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Содержание

Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton
Pelham — Volume 07

CHAPTER LXXIII

Si ad honestatem nati sumus ea aut sola expetenda est, aut certe omni pondere gravior est habenda quam reliqua omnia.
—Tully.

Cas. Brutus, I do observe you now of late:
I have not from your eyes that gentleness,
And shew of love as I was wont to have.

—Julius Caesar.

I rose at my usual early hour; sleep had tended to calm, and, I hope, also, to better my feelings. I had now leisure to reflect, that I had not embraced my party from any private or interested motive; it was not, therefore, from a private or interested motive that I was justified in deserting it. Our passions are terrible sophists! When Vincent had told me, the day before, that it was from men, not measures, that I was to change, and that such a change could scarcely deserve the name, my heart adopted the assertion, and fancied it into truth.

I now began to perceive the delusion; were government as mechanically perfect as it has never yet been (but as I trust it may yet be), it would signify little who were the mere machines that regulated its springs: but in a constitution like ours, the chief character of which—pardon me, ye De Lolmites—is its uncertainty; where men invariably make the measures square to the dimensions of their own talent or desire; and where, reversing the maxim of the tailor, the measures so rarely make the men; it required no penetration to see how dangerous it was to entrust to the aristocratic prejudice of Lincoln, or the vehement imbecility of Lesborough, the execution of the very same measures which might safely be committed to the plain sense of Dawton, and, above all, to the great and various talents of his coadjutors. But what made the vital difference between the two parties was less in the leaders than the body. In the Dawton faction, the best, the purest, the wisest of the day were enrolled; they took upon themselves the origin of all the active measures, and Lord Dawton was the mere channel through which those measures flowed; the plain, the unpretending, and somewhat feeble character of Lord Dawton's mind, readily conceded to the abler components of his party, the authority it was so desirable that they should exert. In Vincent's party, with the exception of himself, there was scarcely an individual with the honesty requisite for loving the projects they affected to propose, or the talents that were necessary for carrying them into effect, even were their wishes sincere; nor were either the haughty Lincoln, or his noisy and overbearing companion, Lesborough, at all of a temper to suffer that quiet, yet powerful interference of others, to which Dawton unhesitatingly submitted.

I was the more resolved to do all possible justice to Dawton's party, from the inclination I naturally had to lean towards the other; and in all matters, where private pique or self-interest can possibly penetrate, it has ever been the object of my maturer consideration to direct my particular attention to that side of the question which such undue partizans are the least likely to espouse. While I was gradually, but clearly, feeling my way to a decision, I received the following note from Guloseton:—

"I said nothing to you last night of what is now to be the subject of my letter, lest you should suppose it arose rather from the heat of an extempore conviviality, than its real source, viz. a sincere

esteem for your mind, a sincere affection for your heart, and a sincere sympathy in your resentment and your interest.

"They tell me that Lord Dawton's triumph or discomfiture rests entirely upon the success of the motion upon—, brought before the House of Commons, on the—. I care, you know, very little for my own part, which way this question is decided; do not think, therefore, that I make any sacrifice when I request you to suffer me to follow your advice in the disposal of my four votes. I imagine, of course, that you would wish them to adopt the contrary side to Lord Dawton; and upon receiving a line from you to that effect, they shall be empowered to do so.

"Pray, oblige me also by taking the merit of this measure upon yourself, and saying (wherever it may be useful to you), how entirely, both the voters and their influence are at your disposal. I trust we shall yet play the Bel to this Dragon, and fell him from his high places.

"Pity me, my dear friend; I dine out to-day, and feel already, by an intuitive shudder, that the soup will be cold, and the sherry hot. Adieu.

"Ever your's,

"Guloseton."

Now, then, my triumph, my vanity, and my revenge might be fully gratified. I had before me a golden opportunity of displaying my own power, and of humbling that of the minister. My heart swelled high at the thought. Let it be forgiven me, if, for a single moment, my previous calculations and morality vanished from my mind, and I saw only the offer of Vincent, and the generosity of Guloseton. But I checked the risings of my heart, and compelled my proud spirit to obedience.

