

**BUCHANAN
ROBERT
WILLIAMS**

FOXGLOVE MANOR,
VOLUME III (OF III)

Robert Buchanan

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Buchanan R.

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Robert W. Buchanan

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

CHAPTER XXVIII. A MONKISH TALE (FROM THE NOTE-BOOK)

Sunday, Sept. 19. My wife has gone to church.

I can hear the bells ringing in the distance as I write... Now they cease, and at this very moment the clergyman, “snowy-banded, delicate-handed,” is ascending the pulpit stairs, amid the reverent hush of his congregation.

Though several times of late she has suggested that a little church-going would do me good, Ellen did not ask me to accompany her on this occasion; indeed, I thought at first that she was going to stay at home herself. At breakfast she was irritable and absent-minded, and she did not dress or order the carriage until the last moment. There was evidently a hard struggle in her mind whether she should go to church or not. Ultimately, she decided to go.

Out of this and other unpleasant indications, I have made a discovery. My wife, despite her purity, despite her lofty sense of honour, is *jealous* of the clergyman.

The day after my fishing expedition, I quietly told her what I had seen in the woodland. It was not without due deliberation that I determined to do so. One portion of the truth, however, I carefully concealed: namely, the references made by the lovers to herself. For the same reason, I showed no sign of personal suspicion, but treated the affair lightly, as a thing of indifference.

I began the conversation in this way, while beating the shell of my second egg at breakfast —
“By the way, my dear Nell, I have made a discovery.”

She looked up and smiled unsuspectingly. “Something terrible, I suppose; like Dr. Dupré’s elixir?”

“Oh dear no, nothing nearly so scientific; a mere social discovery, my dear. I have found out that I was right; that if your pet parson is not married, he ought to be.”

I saw her change colour; but, bending her head over her teacup, she forced a laugh.

“What nonsense you’re talking!”

“Don’t call it nonsense till you hear my story. It will interest you, being quite piscatorial and idyllic. Conceive to yourself, first, the primaeval woodland; then two figures, a nymph in a frock and a satyr in a clerical coat. The nymph, your friend Miss Dove; the satyr, your other friend, Mr. Santley. She was crying; he consoling. I heard their conversation; I saw them quarrel, make it up, embrace, kiss, and disappear. I think you will agree with me that so pretty a pastoral should have, in a moral country, but one sequel – marriage.”

How white and strange she seemed! How nervously she fought with her agitation!

“I don’t believe a word of what you say!” she cried. “You saw all this, but how?”

I told her how, and she uttered a cry of virtuous indignation.

“It is shameful!” she exclaimed. “I will never speak to him again – never!”

“On the contrary, I think you *should* speak to him, and, like a true matchmaker, produce the *dénouement*. You need not tell him that I played Peeping Tom; but, without doing so, you can act on the information I have given you. After all, if he really loves the girl – ”

“But he does *not* love her!”

She paused, trembling and flushing, conscious of her blunder.

“Then is he a greater scoundrel than even I suspected!”

“There must be some mistake. I am sure Mr. Santley would do nothing dishonourable. As to marrying, his ideas are those of the High Church. He does not think that a priest has any right to marry.”

I looked at her in amazement. After what I had told her, could she possibly be attempting to justify him? If so, the case was worse than I had foreseen, and her moral sense had already been effectually poisoned. She continued rapidly and eagerly, as if contending in argument with her own thoughts.

“A clergyman’s position is very difficult. If he is unmarried, as a true priest should be, he is persecuted by all the marriageable girls of his parish. His slightest attentions are misconstrued, his most innocent acts exaggerated; and if he shows a friendly interest in any young person, he is sure to be misunderstood. I have no doubt, after all, that what you saw could be easily explained; and that, in any case, Miss Dove is the person really to blame.”

I was right, then: justification, and – jealousy.

“You forget,” I answered quickly, “that I heard the whole conversation. Besides, though the language of words may be distorted, that of kisses and embraces is unmistakable.”

“He did not kiss her; he did not embrace her! I will never believe it.”

“Then, you simply assume that I am stating an untruth?”

“I know how glad you are,” she cried passionately, “to put this slur upon him.”

With some difficulty I mastered my indignation. Sick of the discussion, I rose and prepared to leave the room; but before leaving I spoke, with cold decision, to the following effect: —

“I have told you precisely what I saw; it is for you to impeach my motives, if you please, and to think, in your infatuation, that I dislike Mr. Santley because of the cloth he wears. If you doubt me, question the girl; you can possibly get the truth from her. In any case, remember that, from this moment, I forbid you to entertain that man in my house.”

So I left her, leaving my words to work.

