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THE AMAZING MARRIAGE

By George Meredith

1895

BOOK 3.

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CHAPTER XX

STUDIES IN FOG, GOUT, AN OLD SEAMAN, A LOVELY SERPENT, AND THE MORAL EFFECTS THAT MAY COME OF A BORROWED SHIRT

Money of his father's enabled Gower to take the coach; and studies in fog, from the specked brown to the woolly white, and the dripping torn, were proposed to the traveller, whose preference of Nature's face did not arrest his observation of her domino and petticoats; across which blank sheets he curiously read backward, that he journeyed by the aid of his father's hard-earned, ungrudged piece of gold. Without it, he would have been useless in this case of need. The philosopher could starve with equanimity, and be the stronger. But one had, it seemed here clearly, to put on harness and trudge along a line, if the unhappy were to have one's help. Gradual experiences of his business among his fellows were teaching an exercised mind to learn in regions where minds unexercised were doctoral giants beside it.

The study of gout was offered at Chinningfold. Admiral Fakenham's butler refused at first to take a name to his master. Gower persisted, stating the business of his mission; and in spite of the very suspicious glib good English spoken by a man wearing such a hat and suit, the butler was induced to consult Mrs. Carthew.

She sprang up alarmed. After having seen the young lady happily married and off with her lordly young husband, the arrival of a messenger from the bride gave a stir the wrong way to her flowing recollections; the scenes and incidents she had smothered under her love of the comfortable stood forth appallingly. The messenger, the butler said, was no gentleman. She inspected Gower and heard him speak. An anomaly had come to the house; for he had the language of a gentleman, the appearance of a nondescript; he looked indifferent, he spoke sympathetically; and he was frank as soon as the butler was out of hearing. In return for the compliment, she invited him to her sitting-room. The story of the young countess, whom she had seen driven away by her husband from the church in a coach and four, as being now destitute, praying to see her friends, in the Whitechapel of London--the noted haunt of thieves and outcasts, bankrupts and the abandoned; set her asking for the first time, who was the man with dreadful countenance inside the coach? A previously disregarded horror of a man. She went trembling to the admiral, though his health was delicate, his temper excitable. It was, she considered, an occasion for braving the doctor's interdict.

Gower was presently summoned to the chamber where Admiral Fakenham reclined on cushions in an edifice of an arm-chair. He told a plain tale. Its effect was to straighten the admiral's back, and enlarge in grey glass a pair of sea-blue eyes. And, 'What's that? Whitechapel?' the admiral exclaimed,--at high pitch, far above his understanding. The particulars were repeated, whereupon the sick-room shook with, 'Greengrocer?' He stunned himself with another of the monstrous points in his pet girl's honeymoon: 'A prizefight?'

To refresh a saving incredulity, he took a closer view of the messenger. Gower's habiliments were those of the 'queer fish,' the admiral saw. But the meeting at Carlsruhe was recalled to him, and there was a worthy effort to remember it. 'Prize-fight!--Greengrocer! Whitechapel!' he rang the changes rather more moderately; till, swelling and purpling, he cried: 'Where's the husband?'

That was the emissary's question likewise.

'If I could have found him, sir, I should not have troubled you.'

'Disappeared? Plays the man of his word, then plays the madman! Prize-fight the first day of her honeymoon? Good Lord! Leaves her at the inn?'

'She was left.'

'When was she left?'

'As soon as the fight was over--as far as I understand.'

The admiral showered briny masculine comments on that bridegroom.

'Her brother's travelling somewhere in the Pyrenees--married my daughter. She has an uncle, a hermit.' He became pale. 'I must do it. The rascal insults us all. Flings her off the day he married her! It 's a slap in the face to all of us. You are acquainted with the lady, sir. Would you call her a red-haired girl?'

'Red-gold of the ballads; chestnut-brown, with threads of fire.'

'She has the eyes for a man to swear by. I feel the loss of her, I can tell you. She was wine and no penalty to me. Is she much broken under it?--if I 'm to credit . . . I suppose I must. It floors me.'

Admiral Baldwin's frosty stare returned on him. Gower caught an image of it, as comparable, without much straining, to an Arctic region smitten by the beams.

'Nothing breaks her courage,' he said.

'To be sure, my poor dear! Who could have guessed when she left my house she was on her way to a prizefight and a greengrocer's in Whitechapel. But the dog's not mad, though his bite 's bad; he 's an eccentric mongrel. He wants the whip; ought to have had it regularly from his first breeching. He shall whistle for her when he repents; and he will, mark me. This gout here will be having a snap at the vitals if I don't start to-night. Oblige me, half a minute.'

The admiral stretched his hand for an arm to give support, stood, and dropped into the chair, signifying a fit of giddiness in the word 'Head.'

Before the stupor had passed, Mrs. Carthew entered, anxious lest the admittance of a messenger of evil to her invalid should have been an error of judgement. The butler had argued it with her. She belonged to the list of persons appointed to cut life's thread when it strains, their general kindness being so liable to misdirection.

Gower left the room and went into the garden. He had never seen a death; and the admiral's peculiar pallor intimated events proper to days of cold mist and a dripping stillness. How we go, was the question among his problems:--if we are to go! his youthful frame insistingly added.

The fog down a wet laurel-walk contracted his mind with the chilling of his blood, and he felt that he would have to see the thing if he was to believe in it. Of course he believed, but life throbbed rebelliously, and a picture of a desk near a lively fire-grate, books and pen and paper, and a piece of writing to be approved of by the Hesper of ladies, held ground with a pathetic heroism against the inevitable. He got his wits to the front by walking faster; and then thought of the young countess and the friend she might be about to lose. She could number her friends on her fingers. Admiral Fakenham's exclamations of the name of the place where she now was, conveyed an inky idea of the fall she had undergone. Counting her absent brother, with himself, his father, and the two Whitechapel girls, it certainly was an unexampled fall, to say of her, that they and those two girls had become by the twist of circumstances the most serviceable of her friends.

Her husband was the unriddled riddle we have in the wealthy young lord,-- burning to possess, and making, tatters of all he grasped, the moment it was his own. Glints of the devilish had shot from him at the gamingtables,--fine haunts for the study of our lower man. He could be magnificent in generosity; he had little humaneness. He coveted beauty in women hungrily, and seemed to be born hostile to them; or so Gower judged by the light of the later evidence on unconsidered antecedent observations of him. Why marry her to cast her off instantly? The crude philosopher asked it as helplessly as the admiral. And, further, what did the girl Madge mean by the drop of her voice to a hum of enforced endurance under injury, like the furnace behind an iron door? Older men might have understood, as he was aware; he might have guessed, only he had the habit of scattering meditation upon the game of hawk and fowl.

Dame Gossip boils. Her one idea of animation is to have her dramatic persona in violent motion, always the biggest foremost; and, indeed, that is the way to make them credible, for the wind they raise and the succession of collisions. The fault of the method is, that they do not instruct; so the breath is out of them before they are put aside; for the uninformative are the humanly deficient: they remain with us like the tolerated old aristocracy, which may not govern, and is but socially seductive. The deuteragonist or secondary person can at times tell us more of them than circumstances at furious heat will help them to reveal; and the Dame will have him only as an index-post. Hence her endless ejaculations over the mystery of Life, the inscrutability of character, --in a plain world, in the midst of such readable people! To preserve Romance (we exchange a sky for a ceiling if we let it go), we must be

inside the heads of our people as well as the hearts, more than shaking the kaleidoscope of hurried spectacles, in days of a growing activity of the head.

Gower Woodseer could not know that he was drawn on to fortune and the sight of his Hesper by Admiral Fakenham's order that the visitor was to stay at his house until he should be able to quit his bed, and journey with him to London, doctor or no doctor. The doctor would not hear of it. The admiral threatened it every night for the morning, every morning for the night; and Gower had to submit to postponements balefully affecting his linen. Remonstrance was not to be thought of; for at a mere show of reluctance the courtly admiral flushed, frowned, and beat the bed where he lay, a gouty volcano. Gower's one shirt was passing through the various complexions, and had approached the Nubian on its way to negro. His natural candour checked the downward course. He mentioned to Mrs. Carthew, with incidental gravity, on a morning at breakfast, that this article of his attire 'was beginning to resemble London snow.' She was amused; she promised him a change more resembling country snow. 'It will save me from buttoning so high up,' he said, as he thanked her. She then remembered the daily increase of stiffness in his figure: and a reflection upon his patient waiting, and simpleness, and lexicographer speech to expose his minor needs, touched her unused sense of humour on the side where it is tender in women, from being motherly.

In consequence, she spoke of him with a pleading warmth to the Countess Livia, who had come down to see the admiral 'concerning an absurd but annoying rumour running over London.' Gower was out for a walk. He knew of the affair, Mrs. Carthew said, for an introduction to her excuses of his clothing.

'But I know the man,' said Livia. 'Lord Fleetwood picked him up somewhere, and brought him to us. Clever: Why, is he here?'

'He is here, sent to the admiral, as I understand, my lady.'

'Sent by whom?'

Having but a weak vocabulary to defend a delicate position, Mrs. Carthew stuttered into evasions, after the way of ill-armed persons; and naming herself a stranger to the circumstances, she feebly suggested that the admiral ought not to be disturbed before the doctor's next visit; Mr. Woodseer had been allowed to sit by his bed yesterday only for ten minutes, to divert him with his talk. She protected in this wretched manner the poor gentleman she sacrificed and emitted such a smell of secrecy, that Livia wrote three words on her card, for it to be taken to Admiral Baldwin at once. Mrs. Carthew supplicated faintly; she was unheeded.

The Countess of Fleetwood mounted the stairs--to descend them with the knowledge of her being the Dowager Countess of Fleetwood! Henrietta had spoken of the Countess of Fleetwood's hatred of the title of Dowager. But when Lady Fleetwood had the fact from the admiral, would she forbear to excite him? If she repudiated it, she would provoke him to fire 'one

of his broadsides,'--as they said in the family, to assert its and that might exhaust him; and there was peril in that. And who was guilty? Mrs. Carthew confessed her guilt, asking how it could have been avoided. She made appeal to Gower on his return, transfixing him.

Not only is he no philosopher who has an idol, he has to learn that he cannot think rationally; his due sense of weight and measure is lost, the choice of his thoughts as well. He was in the house with his devoutly, simply worshipped, pearl of women, and his whole mind fell to work without ado upon the extravagant height of the admiral's shirt-collar cutting his ears. The very beating of his heart was perplexed to know whether it was for rapture or annoyance. As a result he was but histrionically master of himself when the Countess Livia or the nimbus of the lady appeared in the room.

She received his bow; she directed Mrs. Carthew to have the doctor summoned immediately. The remorseful woman flew.

'Admiral Fakenham is very ill, Mr. Woodseer, he has had distracting news. Oh, no, the messenger is not blamed. You are Lord Fleetwood's friend and will not allow him to be prejudged. He will be in town shortly. I know him well, you know him; and could you hear him accused of cruelty--and to a woman? He is the soul of chivalry. So, in his way, is the admiral. If he were only more patient! Let us wait for Lord Fleetwood's version. I am certain it will satisfy me. The admiral wishes you to step up to him. Be very quiet; you will be; consent to everything. I was unaware of his condition: the things I heard were incredible. I hope the doctor will not delay. Now go. Beg to retire soon.'

Livia spoke under her breath; she had fears.

Admiral Baldwin lay in his bed, submitting to a nurse-woman-sign of extreme exhaustion. He plucked strength from the sight of Gower and bundled the woman out of the room, muttering: 'Kill myself? Not half so quick as they'd do it. I can't rest for that Whitechapel of yours. Please fetch pen and paper: it's a letter.'

The letter began, 'Dear Lady Arpington.'

The dictation of it came in starts. At one moment it seemed as if life's ending shook the curtains on our stage and were about to lift. An old friend in the reader of the letter would need no excuse for its jerky brevity. It said that his pet girl, Miss Kirby, was married to the Earl of Fleetwood in the first week of last month, and was now to be found at a shop No. 45 Longways, Whitechapel; that the writer was ill, unable to stir; that he would be in London within eight-and-forty hours at furthest. He begged Lady Arpington to send down to the place and have the young countess fetched to her, and keep her until he came.

Admiral Baldwin sat up to sign the letter.

'Yes, and write "miracles happen when the devil's abroad"--done it!' he said, sinking back. 'Now seal, you'll find wax--the ring at my watch-

chain.'

He sighed, as it were the sound of his very last; he lay like a sleeper twitched by a dream. There had been a scene with Livia. The dictating of the letter took his remainder of strength out of him.

Gower called in the nurse, and went downstairs. He wanted the address of Lady Arpington's town house.

'You have a letter for her?' said Livia, and held her hand for it in a way not to be withstood.

'There's no superscription,' he remarked.

'I will see to that, Mr. Woodseer.'

'I fancy I am bound, Lady Fleetwood.'

'By no means.' She touched his arm. 'You are Lord Fleetwood's friend.'

A slight convulsion of the frame struck the admiral's shirt-collar at his ears; it virtually prostrated him under foot of a lady so benign in overlooking the spectacle he presented. Still, he considered; he had wits alive enough, just to perceive a duty.

'The letter was entrusted to me, Lady Fleetwood.'

'You are afraid to entrust it to the post?'

'I was thinking of delivering it myself in town.'

'You will entrust it to me.'

'Anything on earth of my own.'

'The treasure would be valued. This you confide to my care.'

'It is important.'

'No.'

'Indeed it is.'

'Say that it is, then. It is quite safe with me. It may be important that it should not be delivered. Are you not Lord Fleetwood's friend? Lady Arpington is not so very, very prominent in the list with you and me. Besides, I don't think she has come to town yet. She generally sees out the end of the hunting season. Leave the letter to me: it shall go. You, with your keen observation missing nothing, have seen that my uncle has not his whole judgement at present. There are two sides to a case. Lord Fleetwood's friend will know that it would be unfair to offer him up to his enemies while he is absent. Things going favourably here, I drive back to town to-morrow, and I hope you will accept a seat in my

carriage.'

He delivered his courtliest; he was riding on cloud.

They talked of Baden. His honourable surrender of her defeated purse was a subject for gentle humour with her, venturesome compliment with him. He spoke well; and though his hands were clean of Sir Meeson Corby's reproach of them, the caricature of presentable men blushed absurdly and seemed uneasy in his monstrous collar. The touching of him again would not be required to set him pacing to her steps. His hang of the head testified to the unerring stamp of a likeness Captain Abrane could affix with a stroke: he looked the fiddler over his bow, playing wonderfully to conceal the crack of a string. The merit of being one of her army of admirers was accorded to him. The letter to Lady Arpington was retained.

Gower deferred the further mention of the letter until a visit to the admiral's chamber should furnish an excuse; and he had to wait for it. Admiral Baldwin's condition was becoming ominous. He sent messages downstairs by the doctor, forbidding his guest's departure until they two could make the journey together next day. The tortured and blissful young man, stripped of his borrowed philosopher's cloak, hung conscience-ridden in this delicious bower, which was perceptibly an antechamber of the vaults, offering him the study he thirsted for, shrank from, and mixed with his cup of amorous worship.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH WE HAVE FURTHER GLIMPSES OF THE WONDROUS MECHANISM OF OUR YOUNGER MAN

The report of Admiral Baldwin Fakenham as having died in the arms of a stranger visiting the house, hit nearer the mark than usual. He yielded his last breath as Gower Woodseer was lowering him to his pillow, shortly after a husky whisper of the letter to Lady Arpington; and that was one of Gower's crucial trials. It condemned him, for the pacifying of a dying man, to the murmur and shuffle, which was a lie; and the lie burnt him, contributed to the brand on his race. He and his father upheld a solitary bare staff, where the Cambrian flag had flown, before their people had been trampled in mire, to do as the worms. His loathing of any shadow of the lie was a protest on behalf of Welsh blood against an English charge, besides the passion for spiritual cleanliness: without which was no comprehension, therefore no enjoyment, of Nature possible to him. For Nature is the Truth.

He begged the countess to let him have the letter; he held to the petition, with supplications; he spoke of his pledged word, his honour; and her countenance did not deny to such an object as she beheld the right to a sense of honour. 'We all have the sentiment, I hope, Mr. Woodseer,' she said, stupefying the worshipper, who did not see it manifested. There was a look of gentle intimacy, expressive of common

grounds between them, accompanying the dead words. Mistress of the letter, and the letter safe under lock, the admiral dead, she had not to bestow a touch of her hand on his coatsleeve in declining to return it. A face languidly and benevolently querulous was bent on him, when he, so clever a man, resumed his very silly petition.

