

**BUCHANAN  
ROBERT  
WILLIAMS**

FOXGLOVE MANOR,  
VOLUME II (OF III)

Robert Buchanan

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# Robert W. Buchanan

## Foxglove Manor, Volume II (of III) / A Novel

### CHAPTER XIV. BAPTISTO STAYS AT HOME

As Haldane sat in his study, the evening previous to the morning fixed for his journey to London, Baptisto entered quickly and stood before the desk at which his master was busily writing.

“Can I speak to you, senor?” Haldane looked and nodded.

“What is it, Baptisto?”

“You have arranged that I shall go with you to-morrow, but I have had during the last few days an attack of my old vertigo. Can you possibly dispense with my attendance, senor?” Haldane stared in surprise at the Spaniards face, which was inscrutable as usual.

“Do you mean to say you wish to remain at home?”

“Certainly, senor.”

“Why? because you are ill? On the contrary, you look in excellent health. No; it is impossible. I cannot get along without you.”

And Haldane returned to his papers as if the matter was ended.

Baptisto, however, did not budge, but remained in the same position, with his dark eyes fixed upon his master.

“Do me this favour, senor. I am really indisposed, and must beg to remain.”

Haldane laughed, for an idea suddenly occurred to him which seemed to explain the mystery of his servant’s request.

“My good Baptisto, I think I understand the cause of your complaint, and I am sure a little travel will do you good. It is that dark-eyed widow of the lodge-keeper who attaches you so much to the Manor. The warm blood of Spain still burns in your veins, and, despite your sad experience of women, you are still impressionable. Eh? am I right?”

Baptisto quickly shook his head, with the least suspicion of a smile upon his swarthy face.

“I am not impressionable, senor, and I do not admire your English women; but I wish to remain all the same.”

“Nonsense!”

“Nonsense! In serious lament, senor, I beseech you to allow me to remain.”

But Haldane was not to be persuaded at what he conceived to be a mere whim of his servant. He still believed that Baptisto had fallen a captive to the charms of Mrs. Feme, a little plump, dark-eyed woman, with a large family. He had frequently of late seen the Spaniard hanging about the lodge – on one occasion nursing and dandling the youngest child – and he had smiled to himself, thinking that the poor fellow’s misanthropy, or rather his misogynism, was in a fair way of coming to an end.

Finding his master indisposed to take his request seriously, Baptisto retired; and presently Haldane strolled into the drawing-room, where he found his wife.

“Have you heard of the last freak of Baptisto? He actually wants to remain at ease, instead of accompanying me in my journey.”

Ellen looked up from some embroidery, in which she was busily engaged.

“On no account!” she exclaimed. “If you don’t take him with you, I shall not stay in the place.”

“Dear me! said the philosopher. Surely you are not afraid of poor Baptisto!”

“Not afraid of him exactly, but he makes me shiver. He comes and goes like a ghost, and when you least expect him, he is at your elbow. Then, of course, I cannot help remembering he has committed a murder!”

“Nothing of the kind,” said Haldane, laughing and throwing himself into a chair. “My dear Ellen, you don’t believe the whole truth of that affair. True, he surprised that Spanish wife of his with her gallant, whom he stabbed; but I have it on excellent authority that it was a kind of duello; the other man was armed, and so it was a fair fight.” Ellen shuddered, and showed more nervous agitation than her husband could quite account for.

“Take him away with you,” she cried; “take him away. If you never bring him back, I shall rejoice. If I had been consulted, he would never have been brought to England.”

A little later in the evening, when Haldane had returned to his papers, which he was diligently finishing to take away with him, he rang and summoned the Spaniard to his presence.

“Well, it is all settled. I have consulted your mistress, and she insists in your accompanying me to-morrow.”

A sharp flash came upon Baptisto’s dark eyes. He made an angry gesture; then controlling himself, he said in a low, emphatic voice —

“The *senora* means it? *She* does not wish me to remain?”

“Just so.”

“May I ask why?”

“Only because she does not want you, and I do. Between ourselves, she is not quite so certain of you as I am. She has never forgotten that little affair in Spain.”

Again the dark eyes flashed, and again there was the same angry gesture, instantly checked.

Haldane continued.

“You are violent sometimes, my Baptisto, and madame is a little afraid of you. When she knows you better, as I know you, she will be aware that you are rational; at present — ”

“At present, *senor*,” said Baptisto, “she would rather not have me so near. Ah, I can understand! Perhaps she has reason to be afraid.”

Something in the man’s manner, which was sinister and almost threatening, jarred upon his master’s mind. Rising from his chair, Haldane stood with his back to the fire, and, with a frown, regarded the Spaniard, as, he said —

“Listen to me, Baptisto. I have noticed with great annoyance, especially of late, that your manner to madame has been strange, not to say sullen. You are whimsical still, and apt to take offence. If this goes on, if you fail in respect to your mistress, and make your presence uncomfortable in this house, we shall have to part.”