The next day, i.e. yesterday, Santley called. She did not see him, but sent out a message that she was engaged. I saw him creeping, pale and crestfallen, past my laboratory door.

Since the conversation recorded above, Ellen and I have not alluded to the subject; indeed, we have seen little of each other, and spoken still less. Possibly our temporary estrangement might account for the fixed pallor, the cold look of sorrow and reproach, on my wife’s face; but I am inclined to fear otherwise. At all events, the thing had gone so far, and I knew so much, that the overtures to reconciliation could not come from me. I had to conquer my struggling tenderness, and watch.

The great struggle came this morning. I observed it with sickening suspense. Had honest indignation conquered, had Ellen held to her first decision of not returning into that man’s church, I think I should have taken her into my arms and begged her pardon for suspecting her. But no! she has gone; not, I am sure, to pray. Surely I am a model husband, to sit so tamely here!

Sunday Evening.— She drove home immediately after morning service, and

I saw by the expression of her face that she was greatly agitated. We lunched in silence, and afterwards she took a volume of sermons and sat reading on the terrace. Later on in the afternoon, while I sat writing alone, she came in behind me, and before I could speak, put her arms around my neck and kissed me.

“Forgive me,” she cried, with her beautiful eyes full of tears. “Oh, George, I am so unhappy! I cannot bear to quarrel.”

And she knelt by my side, looking pitifully up into my face.

I returned her kiss, and for the time being, in her soft embrace, forgot my suspicions. It was a happy hour! Neither of us spoke of the subject of our disagreement.

Tuesday. – After a temporary calm, the storm has again broken, and the weather is still charged with thunder. Let me try to record calmly what has taken place.

This afternoon, as I sat at work, Baptisto entered quietly.

“I think you are wanted, señor; there is some one here.”

“What do you mean? Who is it?”

“The clergyman, señor. He is with my lady.”

I started angrily; then, conquering myself, I demanded —

“Did they send you for me?”

“No, señor,” replied Baptisto, with his mysterious look; “but I thought you would like to know.”

I could have struck the fellow, for I saw that he had been playing the spy. Nevertheless, I remembered that I had forbidden Ellen to entertain Santley again at the Manor, and I felt my indignation rapidly rising at the thought of her disobedience. Angry and humiliated, I rose to my feet.

“Where are they?” I asked.

“In the drawing-room, señor.”

I at once went thither, uncertain what to say or do; for I was determined, if possible, not to make a scene. Now, the great drawing-rooms of the Manor house consist of two old-fashioned apartments, communicating with a curtained archway, where there was once a folding-door. The inner room opens on a lobby communicating with the house; the outer opens on the terrace. I approached from within, and finding the door open, entered softly. No one was visible; but I heard voices whispering in the outer room.

After a moment’s hesitation, I sat down in an armchair, and took up a book from the table. My back was to the curtained archway, and facing me was a large mirror, in which the archway and the dimly lighted, rose-coloured chamber beyond were clearly reflected.

The whispering continued.

I could bear the suspense no longer, and was about to rise and make my presence known, when the voices were raised, and I heard the clergyman exclaim —

“Ellen, for God’s sake! I can explain everything!”

Ellen! My satyr was familiar. I crouched in my armchair, listening, as my wife replied —

“Why should you explain to me? I have no wish to listen, Mr. Santley. Only I am shocked and indignant at what I have heard.”

“But there is not one word of truth in it. Who is your informant? I demand to know his name.”

I strained my ears in suspense, wondering how she would reply, for I already guessed the bearings of the conversation. To my surprise, she replied parabolically —

“It is the common talk of the place.”

“Then it is a simple scandal!”

“You are not engaged to Miss Dove?”

“Certainly not. She herself can tell you that there is nothing of the kind between us. I will admit freely that she has a great esteem for me – that, in short, she is attached to me; and that possibly, if I desired it, she would marry me.”

There was a silence. Then I heard Ellen say, quietly and firmly —

“Will you answer me a question?”

“Certainly.”

“Did you meet Miss Dove alone, last Thursday?”

I felt that her eyes were fixed upon his face as she put the question, and I guessed how it startled and amazed him; but he was unabashed, and replied instantly —

“Where?”

She waited a moment, like one pausing to give the *coup de grâce*, before she said – “Close to the river-side, among Lord – s plantations.”

Greatly to my astonishment, for I naturally expected a denial, the answer came at once, in a clear, decided voice. “Yes, I did meet her.”

I could imagine, though I could not see, my wife’s start of virtuous indignation. Almost instantly, I saw her image in the mirror before me, as she rapidly crossed the room beyond; then he followed,

black-suited, like the devil. In the dim distance of the mirror, I now saw their two figures reflected, floating faintly in the rose-coloured light beyond the curtains. Their backs were turned to me, their faces were looking out upon the terrace.

