

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

THE SILENT SHORE

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The Silent Shore / A Romance

Prologue

THE STORY OF THIRTY YEARS AGO

"And you are certain of the year he was married in?"

"Perfectly-there is no possibility of my being mistaken. He was married on New Year's Day, '58; I was born in May, '59."

"It is strange, certainly. But there is one solution of it-is it not possible that, even if this is he, the lady registered as his wife might not have been so? In fact she could not have been, otherwise he could never have married your mother."

"I will not believe it! He was too cold and austere-too puritanical I had almost said-to form any such connection."

"Do you think, then, that he would commit bigamy?"

"I don't know what to think!" the other answered gloomily.

Two men, both about the same age, twenty-five, were seated in a private room at an inn, known as the Hôtel Bellevue, at Le Vocq, a dreary fishing town with a good though small harbour, a dozen miles west of Havre. On a fine day the bay that runs in from Barfleur to Fécamp is gay and bright, but it presented a melancholy appearance on this occasion, as the two young men gazed out at it across the rain-soaked plots of grass that formed the lawn of the "Bellevue." Down below the cliff on which the inn stood, the port was visible, and in the port was to be seen an English cutter, the *Electra*, in which the friends had run for Le Vocq when the storm, that had now been raging for twenty-four hours, broke upon them. They had left Cowes a fortnight ago, and had been yachting pleasantly in the Channel since, putting into Cherbourg on one occasion, into Ste. Mère Eglise on another, and Havre on a third; and now, as ill-luck would have it, it seemed as if they were doomed to be weather-bound in, of the many dreary places on the coast, the dreariest of all, Le Vocq.

The first night in the inn, to which they had come up after seeing the yacht made snug and comfortable in the harbour below, and the sailors left in charge of her also provided for, passed easily enough. There was the hope of the storm abating-which was cheering-and they had cards, and some Paris newspapers to read, and above all, they were fatigued and could sleep well. But, on the next day, the storm had not abated, and they were tired of cards, the old Paris papers had been read and re-read, and later ones had not arrived, and they were refreshed with their night's rest and wanted to be off. But there was no getting off, and what was to be done?

They had stood all the morning looking out of the window disconsolately, had smoked pipes and cigarettes innumerable, and had yawned a good deal, and sworn a little.

"What the deuce are we to do to prevent ourselves from dying of *ennui*, Philip?" the one asked the other.

"Jerry," the other answered solemnly, "I know no more than you do. There is nothing left to read, and soon-very soon, alas! – there will be nothing left to smoke but the *caporal* obtainable in the village. That, however, might poison us and end our miseries."

Then the one called Philip began looking about the salon that was at their disposal, and whistling plaintively, and peering into the cupboards, of which there were two:

"Hullo!" he suddenly exclaimed, "here is another great mental treat for us-a lot of old books; and precious big ones, too! I wonder what they are?"

"Pull them out and let us see. Probably only *Le Monde Illustré*, or *Le Journal Amusant*, bound up for the landlord's winter nights' delectation, after they have been thumbed by every sailor in the village."

"Oh, confound the books!" Philip exclaimed when he had looked into them, "they are only the old registers, the *Livres des Étrangers* of bygone years."

"Nevertheless, let us see them," the other answered; "at any rate we shall learn what kind of company the house has kept."

So, obeying his behest, Philip brought them out, and they sat down "to begin at the beginning," as they said laughingly; and each took a volume and commenced to peruse it.

Every now and then they told one another of some name they had come across, the owner of which was known to them by hearsay, and they agreed that the "Hôtel Bellevue" had, in its day, had some very good people for its guests. They had found several titles-English-inscribed in the pages of the register, and also many prominent names belonging to the same nationality.

"Probably half these people have occupied this very sitting-room at some time or the other," Philip said to Gervase. "I only wish to heaven some of them were here now, and that-"

He stopped at a sudden exclamation of his friend, who was gazing fixedly at the page before him.

"What kind of a find is it now, Jerry?" he asked. "Any one very wonderful?"

"It must be a mistake," the other said in a low voice. "And yet how could such a mistake happen? Look at this!" and he pointed with his finger to a line in the book.

"By Jove!" the other exclaimed, as he read, "*Août 17, 1854, L'Hon. Gervase Occleve et sa femme.*" Then he said, "Your father of course, before he inherited his title?"

"Of course! There never was any other Gervase Occleve in existence, except myself, while he was alive. But what can it mean?"

"It means that your father knew this place many years ago, and came here: that is all, I should say. It is a coincidence, but after all it is no more strange that he should know Le Vocq, than that you should."

"But you don't see the curious part of it, Philip! It is the words *et sa femme*. My father had no wife in 1854! He never had a wife until he married my mother, and then he was Lord Penlyn and no longer known as Gervase Occleve."

And then followed the conversation with which this story opens.

"It *is* a strange thing," Philip said, "but it must be a mistake."

In his own heart, being somewhat of a worldling, he did not think it was any mistake at all. He thought it highly probable that the late Lord Penlyn had, when here, a lady travelling with him who was registered as his wife, but who, in actual fact, was not his wife at all.

After a few moments spent in thought, Gervase turned to his friend and said, "The landlord, the man who stared so hard at me yesterday when we came in, was an elderly person. He may have had this hotel in '54, might even remember this mysterious namesake of mine. I think I will ask him to come up."

"I shouldn't," Philip said. "He isn't at all likely to remember anything about it." In his mind he thought it very probable that the man might, even at that distance of time, remember something of Gervase's father, especially if he had made a long stay at the house, and would perhaps be able to give some reminiscences of his whilom guest that might by no means make his son feel comfortable.

But his remonstrance was unheeded, and the other rang the bell. It was answered by a tidy waitress wearing the cap peculiar to the district, to whom Gervase—who was an excellent linguist—said in very good French:

"If the landlord is in, will you be good enough to say that Lord Penlyn would be glad to speak to him?"

The girl withdrew, and in a few minutes the landlord tapped at the door. When he had received an invitation to enter, he came into the room and bowed respectfully, but, as he did so, Lord Penlyn again noticed that his eyes were fixed upon him with a wondering stare; a stare exactly the same as he had received on the previous day when they entered the hotel. There was nothing rude nor offensive in the look; it partook more of the nature of an incredulous gaze than anything else.

"Milor has expressed a wish to see me," he said as he entered. "He has, I trust, found everything to his wish in my poor house!"

"Perfectly," Gervase answered; "but I want to ask you a question. Will you be seated?" And then when the landlord had taken a chair-still looking intently at him-he went on:

"We found these *Livres des Étrangers* in your cupboard, and, for want of anything else to read, we took them down and have been amusing ourselves with them. I hope we did not take a liberty."

"*Mais, Milor!*" the landlord said with a shrug of his shoulders and a twitch of his eyebrows, that were meant to express his satisfaction at his guests being able to find anything to distract them.

"Thank you," Gervase said. "Well! in going through this book-the one of 1854-I have come upon a name so familiar to me, the name of Gervase Occleve, that-"

But before he could finish his sentence the landlord had jumped up from his chair, and was speaking rapidly while he gesticulated in a thorough French fashion.

"*C'est ça, mon Dieu, mais oui!*" he began. "Occleve-of course! That is the face. Sir, Milor! I salute you! When you entered my house yesterday, I said to myself, 'But where, mon Dieu, but where have I seen him? Or is it but the spirit of some dead one looking at me out of his eyes?' And now that you mention to me the name of Occleve, then in a moment he comes back to me and I see him once again. *Ah! ma foi, Milor!* but when I regard you, then in verity he returns to me, and I recall him as he used to sit in this very room-*parbleu!* in that very chair in which you now sit."

The young men had both stared at him with some amazement as he spoke hurriedly and excitedly, repeating himself in his earnestness, and now as he ceased, Gervase said:

"Do I understand you to say, then, that I bear such a likeness to this man, whose name is inscribed here, as to recall him vividly to you?" "*Mais, sans doute!* you are his son! It must be so. There is only one thing that I do not comprehend. You bear a different name."

