

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

FORTUNE'S MY FOE

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John Bloundelle-Burton

Fortune's My Foe / A Romance

PROLOGUE OFF CARTAGENA

The storm of the night was over. The winds had subsided almost as quickly as they had risen on the previous evening-as is ever the case in the West Indies and the tropics generally. Against a large number of ships of war, now riding in the waters off Boca Chica, the waves slapped monotonously in their regularity, though each crash which they made on the bows seemed less in force than the preceding one had been; while the water looked less muddy and sand-coloured than it had done an hour or so before. Likewise the hot and burning tropical sun was forcing its way through the dense masses of clouds which were still banked up beneath it; there coming first upon the choppy waters a gleam-a weak, thin ray; a glisten like the smile on the face of a dying man who parts at peace with this world; then, next, a brighter and more cheery sparkle. Soon the waves were smoothed, nought but a little ripple supplying the place of their recent turbulence; the sun burst forth, the banks of clouds were dispersed, the bright glory of a West Indian day shone forth in all its brilliancy. The surroundings, which at dawn might well have been the surroundings of the Lower Thames in November, had evaporated, departed; they were now those of that portion of the globe which has been termed for centuries the "World's Paradise."

The large gathering of ships mentioned above-they mustered one hundred and twenty-four-formed the fleet under the command of Admiral Vernon, and in that fleet were also numbers of soldiers and marines who constituted what, in those days, were termed the Land Forces. There were also a large contingent of volunteers from our American colonies, drawn principally from Virginia.

The presence here both of sailors and soldiers was due to a determination arrived at by the authorities at home in the year 1739, to harass and attack the Spanish West Indian Islands and possessions in consequence of England being once again, as she had been so often in the past, at war with Spain. Now that fleet lay off Cartagena and the neighbourhood; some of the officers and men-both sailors and soldiers-were ashore destroying the forts near the sea; the grenadiers were also ashore; the bomb-ketches were at this very moment playing upon the castles of San Fernando and San Angelo; the siege of Cartagena had begun.

Upon the quarter-deck of one of the vessels of war composing the great fleet, a vessel which may be called the *Ariadne*, the captain walked now as the storm passed away and the morning broke in all its fair tropical beauty, and while there came the balmy spice-laden breeze from the South American coast-a breeze soft as a maiden's first kiss to him she loves; one odorous and sweet, and luscious, too, with the scents of nutmeg and banana, guava and orange, begonia, bignonia, and poinsettia, all wafted from the flower-laden shore. But because, perhaps, such perfumes as these, such rippling blue waves, now crested with their feathery tips, such a bright warm sun, were not deemed by Nature to be the fitting accompaniments to the work which that fleet had to do and was about to do-she had provided others.

Near the ship which has been called the *Ariadne*, alongside the great and noble flagship, the *Russell*, passing slowly-but deadly even in their slowness! – through the line made by the *Cumberland*, the *Boyne*, the *Lion*, the *Shrewsbury*, and a score of others, went the hideous white sharks of the Caribbean Sea, showing sometimes their gleaming, squinting eyes close to the surface of the water and showing always their dorsal fin as the water rippled by them.

"The brutes know well that they will be fed ere long," the captain-Henry Thorne-said, half to himself, half aloud, as he gazed through the quarter-deck starboard port; "they know it very well. Trust them."

"They must know it, sir," said the chaplain, a fine rosy-cheeked gentleman, who had already had his morning draught, wherefore his cheeks looked shiny and brilliant-he having been standing near Thorne while he murmured to himself-"specially since they have been fed enough already by our fleet. Three went overboard only yesterday from the *Weymouth*. While we are here they will never leave us."

"So-so," the captain said. "So-so. 'Tis very true." Then, turning to the chaplain, he asked, "How is it with her below? Have you seen the surgeon's mate? What does he say? Is her hour of trial near?"

"It is very near," the other answered. "Very near. Pray Heaven all may go well. Ere long we may hope to congratulate you, sir, upon paternal honours. 'Tis much to be desired that the Admiral will give no signal for the bombardment to commence until Mrs. Thorne is through her peril."

"At least I hope so. With all my heart. Poor girl! Poor girl! I would never have brought my wife on board, Mr. Glew, had I known either of two things. The first that she was so near her time; the second, that we should be ordered to join this squadron-to quit our station at Port Royal."

Whereby, as you may gather by this remark of Captain Thorne, the *Ariadne* was not one of those great war vessels which had sailed from England under the order of the Admirals. Instead, she had come down from Jamaica, where she was stationed, to join the fleet now before Cartagena.

Then the captain continued-

"If the Admiral does open the attack this morning 'twill be a fine hurly-burly for a child to be born amidst. Surely, if 'tis a boy, he should live to do great things. He may be a bold sailor-or soldier, at least. He may go far, too; do well. He will be fortunate also in his worldly gear. I-I-am not rich, Glew, but he-or she-will be some day an heir or heiress to much property and wealth that must come my way at last if I live. If I live," he repeated, more to himself than to his companion.

"You have not made your will yet, sir?" the parson asked, rubbing his chin, which was red and almost raw from the use of a bad razor that morning. "The will you talked about. As a chaplain who, on board ship, is also supposed to be something of a lawyer, I feel it right to tell you that you should do so. No man who is before the enemy, whatever his standing, should neglect so important an office as that."

"I will not neglect it, Mr. Glew. Let the child but be born and I will perform it in my cabin the moment I know the good news." Then, changing the subject, he asked, "Will they let me see her if I go below, think you?"

"I will make inquiries," the other said, going towards the after-hatch. "Yet," he went on, as he put his foot on the ladder beneath, "I doubt it. The event is very near at hand. The wife of the master-at-arms, as well as the wife of the ship's corporal, are with her-they rule all. But I will go see," and his head followed his body and disappeared.

Left alone, or at least without the companionship of Mr. Glew, for none could be alone on board such a ship as this was-even though she might have been making a pleasant cruise on summer seas; while more especially, none could be alone when that ship was one of a large number engaged in a bombardment-the captain went about his duties. He visited the gun decks and saw that all were at their proper stations, inspected the twenty-four, twelve, and nine pounders, swivel guns, stern and bow chasers, and indeed, everything that could throw a ball; he saw that sponges and rammers were ready, and that every bolt and loop was in working order. He neglected nothing, no more than he would have done had his young wife been at home at Deptford or Portsmouth, and he without the knowledge that at the present time, she was about to make him a father.

Yet, all the same, his thoughts were never absent from her, his bride of a year; again and again he lamented bitterly that she had come upon this cruise with him. Why, he asked himself repeatedly, could he not have left her behind in Port Royal, where she would have been well and carefully attended

to, and where he could have joined her after this siege was over? He had been mad to bring her! Already the bomb-ketches were making a hideous din all around; already, too, some of the great ships of war had received their orders to open fire, and were obeying those orders; from the forts on shore a horrible noise was being kept up as they replied to the attackers in a more or less irregular and perfunctory manner.

"What surroundings," he muttered to himself, breaking off even as he did so to bawl orders to the men in the tops to train their swivel guns more accurately upon the shore, "what surroundings for a little helpless babe to be born in the midst of. What surroundings!"

They were, however, to become worse-far worse for the poor mother below; surroundings more terrible and awful to accompany the birth of a new-born child.

Commodore Lestock, with his broad red pennant hoisted, tapering and swallow-tailed, went in to bombard all the forts along the shore, and after him followed an appointed number of the ships in his squadron. It was a noble sight, one that might have caused-and doubtless did cause-many hearts to beat enthusiastically in their owners' breasts. Along the line of other vessels which they passed, cheer rang upon cheer; the bands of the flagships, and others which possessed such music, played "Britons, Strike Home." Soon five hundred great guns were firing on those forts, which replied with courage; the din was tremendous, as also was the vibration caused to each of the vessels while the flames belched forth and the guns shook. And in the middle of the cannonading-when, on board, one could not see across the ship, nor from the mizzen to the main shrouds on either side-the chaplain, staggering on to the upper deck, his handkerchief to his nose and mouth to keep out the saltpetre from his lungs, ran against Captain Thorne giving orders for a marine who had been wounded by a shot from the shore to be carried below.

"Sir," Mr. Glew said hastily, and clutching the captain by the arm, "sir, I offer my congratulations. It-"

"Is well over?" Thorne exclaimed. "Is that it?"

"It is that, sir. And the child is-"

"What?"

"A girl."

"A girl," the captain repeated, while even amongst all the roar of the cannonading, Glew seemed to think he heard a tone of disappointment in the other's voice.

"So-so!" Thorne exclaimed a moment later. "Well, carry down my love to my dear wife. I must not leave the deck now. Say-say-that I will be below ere long. Say that I-am-rejoiced."