To Haldane’s astonishment, Baptisto asked an explanation, and, falling on his knees, seized his master’s hand and kissed it eagerly, “*Senor! Senor!* you don’t comprehend. You don’t think I am ungrateful, that I do not remember? But you are wrong. I would die to save you — yes, I would die; and I would kill with my own hand any one who did you an injury. I am your servant, your slave — ah yes, till death.”

“Come, get up, and go and finish packing my things.”

“But, *senor* — ”

“Get up, I say.”

The Spaniard rose, and with folded hands and bent head stood waiting.

“Get ready like a sensible fellow, and let us have no more of this foolery. There, there, I understand. You are exciting yourself for nothing.”

“Then, I am to go, *senor*?”

“Certainly.”

Early the next morning Baptisto entered the carriage with his master, and was driven to the railway station, some seven miles away. As they went along, Haldane noticed that the man looked very ill, and that from time to time he put his hand to his head as if in pain. At the railway station, while they were waiting for the train, matters looked most serious. Suddenly the Spaniard fell forward

on the platform as if in strong convulsions, his eyes starting out of his head, his mouth foaming. They sprinkled water on his face, chafed his hands, and with some difficulty brought him round.

“The devil!” muttered Haldane to himself. “It looks like epilepsy!” Baptisto was placed on a seat, and lay back ghastly pale, as if utterly exhausted.

“Are you better now?” asked Haldane, bending over him.

“A little better, senor.”

But seeing him so utterly helpless, and likely to have other seizure, Haldane rapidly calculated in his own mind the inexpediency of taking him away on a long railway journey. After all, the poor fellow had not exaggerated his condition, when he had pleaded illness as an excuse for remaining at home.

“After all,” said Haldane, “I think you will have to remain behind.”

Baptisto opened his eyes feebly, and stretched out his hands.

“No, senor; since you wish it, I will go.”

“You shall remain,” answered Haldane, just as the whistle of the coming train was heard in the distance. “Perhaps, if you are better in a day or two, you can follow; but you will go away now in the carriage, and send over to Dr. Spruce, and he will prescribe for you.”

Baptisto did not answer, but, taking his master's hand, kissed it gratefully. The train came up. Haldane entered a carriage, and, gazing from the window as the train began to move on, saw Baptisto still seated on the platform, very pale, his eyes half closed, his head recumbent. Near him stood the station master, a railway porter, and the groom who had driven them over from the Manor, all regarding him with languid curiosity.

But the moment the train was gone, Baptisto began to recover. Rising to his feet, and refusing all offers of assistance from the others, he strolled out of the station, and quietly mounted the dog-cart. The groom got up beside him, and they drove homeward through the green lanes.

Now, Baptisto was a gentleman, and seldom entered or tolerated familiarity from his fellow-servants. Had it been otherwise, the groom might have asked the explanation of his curious conduct; for no sooner was he mounted on the dogcart, and driving along in the fresh air, than the Spaniard seemed to forget all about his recent illness, sat erect like a man in perfect health, and exhibited none of the curious symptoms which had so alarmed his master.

And when the groom, who was a thirsty individual, suggested that they should make a detour and call at the Blue Boar Inn for a little stimulant, chiefly as a corrective to the attack from which his companion had just suffered, the Spaniard turned his dark eyes round about him and actually winked. This proceeding so startled the groom that he almost dropped the reins, for never in the whole course of his sojourn had the foreign gent condescended to such a familiarity.

They drove round to the Blue Boar, however, and the groom consumed the brandy, while Baptisto, who was a teetotaler, had some lemonade, and lit his cigar. Then they drove home to the Manor, Baptisto sitting with folded arms, completely and absolutely recovered.

About noon that day, as Mrs. Haldane moved about the conservatory, looking after her roses, a servant announced the Rev. Mr. Santley. Ellen flushed, a little startled at the announcement, coming so soon after her husband's departure, and her first impulse was to deny herself; but before she could do so the clergyman himself appeared at the door of the conservatory.

“You are an early visitor,” she said coldly, bending her face over the flowers.

“It is just noon,” answered the clergyman, “and I was going home from a sick-call. Has Mr. Haldane gone?”

“Yes. Did you wish to see him?”

“Not particularly, though I had a little commission which I might have asked him to execute had I been in time.” Surely the man's fall had already begun. Ellen knew perfectly well that he was lying. In point of fact, he had seen the dog-cart drive past on the way to the station, and he had been unable to resist the temptation of coming over without delay.