"He became Lord Penlyn later in life, and at his death that title came to me."

"*Bien compris!* And so he is dead! He can scarcely have lived the full space of man's years. And Madame your mother? She is well?"

For a moment the young man hesitated. Then he said: "She is dead too."

"*Pauvre dame,*" the landlord said, and as he spoke it seemed as though he was talking to himself. "She was bright and happy in those days so far off, bright and happy once; and she, too, is gone. And I, who was older than either of them, am left! But, Lord Penlyn," he said, readdressing himself to his guest, "you look younger than your years. It is thirty years since you used to run about those sands outside and play; I have carried you to them often-"

"You carried me to those sands thirty years ago! Why, I was not-"

"Stop!" Philip Smerdon said to him in English, and speaking in a low tone. "Do you not see it all? Say no more."

"Yes," Gervase answered. "Yes, I see it all."

Later on, when the landlord had left the room after insisting upon shaking the hand of "the child he had known thirty years ago," Gervase said:

"So he who was so stern and self-contained, who seemed to be above the ordinary weaknesses of other men, was, after all, worse than the majority of them. I suppose he flung this poor woman off when he married my mother, I suppose he left the boy, for whom this man takes me-to starve or to become a thief preying on his fellow men. It is not pleasant to think that I have an elder brother who may be an outcast, perhaps a felon!"

"I should not take quite such a pessimist view of things as that," Philip said. "For aught you know, the lady he had with him here may have died between 1854 and 1858, and, for the matter of that, so may the boy; or he may have made a good allowance to both when he parted with them. For anything you know to the contrary he might have seen the boy frequently until his death, and have taken care to place him comfortably in the world."

"In such a case I must have known it. I must have met him somewhere."

"Nothing more unlikely! The world is large enough-in spite of the numerous jokes about its smallness-for two peculiarly situated individuals not to meet. If I were you, Jerry, I should think no more about the matter."

"It is not a thing one can easily forget!" the other answered.

The landlord had given them a description of what he remembered of the Gervase Occleve whom he had known thirty years ago, but what he had told them had not thrown much light upon the subject. He described how Gervase Occleve had first come there in the summer of '54 accompanied by his wife (he evidently had never doubted that they were married) and by his son, "the Monsieur now before him," as he said innocently. They had lived very quietly, occupying the very rooms in which they were now sitting, he told the young men; roaming about the sands in the day, or driving over to the adjacent towns and villages, or sailing in a boat that Mr. Occleve hired by the month. They seemed contented and happy enough, he said, and stayed on and on until the autumn's damp and rain, peculiar to that part of the coast, drove them away. It was strange, he thought, that Milor did not remember anything about that period; but it was true, he was but a little child!

Then, he continued, in the following summer they returned again, and again spent some months there-and then, he never saw nor heard of them more. But, so well did he remember Mr. Occleve's face, even after all these years, that, ever since Lord Penlyn had been in the house, he had been puzzling his brains to think where he had seen him before. He certainly should not, he said, have remembered the child he had played with so often, but that his likeness to his father was more than striking. To Madame, his mother, he saw no resemblance at all.

"But I did not tell him," he said to himself afterwards, as he sat in his parlour below and sipped a little red wine meditatively, "I did not tell him that on the second summer a gloom had fallen over them, and that I often saw her in tears, and heard him speak harshly to her. Why should I? *À quoi bon* to disturb the poor young man's meditations on his dead father and mother!"

And the good landlord went out and served a chopine of *petit bleu* to one customer, and a *tasse* of *absinthe gommée* to another, and entertained them with an account of how there was, upstairs, an English Milor who had been there thirty years ago with his father; the Milor who was the owner of the yacht now in port.

On the next day the storm was over, there was almost a due south wind, and the *Electra* was skimming over the waves and leaving the dreary French coast far behind it.

"It hasn't been a pleasant visit," Lord Penlyn said to Philip, as they leant over the bows smoking their pipes and watching Le Vocq fade gradually into a speck. "I would give something never to have heard that story!"

"It is the story of thirty years ago," his friend answered. "And it is not you who did the wrong. Why let it worry you?"

"I cannot help it! And-I daresay you will think me a fool! – but I cannot also help wondering on which of my father's children-upon that other nameless and unknown one, or upon me-his sins will be visited!"

CHAPTER I

Ida Raughton sat, on a bright June day of that year, in her pretty boudoir looking out on the well-kept gardens of a West End square, and thinking of an important event in her life that was now not very far off-her marriage. Within the last month she had become engaged, not without some earlier doubts on her part as to whether she was altogether certain of her feelings-though, afterwards, she told herself over and over again that the man to whom she was now promised was the only one she could ever love: and the wedding-day was fixed for the 1st of September. Her future husband was Gervase Occeleve, Viscount Penlyn.

She was the only daughter of Sir Paul Raughton, a wealthy Surrey baronet, and had been to him, since her mother's death, as the apple of his eye-the only thing that to him seemed to make life worth living. It was true that he had distractions that are not uncommon to elderly gentlemen of means, and possessed of worldly tastes; perfectly true that Paris and Nice, and Ascot and Newmarket, as well as his clubs and his friends-not always male ones-had charms for him that were still very seductive; but, after all, they were nothing in comparison to his daughter's love and his love for her. Never during his long widowerhood, a widowerhood dating from her infancy, had he failed to make her life and happiness the central object of his existence; never had he allowed his pleasures to stand in the way of the study of her comfort. The best schools and masters when she was a child, the best friends and chaperons for her when womanhood was approaching, and when it had arrived, the greatest liberality as regards cheques for dressmakers, milliners, upholsterers, horses, etc., had been but a small part of his way of showing his devotion to her. And she had returned his affection, had been to him a daughter giving back love for love, and endeavouring in every way in her power to make him an ample return for all the thought and care he had showered on her. Of course he had foreseen that the inevitable day must come when-love him however much she might-she would still be willing to leave him, when she would be willing to resign being mistress of her father's house to be mistress of her husband's. His worldly knowledge, which was extensive enough for half-a-dozen ordinary men, told him clearly enough that the parent nest very soon palled on the bird that saw its way to building one for itself. Yet, when the blow fell, as he had known it must fall, he did not find that his philosophy enabled him to endure it very lightly. On the other hand, there was his love for her, and that bade him let her go, since it was for her happiness that she should do so.

"I promised her mother when she lay dying," he said to himself, "that my life should be devoted to her, and I have kept my vow to the best of my power. I am not going to break it now. Besides, it is part of a father's duty to see his daughter well married; and I suppose Penlyn is a good match. At any rate, there are plenty of other fathers and mothers who would like to have caught him for their girls."

That she should have made a sensation during her first season was not a thing to astonish Sir Paul, nor, indeed, any one else. Ida Raughton was as thoroughly beautiful a girl, when first she made her appearance in London society, as any who had ever taken their place in its ranks. Tall and graceful, and possessed of an exquisitely shaped head, round which her auburn hair curled in thick locks; with bright hazel eyes, whose expression varied in accordance with their owner's thoughts and feelings, sometimes sparkling with laughter and mirth, and sometimes saddened with tears as she listened to any tale of sorrow; with a nose the line of which was perfect, and a mouth, the smallness of which disguised, though it could not hide, the even, white teeth within, no one could look at Ida without acknowledging how lovely she was. Even other and rival *débutantes* granted her loveliness, and the woman who can obtain such a concession as this from her sisters has fairly established her right to homage.

As she sat at her boudoir window on this June day, thinking of her now definitely settled marriage, she was wondering if the life before her would be as bright and happy as the one she was leaving behind for ever. That-with the exception of the death of her mother, a sorrow that time had

mercifully tempered to her-had been without alloy. Would the future be so? There was no reason to think otherwise, she reflected, no reason to doubt it. Lord Penlyn was young, handsome, and manly, the owner of an honoured name, and well endowed with the world's goods. Yet that would not have weighed with her had she not loved him.

