that I have found you!"

He started as though he were shot, and tried to shrink away from me. But I would have none of it. I dropped on my knees by his side, and locked my arm in his.

"Father, tell me all about it," I pleaded. "Something terrible happened a long while ago, and that man who was there to-night knew about it. Am I not right? Tell me all about it; I am not afraid to hear."

He shivered from head to foot, and his face looked ghastly cold. I reached out my hand for his coat and made him put it on.

"Hugh, my poor boy, I had meant to tell you this, but I never dreamt that this would come. I thought that I was safe here-away from everyone."

"Let me know it," I begged.

"Ay, listen. When I was not much older than you are, I entered the army."

I could not keep back the exclamation which rose to my lips. Had I not always thought that he had been a soldier?

"At my first battle I unwisely deserted my post to save the life of the man whom we saw on Exmoor last night, and whose servant was at the meeting this evening. After the fighting was over I was charged with running away. I thought lightly of it, and appealed at once to the man whose life I had saved to come forward and clear me. He came forward with his servant, but, to my horror, they both deliberately perjured themselves. They swore that they had only seen me running away, and I was found guilty, guilty of cowardice—was cashiered, ruined, disgraced for life, and, but for your mother, I should have killed myself."

The tears were swimming in my eyes, and I tightened my grasp upon his arm.

"Father, why did he do it?"

"He sprang to his feet, his eyes ablaze with fury, and his voice shaking

"That he might oust me from my home, and my father's heart—the cur—and take my position. We were half-brothers, and I was the elder. My father loved, me and cared little for Rupert. He was jealous. Ah! I can see it all now, and seized this opportunity of ruining me and getting rid of me for ever. He succeeded. Every one believed me guilty. My father turned me out of the house, bade me change my name, and forget that I was a—one of a noble family. From that day to this I have never looked upon his face or seen my old home. Your mother alone believed in me, refused to desert me; and, but for that, I must have died. Oh, God, it has been cruel!"

He covered his face with his hands, and great sobs burst from him! My heart was beating with a passionate pity, but I could not tell how to comfort him.

"Father, you know that I do not believe this thing," I cried. "Tell me the name of the man who has sworn to this wicked lie."

"The same as your own and mine. Devereux. Rupert Devereux. Curse him! On his head be the sin of this thing, if sin there be! Good bye, my boy, good bye, Hugh!"

He made a sudden movement to the edge of the cliff, and it was only by a stupendous effort that I caught hold of him in time.

“Father, what would you do?” I cried. “Are you mad?”

I caught hold of him by the waist, and dragged him back from his perilous position. He submitted without protesting—without speech of any sort. Looking into his face a great fear came upon me. Were my words prophetic, and was he indeed going mad? There was a dreamy, far-away look in his glazed eyes, a look which frightened me more than a wilder one would have done, and his face was like the face of a corpse. Then, with a deep groan, his knees would have given way from under him, but that I still held him up. He was unconscious.

Chapter VIII

My Vow.

How we reached home that night I could never exactly tell. I know that I half carried, half supported him down the narrow path, and at last managed to reach the door of our house. But it was no easy task, and for some minutes I stood there panting and exhausted before I could bring myself to summon any one. Then my mother, who had been sitting up anxiously, heard us, and came hurrying out full of eager inquiries. But I had no strength left to answer her, and when she saw my father’s state she ceased her questioning, for she knew at once what had happened.

For three whole days and nights he was only partially conscious. Then he fell into a heavy sleep, which the doctor whom we had summoned from Minehead assured us was his salvation; and so it turned out, for on the fourth day he recovered consciousness, and within a week he was up, and looked much as usual, save for the worn, troubled look in his eyes, and the deeper lines on his forehead.

On the first afternoon when he was allowed to talk, my mother was alone with him for several hours. Then she came out, and fetched me in from the garden and took me to him.

“Hugh, my boy,” he said slowly, looking up from his desk, “we are making our plans for the future. We are going to leave here at once.”

I was not surprised, and I was certainly not displeased. For although I loved our country home and the quaint homely people by whom we were surrounded, I could never lock upon Bossington Headland again without a shudder, when I remembered how nearly it had witnessed a terrible tragedy.

“Your mother and I thought of travelling abroad for a while,” he went on. “I shall never be able to settle down anywhere again. But with you it is different. You ought to go to college and choose a profession. Whether you do so or not must depend upon one thing. I myself shall never resume the name which I am supposed to have disgraced, but if you choose to do so there is nothing to prevent you. You will have to bear a certain amount of odium, but it is not everyone who will visit my disgrace upon you. You will be poor, but although my father will never leave either of us a penny he cannot prevent the title coming to me, and eventually

to you. The entailed estates which go with the title are very small, and I hear that he has purposely mortgaged them up to the hilt, so that nothing should ever come to me from them. But if you choose to bear your rightful name you will claim a place amongst one of the oldest and most honorable families in the country, you can go to college, and somehow or other we will find the money to start you in one of the professions, but not in the army."

"And if I choose still to bear the name I have always done?"

"Then you will not be able to go to college, or to enter any of the professions," my father answered. "You can do neither under an assumed name."

I walked up and down the room for a minute or two thinking. My mind was soon made up.

"I will not bear any name that you do not," I declared firmly. "If my grandfather thinks that you are not worthy to bear the name of Devereux, neither will I, unless the time shall come when he and the whole world shall know the truth, and you shall take your name again: I will never call myself anything else but Hugh Arbuthnot."

My father stretched out his hand, and looked up at me with glistening eyes.

"Spoken like a man, Hugh," he said. "God grant, that that day may come!"

"Amen!" I added fervently. "And come it shall!"

But I did not tell him then the resolve which I had grafted into my heart. I did not tell him then that I had sworn to myself that I would roll this cloud away from his name, even if I wrung the confession from my uncle's dying lips, and if success should be denied to me, I would, at least, find some means of bringing down retribution on the head of the man who had wrecked and embittered my father's life. By fair means or foul I would gain my end. At eighteen years old I devoted and consecrated my life to this purpose.

Chapter IX

An Unexpected Visit.

During the next four years of my life there happened to me not one single incident worth recording. Our home had been broken up, and we had left Devonshire for ever. My father and mother were living abroad at a small country town in the south of France, Marian was at a boarding school at Weymouth, and I—I was articled clerk to a very respectable firm of land agents and surveyors in Exeter.

To say that I was contented would be false, but, on the other hand, I was not absolutely miserable. The out-of-door life suited me, and I did not find the work unpleasant. But apart from that I was by no means satisfied. Day and night I carried with me the pale unhappy face of my poor father, his proud spirit continually being lashed and mortified by the disgrace which falsely rested upon him. I thought of him wandering about in a foreign country, exiled from his proper place in the world, from the society of his fellows, from all things which men of his

kind most esteem. I thought of him bearing always in his mind those cruel words of his father's, "Out of my house and out of my heart," and it seemed to me a disgrace that I should be leading a humdrum life in a quiet country town, instead of throwing all my heart and energies into the task which I had placed before me as a sacred mission. But how was I to commence it? The combined income of my father and mother was barely four hundred a year, out of which I received one hundred, besides a trifling salary, which, however, was soon to be increased. Out of this I had been able to save a little, but not much. Nothing which would be of the slightest service to me in commencing such a task as I had in view. And so I did not see what move I could possibly make in the matter which was nearest to any heart, although my present inaction was irksome, at times almost unbearably irksome to me.

One night I was working late in my little sitting-room copying some plans, when I heard steps on the stairs and the door was quietly opened. I looked up in some surprise, for I never had visitors, and my landlady would scarcely have entered without knocking. But when I saw who it was standing on the threshold I dropped my compasses and sprang up with an eager, welcoming cry.

"Hugh, my boy!" and our hands were locked in a close grasp. Then all of a sudden the joy of this unexpected meeting was dispelled, and my heart sank cold within me. For from head to foot he was clothed in the deepest mourning, and the tears were standing in his hollow eyes.

"Something has happened!" I exclaimed, in a low voice. "Tell me! Mother—"

"Is dead!"

Then he sank down upon my hard little horsehair sofa, and covered his face with his hands, and I waited patiently, though with an aching heart, for surely his sorrow was greater than mine.

Presently he told me more—told me how she had caught a fever at a poor "ouvrier's" cottage, which had never been looked upon as serious until too late; and how she would not have either Marian or me sent for when she knew that she was dying, but had written us each a dying message, and had made him promise to bring the sad news to us himself, and not trust it to a letter. But all this has little to do with my story, so I pass it briefly over.

He had told me all that there was to tell, and then I ventured to speak to him of the future. I had hoped that he would have settled down in England somewhere with Marian and me, but it was a hope which he very soon dispelled.

"Your mother's death," he said, in a low tone when I first began to hint at my desire, "has left me free. I shall look to you to make a home for Marian, and I shall make over to you for that purpose three quarters of my income. For myself I can never live in England. There is one place, and one place only, which I could call home, and there I cannot go. My life has been for a long time too sedentary a one to be pleasing to me. I am a man of action, and I can never forget that I was once a soldier. I must go where there is fighting."

His words were a blow to me, and for a moment or two I did not answer him. My heart was too hot for words, full of a burning indignation against the cruel slander which was sapping away his life. Notwithstanding the weary look in his eyes, and his wrinkled brow, he was still the finest-looking man I had ever, or ever have, seen. Handsome after the highest type of the patrician Englishman. He was tall,

and though slight, magnificently shaped, with long, firm limbs and stately carriage. His features, though powerful and strongly defined, were delicately carved and of the most refined type, and though his hair and moustache were greyer even than when he had left Devonshire, he was still in the prime of life. There was the "je ne sais quois" of a soldier about him, the air of command and military bearing. And yet there was nothing better for him to do with his life than go and throw it away amongst foreigners, fighting in a cause for which he could care nothing, and which glory and patriotism, the highest incentives of a soldier, could never make dear to him.

A curse upon that uncle of mine! I would have uttered it out loud, but for fear of raising a storm which I should not be able to quell. So I breathed it to myself, savagely, and none the less emphatically.

"Let me go with you, father," I begged; "I am sick of this humdrum life, and I cannot bear to think of your going wandering about the world by yourself; I can fight, and could soon learn the drill."

He shook his head decisively.

"It is good of you to want to come, Hugh," he said kindly, "but it is quite out of the question. You have your sister to look after, and besides," he added, with a smile, "I do not think my career as a soldier of fortune will be a long one."

"Father, don't talk like that," I cried, passionately. "They say that some time or other truth will always out, and I believe it! I believe that the day will come when your innocence will be made clear!"

He shook his head dejectedly, but not without emotion.

"Little hope of that," he said with a deep sigh. "Two men alone amongst the living know the truth about that day, and having once perjured themselves, they are not likely to recant."

"And those two are my uncle Rupert and his servant. What was the servant's name?"

"John Hilton, the man who was at the meeting at Porlock," my father answered, with a shudder, at the recollection of that terrible night. "There was one other man who might have cleared me; but, as fate would have it, when I appealed for his evidence it was discovered that his name was on the missing list. He was either killed or taken prisoner."

"Who was he?" I asked.

"Sergeant Fenwick. Without doubt he was killed, or he would have been delivered over to us at the peace. No, unless Rupert confesses, and one might as well expect the heavens to fall in, I shall die dishonored and nameless," my father concluded, bitterly.

I stood up and drew a long breath.

"Father," I cried in a low, intense tone, "have you never felt that you must seek out this hound of a brother of yours, and hold him by the throat until he has confessed, or until the breath is gone out of his body? I should feel like that! I should want to stand face to face with him and wring the truth from his lying lips."

My father's eyes were sparkling, and his whole frame quivering with compressed excitement.

“Ah, Hugh, I have felt like that,” he cried, “many and many a time. Do you remember the night when we met him on the moor near Dunkerry? If I had been alone that night I should have killed him. I know that I should. It is for that reason that I dare not seek him out. If I heard him utter that lie again, if I saw in his eyes one gleam of pity for me whose life he has hopelessly wrecked, no power on earth could keep me from strangling him, and so I do not seek to meet him. But if chance throws him in my way again, when we are alone, God have mercy on him and me!”

There was a long silence between us. Then I asked him further questions about his present plans.

“You must not think me unkind, Hugh,” he said, gently, “but mine is a very flying visit. I cannot breathe in this country. It chokes me! Everything reminds me so of home! To-night, in half an hour’s time,” he added, taking out his watch, “I leave here for Weymouth to see Marian. To-morrow afternoon I leave England, most likely for ever.”

I tried entreaties, remonstrances, reproaches, but they were all in vain. He shook his head to all.

“I have called at London on my way here,” he said, interrupting me in the midst of my appeal, “and have made over my account at Smith’s to you. Here is the pass-book and a cheque-book. Mr. Malcolm, of 18 Bucklersbury, is my solicitor, and will pay you three hundred a year. If at any time you desire to re-invest the capital you can do so, for it stands in your name. Hugh, God knows it is my bitter sorrow that I can leave you nothing better than a tarnished name. But remember this: I believe that if you were to go to your grandfather, and tell him who you were, and that I had left England with a vow never to return, I believe then that he would receive you, and would make you his heir. So that—”

“Father, what do you take me for?” I interrupted, passionately. “I will live and die Hugh Arbuthnot, unless you before me bear the name and title of the Devereuxs. Can you imagine that I would seek out my grandfather and crave his recognition, whilst you were wandering about, in miserable exile, excluded from it? Father, you cannot think so meanly of me.”

He held out his hand without speaking, but the gesture was in itself enough. Then he drew out his watch, and rose.

“Hugh, my boy, good bye, and God bless you! Where I am going I cannot tell you, for I do not know myself. But I will write, and if at any time you have news for me and do not know my address, put an advertisement in the ‘Times.’ Take care of Marian—and—and God bless you.”

* * * * *

He was gone, and save a dull, gnawing pain at my heart, and the letter which lay on the table before me, there was nothing to remind me of his recent presence. All through the long hours in the night I sat in my chair with my head buried in my hands, and—I see no shame in confessing it—many passionate tears falling on to my spoilt plans. Then, when the grey streaks of dawn commenced to rise in the eastern sky, and throw a ghastly light into my sitting-room, in which the gas was still burning, I fell into a drowsy sleep. When I awoke the sun was shining in a clear sky, and the cathedral bells were chiming the hour. It was eight o’clock.

I stood up half dazed. Then my eyes fell upon the letter which still lay before me, and I remembered with a cold chill all that had happened. I stretched out my hand for it, and tore it open.

The handwriting was weak and straggling, and the words were few; but I held it reverently, for it was a message from the dead.

> "Farewell, my dearest Hugh, for before this reaches you I shall be dead. Take care of Marian always, and be good to her. With my last strength, Hugh, I am tracing these words to lay upon you a solemn charge. Your father is dying slowly of a broken heart. Year after year I have watched him grow more and more unhappy, as the memory of this cruel dishonor seems to grow keener and bitterer. He is pining away for the love of his old home, his father, and the name which he was once so proud to bear. Oh, Hugh, let it be your task, however impossible it may seem, to bring the truth to light, and clear his name and your own. Hugh, this is my dying prayer to you. With my last strength I write these words, and I shall die at peace, because I know that you will bear them ever in your heart, and carry them on with you to the end. Farewell! My strength is going fast, and my eyes are becoming dim. But thank God that I have been able to finish this letter. Farewell, Hugh!—From your loving Mother."

Word by word I read it steadfastly through to the end, and then, my heart throbbing with the fire of a great purpose, I threw open the window and looked out. Below me stretched the fair city of Devon, smiling and peaceful, basking in the early morning sunshine, and the air around was still ringing with the music of the cathedral chimes. Little it all matched with my mood, for my whole being was vibrating with an agony of hate, and with the fervor of a great resolution. With the letter clutched in my hands, I stretched them forth to the blue, cloudless sky, and swore an oath so fearful and blasphemous that the memory of it even now makes me shudder. But I kept it, and thank God, without sin.

Chapter X

The First Move.

My first plans were not easy to form. I was like a blind man groping for some object which has slipped from his fingers, and not knowing in which direction to search for it first. I had a great and solemn purpose before me, a purpose which was my first consideration in life, and which nothing but death would cause me to relinquish. But I did not know how to start upon it.

I was in London when the idea occurred to me, save for which this story might never have been written. It was simple enough, and very vague. Nothing more or less than to try to procure employment near the Devereux estates, which I knew were somewhere in Yorkshire.

My idea was no sooner conceived than I put it into operation. I went to the firm of agents to whom my late employers had given me a letter of introduction, and inquired whether they knew of any vacancy in Yorkshire, either in a land agent's office or on an estate. One of the clerks ran through a long list, and shook his head.

"Nothing so far north," he declared shutting up the book. "Two or three in Leicestershire, if that would do."

I shook my head, and, thanking him, turned away disappointed. At the door he called me back as though a sudden thought had struck him.

"Just wait one moment, will you?" he said, jumping down from his stool. "There was a letter from Yorkshire this morning which I haven't seen yet. I'll fetch it from the governor's room and see what it's about."

I took a seat, and he vanished into the inner office. Presently he reappeared smiling.

"Lucky thing I noticed the postmark of this letter," he remarked. "Strikes me it's just what you want. Listen," and he read it out:

"'Devereux Court, Yorkshire. "'Colonel Sir Francis Devereux—'

"Hullo! what's the matter with you?" he broke off suddenly.

I mastered myself with a quick effort.

"I'm all right," I answered, a little hoarsely. "It's a trifle hot in here, that's all. Go on."

He began again

"'Colonel Sir Francis Devereux is in want of a young man to act under his present agent and collaborate with him in the management of his estate. Applicant must have some knowledge of farming and surveying, and must be a gentleman. Credentials and unexceptionable references required. Salary £250 a year and a cottage rent free.'"

"There, Mr. Arbuthnot, how would that do for you?"

"Nothing could suit me better," I exclaimed—so eagerly that the young man looked at me surprised. "To whom have I to apply?" He consulted the letter again.

"Mr. Benson, solicitor, 19 Bedford Row, has authority to engage you. You had better go and see him, I should think."

I thanked him and hurried out. So nervous was I lest some one else should precede me and secure the better chance that I jumped into a stray hansom and was driven straight to Mr. Benson's office. There I was informed, to my great satisfaction, that Mr. Benson was in, and disengaged, and in a few minutes I was shown into his room.

He was sitting at his desk when I entered, a short, clean-shaven, grey-haired man, with a keen but not unkindly face. He motioned me to a seat, and kept his eyes fixed steadfastly upon me whilst I explained my mission.

When I had finished he took out a bunch of keys from his pocket, and carefully unlocked a small drawer in his desk. For a full minute he seemed to be examining something there, glancing up at me more than once. Then he took it and passed it across the table to me.

"Do you recognise that, Mr. Arbuthnot?" he asked quietly.

Recognise it? How could I help it? It was a photograph—and the photograph of my father.

I leaned back in my chair, agitated and disappointed. Mr. Benson watched me for a while in silence.

"I see that you are in mourning, Mr. Devereux," he said, suddenly, noticing it for the first time. "Your father is well, I hope?"

I pulled myself together, and answered him—

"I am in mourning for my mother, Mr. Benson. I can't say that my father is well, but he is not ill that I know of."

The lawyer was sitting with his head resting upon his elbow, and his eyes fixed upon the photograph.

"Poor Mr. Herbert—poor Mr. Herbert!" he said to himself, in a low tone.

Something, perhaps his sympathetic tone, prompted me to ask him a question.

"Mr. Benson, you knew my father. Do you believe that he was a coward?"

The lawyer looked up at once.

"I do not," he said, firmly. "I never did, and never will."

The words were the sweetest I had ever heard in my life.

"Thank you for those words, Mr. Benson," I exclaimed, warmly. "I can't tell you how glad I am to hear them. But don't call me by the name of Devereux again, please. I won't hear it, I won't even own it."

He nodded approvingly, but made no direct reply. Then, in answer to his questions, I told him as much of our history as I myself knew.

"And with regard to your application to me to-day," he remarked, after a short pause, "it seems a strange one under the circumstances."

I hesitated, and then I told him everything—told him of my father's breaking heart, of my mother's last letter to me, and of my vow. He listened patiently, and with every sign of strong interest.

"Yours is a noble purpose," he said, when I had concluded, "and though I fear that it is hopeless, I shall throw no obstacle in your way. What I can do for you I will. You can go to Devereux, and I shall write to Sir Francis, telling him that you are admirably suited for the work, and, from my own knowledge, that you are a gentleman. Fortunately Sir Francis is rather near- sighted, and as he obstinately refuses to wear glasses there is not the fear of his recognising you that there would otherwise be. But I'm rather afraid of Mr. Rupert. Fortunately, he's not often at Devereux."

"I must chance all that," I declared. "After all, a resemblance is very different from actual recognition. I shall try to hit upon some way of altering my appearance a little."

"You have my best wishes for your success," declared the lawyer, rising. "Write to me, Mr. Arbuthnot—Mr. Hugh, I may call you. I shall be always pleased to hear how you are getting on; and if you need advice or a friend at any time, come to me. Good morning."

I left him feeling almost light-hearted. To have met a man who believed in my father was like a strong invigorating tonic to me. That afternoon I telegraphed to Marian to come to me at once, and set about making the few preparations necessary for our expected move into Yorkshire.

Chapter XI

Colonel Devereux's Land Agent.

As yet I have said nothing of my sister Marian. It is necessary for me now to do so. They say that a man can never describe or appreciate his own sister, and, on the whole, I am not disinclined to lend some credence to this statement. I know that Marian was beautiful, for many people have told, me so, but to give a detailed description of her as she was then I should find an impossible task. I know that her beauty—prettiness always seemed to me the more appropriate term—was of the order evolved by the combination of a trim, shapely figure, good features and complexion, plenty of fair hair, and soft grey eyes (the latter a heritage from her mother), which knew equally well how to gleam with mischief, or to flash with a tenderer and more dangerous light. I feel some diffidence in using the term, but I am bound to here place on record my conviction that when she left school and, in obedience to my telegram, joined me in London, my sister Marian was more or less inclined to be a flirt.

Of the shadow which rested upon my father's name she knew nothing, nor did she know that the name we bore was an assumed one, or anything of the purpose which had induced me to fix our temporary residence in Yorkshire. I judged her to be of too light a nature to be trusted with a great secret—besides, she would doubtless be happier not knowing.

Three days we spent together in London making purchases and superintending the packing up and forwarding of our few belongings. Then there came a note from Colonel Devereux, short but polite, intimating that the sooner I could find it convenient to assume my new position the better. On the next day Marian and I travelled down to Yorkshire.

It was dusk when we arrived at the little wayside station at which we had been directed to alight. Directly I had helped Marian out of the carriage, and we stood together on the platform, a tall, bland-looking man, dressed in the soberest black, hurried up to us and took off his hat.

"Mr. Arbuthnot?"

I admitted that his surmise was correct, and presumed that he had come from Devereux.

"Just so, sir. Colonel Devereux desired me to present his compliments, and if you find that the cottage is not yet habitable, rooms can be prepared for you at the court."

"Very kind, I'm sure," I answered, watching with satisfaction our last box safely thrown out from the van. "We're quite prepared to rough it for a day or two, however, and I nave no doubt that we shall be able to manage. Have you brought anything down for the luggage?"

"Certainly, sir. Bring them this way, John," he added to the porter, and led us through the little booking office out into the road, where a small shapely brougham, drawn by a pair of magnificent dark bays, was waiting.

“I thought it better to bring a brougham, sir,” he explained, “as the young lady might find it chilly driving across the moor. Londoners mostly find it so. There’s no need to wait for the luggage, sir. The cart’s here for that, and I’ve given orders for them to bring it on. I’ll have to intrude upon you inside, sir, as far as the cottage, as my master’s orders is that I don’t leave you until I see you in a fair way to be comfortable. I’d have come down on the box, but the Colonel is so mighty particular about little things that it’s more than I dare do to let a carriage leave the yard without a man on the box, even at night. This is Knighton, this village, sir. From the top of the next hill you’d be able to see a good part of Devereux Court if it were only light enough.”

I let him talk on uninterrupted, for I was too full of a nervous internal excitement to be able to talk. I was amongst the scenes—in a few minutes I should be in sight of the very house-where my father had spent his boyhood. That thought was enough to engross me—to drive every other from my mind, and for once I was devoutly thankful for Marian’s ceaseless chatter, which spared me from all necessity of speech.

We dashed through a tiny village, and up a steep hill. “Dashed” is rather a clap-trap word, perhaps, but it is not far from correctly expressing the rate of our progress. The roads were in good order, it was not yet dark; the thoroughbred horses were eager to get home, and quivering with impatience, and the coachman seemed to be of the same mind. And so I could see but very little of the country. A heather-covered moor, varied by occasional patches of pasture land, bordered the road on either side, but in front things seemed to be different. I could just distinguish the dim outline of a low range of hills, and we seemed to be approaching a wood. Suddenly the carriage came to a halt, but it was only for a moment. A pair of great iron gates were rolled open before us, and we proceeded along a smoother road as swiftly as before.

“Are we nearly there?” asked Marian, looking behind at the grey stone, thatched lodges, which were as large as moderate sized houses.

Colonel Devereux’s servant shook his head, and, smiled in the light of his superior knowledge.

“Bless you, no, miss; we’re only just inside the park. It’s six miles from the lodge gates to the House” (the capital may seem superfluous, but I’m quite sure that the man meant it), “and five and a half to the cottage.”

Marian’s grey eyes were wide open in earnest now.

“Oh, dear me! Did you hear that, Hugh? The park six miles from the house! This must be a very big place.”

“Big!” Our companion’s face grew quite solemn in its impressiveness. “There ain’t such another place in Yorkshire, nor yet in England, barring three. Devereux Court, to my mind, is the finest building I ever set eyes on. Why, it’s the show place of the county, and we gets no end of visitors from all parts to look at it.”

“Colonel Devereux is a very fortunate man,” I remarked.

The man’s manner grew a shade more confidential, and I listened with more eagerness than I dared show.

“Well, he should be, sir; but I doubt whether he thinks himself so. You see, his family ain’t turned out exactly well. He married twice, and each wife died within two years of her marriage, and, strangely enough, each left him a son. Of course,

when they grew up they both wanted to be soldiers. They do say, sir, that every Devereux for twelve generations has been a soldier. A blood- thirsty race they must be!

"But, as I was saying, they both became soldiers, and went out together in the same regiment for their first campaign. Well, they say that one of 'em, Mr. Herbert his name was, the elder of the two, and the old Colonel's favorite and heir, disgraced himself. Anyway, he was found guilty of cowardice, and turned out of his regiment. It very near killed the Colonel, and he's never been the same man since. He's taken a mortal dislike to his other son, Mr. Rupert, and, though he makes no secret of it that he's left him all his estates and property, he never lets him come down here scarcely."

"Bait the title? He can't leave that to his second son," I said. "That must go to the one whom you say disgraced himself."

"It's just that that's troubling the Colonel more than anything," replied the man. "He says it makes him wild to think that the title of Devereux of Devereux must be borne by a coward, and that his picture gallery and grand old house must go to him, too. At times I have heard him pray that his son may be dead, and have died childless; and yet, hard old man though he is, it's easy to see, from the way he talks about him sometimes, that he's as fond of him as ever, though he'd never confess it. But I'm afraid I'm tiring you, sir. Family histories are not very interesting to strangers."

To strangers! I could scarcely keep a sardonic smile from my lips as I echoed the words in my thoughts.

"Not at all," I answered, as lightly as I could; "but I was going to ask you who is there living with Sir Francis now."

"Well, there's no one living regularly with him, sir, except you count old Mrs Platts, who really ain't much more than a housekeeper, though I believe she's a sort of distant connection. But, just now, there's Miss Maud Devereux, Mr. Rupert's daughter, and a friend of hers stopping here. Here we are at the cottage, Mr. Arbuthnot."

The carriage had pulled up, and a tall footman was standing by the side of the opened door. I helped Marian out and looked around. A little distance in front there was a low wire fencing, and about fifty yards further back, with a dark plantation of fir trees immediately behind it, was a long, low, grey stone house, with gabled roof and old-fashioned windows. As we approached, the door was thrown open, and two smiling countrified-looking servants, with neat caps and aprons, stood in a flood of light to welcome us.

We stepped into the hall, and Marian and I looked at one another in astonishment. This was all very different to what I had expected, and my first thought was that the few odds and ends of furniture which I had sent down would be of very little use in such a place as this. But our greatest surprise was to come, for when one of our pleasant-looking servants threw open the door of the dining-room, the room was already furnished, and in a fashion which made us gaze around in astonishment. In stead of bare boards, which we had half expected, our feet sank into a thick Turkey carpet, and the furniture, solid and handsomely carved, matched the black oak panelling which skirted the walls. A bright fire was burning in a marble grate, and the table, covered with a snow- white cloth, and

many things more substantial, was glittering with cut-glass, flowers, and heavy plate, on which were the Devereux arms.

I looked at Colonel Devereux's servant in an amazement which seemed to amuse him immensely.

"What has become of the furniture I sent down?" I asked.

"It is in the lumber room, sir," was the man's quiet reply. "Colonel Devereux's strict orders were that the place should be furnished for you from attic to cellar, and there's furniture enough up at the Court which no one ever sees, enough to furnish a score of such places as this. I hope I may say that you are satisfied, sir?"

"Satisfied? It's quite too lovely," declared Marian, sinking into a low chair. "Isn't it, Hugh?"

"Colonel Devereux has been very kind," I assented, thoughtfully, for I was not too sure that I was altogether pleased.

"And I was to tell you, miss," continued the man, backing towards the door, "that the servants here, and also your man, sir," turning towards me, "receive their wages from the steward. You'll pardon my mentioning this, but it was the housekeeper's strict orders. Good-night, miss; good-night, sir. Colonel Devereux will see you to-morrow morning at 11, if you'll be so good as to come up to the Court. Good-night, sir."

This time he really went, and we were left for a moment alone. I am obliged to confess that the first thing my madcap sister did was to waltz round the room, and wind up by throwing herself into my arms.

"Isn't this perfectly delightful, Hugh, and isn't the Colonel an old dear? I declare I could kiss him! And I am so hungry, and everything looks so nice. Do ring the bell, Hugh."

There was no need, for before she had finished speaking one of our buxom servants had entered with the tray, and the other was waiting to show us our rooms, which we found no less comfortable. Everything was totally different to what I had expected, and for Marian's sake I was pleased. But for my own I could not help regretting that I should be forced to accept favors from the man who believed my father to be a coward and a liar, and whose cruel words, "Out of my house and out of my heart for ever," he carried always with him in weary exile.

Chapter XII

Devereux Court.

At six o'clock on the following morning I was up and in the park. I had prepared myself for much, but what I saw exceeded everything. It is not part of my role as story-teller to attempt long descriptions. I am not an artist or a descriptive writer, and were I to attempt to play the part of either I should most certainly fail. But the park and mansion of Devereux were one day bound to be mine, even though they brought me pauperdom, and despite the sorrow and bitter grief which were bound

up in this recollection, a curious thrill, in which there was something of pleasure, passed through me as I looked upon them for the first time by daylight.

The cottage—such a term was surely a misnomer, for it was three times as large as the habitable part of our Devonshire home—stood at the extremity of the park nearest to the house. Only a wire ring fence separated the gardens from the soft springy turf of the park, which, studded with giant oak trees, a revelation to me after the comparatively stunted growths of Devonshire, stretched away in one direction as far as I could see. Bordering it on one side, close behind the cottage, and curving round as though to form a fitting background for Devereux Court, was a low range of hills, some crowned with thick plantations of black fir, and others purple with the declining glory of the autumn heather. But the house was the grandest sight of all. A great architect might have learnedly protested against its want of any distinct style and its general want of outline, but he would have admired it all the same. It was one of those houses which no one can describe, save by making use of such adjectives as picturesque, romantic, majestic. It was all these, and more. The style of every age seemed represented by the successive enlargements of every century. Every Devereux of Devereux had added something to it, until a century ago, and every one seemed to have had different notions of architecture. There was something in it of the castle, something of the mediaeval abbey, something of the Italian villa, and something of the Venetian palace. It was a magnificent medley, a striking mass of architectural incongruity—altogether the finest building that I had ever seen. It excited me to look upon it, and at the same time it depressed me. Its frowning battlements and gloomily majestic weather-beaten towers seemed to breathe out and help me to better understand the spirit which had fired the words of the stern, proud, old soldier, who had bidden my father leave his home for ever, and bear another name than the name of Devereux. For the first time I began to look forward to the inevitable interview with my grandfather with some thing akin to apprehension.

At breakfast time Marian's lively chatter drove all such thoughts out of my head.

And before they had had time to crowd in on me again, a man from the stables was announced, with whom I went to examine the two horses placed at my disposal.

I loved horses, and it seemed as though Sir Francis Devereux was determined to do everything "*au prince*." Besides a stout useful cob, there was an animal with which I fell in love the moment I saw it. The man uncovered him gingerly, and took particular care to keep out of the reach of his heels.

"I was to tell you, sir," he said, confidentially, as he came out of the box, "that if you wished to change this 'ere animal—the Black Prince they call 'im—for one a wee bit less spirity, that you was to come up to the stables and choose for yourself. There ain't no vice about 'im, but he's got a mouth like iron and the devil's own temper."

"I think I shall manage him," I answered confidently. "Who's been in the habit of riding him?"