I placed Guloseton's letter before me, and as I read it once more in order to reply to it, the disinterested kindness and delicacy of one, whom I had long, in the injustice of my thoughts, censured as selfish, came over me so forcibly, and contrasted so deeply with the hollowness of friends more sounding, alike in their profession and their creeds, that the tears streamed fast and gushingly from my eyes.

A thousand misfortunes are less affecting than a single kindness.

I wrote, in answer, a warm and earnest letter of thanks for an offer, the judicious kindness of which penetrated me to the soul. I detailed, at some length, the reasons which induced me to the decision I had taken; I sketched also the nature of the very important motion about to be brought before the House, and deduced from that sketch the impossibility of conscientiously opposing Lord Dawton's party in the debate. I concluded with repeating the expressions my gratitude suggested, and after declining all interference with Lord Guloseton's votes, ventured to add, that had I interfered, it would have been in support of Dawton; not as a man, but a minister—not as an individual friend, but a public servant.

I had just despatched this letter, when Vincent entered: I acquainted him, though in the most respectful and friendly terms, with my determination. He seemed greatly disappointed, and endeavoured to shake my resolution; finding this was in vain, he appeared at last satisfied, and even affected with my reasons. When we parted, it was with a promise, confirmed by both, that no public variance should ever again alter our private opinions of each other.

When I was once more alone, and saw myself brought back to the very foot of the ladder I had so far and so fortunately climbed; when I saw that, in rejecting all the overtures of my friends, I was left utterly solitary and unaided among my foes—when I looked beyond and saw no faint loophole of hope, no single stepping-stone on which to recommence my broken, but unwearied career—perhaps one pang of regret and repentance, at my determination, came across me: but there is something marvellously restorative in a good conscience, and one soon learns to look with hope to the future, when one can feel justified in turning with pride to the past.

My horse came to the door at my usual hour for riding: with what gladness I sprung upon his back, felt the free wind freshening over my fevered cheek, and turned my rein towards the green lanes that border the great city on its western side. I know few counsellors more exhilarating than a spirited

horse. I do not wonder that the Roman emperor made a consul of his steed. On horseback I always best feel my powers, and survey my resources; on horseback, I always originate my noblest schemes, and plan their ablest execution. Give me but a light rein, and a free bound, and I am Cicero—Cato—Caesar; dismount me, and I become a mere clod of the earth which you condemn me to touch; fire, energy, etheriality have departed; I am the soil without the sun—the cask without the wine—the garments without the man.

I returned home with increased spirits and collected thoughts; I urged my mind from my own situation, and suffered it to rest upon what Lady Roseville had told me of Reginald Glanville's interference in my behalf. That extraordinary man still continued powerfully to excite my interest; nor could I dwell, without some yearning of the kindlier affections, upon his unsolicited, and, but for Lady Roseville's communication, unknown exertions in my cause. Although the officers of justice were still actively employed in the pursuit of Tyrrell's murderer, and although the newspapers were still full of speculations on their indifferent success, public curiosity had began to flag upon the inquiry. I had, once or twice, been in Glanville's company when the murder was brought upon the tapis, and narrowly examined his behaviour upon a subject which touched him so fearfully. I could not, however, note any extraordinary confusion or change in his countenance; perhaps the pale cheek grew somewhat paler, the dreaming eye more abstracted, and the absent spirit more wande ring than before; but many other causes than guilt, could account for signs so doubtful and minute.

"You shall soon know all," the last words which he had addressed to me, yet rang in my ears, and most intensely did I anticipate the fulfilment of this promise. My hopes too—those flatterers, so often the pleasing antitheses of reason, whispered that this was not the pledge of a guilty man; and yet he had said to Lady Roseville, that he did not wonder at my estrangement from him: such words seemed to require a less favourable construction than those he had addressed to me; and, in making this mental remark, another, of no flattering nature to Glanville's disinterestedness, suggested itself; might not his interference for me with Lord Dawton, arise rather from policy than friendship; might it not occur to him, if, as I surmised, he was acquainted with my suspicions, and acknowledged their dreadful justice, that it would be advisable to propitiate my silence? Such were among the thousand thoughts which flashed across me, and left my speculations in debate and doubt.