She had asked herself if she did love him several times before she consented to give him the answer he desired, and then she acknowledged that he alone had won her heart. She recalled other men's attentions to her, their soft words, their desire to please; how they had haunted her footsteps at balls and at the Opera, and how no other man's homage had ever been so sweet to her as the homage of Gervase Occleve. At first-wishing still to be sure of herself-she would not agree to be his wife, telling him that she did not know her heart; but when he asked her a second time, after she had had ample opportunity for reflection, she told him he should have his wish.

"And you do love me, Ida?" he asked rapturously, perhaps boyishly, as they drove back from a large dinner-party to which they had gone at Richmond. "You are sure you do?"

"Yes," she said, "I am sure I do. I was not sure when first you asked me, but I am now."

"Then kiss me, darling, and tell me so. Otherwise I shall scarcely be able to believe it;" and he bent over her and kissed her, and she returned the kiss.

"I love you, Gervase," she said, blushing as she did so.

"You have made me supremely happy," he said to her after their lips had met; "happy beyond all thought. And, dearest, you shall never have cause to repent of it. I will be to you the best, the truest husband woman ever had. There shall be no shadow ever come over your life that I can keep away."

For answer she put her hand in his, and so they drove along the lanes that were getting thick with hawthorn and chestnut blossom, while ahead of them sounded the merry voices of others of the party who were on a four-in-hand. They had come down, a joyous company, from town in the afternoon, had dined at the "Star and Garter," and were now on their way home under the soft moonlight of an early summer evening. Sir Paul had been with them in the landau on the journey out, but on this return one he was seated on the top of the coach, talking to a lady whom he addressed more than once as "his dear old friend," and was smoking innumerable cigarettes. Probably he did not imagine for one moment that Lord Penlyn was going to take this opportunity of proposing to his daughter; but he had noticed that they seemed to enjoy each other's society very much, especially when they could enjoy it alone. And so, all things being suitable and harmonious, and the baronet having a heart beneath his exceedingly well-fitting waistcoat-and that a very big heart where Ida was concerned-had let them have the gratification of the drive home together.

"And you never loved any other man, Ida?" Gervase asked. "Forgive the question, but every lover likes to know, or think, that no one has ever been before him in the affection of the woman he loves."

"No," she answered, "never. You are the first man I have ever loved."

This had happened nearly a month ago, but as Ida sat in her boudoir her thoughts returned to the drive on that May night. Yes, she acknowledged, she loved him, and she loved him more and more every time she saw him. But as she recalled this conversation she also recalled the question he had asked her, the question as to whether she had ever loved any other man; and she wondered what had made him ask it. Could it be that it was supposed by some of their circle-though erroneously supposed, she told herself-that another man loved her? Perfectly erroneously, because that other man had never breathed one word of love to her; and because, though he would sometimes be in her society continually for perhaps a week, and then be absent for a month, he never, during all the time they were thus constantly meeting, paid her more marked attention than other men were in the habit of doing. Yet, notwithstanding this, it had come to her knowledge that it had been whispered about that Walter Cundall loved her.

This man, Walter Cundall, this reported admirer of hers, was well known in society, was in a way famous, though his fame was in the principal part due to the simplest purchaser of that

commodity-to wealth. He was known to be stupendously rich, to be able to spend any large sum of money he chose in order to gratify his inclinations, to be able to look upon thousands as ordinary men looked upon hundreds, and upon hundreds as other men looked upon tens. This was the principal part of his fame; but there was a lesser, though a better part! It was true that he did spend hundreds and thousands, but, as a rule, he spent them quite as much upon others as upon himself. His fours-in-hand, his yachts and steam-yachts, his villa at Cookham, and his house in Grosvenor Place, as well as his villa at Cannes-to which a joyous party went every winter-were as much for his friends as for him. He gave dinners that men and women delighted in getting invitations to; but it was noticed that, though his *chêf* was a marvel, he rarely ate of anything but the soup and joint himself, and that, while others were drinking the best wine that Burgundy, or Aÿ, or Rheims could produce, he scarcely ever quenched his thirst with anything but a tumbler of claret. But he would sit at the head of his table with a smile of satisfaction upon his handsome face, contented with the knowledge that his guests were happy and enjoying themselves.

This man of whom Ida was now thinking and whose story may be told here, had commenced life at Westminster School, to which he had been put by his uncle, a rich owner of mines and woods in Honduras, from which place he paid flying visits to England once a year, or once in two years. The boy was an orphan, left by his mother to her brother's care, and that brother had not failed in his trust. The lad went to Westminster with the full understanding that Honduras must be his home when school days were over; but he knew that it would be a home of luxury and tropical splendour. There, after his school days, he passed some years of his life, attending to the mines, seeing to the consignments of shiploads of mahogany and cedar, going for days in the hills with no companions but the Mestizos and the Indians, and helping his uncle to garner up more and more wealth that was eventually destined to be his. Once or twice in the space of ten years he came to Europe, generally with the object of increasing their connection with London or Continental cities, and of looking up and keeping touch with his old schoolfellows and friends.

And then, at last, two or three years before this story opens, and when his uncle was dead, it came to be said about London that Walter Cundall, the richest man from the Pacific to the Gulf of Honduras, had taken a house in Grosvenor Place, and meant to make London more or less permanently his residence. The other places that have been mentioned were purchased one by one, and he used all his possessions-sharing them with his friends-by turn; but London was, as people said, his home. Occasionally he would go off to Honduras on business, or would rush by the Orient express to St. Petersburg or Vienna; but he loved England better than any other spot in the globe, and never left it unless he was obliged to do so.

This was the man whom gossip had said was the future husband of Ida Raughton-this tall, dark, handsome man, who was, when in England, a great deal by her side. But gossip had been rather staggered when it heard that, during Mr. Cundall's last absence of six months in the tropics, she had become the affianced wife of Lord Penlyn! It wondered what he would say when he came back, as it heard he was about to do very shortly, and it wondered why on earth she had taken Penlyn when she might have had Cundall. It talked it over in the drawing-rooms and the ball-rooms, at Epsom and on the lawn at Sandown, but it did not seem to arrive at any conclusion satisfactory to itself.

"I suppose the fact of it is that Cundall never asked her," one said to another, "and she got tired of waiting."

"I should have waited a bit longer on the off chance," the other said "Cundall's a fifty times richer fellow than Penlyn, and there's no comparison between the two. The one is a man of the world and a splendid fellow, and the other is only a boy."

"He isn't a bad sort of a boy though," said a third, "good-looking, and all that. And," he continued sententiously, "he has the pull in age. That's what tells! He is about twenty-five, and Cundall's well over thirty, isn't he?"

"Thirty is no such great age," said the first one, who, being over forty himself, looked upon Cundall also as almost a boy, "and, for my part, I think she has made a mistake!"

And that was what the world said: "She had made a mistake!" Did she think so herself, as she sat there that bright afternoon? No, that could not be possible! Ida Raughton was a girl with too pure and honourable a heart to take one man when she loved another. And we know what the gossips did not know, that no word of love had ever passed between her and Walter Cundall. The world was indulging in profitless speculations when it debated in its mind why Ida had not taken as a husband a man who had never spoken one word of love to her!

CHAPTER II

A few days after Ida Raughton had been indulging in those summer noontide meditations, Walter Cundall arrived at his house in Grosvenor Place. Things were so well ordered in the establishment of which he was master, that a telegram from Liverpool, despatched a few hours earlier, had been sufficient to cause everything to be in readiness for him; and his servants were so used to his coming and going that his arrival created no unusual excitement.

He walked into his handsome library followed by a staid, grave man-servant, and, sitting down in one of his favourite chairs, said:

"Well, West, what's the news in London?"