"Well, sir, Miss Maud rode him for a bit, but he used to pull her arms out very near, and he gave her one nasty fall, so Sir Francis he's made her leave off."

"I should think so," I answered.

The Black Prince, fine animal though he was, was certainly not a lady's mount.

“Well, she’s a rare plucky ‘un is Miss Maud, and a fine seat, too,” remarked the man, leisurely chewing a wisp of straw. “You think he’ll do for you, sir, then?”

“I think so,” I answered.

Then, glancing at my watch, and seeing that it was but nine o’clock, it struck me that I might as well give him a trial at once, and in half an hour’s time I was careering across the park, my spirits rising at every bound the Black Prince made, and my cheeks glowing with the rapid progress through the sharp morning air, and with the strain of keeping him in hand. What pleasure is there within the reach of man so great as a gallop across an open country, with the fresh morning breeze blowing strong in your teeth, and your mount a perfect one? I got back to the cottage, just before eleven, and after seeing Marian start off for a walk, I set out for Devereux Court, all my apprehensions vanished, and I was only eager to stand face to face with its master.

I had not far to go. Up a steep ascent, across a bridge, through some more iron gates, and I stood upon the open stretch of gravel in front of the main entrance, which was supported by four massive white stone pillars. A man- servant was waiting within the glass doors, which were promptly opened before me, and on telling him my name, I was led across the vast hall, which seemed to me, from its great height, the stained windows, and its size, like the interior of a richly-decorated church, into the library. I had never been in such a room before, nor have I ever since, but the man gave me little time to admire it, for, opening the door of a small ante-room at its furthest extremity, which had a far more habitable appearance, he bade me wait whilst he informed Sir Francis of my arrival.

The room seemed to open upon the gardens, for, though the venetian blinds were drawn, I could hear distinctly the voices of two girls playing tennis just outside.

“Love, love 15, love 30, love 40. Maud, you’re a great deal too lazy for tennis this morning!”

The girl’s triumphant voice floated into the room so clearly that at first I was surprised. Then, by the gentle swaying to and fro of the blind, I saw that the window was open.

The charge seemed not to be made with out foundation, to judge from the languid drawl of the answering voice.

“I believe I am, Olive. It really is too exhausting without some men to look after the balls. Suppose we have a rest for a minute or two.”

There was a laughing assent, and then I heard light footsteps coming towards the window. I thought at first that they were going to enter; but just outside they halted and seemed to subside into a seat.

There was a moment’s silence, during which time I withdrew as far as possible from the window. But I was still within easy reach of their voices, as I very soon learnt, not a little to my discomfort.

“I wonder what the new young man’s like at the cottage. Have you seen him, Maud?”

I started, and drew further back into my corner.

“I really don’t know,” was the very uninterested reply. “By the bye, though, I did see a stranger in the park yesterday. Perhaps it was he.”

“What was he like? Fancy not telling me, when you knew I was dying to hear. Is he tall or short, dark or fair?”

A scornful inflection had crept into the languid drawl of the answering voice. But it was far from an unpleasant voice to listen to—“I only saw him for a moment, but I remember that he was short, and had red hair, and wore glasses. I don’t think even you would flirt with him. Olive.”

This was dreadful. I was six foot four, and my eyesight was keener than most men’s. She must have mistaken some one else for me! But what was I to do? I tried a nervous little cough, but they took no notice.

“Oh! I’m so disappointed. I had made up my mind that he was good-looking, and would do to flirt with, at any rate, until the shooting brings some men down. Goodness gracious, what was that?”

Rendered desperate by the mention of my name. I had essayed a more determined cough. Now that it had been heard my best course was to reveal myself at once. So I walked to the window and drew up the blind.

Two girls started to their feet at once, and stood looking at me in startled postures, one dark, of medium height, decidedly pretty, and with a gleam of mischief in her large eyes; the other tall and slim, fair, and stately as a young princess, with a cold questioning look in her blue eyes, and a slight frown on her proud, delicate face. Something told me that this was Rupert Devereux’s daughter. And the thought checked the smile which I had found some difficulty in repressing.

“I am afraid I startled you,” I said, “I am waiting in here to see Colonel Devereux, and as I heard my name mentioned I thought it as well to let you know that I was here.”

For the life of me I could not meet the laughing gaze of those mischievous black eyes without a smile. They seemed to be looking me over from head to foot, with an air of decided interest, and finally they looked up into mine, as though satisfied with their inspection.

“Did you hear what we were saying, Mr. Arbuthnot?” she asked, eagerly, with a bewitching little smile.

“How could I help it? I coughed once before, but you did not hear me.”

I glanced for the first time at Maud Devereux, and she inclined her head slightly, as though to intimate that she accepted my explanation.

“It is of no consequence,” she said, a little coldly; “we were to blame for talking nonsense. I’m ready for another set now, Olive.”.

She turned and moved slowly away to the tennis court without another look at me; but the other girl lingered for a moment.

“I’m so sorry for what I said, Mr. Arbuthnot,” she remarked. “Of course, I didn’t mean it, but it is so dull here that one is bound to talk nonsense sometimes.”

I bowed, and I am afraid that there was a decided twinkle in my eyes as I answered, “Pray don’t apologise. You can’t imagine how grateful I am for the red hair and other etceteras which are to save me from a broken heart.”

She had the grace to blush a little at last, and it made her look uncommonly pretty.

“You’re too bad, Mr. Arbuthnot. Good bye.”

And, with a parting glance and smile, she picked up her racket and moved away across the lawn towards Maud Devereux, who had never once looked round.

I let the blind fall again, and turned back towards my chair. I had hardly reached it before the door opened', and I stood face to face with my grandfather, Colonel Sir Francis Devereux.

Chapter XIII

Colonel Sir Francis Devereux Bart.

For a second everything swam before my eyes, and it always seemed to me afterwards a miracle that I recovered myself sufficiently to accept his outstretched hand, and mutter some intelligible response to his courteous speech of greeting. For the stately, white-haired, military-looking man who had entered the room was so like my father that I had very nearly called him by name.

At the sound of my voice he started slightly, and, adjusting an eye- glass, looked at me steadily. Then he, too, seemed to receive something of a shock, for he turned abruptly away towards the window, and I could see that his long white fingers were shaking.

"I must ask your pardon, Mr. Arbuthnot," he said, suddenly looking round and scanning me over again. "The fact is, your appearance recalled some one to my mind whom—whom I have not seen for many years."

I bowed silently. I understood his emotion better than he imagined, and my heart was warming to him in consequence of it.

"You are welcome to Devereux, sir," he went on, cordially. "I hope you find your quarters fairly comfortable."

I began to thank him for the generosity of his arrangements, but he stopped me at once.

"If you are satisfied, that is well. I hope you will like the place," he went on after a moment's pause, "for I think that you will suit me. Mr. Andrews will explain what your duties will be on the estate. I don't think you'll find them particularly arduous. You shoot, I hope, and hunt, and fish. H'm, I thought so. I'm glad to hear it. I wanted some one who would be able to show my guests, when I have any, what there is to do about the place, and who won't mind a day amongst the stubble with an old man now and then," he added pleasantly. "Have you seen anything of the place yet?"

I told him of my early ride, and that all the impressions I had as yet received of the country and its surroundings were pleasant ones. He was delighted to hear it, he told me.

"And your sister. Does she think that she will he able to make herself at home here?"

I assured him that there was very little doubt about that. She had been used to the country all her life.

We talked for a while of the estate, and the share of its management which would fall to my lot. There was much that wanted doing, he said, and I was glad to hear it, for though I had come here with another ultimate object, I had no desire to spend my time in idleness. We talked for a long while, he seeming anxious to keep me there, and asking many personal questions which I found it not altogether easy to answer. But at last the luncheon bell rang out, and then he let me go.

"I should like to show you round the place myself," he said, as we walked down the hall together. "Be ready at three o'clock, and I will call for you. We will ride, of course."

Just as we passed the foot of the great oak staircase which descended into the centre of the hall, we came face to face with the two girls who had been playing tennis. Sir Francis stopped at once.

"Ah, Maud, dear, let me introduce you to Mr. Arbuthnot. Mr. Arbuthnot, this is my niece, Miss Devereux, and her friend, Lady Olive Parkhurst."

My cousin bowed very slightly, and scarcely paused in her progress across the hall. But Lady Olive lingered to throw a saucy glance at me over her shoulder.

"You two men have wasted a delightful morning gossiping," she said, lightly. "Maud and I have been dying with curiosity to know what it's all been about."

Miss Devereux was standing in one of the doorways a little way off, with the slightest possible frown of impatience on her face, and looking decidedly supercilious at her friend's remark, although she did not take the trouble to contradict it. They had both changed their morning gowns for riding habits, and though Lady Olive, with her trim, dainty figure and coquettish smile, looked sufficiently charming, I could not help my eyes dwelling the longest on Maud Devereux. Fair, proud, and cold, with slim yet perfectly graceful figure, she reminded me of Tennyson's Princess. It was only for a moment that I looked at her, but her eyes chanced to meet mine, and the frown on her statuesque young face deepened, as though to admire her even were a liberty. I turned away at once, and moved a step nearer the door.

"We have wasted a beautiful morning, certainly," Sir Francis remarked; "but we are going to make up for it this afternoon. Mr. Arbuthnot and I are going to ride together on a tour of inspection. Would you young ladies care to join us?"

Lady Olive leaned forward with a beaming smile.

"I should like it immensely," she declared. "You forget, Olive, that we are going to call on the Annerleys this afternoon," remarked Maud Devereux, in a cold tone of disapprobation. "Luncheon is quite ready, uncle."

Lady Olive gathered up her skirts, and, nodding to me with a comical grimace, took Sir Francis's arm.

"Good morning, Mr. Arbuthnot. I'm so sorry we can't come. I should like to see how you manage the Black Prince."

"You will have plenty of other opportunities," Sir Francis remarked. "Good morning, Arbuthnot; be ready about three o'clock."

And so ended my first visit to Devereux Court.

Chapter XIV

The Beginning of Danger.

Before a month had passed I began to feel quite settled at the cottage. My duties, though many, lay within my capacity, and were such as I found pleasure in undertaking. It was impossible for me not to see that Sir Francis Devereux had taken a great and, to others, an unaccountable fancy to me; and occasionally he made such demands upon my time that I found it hard to get through my work. But I never grudged him an hour that I could honestly spare, for every day the prejudice which I had felt against him grew less, and I began to heartily like and pity him. Perhaps this change in my feelings towards him arose chiefly from the fact that he was obviously an unhappy man. The sorrow which was embittering my father's life and clouding mine had laid its hand with almost equal bitterness upon him. And was it not natural? For more than twenty years he had never looked upon the face or heard of the son whom he had loved better than any one else in the world. The heir of Devereux, for all he knew, might have sunk to the lowest depth of vice and degradation, and yet for all that, he must bear the title and, if he chose, take up his abode in the home where his ancestors had lived with honor, for many centuries, and, at the very best there was a deep blot which nothing could ever efface. The descendant of a long race of mighty soldiers had been publicly pronounced a coward; and yet some day or other, by the inevitable law of nature, he would become the representative of his family. To the stern old soldier I knew well that the thought was agony, and I longed to reassure and comfort him, as I most certainly could have done. But the time was not yet come.

Naturally I saw a good deal of Maud Devereux and Lady Olive, much more of the latter than the former, for she appeared to have taken a violent fancy for Marian, and was often at the cottage. Conceit was never amongst my failings, but of course I could not help noticing that the times she choose for coming were those on which I was most likely to be at home, and generally when I returned from my day's work I found Marian and her gossiping over the fire, or if I was early, indulging in afternoon tea. She seemed determined to flirt with me, and I, willing to be amused, let her have her own way. We were both perfectly aware that the other was not in earnest, and we both-I particularly—took care not to lapse into the sentimental stage! On the whole, we managed to amuse one another very well.

With Maud Devereux I made but little progress—in fact, I feared sometimes that she even disliked me. She was always the same—cold, unbending, and apparently proud. It seemed impossible to win even a smile from her, and the more friendly Lady Olive and I became the more she seemed to stand aloof. Once or twice, when I had found myself riding by her side, or alone with her for a minute, I had fancied that her manner was changing a little. But before I could be sure of it, Lady Olive would bear down on us and challenge me to a race, or make some mocking speech.

Why should it matter to me? I could not tell; yet always at such, times I knew that I wished Lady Olive a little further away. Cold and disdainful though she was,

a minute with her was more to me than hours with Lady Olive. And yet she was the daughter of the man whom I hated more than any living thing, and on whom I had sworn to be revenged should I fail in the great object of my life.

One evening, when, tired and dusty and stiff, after many hours' riding, I walked in to Marian's little drawing-room to beg for a cup of tea before changing my things, I had a great surprise. Instead of Lady Olive, Maud Devereux was leaning back in an easy chair opposite my sister. Maud, with the proud, wearied look gone from her cold blue eyes, and actually laughing a soft, pleasant laugh at one of my sister's queer speeches. I stepped forward eagerly, and there was actually a shade of something very like embarrassment in her face as she leaned forward and held out her hand.

"You are surprised to see me, Mr. Arbuthnot," she said; "I wanted Olive, and thought this the most likely place to find her."

"We haven't seen her to-day, have we, Hugh?" Marian remarked.

I assented silently, and spoke of something else. I did not want to talk about Lady Olive just then.

For more than half an hour we sat there sipping our tea, and chatting about the new schools which Sir Francis was building in the village, the weather, and the close approach of cub-hunting. I could scarcely believe that it was indeed Maud Devereux who sat there in my easy chair, looking so thoroughly at home and talking so pleasantly. As a rule, the only words I had been able to win from her were cold monosyllables, and the only looks half- impatient, half-contemptuous ones.

At last she rose to go, and I walked with her to the gate. It was almost dusk, and I felt that under the circumstances I might offer to walk up to the house with her. But I felt absolutely timid about proposing what with Lady Olive would have been a matter of course.

I did propose it, however, and was not a little disappointed at the passive indifference with which my escort was accepted. But what I should have resented from Lady Olive I accepted humbly from her.

Side by side we walked through the park, and I could think of nothing to say to her, nothing that I dared say. With Lady Olive there would have been a thousand light nothings to bandy backwards and forwards, but what man living would have dared to speak them to Maud Devereux? Not I, at any rate.

Once she spoke; carelessly, as though for the sake of speaking.

"What spell holds Mr. Arbuthnot silent so long? A penny for your thoughts!" and I answered thoughtlessly.

"They are worth more, Miss Devereux, for they are of you. I was thinking that this was the first time I had walked alone with you."

"I am not Lady Olive," she said, coldly. "Be so good, Mr. Arbuthnot, as to reserve such speeches for her."

She quickened her pace a little, and I could have bitten my tongue out for my folly. But she was not angry for long, for at the gate which led from the park into the ground she paused.

Devereux Court, with its lofty battlements and huge stacks of chimneys, toweled above us—every window a burnished sheet of red fire, for the setting sun was lingering around it, and bathing it with its last parting rays as though loth to go.

“What a grand old place it is!” I said half to myself; “I shall be sorry to leave it.”

She turned round quickly, and there was actually a shade of interest in her tone.

“You are not thinking of going away, are you, Mr. Arbuthnot? I thought you got on so well with my uncle.”

“Ay, too well,” I answered bitterly, for I was thinking of my father and hers. “There is a great work which lies before me, Miss Devereux, and I fear that I shall do little towards it down here. Life is too pleasant altogether—dangerously pleasant.”

“And yet you work hard, my uncle says,” she observed; “too hard, he says sometimes. You look tired to-night.”

I might well, for I had ridden over thirty miles without a rest; but I would have ridden another thirty to have won another such glance from her sweet blue eyes.

“A moment’s pleasure is worth a day’s work,” I said, recklessly, “and I have had nearly an hour’s.”

She opened the gate and passed through at once with a gesture of contempt.

“If you cannot remember, Mr. Arbuthnot, that I am not Lady Olive and that such speeches only appear ridiculous to me, I think you had better go home,” she said, coldly.

I looked down—tall though I was, it was not far to stoop—into her slightly flushed face, and through the dusky twilight I could see her eyes sparkling with a gleam of indignation. She was-right to say that I had better go home—nay, I had better never have started. What had come over me that I should find my heart throbbing with pleasure to be alone with the daughter of the man whom I hated? It was treachery to my father, and, as the thought of him wandering about in his weary exile rushed into my mind, a sudden shame laid hold of me. I drew myself up, and strode along in silence, speaking never another word until we reached the gate leading on to the lawn. Then I opened it, and raising my cap with a half-mechanical gesture, stood aside, to let her pass.

“Good evening, Mr. Arbuthnot.”

“Good evening, Miss Devereux.”

It might have been merely a fancy, but it seemed to me that she lingered for a second, as though expecting me to say something else. And though I was gazing fixedly over her head, I knew well that her eyes were raised to mine. But I stood silent and frowning, waiting only for her to pass on, and so she went without another word.

I watched her, fair and stately, walking with swift, graceful steps along the gravel path. Then I turned my back upon the spot where she had vanished, and, leaning against the low iron gate, let my face fall upon my folded arms.

Of all the mental tortures which a man can undergo, what is there worse than the agony of self-reproach? To be condemned by another’s judgment may seem to us comparatively a light thing—but to be condemned by our own, what escape or chance of escape can there be from that! And it seemed to me as though I were arraigned before the tribunal of any own conscience. As clearly as though indeed he stood there, I saw before me the bowed form and unhappy face of my poor father, looking steadfastly at me out of his sad blue eyes, with the story of his weary suffering life written with deep lines into his furrowed face. And then I saw

myself standing at the window of my rooms in Exeter, with an oath ringing from my lips, and a passionate purpose stirring my heart, and last of all I saw myself only a few minutes ago walking by her side with stirred pulses and bounding heart—by her side, whose father, curse him! was the man above all others whom I should hate-for was it not his lying word which had driven Herbert Devereux from his home, and blasted a life more precious to me than my own! At that moment a passionate longing came upon me to stand face to face with him, the man whom we had met in the moonlight on Exmoor, and tear the truth from his lying throat.

"Mr. Arbuthnot!"

I started violently and turned round pale and agitated, with the rage which was burning within me. Maud Devereux stood before me—Maud, with the pride gone out from her exquisite face, and the warming light of a kindly sympathy shining out of her glorious eyes.

"I startled you, Mr. Arbuthnot?"

"I must confess that you did, Miss Devereux. I thought that I was alone."

I had drawn myself up to my full-height, and was looking steadily at her, determined that, neither by word nor look, would I yield to the charm of her altered manner; It was I now who was proud and cold; she who was eager and a little nervous.

"I had a message to deliver to you, and I forgot it," she said, hurriedly. "I was to ask you to dine with us to-night."

"Does Sir Francis particularly wish it?" I asked. "Because, if not, as I have had a long day, and am rather tired—"

She interrupted me, speaking with a sudden hauteur, and with all the coldness of her former manner.

"I don't know that he particularly wishes it, but he has brought Lord Annerley home with him to talk over the Oadby Common matter, so you had better come."

Lord Annerley was the eldest son of a neighboring landholder between whom and myself, as agent of Sir Francis Devereux, there had arisen a friendly dispute as to the right of way over a certain common, and I knew at once that I must not miss the opportunity of meeting him.

"Very good, Miss Devereux," I answered, "I will go home and change my things at once."

"Without speaking to me?" I turned abruptly round. Lady Olive had come softly over the smooth turf, and was looking up into my face with a mischievous smile.

"How cross you both look!" she exclaimed. "Have you been quarrelling?"

"Quarrelling! Scarcely," I answered, laughing lightly. "Miss Devereux and I have no subject in common which we should be likely to discuss, far less to quarrel about. Wherever did you get such beautiful chrysanthemums, Lady Olive?"

She buried her piquant little face in the mass of white and bronze blooms, and then divided them.

"From the south garden. Aren't they lovely? See, Mr. Arbuthnot. I want you to take half of them to your sister, if you don't mind. I don't think you have any cut yet, and the colors of these are so exquisite. Which do you like the better, Maud, the white or the bronze?"

"The white, of course," she answered, scarcely looking at them. "I don't care for the other color at all."

“And I prefer it,” Lady Olive went on, filling my outstretched hands. “Mr. Arbuthnot, did I gather correctly from what you were saying when I came up that you dine with us to-night?”

“I am to have that happiness, Lady Olive,” I answered; “and if I don’t hurry off now, I’m afraid I shall be late.”

“Then don’t stop another moment,” she laughed. “But, Mr. Arbuthnot—”

I halted resignedly and turned round.

“Well?”

“Oh, nothing, only Maud and I expect you to show us this evening whose taste you choose to follow.”

“In what respect?” I asked.

“Why, chrysanthemums, of course! Maud has chosen white, I have chosen bronze. We shall both look out eagerly to see whose colors you wear in your buttonhole to-night. If you wear a white one, I sha’n’t speak to you all the evening. Mind, I warn you.”

“What nonsense you talk, Olive!” said Maud, carelessly, but with a slight flush rising into her cheeks. “As if it could make the slightest possible difference to me which color Mr. Arbuthnot prefers in chrysanthemums!”

There was a distinct vein of contempt in her concluding sentence, and Lady Olive, noticing it, looked at us both in surprise.

“It is my positive conviction,” she declared, with mock seriousness, “that, notwithstanding Mr. Arbuthnot’s high-flown repudiation, yon two have been quarrelling.”

Maud Devereux turned impatiently away, with a scornful shrug of her shoulders, and walked slowly towards the house. Lady Olive started to follow her, but at the gate she paused.

“Mr. Arbuthnot, come here, I want to speak to you.”

I retraced my steps, of course, and stood by her side.

“Well?”

She stood on tiptoe and whispered—quite an unnecessary proceeding, for Maud was a dozen yards away.

“Mr. Arbuthnot, what have you and Maud been quarrelling about?”

I turned round so abruptly, that our heads knocked together and my moustache brushed her cheek.

“Mr. Arbuthnot!”

“It wasn’t my fault,” I assured her, truthfully.

“Sure!”

She was looking up at me with a half coquettish, altogether inviting smile.

“Quite. Shall I show you how it happened?” I asked, stooping down till my face was very close to hers.

“What color chrysanthemums are you going to wear this evening, Mr. Arbuthnot?” she asked, rather irrelevantly.

“Can you ask? Bronze, of course.”

“Well, then—yes—I think you may show me—just so that it sha’n’t happen again, you know,” she added, with laughing eyes.

And so I showed her, just as a matter of precaution, and received for my reward a not very hard box on the ears, and a saucy, mock-angry backward glance as she

broke away from me and hurried after Maud. Then I strode across the park, angry with myself, yet fiercely exultant, for I knew that Maud had been lingering in the shrubbery alone, and had seen us. She would know now, if she did not before, that the grief which she must have read in my face when she had returned so unexpectedly was none of her causing, else had I never let my lips rest for a second on Lady Olive's cheek.

Chapter XV

A Fight For Life.

In less than an hour I was back at Devereux Court. The gong was booming through the hall as I reached the drawing room, and the little party had already risen to their feet. Maud's hand was resting on the coat-sleeve of a man scarcely as tall as herself, with a fair insipid-looking face and weak eyes—whom I knew at once must be Lord Annerley. Sir Francis, who was suffering from a bad attack of gout, was leaning half on his stick, half on Lady Olive's bare white shoulder; but, at my entrance, he withdrew his hand, and she stepped back, rubbing her arm with a comical air of relief.

"Just in time, Arbuthnot! Come and give me your arm, there's a good fellow. Annerley, this is Mr. Arbuthnot, my agent."

Lord Annerley returned my greeting with a slightly patronising air, and then we walked across the hall to the dining-room, Sir Francis leaning heavily on my shoulder.

Maud had noticed me only by the merest inclination of her stately head, and during dinner time she never addressed a single observation to me, her attention seeming wholly absorbed by her companion. Lady Olive, although at first she rattled on in her usual style, seemed always watching for an opportunity to join in their conversation, and when at last she found it, seemed almost to forget my existence. They talked of people whom I did not know, and subjects in which I had no interest, but I was well content to be left alone. I was in no mood for talking, and to answer Sir Francis's few inquiries was quite enough for me.

We were about half way through dinner, when suddenly Sir Francis held up his finger and cried, "Hush!"

Every one stopped talking, and I who had also heard the sound sprung to my feet. It came again in a second or two, three sharp reports from the direction of the park.

"Poachers, by G—d!" exclaimed Sir Francis, angrily, "and in the home spinneys, too! The cheeky rascals!"

I was half way across the room before he had finished speaking.

"Take care of yourself, my boy," he called out, earnestly. "You'll find my revolver in the top drawer of my cabinet in the library. See that it's loaded. By Jove, I wish my foot was right! Annerley, I don't know whether you care about a row as much

as I did when I was a youngster; but if you do, pray go with Arbuthnot. My niece will excuse you."

Lord Annerley did not seem to find that keen prospect of pleasure in the affray, which was doubtless proceeding, that Sir Francis would certainly have done, for as I hurried from the room I heard him mutter something about his boots being rather thin. An irresistible impulse made me glance for a moment into Maud's face whilst he was elaborately excusing himself, and I was satisfied. A slight but distinctly contemptuous expression had stolen into it.

I was scarcely a moment in the library, for the revolver was in its place and loaded. As I hurried down the hall, Sir Francis hobbled out of the drawing- room.

"Arbuthnot," he called out anxiously after me, "I've just remembered Atkins and Crooks are both away to-night; I gave 'em a holiday; so old Heggs and his son must be alone in the home spinneys. Those d—d rascals must have known of it. I'll send the men after you, but run, or you'll be too late!"

There was no need to tell me to run. Holding my revolver clenched in my right hand, I dashed across the gardens toward the park, leaping over the flower-beds, and using my left hand to vault over locked gates and fences. I had scarcely reached the park when I heard the almost simultaneous report of three or four guns, and immediately afterwards, the moon shining in a cloudless sky, showed me the figure of a man leap from one of the dark belts of plantation at the head of the slope, and make for the open country. My first impulse was to strike off to the right hand and intercept him; but before I had gone half a dozen yards out of my way, I changed my intention, for from the interior of the plantation came a hoarse, despairing cry for help, followed by another gunshot.

I was a good runner, and I strained every nerve to reach the spinneys. But when at last, panting but eager, I dashed up the slope, and leaped over the low stone wall, a fear came upon me that I was too late.

At first it was too dark to see anything, for the moon's light could not penetrate through the thickly-growing black fir trees. But close in front of me I could hear the sound of muttered curses and the trampling of feet upon the dried leaves and snapping twigs. A dozen hasty strides forward, and I burst through the bushes into a small clearing, and found myself in the thick of the struggle.

On the ground, only a few feet from me, lay Heggs, groaning heavily, with his leg doubled up under him. Close by his son was struggling desperately with two powerfully built, villainous looking men, and on the ground were stretched the forms of two others, one, an under-keeper, writhing about in pain, and the other, whose face was unknown to me, lying quite still, and evidently insensible. Two other men were hastily filling a bag with their spoil, one holding it open, and the other collecting the birds from a broken net on the ground and throwing them in.

The sound of my rapid approach naturally changed the situation. The two men struggling with young Heggs relapsed their grasp for a moment to look round, and with, a great effort he wrenched himself free, and stood back panting. The others who were filling the bag started up as though to run, but seeing I was alone hesitated, and one of them snatching up a gun commenced hastily to load. But his companion, who appeared to be the leader, yelled to him with an oath to put it down.

“Put your barker down, you fool!” he shouted. “We shall have the whole blooming lot down here if we get using them any more. It’s only one of the fine birds from the Court! We’ll soon settle him.”

One of the men who had been filling the bag sprang up, and, holding his gun by the barrel, rushed at me. Suddenly he stopped and cowered back, for he looked full into the dark muzzle of my revolver. I would have spared him, but the odds were too desperate. There was a sharp report, and the arm which held his weapon sunk helplessly to his side. He staggered back with a howl of pain, and then, turning away, bounded into the thicket.

“You are at my mercy,” I cried, to the others. “Stay where you are, or I shall fire.”

An oath was the only answer, and then two of the men rushed at me, whilst another, turning away to escape, was seized, by young Heggs, who had been leaning, panting, against a tree. The desperate struggle which followed I could never describe in doe tail. One of my assailants I should certainly have shot through the heart, but that in the sudden shock of recognising him my hand swerved, and the bullet only grazed his cheek. Backwards and forwards, amongst the bushes and on the ground, we struggled and fought. But for my Devonshire training in boxing and wrestling, I must have been overpowered at once, for the men who had attacked me were fighting like wild beasts for their liberty—biting, kicking, and dealing out sledge-hammer blows, any one of which, had it struck me, would have sent me down like a log. Heggs could render me no assistance, for, wearied with his long struggle, he was over-matched himself, and in desperate straits. Suddenly there came the sound of voices, and feet clambering over the low stone wall. With a giant effort the taller of the two men with whom I had been struggling flung me backwards amongst the bushes, and bounded away, leaping the wall and scudding away across the park. But in my fall I never relaxed my grasp upon the other man, and together we rolled over and over in a fierce embrace, his teeth almost meeting in my hand, which held him firmly by the throat.

It was all over for help had come. Nearly a dozen of the servants and stablemen from the Court poured into the enclosure, some taking up the pursuit, some making preparations to carry Heggs and the other wounded man up to the house, some tying together the hands, and zealously guarding my prisoner, and all plying me with eager questions. My recollection of all that directly followed is obscure. I remember staggering across the park up to the Court, and meeting Sir Francis, anxious yet thankful, in the courtyard. Then faint and giddy, the blood pouring from a wound in my head down my shirtfront, and my clothes torn and soiled, I sank down upon a couch in the hall, whilst Sir Francis, with his own hand, strove to force some brandy down my throat. A deadly, sickening unconsciousness was creeping over me; there was a singing in my ears, and a buzzing in my head. But although every one and everything around me seemed to my reeling senses confused and chaotic, one person, I saw as vividly as my eyes could show her to me. First standing in the open doorway, then close to my side, I saw her with white, pitying face, and an agony of terror in her dimmed blue eyes, gazing at my shirt-front soaked with blood, and asking eagerly, with quivering lips, where I was hurt. And my last effort was to force a ghastly smile and to utter reassuring words,

which died away half- uttered and altogether incomprehensible upon my lips. Then black darkness surged in upon me, blotting her out from my sight, and I swooned.

Chapter XVI

My Convalescence.

For three days and nights I lay at Devereux Court in danger of my life, but at the end of that time the concussion of the brain from which I was suffering suddenly abated, and I commenced to make rapid strides towards recovery. Everything that skill and kindness could do for me was done. Marian was my principal nurse, but often in the afternoons Lady Olive and Maud would come and sit with me, whilst more than once I woke up to find Sir Francis Devereux himself by my side.

As soon as I was well enough to talk I asked eagerly whether any of the other poachers had been taken. Sir Francis shook his head, and looked severe.

"Not one of them," he declared in a vexed tone. "I scarcely have patience to speak about it at the police office, it seems so scandalous. A thick-head set of muffs they must be!"

How surprised he would have been if any one had told him his answer was a great relief to me—and yet it was so. There was one man among that gang of poachers whom I did not wish to be caught.

"And was Heggs much hurt?" I asked. Sir Francis shook his head.

"The old man was cut about a bit, but not seriously injured. Richard—that's the son, you know—came off very easily, and was able to tell us all about it. Can't say much about it, Arbuthnot, my boy, for the doctor has given orders that there's to be no talking; but you behaved splendidly, just as I should like my own son to have behaved," he added, in a somewhat husky tone.

"What's become of the man they caught?" I asked.

"Remanded without bail until you can give evidence, which you won't be able to do just yet," was the reply. "And now you're not to talk any more. Not another word, sir," he added, sharply, in a tone of command which he often used, and which came naturally from him, as it does from any born soldier. And, of course, I obeyed.

The short period of my illness was made as pleasant for me as kindness and every luxury could make it. Marian was given a room close to mine, and Sir Francis had also insisted upon sending for a trained nurse from York Infirmary. All night she sat up with me, although it was quite unnecessary, for all symptoms of the brain fever, which the doctor had feared was impending, had disappeared, and I invariably slept well. And all day Marion was with me, whilst Lady Olive and, more rarely, Maud Devereux paid me occasional visits.

My most regular, dally visitor, though, was Sir Francis himself. Every afternoon I woke up from my doze to see his tall, stately figure moving softly about the room,

or sitting in the high-backed chair by my side. And sometimes I found him with his eyes fixed upon me, watching me with a half-curious, half tender light softening his fine stern face. Then I knew that he was thinking of my father, and I found it hard to refrain from clasping his hand and telling him who I was, and the whole truth about that miserable day so many years ago. But I remembered that he had heard it from my father, and called him a liar. I remembered that to his soldierly notion the court-martial was a court infallible, a tribunal which could not err, and I kept my mouth closed.

To others the obvious fancy which Sir Francis had taken for me seemed inexplicable. I alone, could guess—nay, knew the reason. Marian and Lady Olive sometimes jested with me about it, but Maud never referred to it. In those days of my convalescence it seemed to me almost as though her wild face, when I had lain fainting in the hall, must have been a dream. She was kind, but in a proud, languid way; she talked to me, but in a monotonous, measured manner, and with a cold gleam in her deep blue eyes. She moved about my room with the stately grace of a princess, but of a princess who is stooping to perform a conscientious duty which she finds very wearisome.