With face half averted, Ellen led the way into the drawing-room, and on to the terrace beyond, from which there was a pleasant view of the Manor, the plain, and the surrounding country. Just below the gardens were laid out in flowerbeds and gravel walks; but the dark shrubberies were beyond, and at a little distance, well in the shadow of the trees, the old chapel.

There was a long silence. Ellen stood silent, gazing upon the woods and lawn, while the clergyman stood just behind her, evidently regarding her.

At last she could bear it no longer, but, turning quickly, exclaimed —

“Why did you come? Have you anything to say to me?”

“Nothing, Ellen, if you are angry,” replied the clergyman.

“Angry! You surely know best if I have cause. After what has passed, I think it is better that we should not meet,” she added in a low voice. “At least, not often.”

He saw she was agitated, and he took a certain pleasure in her agitation, for it showed him that she was not quite unsusceptible to the influence he might bring to bear upon her. As he stood there, his sad eyes fixed upon her, his being conscious of every movement she made, of every breath she drew, he felt again the deep fatality of his passion, and silently yielded to it.

There was another long pause, which he was the first to break.

“Do you know, Ellen, I sometimes tremble for you, when I think of your husbands opinions. In time you may learn to share them, and then we should be further apart than ever. At present, it is my sole comfort to know you possess that living faith without which every soul is lost.”

“Lost?” she repeated, in a bewildering way, not looking at him.

“I don’t mean in the vulgar sense; the theological ideas of damnation have never had my sanction, far less my sympathy. But materialism degrades the believer, and sooner or later comes a disbelief in all that is holy, beautiful, and sanctified. It is a humble creed, the new creed of science, and fatal to spiritual hopes.”

“Does it matter so much what one believes, if one’s life is good?”

“It matters so much that I would rather see one I loved dead before my feet than an avowed unbeliever. But there, I have not come to preach to you. When does Mr. Haldane return?”

“As I told you: in a fortnight, perhaps sooner.”

“And during his absence we shall meet again, I hope?”

She hesitated and looked at him. His eyes were fixed on the distant woods, though he stood expectantly, as if awaiting her reply, which did not come.

“Can you not trust me?” he exclaimed. “You know I am your friend?”

“I hope so; but I think it is best that you should not come here. If you were married, it would be different.”

“I shall not marry,” he replied impatiently. “What then? I am a priest of God, and you may trust me fully. If our Church commenced the confessional, you might enter it without fear, and I – I would listen to the outpourings of your heart. Should you in your grief be afraid to utter them?”

She moved away from him, turning her back; but betrayed herself. He saw the bright colour mount to her neck and mantle there.

“What nonsense you talk!” she said presently, with a forced laugh. “Are you going over to Rome?”

“I might go over to the evil place itself, Ellen, if *you* were there.”

There was no mistaking the words, the tone, in their diabolic gentleness, their suavity of supreme and total self-surrender. She felt helpless in spite of herself. The man was overmastering her, and rapidly encroaching. She felt like a person morally stifled, and with a strong effort tried to shake the evil influence away.

“I was right,” she said. “We must not meet.”

He smiled sadly.

“As you please. I will come, or I will go, at your will. You have only to say to me, ‘Go and destroy yourself, obliterate yourself for ever from my life, blot yourself out from the roll of living beings,’ and I shall obey you.”

Her spirit revolted more and more against the steadfast, self-assured obliquity of the man. She saw that he was desperate, and that the danger grew with his desperation. In every word he spoke, and in his whole manner, there was the sombre assurance of something between them, of some veiled, but excitable sympathy, which she herself utterly ignored. That moment of wild delirium, when he caught her in his arms and kissed her, seemed, instead of severing them, to have made a link between them. He had been conscious of her indignation, he had even professed penitence; but she saw to her dismay that the fact of his folly filled him, not with fear, but with courage. So she determined to end it once and for ever.

“Let us understand each other,” she said, trembling violently. “How dare you talk as if there was any community of feeling between us? How dare you presume upon my patience, Mr. Santley? It is wretched; it is abominable! When you talk of killing yourself, when you assume that I have any serious interest in you, or any right over you, you insult me and degrade yourself. We are nothing, and can be nothing to each other.”

“I know that,” he replied. “Do you think I am so mad as not to know that?”

“Then why do you come here to torture me, and to tempt me?”

The word came from her before she knew it, and her face became scarlet; but he uttered no protest, and raised his white hand in deprecation.

“Tempt you? God forbid!”

“I did not mean that,” she murmured, in confusion; “but you must know, you cannot fail to know, that it is not right for a married woman to receive such expressions of sympathy, however spiritual. It is that which makes me hate the Catholic Church. The priest promises you his office, and too often makes mischief under the guise of religion.”

“Do you accuse me of doing so?” he demanded, in the same sad, calm voice.