* * * * *

Meanwhile, what was passing below in the captain's cabin-which had been set aside for his wife ever since her hour drew nigh; he sleeping in a spare one close by? Independently of it being now a chamber in which a young and beautiful wife had just become a mother, as well as a room in great disorder, there were other things which, in any circumstances, must have caused it to present an appearance of extreme confusion. Naturally, all the pictures had been unshipped, since the concussion of the guns would otherwise have brought them from the bulkheads to the floor, or deck, to say nothing of shivering any glass they might possess. And also all china and glass in the cabin, and the pretty knick-knacks which Thorne had bestowed about it, were removed from their usual positions. Whereby the apartment in the *Ariadne*, in which Mrs. Thorne had but recently presented a child to her husband, was even more disarranged than it would ordinarily have been, Likewise, every port and scuttle was opened, so that thus some of the concussion should be avoided, and the cabin was thereby made less hot and stuffy than such a place would otherwise have been in this climate. Yet it was but a poor place in which to bring a fresh body and soul, into a troublous world-a poor place in which a child should first open its eyes upon the light.

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Tickle, the wife of the master-at-arms, she thinking thus, as she wiped the perspiration from Mrs. Thorne's face. "Dear, dear! What a place for the sweet young thing to give birth to a babe in. Yet," and, as she spoke, she took a sip of rumbullion from a cannikin close to her hand, and then passed it over to Mrs. Pottle, the wife of the ship's corporal, "it might have been wuss. My first was born in Havant Work'us', Tickle being away with Captain Clipperton at the time."

"Ha!" said Mrs. Pottle, as she in her turn took a sip of the toothsome liquor. "Indeed, and it might have been wuss. Even now it may be so. What if one of them forts should plump a round shot into us below the water-line? Then there won't soon be no Captain Thorne, nor Mistress Thorne, nor baby either."

"Nor yet no Mrs. Tickle nor Mrs. Pottle," said the other. Whereupon each took another drink at the rumbullion to calm their nerves, which, in truth, needed little calming, since this was not the first battle, or rather bombardment, in which these good ladies had taken part. For, in those days of a century and a half ago, it was common enough for the wives of the petty officers and the lower-deck men to sail on board ships with their husbands, they doing much such work therein as, in these days, is done by soldier's wives who are on the "strength of the regiment." They could also turn their hands to other things, even as Mrs. Tickle and Mrs. Pottle were now doing. For they were almost always excellent nurses, understanding much about wounds and fevers and other complaints, and quite capable of working under, and sometimes of advising, the raw sawbones whom the Admiralty sent into the ships of war to cure-or kill-the sailors.

"Is the battle over?" Mrs. Thorne asked feebly, opening her eyes now as she spoke, and endeavouring in her newly-developed maternal love, to turn them down upon the tiny mite lying on her breast.

"Over, deary!" said Mrs. Tickle, sinking the character of the inferior woman who was in the presence of the superior, and speaking only as a good-hearted, motherly creature, which indeed she was, to another who needed her care. "Not yet, poor lamb. Lawk's sakes," she whispered to her comrade, "can't she hear the guns a-belching? Ah! drat you all," she muttered, as at this moment a larboard broadside bellowed forth, causing the ship to tremble at her keelson; "that's them lower deck twenty-four pounders at it again. Poor dear, she don't seem to hear or feel them, anyhow."

She should have done so, indeed she must have done so, since even as the roaring continued, while the *Ariadne* was brought round so that now her starboard broadside could be fired, she lifted her arms feebly and enfolded more tightly to her breast than she had done before the little atom she had but recently brought into the world.

"My child," she moaned, "my child! Oh what can your future be with such a beginning as this? What shocks and tempests must threaten the existence that commences in such turbulence and throes as these."

"You 'ear," said the master-at-arms' wife to the wife of the ship's corporal, "you 'ear! She is quite calm and full of understanding. Ah! poor dear." Whereupon she stretched out her hand once more for the can of rumbullion.

And even now, as each of these women in the cabin listened to the uproar without, that uproar seemed to increase. Half a dozen vessels were firing at once; the battery which had been constructed ashore by those who had landed overnight was adding to the tumult; the bo'sun's pipes were heard whistling like some shrill-voiced bird that sings its loudest amidst the violence of a summer storm; the master-gunner's voice was heard on board the *Ariadne* giving his orders. And there came too, the sound of a hideous crash in the vessel, the rending of timbers, the shrieks of sailors, who were doubtless wounded-bellows, shouts and curses.

"The ship is struck," said Mrs. Tickle, calm and tranquil as became a sailor's wife who had been in battle before. "Pray Heaven 'tis not below the water-line."

"Nor that the magazine is set afire," said Mrs. Pottle, also with heroic coolness. "Otherwise we have got our passage to Davy Jones. Yet," she continued, the woman rising above the Amazon, "I

have three poor little children at home in Portsmouth town. And one is a'most blind. God help them, what shall they do if Pottle and I have got our discharge!"

While, even as she spoke of her children, that other child, the newly-born babe present in the cabin, set up a piteous infantine wail. Little, unconscious creature as it was, bearing a brain but an hour old, it seemed to recognise, to have some glimmering of the terrors that enveloped it. And while it did so the ship listed to starboard, causing Mrs. Thorne's body to move somewhat, and, at the same moment, the white, delicate hands seemed to strain the infant closer to her; the liquor can, too, was upset, whereby the drink went slopping over the cabin carpet. But the other two matrons were not to be stopped, even at that moment, from doing their duty. Mrs. Tickle sprang up and held the ailing woman tightly in her berth, as she muttered-

"The ship has listed four degrees. Yet she goes no further. They have stopped the water from pouring in. Go, Pottle, and find the surgeon. He must come here, even though he quits the wounded for an instant."

Whereon Mrs. Pottle went forth, a heroine still, though a white, pale-faced one. A heroine, not thinking of her own life-now in deadly peril! – but only of the little children at home in Portsmouth town. Above all, she thought of the half-blind one who could never do aught for itself when it grew up. She thought of it, and wondered who would protect it when she and her husband were gone.

"My husband, my husband!" wailed Mrs. Thorne, as she and the other woman were left alone. "My husband! Will he not come to me? To me. To his wife and new-born babe. Oh! my husband. Why comes he not?"

"Dear heart," exclaimed Mrs. Tickle, "he cannot come. His duty is on deck. Duty before all." Then she bent her head a little nearer to the other's, and said, "We are sailors' wives. Our duty first. Duty before all," she repeated.

As she did so the cabin door was slid back, and Mrs. Pottle returned, bringing with her the surgeon's mate from the sick bay-a young, callow Irishman, who was now making his first cruise. The surgeon, an old man, who had an army of children of his own at home in Rotherhithe, had attended Mrs. Thorne through her trouble, but now he was busy with those who were wounded and in the cock-pit. He could not come.

The mate was very pale-too pale, thought Mrs. Tickle, for a sailor-doctor to be, even though he were smelling powder for the first time. Then, to that good lady's astonishment, as she cast her eyes on her nursing comrade, she saw that she too was very pale-was white-ghastly. And in a moment she imagined, guessed, that the ship's corporal was dead! By that freemasonry, by some telegraphic method of the eyes, which women alone know how to use, she signalled to the other to ask if such were the case, yet only to discover that she had not divined aright. Mrs. Pottle shook her head; then, seeing that the eyes of the captain's wife were wide open, she stepped behind the surgeon's mate, and from the screen of his broad back put her finger to her lip. Thereby not knowing what else she meant, Mrs. Tickle understood at least that silence was to be observed.

"My husband," moaned Mrs. Thorne again now, gazing up into the dark eyes of the handsome young fellow who looked so white, "my husband-I want him."

"Nay, madam," he said, even as he felt her pulse and arranged her more comfortably in the berth, "nay, not yet; the bombardment is not over." While, turning his head round, he whispered to Mrs. Pottle behind him, "You have left the cabin door open; shut it."

It was well she obeyed him at once. Well that, amidst fresh discharges of the twenty-four pounders, another crash on deck and a noise which was the fall of the foremast, added to the piercing cries of the child, Mrs. Thorne could not hear nor see beyond that door. Well that it was shut immediately on the order of the surgeon's mate.

For now six sailors were carrying down the after-ladder a helpless, limp body at that moment-one that was to be laid in the very next cabin to that which Mrs. Thorne was occupying. The body of Henry Thorne, with a bullet in it that had pierced the heart.

And behind them came the chaplain, shaking his head sadly, yet muttering somewhat thankfully, too-

"But he made that will. He made that will. And the child is safe. Although it seems, no will was needed, yet it is as well that he should have made it."