And yet, when she was there all was glaring light, and my heart was beating with the pleasure of her presence, and, when she was gone, the room seemed dark, and cold, and cheerless, and the light went out of my eyes and from my heart.

During those long days of forced inaction many thoughts troubled me. Not a single line had I heard from my father since our parting at Exeter, and his worn, suffering, face haunted me day and night, and filled me with a vague self-reproach. True, little time had gone by yet, and I had already moved one step forward towards the accomplishment of my sworn purpose. But Maud Devereux, was she not the daughter of the man whom we had met on Exmoor, the daughter of my Uncle Rupert, the man who had blasted my father's life and thrown a long shadow over my own! It was a thought which made me toss about restless and uneasy, and filled me with a vague discontent. I never asked myself why—I doubt whether I knew, but all the same the feeling was there.

One afternoon, just as I was getting a little stronger and able to move about, Sir Francis Devereux gave me the opportunity which I had often coveted. He alluded indirectly to his son. Summoning up all my courage, I asked him a question.

"Will your son—Mr. Rupert Devereux, isn't it?—be down before the shooting is all over, Sir Francis?" I asked.

His face changed at once. From the courteous, sympathising friend he became the stiff, dignified aristocrat. His lips were set firmly together, and there was a decided contraction of his black-grey eyebrows. Altogether, he looked as though he had suddenly remembered that I was a comparative stranger, and only his land agent, from whom a personal question of any sort was a decided impertinence.

"Certainly not," he answered, curtly, "my son never visits Devereux."

"And yet it will be his some day," I could not help remarking.

"It will not be his some day. Devereux Court, at my death, will pass, into the hands of another son of mine, or his heir. Would to God it could crumble into dust first!" the old man added, with a sudden burst of bitterness.

I could not tell what answer to make, so I remained silent. But I suppose my face must have told him that I was eager to hear more. He rose, and walked up and down the room several times, my eyes anxiously following every movement. How like he was to my father! Age had wonderfully little bent his figure. There was the same grace of limb and carriage that I had often admired in my father when we had been striding side by side across the heather-covered moors, the same long, finely-carved features, and the same look of trouble stamped on the brow. But in my father's case it was developed somewhat differently. It had filled his eyes with a weary, long-suffering look which seemed to speak of absolute despair, and unvarying, hopeless grief. There was more of bitterness and concentrated irritation in Sir Francis's face.

It seemed as though the sorrow would not settle into his being, but was continually lashing him into acute and active, wretchedness. Which was the harder to bear, I wonder?

Suddenly Sir Francis stopped short in the middle of the room, and turned round to me.

"Arbuthnot, my boy," he said, kindly, "I'll tell you about my two sons, if you care to hear the story, in a few words."

"There is nothing I should like so well to hear, Sir Francis," I answered in a low tone.

He drew near to me and sat down.

"I've taken a strange fancy to you, Arbuthnot," he said, slowly; "I feel that I should like you to know an old man's sorrow."

His voice was very low indeed, and it seemed to me that his eyes were dim. Then he began speaking in short sentences, as was his wont, but with less than his usual curtness.

„I have been married twice, and by each wife I had a son. Herbert was the name of the elder, Rupert of the younger. Herbert's mother was the daughter of an English nobleman, and he grew up as fine a young Englishman as ever walked on God's earth, and a Devereux to the backbone. Rupert's mother was a Spanish lady, and he resembled her rather than me. Perhaps you will not be surprised when I tell you that, although I concealed it as much as possible, Herbert was the son I loved.

"I made them both enter the army directly they were old enough. Ours is a fighting family, and from the days of the Conqueror there has always been a Devereux ready to fight for his country. There, in the picture gallery, you may see them all, a magnificent race—ay, though I call them so—of knights and cavaliers and generals. Never has there been a battle fought in English history but a Devereux has borne arms in it. I myself was at Inkermann, and led my regiment on into Sebastopol. A glorious time it was."

He stopped for a moment with sparkling eyes, and a pleased smile on his lips, as though enjoying keenly his recollection. Then his face clouded over again, and his head drooped. The change was so complete and such a sad one that my heart ached for him, and I turned my head away. He continued in an altered tone.

"Well, I made them both soldiers, and when the time came for them to go abroad and see active service I parted with them without a pang. In less than six mouths

Herbert, my eldest son, Herbert Devereux, returned, disgraced, turned out of his regiment—a coward."

Never had I heard anything so pathetic as the pang with which he seemed to part with this last word. His voice was shaking, and there was a hot color in his cheeks. Suddenly he turned his back upon me, and I heard a sob.

"Do you believe it?" I asked, excitedly. "Was it proved? Was there no shadow of doubt?"

He shook his head. "None. My oldest friend was bound to pronounce him guilty in open court-martial. It was the bitterest duty he ever performed, he told me long afterwards. But a soldier's duty stands high above all personal feelings. Had I been in his place I should have pronounced the same verdict that he did, though my heart had snapped in two."

"On whose evidence was he convicted?" I asked.

Sir Francis groaned.

"On his own brother's. It was Rupert's word which convicted him. Rupert's word which has pulled down into the dust the name which through centuries and centuries has stood as high in honor and chivalry as any name in Europe. God forgive him! He only did his duly, but I cannot bear to look upon his face. Not that he wants to come here! He is a foreigner, and he lives in a foreign country. He is only half my son! It is Herbert whom I loved."

"And where is he—Herbert?" I asked, fearfully.

"Dead, I hope," he answered, sternly. "Since the day when I heard of this disgrace I have never looked upon his face. I never wish to look upon it again. For five-and-twenty years no one has dared to mention his name in my presence. I have cursed him."

"But if he lives, he is your eldest son, Devereux will be his?"

"A passionate fire leaped into Sir Francis's face.

"Never. If I thought that he lived and would come here when I died I would fire Devereux Court, though I perished in it. I would cram it full to the windows with dynamite, and leave not one stone standing upon another, sooner than he should enter its doors the head of the Devereuxs. You don't understand this feeling, perhaps, Arbuthnot," he went on in a lower voice, which was still, however, vibrating with an intense passion, "some day I will take you info the picture gallery with me, and then perhaps you will understand it a little better."

"I understand it now, Sir Francis," I told him, "but—but you are sure that your son Herbert was guilty? Think of the difference which his disgrace meant to Rupert. It made him your heir, Virtually your only son. If he was of a jealous disposition-Spanish people are, they say—the opportunity of getting rid of Herbert for ever and of taking his place might have tempted him."

I am convinced that the idea which I falteringly suggested to Sir Francis Devereux had never in the vaguest way presented itself to him before. Nor was this wonderful. Courteous and polished man of the world though he was, his nature had preserved all the innate and magnificent simplicity of the ideal soldier. Falsehood and meanness were so utterly beneath him that he never looked for them in others. They represented qualities of which be knew nothing. Any one could have cheated him, but if by chance detected, the crime would have seemed to him unpardonable, and from him they would never have won forgiveness.

Herbert, the son whom he loved, had told him a lie—a court-martial of his fellow-soldiers had determined that it was so—and the crime had seemed to him scarcely less black than the cowardice. He had never doubted it for one reason, because the decision of a court-martial was to him infallible, and for another, because the idea of falsehood in connection with his other son had never been suggested to him, and save from another's lips could never have entered into his mind.

I watched the lightning change in his face eagerly. A ray of sudden startling hope chased the first look of astonishment from his face, but it was replaced in its turn by a heavy frown and a tightening of the lips.

"We are not a race of liars," he began, sternly.

"But, if Rupert lied, Herbert was neither liar nor coward," I interrupted.

He looked at me in such a way that I could say no more.

"There was another witness beside Rupert—"

"Rupert's servant," I faltered, but he took no notice.

"And I should never dream of doubting the court-martial's decision. I've told you this story, Arbuthnot. I don't know why exactly; but I forbid you ever to mention it to me again. Ah, Miss Marian, you see I have been keeping your brother company for a long while this afternoon."

He had risen to his feet with old-fashioned courtesy as my sister entered the room, and had held a chair for her by my sofa. Then, after a few more pleasant words, he nodded kindly to me and went. If he had stayed five minutes longer I might have told him all.

Chapter XVII

A Moonlight Ride.

Before a month had passed I was able to get about, and was soon as well and strong as ever. I gave my evidence before a full bench of the county magistrates, identified the man in custody, and gave descriptions in all cases but one sufficiently clear of the men who were still at large. The local papers had made a great stir about the whole affair, and when the court was over most of the magistrates came up to shake hands with me, and I found myself quite a celebrity. For a full month afterwards invitations to dinner and shooting parties came pouring in upon me, and Lady Olive was never tired of chaffing me about my reputed achievements. But the more friendly Lady Olive became, both with Marian and myself, the less we saw of Maud Devereux. I told myself that I was glad of it, but I was a hypocrite. More than once lately I had reined in my cob, and from a distance watched her riding home from a day's hunting, with Lord Annerley by her side, and had cursed him under my breath for an insolent puppy. Since the night when he had dined at Devereux Court he seemed to have taken a strong dislike to me. I had met him afterwards and nodded, and in return had received an insolent stare. At first I bad been tempted to lay my riding whip across his face, but I quoted Tennyson to myself instead and laughed.

Scorn'd to be scorned by one that I scorn,
Is that a matter to make me fret?
That a calamity hard to be borne?
Well, he may live to hate me yet.

And Lord Annerley did live to hate me, and before very long too, for one afternoon as I was riding home in the dusk I met Maud and him face to face at one of the entrances to the park. She bowed to me coldly, but Lord Annerley looked straight between his horse's ears without even acknowledging my salutation. Instantly she turned round to me.

"Mr. Arbuthnot."

I pulled the Black Prince on his haunches, and brought him round to her side.

"Are you not going our way? It is a long way round by the road unless you want to call in the village."

I was too surprised to think of any excuse, so I turned my horse's head.

"Yes, I suppose the park's the shorter way. I ought to have remembered it for the Black Prince's sake," I remarked. "I'm afraid he's rather done up."

"I thought that you two had met," she said, turning to her companion. "Lord Annerley, you know Mr. Arbuthnot, do you not?"

He turned stiffly round towards me with an angry flush on his cheek.

"Oh—ah—yes. How d'ye do, Arbuthnot?"

I sat bolt upright in my saddle, and looked steadily at Lord Annerley, without returning his insolent greeting.

"My name is Arbuthnot, certainly," I said, coldly, "but your lordship will pardon my observing that I am not accustomed to hear it taken such liberties with."

I raised my hat to Miss Devereux, and digging spurs into Black Prince's side, rode on ahead. But I had scarcely gone a quarter of a mile before I heard a single-horse's hoofs close behind, and looking round saw Maud riding up to me, alone, I reined in at once and waited for her.

She joined me without a word, and we walked our horses side by side in silence. There was a change in her face, which puzzled me; a faint tinge of pink was coloring her cheeks, and a peculiar smile, half of amusement, half, of satisfaction, parted slightly her lips. Her eyes she kept averted from me.

"Where is Lord Annerley?" I asked suddenly.

"Gone home," she answered demurely.

"I'm afraid I've spoilt your ride," I said. "I'm sorry."

"Not at all," she answered, still without looking at me. "You spoilt his, I think."

"I answered nothing. I dared not. I felt that there was safety for me only in silence. And so we rode on, our horses' feet sinking silently into the short, green turf as we cantered slowly through the park. From behind the dark plantations on our right the moon had risen into a clear sky, and every now and then the Black Prince started and shied slightly at the grotesque shadows cast by the giant oak trees under which we rode. Where they were thickest a few bats flew out and wheeled for a minute or two round our heads before disappearing in the opposite, thickets.

“Are you afraid to talk to me, Mr. Arbuthnot, or can’t you think of anything to say?” Maud suddenly asked.

The words which I intended to speak died away on my lips. A subtle power seemed to be struggling with my will and intoxicating my senses. I answered blindly—

“I am afraid to talk to you, Miss Devereux, because I have too much to say.”

She turned round and looked at me, her deep blue eyes full of a half- inviting, half-mocking light which nearly drove me mad. She, at any rate, was quite at her ease.

“Are you going to try and flirt with me, Mr. Arbuthnot?” she asked lightly. “I am not Lady Olive.”

Just then the Black Prince shied as we rode across the shadow of a gigantic oak tree, and we were so close together that our horses’s heads nearly touched. One of her shapely hands was hanging carelessly down, toying with her whip, and, scarcely knowing what I did, I caught hold of it and held it to my lips. She drew it away, but she might have drawn it away a second sooner had she chosen.

“You are a presumptuous boy,” she said, looking at me with a curious, half-puzzled light in her glorious eyes. “If you don’t behave yourself I shall begin to be sorry that I sent Lord Annerley away. He wouldn’t have done such a stupid thing as that, I’m sure.”

“He’d better not,” I said, fiercely. She laughed mockingly. I would have given anything to have been able to keep back the words which were fast rising from my swelling heart to my lips, but I seemed to have lost all control over myself. A fatal, irresistible impulse was luring me on.

“Maud—”

“”*Mr.*’ Arbuthnot,” with, a stress upon the Mr.

I leaned over to her, and strove to look in to her face, but she kept it turned from me.

“Maud, dearest!”

She turned round suddenly, with a curious contradiction of expressions in her face. Her eyes still seemed to mock me with a delusive tenderness, but her lips were close set, and her head thrown proudly back.

“That is quite enough, Mr. Arbuthnot! Must I remind you again that I am not Lady Olive? I have never studied the art of flirting, and I don’t think I’ll begin with you. You’re far too accomplished.”

In vain I tried to analyse the look she threw me as she struck her horse sharply, and rode away from me. It was contemptuous and tender, angry and laughing, serious and mocking. I dug spurs into Black Prince’s side; but he was done up, whilst she was on her second horse. It was not until we were actually in the shrubbery grounds that I caught her up.

“One word, Miss Devereux,” I begged, riding up to her side, “you are not angry with me?”

She looked into my eager face and laughed a low mocking laugh, which maddened me to listen to. The moon was shining full upon her loose coils of fair hair and exquisite profile, bathing her in its silvery light, and making her look like a marvelous piece of statuary, perfectly beautiful, but cold as marble. My heart sank as I looked into her face, and I turned away in despair.

“Maud, you are a flirt,” I cried.

“Mr. Arbuthnot,” she replied, impressively, “people who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.”

Chapter XVIII

A Strange Interview.

The sun had gone down behind a bank of angry, leaden- colored clouds, which were fast spreading over the whole surface of the sky. Only here and there a stunted, half-grown, and leafless oak tree stretched out its naked branches towards the darkening sky, and within a yard or two of me there was a miserable apology for a cottage.

No one, save they had known otherwise, would have taken it for anything but a cow shed of the rudest form. It was built of boards dipped in black tar, windowless, chimneyless, save for a hole in the roof through which a small piece of dilapidated stove piping had been thrust, and without the merest pretence of a garden. It stood, or rather leaned, against one side of a sharp slope in the moor, and fifty yards from the rude sheep-track which did duty as a road, and even in the daytime there was no other human habitation within sight, or any sign of one.

With my arm in the bridle of the Black Prince, I led him down the slope, and, grasping my riding-whip by the stock, knocked sharply at what I concluded to be the door. I heard the quick sound of a man’s startled curse, and then there was a dead silence. I knocked again, but no one answered. Then I kicked at the loose planks till the place seemed as though it would tumble down, like a pack of cards.

“What d’ye want?” a woman’s shrill voice cried trough the open chinks. “Who be you?”

“I want your husband,” I answered.

“Well, he bean’t here, ‘e bean’t coom home.”

“It’s a lie!” I shouted back. “Tell him I shall not go away until I have seen him, though I kick this place about your ears. Is he afraid? Tell him I am alone.”

She withdrew muttering, and I fastened Black Prince as securely as I could against the wall. Suddenly the door was opened, and stooping low, with my heavy riding whip grasped firmly in my right hand, I stepped inside.

At first I could see nothing, but just as I was cautiously feeling in my pocket for a match, the red flames of a wood fire, which was smouldering on the hearth, leaped up and showed me the bare walls and miserable interior of the tumble-down hovel, showed me, too, the figure of a tall, evil-looking man grasping a thick cudgel in his hand, and peering through the gloom at me with a sort of threatening inquisitiveness.

“What d’ye want wi’ me?” the man began, suspiciously. Then suddenly he dropped his cudgel and staggered back against the frail wall, with his arms stretched out as though to keep me off.

"God, it's Muster Herbert! It's Muster Herbert's ghost. What d'ye want? What d'ye want? What d'ye want here wi' me? Speak, can't you?" he cried out in a tone of hysterical dread.

"Don't be a fool, John Hilton," I said, contemptuously. "I am Hugh Devereux, son of the man against whom you swore a lie twenty-five years ago, and I have come here to ask you a few questions."

He kept his eyes fixed upon me in a sort of sullen fascinated stare.

"First tell me why you swore that lie? It was Rupert Devereux who made you."

The man's brute courage was returning to him slowly. He picked up his cudgel and began to beat the side of his legs with it.

"You know how to command, young sir," he said, sneeringly. "Suppose I say I won't answer your d—d questions?"

"I don't think you'll be so foolish," I said. "If you don't want to find yourself in gaol for poaching before the week's out, you'll do exactly as I tell you."

He swore savagely, and turned his ugly face full upon me.

"So you was the d—d young swell that came bursting in upon us when we was just a settling things off nice and comfortable t'other night, was you? I've a good mind—"

He had advanced a step or two towards me, and his fingers had closed firmly round his cudgel.

"Put that piece of timber down, John Hilton," I said, firmly; "you've tried conclusions with me once at Porlock, and you got the worst of it. So you will again if you try the same game. Drop it. Do you hear?"

I took a quick step forward, and raised my riding-whip. He hesitated, and then threw it savagely down.

"Curse it, what d'ye want to know?"

"It was Rupert Devereux who made you tell that lie before the court- martial?"

"Ay. 'twas him, right enough. I'll tell yer all about it. Muster Rupert Devereux ain't nothink to me! He comes to me that morning t' moment the bugle had sounded, and we was in the tents. 'Hilton,' he said to me, 'would yer tell a lie to be made a rich man for the rest of your life?' 'Of coors I would.' said I. 'Then when you're summoned before General Luxton to-morrow,' says he, 'tell him that you saw nothing of my brother during the fight. Forget that he ran out to help us against those two black varmint. Do that, and I'll allow you two hundred pounds a year as long as yon live.' 'I'm your man,' said I. 'That's right,' says he, and turns on his heel and walks back again. That were 'ow it war," he wound up defiantly.

I had hard work to keep my hands off him, but I did.

"And your two hundred pounds a year?"

I asked, glancing around and at the bold-looking, slatternly woman who sat crouched on a stool watching us. "What's become of that? I presume you don't live here from choice?"

He broke into a volley of horrible curses.

"I should think I don't," he broke out. "I'll tell 'e how that —— served, me. I was maybe a bit of a fool; anyways, I was a bit strong-headed, and when we got back to England I would live wi' 'im as his servant, though he didn't like it, and said I was too rough and clumsy, and so I war. But I got into his ways a bit, and live wi' 'im I would, for I didn't nohow feel safe about getting the coin, he war always moving

about so. Often we had rows, and he used to say as he'd send me a packing; but I only laughed at 'im. But that 'ere night, down at Porlock, yer remember it, he got to hear wot I'd done, and he sent for me. 'Hilton,' he said, 'here's a month's wages; and you can go to the devil. I've done wi' you.' "Ow about our little secret, mister?' I said, for I didn't think as he was noways in earnest, and' e says, 'You're a fool, Hilton. You think you've got me in your power, but it's the stupidest mistake you ever made in your life. You can go and tell your secret to any one you like, and I wish you joy of those who'll believe yer.' And I saw then as I wor done, for of coors no one would believe me. They all said as it wor a bit o' spite because he'd given me the sack, and so I went down, down, down, and here I am."

"A poacher," I remarked.

"I didn't say nowt about that," he answered sullenly. "Wot more do yer want wi' me?"

"A little family history, that's all. Whom did your master marry?"

"Miss Saville, or some such name. She war a clergyman's daughter, and she died soon after the second child was born."

"The second child! There is a daughter living at Devereux Court now—is the other one a son?"

The man nodded sullenly.

"And where is he?"

"How the devil should I know! He war at college when I left Muster Rupert; ain't 'eard of 'im since!"

"Or of Rupert Devereux?"

"No, I ain't 'eard of 'im. D'ye think I reads the sassiety papers down 'ere to know where all the fine folks is, 'cos I don't."

I was silent for a few minutes, thinking.

Of what use was this fellow's confession to me now that I had got it? Who would believe the word of such a disreputable vagabond against the word of Rupert Devereux? Still, I would have his confession—some day it might be useful.

"Have you a candle?" I asked.

The woman rose from her seat for the first time, and, after groping about for a moment or two, produced a few inches of tallow dip. I struck a match, and, lighting it, thrust it in the neck of a black bottle which she silently handed me. Then, in as few words as possible, I wrote down the substance of Hilton's confession and handed it to him, with the pencil, to sign.

"If it only does 'im the harm I wish it will," he muttered, "it'll do. Now, mister," he went on, turning towards me half threateningly, half whiningly, "wot I wants to know is this—Be yer going to peach on me for that poaching job, and how in thunder's name did yer know where to find me?"

"By accident, the latter," I answered. "I saw you come out of this den months ago, when I was riding across the moor to Silverbridge. I thought it was a chance resemblance then, but when I saw you in the wood I knew you. John Hilton, I am not going to denounce you as one of that gang of poachers; on the other hand, I have purposely refrained from handing in your description. But you have an account to settle with me."

He grasped his cudgel again.

"What do you mean?" he muttered.

“I shall show you,” I answered. I turned aside to the woman, who sat watching us with a weary, indifferent stare.

“How long is it since you had anything to eat?” I asked.

“Yester forenoon,” she moaned. “Him there”—she pointed to her husband—“he dared na go owt, and I ain’t got no money, nor nowt to sell. We be starving.”

I put my hand in my pocket and gave her half a sovereign.

“Take that, and go and get something at once,” I said.

She started to her feet, and her fingers closed eagerly over the coin. Then she drew her shawl around her and hurried to the door.

“I’ll be back inside o’ an hour, Jack,” she called out to her husband. “We’ll ha’ some supper to-night; I’ll go to Jones’s”—and she hurried away.

I turned to the man, who stood looking hungrily after has wife.

“John Hilton, I said that I had an account to settle with you. I have. It is through your damnable conspiracy and lying that my father is wandering about in a foreign land, a miserable man; that I am here compelled to bear a false name and occupy a false position. If you think that I have forgiven you this because I gave your wife money and do not cause you to be arrested as a poacher, you are mistaken. I don’t want your miserable life. I wouldn’t take it if I had the chance. But I am going to give you the soundest horsewhipping you ever had in your life.”

He shrunk back. He was a coward at heart, but he had plenty of bravado.

“Now, look ‘ere, young mister,” he said, savagely, “you’ve given my missus money when we wanted it lad, and I don’t want to hurt you. But you’re only, a stripling, and if you lay ‘ands on me I sha’n’t take it quiet, I can tell you. Now, keep off.”

He was a tall man, but I was a taller; and though I was slim, my out-of- door life had hardened my muscles till they were like iron. But had I been less his superior in strength, the passionate hatred and disgust which leaped up within me when I remembered what this man had done would have helped me to have gained my end. As it was, he was utterly helpless in my grasp, and I had wrenched his cudgel from him in a moment. All round the little room he struggled, and writhed; whilst holding him by the collar with one hand I dealt him fierce, quick blows with my thonged riding whip. Then, throwing him from me, panting, and helpless, into the furthest corner of the room, I strode out of the shaking tenement to where my horse was neighing impatiently outside. He made no attempt to follow me, and in a few minutes I had given Black Prince the rein, and we were flying across the moor homewards.

Chapter XIX

Marian Surprises Me.

It was eighteen miles from John Hilton’s hut to the park gates, across a wild country, and I had had two hours hard riding when, splashed with bog mud from head to foot, I walked into Marian’s little sitting-room, which, it seemed to me,

after the dark moor, had never looked so cheerful and cosy. Marian herself was there, lounging in a low wicker chair, with her fair hair scarcely so tidy as usual, and a soft, pleased light in her grey eyes, and opposite her was a visitor—our curate. She sprang up as I entered.

"Hugh, how late you are! I waited dinner nearly two hours. Where have you been?"

I was tired, and hungry, and cold; and I shook hands with our visitor without a superabundance of cordiality before dropping into an easy chair in front of the fire.

"A little business, that's all. Did you keep any dinner back?"

"Of course I did."

She rang the bell, and I sat still for a minute or two, expecting Mr. Holdern to take his leave. But he did nothing of the sort. Presently I rose.

"I'll change my things, and have a wash, I think. You'll excuse me for a few minutes," I said to Mr Holdern, curtly.

He consented readily, without making any movement to go. When I descended into our little dining-room, about half an hour afterwards, Marian was not there, though she came in almost directly.

"That fellow Holdern not gone yet?" I asked, surprised.

"N—no, Hugh, he's not gone yet," Marian answered, a little consciously. "Now, I do hope that partridge isn't done up to nothing. And how's the bread sauce? Rather thick, isn't it?"

I couldn't quite make Marian out. She seemed almost nervous, and after she had waited upon me, and poured out a glass of the claret which Sir Francis had insisted upon sending down from the house, she stood by my side with her arm round any neck, and looking uncommonly pretty.

"Hadn't you better go in and talk with that fellow Holdern, if he won't go?" I asked. "Won't do to leave him in there all by himself."

"Oh, he won't hurt," she answered, stroking my hair caressingly; "he's been here ever since afternoon tea."

"The deuce he has!" I exclaimed, setting down my glass, and looking up at her surprised. "What does he want? A subscription?"

"N—no. I don't think so, Hughie."

Something of the truth commenced to dawn upon me, and sitting back in my chair, I caught Marian by the arms, and looked into her face.

"Marian, you don't mean to say that the fellow's been making love to you!"

She was blushing all over her delicate little face, and she held up her hands as though to hide it from me.

"I—I'm afraid he has, Hughie, and—and—"

"And what?"

"And I've been letting him."

"Oh, indeed!" I exclaimed, feebly.

It wasn't a very impressive thing to say, but I was bewildered.

Suddenly she threw herself into my arms and hid her face on my shoulder.

"Oh, Hugh, you won't be angry, will you? Say that you won't! He is so nice, and I'm so happy."

"I don't know how most men would have felt in my position, but I must confess that my first impulse was to go and punch Mr. Holdern's head. But when I began

to think the matter over a little it occurred to me that this was scarcely the proper course lo pursue—at nay rate, it was not the usual one. The more I thought of it, the more natural it seemed to me. I remembered now how often I had found Mr. Holdern sitting at afternoon tea with Marian when I had come home about that time, and what an interest she had been taking in parish matters lately. As far as the man himself was concerned there was nothing against him; in fact, I rather liked him. But to give him—a stranger—Marian, my little sister, who had only just begun to keep house for me, the idea was certainly not a pleasant one, and yet if she wished it, how could I refuse her?

"You're too young, you know, for anything of this sort, Marian," I began, with an at tempt at severity, which I'm sure she saw through.

"I'm eighteen," came a piteous voice from the vicinity of my waistcoat. "Lots of girls are engaged before they're eighteen."

This was unanswerable. I tried another line.

"And you want to leave me, then, Marian, already?" I said, with a plaintiveness that was not all affected.

The arms that were round my neck tightened their grasp, and a tear- stained dishevelled face was lifted piteously to mine.

"I don't, Hugh! You know I don't. We only want to be engaged. We don't want to be married."

"Well, I suppose it's all right," I said, with a sigh. "Look here, Marian, you run along into Mr. Holdern, and leave me to think about it while I finish my dinner."

She unclasped her hands, and looked at me radiantly.

"Dear old Hugh! I knew you'd say yes."

"But I haven't said anything of the sort," I protested, severely. "Don't you run away with that idea, young lady. I shall have to hear what Mr. Holdern's got to say for himself first," I added, frowning, and assuming an air of paternal authority. But she saw through it, and with a final kiss ran away laughing.

Being a somewhat matter-of-fact young man, and keenly conscious of an as yet unsatisfied hunger, I finished my dinner before I commenced to think seriously over this unexpected incident Then I leaned back in my chair and considered it, and in a very few minutes I had come to the conclusion that it was about the most fortunate thing that could have happened. I had never intended my stay here to be a permanent one, and whilst there were now no reasons why I should remain, there were several strong ones why I should go. First, I could attain no nearer now, by stopping, to the great object of my life; on the other hand, every day I stayed here and remained under the fascination of Maud Devereux's presence I stood in greater risk of forgetting my oath. Then, whilst here I had no opportunity of meeting Rupert Devereux, my uncle, the man from whom, if it came at all, must come my father's justification. My father!

I thought of him in his weary exile, and my heart ached. Not a line had I heard from him since our parting, nor had I even the least idea in what country of the world he was. If Marian left me, what was there to prevent my finding him out and throwing in my lot with his? Together we might accomplish what singly each might fail in. The more I thought about it the more I liked the idea.

Leave Devereux I must, though I had grown to love the place, and to feel a strange affection for my stern old grandfather. Yet how could I go on living here to

feel every day the subtle fascination of Maud Devereux's presence getting a stronger hold upon me—Maud Devereux, the daughter of the man who had wrecked my father's life and mine, the man whom I had cursed in my heart? It seemed to me almost like treachery towards him whom I loved so well, and whose wrongs I so bitterly resented, that a glance from her blue eyes could madden or elate, me, and that the sound of her voice could set all my senses quivering. I must go, I must turn my back upon her for ever, and take up the work of my life wherever it might lead me. This thing which had happened to Marian made the way clear before me.

I crossed over to our little drawing-room, and, entering without the ceremony of knocking, found Marian and Mr. Holdern seated on chairs a long way from one another, apparently engaged in a minute examination of the ceiling. Marian took up her work and left us with a blushing face, and Mr. Holdern, without any beating about the bush, stood up on the hearthrug and began his tale.

He was a pleasant-faced, agreeable young fellow, and there was an honest look about his eyes and a straightforward manner winch I liked, and which convinced me of his sincerity. He had a private income, he told me, and had recently been offered a very comfortable living about twelve miles away. "Of course," he added, hesitatingly, "he felt some diffidence in proposing to take Marian away from me, and thus leaving me to live by myself—but, but, the long and short of it was, he wanted to get married as soon as I could possibly spare her. They would not be far away; indeed, if my prospective loneliness was an objection, I could take up my abode with them. Anything so that I would give him Marian, and give him her soon."

I did not waste any time in affecting to consider the matter, but, pledging him first to secrecy, I told him our history, what was our rightful name, and my reasons for not bearing it. If I had had any doubt before, I knew by his behavior when I had finished my story that he was a good fellow. He held out his hand and grasped mine, with the tears standing in, his eyes.

"Mr. Devereux," he said emphatically, "I don't know how to express my sympathy for you. I heard of this sad affair when I was a very little boy, and I have heard my father say many a time that he would never believe Herbert Devereux to be a coward. I hope to God that you will succeed in your quest."

"I hope so," I echoed fervently. "Marian knows nothing of this, Mr. Holdern."

"Nor need she ever," he answered. "I think you nave been quite right to keep it from her! There would have been no object gained in her knowing, and women do not understand these things like men."

"Do you know anything of Rupert Devereux?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Very little. I have seen him once—a tall, dark man, handsome, but very unlike the Devereuxs. I have heard him spoken of as a 'Sybarite, and a pleasure-seeker. He is seldom in England, I believe."

A Sybarite! A pleasure-seeker! I thought of him wandering at will through the countries of the world, steeping his senses in every luxury that money could buy, and living at ease and in comfort, and I thought of my father, also a wanderer on the face of the earth, seeking neither comfort nor pleasure nor ease, at war with the world and with himself, with no joy in the present or hope for the future, seeking only for a chance to throw his life away in the miserable quarrels of any

pettifogging country who would accept his sword! Mr. Holdern watched me in silence while I walked up and down the room for a few minutes almost beside myself with compressed passion. Then he walked up to me and laid a hand on my shoulder. “Devereux,” he said, earnestly, “I can understand your feeling like this, but you must try and keep it under control, or I’m afraid there will be trouble soon.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, turning round and facing him.

He hesitated, and then answered slowly-“I have just heard that young Francis Devereux, your cousin, is expected down here for Christmas.”

Chapter XX

Amongst the Bulrushes.

It wanted but three days to Christmas, and it had been a frost. Upon the bare fields and the shivering landscape had fallen a hand of iron—no gentle hoar-frost, making the fields and country look like a glittering panorama, but a stern, merciless, black frost, which had come in with the east wind, and lay upon the land like a cruel blight. Agricultural work of all sort was at a standstill, and hunting was impossible. The only thing to be done out of doors was to skate, and that everyone who owned a pair of skates was doing.

There was a large party at Devereux Court, but I had contrived to see very little of them. Two of Lady Olive’s sisters, some former schoolfellows of Maud Devereux’s, Francis Devereux, and some town friends, were all stopping there, and Maud was playing hostess, while Sir Francis kept himself partially shut up. Once or twice I had come across them in the park, a laughing, chattering group, but I had passed with a bow, and had chosen not to see Lady Olive’s mute command to stop. I had seen him, my cousin, and I hated him. What freak of nature had made him the brother of such a sister?—this pale, effeminate-looking man, with leaden eyes and insolent stare, and the manners of a fop. “What did Sir Francis think of him,” I wonder, “as the future head of the family of Devereux?” Bah! It was a profitless thought.