“I have nothing to conceal,” he continued passionately. “Some enemy has been spying upon me; but I repeat, I have nothing to conceal. Only, I wished to spare Miss Dove. Now that you have made reserve impossible, I will admit, frankly, that she has misconstrued certain harmless attentions, and that, on the day you mention, she came upon me by accident, and reproached me for my coldness, my want of sympathy. She even went further, and asked me to marry her. I tell you this in sacred confidence, for I have no right to inform others of the young lady’s indiscretion.”

“Was that all that passed?”

“All, I assure you.”

Ellen gave a peculiar laugh, the sound of which I did not like at all. There is nothing more significant than a woman’s light laugh – nothing, sometimes, more horrible.

“She was reproachful, and you – consoled her?”

“Consoled her?”

“As a true lover should, – with kisses and embraces? You see, I know everything!”

“It is a calumny,” cried the clergyman, with seeming indignation. “True, I was gentle with her, for I felt very sorry. I reasoned and remonstrated with the foolish child: after all, she is a child only. Oh, Ellen, how could you listen to such an accusation? You who know that there is but one woman in the world who has my love, my life’s devotion, and that *you* are that woman.”

Did my eyes deceive me, or had he stretched out an arm to embrace her? No, I was right!

“Take away your arm!” she cried. “I will not suffer it!”

She did suffer it, notwithstanding.

“Ellen! dearest Ellen!”

He drew her towards him, and I thought she was going to yield to his embrace; but she shook herself free, and in a moment, before he knew her purpose, had opened the window and glided out upon the terrace. He followed her with a cry, and so – my mirror was empty. I rose to my feet, sick and dazed with what I had seen, and prepared to follow.

What should I do? Should I at once avow my knowledge of what had taken place, and seize my satyr by the throat; or, smiting him in the face, fling him from my door? Should I stand by tamely, and see my hearth violated, my wife tempted, by a common snake of the parish? If I had been less angry with my wife herself, I am sure I should have taken the violent course. But I saw now, to my horror, that she was neither adamant nor marble. She had allowed him to know his evil power upon her, and to see that the knowledge of his power over another woman, so far from shocking and repulsing her, had increased the fascination. If I denounced him openly, it would be to admit his rivalry, and, by inference, to complete her degradation.

Fortunately, I have been accustomed, from youth upward, to control my strongest feelings, whether of tenderness or anger; and though I am capable enough of strong passion, I have generally the power to disguise it. In the present emergency, I found my habit of self-restraint stand me in good stead. I advanced into the outer room. By the time I had reached it, I was calm and cool to all outward appearances.

Quite quietly, I approached the window, and gazed out upon the terrace. There they stood, he talking eagerly, she with face averted from him, and looking my way. She saw me in a moment, and started in agitation. I nodded grimly, and opening the folding windows, looked out. Then, all at once, I drew back apologetically.

“Ah, there you are!” I said to my wife. “I was looking for you.”

She stepped over to the window, looking strangely pale and scared. I had not even looked at, much less addressed, her companion; but he approached, with a ghastly smile.

“I’m afraid I interrupt you,” I continued. “Some religious business, I suppose? Shall I retire till it is settled?” He looked at me doubtfully; but Ellen immediately replied —

“Do not go away. Mr. Santley is just leaving.”

Still preserving my *sang froid*, I sat down in one of the garden seats on the terrace, and opened the book which I had lifted at random from the drawing-room table. Curiously enough, it was a work which is rather a favourite of mine, one of Sebastiano’s “Tales in Verse.” I knew the thing, particularly the passage on which the page had opened, and which, strange to say, had a certain reference to the present situation.

“Pray proceed with your talk,” I said. “I have something here to amuse me, till you have done.”

So I sat reading, or pretending to read. I did not even glance up, but I felt that they were looking uneasily at one another. There was a long pause. At last I lifted my eyes.

“I’m sure I’m in the way,” I said; and rose as if to go.

“No, no!” cried Ellen, more and more uneasy at my manner, which I’m afraid was ominous. “We were only discussing some foolish village matters, on which Mr. Santley wished to have my advice.”

“Very well,” I replied. Then, turning to Santley, I inquired quietly, “Do you read Spanish?”

He shook his head.

“That’s a pity,” I continued. “Otherwise, you might have been much amused by this little work, written by a priest like yourself, though not quite of your persuasion.”

“Is it a tale?” asked Ellen, bending over me.