She was moon out of cloud at a change of the theme. Gower journeyed to London without the letter, intoxicated, and conscious of poison; enamoured of it, and straining for health. He had to reflect at the journey's end, that he had picked up nothing on the road, neither a thing observed nor a thing imagined; he was a troubled pool instead of a flowing river.

The best help to health for him was a day in his father's house. We are perpetually at our comparisons of ourselves with others; and they are mostly profitless; but the man carrying his religious light, to light the darkest ways of his fellows, and keeping good cheer, as though the heart of him ran a mountain water through the grimy region, plucked at Gower with an envy to resemble him in practice. His philosophy, too, reproached him for being outshone. Apart from his philosophy, he stood confessed a bankrupt; and it had dwindled to near extinction. Adoration of a woman takes the breath out of philosophy. And if one had only to say sheer donkey, he consenting to be driven by her! One has to say worse in this case; for the words are, liar and traitor.

Carinthia's attitude toward his father conduced to his emulous respect for the old man, below whom, and indeed below the roadway of ordinary principles hedged with dull texts, he had strangely fallen. The sight of her lashed him. She made it her business or it was her pleasure to go the rounds beside Mr. Woodseer visiting his poor people. She spoke of the scenes she witnessed, and threw no stress on the wretchedness, having only the wish to assist in ministering. Probably the great wretchedness bubbling over the place blunted her feeling of loss at the word of Admiral Baldwin's end; her bosom sprang up: 'He was next to father,' was all she said; and she soon reverted to this and that house of the lodgings of poverty. She had descended on the world. There was of course a world outside Whitechapel, but Whitechapel was hot about her; the nests of misery, the sharp note of want in the air, tricks of an urchin who had amused her.

As to the place itself, she had no judgement to pronounce, except that: 'They have no mornings here'; and the childish remark set her quivering on her heights, like one seen through a tear, in Gower's memory. Scarce anything of her hungry impatience to meet her husband was visible: she had come to London to meet him; she hoped to meet him soon: before her brother's return, she could have added. She mentioned the goodness of Sarah Winch in not allowing that she was a burden to support. Money and its uses had impressed her; the quantity possessed by some, the utter need of it for the first of human purposes by others. Her speech was not of so halting or foreign an English. She grew rapidly wherever she was planted.

Speculation on the conduct of her husband, empty as it might be, was

necessitated in Gower. He pursued it, and listened to his father similarly at work: 'A young lady fit for any station, the kindest of souls, a born charitable human creature, void of pride, near in all she --does and thinks to the Shaping Hand, why should her husband forsake her on the day of their nuptials.

She is most gracious; the simplicity of an infant. Can you imagine the doing of an injury by a man to a woman like her?'

Then it was that Gower screwed himself to say:

'Yes, I can imagine it, I'm doing it myself. I shall be doing it till I've written a letter and paid a visit.'

He took a meditative stride or two in the room, thinking without revulsion of the Countess Livia under a similitude of the bell of the plant henbane, and that his father had immunity from temptation because of the insensibility to beauty. Out of which he passed to the writing of the letter to Lord Fleetwood, informing his lordship that he intended immediately to deliver a message to the Marchioness of Arpington from Admiral Baldwin Fakenham, in relation to the Countess of Fleetwood. A duty was easily done by Gower when he had surmounted the task of conceiving his resolution to do it; and this task, involving an offence to the Lady Livia and intrusion of his name on a nobleman's recollection, ranked next in severity to the chopping off of his fingers by a man suspecting them of the bite of rabies.

An interview with Lady Arpington was granted him the following day.

She was a florid, aquiline, loud-voiced lady, evidently having no seat for her wonderments, after his account of the origin of his acquaintance with the admiral had quieted her suspicions. The world had only to stand beside her, and it would hear what she had heard. She rushed to the conclusion that Lord Fleetwood had married a person of no family.

'Really, really, that young man's freaks appear designed for the express purpose of heightening our amazement!' she exclaimed. 'He won't easily get beyond a wife in the east of London, at a shop; but there's no knowing. Any wish of Admiral Baldwin Fakenham's I hold sacred. At least I can see for myself. You can't tell me more of the facts? If Lord Fleetwood's in town, I will call him here at once. I will drive down to this address you give me. She is a civil person?'

'Her breeding is perfect,' said Gower.

'Perfect breeding, you say?' Lady Arpington was reduced to a murmur. She considered the speaker: his outlandish garb, his unprotesting self-possession. He spoke good English by habit, her ear told her. She was of an eminence to judge of a man impartially, even to the sufferance of an opinion from him, on a subject that lesser ladies would have denied to his clothing. Outwardly simple, naturally frank, though a tangle of the complexities inwardly, he was a touchstone for true aristocracy, as the humblest who bear the main elements of it must be. Certain humorous

turns in his conversation won him an amicable smile when he bowed to leave: they were the needed finish of a favourable impression.

One day later the earl arrived in town, read Gower Woodseer's brief words, and received the consequently expected summons, couched in a great lady's plain imperative. She was connected with his family on the paternal side.

He went obediently; not unwillingly, let the deputed historian of the Marriage, turning over documents, here say. He went to Lady Arpington disposed for marital humaneness and jog-trot harmony, by condescension; equivalent to a submitting to the drone of an incessant psalm at the drum of the ear. He was, in fact, rather more than inclined that way. When very young, at the age of thirteen, a mood of religious fervour had spiritualized the dulness of Protestant pew and pulpit for him. Another fit of it, in the Roman Catholic direction, had proposed, during his latest dilemma, to relieve him of the burden of his pledged word. He had plunged for a short space into the rapturous contemplation of a monastic life--'the clean soul for the macerated flesh,' as that fellow Woodseer said once: and such as his friend, the Roman Catholic Lord Feltre, moodily talked of getting in his intervals. He had gone down to a young and novel trial establishment of English penitents in the forest of a Midland county, and had watched and envied, and seen the escape from a lifelong bondage to the 'beautiful Gorgon,' under cover of a white flannel frock. The world pulled hard, and he gave his body into chains of a woman, to redeem his word.

But there was a plea on behalf of this woman. The life she offered might have psalmic iteration; the dead monotony of it in prospect did, nevertheless, exorcise a devil. Carinthia promised, it might seem to chase and keep the black beast out of him permanently, as she could, he now conceived: for since the day of the marriage with her, the devil inhabiting him had at least been easier, 'up in a corner.'

He held an individual memory of his bride, rose-veiled, secret to them both, that made them one, by subduing him. For it was a charm; an actual feminine, an unanticipated personal, charm; past reach of tongue to name, wordless in thought. There, among the folds of the incense vapours of our heart's holy of holies, it hung; and it was rare, it was distinctive of her, and alluring, if one consented to melt to it, and accepted for compensation the exorcising of a devil.

Oh, but no mere devil by title!--a very devil. It was alert and frisky, flushing, filling the thin cold idea of Henrietta at a thought; and in the thought it made Carinthia's intimate charm appear as no better than a thing to enrich a beggar, while he knew that kings could never command the charm. Not love, only the bathing in Henrietta's incomparable beauty and the desire to be, desire to have been, the casket of it, broke the world to tempest and lightnings at a view of Henrietta the married woman --married to the brother of the woman calling him husband:--'It is my husband.' The young tyrant of wealth could have avowed that he did not love Henrietta; but not the less was he in the swing of a whirlwind at the hint of her loving the man she had married. Did she? It might be

tried.

She? That Henrietta is one of the creatures who love pleasure, love flattery, love their beauty: they cannot love a man. Or the love is a ship that will not sail a sea.

Now, if the fact were declared and attested, if her shallowness were seen proved, one might get free of the devil she plants in the breast. Absolutely to despise her would be release, and it would allow of his tasting Carinthia's charm, reluctantly acknowledged; not 'money of the country' beside that golden Henrietta's.

Yet who can say?--women are such deceptions. Often their fairest, apparently sweetest, when brought to the keenest of the tests, are graceless; or worse, artificially consonant; in either instance barren of the poetic. Thousands of the confidently expectant among men have been unbewitched; a lamentable process; and the grimly reticent and the loudly discursive are equally eloquent of the pretty general disillusion. How they loathe and tear the mask of the sham attraction that snatched them to the hag yoke, and fell away to show its grisly horrors within the round of the month, if not the second enumeration of twelve by the clock! Fleetwood had heard certain candid seniors talk, delivering their minds in superior appreciation of unpretentious boor wenches, nature's products, not esteemed by him. Well, of a truth, she--'Red Hair and Rugged Brows,' as the fellow Woodseer had called her, in alternation with 'Mountain Face to Sun'--she at the unveiling was gentle, surpassingly; graceful in the furnace of the trial. She wore through the critic ordeal his burning sensitiveness to grace and delicacy cast about a woman, and was rather better than not withered by it.

On the borders between maidenly and wifely, she, a thing of flesh like other daughters of earth, had impressed her sceptical lord, inclining to contempt of her and detestation of his bargain, as a flitting hue, ethereal, a transfiguration of earthliness in the core of the earthly furnace. And how?--but that it must have been the naked shining forth of her character, startled to show itself:--'It is my husband':--it must have been love.

The love that they versify, and strum on guitars, and go crazy over, and end by roaring at as the delusion; this common bloom of the ripeness of a season; this would never have utterly captured a sceptic, to vanquish him in his mastery, snare him in her surrender. It must have been the veritable passion: a flame kept alive by vestal ministrants in the yewwood of the forest of Old Romance; planted only in the breasts of very favourite maidens. Love had eyes, love had a voice that night,--love was the explicable magic lifting terrestrial to seraphic. Though, true, she had not Henrietta's golden smoothness of beauty. Henrietta, illumined with such a love, would outdo all legends, all dreams of the tale of love. Would she? For credulous men she would be golden coin of the currency. She would not have a particular wild flavour: charm as of the running doe that has taken a dart and rolls an eye to burst the hunter's heart with pity.

Fleetwood went his way to Lady Arpington almost complacently, having fought and laid his wilder self. He might be likened to the doctor's patient entering the chemist's shop, with a prescription for a drug of healing virtue, upon which the palate is as little consulted as a robustious lollypop boy in the household of ceremonial parents, who have rung for the troop of their orderly domestics to sit in a row and hearken the intonation of good words.

CHAPTER XXII

A RIGHT-MINDED GREAT LADY

The bow, the welcome, and the introductory remarks passed rapidly as the pull at two sides of a curtain opening on a scene that stiffens courtliness to hard attention.

After the names of Admiral Baldwin and 'the Mr. Woodseer,' the name of Whitechapel was mentioned by Lady Arpington. It might have been the name of any other place.

'Ah, so far, then, I have to instruct you,' she said, observing the young earl. 'I drove down there yesterday. I saw the lady calling herself Countess of Fleetwood. By right? She was a Miss Kirby.'

'She has the right,' Fleetwood said, standing well up out of a discharge of musketry.

'Marriage not contested. You knew of her being in that place?--I can't describe it.'

'Your ladyship will pardon me?'

London's frontier of barbarism was named for him again, and in a tone to penetrate.

He refrained from putting the question of how she had come there.

As iron as he looked, he said: 'She stays there by choice.'

The great lady tapped her foot on the floor.

'You are not acquainted with the district.'

'One of my men comes out of it.'

'The coming out of it! . . . However, I understand her story, that she travelled from a village inn, where she had been left-without resources. She waited weeks; I forget how many. She has a description of maid in attendance on her. She came to London to find her husband. You were at the mines, we heard. Her one desire is to meet her husband.'

But, goodness! Fleetwood, why do you frown? You acknowledge the marriage, she has the name of the church; she was married out of that old Lord Levellier's house. You drove her--I won't repeat the flighty business. You left her, and she did her best to follow you. Will the young men of our time not learn that life is no longer a game when they have a woman for partner in the match!

You don't complain of her flavour of a foreign manner? She can't be so very . . . Admiral Baldwin's daughter has married her brother; and he is a military officer. She has germs of breeding, wants only a little rub of the world to smooth her. Speak to the point--do you meet her here? Do you refuse?'

'At present? I do.'

'Something has to be done.'

'She was bound to stay where I left her.'

'You are bound to provide for her becomingly.'

'Provision shall be made, of course.'

'The story will . . . unless--and quickly, too.'

I know, I know!

Fleetwood had the clang of all the bells of London chiming Whitechapel at him in his head, and he betrayed the irritated tyrant ready to decree fire and sword, for the defence or solace of his tender sensibilities.

The black flash flew.

'It 's a thing to mend as well as one can,' Lady Arpington said. 'I am not inquisitive: you had your reasons or chose to act without any. Get her away from that place. She won't come to me unless it 's to meet her husband. Ah, well, temper does not solve your problem; husband you are, if you married her. We'll leave the husband undiscussed: with this reserve, that it seems to me men are now beginning to play the misunderstood.'

'I hope they know themselves better,' said Fleetwood; and he begged for the name and number of the house in the Whitechapel street, where she who was discernibly his enemy, and the deadliest of enemies, had now her dwelling.

Her immediate rush to that place, the fixing of herself there for an assault on him, was a move worthy the daughter of the rascal Old Buccaneer; it compelled to urgent measures. He, as he felt horribly in pencilling her address, acted under compulsion; and a woman prodded the goad. Her mask of ingenuousness was flung away for a look of craft, which could be power; and with her changed aspect his tolerance changed to hatred.

'A shop,' Lady Arpington explained for his better direction: 'potatoes, vegetable stuff. Honest people, I am to believe. She is indifferent to her food, she says. She works, helping one of their ministers--one of their denominations: heaven knows what they call themselves! Anything to escape from the Church! She's likely to become a Methodist. With Lord Feltre proselytizing for his Papist creed, Lord Pitscrew a declared Mohammedan, we shall have a pretty English aristocracy in time. Well, she may claim to belong to it now. She would not be persuaded against visitations to pestiferous hovels. What else is there to do in such a place? She goes about catching diseases to avoid bilious melancholy in the dark back room of a small greengrocer's shop in Whitechapel. There--you have the word for the Countess of Fleetwood's present address.'

It drenched him with ridicule.

'I am indebted to your ladyship for the information,' he said, and maintained his rigidity.

The great lady stiffened.

'I am obliged to ask you whether you intend to act on it at once. The admiral has gone; I am in some sort deputed as a guardian to her, and I warn you--very well, very well. In your own interests, it will be. If she is left there another two or three days, the name of the place will stick to her.'

'She has baptized herself with it already, I imagine,' said Fleetwood.
'She will have Esslemont to live in.'

'There will be more than one to speak as to that. You should know her.'

'I do not know her.'

'You married her.'

'The circumstances are admitted.'

'If I may hazard a guess, she is unlikely to come to terms without a previous interview. She is bent on meeting you.'

'I am to be subjected to further annoyance, or she will take the name of the place she at present inhabits, and bombard me with it. Those are the terms.'

'She has a brother living, I remind you.'

'State the deduction, if you please, my lady.'

'She is not of 'a totally inferior family.'

'She had a father famous over England as the Old Buccaneer, and is a diligent reader of his book of MAXIMS FOR MEN.'

'Dear me! Then Kirby--Captain Kirby! I remember. That's her origin, is it?' the great lady cried, illumined. 'My mother used to talk of the Cressett scandal. Old Lady Arpington, too. At any rate, it ended in their union--the formalities were properly respected, as soon as they could be.'

'I am unaware.'

'I detest such a tone of speaking. Speaking as you do now--married to the daughter? You are not yourself, Lord Fleetwood.'

'Quite, ma'am, let me assure you. Otherwise the Kirby-Cressetts would be dictating to me from the muzzle of one of the old rapsallion's Maxims. They will learn that I am myself.'

'You don't improve as you proceed. I tell you this, you'll not have me for a friend. You have your troops of satellites; but take it as equal to a prophecy, you won't have London with you; and you'll hear of Lord Fleetwood and his Whitechapel Countess till your ears ache.'

The precluding box on them reddened him.

'She will have the offer of Esslemont.'

'Undertake to persuade her in person.'

'I have spoken on that head.'

'Well, I may be mistaken,--I fancied it before I knew of the pair she springs from: you won't get her consent to anything without your consenting to meet her. Surely it's the manlier way. It might be settled for to-morrow, here, in this room. She prays to meet you.'

With an indicated gesture of 'Save me from it,' Fleetwood bowed.

He left no friend thinking over the riddle of his conduct. She was a loud-voiced lady, given to strike out phrases. The 'Whitechapel Countess' of the wealthiest nobleman of his day was heard by her on London's wagging tongue. She considered also that he ought at least have propitiated her; he was in the position requiring of him to do something of the kind, and he had shown instead the dogged pride which calls for a whip. Fool as he must have been to go and commit himself to marriage with a girl of whom he knew nothing or little, the assumption of pride belonged to the order of impudent disguises intolerable to behold and not, in a modern manner, castigate.