Early in the morning I sallied out with Mr. Holdern and Marian for an hour or two’s skating; there was nothing else for me to do. There were two lakes, and we chose the smaller that we might have it all to ourselves. No sooner had we our skates on that the inevitable happened. Hand in hand Marian and Holdern swept away together to the further end where the bulrushes were many and the ice was bad, and I was left alone.

I commenced to make the best of it by selecting a smooth piece of ice and setting myself an impossible task in figure skating. Far away on the other lake I could hear the hum of many skates and the sound of merry voices, and it made me feel lonely and discontented’ I would like to have been with them, skating hand in hand with Maud—Maud, whom I had not spoken a single word to since our last

ride home together; Maud whose face was seldom absent from my thoughts; Maud whom, alas! I loved.

With an aching heart I left off my futile attempt to cut impossible figures, and, lighting my pipe, commenced to make the circuit of the lake, with long, swift strides. There was something exhilarating in the rapid motion, in the desperate hastening over the smooth black ice, and as I came round for the second time my cheeks began lo glow and my heart to grow lighter. Then suddenly it bounded with an unthinking joy, for close above me was a chorus of gay, chattering tongues, and one amongst them I could distinguish in a moment, although it was the lowest of all.

I struck away for the middle of the lake meaning to make my escape, but I was just a second or two too late. Lady Olive was calling to me, and I was obliged to turn round.

The whole group were standing on the bank, some carrying chairs, and some sledges; and, all except Francis Devereux, skates. Lady Olive was calling to me, so I was obliged to skate up to them.

“Fancy your being here all by yourself, Mr. Arbuthnot! Do you know, we were coming down to call on you, the whole lot of us, if we hadn’t seen you soon. Is it good ice? And come in closer, do; I want to introduce you to my sisters.”

There was nothing for me to do but obey, and in a moment I found myself being chatted to by two girls not very unlike Lady Olive herself; and my hand had touched Maud’s for a moment, and my eyes look into her’s.. Then some one introduced me to Mr. Francis Devereux, and I found myself bowing slightly (I had kept my hands behind me, all the time anticipating this, for God forbid that I should place the hand of Rupert Devereux’s son within my own) to my cousin, who looked out at me superciliously from the depths of a fur coat, which had the appearance of having been made for the Arctic regions. It was too cold to stand still, and we all trooped on to the ice. There were many more men than girls in the party, I was pleased to see, and very soon they were scattered all over the lake in couples, and I glad enough of it was left to myself. Maud alone had delayed putting on her skates, and was sitting on a stump close to where I was standing filling my pipe, the centre of a little group of men, amongst whom was Lord Annerley. As I threw the match down, and turned round to start away again, my eyes met hers for a moment, and she smiled slightly. Did she expect me, I wonder, to join the little group of her admirers, and vie with them in making pretty speeches, and compete with them for the privilege of putting her skates on? Bah! not I. If she thought that I was her slave, to be made happy or miserable by a glance from her blue eyes or a kind word from her lips I would show her that she was mistaken. If she was proud, so was I; and drawing on my glove again, I skated over to the other side of the lake, out of hearing and sight of her little court.

Soon Lady Olive came skating up to me alone, with her hands stuck coquettishly into the pockets of her short fur-trimmed jacket, and her bright little face glowing with pleasure and warmth.

“Mr. Arbuthnot, I think you’re the most unsociable man I ever knew!” she exclaimed. “My sisters are dying to skate with you, but you won’t ask them, and—and—so am I,” she added, with a bewitching smile up at me.

Of course I could do nothing but take her little hands into mine and skate away with her at once. We passed Maud again and again skating with Lord Annerley, and the proud cold light in her eyes as she glanced at us in passing half maddened me. Whenever we met her, Lady Olive, out of wanton mischief, forced me to look down into her laughing upturned face and bright eyes, and to do so without an answering smile was impossible; and yet Lady Olive's brilliant chatter and mocking speeches were very pleasant to hear and to respond to, reckless little flirt though she was.

She left me at last to skate with Lord Annerley's brother, who had just driven up in a dog-cart with some more men, and then I went to look for Marian and Holdern. Instead, I came face to face round a sharp corner with Maud leaning back in a sledge and gazing idly into the bulrushes, where one of her brother's friends was busy with a penknife. She motioned me languidly to stop, and I obeyed her.

"What have you done with Lady Olive?" she inquired coldly.

"Resigned her to a more fortunate man," I answered, circling round her chair.

"More fortunate! You haven't much to grumble at! You've been skating with her more than an hour, haven't you?"

"Really I don't know," I answered, lightly. "I took little notice of the time."

"It passed too pleasantly, I suppose?"

"Perhaps so! I so seldom have any one to talk to," I could not help answering.

"It is your own fault. You have been avoiding us deliberately for the last three weeks."

I folded my arms and looked steadily away from her.

"And if I have," I said, slowly, "I think you might congratulate me on my wisdom and strength of mind."

She, laughed a little hesitating laugh, and, with her head thrown back on the cushion of the sledge, fixed her eyes upon me.

"Lady Olive is dangerous, is she?"

I looked at her for a full minute without answering. From underneath her sealskin turban hat her blue eyes were looking full into mine, and a mocking smile was playing around her delicate lips. Surely she was beautiful enough to drive any man mad.

"No, Lady Olive is not dangerous to me," I answered, deliberately, "you are."

"I." A curious change came over her face as she uttered the word. The mocking smile became almost a tender one, and a delicate flush tinged her soft cheeks. But the greatest change was in her eyes. For a moment they flashed into mine with a light shining out of their blue depths which I had never dreamt of seeing there, a soft, warm, almost a loving light.

"You are a silly boy," she said, in a low tone, and the color deepening all the while in her cheeks. "How dare you talk to me like this?"

Ah, how dared I? She might well have asked that if she had only known.

"I don't know," I said, recklessly. "I shall say more if I stay here any longer."

"You? Ah, Captain Hasleton, how beautiful! However did you manage to find so many?"

Captain Hasleton shut up his penknife, and commenced tying the bundle of bulrushes together.

“Ah, you may well ask that, Miss Devereux,” he said, laughing; “it would take’ too long to narrate all the horrors I have faced in collecting them. First of all, endless frogs resented my intrusion by jumping up and croaking all round me. Then I stood in constant peril of a ducking. You should have heard the ice crack! And last, but by no means least, I’ve cut my finger. Nothing but half a dozen waltzes to-night will repay me.”

Maud laughed gaily.

“Half a dozen? How grasping! I’ll promise you two. That reminds me, Mr. Arbuthnot,” she added, leaning forward on her muff and looking up at me, “we’re going to dance to-night, and I’ve persuaded your sister and Mr. Holdern to come up to dinner. You will come, won’t you?”

I said something conventional to the effect that I should be delighted, and, raising my cap, was about to turn away. But she called me back.

“How dreadfully tall you are, Mr. Arbuthnot! I have a private message for your sister. Do you think that you could bring yourself within whispering distance?”

I stooped down till my heart beat to feel her soft breath on my cheek, and I felt a wild longing to seize hold of the slender, shapely hand that rested on my coat-sleeve. And these were the words which she whispered into my ear, half mischievously, half-tenderly.

“Faint heart never won anything, did it? Don’t, you silly boy! Captain Hasleton will see you.”

And then she drew herself up and nodded, and with the hot color burning my cheeks, and with leaping heart, I watched Captain Hasleton seize hold of the light hand-sledge and send it flying along the smooth surface of the lake round the sharp corner and out of sight. Then I turned and skated away in the opposite direction with those words ringing in my ears and a wild joy an my heart. The cold east wind seemed to me like the balmiest summer breeze, and the bare, desolate landscape stretching away in front seemed bathed in a softening golden light. For Maud loved me—or she was a flirt. Maud was a flirt—or she loved me.

Chapter XXI

Rupert Devereux.

If any one had told me that evening, as Marian and Holdern and I drew near to the great entrance of Devereux Court, that I was entering it for the last time for many years, I should probably have thought them mad. And yet so it was, for that night was a fateful one to me. Into foreign lands and far away places I carried with me the memory of the stately greystone front, the majestic towers, the half-ruined battlements, the ivy-covered, ruined chapel, with its stained glass windows, and the vast hall towering up to the vaulted roof. Of Devereux Court of all these, I have said but little, for my story is rather a chronicle of events than a descriptive one. But they made a great impression upon me, as was only natural, for would they not some day, if I chose to claim them, be mine?

We arrived rather early, and leaving Marian and Mr. Holdern in the drawing-room with a few of the other guests who had already assembled, I made use of my knowledge of the house to go and look for Maud, and I found her alone, in the conservatory, leading out of her little morning room.

Surely God's earth had never held a more lovely woman. I stood looking at her for a full minute before speaking. A rich ivory satin dress hung in simple but perfectly graceful folds about her slim, exquisite figure, and bands of wide, creamy old point lace filled in her square bodice right up to her white throat. She wore no ornaments, no flowers, save a single sprig of heliotrope nearly buried amongst the lace. Her deep blue, almost violet, eyes had lost their cold, disdainful gleam, and looked into mine kindly; but there was still the half-mocking smile playing around her slightly parted lips.

"And, pray, what right have you to come into my sanctum without knocking, sir?" she asked, with a soft laugh, which did not seem to me to speak of much anger; "and now that you are here, why do you stand staring at me like a great stupid?"

I drew a long breath, and look a step forward.

"I came to beg for a flower, and—"

"Well, there are plenty in the conservatory," she said, pointing to it. "You may help yourself."

I stood close to her, so close that the faint perfume from the morsel of lace which she was holding in her hand reached me.

"Only one flower will satisfy me," I said. "That sprig of heliotrope. May I have it?"

She laughed again, a low musical laugh, and the tinge of pink in her cheeks grew deeper.

"If nothing else will satisfy you, I suppose you must."

She unfastened it from the bosom of her dress, and her little white fingers busied themselves for a moment with my button hole. So close was her head, with its many coils of dazzlingly fair hair, to mine, that, irresistibly tempted, I let my fingers rest upon it for a second with a caressing touch. She looked up at me with a mock frown, which her eyes contradicted.

She did not speak, neither did I. But a sweet subtle intoxication seemed to be creeping over my senses, and slowly, scarce knowing what I did, I drew her into my arms, and her head rested upon my shoulder. Then my lips touched hers in one long quivering kiss, which she not only suffered, but faintly returned, and it seemed to me that life could hold nothing sweeter than this.

Only for a moment she lingered in my arms. Then, as though suddenly galvanised into life and recollection, she gently disengaged herself, and stood apart from me.

Maud blushing—my princess blushing! I had pictured her to myself often with a thousand different expressions dwelling in her cold, fair face, but never thus! Yet how could she have looked more lovely!

"Now I wonder what my father would have said if he had come in just then!" she exclaimed, holding her fan in front of her face, and looking at me with laughingly reproachful eyes over the top of its wavy feathers. "Mind, you must be on your very best behavior this evening, and not attempt to talk to me too much. He hasn't seen me for five years, and I don't want him to think me frivolous."

“Your father! My God! is he here?” I gasped, leaning back against the table, and clutching hold of it with nervous fingers. The room seemed swimming round with me, and Maud’s face alone remained distinct.

“He’s coming to-night,” she said, looking at me in amazement. “What difference can it make to you? Why, Mr. Ar—Hugh, you are ill!” she exclaimed, shutting up her fan and moving to my side.

I held out my hand to keep her away. God forbid that Rupert Devereux’s daughter should rest in my arms again.

“Coming here!” I muttered. “Coming here to-night!” The idea seemed almost too much for me to realise. How could I sit at the same table with him? How breathe the same air without letting him know of my hate? And this was his daughter Maud-my Maud, my princess. The idea seemed almost to choke me.

The second dinner gong boomed out, and I raised myself at once.

“I’m afraid I frightened you, M—Miss Devereux. I won’t stop to explain now. They will be wanting you in the drawing-room.”

I opened the door for her, and she swept out and across the polished oak and rug strewn floor of the hall, lifting her eyes to mine for one moment as she passed, full of a strange, sweet light. For a brief while I lingered behind; then, with a great effort, regaining my calmness, I followed her.

Chapter XXII

Face to Face.

I sat between Lady Olive and her younger sister at dinner, and I have no doubt that both found me very stupid and inattentive. I could neither eat nor drink, talk nor laugh. Even Lady Olive gave me up at last, and devoted her attention to Captain Hasleton, her neighbor on the other side. It was not until dinner was nearly over that I was able to rouse myself in the slightest degree, and by that time Lady Olive had quite lost her temper with me.

“Skating doesn’t agree with you, Mr. Arbuthnot,” she whispered, when at last Maud had given the signal to rise. “I never knew any one so provokingly stupid in all my life.”

I shrugged my shoulders deprecatingly.

“I’m sorry, Lady Olive,” I said grimly, “but if you felt as I do for five minutes you’d for give me,” which was perfectly true.

She looked up at me with a pitying glance, and I suppose something in my expression told her that I was suffering, for her piquant little face clouded over at once.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Arbuthnot. You look as though you had a very bad headache. Come to me in the drawing-room as soon as you can, and I’ll give you some sal volatile.”

I thanked her a little absently—perhaps without sufficient gratitude, for she was a kind-hearted little woman, although she was such a terrible flirt. But I was eager to watch Maud go by—eager even to be brushed by her garments as she passed.

She half stopped as she reached me.

"I won't allow you to flirt with Lady Olive," she whispered, with a bewitching little moue; then added out loud: "Come to us as soon as ever you can, Mr. Arbuthnot. We want to commence dancing in good time."

I bowed, and letting fall the curtain, turned back to the table. Sir Francis motioned me to take the vacant place by his side, and filled my glass himself from the decanter which stood at his elbow.

"Hugh, my boy," he said, slowly—he had got into the habit of calling me Hugh lately—"I'm upset!"

I looked into his handsome old face, and saw that it was clouded over, and that there was a heavy frown on his brow.

"I'm sorry, sir," I ventured to say.

"Thanks. I knew you would be. I don't suppose a man ought to be sorry because his son's coming to see him, ought he?"

It depended upon the son, I thought.

"Ay, it depends upon the son, of course," he said, thoughtfully, stroking his long grey moustache. "There is nothing against Maud's father, nothing at all. He's nothing; like that young cub of his down there," he went on, jerking his head to where Francis Devereux was talking very loudly and drinking a good deal of champagne. "And yet I don't want him here. I can't bear to see him in the place. It's a d—d funny thing."

"If you feel like that, sir," I said, keeping my eyes fixed upon the tablecloth, "depend upon it, it's your son's fault. He's done something to deserve it."

Sir Francis sat silent for a while, toying with his glasses.

"He has done nothing," he said, half to himself, "and yet I hate the sight of him, and he of me. It is twelve years since he set foot within Devereux Court. Twelve years! I wonder what his fancy is for coming now. Would to God he had stopped away!"

"Sir Francis," exclaimed a voice from the lower end of the table, "a promise to ladies is sacred. We were told that ten minutes was as long as we could be allowed this evening, and we have pledged our words. Have we your permission?"

"Certainly, gentlemen."

Sir Francis rose, and there was a general draining of glasses and a stretching of masculine forms, Then we followed him across the hall into the blue drawing-room.

I should have made my way at once to Maud, but a look in her eyes checked me, and I turned aside and sat down in an empty recess. I had scarcely commenced to turn over the pages of a book of engravings which I had carelessly taken up, when I heard a voice at my elbow.

"As usual, Mr. Arbuthnot, you make me come to you. It's too bad of you."

I put down the book with a start, and stood up. Lady Olive was at my elbow.

"Now, sit down again, and tell me how the headache is," she exclaimed, sinking herself into the cushioned recess, and drawing her skirts aside to make room for me. "See, I've brought you my favorite smelling salts, and I have some sal volatile

in my pocket. I mustn't doctor you before all these people, though! And now for the question I'm dying to ask. Shall you be able to waltz?"

"Come and see," I said, rising and offering her my arm, for an exodus was already taking place from the room. "It's awfully good of you, Lady Olive, to remember my headache," I added, gratefully.

She tapped my fingers with her fan.

"Don't make speeches, sir. What a grand old place this is, isn't it?"

We were to dance in the armor gallery, and the whole party were making their way there now. The magnificent staircase, bordered with massive black oak balustrades, up which we were passing, descended into the middle of the hall, and was supported by solid black marble pillars; and the corridor, which ran at right angles to it, was lighted by stained glass windows, in front of each of which armored knights were grimly keeping watch. One corridor led into another, all of noble dimensions, with high oriel windows, and lined by a silent ghostly guard of steel clad warriors and polished marble statues. A strange contrast they seemed to the gay, laughing procession of girls, in their low necked dinner dresses and flashing diamonds, and men in their mess jackets and evening coats. Maud alone, moving with the slow, stately grace of a princess of former days, seemed in keeping with our surroundings.

Soon the sound of violins reached us, and, pushing aside the heavy curtains, we descended two steps and stood in the armor gallery. Maud's imagination and many nimble fingers had been busy here, and at first I scarcely knew the place. Fairy lights with various colored shades hung from the mailed gloves of many generations of Devereux, and the black oak floor was shining with a polish beyond its own. But no fairy lights or bracketed candles could dispel the gloom which hung about the long lofty gallery, with its vaulted roof black with age, and its panelled walls hung with the martial trophies of every age and every land. And yet it was a gloom which seemed in keeping with the place, and no one found it oppressive.

I danced with Lady Olive, and then, as we stood talking in the shade of one of my armored forefathers, Captain Hasleton came up and claimed her, and I was left alone. Nearly opposite me was Maud, standing like an exquisite picture in the softened light of one of the stained glass windows. But I did not go to her at once. Several men were talking to her, and she was answering them with the languid air of one who finds it hard to be amused, and her blue eyes more than once travelled past them and looked into mine indifferently, but still with a meaning in them. At last I crossed the room and stood before her.

"You promised me a waltz, I think, Miss Devereux. Will not this one do?"

She hesitated for a moment, and then she laid her hand on my coat-sleeve, and we moved away. Without a word I passed my arm around her waist, and we floated slowly up the room. It was one of Waldteufel's wild, sad waltzes, now bursting into a loud flood of music, now dying away into a few faint melodious chords. For many years after wards I never heard it played without longing to rush away into solitude and recall those few minutes of exquisite happiness in that strange, dimly-lit ballroom.

All things come to an end, and so did that waltz. Maud promised me the next but one and was led away by Lord Annerley, and, to while away the time, I took a

lamp from a bracket on the wall, and, pushing aside the heavy curtains, stepped into the picture gallery to look at my father's portrait.

It was not the first time by many that I had done so, for when I had been shown over the court soon after my arrival my first visit had been here. Bitterly indignant had I felt when, after I had looked for long in vain for my father's picture, I had found it—with its face turned against the wall. I had turned it round again during a moment or two when Groves, the portly house steward, had been otherwise engaged, and since then it had not been disturbed, for Sir Francis no longer made this his favorite lounging-place; indeed, he seldom came here at all.

The sound of the music and of voices—some fresh ones I fancied—came to me in a faint, indistinct hum through the drawn curtains, and for a while I forgot all about them. I seemed in another world, amongst those long rows of my frowning ancestors, beruffled ladies in quilted gowns and dresses of strange device, armed knights, and beaux of a later and more peaceful age with perukes, knee-breeches, and snuff-boxes. But though I walked the whole length of the gallery, and glanced leisurely at all of them, it was my father's picture at which I lingered longest, and before which I was standing absorbed when the drawing of the curtain and the sound of voices and feet entering the gallery made me start round and very nearly drop the candle which I held in my hand.

"Why, Arbuthnot, what are you doing moping in here?" exclaimed Sir Francis, in a tone of astonishment. "Why don't you go and dance?"

I turned round with some excuse on my lips, but it died away when I saw who were his companions. Walking by his side was a tall, dark man, with iron- grey hair, and pale, delicate face. On his arm was Maud, and, glancing from one to another, I knew that this was her father, my Uncle Rupert. Behind was my cousin Francis, with Lady Olive on his arm. It was a strange meeting.

"This is Mr. Arbuthnot, Rupert, whom I was telling you about just now," Sir Francis went on, without appearing to notice my start. "Arbuthnot, this is my son, Mr. Rupert Devereux."

I bowed slightly, and my Uncle Rupert did the same, withdrawing the hand which I had affected not to see. God forbid that my hand should touch his, even in the most casual fashion.

"Well, Arbuthnot, we—"

Sir Francis broke off in his pleasant speech, with his eyes riveted on the wall behind me. Slowly his face grew rigid with anger, and his thick eyebrows were contracted in a stern frown.

"Who has touched that picture?" he asked, in a cold, measured tone, which I had never heard from him before.

Rupert Devereux's eyes followed his father's shaking forefinger, and I saw a change pass over his face also. His dark eyes filled with a troubled, fearful light, and he shrank back a pace, as though to escape from the sight of the handsome boyish face which laughed down on him from the massive frame. To my eyes, inspired by knowledge, guilt was written in his pale face as plainly as nature could write, and with a passionate anger which had lain sleeping within me for many weary months leapt out, burning and fierce, kindled by his presence. I forgot that I was Mr. Arbuthnot, the land agent; I forgot Maud's presence; I forgot everything

save that I stood face to face with the man who had blighted my father's name and honor.

That one maddening thought alone held me, and it was only by a great effort that I restrained myself from flying at his throat like a mad bull- dog.

I don't think that Sir Francis noticed my agitation. In fact, I am sure that he did not; for I was standing just outside the streak of light which the moon, shining softly in through the diamond-paned window, was casting upon the polished floor.

"Mr. Arbuthnot," he said, firmly, "might I trouble you—or Francis, you are nearest! Be so good as to turn that picture with its face to the wall."

Francis Devereux dropped Lady Olive's arm, and, advancing, laid his hands upon the frame. . Then the devil broke loose within me, and, seizing him by the collar as though he had been a baby, I threw him on his back upon the floor.

"Dare to lay a finger upon that picture, you or any one else here," I cried, passionately, "and I will kill you!"

Chapter XXIII

In the Picture Gallery.

It is strange that, although so many years have passed, that scene remains as though written with letters of fire into my memory-vivid and clear. Word for word, I can remember every sentence that was spoken; and the different expressions on the face of each I could, if I were a painter, faithfully reproduce. Sir Francis gazed at me speechless in a sort of helpless apathy, Maud and Lady Olive looked horrified and thunderstruck, and my Uncle Rupert, with face as pale as death, was shaking from head to foot, with eyes riveted upon me in a sort of fascinated bewilderment, as though I were one risen from the dead. Sir Francis seemed to be the first to recover himself.

"Arbuthnot! Arbuthnot!" he exclaimed; "what does this mean?"

I pointed to my uncle, and he seemed to shrink back from my outstretched hand.

"Cannot you see?" he faltered in a hollow tone. "Look at him and at the picture."

I had moved a step forward unconsciously, and was standing in the centre of the broad stretch of moonlight which was streaming in from the high window. Sir Francis looked at me, and then gave a great start.

"My God! Arbuthnot, boy! Who are you? Speak!"

"Hugh Arbuthnot, son of Herbert Arbuthnot, who once called himself Devereux," I answered, proudly, looking Sir Francis steadily in the face; "and who would be a Devereux still," I added, "but for that man's villainous lie."

Rupert Devereux turned his head away, as though unable to meet the fire which blazed from my eyes. Maud had sunk, half fainting, upon an ottoman, and Lady Olive was by her side. Sir Francis stood gazing fixedly at me, as though in a dream.

“It can’t be!” he muttered, hoarsely. “He could never have such a son as you. He was a coward!”

“It’s a lie!” I thundered—so vehemently that Sir Francis staggered back aghast. “Rupert Devereux!” I cried, taking a quick stride to his side, “can you dare you look me in the face and tell me that my father was a coward? You, who bribed John Hilton, your servant, into a shameful conspiracy that you might step into his place! You, you—speak, man, and tell me! Was Herbert Devereux a coward?”

He was white to the lips with a fear not merely physical. His senses seemed stupefied; and though I waited amidst a deathlike silence for a full minute, he made me no answer. I turned my back upon him contemptuously.

“Sir Francis!” I cried, “he could lie to strangers and to you, but to me he dare not. Before heaven, I swear that my father is an innocent man, shamefully sinned against by him”—I pointed to my uncle. “Out of a mean jealousy, and for the sake of being your heir, he did it—he perjured himself. He to call himself a Devereux, and my father robbed of his name and honor by such treacherous villainy! Don’t you wonder that I don’t kill you?” I cried, turning round, a very tempest of passion surging up within me. “God knows why I don’t do it! Sir Francis, I appeal to you. John Hilton has confessed to me that his story was a lie. My father is as brave a soldier and a gentleman as ever Devereux was. Tell me that you believe it. Let us make that man confess, aye, even though we have to tear his guilty secret from his heart!”

Sir Francis had recovered himself entirely, and was again the aristocratic, unmovable soldier.

“Hugh, my boy, I believe you,” he said kindly. “Be my grandson, and I shall thank God for it, and be proud of you. But you are mistaken about your father. A court-martial never errs.”

The hope which had sprung up in my heart died away, and in its place had leaped up a bitter hatred—hatred of Rupert Devereux, hatred of my grandfather, hatred of Maud, of every one who refused to believe in my father’s’ innocence. I drew back from Sir Francis’s outstretched band, and looked at him proudly.

“Never, Sir Francis. I will not call myself your grandson, or take the name of Devereux, until my father bears it too. I would sooner live and die Hugh Arbuthnot.”

Then, without another look at one of them, without even a glance into Maud’s white face, I turned, and walked slowly out of the gallery and out of the house.

Chapter XXIV

A Midnight Visitor.

Like a man in a dream, I walked with unsteady footsteps down the avenue, through the shrubbery, and across the park to the cottage. I had forgotten my latchkey, and the servant who answered my ring welcomed me with a little cry of relief.

"John was just a coming up to the house, for you, sir," she exclaimed, shutting the door again. "There's a strange woman wants to see you most particular. She's been here more than an hour, a fretting ever so because you wasn't here."

"Where is she?" I asked.

"In your study, sir. I see'd as there was nothink about as she could lay 'er 'ands on before I let her in."

I had no doubt but that it was the wife of one of the tenants on the estate, though why she should choose such a strange time for her visit I could not imagine. But when I walked into the study I saw at once that she was a stranger to me. And yet, no. I had seen her face before somewhere.

She rose nervously when I entered, and pulled her shawl closer around her.

"You'll excuse the liberty I've taken in coming, sir," she began, hurriedly. "I 'a come to do yer a service. You doant seem to recollect me. I'm John Hilton's wife; him as you comed to see t'other week."

I recognised her at once, and became more interested.

"You see, sir, it's like this," she went on. "My Jack, he's had one o' his drinking fits on, and he's always mortal mischievous after one of 'em. He seems to 'a got a powerful sort o' a grudge agin you, and there's that piece o' paper as you wrote out, and he put 'is name to. He says as 'ow he might get lagged for that if you showed it."

"Well, has he sent you to try and get it away again?" I asked.

"Not he! If he know'd as I'd come 'ere at all he'd half kill me."

"Well, what is it, then?" I asked.

"Well, it's just like this," she answered, slowly; "he's a coming himself to try and get it back agin."

"Indeed! And when may I expect him?" I inquired, becoming suddenly interested.

"To-night."

I leaned back in my chair, and laughed dryly. The woman must be mad.

"'Tain't no laughing matter, master," she said, sullenly. "You'd a laughed t'other side o' your mouth, I can tell 'ee, if I hadn' a chosen ter come and tell 'ee. He ain't a' coming to ask you for it. He's a coming to take it, and to pay yer back something as yer gave 'im at our cottage—him and a mate."

I began to see what it all meant now, and to understand why the woman had come.

"And you've come here to put me on my guard, is that it?" I remarked.

"Yes. Yer gave me money when I was starving, and I felt sort 'er grateful. And when I 'eard them two blackguards a planning how they'd settle you I thought as they just shouldn't. If you puts a bullet in that 'long Jem, which is my man's pal, I shall thank yer for it. Jack's bad enough, specially when he's just getting round from a spell o' drinking, which he is now; but he's a sight worse. Cuss him. He's always a leading my Jack into something."

"What time are they coming?" I asked, thoughtfully.

"I 'eerd 'em say as they'd meet at Cop't Oak, which is a mile from here, as soon as it were dark, and hide until you was all a-gone to bed. I'm mortal afeard of their seeing me, although I shall go 'ome t'other way."

I pressed her to stay at the cottage for the night, but she stubbornly refused. Her Jack would kill her if he found out that she had been here, she declared. But before she went I made her drink a glass of wine, and fill her pockets with the bread and food which I had ordered in.

This promised to be an exciting night for me altogether, I thought, as I drew out my revolver from the cupboard and carefully loaded it. I was not inclined altogether to believe or altogether to disbelieve this woman's story, but at any rate there was no harm in being prepared. If I had gone to bed, there would have been little sleep for me with my head still throbbing with the vivid recollection of that terrible scene in the picture gallery. I dared not think of it, I dared not let my thoughts dwell for an instant on the inevitable consequences of what had happened. The excitement of what might shortly take place kept me from the full sickening realisation of the change which that evening's events must make in my life, but underneath it all there was a dull, aching pain in my heart, for had I not lost Maud?

Presently Marian and Mr. Holdern arrived. I had forgotten their very existence, and directly the latter had taken his leave Marian was full of eager, agitated questions. Why had I left so suddenly? Had I quarrelled with Sir Francis Devereux? What did it all mean? Maud had gone to her room with white face and looking like a ghost, and Lady Olive had not again entered the dancing room. Sir Francis had apologised to his guests with the agitation of one who had received a great shock, and Rupert Devereux none of them had seen again; and I was mixed up in it. What did it all mean?

She threw herself into my arms, and when I saw the gathering tears in her soft grey eyes, and her anxious, troubled look, I shrunk from the task before me.

"Not now, Marian; I will tell you to-morrow; wait until then," I begged. But she would not wait.

Then, with a great effort, I braced myself up, and told her everything. She listened with ever-growing astonishment, and when I had finished she slipped down from my knee and sank upon the hearthrug.

"Poor papa!" she sobbed. "No wonder you hate that Rupert! Beast! Oh, Hugh, Hugh, why could yon not tell me before? I ought to have known," she added reproachfully.

"It could have done no good," I answered.

A wave of sudden anxiety passed across her face.

"Oh, Hugh!" she sobbed. "Char—Mr. Hold—"

"Mr. Holdern knows all about it," I interrupted. "I thought it right to tell him when he asked me for you."

A great relief brightened her face, and she smiled through her tears. Even a woman is selfish when she is in love.

"I am glad he knows," she whispered, looking into the fire. "How strange it all seems! Why our name is Devereux; you will be Sir Hugh Devereux. Why, Hugh, Devereux Court will be yours some day."

"Never!" I answered, firmly; "until Sir Francis asks my father's pardon, and receives him as a son, I shall never take the name of Devereux or enter the Court. I have sworn it, Marian."

"And it was noble of you to swear It, Hugh," she whispered, coming over and kissing me. "They say truth always comes out some time or other. Perhaps this will all come right some day."

"For our father's sake, pray that it may do, Marian dear," I answered, gravely. "And now run along to bed, I have some writing to do."

She lingered by my side.

"Hugh, what are you going to do now? You will leave here, I suppose?"

"I must, Marian. Unless Sir Francis desires otherwise, I shall remain here until he has found some one else to take my place, though, but it will be as Hugh Arbuthnot, his agent, only, and into Devereux Court I will not go again. It will be well for Rupert Devereux, too, that he keeps out of my way," I added to myself. "When does Mr. Holdern want to marry you, Marian?" I asked her suddenly, changing the subject.

She blushed up to her eyes, and looked at me half pleased, half reproachfully.

"Hugh! How could you ask me like that? I—I don't quite know."

"Because you'll have to go away with me, you know," I continued. "I can't leave you behind."

She looked serious enough now.

"Of course you can't, Hugh; I don't think I ought to leave you at all. You'll be alone if I do, with no one to look after you."

I pretended to look serious, as though considering the matter, but her piteous expression and quivering lips were irresistible, and I broke into a reassuring laugh.

"Not I, Marian! It is the best thing that could possibly have happened. When I have no longer you to look after I shall go abroad wherever our father is and share his lot. Country life is beginning to get wearisome to me. I was meant to be a soldier, I think. Now, Marian, you must really go to bed. I want to be alone."

It was past twelve, and I was beginning to get anxious. But she still lingered for a moment.

"Hugh, I had almost forgotten, I have something for you, and a message."

I bent over my desk, lest she should see the light which sprung into my face. I did not wish even Marian to know my secret.

"What is it?" I asked. "Be quick."

"Why, she came to me like I've never seen her before, as lifeless and sorrowful as anything, and said, 'Tell your brother that I think he is behaving nobly, and that I hope we shall always be friends."

"She said that!" I exclaimed, starting round, "Maud said that!"

My sister looked at me amazed.

"Maud! I didn't say anything about Maud!"

"She didn't even speak to me. It was Lady Olive, and she sent you this."