“Yes; one of old Sebastiano’s ‘Tales in Verse.’ Its author, I may tell you, was a Castilian monk, who abandoned the Church for the heretical pursuit of story-writing, and took ‘Sebastiano’ as a pseudonym. The story I am reading here is considered, by many, his masterpiece. The verse is assonantic throughout, the subject — ”

Here my satyr could not forbear a gesture of impatience and irritation.

“I’m afraid I bore you, sir,” I said, smiling. “Your tastes are not literary, I fear?”

“I seldom read fiction,” he answered. “I consider it too trivial, and a waste of time.”

“Do you really think so? I grant you, if the work is not of a truly moral nature, like the present. As I was going to tell you, the subject of this story, or tragedy in narrative, is edifying in the extreme. There was once in Castile a parish priest, an exceedingly handsome fellow, who, in a moment of impulse, fell deeply in love with a Spanish lady.”

There was no need to look up now. I felt that they were both fascinated, not knowing what was to come. Ellen’s hand was on my chair, which vibrated with the violent beating of her heart.

“Very prettily does Sebastiano describe the course of this amour. The priest’s first struggles to resist temptation, his frequent fastings and spiritual purgings, his growing desperation, his final yielding to the spell. To be brief, he at last spoke to her, avowed his passion, and flung himself, despairing and imploring, at her feet.”

“And she?” asked Ellen, in a voice so low that I scarcely heard her.

“Oh, the story says but little of her answer, though doubtless it was to the purpose, as the sequel proves. They understood one another, and might doubtless have been happy, but for one unfortunate impediment, which both had forgotten. The lady had — a *husband!*”

Ah, that frightened, beating heart! how it leapt and struggled, as the little hand still clutched my chair! I just glanced up, and meeting my gaze, she made an appealing gesture; for she began to understand. As for him, he stood pale and sullen, scowling at me with his seraphic face, and as yet imperfectly comprehending.

“A husband!” I repeated, turning over a leaf. “He, poor devil, was an alchemist, a dreary, doting seeker for the elixir of immortal life, and they thought him — blind. In this they were mistaken. As the poor flat flounder on the bottom of the sea, lying half buried and invisible in the sand and mud, still with its watery jelly of an eye surveys the liquid welkin overhead, so he, our alchemist, was marking

much in silence. Well, sir, the thing grew, till at last, out of that obscure laboratory where the dreamer toiled there came a thunderbolt. One fine morning the lady was found – dead!”

“Dead!”

They both echoed the word involuntarily.

“Yes; but the curious part of the affair has yet to be told. They found her lying, as if sleeping, in her bed; so sweet, so quiet, so peaceful, no one in the world would have dreamed that she had been destroyed by a malignant poison. Such, however, was the case.”

Santley buttoned his coat, and moved nervously towards the door.

“A horrible story!” he said. “I detest these tales of violence and murder. Besides, though I am not a Roman Catholic, I look upon such rubbish as a calumny upon the Christian Church.”

I smiled.

“The Church’s history, I am afraid, offers endless corroborations.”

“I do not believe it; and I hold that the Church should be saved from such attacks.”

“Pardon me,” I persisted; while Ellen’s hand was softly laid upon my shoulder, as if beseeching me to cease, “the Church may be sacred, but so, you will admit, is the marriage tie. For myself, I am old-fashioned enough to sympathize with that poor alchemist, and applaud his rough-and-ready mode of vengeance.”

“Then you justify a cowardly murder?” he returned, trembling violently. “But, there, I must really go.”

“Pardon me, I don’t call it murder at all.”

“Not murder?” he ejaculated.

“No, sir; righteous vengeance. Were such a state of things possible *now*— though, of course, wives are now all pure, and priests all immaculate – I should recommend the same remedy. What, *must* you go? Well, good day; and pray excuse a scholar’s warmth. Actually, as I discussed that old monkish nonsense, I almost thought it *real*.”

He forced a feeble laugh, and then, with one long look at my wife, and a murmured “Good afternoon” to us both, retreated through the drawing-room doors. I sat still, as if intent on my book.

The moment he had gone, Ellen caught me wildly by the arm.

“George! look at me – speak to me!”

“Well?” I said, looking up quietly.

“What does it mean? Why did you tell that wild tale? You did not do it without a purpose.”

“Certainly not.”

She stood pale as death, clasping her hands together.

“You did not think – you could not, dare not – that – ”

“That what, pray?” I demanded coldly, seeing that she paused.

“That you suspect – that you can believe – that – ”

She paused again; then she added pleadingly —

“Oh, George, you would never do me such a wrong!”

“I have done you no wrong,” I replied. “You, on the other hand, have disobeyed me?”

“How?”

“I forbade you to entertain that man in my house.”

“He came unexpectedly. Indeed, indeed, I wish he had not come.”