* * * * *

For many years after her father's death *Ariadne's* home was with her mother at Gosport, and here she grew from childhood to womanhood, and became a sweet, pure girl, whom to see was at once to admire. A girl so fair and pretty, that, whenever she walked abroad, the eyes of men were turned towards her approvingly; a girl, tall, and with a figure that full womanhood would develop into one of extreme grace and beauty; one who possessed also such charms as deep hazel eyes, which looked out at you from between thick eyelashes that were many shades darker than the fair hair crowning her head as though with a golden diadem; a pretty girl whose masses of curls reminded one of the cornfields in July.

For years she lived with her mother here in Gosport, having done so from the time when Vernon sent them both home to England in the first ship of war that went back after Mrs. Thorne was able to travel. And of all the neighbourhood around she was the pet; she was, too, the darling of old sea captains who had had arms and legs lopped off in many a fierce fight against those whom we called our old "hereditary foes"; the darling of every old blue who had drawn cutlass for His Majesty King George II., or King George I., or even, amongst the very old and decrepit, for Great Anne; the beloved of those sea-dogs who had first spat their quids out on the enemy's decks and had then hewn that enemy down before them. For these old salts, no matter what their rank was, regarded her as their own child and property. Had she not been born amidst the roar and smoke of England's cannon as they vomited forth fire and fury? Was she not a sailor's child, and he one who had fallen as a sailor should fall, dying on his own deck, while doing his duty? That was enough to make them love the little thing who grew beneath their eyes towards beauteous womanhood; enough to make old lieutenants who had served sufficiently long to be admirals, and admirals-fortunate dogs! – who had not seen half the service of those old lieutenants, worship her; to make them wander up to her mother's house and smoke their pipes there, and talk to her about the father who had died the glorious death. It was sufficient, too, to set old tars carving out ornaments and knick-knacks from ancient ships of war which had been towed as prisoners into the harbour and there broken up, all of which they presented to her with grins of pleasure, and almost with blushes-if such could be! – upon their wind-tanned, scarred faces. It was amply sufficient also to cause others to bring her in baskets of strawberries and raspberries from their little gardens on the outskirts of the town, and bouquets of the sweet old-time flowers that grew in such profusion in those gardens. And some there were-and many-who called her the "Sailor's Pet," and others who named her the "Mariner's Joy."

Yet 'twas not only the old who loved *Ariadne* Thorne. Be very sure of that. For you cannot but suppose that the young men loved her too-those lieutenants and second lieutenants who, although still beardless, had fought in many of the numerous sea-fights of the period. Young fellows with boyish faces who had, all the same, been with Hawke at the Isle of Aix, and Howe at St. Malo, or had assisted in the destruction of the *Oriflamme* by the *Monarque* and the *Monmouth*. They all loved her, and she loved one, and one alone. Happy, happy man!

Two years before this narrative begins, however, and when *Ariadne* was sixteen, there fell upon her a great blow, that of her mother's death-a blow which, when it strikes a young girl in her swift blossoming from maidenhood to womanhood, is doubly cruel. Mrs. Thorne died of an internal disorder with which she had been for some time afflicted, and the girl was left alone, or almost alone, in the world. She had a relative, it was true, an uncle of her late father's, one General Thorne; but he was a very old man-so old, indeed, that he could talk of Eugene's campaign against the Turks, and

speak of that great soldier as one whom he had seen in boyhood; while he was also able to boast that he had formed one of the guard of honour which had accompanied the present King, George II., now grown old, to his coronation. He dwelt at, and owned, an estate spoken of generally as "Fawnshawe Manor," which lay five miles or so on the London side of Portsmouth; one that would at his death come, with a very considerable fortune, to *Ariadne* herself. A fortune and an estate which would have come to her eventually through her father had he not been slain at Cartagena, even without his making that will which his chaplain, the Reverend Mr. Glew, had so impressed on him to do, although it was unnecessary; that must have come to her, since no heir male existed to deprive her of it, or to step in between her and it.

She had likewise a friend, a true and steadfast friend, one who loved her as, next to her mother, no other woman could have loved her. A hard, rugged woman was this friend, with a deep voice and corrugated face, yet possessing within her bosom a heart of gold; the woman who had assisted at her birth-Mrs. Pottle, now growing old.

"Ah!" this good creature would moan sometimes as she sat by her fireside, either in her own room in the house at Gosport, or, later, in her parlour at the lodge at Fanshawe Manor, which she came to occupy later. "Ah! if Ariannie," as she pronounced the loved one's name, "was not left to me, mine would be a weary lot. Pottle, he've gone; he done his duty, but he've gone; at Anson's victory off Finisterre, it were. And as to all my children-oh!" she would exclaim, "there! I can't abide to dwell on them. Oh! my children," whereon-because old customs grow on us and are hard to shake off-the brave sailor-woman would endeavour to console herself with something from a black bottle.

But she was true as steel to "her little child," as she called *Ariadne*; true and loving as her honest English heart, as any honest woman's heart, could be. She had not attended to all the child's wants since the black day off Cartagena in '41; had not nursed and attended to *Ariadne* for years, nor told her-in company with her own little ones-of fierce and turbulent sea-fights and land-fights, without becoming a foster-mother to her. So, now, she accompanied the girl, clad in her deep mourning and weeping sorrowfully for her loss, and also for having to quit the little house where she had lived so happily for the great one where she did not know whether she would be happy or not. She accompanied *Ariadne*, sitting by her side in the coach and calling her "deary" and "dear heart," and bidding her cheer up, because the General-"although he hadn't the luck to be an admiral" – was reported to be kind and good.

"And," she would say more than once, "remember that, as the lawyer told you, you go to what is your inheritance. It will be all your'n, and you will rule over it like a young queen until some day you love one who will rule over you."

Practically, that was what *Ariadne* did do after a few short months; she did rule over the house for her great-uncle, as, ere long, she was to do it for herself. General Thorne was now helpless with old age, and was glad to know that, already, the girl was in the home which must so soon be hers; that she was there to bring sunlight into the great vast house which, through the Fanshawes, had by intermarriage come into the possession of the Thornes.

As Mrs. Pottle had said, she presided over it like a young queen, graciously and kindly, making herself beloved all around the place, yet not forgotten by those old sailors amongst whom her earliest days had been passed. She became its mistress from then until now, when this history opens, and when "*Ariadne Thorne*" was a toast in the county, while many gentlemen of various degrees aspired to win both her hand and her love. When, too, others aspired to win that hand, not so much because they desired to obtain her love so much as, in its stead, they desired the possession of Fanshawe Manor and the hundred thousand guineas which were reported to be her fortune.

CHAPTER I

THE LION AND THE JACKAL

Seventeen years have passed since the child who was to bear the name of that ship of war, in which she was born, had come into the world-upon the very day and at almost the very hour when her father had left it. Seventeen years! – full of storm and strife and battles, of thrones in danger; of one throne-that of England-almost lost to its holder by the invasion of him to whom it by birth belonged. Years full of storm and strife and battle by land and sea; of Dettingen won and Fontenoy lost, of India coming nearer to our grasp and America imperceptibly receding from it. Years full, too, of changes in many ways, especially in our own land. Of growing alteration in that old mother speech of ours which had become welded, by time and mixture of race into the superb and sonorous diction of the English Bible and of Shakespeare, and which found its last exponent in the great Defoe, but was now sinking into a jargon in which gentlemen and ladies spoke in a mincing and affected manner that was but a poor substitute for the grammar which, if they had ever known it, they had now forgotten. Gentlemen and ladies who should have been scholars, but who did not know the difference between "was" and "were" nor "is" and "are," nor the proper pronunciation of the vowel "e."

Changes, too, of clothes, of habits, customs, and morality. Scarlet and blue cloth taking the place of russet or peach-coloured satin; French dishes and kickshaws in the place of the honest beef and mutton which had made us "eat like wolves and fight like devils"; and with the dancing-master manners of Chesterfield and his imitators superseding the grace and dignity of earlier days. The rogue too was now a crafty, scheming knave who feared public opinion as much as he feared the Lord Chief Justice and his subordinates, and began at this time to think as much of his respectability as of his neck; whereby he was an infinitely less interesting vagabond than his predecessor, who revelled in his crimes, drank to the health of his friend, the gallows, and went drunk to Tyburn, damning and cursing the populace who cheered him, and jerring at the parson who sat in the cart by his side, had been.

Two things, however, God be praised! were still left in existence in this England of ours, namely, masculine courage and feminine virtue; and against them neither the vagabond nor the knave had any more chance than they had ever had or ever will have. When they succeeded they did so because their victims were either fools or wantons, and when they failed, as often enough was the case, if they did not find the gallows they found the cart-tail, or what to them, if they belonged to the upper classes, was often quite as bad-contempt and ridicule.