Notwithstanding a dislike of the Dowager Countess of Fleetwood, Lady Arpington paid Livia an afternoon visit; and added thereby to the stock of her knowledge and the grounds of her disapprobation.

Down in Whitechapel, it was known to the Winch girls and the Woodseers that Captain Kirby and his wife had spent the bitterest of hours in

vainly striving to break their immovable sister's will to remain there.

At the tea-time of simple people, who make it a meal, Gower's appetite for the home-made bread of Mary Jones was checked by the bearer of a short note from Lord Fleetwood. The half-dozen lines were cordial, breathing of their walk in the Austrian highlands, and naming a renowned city hotel for dinner that day, the hour seven, the reply yes or no by messenger.

'But we are man to man, so there's no "No" between us two,' the note said, reviving a scene of rosy crag and pine forest, where there had been philosophical fun over the appropriate sexes of those our most important fighting-ultimately, we will hope, to be united-syllables, and the when for men, the when for women, to select the one of them as their weapon.

Under the circumstances, Gower thought such a piece of writing to him magnanimous.

'It may be the solution,' his father remarked.

Both had the desire; and Gower's reply was the yes, our brave male word, supposed to be not so compromising to men in the employment of it as a form of acquiescence rather than insistent pressure.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN DAME GOSSIP'S VEIN

Right soon the London pot began to bubble. There was a marriage.

'There are marriages by the thousand every day of the year that is not consecrated to prayer for the forgiveness of our sins,' the Old Buccaneer, writing it with simple intent, says, by way of preface to a series of Maxims for men who contemplate acceptance of the yoke.

This was a marriage high as the firmament over common occurrences, black as Erebus to confound; it involved the wreck of expectations, disastrous eclipse of a sovereign luminary in the splendour of his rise, Phaethon's descent to the Shades through a smoking and a crackling world. Asserted here, verified there, the rumour gathered volume, and from a serpent of vapour resolved to sturdy concrete before it was tangible. Contradiction retired into corners, only to be swept out of them. For this marriage, abominable to hear of, was of so wonderful a sort, that the story filled the mind, and the discrediting of the story threatened the great world's cranium with a vacuity yet more monstrously abominable.

For he, the planet Croesus of his time, recently, scarce later than last night, a glorious object of the mid-heavens above the market, has been enveloped, caught, gobbled up by one of the nameless little witches riding after dusk the way of the wind on broomsticks-by one of them!

She caught him like a fly in the hand off a pane of glass, gobbled him with the customary facility of a pecking pullet.

But was the planet Croesus of his time a young man to be so caught, so gobbled?

There is the mystery of it. On his coming of age, that young man gave sign of his having a city head. He put his guardians deliberately aside, had his lawyers and bailiffs and stewards thoroughly under control: managed a particularly difficult step-mother; escaped the snares of her lovely cousin; and drove his team of sycophants exactly the road he chose to go and no other. He had a will.

The world accounted him wildish?

Always from his own offset, to his own ends. Never for another's dictation or beguilement. Never for a woman. He was born with a suspicion of the sex. Poetry decorated women, he said, to lime and drag men in the foulest ruts of prose.

We are to believe he has been effectively captured?

It is positively a marriage; he admits it.

Where celebrated?

There we are at hoodman-blind for the moment. Three counties claim the church; two ends of London.

She is not a person of society, lineage?

Nor of beauty. She is a witch; ordinarily petticoated and not squeaking like a shrew-mouse in her flights, but not a whit less a moon-shade witch. The kind is famous. Fairy tales and terrible romances tell of her; she is just as much at home in life, and springs usually from the mire to enthral our knightliest. Is it a popular hero? She has him, sooner or later. A planet Croesus? He falls to her.

That is, if his people fail to attach him in legal bonds to a damsel of a corresponding birth on the day when he is breeched.

Small is her need to be young--especially if it is the man who is very young. She is the created among women armed with the deadly instinct for the motive force in men, and shameless to attract it. Self-respecting women treat men as their tamed housemates. She blows the horn of the wild old forest, irresistible to the animal. O the droop of the eyelids, the curve of a lip, the rustle of silks, the much heart, the neat ankle; and the sparkling agreement, the reserve--the motherly feminine petition that she may retain her own small petted babe of an opinion, legitimate or not, by permission of superior authority!--proof at once of her intelligence and her appreciativeness. Her infinitesimal spells are seen; yet, despite experience, the magnetism in their repulsive display is barely apprehended by sedate observers until the astounding capture is

proclaimed. It is visible enough then:--and O men! O morals! If she can but trick the smallest bit in stooping, she has the pick of men.

Our present sample shows her to be young: she is young and a foreigner. Mr. Chumley Potts vouches for it. Speaks foreign English. He thinks her more ninny than knave: she is the tool of a wily plotter, picked up off the highway road by Lord Fleetwood as soon as he had her in his eye. Sir Meeson Corby wrings his frilled hands to depict the horror of the hands of that tramp the young lord had her from. They afflict him malariously still. The man, he says, the man as well was an infatuation, because he talks like a Dictionary Cheap Jack, and may have had an education and dropped into vagrancy, owing to indiscretions. Lord Fleetwood ran about in Germany repeating his remarks. But the man is really an accomplished violinist, we hear. She dances the tambourine business. A sister of the man, perhaps, if we must be charitable. They are, some say, a couple of Hungarian gypsies Lord F. found at a show and brought over to England, and soon had it on his conscience that he ought to marry her, like the Quixote of honour that he is; which is equal to saying crazy, as there is no doubt his mother was.

The marriage is no longer disputable; poor Lady Fleetwood, whatever her faults as a step-mother, does no longer deny the celebration of a marriage; though she might reasonably discredit any such story if he, on the evening of the date of the wedding day, was at a Ball, seen by her at the supper-table; though it is admitted he left the Ball-room at night. But the next day he certainly was in his place among the Peers and voted against the Government, and then went down to his estates in Wales, being an excellent holder of the reins, whether on the coach box or over the cash box.

More and more wonderful, we hear that he drove his bride straight from the church to the field of a prizefight, arranged for her special delectation. She doats on seeing blood-shed and drinking champagne. Young Mr. Mallard is our authority; and he says, she enjoyed it, and cheered the victor for being her husband's man. And after the shocking exhibition, good-bye; the Countess of Fleetwood was left sole occupant of a wayside inn, and may have learnt in her solitude that she would have been wise to feign disgust; for men to the smallest degree cultivated are unable to pardon a want of delicacy in a woman who has chosen them, as they are taught to think by their having chosen her.

So talked, so twittered, piped and croaked the London world over the early rumours of the marriage, this Amazing Marriage; which it got to be called, from the number of items flocking to swell the wonder.

Ravens ravening by night, poised peregrines by day, provision-merchants for the dispensing of dainty scraps to tickle the ears, to arm the tongues, to explode reputations, those great ladies, the Ladies Endor, Eldritch, and Cowry, fateful three of their period, avenged and scourged both innocence and naughtiness; innocence, on the whole, the least, when their withering suspicion of it had hunted the unhappy thing to the bank of Ophelia's ditch. Mallard and Chumley Potts, Captain Abrane, Sir Meeson Corby, Lord Brailstone, were plucked at and rattled, put to the

blush, by a pursuit of inquiries conducted with beaks. High-nosed dames will surpass eminent judges in their temerity on the border-line where Ahem sounds the warning note to curtailed decency. The courtly M. de St. Ombre had to stand confused. He, however, gave another version of Captain Abrane's 'fiddler,' and precipitated the great ladies into the reflection, that French gentlemen, since the execrable French Revolution, have lost their proper sense of the distinctions of Class. Homme d'esprit, applied to a roving adventurer, a scarce other than vagabond, was either an indiscriminating epithet or else a further example of the French deficiency in humour.

Dexterous contriver, he undoubtedly is. Lady Cowry has it from Sir Meeson Corby, who had it from the poor dowager, that Lord Fleetwood has installed the man in his house and sits at the opposite end of his table; fished him up from Whitechapel, where the countess is left serving oranges at a small fruit-shop. With her own eyes, Lady Arpington saw her there; and she can't be got to leave the place unless her husband drives his coach down to fetch her. That he declines to do; so she remains the Whitechapel Countess, all on her hind heels against the offer of a shilling of her husband's money, if she 's not to bring him to his knees; and goes about at night with a low Methodist singing hymns along those dreadful streets, while Lord Fleetwood gives gorgeous entertainments. One signal from the man he has hired, and he stops drinking--he will stop speaking as soon as the man's mouth is open. He is under a complete fascination, attributable, some say, to passes of the hands, which the man won't wash lest he should weaken their influence.

For it cannot be simply his violin playing. They say he was a pupil of a master of the dark art in Germany, and can practise on us to make us think his commonest utterances extraordinarily acute and precious. Lord Fleetwood runs round quoting him to everybody, quite ridiculously. But the man's influence is sufficient to induce his patron to drive down and fetch the Whitechapel Countess home in state, as she insists--if the man wishes it. Depend upon it he is the key of the mystery.

Totally the contrary, Lady Arpington declares! the man is a learned man, formerly a Professor of English Literature in a German University, and no connection of the Whitechapel Countess whatever, a chance acquaintance at the most. He operates on Lord Fleetwood with doses of German philosophy; otherwise, a harmless creature; and has consented to wash and dress. It is my lord who has had the chief influence. And the Countess Livia now backs him in maintaining that there is nowhere a more honest young man to be found. She may have her reasons.

As for the Whitechapel Countess . . . the whole story of the Old Buccaneer and Countess Fanny was retold, and it formed a terrific halo, presage of rains and hurricane tempest, over the girl the young earl had incomprehensibly espoused to discard. Those two had a son and a daughter born aboard:--in wedlock, we trust. The girl may be as wild a one as the mother. She has a will as determined as her husband's. She is offered Esslemont, the earl's Kentish mansion, for a residence, and she will none of it until she has him down in the east of London on his knees to entreat her. The injury was deep on one side or the other. It may be

almost surely prophesied that the two will never come together. Will either of them deal the stroke for freedom? And which is the likelier?

Meanwhile Lord Fleetwood and his Whitechapel Countess composed the laugh of London. Straightway Invention, the violent propagator, sprang from his shades at a call of the great world's appetite for more, and, rushing upon stationary Fact, supplied the required. Marvel upon marvel was recounted. The mixed origin of the singular issue could not be examined, where all was increasingly funny.

Always the shout for more produced it. She and her band of Whitechapel boys were about in ambush to waylay the earl wherever he went. She stood knocking at his door through a whole night. He dared not lug her before a magistrate for fear of exposure. Once, riding in the park with a troop of friends he had a young woman pointed out to him, and her finger was levelled, and she cried: 'There is the English nobleman who marries a girl and leaves her to go selling cabbages!'

He left town for the Island, and beheld his yacht sailing the Solent:-- my lady the countess was on board! A pair of Tyrolese minstrels in the square kindled his enthusiasm at one of his dinners; he sent them a sovereign; their humble, hearty thanks were returned to him in the name of Die Gräfin von Fleetwood.

The Ladies Endor, Eldritch, and Cowry sifted their best. They let pass incredible stories: among others, that she had sent cards to the nobility and gentry of the West End of London, offering to deliver sacks of potatoes by newly-established donkey-cart at the doors of their residences, at so much per sack, bills quarterly; with the postscript, Vive L'aristocratie! Their informant had seen a card, and the stamp of the Fleetwood dragoncrest was on it.

He has enemies, was variously said of the persecuted nobleman. But it was nothing worse than the parasite that he had. This was the parasite's gentle treason. He found it an easy road to humour; it pricked the slug fancy in him to stir and curl; gave him occasion to bundle and bustle his patron kindly. Abrane, Potts, Mallard, and Sir Meeson Corby were personages during the town's excitement, besought for having something to say. Petrels of the sea of tattle, they were buoyed by the hubbub they created, and felt the tipsy happiness of being certain to rouse the laugh wherever they alighted. Sir Meeson Corby, important to himself in an eminent degree, enjoyed the novel sense of his importance with his fellows. They crowded round the bore who had scattered them.

He traced the miserable catastrophe in the earl's fortunes to the cunning of the rascal now sponging on Fleetwood and trying to dress like a gentleman: a convicted tramp, elevated by the caprice of the young nobleman he was plotting to ruin. Sir Meeson quoted Captain Abrane's latest effort to hit the dirty object's name, by calling him 'Fleetwood's Mr. Woodlouse.' And was the rascal a sorcerer? Sir Meeson spoke of him in the hearing of the Countess Livia, and she, previously echoing his disgust, corrected him sharply, and said: 'I begin to be of Russett's opinion, that his fault is his honesty.' The rascal had won or partly

won the empress of her sex! This Lady Livia, haughtiest and most fastidious of our younger great dames, had become the indulgent critic of the tramp's borrowed plumes! Nay, she would not listen to a depreciatory word on him from her cousin Henrietta Kirby-Levellier.

Perhaps, after all, of all places for an encounter between the Earl of Fleetwood and the countess, those vulgar Gardens across the water, long since abandoned by the Fashion, were the most suitable. Thither one fair June night, for the sake of showing the dowager countess and her beautiful cousin, the French nobleman, Sir Meeson Corby, and others, what were the pleasures of the London lower orders, my lord had the whim to conduct them,--merely a parade of observation once round;--the ladies veiled, the gentlemen with sticks, and two servants following, one of whom, dressed in quiet black, like the peacefullest of parsons, was my lord's pugilist, Christopher Ives.

Now, here we come to history: though you will remember what History is.

The party walked round the Gardens unmolested nor have we grounds for supposing they assumed airs of state in the style of a previous generation. Only, as it happened, a gentleman of the party was a wag; no less than the famous, well-seasoned John Rose Mackrell, bent on amusing Mrs. Kirby-Levellier, to hear her lovely laughter; and his wit and his anecdotes, both inexhaustible, proved, as he said, 'that a dried fish is no stale fish, and a smoky flavour to an old chimney story will often render it more piquant to the taste than one jumping fresh off the incident.' His exact meaning in 'smoky flavour' we are not to know; but whether that M. de St. Ombre should witness the effect of English humour upon them, or that the ladies could permit themselves to laugh, their voices accompanied the gentlemen in silvery volleys. There had been 'Mackrell' at Fleetwood's dinner-table; which was then a way of saying that dry throats made no count of the quantity of champagne imbibed, owing to the fits Rose Mackrell caused. However, there was loud laughter as they strolled, and it was noticed; and Fleetwood crying out, 'Mackrell!! Mackrell!!' in delighted repudiation of the wag's last sally, the cry of 'Hooray, Mackrell !' was caught up by the crowd. They were not the primary offenders, for loud laughter in an isolated party is bad breeding; but they had not the plea of a copious dinner.

So this affair began; inoffensively at the start, for my lord was good-humoured about it.

Kit Ines, of the mercurial legs, must now give impromptu display of his dancing. He seized a partner, in the manner of a Roman the Sabine, sure of pleasing his patron; and the maid, passing from surprise to merriment, entered the quadrille perforce, all giggles, not without emulation, for she likewise had the passion for the dance. Whereby it befell that the pair footed in a way to gather observant spectators; and if it had not been that the man from whom the maid was willy-nilly snatched, conceived resentment, things might have passed comfortably; for Kit's quips and cuts and high capers, and the Sunday gravity of the barge face while the legs were at their impish trickery, double motion to the music, won the crowd to cheer. They conjectured him to be a British sailor. But the

destituted man said, sailor or no sailor,--bos'en be hanged! he should pay for his whistle.

Honourably at the close of the quadrille, Kit brought her back; none the worse for it, he boldly affirmed, and he thanked the man for the short loan of her.--The man had an itch to strike. Choosing rather to be struck first, he vented nasty remarks. My lord spoke to Kit and moved on. At the moment of the step, Rose Mackrell uttered something, a waggery of some sort, heard to be forgotten, but of such instantaneous effect, that the prompt and immoderate laugh succeeding it might reasonably be taken for a fling of scorn at himself, by an injured man. They were a party; he therefore proceeded to make one, appealing to English sentiment and right feeling. The blameless and repentant maid plucked at his coat to keep him from dogging the heels of the gentlemen. Fun was promised; consequently the crowd waxed.

'My lord,' had been let fall by Kit Ines. Conjoined to 'Mackrell,' it rang finely, and a trumpeting of 'Lord Mackrell' resounded. Lord Mackrell was asked for 'more capers and not so much sauce.' Various fish took part in his title of nobility. The wag Mackrell continuing to be discreetly silent, and Kit Ines acting as a pacific rearguard, the crowd fell in love with their display of English humour, disposed to the surly satisfaction of a big street dog that has been appeased by a smaller one's total cessation of growls.