She looked so pretty and so despairing, that I should have straightway forgiven her, had I not suddenly called to mind the conversation in the drawingroom. Women are strange creatures.

At that moment, I am certain she fervently believed that she was innocent, and I cruel. And yet... I knew, by her humility and by her sorrow, that she partially reproached herself for having awakened my anger.

“Let there be an end to this,” I said. “You must never speak to that man again.”

“Never speak to him!” she repeated imploringly. “But he is our clergyman, and if I break with him there will be a scandal. Indeed, George, he is not as bad as you think him. He is very earnest and impetuous, but he is good and noble.”

“What! do you defend him?”

She did not reply.

“You must choose between him and me; between the man whom you know to be a hypocrite, and the man who is your husband. If he comes here again, I shall deal with him in my own fashion; remember that! I spared him to-day, because I thought him too contemptible for any kind of violence. But I know his character, and you know it; that is enough. I shall not warn you again.”

With these words, I walked to my den. There, once alone, I gave way to my overmastering agitation. I found myself trembling like a leaf; looking in a mirror, I saw that I was pale as a ghost.

An hour passed thus. Then I heard a knock at the door.

Enter Baptisto.

“Well, what do you want?” I cried, angrily enough.

Before I knew it he was on his knees, seizing and kissing my hand.

“Senor, I know everything!” he cried. “I have known it all along. That was why I remained at home when you were away – to watch, to play the spy. Senor, give me leave! Let me avenge you!”

I shook him off with an oath, for I hated the fellow’s sympathy.

“You fool,” I said, “I want no one to play the spy for me. Stop, though! What do you mean? What would you like to do?”

In a moment he had sprung to his feet, and flashed before my eyes one of those long knives that Spaniards carry. His eyes flashed with homicidal fire.

“I would plunge this into his heart!”

I could not help laughing, – a little furiously.

“Put up that knife, you idiot! Put it up, I say! This is England, not Spain, and here we manage matters very differently. And now, let me have no more of this nonsense. Be good enough to go about your business.”

He yielded almost instantly to my old mastery over him, and, with a respectful bow, withdrew. So ended the curious events of the day. I have set them down in their order as they occurred. I wonder if this is the last act of my little domestic drama? If not, what is to happen next? Well, we shall soon see.

CHAPTER XXIX. HUSH-MONEY

Mrs. Haldane had not exaggerated when, in her cross-examination of the vicar, she had described his intimate friendship to Miss Dove as the common talk of the parish. There beats about the life of an English clergyman a light as fierce, in its small way, as that other light which, according to the poet,=

~~~~~"... beats about the throne,

~~~~~"And blackens every blot!"=

Charles Santley was very much mistaken if he imagined that his doings altogether escaped scandal. As usual, however, the darkest suspicions and ugliest innuendoes were reserved for the lady; and before very long Edith Dove was the subject of as pretty a piece of scandal as ever exercised the gossips of even an English village.

Now, the thing was a long time in the air before it reached the ears of the person most concerned. Tongues wagged, fingers pointed, all the machinery of gossip was set in motion for months before poor Edith had any suspicion whatever. Gradually, however, there came upon her the consciousness of a certain social change. Several families with which she had been on intimate terms showed, by signs unmistakable, their desire to avoid her visits, and their determination not to return them. One virtuous spinster, on whom she had expended a large amount of sympathy, not to speak of tea and sugar, openly cut her one morning at the post-office; and even the paupers of the village showed in their bearing a certain lessening of that servility which, in the mind of a properly constituted British pauper, indicates respect. Things were becoming ominous, when, late one evening, her aunt boldly broached the subject.

Edith had taken her hat and cloak, and was going out, when the old lady spoke.

"Where are you going so late? I hope – not down to the Vicarage?" Edith turned in astonishment.

"Yes, I am going there," she replied.

"Then listen to my advice: take off your things and stay at home."

The tone was so decided, the manner so peculiar, that Edith was startled in spite of herself. Before she could make any remark, her aunt continued —

"Sit down and listen to me. I mean to talk to you, for no one has a better right; and if I can put a stop to your folly, I will. Do you know the whole place is talking of you – that it has been talking of you for months? Yes, Edith, it is the truth; and I am bound to say you yourself are the very person to blame."

Almost mechanically, Edith took off her hat and threw it on the table. Then she looked eagerly at her aunt.

"What do they say about me?" she cried.

"They say you are making a fool of yourself; but that is not all. They say worse – horrible things. Of course I know they are untrue, for you were always a good girl; but you are sometimes so indiscreet. When a young girl is always in the company of a young man, even a clergyman, and nothing comes of it, people will talk. Take my advice, dear, and put an end to it at once!"