* * * * *

Seventeen years had passed, consequently the world had arrived at the year of our Lord 1758, and Beau Bufton sat in his lodgings in the Haymarket one June afternoon. In front of him, because he was a beau, there stood three wigs upon blocks, one black, the other brown, a third one golden, and upon each his eye glanced with considerable complacency-a complacency which, however, was somewhat marred by the recollection that none were paid for, and, as far as Algernon Bufton knew, were not likely to be so just yet. Which fact would not, perhaps, have been particularly painful to him except for one other, namely, that his credit was running short and his creditors were beginning to pester him. Nevertheless, he smiled approvingly upon them; not because they themselves were splendid, and would be costly-if he should ever pay his bills! – but because he considered that they would become him vastly.

"It was the golden one I wore," he muttered to himself now, "when first I won her young and virgin heart at the Wells. Ay! the golden one. I do remember very well. I assumed it because it matched

the blue frock and the green silk waistcoat trimmed with gold and the black breeches of velvet. Ah! well, I will wear it again."

Then his eye, which was a dark, full one, fell upon a number of fans nailed against the wall, in the midst of which, spread out and open, was one that seemed to possess the place of honour. We know those fans because our grandmothers' grandmothers (when we had any!) left them behind after they had departed for a better world than this. We know the carved ivory sticks, the highly coloured landscape, the lover kneeling at his mistress's feet, with ever one amorous arm around her waist-as should be in such happy sylvan scenes! – also we know the blue sky and the sportive woolly sheep, as well as the bird upon the bough, the rivulet and waterfall. Thus the fan appeared on which Beau Bufton gazed now, his chin-a long one, causing him to be a man mistrusted of other men-in his hand. Yet more particularly he gazed upon two letters carved into the topmost ivory rib, and lacquered golden; two letters entwined together-the letters "A. T."

"Ah, Ariadne!" he whispered, with emotion, "although you did protest, you let me take it. Ah, Ariadne! In faith you must be mine. Those sweet clear eyes, that supple form, those gentle features, and," he concluded, perhaps a little inconsequently, "the Fanshawe Manor and the hundred thousand guineas. All-all must be mine."

Then he returned to his seat, with again the smirk of fervour on his face, while, still nursing that long chin, he pursued his meditations.

It has been said that this chin made other men mistrust him. And, it may also be said, it was of so peculiar a shape as to make people dislike him. In truth, it was a blemish to what otherwise would have been a good-looking face-a long oval face, in which were set the soft dark eyes above mentioned. But this chin, running down to a point (so that some wondered how his barber shaved it, while others said it looked like a sheep's tail stuck on to an ordinary face), spoilt all. It caused him to look crafty; it seemed to make him lisp a little as he spoke, as though its weight was more than his lower jaw could bear; and it gained him enemies, since it irritated those who regarded it. It gave him, too, a cynical appearance, which was not obnoxious to him, as he considered that it emphasised the clever things which he flattered himself he was particularly smart at saying. For the rest, he was fairly tall, not badly knit, and as lean as a greyhound.

Thinking of her whom he apostrophised as Ariadne, and of her sweet, clear eyes and supple form-with the Fanshawe Manor and the hundred thousand guineas not forgotten! – his thoughts lent themselves to other things in connection with her. To a letter he had addressed to her at Fanshawe Manor, this side of Portsmouth-one full of holy vows of admiration and esteem; a billet containing a little scrap of poetry (written for him, probably, by a garreteer of Grub Street for half-a-crown); one suggesting also that, by great good chance, he would be in the neighbourhood of Havant on a certain evening now close at hand, and that then "his wandering love-led steps" (for so he phrased it) would turn, as turns the needle to the pole, towards the avenue of limes where oft Phyllis was known to walk at eve and Philomel to warble. Perhaps, too, the gutter-poet had helped him in this charming composition!

"Ay, so I wrote," he said to himself now. "And so I did. Well! well! Now for the means. I vow they run uncommon short." Whereupon he unlocked a 'scrutoire that stood close to him, and thrusting his hand into a drawer, pulling forth a silk purse. A well-filled one, too, as it seemed by its weight; one heavy enough for any beau to carry, provided always that it was so carried simply to supply the wants of the passing hour, and was backed up by a good sound balance at Sir Mathew Decker's Bank, or at some other. But, should it happen to represent all the available cash that its owner was in possession of as his whole goods, then but a lean and sorry purse.

He turned its contents out upon the table before him, picking out amongst them five great three pound twelve shilling pieces, which he stacked carefully in a little heap by themselves.

"They look well," Beau Bufton said, while assuming the cynical smile which he practised in private, so that it should not fail him when required in public. "They give their possessor an air of

sumptuousness. To draw one out 'twixt thumb and finger from a well-gallooned waistcoat, and present it to, say, Ariadne's tiring maid, or some scurvy groom, bespeaks wealth and ease. So, so. 'Tis very well."

Then he fell to counting the guineas and half-guineas which he had also tumbled out of the silken purse, though, as he did so, his chin seemed to grow longer. "Humph!" he muttered, "seventy-nine guineas in all. Devilish little. I thought there had been more. And where are more to be gotten? Seventy-nine guineas- Come in!" he cried, breaking off. Come in!" – a knock being heard at the door, Yet, even as he did so, he thrust a copy of the *Universal Chronicle* over the little heap, or, rather, endeavoured to do so.

"The chink of money is always agreeable to the ears of the poor," said a man who now entered the room, "especially when those ears have learnt to discriminate 'twixt gold and baser metals. And how does the illustrious Beau Bufton find his health and spirits to-day?"

The new-corner who asked this question was a man of about the same age as the Beau, neither of them being yet thirty, or within a year or so of it; yet, except in point of age, there was no similarity between them, for Bufton's clothes were of the newest and best-as why should they not be, since still the creditors were confiding; his ruffles and neck-lace were clean and expensive. But with the other man things were mighty different. His coat was cloth, 'tis true, but cloth well worn; his linen and his lace were, say, dingy; and his wig had had never a shilling spent on it at the curler's for many a long day. Also his spadron stuck out two inches from its leathern scabbard and clinked against a heel that needed sadly the cobbler's aid. Nevertheless, he was a better-looking man than the Beau, in so far that his features were softly turned and much more manly.

"Has't done it?" asked Bufton now, his dark eye roaming over the other's worn garments, and resting with extreme displeasure on the sight of his visitor's feet, which were lifted with an indifferent air on to a neighbouring chair, across which was thrown a scarlet cloak. "Has't done it, Granger?"

"Ay! ay! She loves you, Algernon, as I do think. The letter is in her hands, and she awaits you in the lime-tree avenue. Thursday is the night. Fortunate man!"

"You have rid post haste back?"

"Post-haste! Ay, in the devil's chariot. A lumbering waggon thing from Portsmouth was my coach. A waggon lined with straw; and, for comrades, two of Knowles' sailors, drunk; a demirep; also a Jew who furnishes for the Press-gang. What travelling! What a sumptuous coach! I protest, Algy, you starve your jackal."

"Better fare next time. When we have bagged the luscious plum. Then the jackal shall be starved no longer. Meanwhile, you know-" and here he gave the well-accustomed smile and fingered his chin, so that the man called Granger began to feel his gall arising, and instantly interrupted him, saying-

"NO jokes. No bites. Starve me as you will, keep me short of money, but in the name of God, spare me your wit. My stomach is weak from heavy fasting. I desire no emetics."

"At least you yourself waste no politeness. You do not curb a bitter tongue."

"Better so, nevertheless. Better I cursed and swore, as Knowles' sailors did all through the night, than listened to your emasculated gibes. Algernon, my friend, in spite of your having won the love of a great heiress, you will never succeed in life if you fail to recognise that you are not a wit. The fourth-form little boy humour with which you regaled us once at Shrewsbury becomes not London. I do remember that humour with pain. I think you killed your little sister Lucy, by repeating your schoolboy wit to her, or perhaps you put your finishing stroke to her end by your Cambridge-"

"Be still! be still!" Beau Bufton exclaimed, wincing as the other mentioned his dead sister's name. In truth he had loved that child, and thinking himself cynical, had sometimes retailed to her his sallies made both at Shrewsbury and at Clare. And now, to hear that his humour, as he deemed it, had slain her! 'Twas too much. "Be still," he cried, "or I will find some other to do my work-to do-"

"Your dirty work! That's what I do. Because of my infirmities. My fall from the position of a gentleman. Well! I have done it. A. T. – she," and he pointed to the fan which occupied the place of

honour, "loves you. If you woo her carefully, and do not weary her with your accursed flabby wit, you may win her. Then-then-why, then-oh! my God!" he exclaimed, breaking off into a strident peal of laughter, "you may be so happy together. So happy. So happy." And again he laughed.

"You have been drinking," Bufton said, fingering his chin still. "Drinking again. Come, tell me once more before you forget. About the meeting? Where, and when is it?"