"Not much, sir; at least nothing that would interest you. There are a good many balls and parties going on, of course, sir; and next week's Ascot, you know, sir."

"Ascot, is it? Yes, to be sure! We might take a house there, West, and have some friends. The four-in-hand could go over from Cookham--"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I don't think you'll be able to entertain any of your friends this year-not at Ascot, any how. Sir Paul Raughton's man and me were a-talking together, sir, last night at our little place of meeting, and he told me as how Sir Paul was going to have quite a large party down at his place, you know, sir, to celebrate-to celebrate-I mean for Ascot, sir."

"Well?"

"Well, of course, sir, you'll be wanted there too, sir. Indeed, Sir Paul's man said as how his master had been making inquiries about the time you was a-coming back, sir, and said he should like to have you there. And of course they want to cele-I mean to keep it up, sir. Now, I'll go and fetch you the letters that have come since I sent you the last mail."

While the servant was gone, Walter Cundall lay back in his chair and meditated. He was a handsome man, with a dark, shapely head, and fine, well-marked features. He was very brown and sunburnt, as it was natural he should be; but, unlike many whose principal existence has been passed in the Tropics, there was no sign of waste or languor about him. His health during all the years he had spent under a burning Caribbean sun had never suffered; fever and disease had passed him by. Perhaps it was his abstemiousness that had enabled him to escape the deadly effects of a climate that kills four at least out of every ten men. As he sat in his chair he wondered why Providence had been so unfailingly good to him through his life; why it had showered upon him-while he was still young enough to enjoy it-the comforts that other men spent their lives in toiling to obtain, and then often failed at last to get.

"And now," he said to himself, "let Fortune give me but one more gift, and I am content. Let me have as partner of all I possess the fairest woman in the world; let my sweet, gentle Ida tell me that she loves me-as I know she does-and what more can I ask? Ah, Ida!" he went on, apostrophising the woman he loved, "I wonder if you have guessed how, night after night during these long six months, I have sat on my verandah gazing up at the stars that look like moons there, wondering if your dear eyes were looking at them in their feeble glory here? I wonder if you have ever thought during my long absence that not an hour went by, at night or day, when I was not thinking of you? Yes, you must have done so; you must have done so! There was everything in your look, in your voice to tell me that you loved me, that you were only waiting for me to speak. And, now, I will speak. I will deprive myself no longer of the love that will sweeten my life."

The man servant came back with an enormous bundle of letters that made Cundall laugh when he saw them.

"Why, West!" he exclaimed, "you don't imagine that I am going to wade through these now, do you?"

"I think they're mostly invitations, sir," the servant answered, "from people who did not know when you would be back."

"Well, give them to me. I will open a few of those the handwriting of which I recognise, and Mr. Stuart can go through the rest to-morrow."

Mr. Stuart was one of Cundall's secretaries, who, when his employer was in town, had sometimes to work night and day to keep pace with his enormous correspondence, but who was now disporting himself at Brighton. When Cundall was away it was understood that this gentleman should attend four days a week, two at Grosvenor Place, and two at his agent's in the City, but that on others he should be free. As, with his usual generosity, Cundall gave him five hundred a year for doing this, his post was a good one.

The valet came down at this moment to take his master's orders, and to say that his bath was ready.

"I shall dine quietly at the club to-night," Mr. Cundall said, "and then, to-morrow, I will make a few calls, and let my friends know I have returned. Is there anything else, West?"

"No, sir. Oh, I beg pardon, sir! I had almost forgot. Lady Chesterton called the day before yesterday to ask when you would be back. When I told her ladyship you were expected, she left a note for you. It's in that bundle you have selected, I think, sir."

Cundall looked through the letters until he found the one in question, and, on opening it, discovered that it contained an invitation for a ball on that evening. As Lady Chesterton was a hostess whom he liked particularly, he made up his mind that he would look in, if only for an hour. It was as good a way as any of letting people know that he was back in town, and his appearance at her house and at the club would be quite enough to do so.

It was eight o'clock when he entered the latter institution, and his arrival was hailed with a chorus of greeting. A man of colossal wealth is, of course, always welcome amongst his intimates and acquaintances, but, if he is of a reflecting nature, it may be that the idea sometimes occurs to him that he is only appreciated for his possessions, and that, behind his back, there is no such enthusiasm on his behalf as is testified to his face. He does not know, perhaps, of all the sneers and jeers that go on about Cr[oe]sus and Sir Gorgius Midas, but it is to be supposed that he has a very good idea of the manner in which his fellow men regard him. With Walter Cundall it was not thus; men neither scoffed at his wealth nor at him, nor did it ever occur to him to think that he was only liked because of that wealth. There was a charm in his nature, a something in his pleasant words and welcoming smile that would have made him, in any circumstances, acceptable to those with whom he mixed, even though it had not been in his power to confer the greatest benefits upon them. There are many such men as he was, as well as many whom we detest for their moneyed arrogance; men whose lawns and parks and horses and yachts we may enjoy, but with whom, if they could not place them at our disposal, we should still be very happy to take a country walk or spend an hour in a humble parlour.

He was surrounded at once by all kinds of acquaintances, asking questions as to when he had arrived, how he had enjoyed the voyage, what May had been like in the Tropics, what he was going to do in the Ascot week, and a dozen others, some stupid and some intelligent.

"I hardly know about Ascot," he said laughingly, after having answered all the others. "When my old servant, West, reminded me that it was next week, which I had entirely forgotten-by-the-bye, what won the Derby? – I thought of taking a house and having a pleasant lot down, but now I hear that I am wanted at Sir Paul Raughton's."

"Of course you are!" one very young member said, "Rather! Why, you know that-"

"They are going to have a jolly party there," an elder one put in; "no one knows how to manage that sort of thing better than Sir Paul."

Then he turned to the younger man and said, as he drew him aside, "You confounded young idiot! don't you know that he was sweet on Miss Raughton himself, and won't like it when he hears

she is engaged to Lord Penlyn? What do you want to make him feel uncomfortable for? He'll hear it quite soon enough."

"I thought he knew it," the other one muttered.

"I imagine not; and I fancy no one but you would want to be the first to tell him."

There was undoubtedly this feeling amongst the group, by whom Cundall was surrounded. Not one of these men, except the boyish member, but was aware that, before he went abroad six months ago, London society was daily expecting to hear that he and the beautiful Ida Raughton were engaged. Now they understood, with that accuracy of perception which men of the world possess in an extraordinary degree, that her recent engagement to Lord Penlyn was unknown to him, and they unanimously determined-though without any agreement between them-that they would not be the first to open his eyes. He was so good a fellow that none of them wanted to cause him any pain; and that the knowledge that Miss Raughton was now engaged would be painful to him, they were convinced.

Two or three of them made up a table and sat down to dinner, and Cundall told them that he was going to Lady Chesterton's later on. But neither here, nor over their coffee afterwards, did any of his friends tell him that he would meet there the girl he was thought to admire, attended in all probability by her future husband, Lord Penlyn.

As, at eleven o'clock, he made his way up the staircase to greet his hostess, he again met many people whom he knew, and, by the time he at last reached Lady Chesterton, it was rapidly being told about the ball-room that Walter Cundall was back in town again.

"I declare you look better than ever," her ladyship said as she welcomed him. "Your bronzed and sunburnt face makes all the other men seem terribly pale and ghastly. How you must enjoy roaming about the world as you do!"

He answered her with a smile and a remark, that, after all, there was no place like London and that he was getting very tired of rambling, when he turned round and saw Ida Raughton coming towards him on the arm of Lord Penlyn.

"How do you do, Miss Raughton?" he said, taking her hand and giving one swift look into her eyes. How beautiful she was, he thought; and as he looked he wondered how he could ever have gone away and left her without speaking of his love. Well, no matter, the parting was over now!

"How are you, Penlyn?" he said, shaking him cordially by the hand.