All might have gone well but for the sudden appearance of two figures of young women on the scene. They fronted the advance of the procession. They wanted to have a word with Lord Mackrell. Not a bit of it--he won't listen, turns away; and one of the pair slips round him. It's regular imploring: 'my lord! my lord!'

O you naughty Surrey melodram villain of a Lord Mackrell! Listen to the young woman, you Mackrell, or you'll get Billingsgate! Here's Mr. Jig-and-Reel behind here, says she's done him! By Gosh! What's up now?

One of the young ladies of the party ahead had rushed up to the young woman dodging to stand in Lord Mackrell's way. The crowd pressed to see. Kit Ines and his mate shouldered them off. They performed an envelopment of the gentlemen and ladies, including the two young women. Kit left his mate and ran to the young woman hitherto the quieter of the two. He rattled at her. But she had a tongue of her own and rattled it at him. What did she say?

Merely to hear, for no other reason,' a peace-loving crowd of clerks and tradesmen, workmen and their girls, young aspirants to the professions, night-larks of different classes, both sexes, there in that place for simple entertainment, animated simply by the spirit of English humour, contracted, so closing upon the Mackrell party as to seem threatening to the most orderly and apprehensive member of it, who was the baronet, Sir Meeson Corby.

He was a man for the constables in town emergencies, and he shouted. 'Cock Robin crowing' provoked a jolly round of barking chaff. The noise

in a dense ring drew Fleetwood's temper. He gave the word to Kit Ines, and immediately two men dropped; a dozen staggered unhit. The fists worked right and left; such a clearing of ground was never seen for sickle or scythe. And it was taken respectfully; for Science proclaimed her venerable self in the style and the perfect sufficiency of the strokes. A bruiser delivered them. No shame to back away before a bruiser. There was rather an admiring envy of the party claiming the nimble champion on their side, until the very moderate lot of the Mackrells went stepping forward along the strewn path with sticks pointed.

If they had walked it like gentlemen, they would have been allowed to get through. An aggressive minority, and with Cock Robin squealing for constables in the midst, is that insolent upstart thing which howls to have a lesson. The sticks were fallen on; bump came the mass. Kit Ines had to fight his way back to his mate, and the couple scoured a clearish ring, but the gentlemen were at short thrusts, affable in tone, to cheer the spirits of the ladies:--'All right, my friend, you're a trifle mistaken, it 's my stick, not yours.' Therewith the wrestle for the stick.

The one stick not pointed was wrenched from the grasp of Sir Meeson Corby; and by a woman, the young woman who had accosted my lord; not a common young woman either, as she appeared when beseeching him. Her stature rose to battle heights: she made play with Sir Meeson Corby's ebony stick, using it in one hand as a dwarf quarterstaff to flail the sconces, then to dash the point at faces; and she being a woman, a girl, perhaps a lady, her cool warrior method of cleaving way, without so much as tightening her lips, was found notable; and to this degree (vouched for by Rose Mackrell, who heard it), that a fellow, rubbing his head, cried: 'Damn it all, she's clever, though!' She took her station beside Lord Fleetwood.

He had been as cool as she, or almost. Now he was maddened; she defended him, she warded and thrust for him, only for him, to save him a touch; unasked, undesired, detested for the box on his ears of to-morrow's public mockery, as she would be, overwhelming him with ridicule. Have you seen the kick and tug at the straps of the mettled pony in stables that betrays the mishandling of him by his groom? Something so did Fleetwood plunge and dart to be free of her, and his desperate soul cried out on her sticking to him like a plaster!

Welcome were the constables. His guineas winked at their chief, as fair women convey their meanings, with no motion of eyelids; and the officers of the law knew the voice habituated to command, and answered two words of his: 'Right, my lord,' smelling my lord in the unerring manner of those days. My lord's party were escorted to the gates, not a little jeered; though they by no means had the worst of the tussle. But the puffing indignation of Sir Meesan Corby over his battered hat and torn frill and buttons plucked from his coat, and his threat of the magistrates, excited the crowd to derisive yells.

My lord spoke something to his man, handing his purse.

The ladies were spared the hearing of bad language. They, according to the joint testimony of M. de St. Ombre and Mr. Rose Mackrell, comported themselves throughout as became the daughters of a warrior race. Both gentlemen were emphatic to praise the unknown Britomart who had done such gallant service with Sir Meeson's ebony wand. He was beginning to fuss vociferously about the loss of the stick--a family stick, goldheaded, the family crest on it, priceless to the family--when Mrs. Kirby-Levellier handed it to him inside the coach.

'But where is she?' M. de St. Ombre said, and took the hint of Livia's touch on his arm in the dark.

At the silence following the question, Mr. Rose Mackrell murmured, 'Ah!'

He and the French gentleman understood that there might have been a manifestation of the notorious Whitechapel Countess.

They were two; and a slower-witted third was travelling to his ideas on the subject. Three men, witnesses of a remarkable incident in connection with a boiling topic of current scandal,--glaringly illustrative of it, moreover,--were unlikely to keep close tongues, even if they had been sworn to secrecy. Fleetwood knew it, and he scorned to solicit them; an exaction of their idle vows would be merely the humiliation of himself. So he tossed his dignity to recklessness, as the ultraconvivial give the last wink of reason to the wine-cup. Persecuted as he was, nothing remained for him but the nether-sublime of a statuesque desperation.

That was his feeling; and his way of cloaking it under light sallies at Sir Meeson and easy chat with Henrietta made it visible to her, from its being the contrary of what the world might expect a proud young nobleman to exhibit. She pitied him: she had done him some wrong. She read into him, too, as none else could. Seeing the solitary tortures behind the pleasant social mask, she was drawn to partake of them; and the mask seemed pathetic. She longed to speak a word in sympathy or relieve her bosom of tears. Carinthia had sunk herself, was unpardonable, hardly mentionable. Any of the tales told of her might be credited after this! The incorrigible cause of humiliation for everybody connected with her pictured, at a word of her name, the crowd pressing and the London world acting audience. Livia spoke the name when they had reached their house and were alone. Henrietta responded with the imperceptible shrug which is more eloquent than a cry to tell of the most monstrous of loads. My lord, it was thought by the ladies, had directed his man to convey her safely to her chosen home, whence she might be expected very soon to be issuing and striking the gong of London again.

CHAPTER XXIV

A KIDNAPPING AND NO GREAT HARM

Ladies who have the pride of delicate breeding are not more than rather violently hurled back on the fortress it is, when one or other of the gross mishaps of circumstance may subject them to a shock: and this happening in the presence of gentlemen, they are sustained by the within and the without to keep a smooth countenance, however severe their affliction. Men of heroic nerve decline similarly to let explosions shake them, though earth be shaken. Dragged into the monstrous grotesque of the scene at the Gardens, Livia and Henrietta went through the ordeal, masking any signs that they were stripped for a flagellation. Only, the fair cousins were unable to perceive a comic element in the scene: and if the world was for laughing, as their instant apprehension foresaw it, the world was an ignoble beast. They did not discuss Carinthia's latest craziness at night, hardly alluded to it while they were in the interjectory state.

Henrietta was Livia's guest, her husband having hurried away to Vienna: 'To get money! money!' her angry bluntness explained his absence, and dealt its blow at the sudden astounding poverty into which they had fallen. She was compelled to practise an excessive, an incredible economy:--'think of the smallest trifles!' so that her Chillon travelled unaccompanied, they were separated. Her iterations upon money were the vile constraint of an awakened interest and wonderment at its powers. She, the romantic Riette, banner of chivalry, reader of poetry, struck a line between poor and rich in her talk of people, and classed herself with the fallen and pinched; she harped on her slender means, on the enforced calculations preceding purchases, on the living in lodgings; and that miserly Lord Levellier's indebtedness to Chillon--large sums! and Chillon's praiseworthy resolve to pay the creditors of her father's estate; and of how he travelled like a common man, in consequence of the money he had given Janey--weakly, for her obstinacy was past endurance; but her brother would not leave her penniless, and penniless she had been for weeks, because of her stubborn resistance to the earl--quite unreasonably, whether right or wrong--in the foul retreat she had chosen; apparently with a notion that the horror of it was her vantage ground against him: and though a single sign of submission would place the richest purse in England at her disposal. 'She refuses Esslemont! She insists on his meeting her! No child could be so witless. Let him be the one chiefly or entirely to blame, she might show a little tact--for her brother's sake! She loves her brother? No: deaf to him, to me, to every consideration except her blind will.'

Here was the skeleton of the love match, earlier than Livia had expected.

It refreshed a phlegmatic lady's disposition for prophecy. Lovers abruptly tossed between wind and wave may still be lovers, she knew: but they are, or the weaker of the two is, hard upon any third person who tugs at them for subsistence or existence. The condition, if they are much beaten about, prepares true lovers, through their mutual tenderness, to be bitterly misanthropical.

Livia supposed the novel economic pinches to be the cause of Henrietta's unwonted harsh judgement of her sister-in-law's misconduct, or the crude expression of it. She could not guess that Carinthia's unhappiness in

marriage was a spectre over the married happiness of the pair fretted by the conscience which told them they had come together by doing much to bring it to pass. Henrietta could see herself less the culprit when she blamed Carinthia in another's hearing.

After some repose, the cousins treated their horrible misadventure as a piece of history. Livia was cool; she had not a husband involved in it, as Henrietta had; and London's hoarse laugh surely coming on them, spared her the dread Henrietta suffered, that Chillon would hear; the most sensitive of men on any matter touching his family.

'And now a sister added to the list! Will there be names, Livia?'

'The newspapers!' Livia's shoulders rose.

'We ought to have sworn the gentlemen to silence.'

'M. de St. Ombre is a tomb until he writes his Memoirs. I hold Sir Meeson under lock. But a spiced incident, a notorious couple,--an anecdotal witness to the scene,--could you expect Mr. Rose Mackrell to contain it? The sacreddest of oaths, my dear!'

That relentless force impelling an anecdotist to slaughter families for the amusement of dinner-tables, was brought home to Henrietta by her prospect of being a victim; and Livia reminding her of the excessive laughter at Rose Mackrell's anecdotes overnight, she bemoaned her having consented to go to those Gardens in mourning.

'How could Janey possibly have heard of the project to go?'

'You went to please Russett, he to please you, and that wild-cat to please herself,' said Livia. 'She haunts his door, I suppose, and follows him, like a running footman. Every step she takes widens the breach. He keeps his temper, yes, keeps his temper as he keeps his word, and one morning it breaks loose, and all that's done has to be undone. It will bemust. That extravaganza, as she is called, is fatal, dogs him with burlesque--of all men!'

'Why not consent to meet her once, Chillon asks.'

'You are asking Russett to yield an inch on demand, and to a woman.'

'My husband would yield to a woman what he would refuse to all the men in Europe and America,' said Henrietta; and she enjoyed her thrill of allegiance to her chivalrous lord and courtier.

'No very extraordinary specimen of a newly married man, who has won the Beauty of England and America for his wife--at some cost to some people,' Livia rejoined.

There came a moisture on the eyelashes of the emotional young woman, from a touch of compassion for the wealthy man who had wished to call her wife, and was condemned by her rejection of him to call another woman

wife, to be wifeless in wedding her, despite his wealth.

She thinks he loves her; it is pitiable, but she thinks it--after the treatment she has had. She begs to see him once.'

'And subdue him with a fit of weeping,' Livia was moved to say by sight of the tear she hated. 'It would harden Russett--on other eyes, too! Salt-water drops are like the forced agony scenes in a play: they bring down the curtain, they don't win the critics. I heard her "my husband" and saw his face.'

'You didn't hear a whimper with it,' Henrietta said. 'She's a mountain girl, not your city madam on the boards. Chillon and I had her by each hand, implored her to leave that impossible Whitechapel, and she trembled, not a drop was shed by her. I can almost fancy privation and squalor have no terrors for Janey. She sings to the people down there, nurses them. She might be occupying Esslemont--our dream of an English home! She is the destruction of the idea of romantic in connection with the name of marriage. I talk like a simpleton. Janey upsets us all. My lord was only--a little queer before he knew her: His Mr. Woodseer may be encouraging her. You tell me the creature has a salary from him equal to your jointure.'

'Be civil to the man while it lasts,' Livia said, attentive to a degradation of tone--in her cousin, formerly of supreme self-containment.

The beautiful young woman was reminded of her holiday in town. She brightened, and the little that it was, and the meanness of the satisfaction, darkened her. Envy of the lucky adventurer Mr. Woodseer, on her husband's behalf, grew horridly conscious for being reproved. So she plucked resolution to enjoy her holiday and forget the contrasts of life--palaces running profusion, lodgings hammered by duns; the pinch of poverty distracting every simple look inside or out. There was no end to it; for her husband's chivalrous honour forced him to undertake the payment of her father's heavy debts. He was right and admirable, it could not be contested; but the prospect for them was a grinding gloom, an unrelieved drag, as of a coach at night on an interminable uphill flinty road.

These were her sensations, and she found it diverting to be admired; admired by many while she knew herself to be absorbed in the possession of her by one. It bestowed the before and after of her marriage. She felt she was really, had rapidly become, the young woman of the world, armed with a husband, to take the flatteries of men for the needed diversion they brought. None moved her; none could come near to touching the happy insensibility of a wife who adored her husband, wrote to him daily, thought of him by the minute. Her former worshippers were numerous at Livia's receptions; Lord Fleetwood, Lord Brailstone, and the rest. Odd to reflect on--they were the insubstantial but coveted wealth of the woman fallen upon poverty, ignoble poverty! She could not discard her wealth. She wrote amusingly of them, and fully, vivacious descriptions, to Chillon; hardly so much writing to him as entering her heart's barred citadel, where he resided at his ease, heard everything

that befell about her. If she dwelt on Lord Fleetwood's kindness in providing entertainments, her object was to mollify Chillon's anger in some degree. She was doing her utmost to gratify him, 'for the purpose of paving a way to plead Janey's case.' She was almost persuading herself she was enjoying the remarks of his friend, confidant, secretary, or what not, Livia's worshipper, Mr. Woodseer, 'who does as he wills with my lord; directs his charities, his pleasures, his opinions, all because he is believed to have wonderful ideas and be wonderfully honest.' Henrietta wrote: 'Situation unchanged. Janey still At that place'; and before the letter was posted, she and Livia had heard from Gower Woodseer of the reported disappearance of the Countess of Fleetwood and her maid. Gower's father had walked up from Whitechapel, bearing news of it to the earl, she said.

'And the earl is much disturbed?' was Livia's inquiry.

'He has driven down with my father,' Gower said carelessly, ambiguously in the sound.

Troubled enough to desire the show of a corresponding trouble, Henrietta read at their faces.

'May it not be--down there--a real danger?'

The drama, he could inform her, was only too naked down there for disappearances to be common.

'Will it be published that she is missing?'

'She has her maid with her, a stout-hearted girl. Both have courage. I don't think we need take measures just yet.'

'Not before it is public property?'

Henrietta could have bitten her tongue for laying her open to the censure implied in his muteness. Janey perverted her.

Women were an illegible manuscript, and ladies a closed book of the binding, to this raw philosopher, or he would not so coldly have judged the young wife, anxious on her husband's account, that they might escape another scorching. He carried away his impression.

Livia listened to a remark on his want of manners.

'Russett puts it to the credit of his honesty,' she said. 'Honesty is everything with us at present. The man has made his honesty an excellent speculation. He puts a piece on zero and the bank hands him a sackful. We may think we have won him to serve us, up comes his honesty. That's how we have Lady Arpington mixed in it--too long a tale. But be guided by me; condescend a little.'

'My dear! my whole mind is upon that unhappy girl. It would break Chillon's heart.'

Livia pished. 'There are letters we read before we crack the seal. She is out of that ditch, and it suits Russett that she should be. He's not often so patient. A woman foot to foot against his will--I see him throwing high stakes. Tyrants are brutal; and really she provokes him enough. You needn't be alarmed about the treatment she 'll meet. He won't let her beat him, be sure.'

Neither Livia nor Gower wondered at the clearing of the mystery, before it went to swell the scandal. A young nobleman of ready power, quick temper, few scruples, and a taxed forbearance, was not likely to stand thwarted and goaded-and by a woman. Lord Fleetwood acted his part, inscrutable as the blank of a locked door. He could not conceal that he was behind the door.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PHILOSOPHER MAN OF ACTION

Gower's bedroom window looked over the shrubs of the square, and as his form of revolt from a city life was to be up and out with the sparrows in the early flutter of morning, for a stretch of the legs where grass was green and trees were not enclosed, he rarely saw a figure below when he stood dressing. Now there appeared a petticoated one stationary against the rails, with her face lifted. She fronted the house, and while he speculated abstractedly, recognition rushed on him. He was down and across the roadway at leaps.