"Have I not said! At the lime-tree avenue, leading up to Fanshawe Manor. Eight of the evening is the hour, and Thursday is the day. Win her-fail not to win her; she is yours for the trouble, and then there is the fortune and a large per centum for me."

"I shall not fail."

"I'll make very sure you do not. Remember, if I am a broken man-I-I can break-bah! Threats are unnecessary. Now, I want money."

Saying which he flung the *Universal Chronicle* aside, and then started at the sight of the little heap of gold before him. "What!" he exclaimed. "What! And three pound twelve shilling pieces, too. Gad! No Shoe Lane ordinary for me to-night."

Whereupon he took two of those coins and dropped them into his waistcoat pocket.

CHAPTER II

AN HEIRESS

The coach-it was the Self-Defence, which did the journey from the "Swan with Two Necks" in Lad Lane to the "Globe" at Portsmouth in ten hours and a quarter-had passed Purbrook, and was nearing Fanshawe, which hamlet lay, as all the world knew, or ought to have known, between the former place and Portsdown Hill, which is some five miles from Portsmouth. About which village the new road-book said, amongst other things, "On L., i.m., Fanshawe Manor, late General Thorne. Justice of the Peace, etc.; now Miss Ariadne Thorne." So that, as all who read may see, since Cary's Guide is understandable enough, the child born seventeen years ago off Cartagena, in the ship after which she was named, was now the owner of an estate. And what else she owned has already been made clear.

The June evening was delicious in its soft summer coolness as, now, the Self-Defence drew near that ancient inn, "The Hautboy," it retaining on its equally ancient sign-board its old-time spelling of Hautbois; and from the box-seat the Beau, who was the only occupant beside the coachman, made ready to descend. A very gallant beau he looked, too, as, throwing off his long light drugget cloak-assumed to fend the dust from his bravery underneath-he displayed his costly attire; attire consisting of his best laced scarlet summer coat, his blue waistcoat, which was a mass of galloon, and his best satin breeches, the whole surmounted by the golden peruke and the much-laced three-cornered hat.

"You will be a-staying at the manor then, my lord?" the coachman said now, deeming that one so fine and brave-seeming as this spark whom he had brought from London could be no other than a lord going courting the heiress of Fanshawe. "I'll go bail the lady is a-looking eagerly for you."

"Not positively at the manor," Beau Bufton replied. "Not positively, as yet. For to-night, at least, at the inn. There is, I should suppose, good accommodation for a gentleman?"

"Ay, there is, my lord; that is, if so be as how one requires not them damned French kickshaws, which they say are now the mode. But if good beef and mutton, a pullet, or- Bill," he broke off to speak to his mate, the guard, "sound the horn. The O'boy is in sight."

None descended at that old hostelry with the exception of the Beau himself, since, with the addition of one personage inside who was booked for Portsmouth, nobody but the Beau had that day travelled from London. Therefore his own descent took but very little time. A small valise was handed out from the boot, the customary fee of half-a-crown was distributed to guard and coachman, the landlady nodded to (she staring somewhat amazed at Bufton's finery all the time, and more particularly at his chin, which, she told her gossips later, gave her "a mort o' fear"), and the visitor entered the low-roofed passage. Then, as he did so, he felt his sleeve pulled gently by a woman standing in the doorway, who, on having attracted his attention, curtsied two or three times.

"Ha!" he said, glancing at her and noticing that, though plainly but comfortably dressed, she had a strangely worn and seamed face, such as those who have led an existence much exposed to the elements often possess. "Ha! It should be the good woman Mr. Granger told me of. Mrs. – Mrs. – ?"

"Pottle, your worship's honour. Miss Ariadne's nurse from the first."

"Ay, Mrs. Pottle. Well, you would speak with me? You have some news?"

"If it pleases your honour. Will your honour step this way?"

It was indeed Mrs. Pottle, one of those women who in past days had assisted at Ariadne's birth. Yet with now but little of the comeliness left for which she had once been distinguished, the rumbullion, or its substitutes in England, usquebaugh and gin, having done their work. Time also had made her grey, and in some places bald. Otherwise, she was not much changed. As for her whilom companion in the *Ariadne*, she was gone. She lay now within the common grave at Gibraltar.

"I shall see her to-night?" Beau Bufton asked, somewhat impatiently-eagerly-as he stepped into a side room after her. "She will be there?"

"In truth she will, the pretty thing," the woman answered, roving an eye, and that a somewhat watery one, on him, "in very truth. At eight, in the lime-tree avenue. Your worship can find it?"

"Doubtless. I may therefore rely on seeing her?"

"It is to tell you so that I'm here. Oh! sir, you will be good to her. She loves you fondly."

"Tush! What do I seek her for except to be kind?" Then he said, "Will she consent, think you, to what I desire-to-to-a speedy marriage?"

"She loves you," Mrs. Pottle replied, with a gleam in her eye, "while, as for the marriage-well! young, tender though she is, and full of a maiden's fears, she longs for it."

"She shall be gratified," Beau Bufton said, smirking and pulling at his chin so that Mrs. Pottle stared at him, wondering in her own mind if he were trying to pull it off. "I do avow she shall as soon as may be. I will go seek your parson here-"

"Not here," Mrs. Pottle said, laying on his arm a finger, which he noticed had lost the top joint-it had, in truth, been shot off by a spent bullet in an attack made by the *Ariadne* and *Kingston* on five Spanish galleys, the shot coming through the scuttle of a cabin in which she was calmly cooking-"not here. You must do that in London town. She is a maiden averse to talk and gossip. She would not suffer-"

"I will do it wher'er she pleases, so that she is mine. Now go, good woman, and tell her I shall be there. I must make a meal first and also remove the dust from off my clothes. Go now."

"There was a promise," Mrs. Pottle said, with an appearance of hesitation, of modesty, which sat strangely on her rough face. "The gentleman, your friend, he gave a promise of reward-"

"Curse me!" replied the Beau; "you waiting-women, you go-betweens, are all alike. Damme! I know there was a promise of five hundred guineas. But-when we leave the church-when all is over. Do you think I have such a sum on me now?"

"Not now, dear gentleman. Oh! no. Not now. But a little earnest. A little-"

"How much?" asked Bufton, looking at her and recognising that here was a cormorant who would do nothing for nothing. "How much?"

"A little. Just a little. A trifle. Ten guineas will not hurt a pretty man like you."

"Five," said Bufton. "Five, now. Five." Then, seeing a strange look in Mrs. Pottle's eyes, which his wonderful knowledge of human nature, whereon he so congratulated himself, did not assist him in fathoming, he said, "Well, ten, then. Here," and slowly drawing forth some loose guineas from his waistcoat, he put them in her open palm.

"A noble gentleman," said Mrs. Pottle, pocketing them in an instant, "a real gentleman. Now, sir, I go. To-night," she repeated, "in the lime avenue, at eight," and so withdrew.

Yet, doubtless because of the rough life she had led for years, her gratitude evaporated swiftly the moment she was outside the door of the room and had closed it on him; while her face assumed an expression strangely unlike that which it had worn when she thanked him for his gift.

"Curse you," she muttered to herself. "Curse you. May joy go with you," and she shook her fist and mumbled to herself.

Two hours later Beau Bufton had entered the long lime avenue, and was making his way up to where the lady of his heart was to await him. He had added somewhat to his appearance, smart as it had been before-had combed and dusted his peruke, perfumed his hands and lace, and supplemented his other adornments with a new sword, which he had brought down from London wrapped in silver paper. Now, it lay against his thigh, its ivory handle decorated with a gold sword knot, and once, as the Beau came to a portion of the avenue where it was almost dark, so thickly did the trees interlace overhead, he told himself he had done wisely to bring it. Ariadne might have other admirers-country clowns, 'tis true, yet fellows, who, nevertheless, were capable of feeling pangs of jealousy at the sight of so aristocratic a wooer as he. And-and-he thought they might attack him with clubs, or

even with plebeian fists-when-well-damme! – he would run them through. A little blood-letting-the reputation of being a swordsman-would not hurt him. To win an heiress after having slain a yokel lover would make him-well! perhaps even make him the more sought after. Therefore he went on, wishing, however, that his Ariadne had not selected a part of the avenue so distant from the main road-and so near to her house; and then-then-he knew she was there and had kept the appointed meeting.

A girl came towards him from beneath the trees, shyly, almost hesitatingly; while over her fair hair she had drawn a riding-hood. And a moment later Beau Bufton had taken her hand and was impressing kisses on it, and muttering phrases such as were in use in the highest London circles, and, consequently, must be irresistible to this provincial heiress.