"When did you return?" Ida asked. Until this moment she had no idea that he was back in England.

"I landed at Liverpool late last night," he answered, "and came up to town to-day. Lady Chesterton, hearing of my probable arrival, was kind enough to leave an invitation for me for to-night."

Before any more could be said the band began to play, and Lord Penlyn turned round to Cundall and said:

"I am engaged for this dance, though it is only a square one. Will you look after Miss Raughton until I return?"

"With pleasure, or until some favoured partner comes to claim her. But," turning to her, "I presume you are also engaged for this dance, 'though it is only a square one.'"

"No," she said, "you know I never dance them."

"Shall we go round the rooms, then?" he asked, offering her his arm. "It is insufferably hot here!"

Lady Chesterton had moved away to welcome some other guests, and so they walked to another part of the room. As Ida looked up at him, she thought how well and strong he seemed, and recalled the many dances they had had together. And she wondered if he was glad to be back in London again?

"How cool and pleasant the conservatory looks!" he said, as they passed the entrance to it. "Shall we go in and sit down until you are claimed for the next dance?"

She assented, and they went in and took possession of two chairs that were standing beneath some great palms and cacti.

"I should think that after the heat you have been accustomed to you would feel nothing in England," she said.

"In Honduras we are suitably clad," he answered, laughing, "and evening dress suits are not in much request. But I am very glad to be wearing one again, and once more talking to you."

"Are you?" she said, raising her eyes and looking at him. She recalled how often they had talked together, and how she had taken pleasure in having him tell her of the different parts of the world he had seen; parts that seemed so strange to her who had never been farther away from home than the Tyrol or Rome.

"Indeed I am! Do you think I should go to the Tropics for pleasure?"

"I suppose you need not go unless you choose," she said; "surely you can do as you please!"

"I can do as I please now," he answered, "I could not hitherto. I will tell you what I mean. Until a month ago the property I owned in Honduras required my constant attention, and necessitated my visiting the place once at least in every two years. But, of late, this has become irksome to me-I will explain why in a moment-and my last visit was made with a view to disposing of that property. This I have made arrangements for doing, and I shall go no more to that part of the world. Now," and his voice became very low, but clear, as he spoke, "shall I tell you why I have broken for ever with Honduras?"

"Yes," she said. "You have told me so often of your affairs that you know I am always interested in them. Tell me."

As she spoke, the band was playing the introduction to the last popular waltz, and the few couples who were in the conservatory left for it. A young man to whom Ida was engaged for this dance came in to look for her, but, seeing that she was talking to Walter Cundall, withdrew. It happened that he did not know she was betrothed to Lord Penlyn, but was aware that, last season, every one thought she would soon be engaged to the man she was now with. So he thought he would not disturb them and went unselfishly away, being seen by neither.

Then, as the strains of the waltz were heard from the ball-room, he said:

"It is because I want to settle down in England and make it my home. Because I want a wife to make that home welcome to me, because I have long loved one woman and have only waited until my return to tell her so. Ida, you are that woman! I love you better than anything in this world! Tell me that you will be my wife!"

For answer she drew herself away from him, pale, and trembling visibly, and trying to speak. But no word came from her lips.

"Why do you not answer me, Ida?" he asked. "Have I spoken too soon? But no! that is not possible-you must have seen how dearly I loved you! how I always sought your presence-you must-"

Then she made a motion to him with her fan, and found her voice.

"You cannot have heard," she said, "no one can have told you that-"

"That what! What is there to tell? For God's sake speak, Ida!"

"That I am engaged."

"Engaged!" he said, rising to his feet. "Engaged! while I have been away. Oh! it cannot be, it is impossible! You must have seen, you must have known of my love for you. It cannot be true!"

"It is true, Mr. Cundall."

"True!" Then he paused a moment and endeavoured to recover himself. When he had done so he said very quietly, but in a deep, hoarse voice: "I congratulate you, Miss Raughton. May I ask who is the fortunate gentleman?"

"I am engaged to Lord Penlyn."

He took a step backward and ejaculated, "Lord Penlyn! Lord-"

Then once more he recovered himself, and said: "Shall I take you back to the ball-room? Doubtless he is looking for you now."

"I am very sorry for your disappointment," she said, looking up at him with a pale face; his emotion had startled her, "very sorry. I would not wound you for the world. And there are so many other women who will make you happy."

"I wanted no other woman but you," he said.

CHAPTER III

Lord Penlyn and his friend and companion, Philip Smerdon, had returned from their yachting tour, which had embraced amongst other places Le Vocq, about a fortnight before Walter Cundall arrived in London from Honduras. The trip had only been meant to be a short one to try the powers of his new purchase, the *Electra*, but it had been postponed by the storm to some days over the time originally intended. Since he had become engaged to Ida Raughton, he naturally hated to be away from her, and, up till the night before he returned to England, had fretted a great deal at his enforced absence from her.

But the discovery he had made in the *Livre des Étrangers* at Le Vocq, had had such an effect upon his thoughts and mind that, when he returned to England, he almost dreaded a meeting with her. He was an honourable, straightforward man, and, with the exception of being possessed of a somewhat violent and obstinate temper when thwarted in anything he had set his heart upon, had no perceptible failings. Above all he hated secrecy, or secrecy's next-door neighbour, untruth; and it seemed to him that, if not Ida, at least Ida's father, should be told about the discovery he had made.

"With the result," said Philip Smerdon, who was possessed of a cynical nature, "that Miss Raughton would be shocked at hearing of your father's behaviour, and that Sir Paul would laugh at you."

"I really don't see what there is to laugh at in my father being a scoundrel, as he most undoubtedly was."

"A scoundrel!" Philip echoed.

"Was he not? We have what is almost undoubted proof that he was living for two summers at that place with some lady who could not have been his wife, and whom he must have cast off previous to marrying my mother. And there was the child for whom the landlord took me! He must have deserted that as well as the woman. And, if a man is not a scoundrel who treats his offspring as he must have treated that boy, I don't know the meaning of the word."

"As I have said before, it is highly probable that both of them were dead before he married your mother."

"Nonsense! That is a very good way for a novelist to make a man get rid of his encumbrances before settling down to comfortable matrimony, but not very likely to happen in real life. I tell you I am convinced that, somewhere or other, the child, if not the mother, is alive, and it is horrible to me to think that, while I have inherited everything that the Occlaves possessed, this elder brother of mine may be earning his living in some poor, if not disgraceful, manner."

"The natural children of noblemen are almost invariably well provided for," Smerdon said quietly; "why should you suppose that your father behaved worse than most of his brethren?"

"Because, if the estate had been charged with anything I should have known it. But it was not for a farthing."

"He might have handed over to this lady a large sum down for her and for her son, when they parted."

"Which is also impossible! He was only Gervase Occlave then, and had nothing but a moderately comfortable allowance from his predecessor, his uncle. He married my mother almost directly after he became Lord Penlyn."

This was but one of half-a-dozen conversations that the young men had held together since their return from France, and Gervase had found comfort in talking the affair over and over again with his friend. Philip Smerdon stood in the position to him of old schoolfellow and playmate, of a 'Varsity friend, and, later on, of companion and secretary. Had they been brothers they could scarcely have been-would probably not have been-as close friends as they were.

When they were at Harrow, and afterwards at Christ Church, Oxford, they had been inseparable, and, in point of means, entirely on an equality, Philip's father being a reported, and, apparently, enormously wealthy contractor in the North. But one day, without the least warning, without a word from his father or the slightest stopping of his allowance, he learnt, by a telegram in a paper, that his parent had failed for a stupendous sum, and was undoubtedly ruined for ever. The news turned out to be true, and Philip knew that, henceforth, he would have to earn his own living instead of having a large income to spend.