I stretched out my hand for the gold-topped cut-glass little smelling salts, which Marian was holding out for me and laid it down before me. Disappointed though I was, it was a kindly act of Lady Olive's, and I was just in that mood when a man appreciates such a one. For a moment or two I felt very tenderly towards Lady Olive; for, reckless little flirt though she was, she was generous and warm-hearted, or she would never have done this.

"It is very kind of her," I said, huskily. "Good night, Marian!"

“Good night, Hughie. Don’t sit up late, dear, and don’t fret. It makes me feel so selfish, Hugh, to think that I can’t help being happy because—because of Charlie, but I can’t help it. I do love him so, and he is so good to me.”

Then at last she went, and I was left alone. First of all I put a heavy shade upon the lamp and placed it so that no one could possibly see it from outside. Then I finished loading my revolver, and put a life-preserver in my breast pocket. Going out on tip toe into the hall, I opened the passage door, and also left my own wide open, so that if any one should attempt to enter the house from any room I must hear them. This seemed to me to be all that I could do, and drawing my easy chair into the corner of the room which faced both door and windows, I sat down and waited patiently with my revolver on my knee.

At first the time did not seem long. I had come to a crisis in my life, and there was much for me to think about. In the twenties, however dark and doubtful the future may be, there is always a certain fascination connected with it—possibilities, however remote, which the sanguine spirit of youth loves to peer into and investigate. And so I sat and thought, and considered, and longed, without ever getting sleepy, or feeling the spell of weariness.

Two o’clock struck, and of a sudden a curious change came over me. I became so violently restless that I could sit no longer in my chair. Sober- minded people may scoff at such a statement, but I declare that some irresistible impulse compelled me to go to the nearest window and look cautiously out.

The window was not one of the front ones, but was one which looked sideways over a strip of garden, a thick privet hedge, into a dark black fir plantation, through which ran a private pathway into the gardens of the court. At first I could see nothing; then suddenly the blood died out from my cheeks, even from my lips, and I stood transfixed, rooted to the spot—my limbs numbed and helpless as though under the spell of some hideous nightmare.

What my eyes looked upon my reason refused to credit. Turning from the hand-gate of the plantation, without a hat, and with a wealth of golden hair streaming down upon a swansdown cloak was Maud! It was impossible—it was ridiculous—it was beyond all credence. And yet my straining, riveted eyes watched her walk slowly, with her usual stately, even tread, down the grass- grown path between the plantation and the hedge of the cottage garden, and disappear from sight.

Though an earthquake had yawned at my feet I could not have moved. Nothing but sound can break up such a spell as this sudden shock had laid upon me. And the sound came, for suddenly there broke upon the stillness of the night such a cry as I had never heard before—the thrilling, agonised shriek of a woman in mortal fear.

Chapter XXV

Cousins.

Like the shock from a galvanic battery did that sound breathe life into my frozen limbs. Holding a chair before my face I literally burst through the high French windows, crashing the glass and splintering the framework into a thousand pieces. With the cry of a wild beast I dashed across the lawn and leaped over the privet hedge. Maud, my Maud, was scarcely a dozen yards from me, struggling in the grasp of the man who had come to rob me of his confession, with his great hand pressed against her wild, beautiful face to stop her cries.

They heard me coming, and he half released her, and with his other hand pointed a revolver at me. But passion must have lent me wings, for before he could pull the trigger I had dashed it into the air, where it exploded harmlessly, and with my clenched fist I struck him such a blow as I had never struck before or since. He was a powerful man, with a thick, bullet-shaped head, but he went down like a log, and well nigh never rose again. His companion, without a word, turned and ran across the park like a hare, and I let him go.

Maud was in my arms, sobbing hysterically, Maud with the moon shining down on her blanched but exquisite face, and her white arms thrown around my neck. If she were the daughter of a prince of hell she was still the woman I loved; and I stooped and covered her cold face and lips with passionate kisses. Then I caught her up in my arms, for she was shivering, and ran with her to the house.

Every one had been roused by the sound of my exit, and the report of the revolver. Marian, with her dressing-gown loosely wrapped around her, was standing trembling at the head of the stairs, and behind her were the servants more frightened even than she. When she saw me cross the hall with Maud's lifeless form (for her faint seemed almost the faint of death) in my arms, she gave vent to one cry of blank amazement and horror, and then hurried down to us.

"Hugh, Hugh," she whispered, clinging to me as I laid my burden down on the sofa, and fell on my knees by its side. "Maud here! Maud out in the park at this time of night! What has happened, Hugh? What does it all mean?"

"Can't you see?" I muttered hoarsely, never withdrawing my eyes from the white, cold face. "She has had a fright, and has fainted!"

"But what on earth has brought her here—out at this time of night? And in her slippers, too!"

I was on the point of saying that I knew no more than she, but suddenly the truth flashed into my mind. Maud had walked out in her sleep! I had heard her say that for a long time she had been obliged to have her maid in her room at night, and sleep with locked doors; and that when Sir Francis lay dangerously ill not many years ago, nearly every night when she had gone to bed thinking of him, she had risen in her sleep and tried to make her way to his room. Then she must have been thinking of me! A sudden thrill of joy passed through me at the thought, and Marian looked at me in stupefied bewilderment to see the smile which for a moment parted my lips.

"She must have come out in her sleep, Marian," I whispered. "There were some men hanging about outside—poachers, I suppose-and they have frightened her. Get some brandy, quick! And tell one of the girls to light a fire. We must have some hot water."

She hurried away, and the door had scarcely closed when Maud changed her position slightly, and her lips moved. I bent my ear close over her, and this is what I heard:

"Hugh! Hugh!"

My heart throbbed with a great joy. Suddenly I stooped down and kissed her half open lips passionately. Then I drew back and stood upright, for I saw that she was fast recovering consciousness.

First her breathing became deeper and less fitful. Then, with a little sigh, she opened her eyes and raised herself a little on her elbow.

She looked around in blank bewilderment. Then her eyes fell upon me, and the hot color rushed into her cheeks.

"Mr. Arbuthnot! Why, where am I? How did I come here? and those men," she added, with a shudder, "those fearful men; was it all a dream?"

She raised her hand to her forehead and looked at me appealingly. I hardened my voice as much as possible, and avoided meeting her eyes.

"I think I can explain to you what has happened," I said. "You must have got up in your sleep, and walked clown through the copse. There were some men outside; I believe they were going to try and break in here, and one of them must have caught hold of you, for when I heard your scream and ran out, you were struggling in his grasp. I knocked him down and the other one ran away. Then I carried you here, and here you are. Marian has just gone out to fetch some brandy."

Womanlike, her first thought was of her appearance, and she sat up and looked at herself eagerly. Evidently she had fallen asleep before preparing to retire, for the only change in her dress since the evening was that she had exchanged her dinner-gown for a long white dressing-robe, and let down her hair. Nevertheless, she blushed as she sat up, and looked at me, pushing back the waves of hair from her face.

"I remember falling asleep in the easy chair," she said, slowly, "and after that everything seems like a horrid dream. Those men's fearful faces, and you—oh, how fierce you looked! But it all seems very indistinct."

Then Marian came in, and she turned to her smiling.

"Miss Arbuthnot, I'm afraid you'll think this a very unceremonious morning call. You didn't know I was a sleep-walker, did you?"

Marian put down the decanter she was carrying with a little cry of relief.

"Oh, dear, I'm so glad to see you all right again. What an awful adventure you've had!"

Maud smiled placidly. She was her old self again, stately and composed.

"It might have been a great deal worse but for your brother," she acknowledged; "I wonder if they've found out at the Court. They'll be getting a little anxious if they have."

"Unless I'm very much mistaken they've found out," I answered. "Listen."

I went out and threw open the hall door. Clearly enough we could hear the alarm bell at the Court clanging out with shrill, quick strokes, and the whole of the park seemed dotted with men carrying lanterns, looking like will-o'-the-wisps, and making the soft night air echo with their hoarse shouts. Two figures were rapidly approaching the cottage, and I hailed them.

“Have you seen anything of Miss Devereux?” called out Groves, the head butler. “She’s out in the park somewhere a-walking in her sleep.”

“She is here,” I answered, and then went in and told Maud that they had come for her.

Marian left us to find a warmer cloak, and thicker shoes, and for a moment we were together. She turned to me at once with a sweet, sad smile on her lips, and a look of regret shining out of the azure depths of her dim eyes.

“Mr. Arbuthnot, I had quite forgotten, in all this excitement, what happened in the picture gallery. We are cousins, are we not?”

I shook my head.

“It is not a relationship which I shall claim,” I answered, slowly. “If I should see you again before I go, Miss Devereux, it will be as Mr. Arbuthnot.”

Her eyes were speaking to me—speaking words which her lips could not utter, but I avoided them.

Eager voices were hurrying through the garden, and Maud held out her hand with a hurried gesture.

“At any rate, you will let me thank you for your timely aid this evening. But for you I don’t know what might not have happened.”

I took her hand and raised it to my lips. Then I let it drop, and moved towards the door.

“I think I ought to thank you rather,” I answered, with a pretence at a laugh, “for giving me the alarm. If those fellows had got into the house and taken me by surprise, things might have been worse for me, at any rate.”

I opened the door and admitted Groves and several of the other servants. Francis Devereux was there, too, but he stood on the pathway outside, without offering to enter, neither did I invite him. Maud went out to him at once, and then I explained to the gaping little crowd what had happened.

“What became of the one you knocked over, sir?” asked Groves, after the little chorus of wondering exclamations had subsided.

“There now, most likely,” I answered, with a start. “I’d forgotten all about him.”

We all trooped over to the spot, and there he lay, doubled up in the underwood, his face drawn with pain, and still unconscious. To say that I was sorry for him would, have been a lie; nay, if Rupert Devereux had lain by his side I should have been only the better pleased. But he lay so still and motionless that I stooped over him anxiously, and felt his heart. It was beating, though faintly, and I felt distinctly relieved when I looked up again.

“He’s alive,” I declared, “but only just. Better get him some brandy.”

They brought him some from the house, and I poured it between his lips. He revived at once.

“We’d a best take him up to the Court, sir,” remarked Groves. “You won’t want him down here with only yourself in the house.”

So they took him away, and as the long streaks of red light in the east slowly deepened until the autumn sun rose up from behind the pine trees like a ball of glowing fire, I threw myself down on the couch and slept.

Chapter XXVI

I Give Warning.

By ten o'clock in the morning I had written a letter which had caused me a good deal of trouble and anxiety. It was to Sir Francis Devereux:

"The Cottage, Devereux,
"Wednesday morning.

"Dear Sir Francis Devereux,—

You will, I am sure, agree with me that the revelation of last evening renders it imperative on my part to leave Devereux at once, or as soon as possible. I must ask you, therefore, to accept this note as an intimation of my desire to do so as soon as is convenient to yourself.

"No one could regret more than I do the necessity which has arisen, and I am deeply sensible of all your kindness to myself and to my sister. But, under the circumstances, it would be, of course, quite impossible for me to remain here as your agent, nor I am sure would you wish it. As to the other offer which you were generous enough to make, the answer which I gave you at the time is absolutely irrevocable.

"With regard to the attempted burglary here last night and assault upon Miss Devereux, I shall be prepared to give evidence when the man is charged. There are several matters connected with the estate with which I will not now trouble you, but which I shall be glad to lay before you or Mr. Bensome before I go. My books I am prepared to hand over to my successor or to Mr. Bensome at any moment.

"Thanking you again for the uniform and, I fear, undeserved kindness which I have always received from you, I remain, yours obediently,
"Hugh Arbuthnot.
"To Colonel Sir Francis Devereux, Bart."

Having dispatched this, I ordered Black Prince, and rode away to a distant part of the estate to superintend the felling of some timber. As usual, when going any distance, I took some luncheon in my pocket, and ate it on a stile whilst the men knocked off for dinner. Just as I had lit my pipe and was preparing to start work again—for I was not afraid of using my hands, and used to take a pleasure in getting through as much as any of the men—I heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the smooth, wide, velvet sward, and glancing up quickly saw that the whole party from the Court were close upon me, all except Maud and the elders.

I drew back indifferently to let them pass, and bowed lo Lady Olive, who was riding by the side of Francis Devereux. She started when she saw me, and, detaching herself from the rest of the party, rode over to me.

"Fancy coming upon you, Mr. Arbuthnot, and hard at work, too! What are you doing?"

"Cutting down trees, Lady Olive."

"Well, you look in a nice mess," she declared, frankly. "What do you want to work yourself for? It's a shame that you should."

I laughed at her indignation, thinking only that her flushed cheeks made her look uncommonly pretty.

"I like working," I answered, "What would you have me do? Shack about with my hands in my pocket all day?"

"I don't know," she said, hotly. "But when I think of that idle, lazy young Francis dawdling his life away, doing nothing except ape a man about town; and then think of you working hard every day, and remember who you are, it makes me feel angry. Do you know, I longed just now to push him out of his saddle. It wouldn't take much, I think."

I laughed outright, but Lady Olive remained serious enough.

"Well, perhaps you'll be pleased to hear that I am going to give up working—here, at any rate," I said. "Of course I can't stop now."

She looked steadily between her horse's ears, growing a shade paler; and I leaned against the stump of an oak-tree wondering how a riding-habit could have been made to fit so well, and admiring her dainty little figure.

"When are you going?" she asked suddenly.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"As soon as Sir Francis will let me. I have '*given warning.*'"

She looked down at me, and spoke; a little hurriedly, but with a frank, sincere look in her flushed face.

"Mr. Arbuthnot—I suppose I must call you Mr. Arbuthnot—I think yours is the saddest story I have ever heard. I want you to let me tell you that I feel for you, as much as any one possibly could do, and I think you are behaving splendidly, just as I would have my own brother behave if he were in the same position."

I felt more moved even than I should have cared to own, for I was just in that mood when kind words are sweet, and I had always liked Lady Olive.

"You are very good," I said, warmly. "Believe me; it is a great pleasure to me to hear you say this."

"Have you any idea yet where you are going?" she asked, "or what you are going to do?"

I shook my head.

"To London, first, and then I shall try and discover my father, and get him to let me throw in my lot with his. Somehow I think that I shall end by being a soldier. It's in the blood, I suppose."

"Mr. Arbuthnot," she said, frankly, stretching out her hand, "may we not be friends? I have never asked so much of a man be fore, but, but—"

I took her little hand, and did not at once release it.

"I shall be always glad to think of you as such," I said, warmly; "but I'm afraid it isn't very likely that we shall meet again, after I leave here. My life and yours will lie very far apart."

"I'm not so sure of that," she answered, with an attempt at gaiety. "I'm going to travel about a good deal next year; and—and Mr. Arbuthnot," she added, coloring a little deeper, "I know you'll forgive me for saying it, but my father—he's ambassador at Rome now, you know—has a good deal of influence in London, and

especially at the Foreign Office, and if there was anything we could do for you—oh, you know what I want to say," she broke off suddenly, and looking away that I might not see the tears in her eyes. "You may want to try and got some appointment abroad or something, or even if you decided to go into the army, he might be useful to you, and he would do anything I asked him. He is very kind, and—and it would make me very happy to feel that we were helping you a little."

Was it so great a sin that for a moment I longed to draw that tearful little face down to mine and kiss it? I had never been in the least danger of falling in love with Lady Olive, bright and fascinating though she was, but at that moment it occurred to me that the man who won her would be a very fortunate man indeed.

"Lady Olive," I said earnestly, "I scarcely know how to thank you. I cannot tell you how much I feel your kindness. I shall take you at your word, and write you if ever I need any help, and if I do not I shall always like to think of your offer."

She smiled down at me beamingly.

"I am so glad you're not offended. Of course I shall see you again before you go, and I will bring you down a card with my address in London. Good bye. No, *au revoir*."

She touched her horse with the whip and galloped away after the others, and the bright winter's day seemed to me less bright when she had gone. I watched her out of sight, and at the bend of the grassy road she turned round in her saddle and waved her whip. I returned her farewell with my hat, then, when she disappeared, I went back to my place amongst the men, and worked till the perspiration streamed down my face, and I was obliged to take off my coat and hang it on a branch of a fallen tree. But I felt all the better for it, for it has always seemed to me, as it did then, that hard physical labor is the most magnificent relaxation for an over-wrought mind. When the sun set and our day's work was over, I was stiff and my arms were sore, but my heart was lighter than it had been since this crisis had come. I stood filling my pipe and chatting to the foreman whilst one of the laborers had gone for my horse, until he, too, followed the others, and I was left alone.

At least I thought so, but I was mistaken. A voice, croaking and weak, almost at my shoulder, suddenly startled me, and I turned round to find an old woman, bent double, leaning on her stick, with her bead-like eyes fixed upon me.

"Who be'st you?" she said. "Be you him as they call the agent?"

I acknowledged that it was so, and that my name was Arbuthnot.

"It's a loi," she answered deliberately. "Dost think that Sarah Milsham knaw'st not a Devereux when she seest one? Be'st thou Muster Herbert's son? God bless him."

I looked around anxiously, but there was not a soul in sight.

"Thou be'st a son o' my Mr. Herbert," she muttered. "I knaw'st thou be'st so like him that I thought thee was a ghost, boy. What be'st thou a doing here? Wheres't thy father?"

"Abroad, mother, since you know me. Who are you?"

"Who be I?" she laughed, a mirthless, unpleasant laugh. "Why, thee hasna' heard of Sarah Milsham? I nursed your father when he were a baby. What be'st a doing here boy? Hast come to kill Rupert Devereux?"

"He deserves it," I cried, hotly.

“So afore God he does,” cried the old hag, tremulously, “and die he will, for I ha’ seen the mark o’ death upon his forehead. But it’ll be no by your hand, no by your hand, boy. What be’st a doing here? Go to thy father, boy! Why hast left him alone?”

“I am going,” I answered. “Please God, I shall be with him before many months.”

“Ay, go, boy, go,” she quivered out, “and tell him this from me. Tell him that sure as Devereux Court is built upon a rock, I, Sarah Milsham, shall live to see him here again. Sure as that limb of hell, Rupert Devereux, bears the seal of death upon his forehead, so sure the day will come when the whole country shall welcome him home again, and old Sir Francis shall be proud t’ own him for his son. Tell him Sarah Milsham said so.”

She hobbled away into the wood and commenced picking up sticks. I would have followed her, but she held out her hand to prevent me, and would not answer me when I spoke. So I mounted Black Prince and galloped away homewards.

When I entered Marian’s room I saw that she had a visitor. Sir Francis Devereux was leaning back in my easy chair, laughing at one of my sister’s quaint speeches, and she was handing him a cup of tea.

Chapter XXVII

Sir Francis Devereux‘s Appeal.

Of all the contingencies which had occurred to me, this was one which I had not considered, for only once since I had been its occupant had Sir Francis called at the cottage. But his greeting was even a greater surprise to me.

“Hugh, my boy,” he said, rising and holding out his hand, “I have come down to have a chat with you, and Miss Marian has been giving me some tea.”

Something in his look, his accent, and his words warned me that the battle of last night would have to be fought over again. But for a while he talked of nothing, save of last night’s strange adventure and minor matters connected with the estate, of the turnip prospects, and the timber felling, until Marian left us to change her frock. Then, after opening the door for her with his usual stately courtesy, he returned to the hearth-rug, and with the firelight playing around his tall, slim figure, and with a soft, almost appealing light relaxing the hard lines in his face, he commenced speaking.

“Hugh,” he said, slowly, “they call me a proud man, but I have come here to beg a great boon from you. Nay, let me go on,” for I would have interrupted him. “Let me say outright what I have come to say,” he continued, stretching out his hands as though to silence me. “I want to tell you a little of my history.”

“You know, perhaps, that I was married twice. To you I do not mind admitting that my last marriage was an unfortunate one. Your grandmother was the only woman I ever loved, and it was her son who took her place in my heart—not Rupert’s mother, much less Rupert himself. Perhaps I am much to blame, but none the less it is a fact that the death of my second wife gave me little sorrow,

and I have never been able to feel towards Rupert as a father should feel towards his son. And since that day when I knew that it was his evidence (although he was right to give it) which had brought irretrievable disgrace upon the name of Devereux, I have never been able—I say it to my shame—I have' never been able to bear the sight of him."

Sir Francis walked restlessly to the other end of the room, and then, returning, took up his old position.

"For twenty years, Hugh, I have been a lonely, unhappy man. Gradually I began to loose all pride and interest in our family name, and even the court itself, every stone of which was once dear to me. Everything that had made life endurable for me and pleasant had gone. My pride in, and love for, my son who had gone away with my blessing to be where a Devereux should always be, in his country's battles, was suddenly blasted for ever. He disgraced our long line of ancestors, disgraced himself and me, and instead of falling on his sword, as he should have done, came home here, turned out of the army—a Devereux turned out of the army to beg for my forgiveness!"

My heart was burning, but I judged it wisest to hold my peace, he had thrown his head back, and his eyes were sparkling with anger. His frowning face was as stern and hard as marble, and, old man though he was, he looked terrible.

For a moment there was silence, and then he went on—"Enough of him! If it had been Rupert I might some day have forgiven him. But Herbert, my eldest son, who at my death must be the head of the Devereuxs—oh, it is a cursed, cruel thing!"

He turned his back upon me, and I heard a sort of gasping sob. I made a pretence of stirring the fire, and when I had finished he was himself again.

"For twenty years," he went on, "I have lived alone with a leaden weight of misery dragging me down almost to the grave. And yet I have struggled against death for the simple reason that the thought of that disgraced man who was once my son calling himself the head of the Devereuxs, and lying down to rest within the walls of Devereux Court, has kept me hanging on to life. My son a coward! To run away from the enemy! My God, what had I done to deserve this?"

"He was not a coward," I interrupted, passionately. "Rupert lied! I know he lied! He was jealous! John Hilton has confessed to me!"

Sir Francis shook his head sorrowfully.

"The word of a servant discharged without a character is worth very little, especially when it is directed against his master," he said. "No, Hugh, my boy, if you had lived as long as I have, and had been a soldier, you would know that a court-martial never errs. It never convicts except on overwhelming evidence, and its judgments are absolute. General Luxton came to see me when he returned to England, and from him I learned the undoubted truth."

I remained silent. One might as well have talked to the Sphinx as to this coldly obstinate, dogmatic old soldier.

"I have come to make you an offer, Hugh," he went on in an altogether different tone of voice, "or rather to make you a request, and I beg you to remember that it is one which lies very near an old man's heart. I am childless and lonely, and weary of seeing none but girls' faces around me. Come and live with me as my grandson! Let that subject, on which we can never agree, be buried between us!

Why should you go away on a wild goose chase? Devereux Court is your natural home. Come and live there."

I stood up and faced him. He was very much in earnest, I could see, for the long white hand which rested upon the chimney piece was shaking, and his eyes were eagerly searching my face for its answer; but what it read there could not have been encouraging, for I never wavered for an instant.

"Sir Francis," I asked, firmly, "does a Devereux ever break his oath or neglect his duty?"

He shook his head. "Never!"

"Neither will I, then," I answered; "my duty would never urge me to renounce my father, whose innocence I firmly believe in, and if I did I should break my oath, Sir Francis. I feel for you, and I love Devereux. But what you ask I distinctly and absolutely refuse."

He walked to the window, and stood there foe a moment gazing across the park, with his hands behind him. Then he turned round suddenly and commenced drawing on his dog skin gloves. He held himself up in his usual stiff, soldierly manner, but I could see that he was hurt and deeply disappointed.

"More than I have said I cannot say," he remarked, quietly. "Good bye, Hugh, make my apologies to your sister."

I walked with him to the door, and watched him walk across the park with head bent more than usual, and slow, weary footsteps. Oh, that I could succeed in my life's desire, and bring him home the son he loved! What would I not give to attain my end! And yet, save through my Uncle Rupert, how could I possibly succeed? My Uncle Rupert! Was it not strange that Maud's father should be the man whom I hated more than any one or anything on earth!

Chapter XXVIII

Goodbye to Devereux Court.

Mr. Holdern dined with us that evening, and when he and I had the table to ourselves, and little clouds of blue smoke began to curl upwards to the ceiling, he made a sudden request to me.

"I want you to let me have Marian at once," he said. "Why not let us be married before you go away?"

I raised but few objections, for the plan suited me. But Marian, when we told her, protested that a month was much too soon. Strangely enough, however, when I took her view, and rescinded my consent, she went over to the other side; so I gave in, and it was settled as they wished. An aunt of Mr. Holdern's was written for, and arrived in a few days in a most excited state, with two tin trunks and a box of caps. A dressmaker took up her abode in our other spare room and peace at the cottage was at an end. Even in my sanctum I was never safe, for Marian would keep waltzing in with her mouth full of pins and her hair all disarranged, to beseech me to give my opinion as to the draping of a gown, or to inquire shyly with

a blushing face, whether I thought Charlie would like this or that! Altogether those few last weeks at the cottage were not quiet ones.

Lady Olive came often and assisted eagerly at the grave consultations. But I saw her only for a moment or two now and then, for there were many things on the estate which needed my attention just then, especially as I was going so soon, and I was out most nights till long after our usual dinner-hour.

Once Maud came, but I did not see her, and I was glad of it. If it had been possible, I would have left Devereux without another word with her. But that was not to be.

On the morning before the wedding I saddled Black Prince myself, and took him out for a farewell ride. I would sooner say farewell to a man than to a horse any day! The Black Prince had been my chief companion at Devereux, and a very faithful one, too. He had never been the same to any one else, they told me; in fact, he had got the name of being a brute, but whenever I entered the stable he would whinny and rub his head against my coat-sleeve, holding it there sometimes, and looking up at me out of his mild, brown eyes as though imploring me to take him. out. And now I was riding him for the last time! For the last time I watched him stretch out his legs for a gallop, and felt him bound away under me as he thundered over the turf. For the last time he picked up his legs as clean as a Leicestershire hunter, and flew over the park railings like a bird. And then who should we meet, as though to spoil our ride, but Maud and her father cantering over the moor towards us, Maud with flashing eyes and a color springing into her soft cheeks as she waved her whip ever so slightly, with a half-imperative gesture. But I would see none of it. What had Black Prince and I to do with them? Nobly he answered my whisper, and cleared the high stone wall which separated us, and left them on their way to the house, whilst he and I flew on towards the desolate moorland, heedless whither we went, so that we were alone.

Three days more and I shall be away—out of temptation, out of Paradise, alone in the world, with my life's work before me. What matter! Banish such thoughts—away with them! Away with that sweet, sad face, with its proud lips and sorrowing eyes! What are these to my Prince and I, whilst we fly across the moorland, over hedges and fences, with the earth skimming beneath and the windswept sky clear and bright above! Live the present! Bury the past! Welcome the future! Regrets and haunting memories are the plagues of the devil. The Black Prince and I will have none of them.

Ah! that was a wild ride. The wonder to me now is that we ever reached home safely. But we did, and when we got there I led him into the stable myself, and took the bit out of his mouth, and the saddle from his back. I watched him munch his corn, and daintily thrust his nose into the bucket of chilled water, and when I turned away and walked into the house there was a lump in my throat.

A gentleman was waiting to see me in my study, I was told—and without asking his name, and with very little curiosity, I crossed the hall and entered the room. Then I gave a great start, and my fingers closed upon my riding-whip, for upon the hearthrug, hat in hand, stood my Uncle Rupert!

Had he not been Maud's father I should have taken him by the neck and thrown him from the house. As it was, I stood waiting with the door in my hand and an angry sparkle in my eyes.

“You are not pleased to see me, Mr. Arbuthnot,” he began, nervously. “I did not expect that you would be. But my daughter tells me that she has scarcely thanked you for your gallant behavior the other night, and, as her father, I trusted that I might be permitted to come and offer you my most heartfelt thanks.”

And this was my Uncle Rupert! this tall, thin man with the eager eyes and nervous manner, and sad, sweet tone. For, though I hated him, I could not help noticing that I had never heard a man’s voice more pleasant to listen to. Whence had come the affected manners and thinly veiled snobbism of my cousin Francis? Not from his father.

“I fear that Miss Devereux, in her very natural terror, has exaggerated the service I was fortunate enough to be able to render her,” I answered icily. “I trust that she has recovered from the shock.”

“Quite, thank you. Mr. Arbuthnot, there was another reason which brought me here. All through my life—which has been a most unhappy one—I have constantly been troubled with the reflection that, though innocently (that you will not believe, but no matter), I was the cause of poor Herbert’s, your father’s trouble. If I could render his son even the slightest service it would be a great happiness to me. You are going to London, I hear. You know no one there, and you have no friends. Could you not make my house your home? You will not take the name of Devereux, I hear, but Mr. Arbuthnot would always be a welcome and an honored guest.”

“You have a conscience, then, Rupert Devereux?” I said, quietly.

He looked at me appealingly, flushing to the very roots of his hair.

“I scarcely understand,” he began, hesitatingly.

“Let me explain, then,” I said, looking at him steadily. “It seems to me that, having wrecked my father’s life by a deliberate conspiracy, you are now seeking to expiate that most damnable sin by conferring favors upon his son. It will not do, Rupert Devereux!”

I should have pitied him had he been any other man, for he stood there looking distressed and disappointed. But, remembering who it was, I watched him with a bitter, sneering smile.

“Then there is nothing more to be said, I suppose,” he remarked, with a sigh. “I had better go.”

“You had better go,” I echoed. “The only words I shall ever care to hear from your lips will be a confession of your villainous lie. I cannot believe that you will have the courage to die with that foul sin on your conscience.”

He moved his position, and then for the first time I remarked how like he was in the outline of the face and the features to Maud. But the niceness softened me not one whit towards him, whilst it made me feel harder towards her. He moved towards the door with a dejected gesture.

“You are very hard,” he said, in a low tone, “very hard for one so young. But I dare say that, according to your view of the matter, you are right, quite right. If you won’t let me help you in any way, you won’t. It’s only another disappointment in a life of disappointments. I must go, then, Mr. Arbuthnot. But if at any time you should change your mind, come to me. I live in Mayfair, London.”

He walked out, and, without answering his farewell, I opened the door, and let him go in silence. This was my first interview with my Uncle Rupert.

On the morrow Marian was married to Mr. Holdern. It was a very quiet wedding down at the village church, but it went off very pleasantly, and Marian looked charming in her plain white satin gown and simple veil. As we were entering the church I had a great surprise. Sir Francis Devereux, in a black frock coat, and with an orchid in his buttonhole, called me on one side for a moment, and asked for permission to give away the bride. I would have preferred refusing such an unusual request—unusual, at any rate, as it would seem to those who knew us as Mr. and Miss Arbuthnot—but he looked so much in earnest that I could not find it in my heart to hurt his feelings. So, in ignorance of what they were beholding, the villagers of Devereux saw Sir Francis give his granddaughter away, whilst I, his grandson, stood a few yards behind.

A woman once told me she always felt inclined to cry at weddings and laugh at funerals. I can understand it. There is something in the former exquisitely, though covertly, pathetic; whilst in the latter case tears are so obviously the correct thing, that sometimes they absolutely refuse to come. I feel certain that the tears were not far from Sir Francis's eyes as he shook hands with us in the churchyard. Perhaps they were not far from mine.

There were presents from nearly every one at the Court, and a sealed envelope from Sir Francis, which, when we opened it, contained a cheque for a thousand pounds. I had offered to make over to Marian half of my little income, but Mr. Holdern was resolute, and oven peremptory, in his refusal. They would have a good deal more money now than they could spend in their quiet country home, and eventually, feeling that Holdern was sincere in his refusal, I had given way. Money would certainly he useful, nay, necessary, for me in carrying out the course of action on which I had decided. And so I kept it.

One day longer I had to spend at Devereux, and a dreary day it was. All the morning I was busy balancing accounts, with the solicitor to the estate, and In the afternoon I finished my packing. In the evening, after dinner, I wrote a note to Sir Francis, bidding him farewell. He would understand, I said, why I did not come to him personally. An oath was not a thing to be broken, and I had sworn that over the threshold of Devereux Court I would not pass save with my father. So I was compelled to write him instead, but I did my best to make my letter as cordial and grateful as possible, and within an hour an answer came back, short and informal.

> *"Farewell, Hugh, my boy. God bless you, wherever you may go, and remember always that though you may call yourself Hugh Arbuthnot, you are still a Devereux of Devereux, and this place is your home whenever you care to make it so.—Ever yours,*
>
> *"Francis Devereux."*

Through many lands and many years I carried with me that half-sheet of thick, heavily-crested notepaper. And yellow with age it reposes now in the secret drawer of my cabinet.

I sent no farewell to Maud. It were better not. My Maud she could never be, though never another should take her place. Me she would soon forget; I was not vain enough to think otherwise for a moment. Only yesterday I had seen her riding

with that ill-bred prig, Lord Annerley, the son of a lawyer peer, with all his father's innate vulgarity, and never a feather's weight of his brains. Let her have him if she would, him or any other—or let her flirt with him, lead him on by the beauty of her dazzling fair face and the glances of her deep blue eyes. Let her flirt with him, and then throw him over with a light laugh as very likely, she would have done me. A fig for all women! An ounce of philosophy would weigh them all down in the scales of reason. But at twenty- four that ounce is hard to get!

Chapter XXIX

I Am Tempted.