Edith smiled – a curious, far-off, bitter smile. She was not surprised at her aunt's warning; for she had expected it a long time, and had been rather surprised that it had not come before.

"Put an end to what?" she said quietly. "I don't know what you mean."

"You know well enough, Edith."

"Indeed I do not. If people talk, that is their affair; but I shall do as I please."

And she took up her hat again, as if to go.

"Edith, I insist! You shall *not* go out to-night. It is shameful for Mr. Santley to encourage you! If you only knew how people talk! You are not engaged to Mr. Santley, and I tell you it is a scandal!"

Edith flushed nervously, as she replied: —

“There is no scandal, aunt! Mr. Santley — ”

“I have no patience with him. In a minister of the gospel, it is disgraceful.”

“What is disgraceful?”

“The encouragement he gives you, when he knows he has no intention of marrying you.”

“How do you know that?” said Edith again, with that far-off curious smile.

“He has not even proposed; you are not engaged? If you were, it would be different.”

With a quiet impulse of tenderness, Edith bent over her aunt and kissed her. The old lady looked up in surprise, and saw that her niece’s eyes were full of tears.

“Edith, what is it? What do you mean?”

“That we have been engaged a long time.”

“And you did not tell me?”

“He did not want it known, and even now it is a secret. You must promise to tell no one.”

“But why? There is nothing to be ashamed of.”

“It is his wish,” said the girl, gently.

Then kissing her aunt again, and leaving her much relieved in mind, she went away, strolling quietly in the direction of the Vicarage. As she walked, her tears continued to fall, and her face was very sorrowful; for there lay upon her spirit a heavy shadow of terror and distrust. With how different an emotion had she, only a year before, flown to meet the man she loved! How eagerly and gladly, *then*, he had awaited her coming! And now? Alas, she did not even know if she would find him at all. Sometimes he seemed to avoid her, to be weary of her company. All was so changed, she reflected, since the Haldanes came-home to the Manor. He was no longer the same, and she herself was different. Would it ever end? Would she ever be happy again?

The shadows of night were falling as she walked through the lanes, with her eyes sadly fixed on the dim spire of the village church. Close to a plantation on the roadside, she encountered a woman and a man in conversation. She recognized the woman at a glance, as Sal Bexley, the black sheep of the parish, who got her living by singing-from one public-house to another; and she had passed by without a word, when a voice called her.

“Here, mistress!”

She turned, and encountered a pair of bold black eyes. Sal, the pariah, stood facing her, swinging her old guitar and grinning mischievously.

“I’m afraid you’re growing proud, mistress. You didn’t seem to know me.”

There was something sinister in the girl’s manner. Edith drew aside, and would have passed on without any reply, but the other ran before her and blocked the way.

“No, you don’t go like that. I want a word with thee, my fine lady. Ah, you may toss your bead, but you’d best bide a bit, and listen.”

“What do you want? I cannot stay.”

“No call to hurry,” cried Sal, with a coarse laugh. “Thy man’s out, and don’t expect thee. Belike he’s gone courting some one else. Ah, he’s a rum chap, the minister, though he do set up for a saint.”

Edith shuddered and shrank back.

“Go away,” she said. “How dare you speak to me like that?”

“Dare? That’s a good one! No, you shan’t pass till I’ve done wi’ thee.” Edith was getting positively frightened, for the girl’s manner was so rude and threatening, when she saw a tall figure approaching, and in a moment recognized the clergyman. He was close to them, and paused in astonishment at seeing the two together.

“Miss Dove! Is anything the matter? Why are you here, so late, and in such company?”

He paused, looking suspiciously at Sal, who laughed impudently.

“I was passing by, and she stopped me. Do send her away!”

“Send me away?” cried the pariah. “I’ll come when I please, and I’ll go when I please. I’m as good as she.” Mr. Santley stepped forward, and placed his hand on her arm.

“What are you doing here? I thought you were far away.”

“So I were; but I’ve come back. Well?”

“Remember what I told you. I will not have my parish disgraced any longer by your conduct. I have warned you repeatedly before. Where are you staying?”

“Down by the river-side, master. I’ve joined the gipsies, d’ye see.”

“Always an outcast,” said Santley, with, a certain gloomy pity. “Will nothing reform you?”

“No, master,” answered the girl, grinning. “I’m a bad lot.”

“I’m afraid you are.”

“But mind this,” she continued, with some vehemence, “there’s others, fine ladies too, as bad as me. Though I like a chap, and ain’t afraid to own it, and though I gets my living anyhow, I’m no worse than my betters, master. You’ve no cause to bully *me*, so don’t try it on, master. I can speak when I like, and I can hold my tongue when I like. Gi’ me a guinea, and I’ll hold my tongue.”