"Thank God!" he said, in those days, "that I am not quite a fool, and have not altogether wasted my time. There must be plenty of ways in which a Harrow and Oxford man can earn a living, and I mean to try. I have got my degrees, and I suppose I could do something down at the old shop (meaning the old University, and with no disrespect intended), or get pupils, or drift into literature-though they say that means starvation of the body and mortification of the spirit."

"First of all," said Penlyn, who in that time was the counsellor, and not, as he afterwards became, the counselled, "see a bit of the world, and come along with me to the East. When you come back, you will be still better fitted than you are now for doing something or other-and you are young enough to spare a year."

"Still, it seems like wasting time-and, what's worse! – it's sponging on you."

"Sponging! Rubbish! You don't think I am going alone, do you? And if you don't come, somebody else will! And you know, old chap, I'd sooner have you than any one else in the world."

"All right, Jerry," his friend said, "I'll come and look after you."

But when they found themselves in the East, it turned out that the "looking after" had to be done by Penlyn, instead of by Philip. The one was always well, the other always ill. From the time they got to Cairo, it seemed as if every malady that can afflict a man in those districts fell upon Smerdon. At Thebes he had a horrible low fever, from which he temporarily recovered, but at Constantine he was again so ill, that his friend thought he would never bring him away alive. Nor, but for his own exertions, would he ever have done so, and the mountain city would have been his grave. But Gervase watched by his side day and night, was his nurse and doctor too (for the grave Arab physician did nothing but prescribe cooling drinks for him and herbal medicines), bathed him, fanned him, and at last brought him, though weak as a child, back to life.

"How am I ever to repay this?" the sick man said, as he sat up one evening, gazing out on the Algerian mountains and watching the sun sink behind them. "What can I ever do in acknowledgment of your having saved my life?"

"Get thoroughly well, and then we'll go home as fast as we can. And don't talk bosh about repayment."

"Bosh! Do you call it that? Well, I don't suppose I ever shall be able to do anything in return, but I should like to have the chance. As a rule, I don't talk bosh, I believe, though no one is a judge of themselves. Do give me another drink of that lemon-water, Jerry, the thirst is coming on again."

"Which comes of talking nonsense, so shut up!" his friend answered, as he handed him the drink.

"It does seem hard, though, that instead of my being your companion as I came out to be, you should have to always-

"Now look here, Phil, my friend," Gervase said, "if you *don't* leave off talking, I'll call the doctor." This threat was effectual, for the native physician had such unpleasant personal peculiarities that Philip nearly went mad whenever he entered the room.

Four years have passed since that excursion to the East and the time when Gervase Occlive is the affianced husband of Ida Raughton, but the friendship of these two has only grown more firm. On their return to England, Lord Penlyn offered his friend the post of his secretary combined with steward, which at that moment was vacant by the death of the previous holder. "But companion as

well," he said laughingly, "I am not going to have you buried alive at Occleve Chase when I want your society in London, nor *vice versâ*, so you had better find a subordinate."

Smerdon took the post, and no one could say with any truth that his friendship for Lord Penlyn stood in the way of his doing his duty to him as his secretary. He made himself thoroughly master of everything concerning his friend's property-of his tenants and his servants; he knew to a head the cattle belonging to him, and what timber might be marked annually, and regulated not only his country estate but also his town house. And, that his friend should not lose the companionship which he evidently prized so dearly, he thought nothing of travelling half the night from Occleve Chase to London, and of appearing fresh and bright at the breakfast table. For, so deeply had Penlyn's goodness to him in all things sunk into his heart, that he never thought he had done enough to show his gratitude.

Of course in society it was known that, wherever Lord Penlyn went his friend went also, and no doors were shut to the one that were open to the other, or would have been shut had Philip chosen. But he cared little for fashionable doings, and refused to accompany his friend to many of the balls and dinners to which he went.

"Leave me alone in peace to read and smoke," he would say, "and go out and enjoy yourself. I shall be just as happy as you are." And when he learned that Ida Raughton had consented to be Lord Penlyn's wife he told him that he was sincerely glad to hear it. "A man in your position wants a wife," he said, "and you have found a good one in her, I am sure. You will be as happy as I could wish you, and that is saying a good deal."

They had been busy this morning-the morning after Lady Chesterton's ball-in going over their accounts, and in making arrangements for their visit, in the forthcoming Ascot week, to Sir Paul's villa, near the Royal course. Then, while they had paused for a few moments to indulge in a cigarette, the conversation had again turned upon that discovery at Le Vocq.

"I tell you what I do mean to do," Penlyn said, "I mean to go and see Bell. Although he could have known nothing of what was going on thirty years ago, he may have heard his father say something on the subject. They have been our solicitors for years."

"It is only letting another person into the story, as he probably knows nothing about it," Philip said. "I wouldn't go, if I were you."

"I will, though," Penlyn answered; and he did.

Mr. Bell was a solicitor of the modern type that is so vastly different from the old one. Thirty years ago, when our fathers went to consult the family lawyer, they saw either an elderly gentleman with a shaved upper lip and decorous mutton-chop whiskers, or a young man, also with his lip shaved, and clad in a solemn suit of black. But all that is passed, and Mr. Bell was an excellent specimen of the solicitor of to-day. He wore a neatly waxed moustache, had a magnificent gardenia in his well-cut morning coat, and received Lord Penlyn in a handsomely furnished room that might almost have passed for the library of a gentleman of taste. And, had his client been a few years older, they would probably have known each other well at Oxford, for Mr. Bell himself had been a John's man, and had been well known at the debating rooms.

He listened to his client's story, smiling faintly once or twice, at what seemed to his worldly mind, too much remorse for his father's sin on the part of Lord Penlyn, then he said:

"I never even knew your father, but I should think the whole affair a simple one, and an ordinary version of the old story."

"What old story?"

"The story of a person of position- Forgive me, Lord Penlyn, we are men of the world" (he said "we," though he considered his client as the very reverse of "a man of the world"), "and can speak plainly; the story of a person of position taking up with some woman who was his inferior and flattered by his attentions, amusing himself with her till he grew tired, and then-dropping her."

"To starve with her-with his offspring!"

"I should imagine not!" Mr. Bell said with an airy cynicism that made him appear hateful to his young client. "No, I should imagine not! The ladies who attach themselves to men of your father's position generally know how to take very good care of themselves. You may depend that this one was either provided for before she agreed to throw in her lot with him, or afterwards."

The lawyer's opinion was the same as Philip's, and they both seemed to look upon the affair as a much less serious one than it appeared to him! Were they right, and was he making too much out of this peccadillo of his father's?

"And you can tell me nothing further?" he asked the solicitor.

"What can I tell you?" the lawyer said. "I never saw the late Lord Penlyn, and scarcely ever heard my father mention him. If you like I will have all the papers relative to him gone through; but it is thirty years ago! If the lady is alive and had wanted anything, she would surely have turned up by now. And I may say the same of the son."

"He may not even know the claim he has."

"Claim! my lord, what claim? He has no claim on you."

"Has he not? Has he not the claim of brotherhood, the claim that my father deserted his mother? I tell you, Mr. Bell, that if I could find that man I would make him the greatest restitution in my power."

The lawyer looked upon Lord Penlyn, when he heard these words, as a Quixotic young idiot, but of course he did not say so. It occurred to him that, in all probability, his father had had more than one affair of this kind, and he wondered grimly what his romantic young client would say if he heard, by chance, of any more of them. But he did promise to go through all the papers in his possession relating to the late lord, and to see about this particular case. "Though I warn you," he said, "that I am not likely to find anything that can throw any light upon an affair of so long ago. And, as a lawyer, I must say that it is not well that such a dead and gone business should ever be dug up again."

"I would dig it up," Lord Penlyn answered, "for the sake of justice."

Then he went away, leaving the lawyer's mind wavering between contempt and admiration for him.

"He must be a good young fellow at heart, though," Mr. Bell said to himself; "but the world will spoil him."