"I am enraptured," he murmured now, "that one so fair should deign to receive her admirer. Ah, madam, if you but knew how my thoughts have dwelt on you since you let me claim you at the Wells-"

"And stole my fan, bad man. Ah, sir, you should not have trifled thus-"

"Love, madam, knows no law. But-but-fair Ariadne-almost had I said fair and chaste Diana-may I not gaze once more in rapture on those lovely orbs, those features ever present in my memory? Will you not remove your hood?"

With no more than a brief assumption of coyness, the fair one did as her gallant desired, showing a mass of light hair beneath the hood, and, beneath that, a pair of bright eyes which glistened in the evening dusk. She had too a fresh red-and-white complexion, the whole being a very satisfactory proof of the benefits of country air and living, as opposed to the effects of what an earlier poet had rapturously spoken of as "the stench of the London flambeaux."

"Ah! I protest," Beau Bufton exclaimed now as the maiden yielded to his request, and displayed her loveliness, "once more I tremble at the sight of those charms which won my heart at Tunbridge. Ariadne, you know by my letters all that I desire-all I wish. To call you mine. To be your husband. You cannot doubt my love."

"So soon?" she said. "Oh, fie! Not yet-not for years, I vow. I am too young."

"Young! Is the heart ever too young for love? And, Ariadne, dearest one, now is the time. I protest I cannot wait."

"But there are my guardians, the lawyers. What will they say?"

"What can they say? I am of ancient family, sweet one, and allied to some of the most distinguished houses in the land. They can make no dissent."

"If 'tis to be done," the girl said, "it must not be here. Oh! I could not. Instead, in London. We go to London two weeks hence. Yet-yet-I fear," and she gazed up into his face with a look of alarm that fascinated him. For now he knew that the hundred thousand guineas were almost in his grasp.

Yet as those clear eyes met his, they also disturbed him.

"Where," he muttered, "where, dearest, have I seen such orbs as yours before? Or was't in my dreams of them? Those lovely orbs."

"I do not know," she answered. "How can I say? I have wandered little away from this old country home of mine; and at Tunbridge was the first time I have ever been in the gay world. Ah, Algernon, you will be good to me?"

"Your life shall ever be my choicest care. My most precious treasure. Dearest, may I not put up the banns to-morrow, when I return to London?"

"You will love me always?"

"Always and ever."

Then she slid her hand coyly into his, and told him it should be as he desired.

"Now," she whispered, "you must away. Sunday sen'-night we leave for Cowley Street in Lambeth. You will not, Algernon, desire a great wedding? Let it be private; with none there but Mrs. Pottle, my faithful nurse. Say that it shall be so, my own."

"It shall be ever as you wish, sweet one," Beau Bufton answered, while as he did so he laughed in his sleeve. Mrs. Pottle, her faithful nurse! The woman who had done more to bring this about in

accord with his jackal's, with Lewis Granger's machinations, than any one else; the woman who was to have five hundred guineas for so bringing it about (unless he could in any way manage to avoid the payment of the money); the woman, who, that very night, had had ten guineas from him.

"Yes, yes," he whispered, "Mrs. Pottle, your faithful nurse, on your side; Lewis Granger, my hireling, on mine." While as he mentioned the latter's name he reflected that here was another who would have to be hoodwinked out of the guerdon he had stipulated for-hoodwinked out of five thousand guineas. Verily! a vast number of those guineas would drunken, ruined Lewis Granger get, when once Ariadne's fortune was in his hands. A vast number!

"Farewell, then," the girl said now. "Farewell, my beloved. Oh! do not deceive me, do not take advantage of my innocence and inexperience. Say you will not."

"Dear heart," he murmured, "who could deceive thee?" "A girl," he added to himself, "who has a hundred thousand guineas and a Hampshire manor. Who could do so?"

They parted now, she clinging to him tenderly before going away, and whispering in his ear that 99, Cowley Street, Lambeth, was where she would be a week from Sunday next, and that then she would be all his, and, meanwhile, would write often. They parted, she going up the avenue towards where the house stood, and he standing looking after her, feeling his chin and, with a contemptuous smile, drawing down the corners of his mouth.

CHAPTER III

"A COUNTRY CLOD."

It was now almost dark-yet not quite so, it being the period when the days are longest-and for some little time the Beau stood gazing after the retreating figure of his captured heiress. Then he turned slowly and began to retrace his steps to the Hautbois, where he intended to snatch a few hours' rest ere the up coach, which left the "Globe" at Portsmouth at five o'clock in the morning, should pass.

Perhaps never had Algernon Bufton been in a more agreeable frame of mind than he was at this present time. Everything was, he told himself, very well with him. A ruined spendthrift; a man who, seven years ago, had inherited a substantial fortune and, in the passage of those seven years, had managed to squander it; the chance had come to him of winning this girl, whom, in his mind, he considered to be little better than a fool.

He had thought so at first when he made her acquaintance at a public ball at Tunbridge, he having gone there heiress hunting and with a list in his pocket of all the young ladies who were known to be either the possessors of large fortunes or the future inheritors thereof; and he still thought her a fool after this evening's interview. That she should have fallen violently in love with him did not of course stamp her as one, since, in spite of his unfortunate chin, he deemed himself not only attractive, but irresistible. Yet a fool she undoubtedly was to throw herself away on a man about whom she had made no inquiries (as he knew she could not have made), and to be willing to marry him in the surreptitious, or, as he termed it, "hole in the corner," manner that she was about to do.

"If I were a scoundrel," he mused to himself with extreme complacency, "who was pursuing the girl with some other object than that of obtaining possession of her fortune, how I might hoodwink her! Granger, if kept sober till midday, could play the parson sufficiently well to throw dust in her eyes. But not in such a case as this should it be done. No. No! my beauteous Ariadne. Not in such a case as this. You shall be tied up devilish tight, so tight that never shall you escape your bonds with Algernon Bufton; so fast that my demise alone shall cancel them. You are not one of the pretty helpless fools whom villains deceive.

"A fine property, too," he mused, casting a dark eye around, "a fine property. The trees alone would sell for much if cut down. Yet-yet-we must not come to that. An avenue gives ever an imposing-Hist! What is this? Some country clown, by the way he sings to himself. Perhaps a rival."

Whereon, true to himself, Beau Bufton assumed a haughty, indifferent air as he strode along, and drew down his lips into the well-known Bufton sneer, as he considered it.

The person of whom he spoke, and who was quite visible in the evening gloaming, was now drawing near, and Bufton decided that he had guessed aright when he imagined him to be a country clown. A country squire perhaps; but no more.

This person's face, he could observe, was an extremely good-looking one, though marvellously brown and sunburnt-probably, the Beau thought, from common country pursuits-a handsome English face indeed, from which looked forth two bright blue eyes. Also he was tall and well-set, though perhaps his figure was not exhibited to its best advantage owing to a rolling gait. In his apparel he showed that he was a gentleman, his coat of blue cloth being of the best, while his lace, although not costly, was that which a person of position might wear. By his side he carried a sword which evoked the deepest disdain from Bufton, since it was but a common whinyard in a black leather case, and boasted only a brass handle and hilt. For the rest, he was a young man of the Beau's own age.

As they drew close to each other in the twilight, this young man fixed those blue eyes on Bufton's face with an extremely keen glance; a glance so penetrating that the other whose nose was in the air, and whose chin was stuck out in front of him, knew well enough that he was being scanned

from head to foot. Then, before he could progress more than another step or so, he was startled by hearing the new-comer address him.

"My friend," that person said, "have you not lost your way? Or are you not aware that this is private ground, the property of Miss Thorne?" For a moment the Beau could scarcely believe his ears. To be addressed as "his friend" by a person of this description! A country clod, and in a plain blue coat!

"My good fellow," he said, with now his choicest sneer, "is it not possible that the lady you mention may occasionally receive visitors other than the rural inhabitants of this neighbourhood?"

"Extremely possible," the new-corner replied, "since she deigns to receive me, who am not of this neighbourhood. But, since I happen to have a very strong and tender interest in Miss Thorne, may I make so bold as to ask if you have been received as a visitor by her to-night?"

It was, perhaps, as it happened at this juncture, a little unfortunate that Bufton had never accepted his friend Granger's estimate of him as a more just one than that which he had long since formed of himself. For the latter, in "coarse and ruffianly language," as the Beau termed it, always took great delight in telling him that he didn't know himself. "You are not as clever as you think, my friend," he would say again and again; "you are not astute, and, indeed, without my assistance you would be but a sorry knave. Also, your absurd belief in your powers of ridicule, the use of which is always the mark of either an envious person or a fool, will some day get you into trouble. I wish you could be more intelligent." Which advice was, however, entirely thrown away on Bufton, who was a man strong in his own conceit. And, perhaps, after all, he had a right to be so, since he had undoubtedly perpetrated many knavish tricks very successfully during his career.