Nor did my reflections pass unnoticed the nature of Lady Roseville's affection for Glanville. From the seeming coldness and austerity of Sir Reginald's temperament, it was likely that this was innocent, at least in act; and there was also something guileless in the manner in which she appeared rather to exult in, than to conceal, her attachment. True that she was bound to no ties; she had neither husband nor children, for whose sake love became a crime: free and unfettered, if she gave her heart to Glanville, it was also allowable to render the gift lawful and perpetual by the blessing of the church.

Alas! how little can woman, shut up in her narrow and limited circle of duties, know of the wandering life and various actions of her lover. Little, indeed, could Lady Roseville, when, in the heat of her enthusiasm, she spoke of the lofty and generous character of Glanville, dream of the foul and dastardly crime of which he was more than suspected; nor, while it was, perhaps, her fondest wish to ally herself to his destiny, could her wildest fancies anticipate the felon's fate, which, if death came not in an hastier and kinder shape, must sooner or later await him.

Of Thornton, I had neither seen nor heard aught since my departure from Lord Chester's; that reprieve was, however, shortly to expire. I had scarcely got into Oxford-street, in my way homeward, when I perceived him crossing the street with another man. I turned round to scrutinize the features of his companion, and, in spite of a great change of dress, a huge pair of false whiskers, and an artificial appearance of increased age, my habit of observing countenances enabled me to recognize, on the instant, my intellectual and virtuous friend, Mr. Job Jonson. They disappeared in a shop, nor did I think it worth while further to observe them, though I still bore a reminiscetory spite against Mr. Job Jonson, which I was fully resolved to wreak, at the first favourable opportunity.

I passed by Lady Roseville's door. Though the hour was late, and I had, therefore, but a slight chance of finding her at home, yet I thought the chance worth the trouble of inquiry. To my agreeable surprise, I was admitted: no one was in the drawing-room. The servant said, Lady Roseville was at that moment engaged, but would very shortly see me, and begged I would wait.

Agitated as I was by various reflections, I walked (in the restlessness of my mood) to and fro the spacious rooms which formed Lady Roseville's apartments of reception. At the far end was a small boudoir, where none but the goddess's favoured few were admitted. As I approached towards it, I heard voices, and the next moment recognised the deep tones of Glanville. I turned hastily away, lest I should overhear the discourse; but I had scarcely got three steps, when the convulsed sound of a woman's sob came upon my ear. Shortly afterwards, steps descended the stairs, and the street door opened.

The minutes rolled on, and I became impatient. The servant re-entered— Lady Roseville was so suddenly and seriously indisposed, that she was unable to see me. I left the house, and, full of bewildered conjectures, returned to my apartments.

The next day was one of the most important in my life. I was standing wistfully by my fireplace, listening to a broken-winded hurdy-gurdy, with the most mournful attention, stationed opposite to my window, when Bedos announced Sir Reginald Glanville. It so happened, that I had that morning taken the miniature I had found in the fatal field, from the secret place in which I usually kept it, in order more closely to examine it, lest any more convincing proof of its owner, than the initials and Thornton's interpretation, might be discovered by a minuter investigation.

The picture was lying on the table when Glanville entered: my first impulse was to seize and secrete it; my second to suffer it to remain, and to watch the effect the sight of it might produce. In following the latter, I thought it, however, as well to choose my own time for discovering the miniature; and as I moved to the table, I threw my handkerchief carelessly over it. Glanville came up to me at once, and his countenance, usually close and reserved in its expression, assumed a franker and bolder aspect.

"You have lately changed towards me," he said:—"mindful of our former friendship, I have come to demand the reason."

"Can Sir Reginald Glanville's memory," answered I, "supply him with no probable cause?"

"It can," replied Glanville, "but I would not trust only to that. Sit down, Pelham, and listen to me. I can read your thoughts, and I might affect to despise their import—perhaps two years since I should—at present I can pity and excuse them. I have come to you now, in the love and confidence of our early days, to claim, as then, your good opinion and esteem. If you require any explanation at my hands, it shall be given. My days are approaching their end. I have made up my accounts with others—I would do so with you. I confess, that I would fain leave behind me in your breast, the same affectionate remembrance I might heretofore have claimed, and which, whatever be your suspicions, I have done nothing to forfeit. I have, moreover, a dearer interest than my own to consult in this wish —you colour, Pelham—you know to whom I allude; for my sister's sake, if not for my own, you will hear me."