Early on the following morning I mounted for the last time into the high dog-cart, which had been kept in the coach-house at the "cottage" for my use, and was driven rapidly away with my back to Devereux Court. It was a grey, misty morning, and a watery sun was shining feebly down from a cloud-strewn sky. It had been raining, and innumerable glistening drops of moisture were hanging and falling from the well-nigh leafless trees. A desolate morning; with a slight vapory mist rising from the ground and chilling the air. But my thoughts were not of the weather, for I was taking my last lingering farewell of Devereux Court. As we turned the corner and lost sight of it for awhile, a stronger ray of sunlight than any which had as yet succeeded in piercing the bank of clouds reached its windows, and transformed its whole appearance. A thousand rays of light seemed to be smiling down at me from the massive stretching front and the frowning towers, all the brighter from the contrast with the black woods above and around. I was young and impressionable to anything in nature, especially with my heart so full as it was then, and, with a sudden start, I rose up and waved my hat in an answering farewell. Then I sat down and would not look round again lest the light should have died out from the diamond-framed windows, and the gloom from the threatening clouds reign there instead. I was superstitious, perhaps—but I wanted to carry away with me in my heart the memory of Devereux Court, as I had seen it a moment ago, with its dark grey front softened and its windows sparkling gaily in that chance flickering ray of sunlight. And so I would not look round, even when John slackened at the top of the last hill, and, pointing with his whip, reckoned that "this wur the last I should see of t'ould place. And rare sorry he wur too," he added, with grateful recollections of a piece of gold at that moment reposing snugly in his waistcoat pocket.

But I would not look, and, a little offended, he touched the old hunter with his whip, and before long we reached the station of Devereux.

In six hours I was in London, friendless, and I had well-nigh said purposeless, for, after I had written out and myself taken to the office of the "Times" a brief but imploring message to my father, I knew not which way to turn or what to do with myself. London disgusted, sickened me, and at every step I took I felt myself longing the more for a strong fresh breeze from a Yorkshire moor, and for the sight

of a country lane and a few ruddy-cheeked, good-natured country folk, instead of this never-ceasing stream of pale-faced, anxious men and over-dressed artificial women, and this interminable succession of great dirty buildings. I felt awkward, too, and ill at ease, for though in the country there had never seemed to be anything extraordinary in my stature, here, as I walked down the Strand with my hands behind my back, I seemed head and shoulders above everybody else, and people looked up at me wonderingly and made laughing remarks to one another, some of which I could not help but overhear. At last, in despair, it occurred to me that my country costume had some thing to do with it; so I went to a tailor in Bond-street, and, with a sigh, abandoned my loose shooting jacket and breeches and brown deer-stalker for a black frock coat, dark grey trousers, and tall hat. The change was an effectual one, however, for though people still stared at me, it was no longer as though I were some wild animal.

One afternoon during the second week of my stay in London I turned with a crowd of other loungers into the Park, and there, to my surprise, I saw Maud. She was sitting in a victoria by herself', leaning back amongst the cushions with pale face and a light in her cold blue eyes which seemed to speak of indifference to everything and everybody around her. As fate would have it, there was a block just then, and her carriage, with its pair of restless, fuming bays, came almost to a standstill close to where I was leaning over the railing. I would have drawn back, but I could not, I seemed fascinated, and I remained there with my eyes fixed upon hers, and from that moment I was a believer in animal magnetism, for suddenly she looked languidly up, and her eyes rested deliberately upon the little crowd of black-coated loungers of whom I was one. She saw me, she singled me out from the rest in a moment, and instantly the proud, bored look left her face, and she leaned forward in her carriage towards me with her lips parted in a slight smile. I obeyed her imperious little gesture, and, stepping over the railings, stood by her side hat in hand.

She laid an exquisitely gloved little hand in mine for a moment, and then leaned back, looking at me with the old look, half mocking, half tender, altogether bewildering.

“Saul amongst the prophets!” she laughed. “Since when, might I ask, has Mr. Arbuthnot become an acclimatised Londoner? Really you ought to feel flattered that I recognised you,” she added, looking at my black coat and hat and the gardenia in my buttonhole.

“I am only waiting in London until I have news from abroad,” I answered. “When did you come from Devereux?”

“Only yesterday. And I had not thought to see you so soon,” she said, in an altered tone.

Why was I standing there at Maud’s feet? Why had I come into the Park at all? I, who was so little of a man that, amidst all this great crowd of people I was obliged to struggle hard to keep an unmoved countenance and a measured tone. I felt bitterly angry with myself as I answered, with averted face—

“Nor I you. I had forgotten that Devereux was not your home. You live here, do you not?”

“We are generally here for the season,” she said. “We have a house in Mayfair. Will you come and see me?”

“Thank you, no, Miss Devereux.”

“You are a Don Quixote, Hugh,” she said, half angrily, half reproachfully. “How can you be so foolish as to believe that rubbish about my father! Wait till you hear how people talk of him, and then you will know how stupidly mistaken you have been. And he likes you so much, too. You might come and see us whenever you liked, if you would only not be so silly.”

“How do you do, Miss Devereux?”

She turned round I quickly, and saw Lord Annerley, who had ridden up on the other side of the carriage.

“Lord Annerley! Really, how very surprising! I thought that you had gone off to break the bank at Monaco. Francis said so.”

“I had meant to go,” he began, twirling his little waxen moustache with his small hand, of which he seemed inordinately proud; “but something kept me in London.”

“You have not answered me, Mr. Arbuthnot. Is it to be no or yes?”

“I am sorry, Miss Devereux, that I have nothing to add to my previous answer,” I said, stiffly, for her beautiful smiling face seemed to me like the face of a temptress just then.

“Just as you wish, of course,” she answered coldly, with a slight haughty inclination of her head. “And now, Lord Annerley,” I heard her add, in a very altered tone, “I hear that you have a new team. Do tell me all about them. Are they greys or mixed?”

I walked away, nor did I enter the Park again whilst I was in London.

Chapter XXX

Liar and Coward.

“It’s the book of the day.”

“It’s decidedly the cleverest thing of its sort I ever read.”

“Have you read the review in the ‘Athenaeum’?”

“And in the ‘Saturday Review.’”

“They all praise it, even the ‘Spectator.’”

“Who’s the author? Whose initials are R. D.?”

“Why, don’t you know? It’s Major Rupert Devereux, the man who wrote that awfully clever article in the ‘Fortnightly’ last month. He’s an M.P., and a great man on committees. Sort of practical philanthropist.”

I was standing in front of a bookshop leading out of the Strand amongst a little group of other passers-by, who had halted for a moment to turn over the volumes which were out on view, and this was the conversation which I beard being carried on almost at my elbow. I listened eagerly for more, but the speakers had passed on.

My Uncle Rupert was a great man, then, I thought, bitterly. Curse him! I was scarcely surprised, for there was in his pale face all the nervous force of imaginative intellect. What was it he had written, I wondered? I took up the

"*Times*," and glanced through its columns. Ah, there it was—a review two columns long—"*Richard Strathdale, novelist*," by R. D.?

I glanced through the review; it was one long eulogy. A profound metaphysical romance! The most brilliant work of fiction of the age, and so on, and so on. I stopped at a bookseller's, and asked for "*Richard Strathdale*." They were sold out. I tried another with the same result—there had been a tremendous run on it, they told me. But at last, at a railway bookstall, I was just in time to purchase their last copy, and hurried back with it to my hotel.

I commenced to read, and I read on deeply interested. There was much that I could not understand, much that betrayed an intimate knowledge with schools of philosophic thought the names of which even were unknown to me. But there was a great deal which, despite my prejudice against the writer, seemed to me almost sublime. It was written from a noble, almost an idyllic standpoint. There were no carping pessimisms in it, no Nineteenth Century disputativeness. It seemed to be the work of a man who believed in all that was pure and lofty in nature and in human nature. The spirit of a good, high-minded man seemed to be breathing through it in every line. I laid it down when I was half-way through with a startled little gasp. Could this be my Uncle Rupert! this the man whose life was a living lie! Never had my faith in my father wavered for one moment, but just then, every thing seemed chaos. I read on until I came to a passage where the hero of the story was speaking of another man:

"An unhappy man! Of course he is an unhappy man! He always will be! Go and ask him what it is he desires. He will tell you a larger fortune, or a peerage, or something of that sort. He is a fool—a blind fool—not to have realised by this time that desires expand with possessions, and the more the one increases the more ravenous the other becomes. Bah! the principle is as simple as A B C. 'Tis the moralists of the earth, be they Christians or Chinese, who win here! Logic and philosophy may knock Christianity into a cocked hat. But Christianity can make a man happy, which is exactly what philosophy won't do. Happiness is internal, not external. It must sit in the heart, and not float in the senses. And what gratification is there which a man can get out of the good things of the world which can strike deeper than the senses? Happiness is a consciousness; it is the consciousness of goodness. Dreadfully commonplace talk this, but commonplacisms are often truisms!"

I closed the book, and walked up and down the room restlessly. A great bewilderment seemed to be closing in upon me. My faith in my father was never really shaken, and yet this book seemed to me to ring with evidences that it was written by a high-minded, naturally good man. All my ideas were disarranged. A great wave of wondering doubt seemed beating against the prejudice which had grown up in my heart against my Uncle Rupert. At last I could bear it no longer. With the book still in my hand I hurried out into the street. Within ten minutes I stood before Rupert Devereux's house in Mayfair, and almost immediately was ushered by the servant into his study.

He was bending close over his writing-desk with his back to me, writing fast, and sheets of foolscap lay on the floor all around him. He had not heard me announced, and he wrote on without looking up.

I stepped into the middle of the room and spoke to him:

“Rupert Devereux,” I cried, “it is I, Herbert Devereux’s son. Turn round, for I have something to say to you.”

He started to his feet, and turned an eager face toward me. Then he advanced a step or two, half holding out his hand.

“Hugh, you have come to accept my offer. God grant that you have.”

I shook my head. “I have come to ask a question of the man who wrote this book,” I answered, holding it out. “I have come to ask the man who writes that happiness is the abstract product of a consciousness of right doing, whether he is happy? Rupert Devereux, you know what happiness is. Tell me are you happy?”

He sank into a chair and covered his face with his bands. My heart grew lighter as I looked upon him.

“They tell me that you are a successful man,” I continued, mercilessly. “You are a member of Parliament, and a noted one. You are spoken of as a philanthropist, and a zealous one. You have written a book which any man might be proud of having written. You are rich, you are well spoken of every where. And you are a miserable man.”

“Out of your own mouth you stand convicted,” I cried, stretching out the book to wards him. “You are not happy because none of these things can bring you happiness. You are not happy because you have not that consciousness of right doing in your heart. You are miserable because you have wrecked another’s life that you might gain his wealth. Fool! Villain!”

Still he did not answer; only he stretched out his hand as though to implore my silence.

“Rupert Devereux,” I cried, passionately “It is not too late to make amends even now. Confess that lie which you uttered so many years ago, and you will be a happier man than you are how! You know it! The man who wrote this book knows it. I will forgive you, my father shall forgive you everything if you will lift this weight from him which is dragging him down to death. You will lose your name, your wealth, your position. But you will gain something which none of these can give you. Rupert Devereux, as there is a God above us, I charge you to speak the truth this night!”

Ghastly pale, with the wild agony of his remorse written into his face, he tottered rather than rose to his feet.

“I admit nothing, I deny nothing,” he faltered out in a broken voice. “But supposing circumstances were as you imagine them to be, I have gone too far to retract. There are my children!”

“What of them?” I cried. “This is not a censorious generation, and none would visit on them their father’s sin. Francis is one whom money would make happy, and he should have it! Maud, I love Maud, and would make her my wife.”

He looked up amazed, and then an eager hope flashed out from his sunken eyes.

“You love Maud!” he repeated. “Then marry her, Hugh; marry her, and I will dower her with every penny I have, and go and live anywhere. Only let this other matter drop between us. If I have sinned in a mad impulse of folly, I have sinned. What is done cannot be recalled! The best years of Herbert’s life have gone, and by this time he will have become resigned. Let me call Maud, or go to her. She is in her room.”

I stretched out my hand, but with a great effort: withdrew it. What should I gain by striking this man? I made one last appeal to him.

"There is but one thing I want from you," I cried, "and nothing else will I have. All that I want to know is whether you will go down to hell with this lie upon your soul, or whether you will do that which alone can bring you any peace of mind. Answer!"

"I have answered, Hugh," he said, sadly. "What you ask of me I, cannot, I will not do. If you will accept nothing else—I am sorry."

"Then curse you for a coward!" I cried, springing up. "A liar and a coward! Live on your false life, fair before men, but black and corrupt within; live it on! But see whether their praises, their admiration, or your success will ever lift for one moment from your heart my curse!"

Then I left him, mad and white with anger, and rushed out into the busy streets.

* * * * *

Wearily the days dragged on for me, bringing me no news from abroad, no answer to the passionate entreaty which every morning appeared in the agony column of the *Times*. I grew disheartened and dispirited, feeling every day more bitter against my kinsman, whose name seemed to be in everyone's mouth, and every day a keener longing to stand face to face with my father, and feel his hand clasped in mine. Fool that I had been to let him wander off alone, bearing in his heart that dead weight of misery! What if he were dead—had fallen in the petty quarrels of some fourth-rate Principality! Had there been war anywhere I should have known where to look for him; but Europe was at peace, and I knew not in which country of the globe to commence my search.

One evening I had taken up a society journal, and as usual Rupert Devereux's name headed one of the paragraphs. He was giving a fancy dress ball to-night, at which Royalty was expected to be present. I threw the paper from me in disgust, and a wild storm of anger laid hold of me. Rupert Devereux, a great man, a leader of society, everywhere quoted as brilliant, talented, and withal kind-hearted; whilst my father, his victim, wandered about in miserable exile, holding his life in his hand! It was the thought that was with me day and night, but that moment it gained such a hold on me as to cry out for action of some sort. But what could I do? All idea of physical punishment which naturally leaped first into my mind revolted me, for he was a weak man, and would have been like a lath in my hands. And what other means had I? Denunciation would make me ridiculous without injuring him; for, when a man stands firm in the world's esteem, they are slow to believe ill of him. I caught up the paper again, and a sudden idea flashed into my mind which I first scouted as ridiculous, then reconsidered, and finally embraced. I called a hansom, and drove to several costumiers. At last I found what wanted, and returned to the hotel to dress, for I was going to Major Rupert Devereux's fancy dress ball.

* * * * *

A suite of reception rooms, decorated like the rooms of a palace, and the strains of the Hungarian band floating softly on an air heavy with the rich perfume of

banks of rare exotics. Distinguished-looking men and beautiful women, in the picturesque garb of all ages and nations, gliding over the smooth floor. Powdered footmen noiselessly passing backwards and forwards over the thick carpets of a succession of satin-draped anterooms. Flowers, light, music, and perfume; fair faces and soft words. That night seems like a confused dream of all these to me, save for one brief minute. One brief minute, when the giver of all these, the flattered recipient of endless compliments from noble lips, came face to face with the image of the man on whoso misery all these things were built up, came face to face with him, in the very uniform, and with the same fiercely reproachful gaze, which he had worn more than twenty years ago.

"It was the heat—the excitement—the overwork!" his sympathising guests declared, as their host was carried from their midst in a dead faint, with his face like the face of a corpse. But I knew better, and I laughed as I strode into my room at the hotel, and flung myself into an easy chair. Something on the mantelpiece attracted my attention, and I sprang up with a quick cry, and caught hold of a thin, foreign envelope. I tore it open with trembling fingers, and read:—"*My dear son. Come to me at Palermo, if you will—Yours affectionately, H. D.—*"

It had come at last, then! Thank God! Thank God!

Chapter XXXI

My Father and I.

"My father! my father!"

We stood on the slope of a wild heath-covered hill, alone, with no human being or sign of habitation in sight. Before us towered a dreary, lofty range of bare mountains—on one side was a fearful precipice, and below us on the other the blue sea. We had met on the road, my father and I!

With both hands clasping his, I looked into his face. Alas, how changed it was! Thin and shrunken, with hollow eyes and furrowed brow, he looked to me what he was, a wreck.

"You have been ill," I cried, with a lump in my throat and the tears springing into my eyes; "Where have you been? Why did you not send for me?"

He pointed to a loose piece of rock a few yards off.

"Let us sit down, and I will tell you everything," he said, wearily. "I am tired."

We sat down, and I waited eagerly for him to begin. There was a patch of brilliantly colored wild flowers at our feet which filled the air all round with a dreamy, intoxicating odor. It was a perfume which has lingered with me even to this day.

"Ay, I have been ill," he began slowly, "almost to death, but death would have none of me. I have little, very little, to tell you, Hugh, my boy. Since we parted in England I have wandered about in many countries seeking to find an honorable manner of disposing of my life, but in vain. The dead calm of peace which seems to

rest all over Europe can be but the hush before a storm, but the storm is long in coming—long in coming.

"I have done nothing save wander about," he added, after a moment's pause, "after the fashion of a tramp, carrying my luggage with me, and calling no place home. A few miles from here, about two months ago, I thought that, my release had come. I swooned suddenly in a lonely part of yonder range of mountains, and when I came to I was still lying on the track, but a fever had laid hold of me, and I thought then that surely I must die. I became unconscious again, and when I recovered my senses for the second time I was no longer lying on the ground, but was in a rude sort of a tent, lying on a bed of dried leaves and heath. Ono of the roughest looking men I ever saw, dirty, but gaudily dressed, with a brace of pistols stuck in his belt, was sitting by my side, and through the opening of the tent I could see more like him moving backwards and forwards, and shouting to one another in some villainous patois. For a long time I couldn't imagine into whose hands I had fallen, but they were very kind to me, and brought me plenty of everything they could get—grapes, and olives, and wild aloes, and wine. At last one of them, who seemed to be their chief, and who spoke French, came in to talk with me. Then I knew that these men who had taken such care of me were really bandits, brigands. They had taken nothing of mine, and would accept nothing in return for their kindness. They rob the rich only, the chief assured me. I daresay you'll be surprised to hear, Hugh, that when I began to get stronger and able to get about, I felt quite loth to leave the place. I felt that there I was, at any rate, right out of the world, and secure from any casual questioning. And the spot where they have fixed their abode is the most lovely I ever looked upon. So I had a talk with their chief one day—Jose his name is—and it was arranged that I should pay a small sum to them for the use of the tent, and for supplies of fruit and olives and wine which the peasants bring them in abundance; and, in short, that I should live with them, though not be of them. I have felt at rest there, though at times the weariness of complete inaction is hard to bear. Only a few days ago I travelled into Palermo for the first time. There I bought the 'Times,' and saw your advertisement, and answered it, and the rest you know. I sent Jose's son, a quick little fellow he is, into the town to hunt you out, and bring you here. God bless you for coming, Hugh. It has done me good to see you again."

He ceased, and my heart was very heavy. Through every word he uttered, and in his whole appearance, I could trace how thoroughly he had renounced all idea of again mixing with the world, and yet what could his present state of existence be but a state of living death?

"And now for my story, father," I said, as lightly as I could. "First, Marian is married."

"Marian married!" He repeated the words slowly, with a sort of passive wonderment in his tones.

"Yes, Marian is married to a clergyman, and a very good fellow, and I, father—I have been in a situation."

He frowned, and repeated the words slowly to himself, as though displeased with it.

"A situation? What sort of a one?"

"I have had the management of a large estate. It was pleasant work."

"Whereabouts?" he asked.

"Father," I said, holding his arm, "I held it as Mr. Arbuthnot, of course, at Devereux."

He sprang up like a galvanised figure, and looked down at me in eager amazement.

"At Devereux! 'At Devereux! Oh, my God, at Devereux!"

He sat down again, and covered his face with his hands. Thinking it best to leave him alone, I remained silent for a while. Suddenly he turned round.

"How does the old place look, Hugh? Tell me all about it. And my—my—Sir Francis. Did you see him? Is he well?"

There was such a lingering pathos in his eager questions, that, with an aching heart, I turned away and wept. Then, after a while, I told him everything. Told him of my recognition, of my grandfather's offer, of Hilton's confession, and of my appeal to Rupert Devereux. He listened as though every word were sinking into his heart—listened with an utter absorption which was almost painful to witness. I told him of everything save of Maud.

There was a long silence when I had finished. Then he said quietly—

"You have done wrong, Hugh. You should have accepted your grandfather's offer. You must go back to England, and go to him."

"Father," I answered, "an oath is a sacred thing, and I have sworn before God that I will not do this thing. Whilst your name is Arbuthnot mine will be Arbuthnot. The name of Devereux may die out for all I care! Those who bear the name now are not worthy of it—an obstinate old man, blinded by his military notions and his cursed family pride, and a man who has lived upon a villainous lie, which he refuses to own to! They may rot before I will go near them again, or take their cursed name. You are the only Devereux, father, whom I love and respect, and with you I will stop. I swear it."

His hands were locked in mine, and a wonderful change had softened his face. But by degrees the light seemed to die out of it, and he shook' his head anxiously.

"You don't know what you are saying, Hugh. What, you, a young, man, with your life all before you, bury yourself with a hermit! Ah, no, it must not be. You must retract that oath, and go back to England. I wish it; nay, I command it!"

There is no need to reproduce the arguments he used, or my stubborn opposition. We talked till the sun sank down, tingeing the glass-like sea into which it sank and the clouds in the western horizon with glowing tints of orange and purple and gold. And when the last word had been spoken it was I who was unshaken in my resolve, and he who was yielding. For we had agreed that for a time, at any rate, we would live together.

The shades of evening had fallen with a suddenness which to me seemed strange, but to which my father was accustomed.

"We must part for to-night, at any rate, Hugh," he exclaimed, rising. "It will be dark in half an hour. I must call young Pietro to guide you back to the town, unless," he added, hesitatingly, "you would care to come on and rough it with us for a night. I can only offer you a shake-down of dried leaves."

"With you, by all means," I answered, quickly. "One could sleep out of doors in this country."

“Come, then,” he said, and, arm-in-arm, we struck over the heath, following no path, for the simple reason that there was none, but aiming for one of the heights of the range of hills before us, and skirting, at a respectable distance, the cleft-like precipice which stretched yawning by our side.

Chapter XXXII

The Brigands‘ Home.

It was a strange, wild, magnificent spot. A deep gorge running inland from the sea, only avoided cutting into the precipice which we were carefully avoiding by a strip of turf, a few yards wide, along which we passed, and by which alone access could he obtained to our destination. It curled in a zig-zag position, sometimes wider, sometimes narrower, towards a low promontory fronting the sea for the gorge seemed to take a complete circle. As we neared this hill I could see that it was a far more fertile one than most of the country around. Up one side stretched a vineyard, and little knolls of olive and cypress trees were dotted about on the summit, which seemed enclosed by a thick hedge of wild aloes. A keen, piercing whistle greeted our approach, to which my father at once replied.

Then there was silence.

We climbed right up the side and passed over the summit of the hill without seeing a sign of any human being or habitation. I looked at my father inquiringly, but he only smiled.

“Follow me carefully, Hugh,” he said, walking on as though to descend the promontory on the other side. I did so, along a winding, narrow, path covered with loose stones, until suddenly, as we reached a sharp corner, I came to a standstill, and could not repress a cry of admiration. Just below was a wide, natural plateau jutting out until it seemed to stand sheer over the violet sea, and around it at regular distances, close to the side of the hill, and overhung by a luxurious outgrowing plantation of cypress trees, were a number of rudely constructed brown tents. Lying about on the turf were several men dressed in a picturesque medley of bright-hued garments, smoking long cigarettes and drinking wine from horn cups. It reminded me of a scene from the “Spanish Student,” only it was far more beautiful.

A tall, dark man of swarthy complexion and black eyes, but who was far from ill-looking, came forward languidly to meet us. My father spoke to him rapidly apart for a moment or two, and then he turned towards me.

“This is Monsieur Jose, Hugh, whose guest I am.”

Monsieur Jose took off his feathered hat, and made me a sweeping bow.

“The son of my friend, the Englishman, is very welcome,” he said, speaking in French. “You would wish to rest, no doubt? If monsieur will seek his tent, I will order refreshments to be sent.”

We entered one of the curiously-shaped habitations, and I glanced wonderingly around. There was a small chest, a gun, a little pile of books, a bed of dried leaves

and heath pressed together in a compact form, which gave forth an aromatic, agreeable smell, and very little else.

"Not much furniture, you see," my father remarked. "Now come outside again."

A white cloth had been spread out on the turf, and wooden dishes of olives, aloes, magnificent grapes, and some sort of dried meat had been arranged on it. Two long-necked bottles of wine and a couple of horn mugs were also brought, and then the man who had been making these preparations bowed clumsily and withdrew.

I flung myself on the turf by my father's side, and, for the first time for many years, we ate and drank together. Afterwards we lit long paper cigarettes, of which there seemed to be no lack, and I stretched myself out with a sense of dreamy satisfaction. The warm, balmy air, heavily laden with the exquisite perfume of wild flowers and the odorous scent of the vineyard, seemed to lull my senses into a sweet, satisfied stupor, and for hours we both lay there, scarcely exchanging half a dozen sentences.

"Father," I said, suddenly, "a man might be happy here."

He sighed. "It would not be impossible," he assented.

I thought of London at night, with its endless whirl of excitement and hurry; its flaming gaslights, its heated theatres, its hurrying, eager crowds, and its hideous vice, and I drew a deep, satisfied breath.

"One is happiest out of the world, I think, after all. How could any man be miserable in a place like this?"

My father smiled sadly.

"A certain amount of philosophy is necessary to appreciate solitude," he said. "You are too young to have imbibed it. You would be longing to be back in the world again before long."

I shook my head.

"Not I. There is nothing in England to compare with this. As for London, the little time I spent there seems like a bad dream. To live in a great city seems to me the greatest mistake a man can make. All the town people I met were artificial in their manners, and in their nature too, I believe. The struggle for existence seems to stunt them, and to check their development."

"Yet contact with one another sharpens their wits and energy," my father remarked.

"I doubt whether it improves them morally," I answered. "But perhaps I am prejudiced. I hate towns, and I love the country."

"Monsieur is very wise."

I turned my head, and saw Monsieur Jose's tall figure standing out against the sky.

"Monsieur is very wise," he repeated. "I, too, have lived in towns, but I love best the country, else I should not be here. Monsieur is young to have attained to so much wisdom."

I laughed. "Isn't it a matter of taste rather than a matter of wisdom?" I remarked.

He shrugged his shoulders, and leaned for ward on the long gun which he was carrying. "With monsieur's permission," he said, "I will tell him a short story. It is my own."

“Delighted,” I murmured, lighting a fresh cigarette, and my father gravely bowed his head.

“I was born and brought up in the country,” Monsieur Jose commenced, “in a small village, about fifty miles south of Paris. When I was sixteen years old my father and mother both died, and I was left alone in the world, in possession of a small farm. I had to work hard, but I loved the place, and I was able to make a good living. I was happy enough, too, until Marie Marteuil came to live in our village, and I fell in love with her. I trust Monsieur will never know what it is to be in love with a heartless coquette! It was my lot, and a miserable lot it was! One day she would single me out from all the rest and talk to me only, and at another she would scarcely speak to me at all. It was Paris which had done it. Before she went up there to stay with an aunt for a while, she was as quiet, and simple, and sweet as ever a maiden could be, but when she returned she was, as I say, a confirmed coquette. I bore patiently with all her vagaries, and put up with all her saucy speeches, for more than a year. Then, when I asked her to marry me, she laughed in my face. What, marry a little country farmer! Not she. She would marry no one, she said, who did not live in Paris, or who could not take her there. If I could do that she would have me.

“Well, I sold the farm on which I was born, every field of which I loved, and with a light heart went up to Paris. They call Paris a gay city! I found it a cruel one! I had no idea how to set about making a living there, and gradually my little stock of money dwindled away until it was nearly all gone. But I would succeed, I swore, for was not Marie waiting for me? At last, in despair, I turned blacksmith; I worked night and day until my cheeks lost their color, and I began to stoop. But I got on very well, and at last I got a forge for myself and took a little house and furnished it. Then I went down to my old home, happy and exultant, to fetch Marie. I went to her house and saw her, but when I would have embraced her she drew back as though she had forgotten me. I was pained, but I thought that she was playing with me, and I commenced to tell her my story, and all that I had done, and how I had worked for her sake, and about the house I had furnished. And when I had told her everything, what do you think she did? She burst out laughing in my face.

“‘The idea of her marrying a blacksmith!’ she exclaimed, tossing her pretty little head. ‘It was ridiculous.’ Besides, she had changed her mind about living in Paris. I had better get some one else to go and live with me in the house I had furnished; and when I commenced to plead to her, she shut the door in my face. Next week she was married to the man to whom I had sold my farm. Does Monsieur wonder that I, too, detest the cities, and love best the country?”

I looked at him sympathisingly, for though he had told his story lightly, there was a deep vein of sadness underlying his assumed manner, and his dark eyes had a sorrowful look.

“Perhaps it was as well for you that you didn’t marry her,” I remarked. “She must have been a heartless coquette.” He shrugged his shoulders.

“If our love came from our head, that would would be very good consolation. I wish messieurs a very good-night,” he added, bowing. Then he turned somewhat abruptly upon his heel and walked away to his tent.

One by one the men around us left the central group, and, curling themselves up in their cloaks, threw themselves down to sleep—some inside their tents, some

on the threshold, and others where they had been sitting. The golden moon had risen high above the gleaming, sparkling surface of the still sea, and shone down upon the strange little scene with a full, soft light. I looked round at the slumbering forms of the brigands in the fantastic dress, and at the dark cypress trees which stood out in strange shapes against the clear, star-bespangled sky. I watched the fire-flies around the aloe hedge, until my eyes ached with following their erratic course. Then I thought of Maud—wondered whether she was at that moment waltzing with Lord Annerley in some heated London ballroom, wondered whether she ever thought of me, whether she knew that I loved her!

And then I closed my eyes, and the sweet, intoxicating perfume which floated about on the heavy southern air lulled me to sleep.

Chapter XXXIII

At Palermo.

For a whole week I shared my father's abode in company with this band of robbers, and then, finding me indomitable in my determination to remain with him, he made another proposition. Such a retreat and such company as we were amongst was all very well for him, an outcast from the world: but for me it was different. He did not like the thought of my dwelling amongst proscribed men; there was no necessity for it.

At first I laughed at him. Monsieur Jose and I were the best of friends, and, though with the other men, I could not exchange even a casual remark, for their only language was a vile, unintelligible patois, they were all civil enough, and seemed disposed to be friendly. The wild, open life suited me exactly, especially in the mood in which I then was, and I had no wish to change it for any more luxurious method of living. But as my father seemed to have made up his mind upon the matter, I, of course, had little to say about it.

We did not have much difficulty in finding a suitable abode. At the foot of the wild gorge which gives access to the mountains amongst which the convent of San Martino, and the Cathedral of Monreale lie hidden, we came across a tumble-down, half-ruined, grey villa, of which several of the rooms were fairly habitable. We took it from its owner, a neighboring farmer, for a sum which seemed to us ridiculously low. Then, from the little village of Bocca di Falco, we engaged, for wages little above their keep, a man and woman, and with the remainder of the old furniture which was in the place, and a very few additions from Palermo, we were fairly set up in housekeeping.

I am quite sure that that period was not altogether an unhappy one for my father, and, for my part, I found it very far from such. The complete novelty of our surroundings and manner of life was full of interest to me, and it was with the keenest pleasure, too, that I watched the color come slowly back to my father's cheeks and his limbs regain their old elasticity and vigor. He could not conceal the change which my coming had brought into his life, and he did not attempt to.

Many a time did I feel devoutly thankful that I had held to and carried out my purpose.

Our life was simple enough, but pleasant. Some times we spent the whole day trying to shoot the only bird there is to shoot—a sort of wild duck; at others we took long walks, exploring the coast scenery, and frequently winding up by a visit to our robber friends. Antiquities or sight-seeing we neither of us cared much about, but we paid together more than one visit to the vast palatial Convent of San Martino and to the cathedral of Monreale. Other places of interest we avoided, for my father had lost none of his old dread of meeting any of his fellow-countrymen, although, as I more than once pointed out to him, the probabilities of their ever having heard his story were very far removed.

Sometimes we rode on mules across the rich intervening plain into Palermo, and mingled with the little crowd of priests and soldiers in the cafe, and went down to the Casino to glance through the papers. It was I who read these, however, for my father carefully avoided them, and perhaps it was as well that he did, for more often than not there was some mention of Rupert Devereux's name, either presiding at a meeting or heading a subscription list, or as one of the committee interested in some great philanthropic work. It could not have been pleasant for him to have read such items of news as this, and I was thankful that he chose never to read English papers.

And so our life passed on for more than a year, not at all unpleasantly for either of us. My father, in his previous state of complete solitude, had developed a taste for profound reading, and seemed to find much pleasure in studying abstruse works on Buddhism, the creed of the Mahometans, the Confucian teaching, the religion of the Brahmins and the Fetichists, and the strange, fascinating doctrine of quietism held by so many of the nations of the East. It was a taste which I never pretended to share, the only one of our joint interests in which the other did not participate. I feared it, although in my ignorance I could do nothing to check it. I had dim ideas that to a man circumstanced, as my father was, such study must develop any secret leanings towards fatalism, and it was a doctrine which he would have many excuses for embracing. But I was too ignorant to argue with him, so I contented myself with keeping him from his books always in the daytime and often in the evening; for we had improvised in one of the empty rooms a sort of billiard table, on which, I am convinced, we executed some of the most extra-ordinary strokes that a marker ever gazed upon. Then, too, we played chess often, and I tried, by every means in my power, to keep him from turning bookworm. And, on the whole. I was not dissatisfied with my success.