But now his folly and his idea of his own importance ran away with him; while, at the same time, the reticence on which he prided himself-and truly so in unimportant matters, though he could blab freely on matters that should be kept secret-was shown to be the useless thing it was.

"Young man," he said, "you forget yourself, allow yourself an unpardonable license when you state that you have a strong and tender interest in Miss Thorne. Such a thing is impossible in one of your condition-indeed, in any one-now!"

"Why, you scurvy dog!" the other answered, approaching him-and now his blue eyes blazed indignantly, while his brown face seemed to assume a deeper hue-"you dare to speak thus to me-you jackanapes. Begone from off this place at once, ere I kick you down the avenue. Who are you, you bedizened mountebank, who dares put his foot here? Begone, I say, at once!"

That calmness is a mark of the truly great had long been an axiom of Beau Bufton; while he was also aware that those who possess such terrible powers of ridicule and contempt as were his, must never stoop to bandy words with others-since, thereby, even a clown might find a loophole for retaliation. Nor did he forget those axioms now, even though his blood boiled at being addressed as he had just been. But, on the other hand, none could be allowed to make such remarks to him-especially not he who had the monstrous temerity to state that he had a strong and tender interest in Miss Thorne. In Miss Thorne-the girl who, not a quarter of an hour ago, had promised to be his wife within a fortnight-the girl who had a hundred thousand guineas for portion!

"My good man," he said, "you carry a sort of weapon at your side."

"Ay, I do. A good one, too."

"Draw it, then. I must teach you a lesson. I presume you are of some standing; that I may cross swords with you. You perhaps may be considered a gentleman-"

"At least I have the gentleman's trick of knowing how to use a small sword. Come, let us make an attempt. Lug out. Come."

Not being wanting in personal courage, while feeling very sure, too, that Renoud had taught him all that there was to be learnt at the fence school in Marylebone, the Beau drew forth from its scabbard the bright new blade which, for the first time, he had hung by his side to-night, and put himself upon his guard. Yet he could have wished that his calm and dignified manner had more

favourably impressed his antagonist, and that he had not drawn his own common-looking blade with such an easy air. It was, he thought, an air far too self-confident for a yokel to assume. However, there was a lesson to be taught, and he must teach it.

"You have ventured to state," he said, "that you have a tender interest in Miss Thorne. If you will withdraw those words-"

"Curse you!" the other said furiously. "You dare to mention her name again. Have at you!" and in a moment their swords were crossed.

Then Beau Bufton knew that he could not possibly be dealing with a gentleman. For his opponent seemed utterly oblivious of every form and method of recognised attack and defence, and, what was more, parried every one of his choicest thrusts-even Renoud's low quarte, which was thought so well of; while he also had the gross vulgarity to parry a sweet flanconnade with his left hand. And the fellow had made him positively warm! Nevertheless, he seemed to know more than was desirable, since he had an accursed acquaintance with the old *contretemps*, or *coup fourré*, which was a dangerous knowledge for one's antagonist to possess.

In truth, Bufton began to think (although scarcely could it be possible that Heaven would ever permit such an outrage) that this provincial was very likely to stretch him ere long upon the soft grass beneath his feet. A thing that, if ever known, must load his memory with eternal disgrace. He a beau, a *maître des escrimeurs*, to be laid low by such a one. It must not be. He must try the *botte coupée*. He did try it-and it failed! While to make matters worse, his bucolic adversary laughed at him.

"Come," that adversary said, "this will not do. You are not a coward, it seems, therefore I will spare you. Only, henceforth, venture no more in this place." Whereon, as he spoke, he disarmed Beau Bufton with a heavy parry, and, a moment later held that gentleman's sword in his left hand.

"Now," he said, while on his face there came a good-humoured expression which made him look surprisingly handsome, though, indeed, there was little enough light left for the other to observe it by-"now be off. And, here, take your sword; it is a pretty weapon. Only, for the future, wear it for ornament-not use. Away with you."

"Curse you!" said the Beau, snarling at him. "I'll be at evens with you yet. If what I think is true, we shall meet again."

"Very likely," replied the other, "but it must not be here. I suspect you of having been courting one of the maids; next time go round to the offices-there you will not be interrupted," and in a moment he had walked swiftly away up the avenue.

Humiliated as the Beau was by his defeat at the hands of such a fellow! doubly humiliated, too, by that insulting suggestion that he, a gentleman, should have been lurking about after one of Ariadne's maid-servants, he had the good sense to hold his tongue and to let the victor-for such, in truth the other was-depart without further words. Yet, even after his defeat at that other's hands, he could still find some reflections to comfort him.

"Since," he said to himself, as now he went down the avenue on his road back to the inn, "the fellow is evidently on his way to visit her, he must be some local rustic who imagines that she favours him. Favours him! Oh, ye gods. Him! And not a quarter of an hour ere he came along she was promising to be mine-to be my wife-her head upon my shoulder-kissing me. Nay, I think she did not kiss me; in the hurry of our parting that sweet ceremony was forgotten. Ha! very well. When next he observes me, in this avenue, perhaps-it may be so! – he will see me riding up it as the owner, and the owner also of my Ariadne's guineas. Ah! my rural friend," he murmured, "I can forgive your insolence very easily."

Whereon, comforted by these reflections, he strode forward to the Hautbois, intent on obtaining some rest ere the coach should pass in the early morning.

His host and hostess were sitting outside the porch of the inn as he drew near it, the summer evening being so warm and balmy, while the old thatched house, over which the honeysuckle and

woodbine twined, was close and stuffy inside; and as he now drew near both rose with the antique ceremony of such persons, and bowed and curtsied.

"Your worship has paid a visit to Mistress Thorne?" the man asked inquiringly, supposing that for no other purpose could a gentleman have come down from London by the coach, only to return by it the next morning.

"Yes, to Mistress Thorne," the Beau answered. "Yet, my friends," he said, "it is a visit which I wish not discussed. It was on business-a matter of business of some import. I pray you to keep silence on the matter."

"For," he continued to himself, "I would not have that country calf know that he has a rival in the field. Thus, when he learns that Ariadne is mine, his despair will be greater. Thus, too, I shall have my revenge."

"I will say nothing, your worship," the man promised, while his wife echoed his words. "Nothing. Doubtless Miss Thorne has much business to transact."

"Always-always," replied the Beau.

"And did your worship see Sir Geoffrey going up to the house? He must have passed that way almost as you returned."

"Sir Geoffrey!" Bufton exclaimed. "Sir Geoffrey! What Sir Geoffrey, pray?" while as he spoke he felt, he knew not why, that he was turning somewhat white. Fortunately, however, the darkness which was now all around prevented that whiteness from being seen.

"Sir Geoffrey Barry," the man replied. "I thought your worship would have known him. He is of the county, and one of His Majesty's sea captains. And he awaits only the command of a ship-of-war to-to-"

"To what?"

"To espouse Mistress Thorne!"

Later that night, if the worthy landlord could have but seen into the small, low-ceilinged room in which Beau Bufton was installed, he would perhaps have thought that his guest was a madman, or, had at least, partaken too freely of the contents of a silver flask by his side. For he laughed and chuckled to himself again and again; while also, he snapped his fingers more than once in a manner which seemed to testify exuberant delight.

"To espouse Mistress Thorne," he repeated continually, as now he proceeded to divest himself of his clothes, knowing that it was necessary he should obtain some few hours' rest. "To espouse Mistress Thorne. Oh, gad! It is too much!" Yet, it would seem as though there was a sinister side to his humour as well, since occasionally, amidst all his hilarity, he would exclaim-

"Curse him! Curse him! He *is* a gentleman, it would seem, and he outraged me not only by his jeers and derisions, but also by having got the better of me in the encounter. So be it! A fortnight hence, my friend, and I shall have had my full retaliation. Ah, Sir Geoffrey Barry, you do not know yet with whom you have to deal! 'One of the maids,' indeed!"

CHAPTER IV

AN UNKNOWN VISITOR

"Ah! what a little Time to Love is lent,
Yet half that time is in unkindness spent."

As Sir Geoffrey proceeded up the avenue, at the end of which stood Fanshawe Manor-an ancient house that for years had belonged to a family bearing the same name as itself, and had then passed into the hands of that family's kinsmen, the Thornes-he looked ahead of him, expecting to see the light dress of Ariadne on the verandah; the spot where, whenever she knew he was coming from Portsmouth to visit her, she placed herself.