Glanville paused for a moment. I raised the handkerchief from the miniature—I pushed the latter towards him—"Do you remember this?" said I, in a low tone.

With a wild cry, which thrilled through my heart, Glanville sprung forward and seized it. He gazed eagerly and intensely upon it, and his cheek flushed—his eyes sparkled—his breast heaved. The next moment he fell back in his chair, in one of the half swoons, to which, upon any sudden and violent emotion, the debilitating effects of his disease subjected him.

Before I could come to his assistance he had recovered. He looked wildly and fiercely upon me. "Speak," he cried, "speak—where got you this— where?—answer, for mercy's sake!"

"Recollect yourself," said I, sternly. "I found that token of your presence upon the spot where Tyrrell was murdered."

"True, true," said Glanville, slowly, and in an absent and abstracted tone. He ceased abruptly, and covered his face with his hands; from this attitude he started with some sudden impulse.

"And tell me," he said, in a low, inward, exulting tone, "was it—was it red with the blood of the murdered man?"

"Wretch!" I exclaimed, "do you glory in your guilt?"

"Hold!" said Glanville, rising, with an altered and haughty air; "it is not to your accusations that I am now to listen: if you are yet desirous of weighing their justice before you decide upon them, you will have the opportunity: I shall be at home at ten this night; come to me, and you shall know all. At present, the sight of this picture has unnerved me. Shall I see you?"

I made no other rejoinder than the brief expression of my assent, and Glanville instantly left the room.

During the whole of that day, my mind was wrought up into a state of feverish and preternatural excitation. I could not remain in the same spot for an instant; my pulse beat with the irregularity of delirium. For the last hour I placed my watch before me, and kept my eyes constantly fixed upon it. Should any one think this exaggerated, let him remember, that it was not only Glanville's confession that I was to hear; my own fate, my future connection with Ellen, rested upon the story of that night. For myself, when I called to mind Glanville's acknowledgment of the picture, and his slow and involuntary remembrance of the spot where it was found, I scarcely allowed my temper, sanguine as it was, to hope.

Some minutes before the hour of ten I repaired to Glanville's house. He was alone—the picture was before him.

I drew my chair towards him in silence, and accidentally lifting up my eyes, encountered the opposite mirror. I started at my own face; the intensity and fearfulness of my interest had rendered it even more hueless than that of my companion.

There was a pause for some moments, at the end of which Glanville thus began.

CHAPTER LXXIV

I do but hide
Under these words, like embers, every spark
Of that which has consumed me. Quick and dark
The grave is yawning;—as its roof shall cover
My limbs with dust and worms, under and over,
So let oblivion hide this grief.
Julian and Maddalo.

With thee, the very future fled,
I stand amid the past alone;
A tomb which still shall guard the dead
Tho' every earthlier trace be flown,
A tomb o'er which the weeds that love
Decay—their wild luxuriance wreathe!
The cold and callous stone above—
And only thou and death beneath.

From Unpublished Poems by_____.

THE HISTORY OF SIR REGINALD GLANVILLE

"You remember my character at school—the difficulty with which you drew me from the visionary and abstracted loneliness which, even at that time, was more consonant to my taste, than all the sports and society resorted to by other boys—and the deep, and, to you, inexplicable delight with which I returned to my reveries and solitude again. That character has continued through life the same; circumstances have strengthened, not altered it. So has it been with you; the temper, the habits, the tastes, so strongly contrasted with mine in boyhood, have lost nothing of that contrast. Your ardour for the various ambition of life is still the antipodes to my indifference; your daring, restless, thoughtful, resolution in the pursuit, still shames my indolence and abstraction. You are still the votary of the world, but will become its conqueror—I its fugitive—and shall die its victim.

"After we parted at school, I went for a short time to a tutor's in— shire. Of this place I soon grew weary; and my father's death leaving me in a great measure at my own disposal, I lost no time in leaving it. I was seized with that mania for travel common enough to all persons of my youth and disposition. My mother allowed me an almost unlimited command over the fortune hereafter to be my own; and, yielding to my wishes, rather than her fears, she suffered me, at the age of eighteen, to set out for the Continent alone. Perhaps the quiet and reserve of my character made her think me less exposed to the dangers of youth, than if I had been of a more active and versatile temper. This is no uncommon mistake; a serious and contemplative disposition is, however, often the worst formed to acquire readily the knowledge of the world, and always the most calculated to suffer deeply from the experience.