Chapter XXXIV

Visitors from Rome.

It was one of those evenings which, to any one acquainted only with our English climate, seems like a foretaste of paradise. I sat before a tiny marble table at one of

the open-air cafes at the head of the Marina, listening idly to the music of the band only a few yards off, and gazing over the peaceful, glistening sea which stretched away in front. There were many people passing backwards and forwards, but my thoughts were far away, and I took notice of none of them. With my head resting upon my arm, and my arm upon the low balustrade, I had fallen into a semi-somnolent slumber of thought, and the faces of the people who lounged by chattering and laughing I saw only as figures in a dream. My cigarette even had burnt out between my lips, and the coffee which stood by my side I had not tasted.

The roadway was completely blocked with the carriages of the Palermitan nobility and elite, and the promenade was thronged with a heterogeneous stream of fishermen and natives and visitors. All Palermo flocks on to the Marina at nightfall—as who would not?—to hear the band and breathe in the freshness of the sea, and with other objects very similar to those which attract promenaders on to the esplanades of English watering-places at a similar hour. Often I had amused myself by watching them, and looked out for English visitors; but to-night, early in the evening, I had seen a Sicilian countess who reminded me slightly of Maud, and my thoughts had flashed back to Devereux, and remained there, heedless of my efforts to recall them, hovering around one fair face, which sometimes I feared was more to me than anything else in the world.

What should recall them but the glad, amazed greeting of an English voice! I sprang to my feet, and before me, her face radiant with pleasure, and her little hand stretched out eagerly—stood Lady Olive.

“Of all the strange meetings I ever heard of, Mr. Arbuthnot, this is the most extraordinary!” she exclaimed. “It quite takes my breath away!”

I held her hand in mine, forgetful of what I was doing—amazed and admiring. A warm climate evidently suited Lady Olive, for I had never seen her look so charming as she did then in the airy muslin dress which floated gracefully around her slight figure, with a great bunch of light-colored violets in the bosom of her gown, and with a decided tinge of color and delighted sparkle in her eyes.

“Mr. Arbuthnot, am I a ghost that you look at me so without speaking? And you really must let go my hand, please.”

I dropped it at once.

“Lady Olive,” I exclaimed, “I never met any one whom I was so pleased to see! What ever stroke of good fortune brought you to Sicily?”

“This,” she laughed, laying her arm within that of a tall, bearded gentleman who stood wondering by her side. “Papa, this is Mr. Arbuthnot. Mr. Arbuthnot, my father, Lord Parkhurst.”

He held out his hand cordially.

“Very glad to meet you, Mr. Arbuthnot. I have heard my daughter speak of you often.” We were blocking up the crowded promenade, and so we all three turned and walked leisurely along amongst the others. In a few minutes I had heard that Lord Parkhurst had brought his daughter and some other friends here from Rome in his yacht, and they were uncertain as to their stay. And in return I had told them that I was living with my father for a while close to Palermo.

Presently we came up with the remainder of their party, and Lord Parkhurst, leaving his daughter in my charge, joined them. A tall, good-humored- looking boy

strolled, up to us, looking at me questioningly. Lady Olive introduced me to her brother, who came over to my side, and seemed disposed to stay with us.

"Now, we're not going to have you, Frank," Lady Olive declared, laughing. "Mr. Arbuthnot and I are old friends, and we have a lot to talk about. Go and take care of Cissy, do!"

He laughed good-humoredly, and then, nodding to me, strolled off with his hands hi his pockets. Lady Olive rested her little hand upon my arm for a moment, and guided me down towards the winter garden, where the throng was less dense. There we found a low seat, and sat down with our faces to the sea, and our backs to the ever-increasing crowd, the murmur of whose conversation reached us in an incessant subdued hum.

"And now, Mr. Arbuthnot, tell me all the news, please; I want to know everything about yourself," exclaimed Lady Olive, making herself comfortable. "Quick, please; we haven't more than half an hour before someone will be looking for me."

"Half a minute will suffice to tell you my news," I answered, and I told her the little that had happened to me since Marian's marriage. I told her of my meeting with my father, and of our quiet life together. She listened with more than interest; and very enchanting she looked in the golden light which shone upon her upturned, piquant face, and in her dark, tender eyes, which had almost filled with compassionate tears when I had finished. For, after all, there was something sad about my story.

"I think it is so good of you, Mr—Mr. Arbuthnot, to give up your life, as you are doing, to your father," she said, softly.

I laughed at the idea.

"Give it up! It is no sacrifice. I like being with him; and life isn't at all unpleasant out here, I can tell you."

"Isn't it a little dull?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"I had not found, it so," I told her; "Perhaps I should when she were gone," I added. She made a mocking face at me, and then suddenly became grave again.

"Mr. Arbuthnot, I wonder whether you will mind," she said, looking at me very earnestly, "but papa knows your real name and all about you. I couldn't help telling him, because I have thought about you so much. You are not angry?"

I smiled down at her reassuringly. Angry! Why should I be? Instead, I must confess that I felt a decided glow of pleasure at her eager words.

"Tell me something about yourself now," I begged, "and some English news, if there is any."

"English news! Well, old Sir Francis is moping worse than ever since you left; Mr. Rupert Devereux has written the hovel of the season; Mr. Francis, from all I can hear of him, is going to the bad; and Maud—they say Maud is engaged to that little fop, Lord Annerley. Is that enough news?"

Yes, it was quite enough! Something told me that she was watching for the effect of her words, and a sort of stubborn pride held my features rigid, and enabled me to answer lightly, and to put the words which I had heard away from me.

We talked for a long time in low tones, exchanging reminiscences and speeches, my share of which I have often since repented. But to meet unexpectedly a countrywoman, especially so charming a one as Lady Olive, in a strange country,

when you have seen nothing but strange faces for many months, is sufficient excuse for a little more than cordiality creeping into the conversation. And then there was the influence of the scene and of the night, an influence which no one can properly appreciate who does not know what the long summer nights of Southern Europe are like. Everything seemed steeped in a sort of languid, evanescent beauty. The dark mountains, stretching out like giant sentinels into the silvery, glistening bay, the twinkling lights from the low, white-houses, the softened strains of the band, the musky air heavily laden with the mingled perfume of the orange grove, the hyacinths, and the more distant vineyards, and Lady Olive's beautiful dark eyes so close to mine, and flashing with such a dangerously sweet light—all these seemed leagued together to stir my senses and my heart. If Lady Olive spoke in a lower tone and with a tenderer accent than she need have done, was I to blame, knowing her to be a flirt, if I followed suit? The wonder is that I forebore to answer the mute invitation of her eyes, and press my lips against the archly tender, oval face, which more than once almost touched mine. But for the thought that, gone from me for ever though she might be, Maud's kiss was the last upon my lips, assuredly I should have yielded to the fascination of that moment.

Fewer and fewer became our words, until at last we ceased talking altogether, and remained silent, drinking in the exquisite enjoyment of our surroundings.

At last Lady Olive rose reluctantly.

"Mr. Arbuthnot, we must really go. They'll be coming to look for us directly, and, really, if it hadn't been too ridiculous, people might almost imagine that we'd been spooning mightn't they?"

She blushed as she smoothed clown the folds of her white dress, and waited whilst I lit a cigarette. Certainly, if people had entertained that very ridiculous notion there would have been some excuse for them, for our hands had been very close together—very close indeed—and there was a soft light in Lady Olive's lustrous eyes, which, to any one who had not known that she was a flirt, and could command them at will, might have suggested love- making. Our tjte-`-tjte, such a it was, was over for the present, at any rate for we had scarcely gone a dozen yards when we came upon Lord Parkhurst, with Miss Cissy, who, I found out afterwards, was Lady Olive's youngest sister, and Master Frank, and a tall, sandy-haired man, with bushy eyebrows and an intelligent forehead, whom Lord Parkhurst introduced to me as Mr. Burton Leigh.

We all walked up the promenade together but presently Lord Parkhurst took an opportunity to draw me a little behind the others.

"My dear fellow," he said kindly, "my daughter told me all your sad history when she came to me from England. Do you know, I should like to know your father, Mr. Devereux, very much. My cousin was in his regiment, and always swore that there was something wrong about that court-martial. Do you think that he would mind my calling on him?"

I hesitated, at a loss how to decide.

"Well, well, let it be until you have asked him," Lord Parkhurst went on good-humoredly. "We shall be here for a week or two at any rate, and I hope that we shall see a good deal of you. We thought of going to see the convent at San Martino to-morrow. Will you join us?"

“The convent of San Martino?” I exclaimed. “Why you will pass our house.”

“Indeed!’ Then we will look in and see your father on our way back, if he has no objection. You’ll come in for an hour?”

We had reached the entrance to the hotel and Lady Olive was looking behind to see that I was following. But I shook my head.

“I have a six-mile ride over a rough country,” I said, “and though the patience of mules is supposed to be inexhaustible, experience has taught me that that idea is a popular delusion. I’ve kept mine waiting four hours already, and I really must go.”

“If you must, then,” Lord Parkhurst said, holding out his hand, “where shall we see you to-morrow?”

“I’ll come and meet you if you’ll tell me what time you’ll start.”

They consulted, and fixed upon an hour. Then I shook hands with Lady Olive and the rest of the party, and walked back along the now nearly deserted Marina to the inn where I had left my mule.

Jacko was a faithful beast and sure of foot. But he was slow, and by the time we had reached home it was past midnight. My father was sitting up for me, poring over a musty old volume, which he laid down as I entered.

“Hugh, my boy, I thought you were lost. Disgraceful hour, sir,” he added, with a mild attempt at facetiousness.

I laughed, and throwing my whip into a corner, poured myself out a cup of coffee.

“Father, what do you think has happened?” I explained. “I have met some English friends in Palermo.”

“Who are they?” he asked, nervously.

“Lord Parkhurst and his daughter. Lady Olive is a friend of Miss Devereux, and a very jolly little girl she is.”

My father nodded. “‘Glad you’ve been enjoying yourself,” he remarked. “I hope they are going to stay for a time. They’ll be company for you.”

“And you, too, father,” I added quickly. “Lord Parkhurst wants to call and see you. He knows all about us, and he seems very anxious to make your acquaintance. Do you mind?”

My father considered for some time before he answered. I could see that the idea half pleased him, although he could not quite make-up his mind to break through his old habit.

“I don’t think I should mind much, Hugh,” he said at last. “But there’s no one else, is there?”

“Only a son and two daughters. Lady Olive is quite as anxious to know you as her father. Oh! and there’s a fellow called Burton Leigh.”

“Burton Leigh!” repeated my father. “Burton Leigh! There is no man whom I should like to meet more if it’s the same Burton Leigh who wrote this treatise on Modern Mahometanism.”

“Same fellow,” I declared, without hesitation. “He looks beastly clever, and Lady Olive said that he’d lived for years in Egypt with a tribe of Arabs. Same fellow for certain.”

“How strange! When are they coming, Hugh?”

“To-morrow,” I answered, invoking secret blessings on the head of Mr. Burton Leigh. “They are coming this way to San Martino, and I was to let them know whether they might call.”

Chapter XXXV

We Entertain at the Villa.

My father and I were sitting at breakfast on the following morning, out of doors, on the wooden balcony, when I again recurred to the visit which we were to receive.

Below us stretched a wild, neglected garden, picturesque but overgrown, and further away was a flourishing vineyard and a bare stretch of heath, only redeemed from absolute ugliness by the brilliant patches of wild flowers and frequent groups of olive trees. Although it was early morning, the warm air was already laden with the languid, almost oppressive, scent of wild hyacinthe and other odorous plants, and there seemed to be every promise of a scorching hot day. As usual, our breakfast consisted almost entirely of different sorts of fruits and the wine of the country and until we had nearly finished and my father had leaned back in his low wicker chair, with the blue smoke from a cigarette curling around him, we scarcely interchanged a word.

“I wonder if there’s anything in the house for lunch?” I remarked, rather abruptly.

My father looked at me with a mild astonishment, for we seldom asked one another questions of that sort, leaving almost every thing to our housekeeper.

“I haven’t the faintest idea,” he acknowledged, languidly fanning himself with his hat. “Better ask Marie. Why this premature curiosity?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “We may have company,” I remarked.

My father arched his eyebrows, and looked at me incredulously.

“Company, nonsense! You haven’t asked your friends to luncheon, have you?”

I shook my head. “Haven’t asked them, but I shouldn’t wonder if they weren’t here all the same. They are going to San Martino, and it occurs to me that by the time they reach here they may be glad of a rest. It’s going to be a warmish day.”

Marie had come out to take away the remains of our breakfast, and I appealed to her. She shrugged her massive shoulders discouragingly, and held up her hands. We were not often home for luncheon, and she had provided nothing.

We looked at one another helplessly, my father and I, and then simultaneously broke into a short laugh.

“Let us hope your friends will have had a good breakfast, Hugh,” my father said. “But, Marie,” he added, “surely there were chickens?”

“Ah, surely, there were chickens, so many that they were becoming a nuisance! Pietro should kill some at once, that they might be cooked and cold by luncheon time.”

“And omelettes, Marie; you can make omelettes?” I suggested.

She was half indignant at the idea of there being any doubt about it! Omelettes there could be, surely! Were not her omelettes equal to any one's? And if the signors were expecting visitors, they need have no fear!

They might make their minds quite at rest. Lunch there should be, fit for any one.

We both breathed more freely, and decided that Marie was a treasure. Then I lounged off into the garden on a very womanish errand—namely, to gather some flowers to decorate the table with, and finally, having seen all things in a state of preparation, I mounted Jacko and rode off towards Palermo, leaving my father vastly amused at the orders I had given.

Just outside the city I met them in a heavy native carriage, and, turning round, I rode by their side. Frank and Mr. Leigh were also on mules, but Lady Olive, in a cream-colored costume, and with a bunch of hyacinths, which I had given her the night before, in her bosom, was sitting in the carriage by her father's side. She welcomed me with the most becoming blush, and, as I touched her hand, I could not help thinking how fresh, and cool, and English-like she appeared. Perhaps my eyes told her something of my admiration, for she turned hers quickly away, and seemed eager to commence a conversation.

"Mr. Arbuthnot, how strange you look on that animal after the Black Prince! Aren't you afraid of your feet touching the ground?"

"Jacko is not to be despised," I assured her. "I'm afraid the Black Prince's knees would suffer in this country. Ever ridden one of these animals before?" I asked Mr. Leigh, who was by my side. He smiled at the question.

"In very many countries," he answered. "I've crossed the Pyrenees, and cantered into Jerusalem on one. They're sure-footed beasts."

I looked at him with interest. Evidently he had been a traveller, and he was doubtless the man whom my father desired to meet.

"There was not much opportunity for conversation, for the road was such that it took all our attention to remain safely in our saddles. Our progress, too, or rather the progress of the carriage, was slow, and long before we had arrived at the villa Lord Parkhurst began to look hot and Lady Olive a little bored. Only Frank seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself, with that indifference to the weather which a hardy schoolboy generally displays, galloping around in circles and urging his animal, a respectable and highly- disgusted old mule, into the most extraordinary antics. At last the ruined front of the villa, half hidden amongst the grove of orange trees which stretched behind it, came in sight.

"What a dear old place!" remarked Lady Olive. "Who lives there, Mr. Arbuthnot?"

"At present, we do," I said, riding up to the side of the carriage. "If you would really like to make my father's acquaintance, Lord Parkhurst, we should find him at home now, and he would be pleased to see you."

Lord Parkhurst seized upon the idea with avidity.

"I should like it, above all things," he declared, "and a change from this beastly rackety machine and this broiling sun will be very welcome. What do you say, Olive?"

Lady Olive was quite of her father's opinion, and so in a few minutes a halt was made at the rusty iron gales supported by tottering grey stone pillars, and we all trooped up the grass-grown avenue.

My father met us at the door, and welcomed our guests with an air of dignified courtesy of which many years of seclusion had not robbed him. He brought up the rear, exchanging affable commonplacisms with Lord Parkhurst, whilst I, with Lady Olive and the rest of the party, crossed the marble floor of the entrance-hall, stained and discolored by age, and entered the larger of the two rooms which we had made some attempt at furnishing. The close-drawn blinds had kept out the burning sun, and after the fierce heat outside, the room seemed cool and pleasant enough, although its decorations were faded and its walls in places dilapidated. Lady Olive, stretched in my father's easy chair, pronounced her firm intention of remaining where she was until the sun had lost some of its fierceness, and Lord Parkhurst, who was fanning himself with an air of great contentment, seemed by no means reluctant. So we sat there, a merry, chattering party, my father and Mr. Leigh deep in the discussion of some vexed point in the latter's book—a discussion in which Lord Parkhurst seemed also interested—and we younger ones talking in a somewhat lighter vein.

Chapter XXXVI

Mr Burton Leigh.

"Soon after four o'clock Lord Parkhurst suddenly woke up, and remembered that the Convent of San Martino was still unvisited. We were recalled from the garden, and after a hasty afternoon tea—*a l'Anglaise*—the mules were brought round, and we prepared to make a start. At the last moment Mr. Leigh, whose conversation with my father had never flagged, begged to be left behind and called for on our return, a proposition to which Lord Parkhurst at once good-humoredly assented.

"I'm sure we have to thank you heartily for your hospitality, Mr. Arbuthnot," his lordship remarked, as he bade my father farewell. "We came to call on you for a few minutes, and have quartered ourselves upon you for the day. I do hope you'll return our visit. I've taken the Palazzo Pericilo, in Palermo, for a month. Your son'll soon be able to show you where it is, I hope," he added, turning to me.

My father made some courteous but indefinite reply as he walked down the hall with his departing guests. To have looked at the two men, any one would certainly have supposed the positions reversed, and that my father had been the distinguished diplomatist and peer, whose visit was an honor, and Lord Parkhurst the man without a name.

"Your father is a veritable grand seigneur," Lady Olive said to me, as we stood at the gate prepared to start. "I never saw a more distinguished-looking man." And, though I only laughed at her, I was pleased.

The ride to San Martino was a delightful one. We entered at once, after leaving the villa, into a narrow, rugged glen, which led us higher and higher, until at last Palermo, with its marvellously beautiful plain, and the blue water of the Mediterranean sweeping into its bay, lay stretched out behind us like a beautiful

panorama. Though we were high up in the mountains, we were still surrounded by the most luxuriant vegetation, and a sudden turn in the road showed us, thousands of feet below, a beautifully cultivated valley in the bed of which were dense groves of orange trees, while its sides were laid out as vineyards and wheat-fields. But perhaps the most beautiful sight of all was the huge facade of the Convent of San Martino, which we came upon unexpectedly, and which seemed to be heaved out of the earth by some caprice of nature.

More than an hour we spent wandering about its vast open corridors and magnificent staircases, and, melancholy and silent though it was, its grandeur and solemnity, and, above all, the silence which reigned throughout the enormous building, made a strong impression upon us. Even Lady Olive forebore to chatter, and we none of us felt inclined to speak above a whisper. For my part I was not sorry when our tour of inspection was over, for the place seemed to me depressing in its vast emptiness, and I think the others were of the same opinion, for we all gave a simultaneous gesture of relief when we stood again in the open air.

"We'll go back now, I think," said Lord Parkhurst, yawning. "What do you say, Olive? Had enough sight-seeing?"

Lady Olive was content to do anything, so I handed her into the carriage, and we started homewards, with a fresh breeze from the Mediterranean blowing in our faces, and the glorious prospect of Palermo at the edge of the most luxurious plain of Southern Europe before our eyes.

In about an hour we reached the villa, and found my father and Mr. Leigh, with a pile of books before them, still eagerly conversing. I had promised Lady Olive in a weak moment to return and dine with them, but when Lord Parkhurst cordially extended the invitation to my father, I could scarcely believe my ears when I heard him, after a moment's indecision, accept. But he did so, and after a very few minutes' delay we all set out together for Palermo.

That was a very pleasant day—so pleasant that I felt almost inclined to echo Lady Olive's words whispered to me as we lounged about on the Marina, pretending to listen to the band, and call it one of the happiest of my life. I had never seen my father so thoroughly interested as he was with Mr. Leigh, and as we rode home together in the moonlight I asked him about it.

"I never met a man to whom I took such a liking, or in whom I was more interested," my father declared. "He has lived for a long time amongst the Arabs, and seems to have been much impressed by them. He is a disciple of a very curious Calvinistic doctrine of fatalism, which has a good deal of resemblance to the creed of the nomad Arabs. I don't think it ever struck him till I pointed it out."

"He is going back to Egypt, isn't he?" I asked.

"He is. There is a storm brewing there, and he is going to try and see what he can do to prevent mischief. He has asked me to go with him, Hugh," my father added quietly.

"But you won't go," I cried.

He looked at me with one of his old sweet smiles, which it filled me with joy to see again, and he rested his arm for a moment on my shoulder.

"Hugh, I have promised to think it over. Before I decide, we will have a talk about it; but not to-night, not to-night."

Chapter XXXVII

Cut Down.

It must have been a little before six o'clock on the following morning, when I was suddenly aroused from sleep, and, opening my eyes, saw my father, half-dressed, bending over me with his hand on my shoulder.

"Wake up, Hugh!" he cried, "wake up!"

I sat up in bed, bewildered and amazed.

My father, with an anxious face, was rapidly putting on his boots.

"What has happened?" I asked, springing out of bed. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Dress yourself quick and follow me. I am going to Jose's. Pietro has just come, and says that there was some desperate fighting last night between the brigands and some travellers on their way to Palermo. Two of the brigands were killed, but they have captured the man who killed them. Pietro thinks he was an Englishman. They will hang him this morning unless we can prevent it. Hurry, Hugh, and come after me. You don't know what those fellows are if they can lay their hands on any one who has killed one of their band. Sure as fate, they'll hang him. I fear that we may be too late now. I shall take the mountain road."

All the time my father had been talking he had been completing a hasty toilette, and, now he had finished, he hurried from the room, and directly afterwards I heard Jacko cantering down the avenue. In a few minutes I, too, was dressed and following him on foot.

Our villa was four miles and a half from the hill on which Monsieur Jose and his friends had pitched their habitation, and it was uphill all the way, and a very rough road. The path—it was a mere mountain track—was covered with loose stones, and in many places was but a few feet wide. Below sloped, with the abruptness of a precipice, the green hillside dotted with olive trees and aloe shrubs, and above the vegetation grew more and more stunted, and great masses of rock jutted out and lay about the barren brown summit. I was running towards the sea, and the soft invigorating breeze which blew steadily in my teeth seemed to lend me an added vigor, for when I caught my father up, close to our destination, I was as fresh as at the start. Side by side we reached the chasm-like gorge which separated the range of hills which we had been traversing from the solitary one behind which was the brigands' dwelling-place. Here we halted, and my father, dismounting, put two of his fingers in his mouth and whistled a peculiar screech like whistle, which I had often vainly tried to imitate.

At first there was no answer, save the echoes which came mockingly back again and again. Again he gave the signal, and this time one of the band made a cautious appearance from behind a knoll of trees, and, see ing who we were, came forward and threw a rough bridge, formed from the trunk of a tree, across the chasm. We were on the other side in a moment, and I hurried up the steep hillside whilst my father remained behind to exchange a few sentences with the man

whose vile patois I could not pretend to understand. He caught me up at the summit and, without stopping, ran down the green footpath, calling out to me—

"Quick, Hugh, we shall only be just in time. They are going to hang him!"

Below us stretched the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean, gleaming and sparkling in the morning's sun, and though we were within a couple of hundred yards of our destination, not a sound broke the dead silence, nor was there any sign of human life anywhere about. We reached the edge of the cliff and half fearfully looked down below. Instantly, the whole view burst upon us, and we saw that we were but barely in time. As we looked upon the little scene, with its picturesque grouping, it seemed hard to believe that it was not some elaborate tableau which met our horrified eyes, rather than a grim, ghastly reality. Standing about on the smooth, velvety little stretch of turf, which seemed to hang right over the sea like a suspended platform, were the brigands, most of them with folded arms, and all with eyes fixed upon the little grove of cypresses. Foremost amongst them stood Jose, with a long cigarette between his thin lips, and a fierce, satisfied look upon his dark face. Simultaneously our eyes followed theirs, and a sickening horror crept over me, for, dangling from the boughs of one of the trees, was the struggling, quivering body of a man, whose feet, only a few inches from the ground, were making spasmodic but vain efforts to reach it. It was a fearful sight.

With a cry which rang out like the angry roar of a lion, my father sprang forward. For a moment he balanced himself on the edge of the cliff, and then with a single bound, which turned my heart sick to see, he leaped on to the plateau below. With fascinated eyes I watched him rush to the tree with the gleaming blade of a knife in his hand, and in a second the rope was severed, and the man lay in a heap on the ground, and then with a wild cry and a look on his face which no mortal painter could have depicted and no words describe, my father threw his hands up towards the heavens, and staggered backwards.

I rushed down the narrow path and stood by his side. His whole frame was shaking as though with a great horror; but his face, white to the lips, was rigid as solid marble. As he felt my touch upon his arm, he pointed with quivering finger to the man who lay doubled up upon the ground, although no sound came from him. With a new horror my eyes followed his gesture, and the man was my Uncle Rupert.

The momentary torpor into which my father's' sudden appearance and action had thrown the little company of brigands had passed away, and with an angry exclamation Jose sprung forward.

"Mille diable! what did the Monsieur Anglais mean by this interference! How dared he thus presume to interfere with a simple act of justice?"

"Carlo! Paulato! String the fellow up again at once," he added, turning rapidly around.

My father seemed to have recovered himself; but, to my surprise, he stood stock still.

"Father, they will hang him again," I cried; but he never moved.

I looked into his face, and shrunk back terrified. The passionate hatred of a lifetime was convulsing and blackening his features, and flashing fiercely from his blazing eyes.

"Let them," he muttered, "let them. A dog's death is fittest for him!"

One swift thought saved him. He was Maud's father. I hastened forward and wrenched the rope from the hands of the men who were binding it together.

"Monsieur Jose," I cried, "tell me for what you hang this man? What has he done?"

"Killed two of my best comrades," was the prompt reply, "and by heaven, he shall swing for it."

The rope was wrenched from my hands and adjusted round Rupert Devereux's neck. He was conscious now, but half dazed, and unable to make any resistance. Seizing him by the collar, I released him from the men's grasp, and dragged him with me to the side of the hill, against which I set my back. They sprang after me, but started back with a quick exclamation, for they looked into the black muzzle of my father's revolver.

"You are right, Hugh," he cried, "I was mad! Monsieur Jose, listen to me," he added quickly. "This man is an Englishman, and you know very well what that means! To take his life would be to compass your own extermination. He is a man of great position, and if you killed him, sure as there is a heaven above us, you would he hunted out and hanged, every man of you."

"Who is to tell of his death?" Jose answered.

"I shall," was the firm reply. "And if you kill us, your fate is all the surer, for we, too, are English and it is known that we have come here. Be sensible, Jose. Why kill him? What good will that do you? Why not a ransom?"

The battle was won, but Monsieur Jose, did not yield all at once.

"He has killed two of my best fellows," he said, sullenly.

"'What of that? It was done in fair fight, I suppose? He did not attack them."

Monsieur Jose retired and consulted with his men. Presently he re- appeared, smiling.

"Monsieur Arbuthnot," he said, "we are anxious to oblige a friend whom we value so much as you, but, at the same time, we feel the loss of two such well-beloved comrades as Pintro and Salino deeply; so deeply, in fact, that we cannot see our way to fix the ransom at less than two thousand pounds English.

"They shall have it," groaned Rupert Devereux, lifting his head.

"Good! Where is the money to be got?" inquired Jose, with twinkling eyes.

"There is as much in Rothschild's bank at Rome. Send one of your men to Palermo with a telegram, and let him wait till the money is wired to my credit. If you will give me something to write with, I will give him authority to draw it."

It was done, and then, whilst Jose withdrew to consult with his followers as to who should be the messenger, my Uncle Rupert turned slowly round and looked into my father's face.

Chapter XXXVIII

An Ominous Note.

It was a strange meeting. Full, of a great throbbing hope, I glanced from one to another of their faces. My father's was white and set and stern. My Uncle Rupert's was ghastly pale, sad, and expressionless.

"I owe my life to you and your son," he said slowly. "Would to God it had been to any other man!"

"You speak well," my father answered.

"You owe your life to the man whose life you have made a living hell. Strange things have happened, but none stranger than this! Why, I have prayed with a sinking heart, Rupert Devereux, that if chance should bring us face to face I might not kill you. And I have saved your life. How came you here?"

"Bound to Palermo with a letter for Lord Parkhurst from England. They told me at Rome that he was here, so I followed."

There was a dead silence save for the hum of clamorous voices from the little group of brigands. My father's eyes were fixed upon Rupert Devereux's white, anguish-smitten, face, full of stern expectation. But neither spoke for many minutes.

"I am waiting to hear what you have to say to me," my father said at last. "I have saved your life. 'Tis a deed which most men would deem deserving of reward. I ask no reward, but I demand justice of you, Rupert Devereux. For the long, weary years of my wasted life you can return me nothing. But you can give me back my name to die under and to leave to my son. Speak."

Like a man who is torn asunder by a passionate indecision, Rupert Devereux hid his face in his hands, and rocked himself to and fro.

"Herbert," he moaned, "would to God you had let me die! Oh, how can I do this thing, how can I? It is not for myself I care, but for my son, for my daughter. They would never speak to me again. They would hate me.

"That they should do so would be a just punishment," was my father's stern reply. "You have built up your life upon a lie, and this is your reward. Rupert Devereux I demand that you make a full confession, and restore to me my honor! If you have one single spark of conscience left, you cannot deny me. You shall not deny me!"

He turned away again and groaned. Almost I could have pitied him.

"I cannot do it. I cannot do it," he moaned. "Oh! think what it means! To cut myself off from life and the world. To make myself an object of contempt for all men. To forfeit everything that I have won. To endure the everlasting scorn of my children. Oh! Herbert, will you really ask me to do all this?"

"Ask! No! I demand it!" my father thundered. "Think of my sufferings; think of my five-and-twenty years, the best part of my life, hidden away in a secret corner of the earth, never setting eyes on my country or the home I love—a stranger to my children and a stranger to my father. What can you suffer more than this? Speak, Rupert Devereux, and quickly, or I shall kill you where you stand."

He turned around white and resolute.

"Kill me, then. I wish for nothing else. There is not a more miserable man than I on earth. You talk of your wasted years and weary exile, and yet you have not suffered as I have. You have had a clear conscience; I have had a guilty one. Everything I have won, every success, every joy I have stretched out my hand for has tasted like ashes between my teeth. Yours has been a passive sorrow—my life

has been one long hell of remorse. But I will not do this thing. I will not pull down with my own hand what it has taken so many years to build up. I will not make my children hate me. Go your way, Herbert, or kill me if you like—I am indifferent."

I saw my father's arm lifted to strike him, but the blow never fell. Instead, his arm sank to his side and he turned away.

"Hugh," he said to me, in a low, hollow voice, "let us go. Let us go now. God keep him and me apart. I thought I saw him at that moment dead! murdered by me! I will not kill him! I will not kill him!"

Jose came hurrying out to us.

"Messieurs," he said, anxiously, "I must ask of you for a pledge before you go. Not to a soul will you mention the presence of that gentilhomme in our tents, and you will attempt no rescue, or to interfere with the ransom. You must swear this."

"Ay, I swear it," said my father, and I echoed his words.

"It is good," Jose declared, smiling and twirling his long black moustachios. "Messieurs will oblige me by accepting a cigarette. No. Very good. Monsieur will allow me, at any rate, to render him my most hearty thanks for having prevented us from committing an act of great folly. This ransom will be a gift from heaven. It will enable me to leave this country, and seek a more stirring life. Life here is dull—very dull."

My father nodded, and passed on.

"Good day, Monsieur Jose," he said, briefly, and then we strode away to where Jacko was still patiently waiting. He mounted, and rode on, leaving me far behind, for the sun was high in the heavens, and the heat was great. When I reached home he had gone to his room, and on trying the door softly I found it locked. So I stole away again again downstairs and waited.

Hour after hour passed, but still he did not come down. At last, to my inexpressible relief, I heard the door of his room open, and he slowly descended. He opened the door and stood before me, gaunt and hollow-eyed, but with an air of resolution about him which struck me with a chill foreboding.

I greeted him cheerfully, and asked whether I should have some lunch brought in for him, but he took no notice.

"Hugh," he said, quietly, "I wonder whether you would mind riding into Palermo with this letter and bringing me an answer."

I rose up and took it at once, glancing nervously at the address. As I had feared, it was directed to Burton Leigh, Esq.

"I will go, father," I said; and with a heavy heart I saddled Jacko and started off. In the grounds of Lord Parkhurst's villa, fast asleep in a miniature kiosk, I came, upon Mr. Leigh. I woke him and gave him the note.

He read it through, and when he had finished smiled as though well pleased.

"Tell your father," he said, "that I will breakfast with him to-morrow morning. You are coming up to the villa?"

But I shook my head and turned away. I was in no mood for Lord Parkhurst's kindly talk or Lady Olive's merry chatter. Already I began to see that a great trouble was looming before me.

Chapter XXXIX

My Father‘s Resolution.

The whole of the following morning my father spent with Mr. Leigh, who arrived in answer to his invitation soon after nine o’clock.