“No; but you should remember that you have not the custody of my soul, and I have no right to influence your actions. Come,” she continued, with rather a forced laugh, “talk to me like a true English clergyman. Tell me of the old women of the village, and their ailments; ask me for a subscription to give to your new soup kitchen; talk to me as if Mr. Haldane were listening to us – of your schools, your parish troubles – and you shall find me an eager listener!”

“I will talk of anything, Ellen, so long as I may talk to you.”

Again that manner of despairing certainty, of assured and fatal sympathy. The man was incorrigible.

She waited impatiently for some minutes, but finding he did not speak again, she held out her hand.

“Since you have nothing more to tell me,” she observed lightly, “I think I will say good morning. I am going to order the carriage and drive to Omberley.”

“When may I come again?”

“When you have anything really parochial to say to me. Please go now.”

Their eyes met, and hers sank beneath his own.

As he crossed towards the door it opened, and Baptisto appeared upon the threshold.

“Did you ring, senora?”

At the sight of the Spaniard’s dull impressive face Mrs. Haldane started violently, and went a little pale. She had heard nothing of his return, and he came like an apparition.

“Baptisto! What are you doing here? I thought – ”

She paused in wonder, while the Spaniard inclined his head and bowed profoundly.

“I was taken with a vertigo at the station, and the senor permitted me to return.”

“Then your master has gone alone?”

“Yes, senora.”

“Very well. Order the carriage at once. I am going out.”

Baptisto bowed and retired, quickly closing the door.

Santley, who had stood listening during the above conversation, now prepared to follow, but, glancing at Ellen, saw that she was unusually agitated.

“That is a sinister-looking fellow,” he remarked. “I am afraid he has frightened you.”

“Indeed, no,” she replied; “though I confess I was startled at his unexpected return. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” he said, again taking her hand and holding it up a moment in his own.

Passing from the drawing-room, he again came face to face with Baptisto, who was lurking in the lobby, but who drew aside with a respectful bow, to allow the clergyman to pass.

He crossed the hall, descended the stone steps of the portico, and walked slowly towards the lodge. As he passed the ruined chapel, its shadows seemed to fall upon his spirit and leave it in ominous darkness. He shivered slightly, and drew his cloak about him, then with his eyes cast down he thoughtfully walked on.

He did not glance back. Had he done so, he would have seen Baptisto standing on the steps of the Manor house, watching him with a sinister smile.

## CHAPTER XV. CONJURATION

It was a chill day in early autumn, and as Charles Santley passed along the dark avenue of the Manor his path was strewn here and there with freshly fallen leaves. Dark shadows lay on every side, and the heaven above was full of a sullen, cheerless light. It was just the day for a modern Faust, in the course of his noonday walk, to encounter, in some fancied guise, canine or human, the evil one of old superstition.

Be that as it may, Santley knew at last that the hour of his temptation was over, and that the evil one was not far away. He knew it, by the sullen acquiescence of evil of his own soul; by the deliberate and despairing precision with which he had chosen the easy and downward path; by the sense of darkness which already obliterated the bright moral instincts in his essentially religious mind. He had spoken the truth when he said he would follow Ellen Haldane anywhere, even to the eternal pit itself. Her beauty possessed him and disturbed him with the joy of impure thoughts; and now that he perceived his own power to trouble her peace of mind, he rejoiced at the strength of his passion with a truly diabolic perversity.

As he came out of the lodge gate he saw, far away over the fields, the spire of his own church. He laughed to himself.

But the man's faith in spiritual things, so far from being shaken, was as strong as ever. His own sense of moral deterioration, of spiritual backsliding, only made him believe all the more fervently in the heaven from which he had fallen, or might choose to fall. For it is surely a mistake to picture, as so many poets have pictured, the evil spirit as one ignorant of or insensible to good. Far wiser is the theology which describes Satan as the highest of angelic spirits – the spirit which, above all others, had beheld and contemplated the Godhead, and had then, in sheer revolt and negation, deliberately and advisedly decided its own knowledge and rejected its own truthright. Santley was, in his basest moods, essentially a godly man – a man strangely curious of the beauty of goodness, and capable of infinite celestial dreams. If, like many another, he confused the flesh and the spirit, he did no more than many sons of Eve have done.

As he walked slowly along he mused, somewhat to this effect – “I love this woman. In her heart she loves me. Her superior spiritual endowments are mystically alive to those I myself possess. Her husband is a clod, an unbeliever, with no spiritual promptings. In his sardonic presence, her aspirations are chilled, frozen at the very fountain-head; whereas, in mine, all the sweetness and the power of her nature are aroused, though with a certain irritation. If I persist, she must yield to the slow moral mesmerism of my passion, and eventually fall. Is this necessarily evil? Am I of set purpose sinning? Is it not possible that even a breach of the moral law might, under certain conditions, lead us both to a higher religious place – yes, even to a deeper and intenser consciousness of God?”