'It's Madge here!'

The girl panted for her voice.

'Mr. Woodseer, I'm glad; I thought I should have to wait hours. She's safe.'

'Where?'

'Will you come, sir?'

'Step ahead.'

Madge set forth to north of the square.

He judged of the well-favoured girl that she could steer her way through cities: mouth and brows were a warning to challenger pirate craft of a vessel carrying guns; and the red lips kept their firm line when they yielded to the pressure for speech.

'It's a distance. She's quite safe, no harm; she's a prisoner; she's well fed; she's not ill treated.'

'You 're out?'

'That's as it happens. I'm lucky in seeing you early. He don't mean to hurt her; he won't be beaten. All she asks is ten minutes with him. If he would!--he won't. She didn't mean to do him offence t' other night in that place--you've heard. Kit Ines told me he was on duty there--going. She couldn't help speaking when she had eyes on her husband. She kisses the ground of his footsoles, you may say, let him be ever so unkind. She and I were crossing to the corner of Roper Street a rainy night, on way to Mile End, away down to one of your father's families, Mother Davis and her sick daughter and the little ones, and close under the public-house Goat and Beard we were seized on and hustled into a covered carriage that was there, and they drove sharp. She 's not one to scream. We weren't frightened. We both made the same guess. They drove us to the house she 's locked in, and me, too, up till three o'clock this morning.'

'You've seen nobody, Madge?'

'He 's fixed she 's to leave London, Mr. Woodseer. I've seen Kit Ines. And she 's to have one of the big houses to her use. I guessed Kit Ines was his broom. He defends it because he has his money to make--and be a dirty broom for a fortune! But any woman's sure of decent handling with Kit Ines--not to speak of lady. He and a mate guard the house. An old woman cooks.'

'He guards the house, and he gave you a pass?'

'Not he. His pride's his obedience to his "paytron"--he calls his master, and won't hear that name abused. We are on the first floor; all the lower doors are locked day and night. New Street, not much neighbours; she wouldn't cry out of the window. She 's to be let free if she'll leave London.'

'You jumped it!'

'If I'd broke a leg, Mr. Kit Ines would have had to go to his drams. It wasn't very high; and a flower-bed underneath. My mistress wanted to be the one. She has to be careful. She taught me how to jump down not to hurt. She makes you feel you can do anything. I had a bother to get her to let me and be quiet herself. She's not one to put it upon others, you'll learn. When I was down I felt like a stick in the ground and sat till I had my feet, she at the window waiting; and I started for you. She kissed her hand. I was to come to you, and then your father, you nowhere seen. I wasn't spoken to. I know empty London.'

'Kit Ines was left sleeping in the house?'

'Snoring, I dare say: He don't drink on duty.'

'He must be kept on duty.'

'Drink or that kind of duty, it's a poor choice.'

'You'll take him in charge, Madge.'

'I've got a mistress to look after.'

'You've warmed to her.'

'That's not new; Mr. Woodseer. I do trust you, and you his friend. But you are the minister's son, and any man not a great nobleman must have some heart for her. You'll learn. He kills her so because she's fond of him--loves him, however he strikes. No, not like a dog, as men say of us. She'd die for him this night, need were. Live with her, you won't find many men match her for brave; and she's good. My Sally calls her a Bible saint. I could tell you stories of her goodness, short the time though she's been down our way. And better there for her than at that inn he left her at to pine and watch the Royal Sovereign come swing come smirk in sailor blue and star to meet the rain--would make anybody disrespect Royalty or else go mad! He's a great nobleman, he can't buy what she's ready to give; and if he thinks he breaks her will now, it's because she thinks she's obeying a higher than him, or no lord alive and Kit Ines to back him 'd hold her. Women want a priest to speak to men certain times. I wish I dared; we have to bite our tongues. He's master now, but, as I believe God's above, if he plays her false, he's the one to be brought to shame. I talk.'

'Talk on, Madge,' said Gower, to whom the girl's short-syllabled run of the lips was a mountain rill compared with London park waters.

'You won't let him hurry her off where she'll eat her heart for never seeing him again? She prays to be near him, if she's not to see him.'

'She speaks in that way?'

'I get it by bits. I'm with her so, it's as good as if I was inside her. She can't obey when it goes the wrong way of her heart to him.'

'Love and wisdom won't pull together, and they part company for good at the church door,' said Gower. 'This matrimony's a bad business.'

Madge hummed a moan of assent. 'And my poor Sally 'll have to marry. I can't leave my mistress while she wants me, and Sally can't be alone. It seems we take a step and harm's done, though it's the right step we take.'

'It seems to me you've engaged yourself to follow Sally's lead, Madge.'

'Girls' minds turn corners, Mr. Woodseer.'

He passed the remark. What it was that girls' minds occasionally or habitually did, or whether they had minds to turn, or whether they took their whims for minds, were untroubled questions with a young man studying abstract and adoring surface nature too exclusively to be aware of the manifestation of her spirit in the flesh, as it is not revealed so

much by men. However, she had a voice and a face that led him to be thoughtful over her devotedness to her mistress, after nearly losing her character for the prize-fighter, and he had to thank her for invigorating him. His disposition was to muse and fall slack, helpless to a friend. Here walked a creature exactly the contrary. He listened to the steps of the dissimilar pair on the detonating pavement, and eyed a church clock shining to the sun.

She was sure of the direction: 'Out Camden way, where the murder was.'

They walked at a brisk pace, conversing or not.

'Tired? You must be,' he said.

'Not when I'm hot to do a thing.'

'There's the word of the thoroughbred!'

'You don't tire, sir,' said she. 'Sally and I see you stalking out for the open country in the still of the morning. She thinks you look pale for want of food, and ought to have some one put a biscuit into your pocket overnight.'

'Who'd have guessed I was under motherly observation!'

'You shouldn't go so long empty, if you listen to trainers.'

'Capital doctors, no doubt. But I get a fine appetite.'

'You may grind the edge too sharp.'

He was about to be astonished, and reflected that she had grounds for her sagacity. His next thought plunged him into contempt for Kit Ines, on account of the fellow's lapses to sottishness. But there would be no contempt of Kit Ines in a tussle with him. Nor could one funk the tussle and play cur, if Kit's engaged young woman were looking on. We get to our courage or the show of it by queer screws.

Contemplative over these matters, the philosopher transformed to man of action heard Madge say she read directions in London by churches, and presently exclaiming disdainfully, and yet relieved, 'Spooner Villas,' she turned down a row of small detached houses facing a brickfield, that had just contributed to the erection of them, and threatened the big city with further defacements.

Madge pointed to the marks of her jump, deep in flower-bed earth under an open window.

Gower measured the height with sensational shanks.

She smote at the door. Carinthia nodded from her window. Close upon that, Kit Ines came bounding to the parlour window; he spied and stared. Gower was known to him as the earl's paymaster; so he went to the passage

and flung the door open, blocking the way.

'Any commands, your honour?'

'You bring the countess to my lord immediately,' said Gower.

Kit swallowed his mouthful of surprise in a second look at Madge and the ploughed garden-bed beneath the chamber window.

'Are the orders written, sir?'

'To me?--for me to deliver to you?--for you to do my lord's bidding? Where's your head?'

Kit's finger-nails travelled up to it. Madge pushed past him. She and her mistress, and Kit's mate, and the old woman receiving the word for a cup of tea, were soon in the passage. Kit's mate had a ready obedience for his pay, nothing else,--no counsel at all, not a suggestion to a head knocked to a pudding by Madge's jump and my lord's paymaster here upon the scene.

'My lady was to go down Wales way, sir.'

'That may be ordered after.'

'I'm to take my lady to my lord?' and, 'Does it mean my lady wants a fly?' Kit asked, and harked back on whether Madge had seen my lord.

'At five in the morning?--don't sham donkey with me,' said Gower.

The business looked inclined to be leaky, but which the way for proving himself other than a donkey puzzled Kit: so much so, that a shove made him partly grateful. Madge's clever countermove had stunned his judgement. He was besides acting subordinate to his patron's paymaster; and by the luck of it, no voice of woman interposed. The countess and her maid stood by like a disinterested couple. Why be suspicious, if he was to keep the countess, in sight? She was a nice lady, and he preferred her good opinion. She was brave, and he did her homage. It might be, my lord had got himself round to the idea of thanking her for saving his nob that night, and his way was to send and have her up, to tell her he forgave her, after the style of lords. Gower pricked into him by saying aside: 'Mad, I suppose, in case of a noise?' And he could not answer quite manfully, lost his eyes and coloured. Neighbours might have required an explanation of shrieks, he confessed. Men have sometimes to do nasty work for their patrons.

They were afoot, walking at Carinthia's pace before half-past seven. She would not hear of any conveyance. She was cheerful, and, as it was pitiful to see, enjoyed her walk. Hearing of her brother's departure for the Austrian capital, she sparkled. Her snatches of speech were short flights out of the meditation possessing her. Gower noticed her easier English, that came home to the perpetual student he was. She made use of some of his father's words, and had assimilated them mentally besides

appropriating them: the verbalizing of 'purpose,' then peculiar to his father, for example. She said, in reply to a hint from him: 'If my lord will allow me an interview, I purpose to be obedient.' No one could imagine of her that she spoke broken-spiritedly. Her obedience was to a higher than a mortal lord: and Gower was touched to the quick through the use of the word.

Contrasting her with Countess Livia and her cousin, the earl might think her inferior on the one small, square compartment called by them the world; but she carried the promise of growth, a character in expansion, and she had at least natural grace, a deerlike step. Although her picturesqueness did not swarm on him with images illuminating night, subduing day, like the Countess Livia's, it was marked, it could tower and intermittently eclipse; and it was of the uplifting and healing kind by comparison, not a delicious balefulness.

The bigger houses, larger shops, austere streets of private residences, were observed by the recent inhabitant of Whitechapel.

'My lord lives in a square,' she said.

'We shall soon be there now,' he encouraged her, doubtful though the issue appeared.

'It is a summer morning for the Ortler, the Gross-Glockner, the Venediger,--all our Alps, Mr. Woodseer.'

'If we could fly!'

'We love them.'

'Why, then we beat a wing--yes.'

'For I have them when I want them to sight. It is the feet are so desirous. I feel them so this morning, after prisonership. I could not have been driven to my lord.'

'I know the feeling,' said Gower; 'any movement of us not our own impulse, hurries the body and deadens the mind. And by the way, my dear lady, I spoke of the earl's commands to this man behind us walking with your Madge. My father would accuse me of Jesuitry. Ines mentioned commands, and I took advantage of it.'

'I feared,' said Carinthia. 'I go for my chance.'

Gower had a thought of the smaller creature, greater by position, to whom she was going for her chance. He alluded to his experience of the earl's kindness in relation to himself, from a belief in his 'honesty'; dotted outlines of her husband's complex character, or unmixed and violently opposing elements.

She remarked: 'I will try and learn.'

The name of the street of beautiful shops woke a happy smile on her mouth. 'Father talked of it; my mother, too. He has it written down in his Book of Maxims. When I was a girl, I dreamed of one day walking up Bond Street.'

They stepped from the pavement and crossed the roadway for a side-street leading to the square. With the swift variation of her aspect at times, her tone changed.

'We are near. My lord will not be troubled by me. He has only to meet me. There has been misunderstanding. I have vexed him; I could not help it. I will go where he pleases after I have heard him give orders. He thinks me a frightful woman. I am peaceful.'

Gower muttered her word 'misunderstanding.' They were at the earl's house door. One tap at it, and the two applicants for admission would probably be shot as far away from Lord Fleetwood as when they were on the Styrian heights last autumn. He delivered the tap, amused by the idea. It was like a summons to a genie of doubtful service.

My lord was out riding in the park.

Only the footman appeared at that early hour, and his countenance was blank whitewash as he stood rigid against the wall for the lady to pass. Madge followed into the morning room; Ines remained in the hall, where he could have the opening speech with his patron, and where he soon had communication with the butler.

This official entered presently to Gower, presenting a loaded forehead. A note addressed to Mrs. Kirby-Levellier at the Countess Livia's house hard by was handed to him for instant despatch. He signified a deferential wish to speak.

'You can speak in the presence of the Countess of Fleetwood, Mr. Waytes,' Gower said.

Waytes checked a bend of his shoulders. He had not a word, and he turned to send the note. He was compelled to think that he saw a well-grown young woman in the Whitechapel Countess.

Gower's note reached Henrietta on her descent to the breakfast-table. She was, alone, and thrown into a torture of perplexity: for she wanted advice as to the advice to be given to Janey, and Livia was an utterly unprofitable person to consult in the case. She thought of Lady Arpington, not many doors distant. Drinking one hasty cup of tea, she sent for her bonnet, and hastened away to the great lady, whom she found rising from breakfast with the marquis.

Lady Arpington read Gower's note. She unburdened herself: 'Oh! So it 's no longer a bachelor's household!'

Henrietta heaved the biggest of sighs. 'I fear the poor dear may have made matters worse.'

To which Lady Arpington said: 'Worse or better, my child!' and shrugged; for the present situation strained to snapping.

She proposed to go forthwith, and give what support she could to the Countess of Fleetwood.

They descended the steps of the house to the garden and the Green Park's gravel walk up to Piccadilly. There they had view of Lord Fleetwood on horseback leisurely turning out of the main way's tide. They saw him alight at the mews. As they entered the square, he was met some doors from the south corner by his good or evil genius, whose influence with him came next after the marriage in the amazement it caused, and was perhaps to be explained by it; for the wealthiest of young noblemen bestowing his name on an unknown girl, would be the one to make an absurd adventurer his intimate. Lord Fleetwood bent a listening head while Mr. Gower Woodseer, apparently a good genius for the moment, spoke at his ear.

How do we understand laughter at such a communication as he must be hearing from the man? Signs of a sharp laugh indicated either his cruel levity or that his presumptuous favourite trifled--and the man's talk could be droll, Lady Arpington knew: it had, she recollected angrily, diverted her, and softened her to tolerate the intruder into regions from which her class and her periods excluded the lowly born, except at the dinner-tables of stale politics and tattered scandal. Nevertheless, Lord Fleetwood mounted the steps to his house door, still listening. His 'Asmodeus,' on the tongue of the world, might be doing the part of Mentor really. The house door stood open.

Fleetwood said something to Gower; he swung round, beheld the ladies and advanced to them, saluting. 'My dear Lady Arpington! quite so, you arrive opportunely. When the enemy occupies the citadel, it's proper to surrender. Say, I beg, she can have the house, if she prefers it. I will fall back on Esslemont. Arrangements for her convenience will be made. I thank you, by anticipation.'

His bow included Henrietta loosely. Lady Arpington had exclaimed: 'Enemy, Fleetwood?' and Gower, in his ignorance of the smoothness of aristocratic manners, expected a remonstrance; but Fleetwood was allowed to go on, with his air of steely geniality and a decision, that his friend imagined he could have broken down like an old partition board under the kick of a sarcasm sharpening an appeal.

'Lord Fleetwood was on the point of going in,' he assured the great lady.

'Lord Fleetwood may regret his change of mind,' said she. 'The Countess of Fleetwood will have my advice to keep her footing in this house.'

She and Henrietta sat alone with Carinthia for an hour. Coming forth, Lady Arpington ejaculated to herself: 'Villany somewhere!--You will do well, Henrietta, to take up your quarters with her a day or two. She can hold her position a month. Longer is past possibility.'

A shudder of the repulsion from men crept over the younger lady. But she was a warrior's daughter, and observed: 'My husband, her brother, will be back before the month ends.'

'No need for hostilities to lighten our darkness,' Lady Arpington rejoined. 'You know her? trust her?'

'One cannot doubt her face. She is my husband's sister. Yes, I do trust her. I nail my flag to her cause.'

The flag was crimson, as it appeared on her cheeks; and that intimated a further tale, though not of so dramatic an import as the cognizant short survey of Carinthia had been.

These young women, with the new complications obtruded by them, irritated a benevolent great governing lady, who had married off her daughters and embraced her grandchildren, comfortably finishing that chapter; and beheld now the apparition of the sex's ancient tripping foe, when circumstances in themselves were quite enough to contend against on their behalf. It seemed to say, that nature's most burdened weaker must always be beaten. Despite Henrietta's advocacy and Carinthia's clear face, it raised a spectral form of a suspicion, the more effective by reason of the much required justification it fetched from the shades to plead apologies for Lord Fleetwood's erratic, if not mad, and in any case ugly, conduct. What otherwise could be his excuse? Such was his need of one, that the wife he crushed had to be proposed for sacrifice, in the mind of a lady tending strongly to side with her and condemn her husband.