When I returned to lunch he was still there, and it was not until evening that I found myself alone with my father.

“Hugh, I have something to say to you,” he began, gravely, “something important.”

I waited in silence, preparing to do battle with a sinking heart. But as I looked into his worn, sad face, I saw there was a change in it which favored little the chances of my opposition. The vacuity of hopeless weariness had gone, and in its place shone the light of a great resolution. How should I hope to bend it!

“Hugh, my boy,” my father, began, “I owe to you a greater debt than father ever owed son.”

I would have interrupted him, but he held up his hand with an imperative gesture, which I could not choose but to obey. And so I listened in silence.

“I am not going to speak of this black cloud, which fate seems to have decreed should never be rolled away from my head,” he went on. “What would be the use? Twelve months ago I tasted the very bittermost depths of misery. It seemed to me then that I must either go mad or take my life. It was your letter, Hugh, which saved me from either fate. God bless you for it!”

He turned away as though to watch the sun shoot down its parting rays on the brown hillside. But I knew that he had another reason for looking away, and a womanish longing came over me to seize his hands and breathe out fond words. But somehow I could not. I don’t know how others find it, but it always seems to me to be as difficult for a man to give vent to his feelings as it is for women to conceal them. Between man and man there is always a curious shrinking from the displayal of any emotion, more especially when it takes the form of affection. To me, at any rate, it has always seemed so, and, though my heart was full of a wild sympathy, and there was a great lump in my throat, I said nothing.

“From the moment when you came to me, Hugh,” my father proceeded, “life began to be endurable. The months which we have spent together here have been by far the brightest I have ever known since we were all together in Devonshire. But we cannot go on for ever like this.”

“Why not?” I dissented. “Life is very pleasant here to me, at any rate. Where could we find a better dwelling place?”

He shook his head.

“Life is not given to us to drone away,” he answered. “A man’s life should include a career, should be always shaping itself to wards a definite end. It is a crime against nature, against our great destiny, for a young man like you to live as we are doing; and it must not be.”

“What would you have me do?” I cried. “Cannot we do something together?”

He shook his head with a sad, yet pleased smile.

“I have already decided,” he said, gravely. “Chance has been kind to me, and has thrown in my way the man most likely to be of use to me. I will tell you more of this presently. For me the field of choice has not been large—for you it is illimitable. Hugh, this is what I chiefly want to say to you. It is my wish, my strong heartfelt wish, that you should accept your grandfather’s offer and take your rightful name and position.”

I looked at him incredulous, bewildered, hurt. Of all things I had least expected this.

“Yes,” he wont on, speaking more rapidly, and with a deep earnestness in his tone and manner, “it is my great wish. Do not think, Hugh, my boy, that I have not appreciated your chivalrous renunciation of it. The thought has been very dear to me, that my son has preferred poverty and obscurity out of mere resentment for my bitter wrongs. But of late I have seen this matter in a different light. Between my father and I, Hugh, there has been no injustice. He was hard, but he is a soldier, bred and born with all a soldier’s instincts. He has honestly believed me guilty, and I bear him no resentment. He, too, must have suffered, Hugh, for I was his favorite son.”

Suffered! Aye, I knew that he had suffered; but what were all his sufferings to me compared with my father’s!

“Hugh, it has become a bitter thought to me that, innocent as I am of all offence against him, I am keeping away from him by keeping you with me—a great consolation; and not only that, but I am keeping you away from a great name, and a great position. It has grown upon me, Hugh, this bitter thought, and now I pray you, I command you as my son, that when you leaves me, as leave me you must, you go to him.”

“Why must I leave you, father?” I asked. “Let me go with you where you are going?”

He shook his head.

“It is absolutely Impossible. I am going, Hugh, with Mr. Leigh, to travel in Northern Egypt. There is no race in the world in whom I have fell more interest, and Mr. Leigh has strengthened it. He has spent long years with them, living with a tribe of Arabs in a tent, and sharing their life. He knows their language and their customs. He has been as one of themselves, and, save in the forms of their religion, he has become one of them, and now he has had disquieting news of his favorite race. False prophets are working upon their imagination, and stirring them up to no good end, striving to incite them to rise against their best friends, the English! Matters are fast coming to a crisis, and Mr. Leigh is going back to his old tribe to try and regain his former influence with them, and to keep them, at any rate, out of the troubles which are fast arising. He has asked me to go with him, Hugh, and I have consented. It is the sort of enterprise which I most desired. There is a little danger, it is true, but if the worst should happen I shall end my days not by my own hand, as one day I had feared that I should, but sword in hand with a clear conscience. Could a soldier wish for anything better?”

“I will go with you,” I cried, passionately. “Father, yon shall not leave me thus!”

He left his chair, and, coming to me, laid his hand upon my shoulder. He had drawn himself up to his full height, and stood looking there every inch a soldier, stately, imperious, and commanding.

“Hugh,” he said, firmly, “you have been the best son to me a father ever had, and you will not thwart me now. Go with me to Egypt you cannot. I forbid it. Command you to take your rightful name, I cannot; but I desire it above all things. Take a day to think it over, and let me know your decision to-morrow. Shall we leave it like that?”

Sorrowfully I bowed my head, and then I left the room, wandering, aimlessly out into the twilight, I cared not whither. Down the grass-grown avenue I went, and out on to the white road, with a great weight of grief upon my heart, and a dull despair numbing my senses. It seemed to me that the crisis of my life had come at last, and whichever way I looked black clouds were looming before me. Almost I wished that I might die.

Chapter XL

A Horrible Mistake.

What led me there I cannot imagine, save it was a wild desire to escape for a brief while from the thoughts that were tormenting me, but an hour or two later I was on the Marina, mixing with gay throngs of merry pleasure-seekers, stalking amongst them like a Banquo at a feast. And whom should I meet there but Lady Olive! Lady Olive alone, for her brother and sister had left her for a moment to buy bon-bons.

She greeted me with some laughing speech, but her face grew grave as she looked into my face.

“Something has happened, Mr. Arbuthnot?” she said, quickly; and then, as I made no answer, she placed her hand in my arm, and led me away from the people down towards the seat on which we had sat the first evening of our meeting there.

It was a night which mocks description. The sweet, subtle perfumes with which the soft night breeze was laden, the dark boughs of the cypress trees over our heads, the glittering, sparkling sea stretching away before us to the horizon, the picturesque town with its white villas and rows of houses standing out clear and distinct in the brilliant moon light-all these had a softening effect upon me. I looked into Lady Olive’s dark, expressive eyes, and I felt as though I must weep.

I do not believe there lives a man who has not, at some time or other of his existence, felt a longing for a woman’s sympathy. There is an art and a tact in its bestowal which only a woman properly understands. A man may speak words of comfort in a rough, hearty sort of way; but the chances are that he will strike the wrong vein and leave unsaid the words which would have been most efficient. He has not the keen, fine perceptions which a woman has in such matters, and which have made it her peculiar province to play the part of comforter.

I was not then, or at any other time in love with Lady Olive. But as I looked into her dark, eager eyes as we sat side by side on the seat under the cypress trees, I could not help thinking that it would be very pleasant to win from her a few kind

words and the sympathy which I knew was there waiting to be kindled, and so, when she asked me again what was the matter, I hesitated only for a moment, and then told her.

She knew most of my history; why should she not know all? And so I told her, and she listened with all the gaiety gone from her face, and her eye's growing sadder and sadder. When I had finished there were great tears in them.

"What can I say to comfort you?" she whispered, softly. "Tell me, and I will say it—anything!"

My sorrow had blunted my senses, or I must have seen whither we were drifting; but I was blind, blind with the selfishness of a great grief, and I caught at her sympathy like a drowning man at a straw.

"I am alone in the world, Lady Olive, or I shall be in a week or two's time," I said. "Tell me what to do with myself."

"How can I tell you?" she answered, with streaming eyes. "But you must not say that you are alone in the world. My father would be your friend if you would let him—and so would I."

I took her hand, which yielded itself readily to mine, and raised it to my lips. I felt just then as though I dare not speak, lest my voice should be unsteady. I looked instead into her face gratefully, and it seemed to me that a change had come over it, a change which puzzled me. The lips were quivering, and out of her soft, tender eyes the laughing sparkle seemed to have gone. It was another Lady Olive, surely, this grave, sweet-faced, tremulous woman, with her eyes cast down, and a faint pink glow in her cheeks! Nothing of the gay, light-hearted, chattering little flirt, with her arched looks and piquant attitude, seemed left. I was puzzled. Was she, indeed, so tender-hearted?

"And do you really mean," she whispered, stealing a glance up at me, "that if your father goes away, there is nothing left in the world, which could give you any pleasure? Nothing you would wish for?"

I thought of Maud—when was I not think ing of her?—and sighed bitterly!

"Only one thing," I said, "and that I can not have."

"Won't you tell me what it is?" she asked, hesitatingly, with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

I shook my head. "I think not. No; it would be better not."

There was a short silence. Then she lifted her beautiful eyes to mine for a moment, and dropped them again instantly, with a deep blush. I was puzzled. There was something in them which I could not read, something inviting, beseeching, tender. Knowing what I know now, it seems to me that I must have been a blind, senseless fool. But it is easy to be wise afterwards, and my own sorrows were absorbing every sense.

"Will you tell me this?" she asked. "Does this one thing include somebody else?"

She had read my secret, then; she knew that I loved Maud. Well, it was not very strange that she should have guessed it after all!

"Yes, you have guessed it, Lady Olive," I said, quietly, with my eyes fixed upon the line of the horizon where a star-bespangled sky seemed to touch the glistening, dancing sea. "You have guessed it; but, remember, I never told you."

I felt a soft breath on my cheek, and before I could move a pair of white arms were thrown around my neck, and a tear-stained half-blushing, half-smiling face, with a mass of ruffled hair, was lying on my shoulder.

"Why—why have you made me guess, Hugh? Why could you not tell me? You know that—that I—I love you!"

* * * * *

"Father, I have decided."

I stood before him dishevelled and weary, for I had been out all night, seeking to ease my heart of its pain by physical fatigue.

He turned and looked at me in surprise—a surprise which changed into a look of grave sorrow as his eyes dwelt upon me.

"Hugh, you have been up all night," he said reprovingly; "you will be ill!"

I laughed recklessly.

"What matters? Do men die of a broken heart, I wonder? I would that they did?"

He came to me, and laid his hands upon my shoulders.

"Hugh, my boy, do you want to break mine?"

I turned away, and buried my face in my hands. This last sorrow, which had come to me filling me with shame, with self-reproach, with pity, had been the filling of my cup.

Lady Olive's white, horror-struck face, as my blundering words had told her the truth, had been before me all the night, and like a haunting, reproachful shadow, seemed as though it would never leave me. I was unnerved and weak, and before I well knew what was going to happen, the hot tears were streaming from my eyes.

I was the better for them. When I stood before my father again I felt more like myself.

"I have decided," I said, calmly. "I have prayed you to let me go with you, and you have refused. God knows I would rather go with you; but, if you will not have me, I must stay behind. I will take the name of Devereux, since you wish it, and since you say that my taking it will make you happier. But into Devereux Court I will not go. I have sworn it before heaven, and I will not break my oath!"

"But you will see your grandfather?"

"I will see him anywhere else but at Devereux; I shall write him and tell him so. And as to my future, I have but one desire-to enter the army."

A look almost of peace came into my father's face.

"You have made me very glad, Hugh," he said simply. "But about our home? Supposing your grandfather and I both die, and you became Sir Hugh Devereux?"

"Then my oath ceases, and I shall go there. But whilst he holds out his hand to me, and not to you, I will not take it. That will I not depart from."

My father said never another word; but I knew that he was satisfied.

Chapter XLI

Two Years After.

"Colonel Sir Francis Devereux to see you, sir."

I turned away from the window of my room, whence I had been gazing idly into the dreary barrack square below, and advanced to greet the stately, grey- headed old man who stood in the doorway.

"Surprised to see me, Hugh, eh?" he asked, sinking into my one easy chair.

"I didn't expect you in town again so soon," I acknowledged. "But I'm very glad to see you. You know that."

"Are you?" he said shortly. "Then why the devil can't you come and see me sometimes? A nice thing to bring an old man over seventy years of ago a couple of hundred miles whenever he wants to have a word or two with his grandson! Damn it, sir, you're as obstinate as a mule!"

I did not answer him. He knew very well why I would not go to Devereux. What was the use of treading all over the old ground again?

"More rumors in the 'Times,' this morning, I see, about Burton Leigh and Mr. Arbuthnot," he remarked, after a short silence. "They say they've been handed over to the Mahdi, now. Don't believe a word of it!"

"I hope to God that it's not true," I groaned; "but in any case they must be in terrible danger. The Mahdi is gaining fresh followers every day, and they must be in the very centre of the most perilous district. Why on earth the Government doesn't make a decided move, I can't imagine!"

Sir Francis looked at me for a moment, half sadly, with an expression on his face which I scarcely understood. Then he sighed.

"I have brought you news, Hugh," he said, slowly.

"News!" I repeated; and then a sudden light flashed in upon me.

"Tell me quick," I cried. "You have been with Lord Cannington?"

My grandfather nodded.

"I left him only a quarter of an hour ago, at Whitehall, and came down here as fast as a hansom could bring me. The 17th, 19th and 21st are ordered out. 'Twill be in tonight's 'Gazette'."

I could have shouted, done any mad thing, in my great joy. But I sat quite still in my chair, grasping its sides, and struggling to conceal my excitement.

"Thank God!" I murmured, fervently, "this is what I have prayed for. I am sick of playing at being a soldier, of lounging about here, whilst he—others—were in such mortal peril."

He sat looking at me, nodding his head slowly.

"He! others! Ah, well! But I have more news for you, Hugh. Who do you think is appointed to the colonelcy of the 18th?"

"Utterson? Haigh?" He shook his head.

"Your Uncle Rupert."

I was not surprised, for I had heard rumors that it might be so. But it seemed very strange when I thought it over. Were we three to meet again, I wondered.

"Yes," my grandfather went on, with a shade of sadness in his tone, "I am to be left quite alone again, you see."

"Miss Devereux will be with you, I suppose?"

"Maud! Oh, yes, Maud will be with me. What's come to her, I don't know. She's refused Lord Annerley and Captain Bryant, and I don't know how many others,

and seems settling down into an old maid. Hugh, I'm getting a nervous old man, I think, but I shall have no peace till you get back again. When I think that if anything happened to you—which God forbid—that dissipated, low young cub of a nephew of mine would be my heir, it makes me feel sick. I'd burn Devereux Court above my head rather than that should be."

"It is not likely than anything will happen to me, grandfather," I said, bitterly. "There is one who should be dearer to you than I, who stands in greater peril."

He shook his head sadly.

"He is nothing to me; nothing. He is your father, Hugh, and I have never blamed you for—"

"And he is your son," I interrupted. Sir Francis looked at me sternly.

"He is nothing to me. I disowned him."

"Ay, disowned him! I know that. You disowned him. You believed that accursed lie against your own son's words."

"I believed in the decision of the court-martial," he said with all his old severity of tone and manner. "And if the same thing were to happen over again with you, Hugh, I should do exactly the same. I would never look upon your face again."

"I am in no danger," I answered, bitterly. "I have no younger brother who would gain a fortune by my ruin."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"What I say. 'Tis simple enough! I tell you now, what I have told you before, that your son Rupert forged that lie against my father that he might take his place as your heir. Or was done in a mad impulse of jealousy, and thank God, his conscience has punished him for it! Look at his life! Can't you see that there is something amiss with it? Has he not always seemed like a man haunted by some guilty shadow? From one career he has passed to another, never, satisfied, never happy. He made two great speeches in Parliament, and then resigned his seat to travel abroad. He became famous as a writer and novelist, and now never touches a pen. Can't you see it written into his face—a guilty conscience? Why, if it had not been for that, I should have killed him, on my word and honor, grandfather. I have heard him with his own lips acknowledge it, and in my desk there is the confession of John Hilton, whom he bribed. Grandfather, chance may bring him and me together before long. You know in your heart that the man who is braving all the worst terrors of death amongst a fanatical people to save them from bloodshed and to urge them against a hopeless struggle, you know that this man is not a coward! Go into the clubs and listen to what they are saying about these two Englishmen who have pushed their way alone into an unknown country amongst a savage people. Say that you believe Burton Leigh's companion to be a coward, and you will be ridiculed. Grandfather, if he escapes—they say that escape is almost impossible for them—but if fate does bring us together again, may I take him a message from you—one word?"

"You may not."

The words came with a hard and cutting distinctness. I drew back chilled and bitterly disappointed.

"You are blinded, Hugh, by your love for your father. I do not blame you for it, but I am sorry, that you re-opened this subject. When a court-martial shall reverse

the decision of five-and-twenty years ago, then and then only will I crave my son's pardon, and welcome him back to Devereux. Enough of the subject."

Proud, obstinate old soldier! For a moment my heart leaped with anger, but it died away again almost immediately. Surely it was more his misfortune than his fault that his military training and instincts should have made him a soldier first and a father afterwards, and I thought of his long, cheerless life, and of the agony under which he had writhed because of the blot upon the name which he loved, and I pitied him.

"Will you dine with me at the Army and Navy, Hugh?" he asked, in an altered tone. "I must see as much as I can of you now."

I shook my head.

"Dine away from mess to-night? Why, not a man will do that with this glorious news to talk about! You must mess with us, sir!"

He smiled grimly.

"Glorious news, indeed! Because you're going out to cut a lot of half- naked savages to pieces! Well, well, perhaps it's a good thing it's nothing more serious. The more chance of seeing you home safe and sound. Yes, I'll mess with you if you like, and if your mess will not mind an old fogie like me."

He spoke lightly, for no one knew better than he that Colonel Devereux, V.C., would have been a welcome and an honored guest at the table of any regiment in Great Britain.

"Give me your arm down these infernal stairs, Hugh," he said, rising and making his way to the door. "I have some commissions to do for Maud, and I want to see my lawyer, so I must be off. I'll be back before seven."

I watched him cross the square, with his head thrown hack and his shoulders very slightly stooped, notwithstanding his seventy five years. Then I returned to my room to think over the great news.

Chapter XLII

A Traitorous Love.

In three days we were to leave England. In three days I should be started upon the journey which would lead me into the land where, above all others, I desired to be. And, where was I? Standing on a Yorkshire moor, with a wild west wind blowing in my face and singing in my ears, a wind that came booming up the hollows and across the open country towards me like the sound of a cannonade within the earth. But what cared I for the wind, for was it not bearing towards me on its bosom her whom I had come to see?

On she came like a phantom shadow out of the twilight, for her horse's hoofs sank noiselessly into the soddened earth. On she came with her golden hair streaming in the wind, and her habit flying wildly around her. Fair and proud as ever was her exquisite face, and blue as ever her flashing eyes. But it seemed to

me that she was pale and thin, and my heart leaped with a sudden joy; and then stood still.

Maud! my princess! my beloved! Would she see me? Would she pass me without a word, with only a tightening of those proud lips, and a haughty flash from those beautiful eyes?

I had meant to look upon her and come away. There may be men who could have done it. I could not. As she came upon me, I stood out from the shadows upon the dark moor, and right in her path.

Fool that I was! Back on his haunches reared the Black Prince, trembling with fright, and she—she must have fallen, but that I sprung forward and caught her. The Black Prince galloped away into the darkness, and she, my Maud, lay in my arms.

A great madness came upon me. Every thought save one was blotted out from my memory. Maud was in my arms, with her face close to mine, and bending down, our lips met in one long, passionate kiss.

"Hugh!"

"Maud!"

No sound but the sound of Black Prince's furious gallop as he tore across the country moor! No one in sight, no one near, I was alone with Maud, my Maud, by the color which had chased the ivory pallor from her cheeks, and the love- light which shone in her eyes. "Why have you kept away so long?" she whispered softly.

Why had I come at all! His daughter in my arms yielding herself to my embrace, and her lips to my wild kiss! Oh, it was madness! I was a traitor.

"I should not have come," I groaned, "but to bid you farewell. We sail for Egypt in three days. I struggled hard to keep away; but I could not."

"Why should you wish to, Hugh?" she whispered, burying her face on my shoulder. "Do you hate me so much?"

"Hate you!" I drew her unresistingly into my arms again, and again my traitorous lips touched hers. Never a thought of a miserable exile dwelling amongst a strange people in deadly peril under a scorching sun, or of a hermit sybarite with the blast of fame in his ears, and all the luxuries of wealth ready to his touch, and a black lie burning in his heart! Never a thought of any save of her! Weak traitor that I was.

What is there so maddeningly sweet as to love and be loved again! The world died away from me and time ceased, whilst Maud, with her lovely face wet with tears, and happy with smiles, stood clasped in my arms on the wild open moor. The wind howled around us, and the driving rain and mist beat in our faces, and the twilight deepened into darkness; but what did we care! The only light I looked for was the gleam in her soft eyes, and the only touch I felt was the beating of her heart against mine. But the time came when memory swept again into my mind, and I trembled.

She saw the change pass over my face, and with a woman's marvellous quickness she divined what had caused it. But she clung the closer to me.

"Hugh, is this to be the end of it?" she cried. "When you leave me, will you never come back?" and I turned away with a great sob.

"Oh, that you were another man's daughter, Maud!" and she was answered.

Black clouds were driving across the sky, and a black cloud settled upon my heart. The words rang in my ears. Never come back!' Never come back! Never come back!

A dark shape stole up to us, and stood by our side. Then there was a glad neigh and a prolonged snort. The Black Prince had recognised me, and was rubbing his nose against my coat-sleeve.

"I must go, Hugh!" Slowly I lifted her in to the saddle, and stood by her side in silence because I could not speak.

"Hugh, kiss me once more!"

She stooped down and held a white, strained face close to mine. One clinging kiss I pressed upon her quivering lips, and then I drew aside. But as she rode away into the darkness, she called to me a wild sobbing cry, which the wind dashed into my ears.

"Come back to me, Hugh, my love. You will come back to me," and scarce knowing what I did I answered her passionately:

"I will! I will!"

* * * * *

We were together on H.M.S. ORONTES, eastward bound, her father and I, but though we sat opposite one another at the captain's table, we never spoke. Sometimes I caught him looking at me wistfully, and then I remembered that I had saved his life. But I wanted no thanks for it, and from him I would receive none.

"Queer lot those Devereux," I heard one of my brother officers remark, unconscious of my presence. "Uncle and nephew, and don't speak! Must be something wrong, I should think."

"Looks like it. If the Colonel hadn't written that tremendously clever book, I should think he was a bit cracked."

"Might be further from the mark, I think. The young 'un isn't such a bad sort, only he's so confoundedly proud and close. Most unsociable fellow we ever had in the regiment!"

"He's a bit of a prig, I must say, but I don't dislike him. Splendid family, you know, and rolling in money. By the by," dropping his voice a little, "wasn't there something queer about one of 'em? This one's father, I believe?"

"Hush! Yes, I'll tell you all about it presently;" and then they strolled up the deck, and I heard no more.

Something queer about one of them! I turned away with the old pain at my heart. Would the something queer ever be made right? Yes, and the time was not far distant.

Chapter XLIII

Expiation.

Whether it was the stifling desert air or the anticipation of the morrow's battle, I cannot tell; but sleep for me was a thing impossible. We were encamped on the outskirts of a mighty plain and within an hour's march the Mahdi lay entrenched awaiting our attack. Outside my tent all was bustle and stir in preparation for the morrow's light, and a yellow moon was shining with a grim, ghostly, light upon our white tents, and the figures moving silently about.

There were many other reasons why I should be restless. We were within a day's march, they could not be further away, and they might be nearer, of my father and Burton Leigh. Every day came tidings of the two white men on whose heads the Mahdi had set an enormous price, and who lived in deadly peril for fear of the treachery of their wavering friends, and to-morrow their fate would be decided, for if the tribe of the Asarees seceded to the false prophet and joined in the fight, then they were most surely doomed. But if, on the other hand, they held aloof from the fight, then would my father and Burton Leigh have succeeded in their daring mission, and would reach us in safety to be received as heroes.

A shadow darkened my tent, and an orderly stood before me, saluting.

"Colonel Devereux would like particularly to see you in his tent, sir."

What could it mean! Neither word, nor glance had passed between us since we left England on board the same ship. I followed the man with beating heart.

The vision of a man physically weak who, after a mortal struggle with some fiendish sin, has cast it from him and come out of the fight dying but triumphant, with a spiritual joy; it seemed to me that this was what I saw when I stood face to face with my Uncle Rupert. Ghastly pale, but firm, with deep lines suddenly engraven across his forehead, but with the light of a great calm resolution in his eyes, he stood before me, and I trembled, for strong and clear the conviction of the truth flashed upon me. The day for which. I had longed with such a sickening desire had come.

"Hugh," he said, quietly, "to-night is my last on earth. People may scoff at presentiments who never feel them. Like a still whisper from another world, have heard the truth. In to-morrow's fight I shall die."

I would have spoken, but it was impossible. The words stuck in my throat.

"One word about this sin of mine, Hugh," he went on in a strange, calm tone, "it was done in a mad impulse of jealousy—in a moment of madness which a lifetime of misery has not expiated. Every one knows that I have been an unhappy man. Success and fame have only been glow-worms leading me on into a marsh of discontent. With a guilty conscience no man on earth can be happy!"

He took up a roll of papers from a table by his side and summoned his servant.

"Greasely, go to General Fielding's tent and tell him I am ready."

I stood there still in silence. My uncle sank into a low chair and half covered his face. In less than a minute the opening to the tent was lifted, and our commander-in-chief, followed by a younger officer, entered.

"Colonel Devereux," he said, kindly but promptly, "in accordance with my promise I am here, and I have brought Captain Luxton. I can spare you five minutes."

Like a gaunt spectre my uncle came out from the shades of the tent, and his sad, weary tone moved even my pity.

“Three will be sufficient,” he said. “General Fielding, a quarter of a century ago you heard me commit perjury against my brother; and your father, Captain Luxton, pronounced the sentence. It is for this reason I have asked you to witness my confession. You have already read it.”

He took up his pen and signed the roll of paper. General Fielding and Captain Luxton immediately followed suit, and the former took possession of the document.

“General Fielding,” my uncle continued, with a voice that commenced to shake a little, “I am already your debtor, inasmuch as you permit me to retain my commission until after to-morrow’s fight. But I ask you still another favor.”

The General bowed, and there was a decided gleam of compassion in his stern face.

“Let this matter be cleared up immediately after to-morrow’s fight. If my brother be found alive, which God grant that he may, let my confession be read in open court-martial, however informal, at once,” he pleaded.

“It shall be done. Luxton, we must be off. Gentlemen, good night.”

“We were alone, my uncle and I. His unnatural, calm seemed to be breaking up, and the look of agony on his face filled me with compassion—aye, compassion even towards him.

“There is something still troubling you,” I said quietly. “You are thinking of Maud.”

He looked at me wildly. I knew that I was right.

“Maud’s future will be in my hands,” I told him in a low tone. “She loves me, and she will be my wife.”

At first he seemed dazed, then, as he began to realise my words, a great sob of relief shook him from head to foot.

“And Francis,” I added, after a short pause, “I will remember that he is my cousin—and my brother.”

He stood up like one who has passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, yet with a look almost of peace upon his spiritualised face.

“Hugh, will you take my hand?”

I took it, wrung it warmly, and left him. What more could I have done? He was better alone.

* * * * *

Like the sands of the desert before a fierce sirocco, the followers of the false prophet were flying far and wide. It had been a fierce fight. They had come down upon us like a whirlwind, with their lances gleaming like silver in the sunlight, and wild cries of “Allah! Allah!” bursting from their lips. But the maddening enthusiasm of fanatical zeal had quickly burnt itself out. We had driven them behind their trenches, only to carry them at the point of the bayonet and drive them out into the desert. The victory was complete.

With my broken sword still in my hand, and my face streaming with blood and perspiration, I kneeled with wildly beating heart by the side of my father’s prostrate body. For I had found him lying white and still at the bottom of one of the trenches, and—oh! the horror of it!—with a great gaping wound in his side.

“My father! My father, speak to me!” I cried. “O God! if this should be death!”

He opened his eyes slowly, and, dimmed though they were, he recognised me at once.

"Hugh, Hugh, my boy. Thank God!" he faltered out.

"You are wounded," I sobbed. "Are you in pain? Tell me, father."

A spasm of agony passed over his face, but he answered me in a while.

"My side—a spear-head. 'Twill soon be over."

I passed my arm around him, and gazed into his face with streaming eyes.

"Father, you must live," I sobbed. "Rupert Devereux has confessed. All is known!"

He nodded, and smiled faintly. "I know, Hugh. He was first over the trenches. They were murdering me. He fought like a devil. There they lie—five of them. He saved my life, and crawled here as he was dying—told me—everything. I forgave him. See."

I looked around, and there, scarcely a yard away, lay my Uncle Rupert, with a calm peace in his white face, turned to heaven, which in life he had never known.

* * * * *

A strange scene. General Fielding, with a little crowd of officers around him, at one end of the tent, and a little distance away my father lying on a stretcher, with a surgeon on one side striving to stanch the blood which flowed from that hideous, gaping wound, whilst on the other I knelt clasping his hands and anxiously watching his face.

General Fielding had done all in his power. He had read my Uncle Rupert's confession, and had formally rescinded the verdict of General Luxton. The black stain of dishonor no longer rested upon my father's name. But this greatest of joys had surely come too late; for the hand which I held passionately clasped in mine was growing colder and colder every moment, and the surgeon's face was very grave.

"Is there hope?" I faltered out. But the doctor shook his head.

"Very little, I fear," he whispered. "I am expecting hemorrhage every moment."

A deep silence reigned in the tent, a silence which seemed ominously like the silence of death. Suddenly he reopened his eyes, and a feeling of sickening agony stole over me, for there was a deeper film than ever upon them.

He smiled very faintly and struggled to speak, but the words died away on his lips. I bent closer still, and strove to catch his meaning.

"Hugh—my—s—." The fingers of his right hand were moving nervously about, and I knew what he meant.

"General Fielding," I said, standing up, with hot, burning eyes, and with a choking in my throat, "he wants his sword."

The General stepped forward, and, unsheathing his own, held it by the blade, and my father's long fingers, trembling with eagerness, wound themselves around it. Then he sank back with a little satisfied gasp, and I knew that he was at rest.

Chapter XLIV

Hero.

I had kept my vow, for though I was again within the park of Devereux, and in sight of the grand old mansion, my father was by my side. A splendid constitution had saved him from the very jaws of death, and he had recovered to find his country ringing with his name, and himself a hero. Our journey had been like a triumphal progress. Distinguished men, amongst whom old General Luxton, had met us at London to welcome my father back to his country, and all the way down we had been besieged by newspaper reporters, and little knots of people were gathered on the platform at every station, to gaze at us and shout a welcome; and at the little wayside station such crowds of the country folk were gathered together that progress along the narrow winding lane was almost an impossibility. And now we were at the last sweep of the drive, surrounded by lines of shouting tenants and servants, who stood uncovered as we approached, and made the air vibrate with lusty Yorkshire cheers.

It was one of those days which a man may live to be a hundred years old, and never forget; and yet it would dwell in his mind, less by its actual events than by the effect which it left. I remember a noble-looking, grey-haired old man standing out in the sunlight, with outstretched hands and a great joy in his face, and I remember a deep hush falling upon the assembled crowd as father and son met after so many years—a hush which lasted until they stood there, hand grasping hand, and the first words were spoken—then it gave place to a shout which seemed to shake the air.

And I remember Maud's greeting—how could I ever forget it? Cold she was at first, cold but kind—after the manner of the days when I was Hugh Arbuthnot, a presumptuous boy. But when I told her of my interview with her father on the night before the battle, when I took her into my arms with words of passionate love and bade her recall our last parting, then she yielded and became my Maud, and mine she has been ever since.

* * * * *

Had I told this story of mine as a professed story-writer, there are many things now omitted which would in their proper place have been recounted. I should have said more of Marian, the happiest of young wives, and of the joy with which she welcomed us home. I should have told of Lady Olive's brilliant marriage to the Earl of ——, and of Francis Devereux's reformation and success at the bar, and of Burton Leigh's extraordinary reappearance in the world after having long been mourned as dead, and of my father's joy at meeting again his old companion. There are other things, too, which should have been told, but let them pass! One more incident alone shall I relate.

* * * * *

Again I stood in the grand old picture gallery of the Court, amongst the shades of many generations of Devereux. We three were there—Sir Francis, my father, and I; Sir Francis out of sight, my father and I bending over a curious piece of armor.

Suddenly we both looked up. Out of the dark shades of the lower end of the chamber my grandfather was coming towards us, walking steadily down between the long rows of pictures, with measured military tramp and head thrown back. But we could see by his fixed gaze and the strange rapt look on his face that something was wrong, and almost simultaneously we sprang forward to him.

We were just in time. Suddenly he threw up his arms over his head, and cried out with a loud voice: “It was a lie! It was a lie! Thank God, Herbert, my son! Hugh, my boy. God bless you both!”

He sank back into my arms. And the moonlight, streaming in upon his face, showed it gentle and peaceful as a child’s. Death struggle there was none. With a calm, satisfied smile of perfect happiness the life seemed to glide away from him, and with his last breath we heard him murmur softly:

“Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace—in peace.”