"I took up my residence for some time at Spa. It is, you know, perhaps, a place dull enough to make gambling the only amusement; every one played— and I did not escape the contagion; nor did I wish it: for, like the minister Godolphin, I loved gaming for its own sake, because it was a substitute for conversation. This habit brought me acquainted with Mr. Tyrrell, who was then staying

at Spa; he had not, at that time, quite dissipated his fortune, but was daily progressing to so desirable a consummation. A gambler's acquaintance is readily made, and easily kept, provided you gamble too.

"We became as intimate as the reserve of my habits ever suffered me to become with any one, but you. He was many years older than me—had seen a great deal of the world—had mixed much in its best societies, and, at that time, whatever was the grossierete of his mind, had little of the coarseness of manner which very soon afterwards distinguished him; evil communication works rapidly in its results. Our acquaintance was, therefore, natural enough, especially when it is considered that my purse was entirely at his disposal—for borrowing is twice blessed, in him that takes and him that gives—the receiver becomes complaisant and conceding, and the lender thinks favourably of one he has obliged.

"We parted at Spa, under a mutual promise to write. I forget if this promise was kept—probably not; we were not, however, the worse friends for being bad correspondents. I continued my travels for about another year; I then returned to England, the same melancholy and dreaming enthusiast as before. It is true that we are the creatures of circumstances; but circumstances are also, in a great measure, the creatures of us. I mean, they receive their colour from the previous bent of our own minds; what raises one would depress another, and what vitiates my neighbour might correct me. Thus the experience of the world makes some persons more worldly—others more abstracted, and the indulgence of the senses becomes a violence to one mind, and a second nature to another. As for me, I had tasted all the pleasures youth and opulence can purchase, and was more averse to them than ever. I had mixed with many varieties of men—I was still more rivetted to the monotony of self.

"I cannot hope, while I mention these peculiarities, that I am a very uncommon character; I believe the present age has produced many such. Some time hence, it will be a curious inquiry to ascertain the causes of that acute and sensitive morbidity of mind, which has been, and still is, so epidemic a disease. You know me well enough to believe, that I am not fond of the cant of assuming an artificial character, or of creating a fictitious interest; and I am far from wishing to impose upon you a malady of constitution for a dignity of mind. You must pardon my prolixity. I own that it is very painful to me to come to the main part of my confessions, and I am endeavouring to prepare myself by lingering over the prelude."

Glanville paused here for a few moments. In spite of the sententious coolness with which he pretended to speak, I saw that he was powerfully and painfully affected.

"Well," he continued, "to resume the thread of my narrative; after I had stayed some weeks with my mother and sister, I took advantage of their departure for the continent, and resolved to make a tour through England. Rich people, and I have always been very rich, get exceedingly tired of the embarrassment of their riches. I seized with delight at the idea of travelling without carriages and servants; I took merely a favourite horse, and the black dog, poor Terror, which you see now at my feet.

"The day I commenced this plan was to me the epoch of a new and terrible existence. However, you must pardon me if I am not here sufficiently diffuse. Suffice it, that I became acquainted with a being whom, for the first and only time in my life, I loved! This miniature attempts to express her likeness; the initials at the back, interwoven with my own, are hers."

"Yes," said I, incautiously, "they are the initials of Gertrude Douglas."

"What!" cried Glanville, in a loud tone, which he instantly checked, and continued in an indrawn, muttered whisper: "How long is it since I heard that name! and now—now—" he broke off abruptly, and then said, with a calmer voice, "I know not how you have learnt her name; perhaps you will explain?"

"From Thornton," said I.

"And has he told you more?" cried Glanville, as if gasping for breath— the "history—the dreadful—"

"Not a word," said I, hastily; "he was with me when I found the picture, and he explained the initials."

"It is well!" answered Glanville, recovering himself; "you will see presently if I have reason to love that those foul and sordid lips should profane the story I am about to relate. Gertrude was an only daughter; though of gentle blood, she was no match for me, either in rank or fortune. Did I say just now that the world had not altered me? See my folly; one year before I saw her, and I should not have thought her, but myself honoured by a marriage;—twelve little months had sufficed to—God forgive me! I took advantage of her love—her youth—her innocence—she fled with me—but not to the altar!"