Lady Arpington had counselled Carinthia to stay where she was, the Fates having brought her there. Henrietta was too generous to hesitate in her choice between her husband's sister and the earl. She removed from Livia's house to Lord Fleetwood's. My lord was at Esslemont two days; then established his quarters at Scrope's hotel, five minutes' walk from the wedded lady to whom the right to bear his title was granted, an interview with him refused. Such a squaring for the battle of spouses had never--or not in mighty London--been seen since that old fight began.

CHAPTER XXVI

AFTER SOME FENCING THE DAME PASSES OUR GUARD

Dame Gossip at this present pass bursts to give us a review of the social world siding for the earl or for his countess; and her parrot cry of 'John Rose Mackrell!' with her head's loose shake over the smack of her lap, to convey the contemporaneous tipsy relish of the rich good things he said on the subject of the contest, indicates the kind of intervention it would be.

To save the story from having its vein tied, we may accept the reminder,

that he was the countess's voluble advocate at a period when her friends were shy to speak of her. After relating the Vauxhall Gardens episode in burlesque Homeric during the freshness of the scandal, Rose Mackrell's enthusiasm for the heroine of his humour set in. He tracked her to her parentage, which was new breath blown into the sunken tradition of some Old Buccaneer and his Countess Fanny: and, a turn of great good luck helping him to a copy of the book of the MAXIMS FOR MEN, he would quote certain of the racier ones, passages of Captain John Peter Kirby's personal adventures in various lands and waters illustrating the text, to prove that the old warrior acted by the rule of his recommendations. They had the repulsive attraction proper to rusty lumber swords and truncheons that have tasted brains. They wove no mild sort of halo for the head of a shillelagh-flourishing Whitechapel Countess descended from the writer and doer.

People were willing to believe in her jump of thirty feet or more off a suburban house-top to escape duress, and her midnight storming of her lord's town house, and ousting of him to go find his quarters at Scrope's hotel. He, too, had his band of pugilists, as it was known; and he might have heightened a raging scandal. The nobleman forbore. A woman's blow gracefully taken adds a score of inches to our stature, floor us as it may: we win the world's after-thoughts. Rose Mackrell sketched the earl;--always alert, smart, quick to meet a combination and protect a dignity never obtruded, and in spite of himself the laugh of the town. His humour flickered wildly round the ridiculous position of a prominent young nobleman, whose bearing and character were foreign to a position of ridicule.

Nevertheless, the earl's figure continuing to be classic sculpture, it allied him with the aristocracy of martyrs, that burn and do not wince. He propitiated none, and as he could not but suffer shrewdly, he gained esteem enough to shine through the woman's pitiless drenching of him. During his term at Scrope's hotel, the carousals there were quite old-century and matter of discourse. He had proved his return to sound sense in the dismissal of 'the fiddler,' notoriously the woman's lieutenant, or more; and nightly the revelry closed at the great gaming tables of St. James's Street, while Whitechapel held the coroneted square, well on her way to the Law courts, as Abrane and Potts reported; and positively so, 'clear case.' That was the coming development and finale of the Marriage. London waited for it.

A rich man's easy smile over losses at play, merely taught his emulous troop to feel themselves poor devils in the pocket. But Fleetwood's contempt of Sleep was a marvel, superhuman, and accused them of an inferior vigour, hard for young men to admit by the example. He never went to bed. Issuing from Fortune's hall-doors in the bright, lively, summer morning, he mounted horse and was away to the hills. Or he took the arm of a Roman Catholic nobleman, Lord Feltre, and walked with him from the green tables and the establishment's renowned dry still Sillery to a Papist chapel. As it was not known that he had given his word to abjure his religion, the pious gamblers did no worse than spread an alarm and quiet it, by the citation of his character for having a try at everything.

Henrietta despatched at this period the following letter to Chillon:

'I am with Livia to-morrow. Janey starts for Wales to-morrow morning, a voluntary exile. She pleaded to go back to that place where you had to leave her, promising she would not come Westward; but was persuaded. Lady Arpington approves. The situation was getting too terribly strained. We met and passed my lord in the park.

'He was walking his horse-elegant cavalier that he is: would not look on his wife. A woman pulled by her collar should be passive; if she pulls her way, she is treated as a dog. I see nothing else in the intention of poor Janey's last offence to him. There is an opposite counsel, and he can be eloquent, and he will be heard on her side. How could she manage the most wayward when she has not an idea of ordinary men! But, my husband, they have our tie between them; it may move him. It subdues her--and nothing else would have done that. If she had been in England a year before the marriage, she would, I think, have understood better how to guide her steps and her tongue for his good pleasure. She learns daily, very quickly: observes, assimilates; she reads and has her comments--would have shot far ahead of your Riette, with my advantages.

'Your uncle--but he will bear any charge on his conscience as long as he can get the burden off his shoulders. Do not fret, my own! Reperuse the above--you will see we have grounds for hope.

'He should have looked down on her! No tears from her eyes, but her eyes were tears. She does not rank among beautiful women. She has her moments for outshining them--the loveliest of spectres! She caught at my heart. I cannot forget her face looking up for him to look down. A great painter would have reproduced it, a great poet have rendered the impression. Nothing short of the greatest. That is odd to say of one so simple as she. But when accidents call up her reserves, you see mountain heights where mists were--she is actually glorified. Her friend--I do believe a friend--the Mr. Woodseer you are to remember meeting somewhere --a sprained ankle--has a dozen similes ready for what she is when pain or happiness vivify her. Or, it may be, tender charity. She says, that if she feels for suffering people, it is because she is the child of Chillon's mother. In like manner Chillon is the son of Janey's father.

'Mr. Woodseer came every other evening. Our only enlivenment. Livia followed her policy, in refusing to call. We lived luxuriously; no money, not enough for a box at the opera, though we yearned--you can imagine. Chapters of philosophy read out and expounded instead. Janey likes them. He sets lessons to her queer maid--reading, writing, pronunciation of English. An inferior language to Welsh, for poetical purposes, we are informed. So Janey--determining to apply herself to Welsh, and a chameleon Riette dreading that she will be taking a contrary view of the honest souls--as she feels them to be--when again under Livia's shadow.

'The message from Janey to Scrope's hotel was despatched half-an-hour after we had driven in from the park; fruit of a brown meditation. I

wrote it--third person--a single sentence. Arrangements are made for her to travel comfortably. It is funny--the shops for her purchases of clothes, necessaries, etc., are specified; she may order to any extent. Not a shilling of money for her poor purse. What can be the secret of that? He does nothing without an object. To me, uniformly civil, no irony, few compliments. Livia writes, that I am commended for keeping Janey company. What can be the secret of a man scrupulously just with one hand, and at the same time cruel with the other? Mr. Woodseer says, his wealth:--"More money than is required for their needs, men go into harness to Plutus,"--if that is clever.

'I have written my husband--as Janey ceases to call her own; and it was pretty and touching to hear her "my husband."--Oh! a dull letter. But he is my husband though he keeps absent--to be longed for--he is my husband still, my husband always. Chillon is Henrietta's husband, the world cries out, and when she is flattered she does the like, for then it is not too presumptuous that she should name Henrietta Chillon's wife. In my ears, husband has the sweeter sound. It brings an angel from overhead. Will it bring him one-half hour sooner? My love! My dear! If it did, I should be lispng "husband, husband, husband" from cock-crow to owl's cry. Livia thinks the word foolish, if not detestable. She and I have our different opinions. She is for luxury. I choose poverty and my husband. Poverty has its beauty, if my husband is the sun of it. Elle radote. She would not have written so dull a letter to her husband if she had been at the opera last night, or listened to a distant street-band. No more--the next line would be bleeding. He should have her blood too, if that were her husband's--it would never be; but if it were for his good in the smallest way. Chillon's wish is to give his blood for them he loves. Never did woman try more to write worthily to her absent lord and fall so miserably into the state of dripping babe from bath on nurse's knee. Cover me, my lord; and love, my cause for--no, my excuse, my refuge from myself. We are one? Oh! we are one!--and we have been separated eight and twenty days.

'HENRIETTA KIRBY-LEVELLIER.'

That was a letter for the husband and lover to receive in a foreign land and be warmed.

The tidings of Carinthia washed him clean of the grimy district where his waxen sister had developed her stubborn insensibility;--resembling craziness, every perversion of the refinement demanded by young Englishmen of their ladies; and it pacified him with the belief that she was now at rest, the disturbed history of their father and mother at rest as well; his conscience in relation to the marriage likewise at rest. Chillon had a wife. Her writing of the welcome to poverty stirred his knowledge of his wife's nature. Carinthia might bear it and harden to flint; Henrietta was a butterfly for the golden rays. His thoughts, all his energies, were bent on the making of money to supply her need for the pleasure she flew in--a butterfly's grub without it. Accurately so did the husband and lover read his wife--adoring her the more.

Her letter's embracing close was costly to them. It hurried him to the

compromise of a debateable business, and he fell into the Austrian Government's terms for the payment of the inheritance from his father; calculating that--his sister's share deducted--money would be in hand to pay pressing debts and enable Henrietta to live unworried by cares until he should have squeezed debts, long due and increasing, out of the miserly old lord, his uncle. A prospect of supplies for twelve months, counting the hack and carriage Henrietta had always been used to, seemed about as far as it was required to look by the husband hastening homeward to his wife's call. Her letter was a call in the night. Besides, there were his yet untried Inventions. The new gunpowder testing at Croridge promised to provide Henrietta with many of the luxuries she could have had, and had abandoned for his sake. The new blasting powder and a destructive shell might build her the palace she deserved. His uncle was, no doubt, his partner. If, however, the profits were divided, sufficient wealth was assured. But his uncle remained a dubious image. The husband and lover could enfold no positive prospect to suit his wife's tastes beyond the twelve months.

We have Dame Gossip upon us.

--One minute let mention be of the excitement over Protestant England when that rumour disseminated, telling of her wealthiest nobleman's visit to a monastery, up in the peaks and snows; and of his dwelling among the monks, and assisting in all their services day and night, hymning and chanting, uttering not one word for one whole week: his Papistical friend, Lord Feltre, with him, of course, after Jesuit arts had allured him to that place of torrents and lightnings and canticles and demon echoes, all as though expressly contrived for the horrifying of sinners into penitence and confession and the monkish cowl up to life's end, not to speak of the abjuration of worldly possessions and donation of them into the keeping of the shaven brothers; when either they would have settled a band of them here in our very midst, or they would have impoverished--is not too strong a word--the country by taking the money's worth of the mines, estates, mansions, freehold streets and squares of our metropolis out of it without scruple; rejoicing so to bleed the Protestant faith. Underrate it now--then it was a truly justifiable anxiety: insomuch that you heard people of station, eminent titled persons, asking, like the commonest low Radicals, whether it was prudent legislation to permit of the inheritance of such vast wealth by a young man, little more than a boy, and noted for freaks. And some declared it could not be allowed for foreign monks to have a claim to inherit English property. There was a general consent, that if the Earl of Fleetwood went to the extreme of making over his property to those monks, he should be pronounced insane and incapable. Ultimately the world was a little pacified by hearing that a portion of it was entailed, Esslemont and the Welsh mines.

So it might be; but what if he had no child! The marriage amazing everybody scarcely promised fruit, it was thought. Countess Livia, much besought for her opinion, scouted the possibility. And Carinthia Jane was proclaimed by John Rose Mackrell (to his dying day the poor gentleman tried vainly to get the second syllable of his name accentuated) a young woman who would outlive twice over the husband she had. He said of his

name, it was destined to pass him down a dead fish in the nose of posterity, and would affect his best jokes; which something has done, or the present generation has lost the sense of genuine humour.

Thanks to him, the talk of the Whitechapel Countess again sprang up, merrily as ever; and after her having become, as he said, 'a desiccated celebrity,' she outdid cabinet ministers and naughty wives for a living morsel in the world's mouth. She was denounced by the patriotic party as the cause of the earl's dalliance with Rome.

The earl, you are to know, was then coasting along the Mediterranean, on board his beautiful schooner yacht, with his Lord Feltre, bound to make an inspection of Syrian monasteries, and forget, if he could, the face of all faces, another's possession by the law.

Those two lords, shut up together in a yacht, were advised by their situation to be bosom friends, and they quarrelled violently, and were reconciled, and they quarrelled again; they were explosive chemicals; until the touch of dry land relieved them of what they really fancied the spell of the Fiend. For their argumentative topic during confinement was Woman, when it was not Theology; and even off a yacht, those are subjects to kindle the utmost hatred of dissension, if men are not perfectly concordant. They agreed upon land to banish any talk of Women or Theology, where it would have been comparatively innocent; so they both desiring to be doing the thing they had sworn they would not do, the thoughts of both were fastened on one or the other interdicted subject. They hardly spoke; they perceived in their longing minds, that the imagined spell of, the Fiend was indeed the bile of the sea, secreted thickly for want of exercise, and they both regretted the days and nights of their angry controversies; unfit pilgrims of the Holy Land, they owned.

To such effect, Lord Fleetwood wrote to Gower Woodseer, as though there had been no breach between them, from Jerusalem, expressing the wish to hear his cool wood-notes of the philosophy of Life, fresh drawn from Nature's breast; and urgent for an answer, to be addressed to his hotel at Southampton, that he might be greeted on his return home first by his 'friend Gower.'

He wrote in the month of January. His arrival at Southampton was on the thirteenth day of March; and there he opened a letter some weeks old, the bearer of news which ought by rights to make husbands proudly happy.

CHAPTER XXVII

WE DESCEND INTO A STEAMER'S ENGINE-ROOM

Fleetwood had dropped his friend Lord Feltre at Ancona; his good fortune was to be alone when the clang of bells rang through his head in the reading of Gower's lines. Other letters were opened: from the Countess

Livia, from Lady Arpington, from Captain Kirby-Levellier. There was one from his lawyers, informing him of their receipt of a communication dated South Wales, December 11th, and signed Owain Wythan; to the effect, that the birth of a son to the Earl of Fleetwood was registered on the day of the date, with a copy of the document forwarded.

Livia scornfully stated the tattling world's 'latest.' The captain was as brief, in ordinary words, whose quick run to the stop could be taken for a challenge of the eye. It stamped the adversary's frown on Fleetwood reading. Lady Arpington was more politic; she wrote of 'a healthy boy,' and 'the healthy mother giving him breast,' this being 'the way for the rearing of strong men.' She condescended to the particulars, that she might touch him.

The earl had not been so reared: his mother was not the healthy mother. One of his multitudinous, shifty, but ineradicable ambitions was to exhibit an excellingly vigorous, tireless constitution. He remembered the needed refreshment of the sea-breezes aboard his yacht during the week following the sleep-discarded nights at Scrope's and the green tables. For a week he hung to the smell of brine, in rapturous amity with Feltre, until they yellowed, differed, wrangled, hated.

A powerful leaven was put into him by the tidings out of Wales. Gower, good fellow, had gone down to see the young mother three weeks after the birth of her child. She was already renewing her bloom. She had produced the boy in the world's early manner, lightly, without any of the tragic modern hovering over death to give the life. Gower compared it to a 'flush of the vernal orchard after a day's drink of sunlight.' That was well: that was how it should be. One loathes the idea of tortured women.

The good fellow was perhaps absurdly poetical. Still we must have poetry to hallow this and other forms of energy: or say, if you like, the right view of them impels to poetry. Otherwise we are in the breeding yards, among the litters and the farrows. It is a question of looking down or looking up. If we are poor creatures--as we are if we do but feast and gamble and beget--we shall run for a time with the dogs and come to the finish of swine. Better say, life is holy! Why, then have we to thank her who teaches it.

He gazed at the string of visions of the woman naming him husband, making him a father: the imagined Carinthia--beautiful Gorgon, haggard Venus; the Carinthia of the precipice tree-shoot; Carinthia of the ducal dancing-hall; and she at the altar rails; she on the coach box; she alternately softest of brides, doughtiest of Amazons. A mate for the caress, an electrical heroine, fronted him.

Yes, and she was Lord Fleetwood's wife, cracking sconces,--a demoiselle Moll Flanders,--the world's Whitechapel Countess out for an airing, infernally earnest about it, madly ludicrous; the schemer to catch his word, the petticoated Shylock to bind him to the letter of it; now persecuting, haunting him, now immovable for obstinacy; malignant to stay down in those vile slums and direct tons of sooty waters on his head

from its mains in the sight of London, causing the least histrionic of men to behave as an actor. He beheld her a skull with a lamp behind the eyeholes.