And again – “What *is* sin? Surely it is better than moral stagnation, which is death. There are certain deflections from duty which, like the side stroke of a bird's wing, may waft us higher. In the arms of this woman, I should surely be nearer God than crawling alone on the bare path of duty, loving nothing, hoping nothing, becoming nothing. What is it that Goethe says of the Eternal Feminine which lead us ever upward and onward? Which was the highest, Faust before he loved Marguerite, or Faust after he passed out of the shadow of his sin into the sphere of imperial and daring passion? I believe in God, I love this woman. Out of that belief, and that love, shall I not become a living soul?”

Was this the man's own musing, or rather the very devil whispering in his ear? From such fragmentary glimpses of his mind as have been given, we can at least guess the extent of his intellectual degradation.

As he walked along the country road, his pale countenance became seraphic; just so may the face of Lucifer have looked when he plumed his wings for deliberate flight from heaven.

He stepped into a roadside farm and had a glass of milk, which the good woman of the place handed to him with a sentiment of adoration; he looked so gentle, so at peace with all living things. His white hand rested for a moment on the head of her little girl, in gentle benediction. He had never felt more tenderly disposed to all creation than at that moment, when he was prepared to dip a pen into his own hearts blood, and sign the little promissory note which Mephistopheles carries, always ready, in his pocket. He had hated his congregation before; now he loved them exceedingly – and all the world.

## CHAPTER XVI. AT THE OPERA

On arriving in London, George Haldane was driven straight to the house of an old friend at Chelsea, where he always stayed during his visits to the Metropolis. This friend was Lovell Blakiston, as eccentric a being in his own way as Haldane himself was in his. He had been, since boyhood, in the India Office, where he still put in an appearance several hours a day, and whence he still drew a large income, with the immediate right to a retiring pension whenever he choose to take it. He was a great student, especially of the pagan poets and philosophers; and the greater part of his days and nights were spent in his-old-fashioned library, opening with folding doors on to a quiet lawn, which led in its turn to the very river-side. He had two pet aversions – modern progress, in the shape of railroads, electricity, geology; all the new business of science and modern religion, especially in its connection with Christian theology. He was, in short, a pagan pure and simple, fond of old books, old wine, old meditations, and old gods. However he might differ with Haldane on such subjects' as the nebular hypothesis, which he hated with all his heart, he agreed with him sufficiently on the subject of Christianity. Both had a cordial dislike for church ceremonies and church bells.

The two gentlemen had another taste in common. This was the opera, which both enjoyed hugely, though Blakiston never ceased to regret the disappearance of that old operatic institution, the ballet, which, like a rich dessert wine, used to bring the feast of music to a delightfully sensuous conclusion. Haldane was too young a man to remember such visions of loveliness as Cerito, whom his old friend had often gone to see in company with Horne Took.

So it happened that two or three days after his arrival, Haldane accompanied his host to the opera house, where Patti was to appear in "Traviata."

Seated comfortably in the stalls, he was glancing quietly round the house between the acts, when his attention was attracted to a face in one of the private boxes. A pale, Madonna-like, yet girlish face, set in golden hair, with soft blue eyes, and an expression so forlorn, so wistful, so ill at ease, that it was almost painful to behold.

Haldane started in surprise.

"What is the matter?" said his friend; "Have you recognized anybody?"

"I am not certain," returned Haldane, raising his opera-glass and surveying the face through them. Then, after a long look, he added' as if to himself, "I am almost sure it is the same."

"Do you mean that young lady in black, seated in the second tier?"

"Yes. Oblige me by looking at her, and tell me what you think of her." Blakiston raised his opera-glass, and took a long look.

"Well?" asked Haldane.

"She reminds me of one of your detestable pre-Raphaelistic drawings, shockheaded and vacuous. She is pretty, I grant you, but she has no expression."

"I should say, on the contrary, a very marked expression of deep pain."

"Tight lacing," grunted Blakiston. "Your modern women have no shape, since Cerito."

Here Haldane rose from his seat. Looking up again, he had met the young lady's eyes, and had perceived at once that she recognized him.

"I am going to speak to her," he explained. "She is a neighbour of ours, and a friend of my wife."

He made his way to the second tier, and finding the door of the box open, he looked in, and saw the person he sought, seated in company with an elderly lady and a young man.

"Miss Dove!" he said, advancing into the box. "Although we have only met twice, I thought I could not be mistaken." Edith (for it was she) turned quickly and took his outstretched hand..

"How strange to find you here!" she exclaimed. "Is Mrs. Haldane with you?"