She held out her brown hand, leering up into his face.

“What do you mean?” he exclaimed. “I shall give you no money.”

She looked round at Edith, who stood by trembling.

“Tell him he’d best, mistress – for *thy* sake! Come, it’s worth a guinea! There’s many a folk hereabouts would gi’ five, to see what I saw t’other day, down to Omberley wood.”

Edith started in a new terror, while her face flushed scarlet and her head swam round. Santley winced, but preserving his composure, looked fixedly and sternly at the outcast.

“You’re a bold hussy,” he said, between his set teeth, “as bold as bad. But take care! Do you know that if I only say one word, I can have you up before the magistrates and sent back to prison?”

“What for?” snarled the girl.

“For vagrancy, begging, and threatening a lady on the roadside!”

“A pretty lady. And I bean’t begging, neither. Well, send me to prison, and when I’m up before the magistrates, I’ll tell’em why you were down upon me. Come!”

Santley was about to reply angrily, when Edith interposed. Trembling and almost fainting, she had taken out her purse.

“Here is some money,” she cried; “give it to her and let her go!”

“She does not deserve a farthing,” exclaimed Santley. “Still, if you wish it – ”

“Yes, yes! I – I am sorry for her.”

Santley opened the purse, and took out a sovereign.

“If I give you this, will you promise to go out of the parish?”

“Maybe.”

“And to conduct yourself properly – to turn over a new leaf?”

Sal grinned viciously from ear to ear.

“I take example by you, master, and your young lady there! Leastways, if I *do* go a-larking I’ll be like you gentry, and say naught about it. There, gi’ me the guinea! Stop, though, make it two, and I’ll go away out o’ Omberley this very night.”

Santley and Edith rapidly exchanged a look, and a second piece of gold was at once added to the first. Then, after giving Sal a few words of solemn warning, in his priestly character, Santley walked away with Edith. The pariah girl watched them until they disappeared; then, with a low laugh, she rejoined her companion, a one-eyed and middle-aged gipsy, who, during the preceding scene, had phlegmatically stretched himself on his back, along the roadside.

CHAPTER XXX. “AND LO! WITHIN HER, SOMETHING LEAPT!”

Santley and Edith walked along for some time without a word. At last, after looking round nervously to see that they were not observed or followed, the clergyman broke the silence. – :

“It is horrible! It is insufferable!” he cried. “I shall be ruined by your indiscretion.”

She looked at him in amazement. It was too dark to see his face, but his whole frame, as well as his voice, trembled with anger.

“My indiscretion!” she echoed.

“Yes.”

“But I have done nothing.”

“I found you talking to that creature, and it is evident that she knows our secret. I shall be ruined through you. What have you told her?”

“Nothing. I met her by accident, and she spoke to me; that is all.”

There was a pause. Then Santley stopped short, saying in a whisper —

“Go home now. After to-day we must not be seen together.”

But she clung to his arm, weeping.

“Charles, for Gods sake, do not be so unkind!”

“I am not unkind,” he said; “but I am thinking of your good name, as well as of my own reputation. What that woman knows others must know. It will be the talk of the place. Edith, think of it. We shall both be lost. Go home, I entreat you.”

“Charles, listen to me!” exclaimed the weeping girl. “If there is any scandal it will kill me. But there need to be none. You have only to keep your word, as you have promised, and then – ”

“What? and marry you?”

“Yes.”

“I cannot – at least, not yet.”

“Why not? Oh, Charles, have I not been patient? There is nothing but your own will to come between us. Make me your wife, as you have promised, before it is too late. Even my aunt begins to suspect something. My life is miserable – a daily falsehood. I have loved you next to God. For your sake I have even forgotten Him. I thought there was no sin; you yourself told me there was no sin – that we were man and wife in God’s sight.. But now I am terrified. I cannot sleep, I cannot pray. Sometimes I feel as if God had cast me out. And you – ”

She ceased, choked with tears, and, placing her head upon his shoulder, sobbed wildly. He shrank from her touch, and sought to disengage himself, gazing round on every side and searching the darkness; in dread of being watched.

“Control yourself. If we should be seen!”

But she did not seem to hear, and his anger increased in proportion to her terror.

“Do you want to compromise me?” he cried. “I begin to think you have no discretion, no respect for yourself – I hate these scenes. They make me wish that we had never met.”

“If I thought you wished that from your heart,” she sobbed, “I would not live another day.”