But this woman was the woman who made him a father; she was the mother of the heir of the House; and the boy she clasped and suckled as her boy was his boy. They met inseparably in that new life.

Truly, there could not be a woman of flesh so near to a likeness with the beatific image of Feltre's worshipped Madonna!

The thought sparkled and darkened in Fleetwood's mind, as a star passing into cloud. For an uproarious world claimed the woman, jeered at all allied with her; at her husband most, of course:--the punctilious noodle! the golden jackass, tethered and goaded! He had choice among the pick of women: the daughter of the Old Buccaneer was preferred by the wiseacre Coelebs. She tricked him cunningly and struck a tremendous return blow in producing her male infant.

By the way, was she actually born in wedlock? Lord Levellier's assurances regarding her origin were, by the calculation, a miser's shuffles to clinch his bargain. Assuming the representative of holy motherhood to be a woman of illegitimate birth, the history of the House to which the spotted woman gave an heir would suffer a jolt when touching on her. And altogether the history fumed rank vapours. Imagine her boy in his father's name a young collegian! No commonly sensitive lad could bear the gibes of the fellows raking at antecedents: Fleetwood would be the name to start roars. Smarting for his name, the earl chafed at the boy's mother. Her production of a man-child was the further and grosser offence.

The world sat on him. His confession to some degree of weakness, even to folly, stung his pride of individuality so that he had to soothe the pain by tearing himself from a thought of his folly's partner, shutting himself up and away from her. Then there was a cessation of annoyance, flatteringly agreeable: which can come to us only of our having done the right thing, young men will think. He felt at once warmly with the world, enjoyed the world's kind shelter, and in return for its eulogy of his unprecedented attachment to the pledge of his word, admitted an understanding of its laughter at the burlesque edition of a noble lady in the person of the Whitechapel Countess. The world sat on him heavily.

He recurred to Gower Woodseer's letter.

The pictures and images in it were not the principal matter,--the impression had been deep. A plain transcription of the young mother's acts and words did more to portray her: the reader could supply reflections.

Would her boy's father be very pleased to see him? she had asked.

And she spoke of a fear that the father would try to take her boy from her.

'Never that--you have my word!' Fleetwood said; and he nodded consentingly over her next remark

'Not while I live, till he must go to school!'

The stubborn wife would be the last of women to sit and weep as a rifled mother.

A child of the Countess Carinthia (he phrased it) would not be deficient in will, nor would the youngster lack bravery.

For his part, comparison rushing at him and searching him, he owned that he leaned on pride. To think that he did, became a theme for pride. The mother had the primitive virtues, the father the developed: he was the richer mine. And besides, he was he, the unriddled, complex, individual he; she was the plain barbarian survival, good for giving her offspring bone, muscle, stout heart.

Shape the hypothesis of a fairer woman the mother of the heir to the earldom.

Henrietta was analyzed in a glimpse. Courage, animal healthfulness, she, too, might--her husband not obstructing--transmit; and good looks, eyes of the sapphire AEgean. And therewith such pliability as the Mother of Love requires of her servants.

Could that woman resist seductions?

Fleetwood's wrath with her for refusing him and inducing him in spite to pledge his word elsewhere, haphazard, pricked a curiosity to know whether the woman could be--and easily! easily! he wagered--led to make her conduct warrant for his contempt of her. Led,--that is, misled, you might say, if you were pleading for a doll. But it was necessary to bait the pleasures for the woman, in order to have full view of the precious fine fate one has escaped. Also to get well rid of a sort of hectic in the blood, which the woman's beauty has cast on that reflecting tide: a fever-sign, where the fever has become quite emotionless and is merely desirous for the stain of it to be washed out. As this is not the desire to possess or even to taste, contempt will do it. When we know that the weaver of the fascinations is purchasable, we toss her to the market where men buy; and we walk released from vile subjection to one of the female heap: subjection no longer, doubtless, and yet a stain of the past flush, often colouring our reveries, creating active phantasms of a passion absolutely extinct, if it ever was the veritable passion.

The plot--formless plot--to get release by the sacrifice or at least a crucial temptation of the woman, that should wash his blood clean of her image, had a shade of the devilish, he acknowledged; and the apology offered no improvement of its aspect. She might come out of the trial triumphant. And benefit for himself, even a small privilege, even the pressure of her hand, he not only shrank from the thought of winning,-he loathed the thought. He was too delicate over the idea of the married

woman whom he fancied he loved in her maidenhood. Others might press her hand, lead her the dance: he simply wanted his release. She had set him on fire; he conceived a method for trampling the remaining sparks and erasing stain and scars; that was all. Henrietta rejected her wealthy suitor: she might some day hence be seen crawling abjectly to wealth, glad of a drink from the cup it holds, intoxicated with the draught. An injured pride could animate his wealth to crave solace of such a spectacle.

Devilish, if you like. He had expiated the wickedness in Cistercian seclusion. His wife now drove him to sin again.

She had given him a son. That fluted of home and honourable life. She had her charm, known to him alone.

But how, supposing she did not rub him to bristle with fresh irritations, how go to his wife while Henrietta held her throne? Consideration was due to her until she stumbled. Enough if she wavered. Almost enough is she stood firm as a statue in the winds, and proved that the first page of her was a false introduction. The surprising apparition of a beautiful woman with character; a lightly-thrilled, pleasure-loving woman devoted to her husband or protected by her rightful self-esteem, would loosen him creditably. It had to be witnessed, for faith in it. He revered our legendary good women, and he bowed to noble deeds; and he ascribed the former to poetical creativeness, the latter operated as a scourging to his flesh to yield its demoniacal inmates. Nothing of the kind was doing at present.

Or stay: a studious re-perusal of Gower Woodseer's letter enriched a little incident. Fleetwood gave his wife her name of Carinthia when he had read deliberately and caught the scene.

Mrs. Wythan down in Wales related it to Gower. Carinthia and Madge, trudging over the treeless hills, came on a birchen clump round a deep hollow or gullypit; precipitous, the earl knew, he had peeped over the edge in his infant days. There at the bottom, in a foot or so of water, they espied a lamb; and they rescued the poor beastie by going down to it, one or both. It must have been the mountain-footed one. A man would hesitate, spying below. Fleetwood wondered how she had managed to climb up, and carrying the lamb! Down pitches Madge Winch to help--they did it between them. We who stand aloof admire stupidly. To defend himself from admiring, he condemned the two women for the risk they ran to save a probably broken-legged little beast: and he escaped the melting mood by forcing a sneer at the sort of stuff out of which popular ballads are woven. Carinthia was accused of letting her adventurous impulses and sentimental female compassion swamp thought of a mother's duties. If both those women had broken their legs the child might have cried itself into fits for the mother, there she would have remained.

Gower wrote in a language transparent of the act, addressed to a reader whose memory was to be impregnated. His reader would have flown away from the simple occurrence on arabesques and modulated tones; and then envisaging them critically, would have tossed his poor little story to

the winds, as a small thing magnified: with an object, being the next thought about it. He knew his Fleetwood so far.

His letter concluded: 'I am in a small Surrey village over a baker's shop, rent eight shillings per week, a dame's infant school opposite my window, miles of firwood, heath, and bracken openings, for the winged or the nested fancies. Love Nature, she makes you a lord of her boundless, off any ten square feet of common earth. I go through my illusions and come always back on that good truth. It says, beware of the world's passion for flavours and spices. Much tasted, they turn and bite the biter. My exemplars are the lately breeched youngsters with two pence in their pockets for the gingerbread-nut booth on a fair day. I learn more from one of them than you can from the whole cavalcade of your attendant Ixionides.'

Mounting the box of his coach for the drive to London, Fleetwood had the new name for the parasitic and sham vital troop at his ears.

'My Ixionides!' he repeated, and did not scorn them so much as he rejoiced to be enlightened by the title. He craved the presence of the magician who dropped illumination with a single word; wholesomer to think of than the whole body of those Ixionides--not bad fellows, here and there, he reflected, tolerantly, half laughing at some of their clownish fun. Gower Woodseer and he had not quarrelled? No, they had merely parted at one of the crossways. The plebeian could teach that son of the, genuflections, Lord Feltre, a lesson in manners. Woodseer was the better comrade and director of routes. Into the forest, up on the heights; and free, not locked; and not parroting day and night, but quick for all that the world has learnt and can tell, though two-thirds of it be composed of Ixionides: that way lies wisdom, and his index was cut that way.

Arrived in town, he ran over the headings of his letters, in no degree anxious for a communication from Wales. There was none. Why none?

She might as well have scrawled her announcement of an event pleasing to her, and, by the calculation, important to him, if not particularly interesting. The mother's wifeish lines would, perhaps, have been tested in a furnace. He smarted at the blank of any, of even two or three formal words. She sulked? 'I am not a fallen lamb!' he said. Evidently one had to be a shivering beast in trouble, to excite her to move a hand.

Through so slight a fissure as this piece of discontent cracked in him, the crowd of his grievances with the woman rushed pell-mell, deluging young shoots of sweeter feelings. She sulked! If that woman could not get the command, he was to know her incapable of submission. After besmutting the name she had filched from him, she let him understand that there was no intention to repent. Possibly she meant war. In which case a man must fly, or stand assailed by the most intolerable of vulgar farces;--to be compared to a pelting of one on the stage.

The time came for him to knock at doors and face his public.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BY CONCESSIONS TO MISTRESS GOSSIP A FURTHER INTRUSION IS AVERTED

Livia welcomed him, with commiserating inquiry behind her languid eyelids. 'You have all the latest?' it said.

He struck on the burning matter.

'You wish to know the part you have to play, ma'am.' 'Tell me, Russett.'

'You will contradict nothing.'

Her eyebrows asked, 'It means?'

'You have authority from me to admit the facts.'

'They are facts?' she remarked.

'Women love teasing round certain facts, apparently; like the Law courts over their pet cases.'

'But, Russett, will you listen?'

'Has the luck been civil of late?'

'I think of something else at present. No, it has not.'

'Abrane?'

'Pray, attend to me. No, not Abrane.'

'I believe you've all been cleared out in my absence. St. Ombre?'

Her complexion varied. 'Mr. Ambrose Mallard has once or twice . . .
But let me beg you--the town is raging with it. My dear Russett, a bold front now; there 's the chance of your release in view.'

'A rascal in view! Name the sum.'

'I must reckon. My head is--can you intend to submit?'

'So it's Brosey Mallard now. You choose your deputy queerly. He's as bad as Abrane, with steam to it. Chummy Potts would have done better.'

'He wins one night; loses every pound-note he has the next; and comes vaunting--the "dry still Sillery" of the establishment,--a perpetual chorus to his losses!'

'His consolation to you for yours. That is the gentleman. Chummy

doesn't change. Say, why not St. Ombre? He's cool.'

'There are reasons.'

'Let them rest. And I have my reasons. Do the same for them.'

'Yours concern the honour of the family.'

'Deeply: respect them.'

'Your relatives have to be thought of, though they are few and not too pleasant.'

'If I had thought much of them, what would our relations be? They object to dicing, and I to leading strings.'

She turned to a brighter subject, of no visible connection with the preceding.

'Henrietta comes in May.'

'The month of her colours.'

'Her money troubles are terrible.'

'Both of you appear unlucky in your partners,--if winning was the object. She shall have all the distractions we can offer.'

'Your visit to the Chartreuse alarmed her.'

'She has rejoiced her husband.'

'A girl. She feared the Jesuit in your friend.'

'Feltre and she are about equally affected by music. They shall meet.'

'Russett, this once: I do entreat you to take counsel with your good sense, and remember that you stand where you are by going against my advice. It is a perfect storm over London. The world has not to be informed of your generosity; but a chivalry that invites the most horrible of sneers at a man! And what can I say? I have said it was impossible.'

'Add the postscript: you find it was perfectly possible.'

'I have to learn more than I care to hear.'

'Your knowledge is not in request: you will speak in my name.'

'Will you consult your lawyers, Russett, before you commit yourself?'

'I am on my way to Lady Arpington.'

'You cannot be thinking how serious it is.'

'I rather value the opinion of a hard-headed woman of the world.'

'Why not listen to me?'

'You have your points, ma'am.'

'She's a torch.'

'She serves my purpose.'

Livia shrugged sadly. 'I suppose it serves your purpose to be unintelligible to me.'

He rendered himself intelligible immediately by saying, 'Before I go-- a thousand?'

'Oh, my dear Russett!' she sighed.

'State the amount.'

She seemed to be casting unwieldy figures and he helped her with, 'Mr. Isaacs?'

'Not less than three, I fear.'

'Has he been pressing?'

'You are always good to us, Russett.'

'You are always considerate for the honour of the family, ma'am. Order for the money with you here to-morrow. And I thank you for your advice. Do me the favour to follow mine.'

'Commands should be the word.'

'Phrase it as you please.'

'You know I hate responsibility.'

'The chorus in classical dramas had generally that sentiment, but the singing was the sweeter for it.'

'Whom do you not win when you condescend to the mood, you dear boy?'

He restrained a bitter reply, touching the kind of persons he had won: a girl from the mountains, a philosophical tramp of the roads, troops of the bought.

Livia spelt at the problem he was. She put away the task of reading it. He departed to see Lady Arpington, and thereby rivet his chains.

As Livia had said, she was a torch. Lady Endor, Lady Eldritch, Lady Cowry, kindled at her. Again there were flights of the burning brands over London. The very odd marriage; the no-marriage; the two-ends-of-the-town marriage; and the maiden marriage a fruitful marriage; the monstrous marriage of the countess productive in banishment, and the unreadable earl accepting paternity; this Amazing Marriage was again the riddle in the cracker for tattlers and gapers. It rattled upon the world's native wantonness, the world's acquired decorum: society's irrepressible original and its powerfully resisting second nature. All the rogues of the fine sphere ran about with it, male and female; and there was the narrative that suggestively skipped, and that which trod the minuet measure, dropping a curtsey to ravenous curiosity; the apology surrendering its defensible cause in supplications to benevolence; and the benevolence damnatory in a too eloquent urgency; followed by the devout objection to a breath of the subject, so blackening it as to call forth the profanely circumstantial exposition. Smirks, blushes, dead silences, and in the lower regions roars, hung round it.

But the lady, though absent, did not figure poorly at all. Granting Whitechapel and the shillelagh affair, certain whispers of her good looks, contested only to be the more violently asserted; and therewith Rose Mackrell's tale of her being a 'young woman of birth,' having a 'romantic story to tell of herself and her parentage,' made her latest performance the champagne event of it hitherto. Men sparkled when they had it on their lips.

How, then, London asked, would the Earl of Fleetwood move his pieces in reply to his countess's particularly clever indication of the check threatening mate?

His move had no relation to the game, it was thought at first. The world could not suppose that he moved a simple pawn on his marriage board. He purchased a shop in Piccadilly for the sale of fruit and flowers.

Lady Arpington was entreated to deal at the shop, Countess Livia had her orders; his friends, his parasites and satellites, were to deal there. Intensely earnest as usual, he besought great ladies to let him have the overflow of their hothouses; and they classing it as another of the mystifications of a purse crazy for repleteness, inquired: 'But is it you we are to deal with?' And he quite seriously said: 'With me, yes, at present.' Something was behind the curtain, of course. His gravity had the effect of the ultra-comical in concealing it.

The shop was opened. We have the assurance of Rose Mackrell, that he entered and examined the piles and pans of fruit, and the bouquets cunningly arranged by a hand smelling French. The shop was roomy, splendid windows lighted the yellow, the golden, the green and parti-coloured stores. Four doors off, a chemist's motley in bellied glasses crashed on the sight. Passengers along the pavement had presented to them such a contrast as might be shown if we could imagine the Lethean ferry-boatload brought sharp against Pomona's lapful. In addition to the plucked flowers and fruits of the shop, Rose Mackrell more attentively examined the samples doing service at the counters. They were three,

under supervision of a watchful-eyed fourth. Dame Gossip is for quoting his wit. But the conclusion he reached, after quitting the shop and pacing his dozen steps, is important; for it sent a wind over the town to set the springs of tattle going as wildly as when the herald's trumpet blew the announcement for the world to hear out of Wales.

He had observed, that the young woman supervising was deficient in the ease of an established superior; her brows were troubled; she was, therefore, a lieutenant elevated from a lower grade; and, to his thinking, conducted the business during the temporary retirement of the mistress of the shop.

And the mistress of the shop?

The question hardly needs be put.

Rose Mackrell or his humour answered it in unfaltering terms.