"No, indeed. I left her to the pious duties of the parish, which she is fulfilling daily, I expect, in company with your seraphic friend the minister."

Edith looked at him with strange surprise, but said nothing.

“When did you come to town?” he asked. “I thought you were quite a country young lady, and never ventured into the giddy world of London.”

“I was not very well,” replied Edith, “and my aunt invited me to stop with her a few weeks. This is my aunt, Mrs. Hetherington; and this gentleman is my cousin Walter.” Here Edith went somewhat nervously through the ceremony of introduction. She added, with a slight flush, “My cousin insisted on bringing us here to-night. I did not wish to come.”

“Why not?” demanded Haldane, noticing her uneasiness.

“Because I did not think it right; and I have been thinking all the evening what the vicar will say when I tell him I have been to such a place.”

Here the old lady shook her head ominously, and gave a slight groan.

“Is the place so terrible,” asked Haldane, smiling, “now you have seen it?”

“No, it is very pretty; and of course the singing is beautiful. But Mr. Santley does not approve of the theatre, and I am sorry I came.”

“Nonsense, Edith,” said young Hetherington, with a laugh. “You know you wanted to see the ‘Traviata,’ The fact is,” he continued, turning to Haldane, “my mother and my cousin are both terribly old-fashioned. My mother here is Scotch, and believes in the kirk, the whole kirk, and nothing but the kirk; and as for Edith, she is entirely, as they say in Scotland, under the minister’s ‘thoomb.’ I thought they would have enjoyed themselves, but they have been doing penance all the evening.”

Without paying attention to her cousin’s remarks, Edith was looking thoughtfully at Haldane.

“When do you return to Omberley?” she asked.

“I am not sure – in a fortnight, at the latest. I am going on to France.”

“And Mrs. Haldane will remain all that time alone?”

“Of course,” he replied. “Oh, she will not miss me. She has her household duties, her parish, her garden – to say nothing of her clergyman. And you, do *you* stay long in London?”

“I am not sure; I think not. I am tired of it already.”

Again that weary, wistful look, which sat so strangely on the young, almost childish face. She sighed, and gazed sadly around the crowded house. A minute later, Haldane took his leave, and rejoined his friend in the stalls. Looking up at the end of the next act, he saw that the box was empty.

The women had yielded to their consciences, and departed before the end of the performance.

That night, when Haldane went home to Chelsea, he found a letter from his wife. It was a long letter, but contained no news whatever, being chiefly occupied with self-reproaches that the writer had not accompanied her husband in his pilgrimage. This struck Haldane as rather peculiar, as in former communications Ellen had expressed no such dissatisfaction; but he was by nature and of set habit unsuspecting, and he set it down to some momentary *ennui*. The letter contained no mention whatever of Mr. Santley, but in the postscript, where ladies often put the most interesting part of their correspondence, there was a reference to the Spanish valet, Baptisto.

“As I told you,” wrote Ellen, “Baptisto seems in excellent health, though he is mysterious and unpleasant as usual. He comes and goes like a ghost, but if he made you believe that he was ill, he was imposing upon you. I do so wish you had taken him with you.”

Haldane folded up the letter with a smile.

“Poor Baptisto!” he thought, “I suppose it is as I suspected, and the little widow at the lodge is at the bottom of it all.”

After a few days’ sojourn at Chelsea, during which time he was much interested in certain spiritualistic investigations which were just then being conducted by the London *savants*, to the manifest confusion of the spirits and indignation of true believers, Haldane went to Paris, where he read his paper before the French Society to which he belonged. There we shall leave him for a little time, returning to the company of Miss Dove, with whom we have more immediate concern.

Mother and son lived in a pleasant house overlooking Clapham Common, a district famous for its religious edification, its young ladies' seminaries, and its dissenting chapels. Mrs. Hetherington was the wealthy widow of a Glasgow merchant, long settled in London, and she set her face rigidly against modern thought, ecclesiastical vestments, and cooking on the sabbath. Curiously enough, her son Walter, who inherited a handsome competence, was a painter, and followed his heathen occupation with much talent, and more youthful enthusiasm. His landscapes, chiefly of Highland scenes, had been exhibited in the Royal Scottish Academy. His mother, whose highest ideas of art were founded on a superficial acquaintance with the Scripture pieces of Noel Paton, and an occasional contemplation of biblical masterpieces in the Doré Gallery, would have preferred to have seen him following in his father's footsteps, and even entering the true kirk as a preacher; but his sympathies were pagan, and a gloomy childish experience had not fitted him with the requisite enthusiasm for John Calvin and the sabbath.