Two nights afterwards Penlyn received a letter from him, saying that there was not the slightest trace in any of the Occleve papers in his possession of the persons about whom they had spoken. Moreover, Mr. Bell said he had gone through a great many of the accounts of the late Lord Penlyn, and of his uncle and predecessor, but in no case could he find any evidence of the Hon. Gervase having ever exceeded his income, or, when he succeeded to the property, of having drawn any large sum of money for an unknown purpose. "And," he concluded, "I should advise your lordship to banish the whole affair for ever from your mind. If your father really had the intimacy imagined by you with that lady, time has removed all signs of it; and, even though you might be willing to do so, it would be impossible for you now to obtain any information about it."

CHAPTER IV

Two people went away from Lady Chesterton's ball with anything but happiness at their hearts—Ida Raughton and Walter Cundall. The feelings with which the former had heard the latter's declaration of love had been of a very mixed nature; pity and sympathy for him being combined with an idea that she had not altogether been loyal to the man to whom she was now pledged. She was able to tell herself, as she sat in her dressing-room after her maid had left her, that she had, after all, become engaged to the man whom she really loved; but she had also to acknowledge that, for that other one, her compassion was very great. She had never loved him, nor did she until this night believe the rumours of society that reached her ears, to the effect that he loved her; but she had liked him very much, and his society had always been agreeable to her. His conversation, his stories of a varied life in other lands, had had a charm for her that the invertebrate gossip of an ordinary London salon could never possess; but there her liking for him had stopped. And, for she was always frank even to herself, she acknowledged that he was a man whom she regarded with some kind of awe; a man whose knowledge of the world was as much above hers as his wealth was above her father's wealth. She remembered, that when any question had ever perplexed her, any question of politics, science, or art, to which she could find no answer, he would instantly solve the knotty subject for her, and throw a light upon it that had never come to her mind. Yes, she reflected, he was so much above her that she did not think, in any circumstances, love could have come into her heart for him.

But, if there was no love there was intense sympathy. She could not forget, at least not so soon after the occurrence, his earnest appeal to her to speak, his certainty that she knew of his love, and then the deep misery apparent in his voice when he forced himself into restraint, and could even go so far as to congratulate her. Her knowledge of the world was small, but she thought that from his tone this must have been almost the first, as she was sure it was the greatest, disappointment he had ever had. "He wanted to have a wife to make his home welcome to him," he had said, "and she was the woman whom he wanted for that wife." Surely, she reflected, he was entitled to her pity, though she could not give him her love. And then she wondered what she ought to do with regard to telling her father and her future husband. She did not quite know, but she thought she would tell her father first, and then, if he considered it right that Gervase should know, he should also be told. Perhaps he, too, would feel inclined to pity Mr. Cundall.

As for him, he hardly knew what to do on that night. He walked back to his house in Grosvenor Place (he was too uneasy to sit in his carriage), and, letting himself in went to his library, where he passed some hours pacing up and down it. Once he muttered a quotation from the Old Testament, and once he flung himself into a chair and buried his head in his hands, and wept as strong men only weep in their darkest hour. Afterwards, when he was calmer, he went to a large *écritoire*, and, unlocking it, took out a bundle of papers and read them. They were a collection of several old letters, a tress of hair in an envelope, which he kissed softly, and two slips of paper which he seemed to read particularly carefully. Then he put them away and said to himself: "It must be done, there is no help for it. My happiness is gone for ever, and, God knows, I would not wreck the happiness of others! but, in this case, my sin would be beyond recall if I hesitated." And, again, after a pause, he said to himself: "It must be done."

He rose in the morning at his usual time, though it was nearly six before he flung himself wearily on his bed to snatch some troubled rest, and when he went downstairs to his breakfast he found his secretary, Mr. Stuart, waiting for him. The young fellow had been telegraphed for on his employer's return, and had torn himself away from the charms of Brighton to come back to his duties. After they had exchanged greetings, the secretary said:

"West told me that I should find you looking better than ever, Mr. Cundall, but I cannot honestly say that I do. You look pale and worn."

"I am perfectly well, nevertheless. But I went to a bail last night, and, what with that and travelling all day, I am rather knocked up. But it is nothing. Now, let us get to work on the correspondence, and then we must go into the City."

They began on the different piles of letters, Mr. Cundall throwing over to Stuart all those the handwriting of which he did not recognise, and opening those which he did know himself.

Presently he came to one with a crest on the envelope that he was well acquainted with—the Raughton crest, and he could scarcely resist a start as he saw it. But he controlled himself and tore the letter open. It was from Sir Paul, and simply contained an invitation from him to Cundall to make one of his Ascot party at Belmont, the name of his place near there. The writer said he had heard it rumoured about that he was on his way home from Honduras, and hence the invitation, as if he got back in time, he hoped he would come. This letter had been written some day or two ago, and had been passed over by Cundall on the previous one. Had he not so passed it over, he would have known his fate before he went to Lady Chesterton's ball, for the Baronet went on to say: "You may have learned from some of your numerous correspondents that Ida and Lord Penlyn are engaged. The marriage is fixed for the 1st September, and will, I hope and believe, be a suitable one in every way. At least, I myself can see nothing to prevent its being so; and I shall hope to receive your congratulations, amongst others, when we meet."

He read the letter and put it in his pocket, and then he said to Stuart:

"I have had a letter from Sir Paul Raughton, in which he tells me his daughter is engaged to Lord Penlyn. You go out a good deal, when did you first hear of it?"

The secretary looked up, and seemed rather confused for the moment. He, too, like every one else, even to West the butler, knew that it was supposed that Cundall was in love with Ida, and had wondered what he would say when he heard it. And now he was sitting opposite to him, asking him in the most calm tone when he first knew of her engagement, and the calmness staggered him. Had the world, after all, been mistaken?

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "Not so very long ago. About a month, I should say."

"About a month since it was announced?"

"Yes, about that."

"I wonder you did not think of telling me in your last letter, since you knew how intimate I was with the Raughtons."

"I forgot it. It-it slipped my memory. And there were so many business matters to write about."

"Well! it is of no importance."

"Of no importance!" Stuart thought to himself. "Of no importance!" Then they must all have been indeed mistaken! Why, it was only two or three days before Mr. Cundall's return that he had, when up in town for the day, consulted West, and told him that he had better not say anything on that subject to his master, but let him find it out for himself. And now he sat there calmly reading his letters, and saying that "it was of no importance!" Well, he was glad to hear it! Cundall was a good, upright man, and, when he heard of Ida Raughton's engagement, his first thought had been that it would be a blow to his employer. He was very glad that his fears were ungrounded.

They went to the City together later on, and then they separated; but before they did so, Cundall asked Stuart if he knew what club Lord Penlyn belonged to.

"'Black's,' I fancy, and the 'Voyagers,' but we can see in the Directory." And he turned to the Court department of that useful work, and found that he was right.

In the evening of two days later Cundall called at "Black's," and learned that Lord Penlyn was in that institution.

"Will you tell him, if you please," he said, "that Mr. Cundall wishes to see him?"

All through those two days he had been nerving himself for the interview that was now about to take place, and had at last strung himself up for it. He had prayed that there might be no cruelty in what he was about to do; but he was afraid! The lad—for he was little better—whom he was now

summoning, was about to be dealt a blow at his hand that would prostrate him to the earth; he hoped that he would be man enough to bear it well.

"How are you, Cundall?" Lord Penlyn said, coming down the stairs behind the porter, and greeting him with cordiality. "I have never had the pleasure of seeing you here before."

Then he looked at his visitor and saw that he was ghastly pale, and he noticed that his hand was cold and damp.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, "aren't you well? Come upstairs and have something."

"I am well, but I have something very serious to say to you, and-"

"Ida is not ill?" the other asked apprehensively, his first thoughts flying to the woman he loved. And the familiar name upon his lips struck to the other's heart.

"She is well, as far as I know. But it is of her that I have come to speak. This club seems full of members, will you come for a stroll in the Park? It is close at hand."