But to-night, very much to his disappointment as well as to his astonishment-she was not there. This disconcerted him a little, since it was the first time that he had ever known her to be absent from that point of observation. The first time! and this on the evening when, of all other evenings, he had encountered that grimacing, pranked-up fop who had spoken as though, forsooth, he had some intimate knowledge of her and her doings. What did it mean? he asked himself in consequence. What? Was it possible that she, his modest, winsome Ariadne, in whose eyes truth shone, in whose every accent truth was proclaimed, could be-a-a coquette! Was it possible, too, that she, who knew that he was riding from Portsmouth on that very evening to pass an hour with her, had been whiling away the previous hour with that fellow-that creature whom he believed was what they called, in their London jargon, a macaroni-a swaggerer-a beau!

If so-but no! He could never believe that!

He had resolved at first, after quitting his unknown antagonist, that he would tell Ariadne all and make her laugh at his description of the man, and especially at the encounter they had had, as well as its result; but, now-would it not be best to say nothing whatever on the subject-to see, instead, what she would say to him? Surely the stranger must have been there to visit her, and, equally surely, if such were the case, she would tell him all about it.

So he went on towards the house, yet with, he knew not why, his feelings a little dashed-his heart a little sore, in spite of his certainty in Ariadne's truth and honour.

These two had known each other almost from boy and girl, and from that time, notwithstanding he was ten years older than she, had loved each other, the love not being, however, spoken of openly until a year or so ago. They had known each other from the time when his father, the late Sir Geoffrey Barry, had returned to his mortgaged, encumbered estate near Alverstoke, "a battered and shattered man," as he had frankly, and without shame, described himself to be.

"Foregad!" the late baronet used to say, he never having ceased to use the quaint expressions of his earlier days of nearly fifty years ago; those days of Queen Anne and the first George-which now seemed so far off-when he had wassailed and drunk deep at Locket's, Pontack's, and Rummer's, amidst such company as Vanbrugh, Nokes, and gentle George Farquhar. "Foregad, what would you have? Why should I not be battered, broken? I fags, I have laced myself with claret all my days, and done other things as well, equally dashing to one's constitution. Wherefore, behold the result. A broken, ruined old man; a beggar, where once I owned every acre I could see from my blue saloon window. And with nothing to leave poor little Geoff-nothing. Not a stiver!"

And then, when he spoke of the boy, he would almost weep; nor was he able to find consolation until his old butler (who served him now without wage) said that he thought-"he was not sure, but still he thought there might be yet a bottle or so of the yellow seal in the cellar," which, when found, revived his drooping spirits so much that soon he would be singing snatches of songs he should have

forgotten, or warbling "Ianthé the Lovely" in a cracked and quavering voice, or other snatches from "Charming Creature," and, by midnight, would go reeling and staggering to bed. In one way, this was a bad example for his son; in another, it proved a good one; for the boy grew up hating and despising such habits as those of his father, and contemning the sight of an old man who had outlived all his dissolute companions yet had never outlived their dissolute ways. And he also grew up resolved that his life should be a different one from that. He did not know the French proverb, "*Autres temps, autres mœurs*," but he felt it, and he resolved to put it into action. Wherefore, when the old satyr, the man of so many unclean memories, sometimes maundered on over his second bottle of yellow seal about the miserable remnants of a fortune, once so substantial, which would be all he could possibly leave behind, Geoffrey would turn almost fiercely on him and say:

"Enough, sir, enough. The past is past, and cannot be undone. Suffice it that I have a calling, an honourable profession; that I am a sailor. I want nothing more. Yet, since our calling-mine is one in which in these days interest is of greater value than merit, and a friend at Court of more use than courage and determination, if you have any interest, use it on my behalf. There must be some amongst your old boon companions still alive who will lend a helping hand, even though only in memory of the Iphigenias and Roxanas with whom you all revelled once."

This was not, perhaps, a dutiful speech, nor one which a son should very willingly make to a father, yet, in the circumstances, it was pardonable enough; and, at least, the old baronet did not resent it, as how, indeed, could he, remembering the ruin he had brought upon himself and his son after him?

That he acted upon the hint was, however, probable; it was most probable, too, that he brought influence to bear upon some of those admirals and captains whose seamanship had never been as great as their social power and influence (for it was the latter, as often as not, which made admirals and captains in those days). At any rate, the young man rose fast, and shifting from ship to ship, serving at one time as lieutenant in some great vessel of war, at another in command of a bomb-ketch, and, next, of a third-rate; and then woke up one day to learn that he was a captain, though without a ship. He was getting on, he told himself; he was eradicating the disorders caused by his now dead father's life; the name of Sir Geoffrey Barry should lose its tarnish and should be borne once more with honour.

And all the time he was in love with a child, a girl with whom he had often played, a sailor's daughter; the child of a man whose memory was honoured and esteemed. This was the softer side, the romantic portion of his life; this-his love for Ariadne Thorne; a romance that had only one drawback to its perfection-the fact that she was rich, and he, although now one of the King's captains, was poor. How, therefore, should they wed?

Yet love sometimes ran smoothly in those brave, sweet old days; a man of rank who followed an honourable calling, whose prospects were good, might hope to win an even richer woman than Ariadne was, especially when she loved him. And if his girl did not love him, then-then! there was no truth in womankind; no truth in whispered words, in glances, and, later, in vows and protestations. For, a year before the time which had now arrived when he was drawing close to the house in which she dwelt, Ariadne told him that she loved him, and had loved him always; that she would be his wife the moment that he asked her.

Even as he thought upon all this, he saw her appear on the verandah; he caught a glance of her white summer dress, and could see that she was fastening some lace about her throat; he saw, too, that she perceived him, for now she took her handkerchief and waved it to him, and then, leaning forward with both hands upon the balcony-rail, watched his approach. And a moment later, descending to the path beneath, she came towards him.

It was dark now, or almost so-dark enough, at least, to prevent them from doing more than recognise each other's forms; but-for lovers-that is enough. Whereon Geoffrey Barry, putting now her hand within his arm, led her back to the verandah from which she had descended.

"For the first time," he said, after a tender greeting, "for the first time, sweet, you were not in your accustomed place. Almost I began to fear you might be unwell. Lovers are difficult to satisfy, you know, and that which they have grown used to expect-"

"I had to change my dress," Ariadne said, glancing up at him. "I wore a darker one but lately, and it got torn. Otherwise I should not have failed." Then she asked, as now they entered the great saloon to which a domestic had by this time brought a large branch-candelabra, in which were a dozen white wax candles, "How is it you have come so late? What is there to do at Portsmouth that should keep you from me?"

"Much. You know, sweetheart, that I have gotten a ship. No great affair at present-a small frigate, a capture; yet the time is coming. France itches for another great defeat; she is never satisfied! Soon it will come, And then, my Ariadne- Ah!" he said, breaking off, "ah! I see you have already been taking the air to-night," and he directed her eyes to a dark hood lying on a table close by. "Did you get your dress torn in the bushes of the park?"

"No," she said. "No. I have not been out since the afternoon. But if I go with you partway down the avenue, the hood will be necessary. The dews are heavy sometimes on these summer nights," and she lifted her soft eyes to his.

"You have had a visitor," he said, as now he took a place by her side on a vast couch in the saloon. "A person-"

"I have had no visitor here to-day, Geoffrey," she said, interrupting him. "Why should you suppose that?"

"No one to see you?"

"No one. Why do you ask?" And there came now a blush upon her face, a deeper colour than before.

"I met," he said, "a man who, without doubt, hinted that he had been to see you."

"It is impossible!" she exclaimed.

"Impossible, perhaps, that he saw you. Undoubtedly possible, however, that I saw him-and-and-conversed with him. A gallant spark, too, if rich clothes and gauds make a man such. A gentleman figged out in London fashion, scarlet coat, yellow peruke, and such things. One who might be a rich man, if, too, such things mean wealth."

"Geoffrey!" the girl cried, and now he saw that she had turned very white. "I cannot understand. And-and-you conversed with him. What, then, did he say?"

"He said," her lover continued, "on my asking him if he had not lost his way, if he had not wandered by accident into private property, that it was possible you might receive other visitors sometimes than the rural inhabitants of this place."

"Oh!" Ariadne exclaimed. "It is impossible! Impossible! He must have been some stranger-some man who had been drinking-"

"He had not been drinking," Geoffrey answered, with quiet emphasis.

"Who, then, could he have been?" she asked now, while he saw that she was still very white; whiter even than before. He felt certain, too, that her hands were trembling. "Could he be lurking here with a view to entering the house at night?" she added.

"Not in that apparel."

"Then seeking one of the maids. Perhaps 'twas that. There are evil men everywhere, men of rank and wealth, who- Oh!" she exclaimed, "I will summon Mrs. Pottle;" and so speaking, she went towards the bell-pull and rang it.

"Has Mrs. Pottle gone to her room yet?" she asked the servant who answered the summons. "If not, bid her come here." While on receiving an answer to the effect that Mrs. Pottle was in the housekeeper's room, she repeated her order.

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