Walter Hetherington was a fine fresh young fellow of three and twenty, and belonged to the clever set of Scotch painters, headed by Messrs. Pettie, Richardson, and Peter Graham. He was "cannie" painstaking, and rather sceptical, and, putting aside his art, which he really loved, he felt true enthusiasm for only one thing in the world – his cousin Edith, whom he hoped and longed to make his wife.

As a very young girl, Edith had seemed rather attached to him; but of late years, during which they saw each other only at long intervals, she seemed colder and colder to his advances. He noticed her indifference, and set it down somewhat angrily to girlish fanaticism, for he had little or no suspicion whatever that another man's image might be filling her thoughts. Once or twice, it is true, when she sounded the praises of her Omberley pastor, his zeal, his goodness, his beauty of discourse, he asked himself if he could possibly have a rival *there*; but knowing something of the relinquent fancies of young vestals, he rejected the idea. To tell the truth, he rather pitied the Rev. Mr. Santley, whom he had never seen, as a hardheaded, dogmatic, elderly creature of the type greatly approved by his mother, and abundant even in Clapham. He had no idea of an Adonis in a clerical frock coat, with a beautiful profile, white hands, and a voice gentle and low – the latter an excellent thing in woman, but a dangerous thing in an unmarried preacher of the Word.

## CHAPTER XVII. WALTER HETHERINGTON

When the party got home from the opera, it was only half-past ten. They sat down to a frugal supper in the dining-room.

"I am sorry you did not wait till the last act," said the young man, after an awkward silence. "Patti's death scene is magnificent."

"I'm thinking we heard enough," his mother replied. "I never cared much for play-acting, and I see little sense in screeching about in a foreign tongue. I'd rather have half an hour of the Reverend Mr. Mactavish's discourses than a night of fooling like you."

"What do *you* say, Edith? I'm sure the music was very pretty."

"Yes, it was beautiful; but not knowing much of Italian, I could not gather what it was all about."

"It is an operatic version of a story of the younger Dumas," explained Walter, with an uncomfortable sense of treading on dangerous ground. "The story is that of a beautiful woman who has lived an evil life, and is reformed through her affection for a young Frenchman. His friends think he is degrading himself by offering to marry her, and to cure him she pretends to be false and wicked. In the end, she dies in his arms, broken-hearted. It is a very touching subject, I think, though some people consider it immoral."

Here the matron broke in with quiet severity.

"I wonder yon woman – Patti, you call her – doesn't think shame to appear in such dresses. One of them was scarcely decent, and I was almost ashamed to look at her – the creature!"

"But her singing, mother, her singing; was it not divine?"

"It was meedding loud; but I've heard far finer in the kirk. Edith, my bairn, you're tired, I'm thinking. We'll just read a chapter, and get to bed."

So the chapter was read, and the ladies retired, while Walter walked off to his studio to have a quiet pipe. He was too used to his mother's peculiarities to be much surprised at the failure of the evening's entertainment; but he felt really amazed that Edith had not been more impressed.

The next morning, when they met at breakfast, Edith astonished both her aunt and cousin by expressing her wish to return to Omberley as soon as possible.

"Go away already!" cried the young man. "Why, you've hardly been here a week, and you've seen nothing of town, and we've all the picture-galleries to visit yet."

"And you have not heard Mr. Mactavish discoorse," cried his mother. "No, no; you must bide awhile."

But Edith shook her head, and they saw her mind was made up.

"I can come again at Christmas, but I would rather go now," she said.

"But why have you changed your mind?" inquired her cousin eagerly.

"I think they want me at home; and there is a great deal of church work to be done in the village."

Walter was not deceived by this excuse, and tried persuasion, but it was of no avail. The girl was determined to return home immediately. He little knew the real cause of her determination. Haldane's presence in London had filled her, in spite of herself, with jealous alarm. Ellen Haldane was alone at the Manor, with no husband's eyes to trouble her; and, despite the clergyman's oath of fidelity, Edith could not trust him.

Yes, she would go home. It was time to put an end to it all, to remind Santley of his broken promises, and to claim their fulfilment. If he refused to do her justice, she would part from him for ever; not, however, without letting the other woman, her rival, know his true character.

It was arranged that she should leave by an early train next morning. For the greater part of the day she kept her room, engaged in preparations for the journey; but towards evening Walter found her alone in the drawing-room. The old lady, his mother, who earnestly wished him to marry his cousin, had contrived to be out of the way.

“I am so sorry you are going,” the young man said. “We see so little of each other now.”

Edith was seated with her back to the window, her face in deep shade. She knew by her cousin’s manner that he was more than usually agitated, and she dreaded what was coming – what had come, indeed, on several occasions before. She did not answer, but almost unconsciously heaved a deep sigh.

“Does that mean that you are sorry too?” asked Walter, leaning towards her to see her face.

“Of course I am sorry,” she replied, with a certain constraint.