“There, again. You are so unreasonable, so violent. When I attempt to reason, you talk of suicide or some such mad thing. If you really loved me, as you say, you would be willing to make some sacrifice for my sake. But no; you have only one cry – marriage, marriage! – till I am sick of the very word. Cease crying. Dry your eyes, and listen to me. Go home tonight, and I will think it over. Yes, I will do what I can – anything, rather than be so tormented.”

She obeyed him passively, and tried to stifle her deep sorrow. Child as she was, and loving him as she did, she could not bear his words of blame; and her soul shuddered at the strange tones

of the voice that had once been so kind. For it was as she had said. She had made an idol of this man, next to God. She had offered up to him, at his passionate request, her young life, her purity of heart, her very soul. He had been God's voice and very presence to her; ah! so beautiful! She had been content to lie at his feet, to obey him like a slave, to accept his will as law, even when the law seemed evil. And now he was so changed. Not base – ah! no, she could not bear to think him base; not base – still good, but cruel. Was she losing him? Was she destined to lose him for ever, and, with him, surely her immortal soul?

“Good night,” she moaned. “I will go home.”

And she held up her face for his kiss; then, as he kissed her, she yielded again to her emotion, and clung, wildly crying, about his neck.

“Oh, Charles, be true to me! I have no one in the world but you.”

With that fond appeal she left him, turning her tearful face homeward. On reaching the cottage she found the door ajar, stole quietly up to her room, and locked herself in. A few minutes afterwards her aunt knocked.

“Are you there, Edith? Supper is ready.”

“I have a headache, and am going to bed,” she replied, stifling her sobs.

“May I not come in?” said the old lady. “I want to speak to you.”

“Not to-night. I am so tired.”

She heard the feeble feet descending the stairs, and again resigned herself to sorrow. Presently, when she had grown a little calmer, she arose, lit a candle, and proceeded to undress. The moon, which had newly risen, shone through the cottage window, with its white blinds, and the faint rays, creeping in, mingled with the yellow candle-light. The room was like a white rose, all pale and pure; and the girl herself, when she was undressed and clad in her night-dress, seemed the purest thing there. But the night-dress felt like a shroud, and she felt ready for the grave.

She knelt by the bed to say her prayers.

How long she remained on her knees she knew not. While her lips repeated, half aloud, the prayers she had learned as a child, and those which, in later years, she had framed to include the name of the man she loved, her tears still fell, and with her long hair streaming over her shoulders, and her little hands clasped together, she sobbed and sobbed. The moonlight crept further into the room, and touched her like a silver hand – not tenderly, not pityingly; nay, it might have been the very hand of the Madonna herself, bidding her arise to face her fate.

She arose shivering; and at that very instant there came to her a warning, an omen, full of nameless terror. It seemed to her as if faces were flashing before her eyes, voices shrieking in her ears; her heart leapt, her head went round, and at the same moment she felt her whole being miraculously thrilled by the quickening of a new life within her own.

With a loud moan, she fainted away upon the floor.

When she returned to consciousness, she was lying, nearly naked, by the bedside, and the moonlight was flooding the little room. She arose, dazed, stupefied, and appalled. Her limbs shook beneath her, and she had to clutch the bedstead for support. Then she tottered to the dressing-table, and holding the candle, looked into the mirror.

Reflected there was a face of ghastly whiteness, with two great despairing eyes, wildly gazing into her own.

CHAPTER XXXI. A LAST APPEAL

The night had passed away, and the chilly light of dawn creeping into Edith's; room, found her quietly sleeping. During that night, when the full horror of her situation had flashed for the first time upon her, she had passed through hours of agony similar to those which have turned pretty brown hair grey; then, overcome by a sense of thorough mental exhaustion, she had laid her head upon the pillow and slept.

She slept long and soundly.

When she opened her eyes she saw that it was broad daylight; indeed, the day was well spent, for her aunt, after tapping gently at her door and receiving no reply, had determined not to disturb her rest.

Her first feeling on opening her eyes was one of pleasure, such pleasure as is felt by a young matron, when the knowledge of approaching maternity first dawns upon her; but this feeling was only momentary, and was succeeded in this case by one of intense mental pain.

She lay for a time, thinking of the past, and trying to penetrate the future. She recalled her interviews with Santley; the last interview which had taken place only the night before. She remembered with pleasure the promise he had made, and she tried to think that all would yet be well. Yes, even when he knew nothing, he had yielded to her solicitations; and as soon as he *knew*— for of course at their next meeting she must tell him — he would not hesitate for a single day. He had a double duty now: not only had he to save her reputation, he had to think of the future of his child. He had said that he would think it over; that the next day, this very day, she should hear from him. He would appoint a meeting, then when she saw him, if he still hesitated, she would tell him, and he would hesitate no longer.

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