London heard, with the variety of feelings which are indistinguishable under a flooding amazement, that the beautiful new fruit and flower shop had been purchased and stocked by the fabulously wealthy young Earl of Fleetwood, to give his Whitechapel Countess a taste for business, an occupation, and an honourable means of livelihood.

There was, Dame Gossip thumps to say, a general belief in this report. Crowds were on the pavement, peering through the shop-windows. Carriages driving by stopped to look. My lord himself had been visible, displaying his array of provisions to friends. Nor was credulity damped appreciably when over the shop, in gold letters, appeared the name of Sarah Winch. It might be the countess's maiden name, if she really was a married countess.

But, in truth, the better informed of the town, having begun to think its Croesus capable of any eccentricity, chose to believe. They were at the pitch of excitement which demands and will swallow a succession of wilder extravagances. To accelerate the delirium of the fun, nothing was too much, because any absurdity was anticipated. And the earl's readiness to be complimented on the shop's particular merits, his gratified air at an allusion to it, whirled the fun faster. He seemed entirely unconscious that each step he now took wakened peals.

For such is the fate of a man who has come to be dogged by the humourist for the provision he furnishes; and, as it happens, he is the more laughable if not in himself a laughable object. The earl's handsome figure, fine style, and contrasting sobriety heightened the burlesque of his call to admiration of a shop where Whitechapel would sit in state-according to the fiction so closely under the lee of fact that they were not strictly divisible. Moreover, Sarah Winch, whom Chumley Potts drew into conversation, said, he vowed, she came up West from Whitechapel. She said it a little nervously, but without blushing. Always on the side of the joke, he could ask: 'Who can doubt?' Indeed, scepticism poisoned the sport.

The Old Buccaneer has written: Friends may laugh; I am not roused. My enemy's laugh is a bugle blown in the night.

Our enemy's laugh at us rouses to wariness, he would say. He can barely mean, that a condition of drowsiness is other than providently warned by laughter of friends. An old warrior's tough fibre would, perhaps, be insensible to that small crackle. In civil life, however, the friend's laugh at us is the loudest of the danger signals to stop our course: and the very wealthy nobleman, who is known for not a fool, is kept from hearing it. Unless he does hear it, he can have no suspicion of its being about him: he cannot imagine such 'lese-majeste' in the subservient courtiers too prudent to betray a sign. So Fleetwood was unwarned; and his child-like unconsciousness of the boiling sentiments around, seasoned, pricked, and maddened his parasites under compression to invent, for a faint relief. He had his title for them, they their tales of him.

Dame Gossip would recount the tales. She is of the order of persons inclining to suspect the tittle of truth in prodigies of scandal. She is rustling and bustling to us of 'Carinthia Jane's run up to London to see Sarah Winch's grand new shop,' an eclipse of all existing grand London western shops; and of Rose Mackrell's account of her dance of proud delight in the shop, ending with a 'lovely cheese' just as my lord enters; and then a scene, wild beyond any conceivable 'for pathos and humour'--her pet pair of the dissimilar twins, both banging at us for tear-drops by different roads, through a common aperture:--and the earl has the Whitechapel baby boy plumped into his arms; and the countess fetches him a splendid bob-dip and rises out of a second cheese to twirl and fandango it; and, all serious on a sudden, request, whimperingly beseech, his thanks to her for the crowing successor she has presented him with: my lord ultimately, but carefully, depositing the infant on a basket of the last oranges of the season, fresh from the Azores, by delivery off my lord's own schooner-yacht in Southampton water; and escaping, leaving his gold-headed stick behind him--a trophy for the countess? a weapon, it may be.

Quick she tucks up her skirts, she is after him. Dame Gossip speaks amusingly enough of the chase, and many eye-witnesses to the earl's flight at top speed down the right side of the way along by the Green Park; and of a Prince of the Blood, a portly Royal Duke on foot, bumped by one or the other of them, she cannot precisely say which, but 'thinks it to have been Carinthia Jane,' because the exalted personage, his shock of surprise abating, turned and watched the chase, in much merriment. And it was called, we are informed, 'The Piccadilly Hare and Hound' from that day.

Some tradition of an extenuated nobleman pursued by a light-footed lady amid great excitement, there is; the Dame attaches importance also to verses of one of the ballads beginning to gain currency at the time (issuing ostensibly from London's poetic centre, the Seven Dials, which had, we are to conjecture, got the story by discolouring filtration through footmen retailing in public-houses the stock of anecdotes they gathered when stationed behind Rose Mackrell's chair, or Captain

Abrane's, or Chumley 'Potts's), and would have the whole of it quoted:--

"'Tho' fair I be a powdered peruke,
And once was a gaping silly,
Your Whitechapel Countess will prove, Lord Duke,
She's a regular tiger-lily.
She'll fight you with cold steel
or she'll run you off your legs
Down the length of Piccadilly!"

That will satisfy; and perhaps indicate the hand.

'Popular sympathy, of course, was all on the side of the Fair, as ever in those days when women had not forfeited it by stepping from their sanctuary seclusion.'

The Dame shall expose her confusions. She really would seem to fancy that the ballad verifies the main lines of the story, which is an impossible one. Carinthia had not the means to travel: she was moneyless. Every bill of her establishment was paid without stint by Mr. Howell Edwards, the earl's manager of mines; but she had not even the means for a journey to the Gowerland rocks she longed to see. She had none since she forced her brother to take the half of her share of their inheritance, £1400, and sent him the remainder.

Accepted by Chillon John as a loan, says Dame Gossip, and no sooner received than consumed by the pressing necessities of a husband with the Rose Beauty of England to support in the comforts and luxuries he deemed befitting.

Still the Dame leans to her opinion that 'Carinthia Jane' may have been seen about London: for 'where we have much smoke there must be fire.' And the countess never denying an imputation not brought against her in her hearing, the ballad was unchallenged and London's wags had it their own way. Among the reasons why they so persistently hunted the earl, his air of a smart correctness shadowed by this new absurdity invited them, as when a spot of mud on the trimmest of countenances arrests observation: Humour plucked at him the more for the good faith of his handsome look under the prolific little disfigurement. Besides, a wealthy despot, with no conception of any hum around him, will have the wags in his track as surely as the flexibles in front: they avenge his exactions.

Fleetwood was honestly unaware of ridicule in the condition of inventive mania at his heels. Scheming, and hesitating to do, one-half of his mind was absorbed with the problem of how now to treat the mother of his boy. Her behaviour in becoming a mother was acknowledged to be good: the production of a boy was good--considerate, he almost thought. He grew so far reconciled to her as to have intimations of a softness coming on; a wish to hear her speak of the trifling kindness done to. the sister of Madge in reward of kindness done to her; wishes for looks he remembered, secret to him, more his own than any possessions. Dozens of men had wealth, some had beautiful wives; none could claim as his own that face

of the look of sharp steel melting into the bridal flower, when she sprang from her bed to defend herself and recognized the intruder at her window; stood smitten:--'It is my, husband.' Moonlight gave the variation of her features.

And that did not appease the resentment tearing him from her, so justifiable then, as he forced himself to think, now hideous. Glimpses of the pictures his deeds painted of him since his first meeting with this woman had to be shunned. He threw them off; they were set down to the mystery men are. The degrading, utterly different, back view of them teaches that Life is an irony. If the teaching is not accepted, and we are to take the blame, can we bear to live? Therefore, either way the irony of Life is proved. Young men straining at thought, in the grip of their sensations, reach this logical conclusion. They will not begin by examining the ground they stand on, and questioning whether they have consciences at peace with the steps to rearward.

Having established Life as the coldly malignant element, which induces to what it chastises, a loathing of womanhood, the deputed Mother of Life, ensues, by natural sequence. And if there be one among women who disturbs the serenity we choose to think our due, she wears for us the sinister aspect of a confidential messenger between Nemesis and the Parcae. Fleetwood was thus compelled to regard Carinthia as both originally and successively the cause of his internal as well as his exterior discomfort; otherwise those glimpses would have burnt into perpetual stigmas. He had also to get his mind away from her. They pleaded against him volubly with the rising of her image into it.

His manager at the mines had sent word of ominous discontent down there. His presence might be required. Obviously, then, the threatened place was unfitting for the Countess of Fleetwood. He despatched a kind of order through Mr. Howell Edwards, that she should remove to Esslemont to escape annoyances. Esslemont was the preferable residence. She could there entertain her friends, could spend a pleasanter time there.

He waited for the reply; Edwards deferred it.

Were they to be in a struggle with her obstinate will once more?

Henrietta was preparing to leave London for her dismal, narrow, and, after an absence, desired love-nest. The earl called to say farewell, cool as a loyal wife could wish him to be, admiring perforce. Marriage and maternity withdrew nothing--added to the fair young woman's bloom.

She had gone to her room to pack and dress. Livia received him. In the midst of the casual commonplaces her memory was enlightened.

'Oh,' said she, and idly drew a letter out of a blottingpad, 'we have heard from Wales.' She handed it to him.

Before he knew the thing he did, he was reading:

'There is no rest foamy brother, and I cannot help; I am kept so poor I

have not the smallest of sums. I do not wish to leave Wales--the people begin to love me; and can one be mistaken? I know if I am loved or hated. But if my lord will give me an allowance of money of some hundreds, I will do his bidding; I will leave England or I will go to Esslemont; I could say--to Mr. Woodseer, in that part of London. He would not permit. He thinks me blacked by it, like a sweepboy coming from a chimney; and that I have done injury to his title. No, Riette, to be a true sister, I must bargain with my lord before I submit. He has not cared to come and see his little son. His boy has not offended him. There may be some of me in this dear. I know whose features will soon show to defend the mother's good name. He is early my champion. He is not christened yet, and I hear it accuse me, and I am not to blame,--I still wait my lord's answer.'

'Don't be bothered to read the whole,' Livia had said, with her hand out, when his eyes were halfway down the page.

Fleetwood turned it, to read the signature: 'Janey.'

She seemed servile enough to some of her friends. 'Carinthia' would have had--a pleasanter sound. He folded the letter.

'Why give me this? Take it,'--said he.

She laid it on the open pad.

Henrietta entered and had it restored to her, Livia remarking: 'I found it in the blotter after all.'

She left them together, having to dress for the drive to the coach office with Henrietta.

'Poor amusement for you this time.' Fleetwood bowed, gently smiling.

'Oh!' cried Henrietta, 'balls, routs, dinners, music--as much music as I could desire, even!! What more could be asked? I am eternally grateful.'

'The world says, you are more beautiful than ever.'

'Happiness does it, then,--happiness owing to you, Lord Fleetwood.'

'Columelli pleases you?'

'His voice is heavenly! He carries me away from earth.'

'He is a gentleman, too-rare with those fellows.'

'A pretty manner. He will speak his compliments in his English.'

'You are seasoned to endure them in all languages. Pity another of your wounded: Brailstone has been hard hit at the tables.'

'I cannot pity gamblers.--May I venture?--half a word?'

'Tomes! But just a little compassion for the devoted. He wouldn't play so madly--if, well, say a tenth dilution of the rapt hearing Columelli gets.'

'Signor Columelli sings divinely.'

'You don't dislike Brailstone?'

'He is one of the agreeable.'

'He must put his feelings into Italian song!'

'To put them aside will do.'

'We are not to have our feelings?'

'Yes, on the proviso that ours are respected. But, one instant, Lord Fleetwood, pray. She is--I have to speak of her as my sister. I am sure she regrets . . . She writes very nicely.'

'You have a letter from her?'

Henrietta sighed that it would not bear exposure to him: 'Yes.'

'Nicely worded?'

'Well, yes, it is.'

He paused, not expecting that the letter would be shown, but silence fired shots, and he had stopped the petition. 'We are to have you for a week's yachting. You prescribe your company. Only be merciful. Exclusion will mean death to some. Columelli will be touring in Switzerland. You shall have him in the house when my new bit of ground Northwest of London is open: very handy, ten miles out. We'll have the Opera troupe there, and you shall command the Opera.'

Her beauty sweetened to thank him.

If, as Livia said, his passion for her was unchanged, the generosity manifested in the considerate screen it wore over any physical betrayal of it, deserved the lustre of her eyes. It dwelt a moment, vivid with the heart close behind and remorseful for misreading of old his fine character. Here was a young man who could be the very kindest of friends to the woman rejecting him to wed another. Her smile wavered. How shall a loving wife express warmth of sentiment elsewhere, without the one beam too much, that plunges her on a tideway? His claim of nothing called for everything short of the proscribed. She gave him her beauty in fullest flower.

It had the appearance of a temptation; and he was not tempted, though he admired; his thought being, Husband of the thing!

But he admired. That condition awakened his unsatisfied past days to desire positive proof of her worthlessness. The past days writhed in him. The present were loveless, entirely cold. He had not even the wish to press her hand. The market held beautiful women of a like description. He wished simply to see her proved the thing he read her to be: and not proved as such by himself. He was unable to summon or imagine emotion enough for him to simulate the forms by which fair women are wooed to their perdition. For all he cared, any man on earth might try, succeed or fail, as long as he had visual assurance that she coveted, a slave to the pleasures commanded by the wealth once disdained by her. Till that time, he could not feel himself perfectly free.

Dame Gossip prefers to ejaculate. Young men are mysteries! and bowl us onward. No one ever did comprehend the Earl of Fleetwood, she says: he was bad, he was good; he was whimsical and steadfast; a splendid figure, a mark for ridicule; romantic and a close arithmetician; often a devil, sometimes the humanest of creatures.

In fine, he was a millionaire nobleman, owing to a considerable infusion of Welsh blood in the composition of him. Now, to the Cymry and to the pure Kelt, the past is at their elbows continually. The past of their lives has lost neither face nor voice behind the shroud; nor are the passions of the flesh, nor is the animate soul, wanting to it. Other races forfeit infancy, forfeit youth and manhood with their progression to the wisdom age may bestow. These have each stage always alive, quick at a word, a scent, a sound, to conjure up scenes, in spirit and in flame. Historically, they still march with Cadwallader, with Llewellyn, with Glendower; sing with Aneurin, Taliesin, old Llywarch: individually, they are in the heart of the injury done them thirty years back or thrilling to the glorious deed which strikes an empty buckler for most of the sons of Time. An old sea rises in them, rolling no phantom billows to break to spray against existing rocks of the shore. That is why, and even if they have a dose of the Teuton in them, they have often to feel themselves exiles when still in amicable community among the preponderating Saxon English.

Add to the single differentiation enormous wealth--we convulse the excellent Dame by terming it a chained hurricane, to launch in foul blasts or beneficent showers, according to the moods during youth--and the composite Lord Fleetwood comes nearer into our focus. Dame Gossip, with her jiggling to be at the butterwoman's trot, when she is not violently interrupting, would suffer just punishment were we to digress upon the morality of a young man's legal possession of enormous wealth as well.

Wholly Cambrian Fleetwood was not. But he had to the full the Cambrian's reverential esteem for high qualities. His good-bye with Henrietta, and estimate of her, left a dusky mental, void requiring an orb of some sort for contemplation; and an idea of the totally contrary Carinthia, the woman he had avowedly wedded, usurped her place. Qualities were admitted. She was thrust away because she had offended: still more because he had offended. She bore the blame for forcing him to an

examination of his conduct at this point and that, where an ancestral savage in his lineaments cocked a strange eye. Yet at the moment of the act of the deed he had known himself the veritable Fleetwood. He had now to vindicate himself by extinguishing her under the load of her unwomanliness: she was like sun-dried linen matched beside oriental silk: she was rough, crisp, unyielding. That was now the capital charge. Henrietta could never be guilty of the unfeminine. Which did he prefer?

It is of all questions the one causing young men to screw wry faces when they are asked; they do so love the feminine, the ultra-feminine, whom they hate for her inclination to the frail. His depths were sounded, and he answered independently of his will, that he must be up to the heroic pitch to decide. Carinthia stood near him then. The confession was a step, and fraught with consequences. Her unacknowledged influence expedited him to Sarah Winch's shop, for sight of one of earth's honest souls; from whom he had the latest of the two others down in Wales, and of an infant there.

He dined the host of his Ixionides, leaving them early for a drive at night Eastward, and a chat with old Mr. Woodseer over his punching and sewing of his bootleather. Another honest soul. Mr. Woodseer thankfully consented to mount his coach-box next day, and astonish Gower with a drop on his head from the skies about the time of the mid-day meal.

There we have our peep into Dame Gossip's young man mysterious.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Always the shout for more produced it ("News")
Anecdotalist to slaughter families for the amusement
Call of the great world's appetite for more (Invented news)
Enemy's laugh is a bugle blown in the night
He wants the whip; ought to have had it regularly
Magnificent in generosity; he had little humaneness
She was thrust away because because he had offended
Women treat men as their tamed housemates

[The End]

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