“I wish I could believe that. Somehow or other, Edith, it seems to me that you would rather be anywhere than here. Well, you have some cause; for the house is dreary enough, and we are all dull people. But you and I used to be such friends! More like brother and sister than mere cousins. Is that all over? Are we to drift farther and farther apart as the years pass on? It seems to me as if it might come to that.”

“How absurd you are!” said Edith, trying to force a laugh, but failing lamentably. “You know I was always fond of you and – and – of your mother.” Walter winced under the sting of the last sentence, so unconsciously given.

“I don’t mean that at all,” he exclaimed. “Of course you liked us, as relations like each other; but am I never to be more to you than a mere cousin? You know I love you, that I have loved you ever since we were boy and girl; and once – ah, yes, I thought you cared for me a little. Edith, what does it mean? Why are you so changed?”

Edith was more deeply changed than ever her cousin could guess. Had he been able to see her face, he would have been wonder-stricken at its expression of mingled shame and despair. She tried to reply; but before she could do so her voice was choked, and her tears began to fall. In a moment he was close beside her, and bending over her, with one hand outstretched to clasp her.

“Now, you are crying. Edith, my darling, what is it?”

“Don’t touch me,” she sobbed, shrinking from him. “I can’t bear it.”

“Forgive me, if I have said anything to pain you; and oh, my darling! remember it is my love that carries me away. I do love you, Edith. I wish to God I could prove to you how much!”

He took her hand in his; but she drew it forcibly from him, and, shrinking still further away, entirely losing her self-control, sobbed silently.

“Don’t!” she exclaimed. “For pity’s sake, be silent. You do not know what you are saying. I am not fit to become your wife.”

He moved a few steps from her, and waited until her wild, hysterical sobbing should have ceased. She commanded herself quickly, as it the wild outburst which she had not been able to control had terrified her. Then she rose, and would have left the room, but the young man stopped her.

“Edith,” he said, “surely you did not mean what you said just now, that you are not fit to become my wife?”

“Yes,” she replied quickly; “I did mean it.”

She was glad that her face, was turned from him, and that the room was in partial darkness. She was glad that she was able to steady her voice, and to give a direct reply.

He did not answer; she felt he was waiting for her to speak on.

“Even if two people love each other,” she said, trembling, “or only think they do, which is too often the case, they have no right to thoughtlessly contract that holy tie. There cannot be perfect happiness in this world without perfect spiritual communion. I know – I feel sure – that this does not exist between you and me.”

The young man flushed, and his brow contracted somewhat angrily.

“Take time to think it over,” he said quickly; “this is not your own heart that is speaking now. The seeds which that man, your clergyman, has been sowing in your heart have borne fruit. Religion is changing your whole nature. It is alienating you hopelessly from all to whom you are so dear; it is making you unjust, cruelly unkind, to yourself, but doubly so to others, under the shallow pretence that you are serving God!”

She did not interrupt him; but when he ceased, she put out her hand and said, quickly but firmly —

“Good night.”

“Good night,” he repeated. “It is so early, surely you are not going to-your room already? This is our last night together, remember.”

“I am so tired,” returned the girl, wearily. “I must get a good night’s rest, since I am to start early in the morning.”

“And you will not say another word?”

“I don’t know that there is anything more that I can say.”

“You are angry with me, Edith. Before you go, say at least that you forgive me.”

“I am not angry; indeed, I am glad you have spoken. I know now I should never have come here. I know I must never come again.”

So, without another word, they parted. Edith went up to her room. Walter sought his, and there he remained all the evening, sitting in the darkness, pondering over the unaccountable change which had taken place in the girl.

Yes, she was changed; but was it hopeless, and altogether unexpected? Might she not, with gentle care, be freed from this hateful influence of the Church? Walter believed that might be so. Already he seemed to see light through the cloud, and to trace the secret of this man’s influence over her. Edith was imaginative and highly fanatical; he had appealed to her imagination. Being a High Church clergyman, he had employed two powerful agents – colour and form. He had scattered the shrine at which she worshipped with soft and durable perfumes, and had set up sacred symbols; and he had said, “Kneel before these; cast down all your worldly wishes and earthly affections.” She, being intoxicated, as it were, had yielded to the spell. It was part of his plan, thought Walter, that she must neither marry nor form any other earthly tie; for was it not through her, and such as her, that his beloved Church was able to sustain its full prestige? The Church must reign supreme in her heart, as it had done in that of many another vestal; it was at the altar alone that her gifts of love and devotion must be burned. She must be sacrificed, as many others had been before her, and the Church would stand.

This was the young man’s true view of the case. He believed it, for he had learnt in his home to hate other worldliness; but though he fancied he saw the nature of the discord, he could not as yet perceive the directest means of cure.

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