"Yes, yes!" Penlyn said, calling to the porter for his hat and stick. "But what can you have to say to me about her?"

Then, as they went down St. James' Street and past Marlborough House into the Park, there did come back suddenly to his memory some words he had once overheard about Cundall being in love with the woman who was now his affianced wife. Good God! he thought, suppose he had come to tell him that he held a prior promise from her, that she belonged to him! But no; that was absurd! He had seen her that very day, and, though he remembered that she had been particularly quiet and meditative, she had again acknowledged her love. There could be nothing this man might have to say about her that should be disagreeable for him to hear. Yet, still, the remembrance of that whisper about his love for her disquieted him.

"Now tell me, Mr. Cundall," he said, "what you have to say to me about my future wife."

They had passed through the railings into St. James' Park, and were in one of the walks. The summer sun was setting, and the loiterers and nursemaids were strolling about; but, nevertheless, in this walk it was comparatively quiet.

"I have come to tell you first," Cundall answered, "that, three nights ago, I asked Ida Raughton to be my wife."

"What!" the other exclaimed, "you asked my future-"

"One moment," Cundall said quietly. "I did not know then that she was your future wife. If you will remember, I had only returned to London on that day."

"And you did not know of our engagement?"

"I knew nothing. Let me proceed. In proposing to her and in gaining her love-for she told me that she had consented to be your wife-you have deprived me of the only thing in this world I prize, the only thing I wanted. I came back to England with one fixed idea, the idea that she loved me, and that, when I asked her, she would accept me for her husband."

He paused a moment, and Lord Penlyn said:

"While I cannot regret the cause of your disappointment, seeing what happiness it brings to me, I am still very sorry to see you suffering so."

Cundall took no notice of this remark, though his soft, dark eyes were fixed upon the younger man as he uttered it. Then he continued:

"In ordinary cases when two men love the same woman-for I love her still, Heaven help me and shall always love her; it is my love for her that impels me to say what I am now about to-when two men love the same woman, and one of them gets the acknowledgment of her love, the other stands aside and silently submits to his fate."

Lord Penlyn had been watching him fixedly as the words fell from his lips, and had noticed the calmness, which seemed like the calmness of despair, that accompanied those words. But there was not, however, the calm that accompanies resignation in them, for they implied that, in this case, he did not intend to follow the usual rule.

"You are right in your idea, Mr. Cundall," he answered. "Surely it is not your intention to struggle against what is always accepted as the case?"

"It is not, for since she loves you I must never look upon her face again. But-there is something else?" He paused again for a moment and drew a deep breath, and then he proceeded:

"Are you a strong man?" he asked. "Do you think you can bear a sudden shock?"

"I do not know what you mean, nor what you are driving at!" Lord Penlyn said, beginning to lose his temper at these strange hints and questions. "I am sorry for your disappointment, in one way, but it is not in your power, nor in that of any one else, to come between the love Miss Raughton and I bear to each other."

"Unfortunately it is in my power and I must do it-temporarily, at least. At present, you cannot marry Miss Raughton."

"*What!* Why not, sir? For what reason, pray?"

"Do not excite yourself! Because she and her father imagine that she is engaged to Lord Penlyn, and-

"What the devil do you mean, sir?" the other interrupted furiously.

"*And,*" Cundall went on, without noticing the interruption, "*you are not Lord Penlyn!*"

"It is a lie!" the other said, springing at him in the dusk that had now set in, "and I will kill you for it." But Cundall caught him in a grasp of iron and pushed him back, as he said hoarsely: "It is the truth, I swear it before Heaven! Your father had another wife who died before he married your mother, and he left a son by her. That man is Lord Penlyn."

Gervase Occleve took a step back and reeled on to a seat in the walk. In a moment there came back to his mind the inn at Le Vocq, the *Livre des Étrangers* there in which he had seen that strange entry, and the landlord's tale. So that woman was his wife and that son a lawful one, instead of the outcast and nameless creature he had pictured him in his mind! But-was this story true?

He rose again and stood before Cundall, and said:

"I do not know how you, who seem to have lived in such out-of-the-way parts of the world, are capable of substantiating this extraordinary statement; but you will have to do so, and that before witnesses. You have brought a charge of the gravest nature against the position I hold. I suppose you are prepared to produce some proof of what you say?"

"I am fully prepared," Cundall said.

"Then I would suggest, Mr. Cundall, that you should call at my house to-morrow, and tell this remarkable tale in full. There will be at least one witness, my friend, Mr. Smerdon. When we have heard what you have to say, we shall know what credence to place in your story."

"I will be there at midday, if you will receive me. And believe me, if it had not been that I could not see Miss Raughton married illegally, and assuming a title to which she had no right, I would have held my peace."

Lord Penlyn had turned away before the last words were spoken, but on hearing them, he turned back again and said:

"Is this secret in your hands only, then, and does it depend upon you alone for the telling? Pray, may I ask who this mysterious Lord Penlyn is whom you have so suddenly sprung upon me?"

"*I am he!*" the other answered.

"You!" with an incredulous stare. "You!"

"Yes, I."

CHAPTER V

"I have heard it said that he is worth from two to three millions," Philip Smerdon said to his friend the next morning, when Penlyn had, for the sixth or seventh time, repeated the whole of the conversation between him and Cundall. "A man of that wealth would scarcely try to steal another man's title. Yet he must either be mistaken or mad."

"He may be mistaken-I must hope he is-but he is certainly not mad. His calmness last night was something extraordinary, and I am convinced that, provided this story is true, he has told it against his will."

"You mean that he only told it to prevent Miss Raughton from being illegally married, or rather, for the marriage would be perfectly legal since no deception was meant, to prevent her from assuming a title to which she had no claim?"

"Yes."

"You do not think that he hopes by divulging this secret-always assuming it to be true-to cause your marriage to be broken off, so that he might have a chance of obtaining Miss Raughton himself? If his story is true, he can still make her Lady Penlyn."

His friend hesitated. "I do not know," he said. "He bears the character of being one of the most honourable men in London. Supposing his story true, I imagine he was right to tell it."

The young man expressed his opinion and spoke as he thought, but he also spoke in a voice broken with sorrow. If what Cundall had told him was the actual case, not only was he not Lord Penlyn, but he was a beggar. And then Ida Raughton could never be his wife. Even though she might be willing to take him, stripped as he would be of his title and his possessions, it was certain that Sir Paul would not allow her to do so. He began to feel a bitter hatred rising up in his heart against this man, who had only let him enjoy his false position till he happened to cross his path, and had then swooped down upon him, and, in one moment, torn from him everything he possessed in the world. His heart had been full of pity for that unknown and unnamed brother, whom he had imagined to be in existence somewhere in the world; for this man, who was now to come forward armed with all lawful rights to deprive him of what he had so long been allowed blindly to enjoy, he experienced nothing but the blackest hate. For he never doubted for one moment but that the story was true!

At twelve o'clock he and Smerdon were ready to receive the new claimant to all he had imagined his, and at twelve o'clock he arrived. He bowed to Smerdon and held out, with almost a beseeching glance, his hand to Gervase Occleve, but the latter refused to take it.

"Whether your story is true or not," he said, "I have nothing but contempt to give you. If it is false, you are an impostor who shall be punished, socially if not legally; if it is true, you are a bad-hearted man to have left me so long in my ignorance."

"I should have left you so for ever," Cundall answered in a voice that sounded sadly broken, "had it not been for Miss Raughton's sake; I could not see her deceived."

"Had he not come between you and her," Philip Smerdon asked, "but had wished to marry some other lady, would your scruples still have been the same?"

"No! for she would not have been everything in the world to me, as this one is. And I should never have undeceived him as to the position he stood in. He might have had the title and what it brings with it, I could have given Ida something as good."

"Your ethics are extraordinary!" Philip said, with a sneer.

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