Again Glanville paused, and again, by a violent effort, conquered his emotion, and proceeded:

"Never let vice be done by halves—never let a man invest all his purer affections in the woman he ruins—never let him cherish the kindness, if he gratifies the selfishness, of his heart. A profligate, who really loves his victim, is one of the most wretched of beings. In spite of my successful and triumphant passion—in spite of the delirium of the first intoxication of possession, and of the better and deeper delight of a reciprocity of thought—feeling, sympathy, for the first time, found;—in the midst of all the luxuries my wealth could produce, and of the voluptuous and spring-like hues with which youth, health, and first love, clothe the earth which the loved one treads, and the air which she inhales: in spite of these, in spite of all, I was any thing but happy. If Gertrude's cheek seemed a shade more pale, or her eye less bright, I remembered the sacrifice she had made me, and believed that she felt it too. It was in vain, that, with a tender and generous devotion—never found but in woman—she assured me that my love was a recompense for all; the more touching was her tenderness, the more poignant my remorse. I never loved but her; I have never, therefore, entered into the common- place of passion, and I cannot, even to this day, look upon her sex as ours do in general. I thought, I think so still, that ingratitude to a woman is often a more odious offence—I am sure it contains a more painful penalty—than ingratitude to a man. But enough of this; if you know me, you can penetrate the nature of my feelings—if not, it is in vain to expect your sympathy.

"I never loved living long in one place. We travelled over the greater part of England and France. What must be the enchantment of love, when accompanied with innocence and joy, when, even in sin, in remorse, in grief, it brings us a rapture to which all other things are tame. Oh! those were moments steeped in the very elixir of life; overflowing with the hoarded fondness and sympathies of hearts too full for words, and yet too agitated for silence, when we journeyed alone, and at night, and as the shadows and stillness of the waning hours gathered round us, drew closer to each other, and concentrated this breathing world in the deep and embracing sentiment of our mutual love! It was then that I laid my burning temples on her bosom, and felt, while my hand clasped her's, that my visions were realized, and my wandering spirit had sunk unto its rest.

"I remember well that, one night, we were travelling through one of the most beautiful parts of England it was in the very height and flush of summer, and the moon (what scene of love—whether in reality, or romance- -has any thing of tenderness, or passion, or divinity, where her light is not!) filled the intense skies of June with her presence, and cast a sadder and paler beauty over Gertrude's cheek. She was always of a melancholy and despondent temper; perhaps, for that reason, she was more congenial to my own; and when I gazed upon her that night, I was not surprised to see her eyes filled with tears. "You will laugh at me," she said, as I kissed them off, and inquired into the cause; "but I feel a presentiment that I cannot shake off; it tells me that you will travel this road again before many months are past, and that I shall not be with you, perhaps not upon the earth." She was right in all her foreboding, but the suggestion of her death;—that came later.

"We took up our residence for some time at a beautiful situation, a short distance from a small watering place. Here, to my great surprise, I met with Tyrrell. He had come there partly to see a relation from whom he had some expectations, and partly to recruit his health, which was much broken by his irregularities and excesses. I could not refuse to renew my old acquaintance with him, and,

indeed, I thought him too much of a man of the world, and of society, to feel with him that particular delicacy, in regard to Gertrude, which made me in general shun all intercourse with my former friends. He was in great pecuniary embarrassment—much more deeply so than I then imagined; for I believed the embarrassment to be only temporary. However, my purse was then, as before, at his disposal, and he did not scruple to avail himself very largely of my offers. He came frequently to our house; and poor Gertrude, who thought I had, for her sake, made a real sacrifice in renouncing my acquaintance, endeavoured to conquer her usual diffidence, and that more painful feeling than diffidence, natural to her station, and even to affect a pleasure in the society of my friend, which she was very far from feeling.

"I was detained at—for several weeks by Gertrude's confinement. The child—happy being!—died a week after its birth. Gertrude was still in bed, and unable to leave it, when I received a letter from Ellen, to say, that my mother was then staying at Toulouse, and dangerously ill; if I wished once more to see her, Ellen besought me to lose no time in setting off for the continent. You may imagine my situation, or rather you cannot, for you cannot conceive the smallest particle of that intense love I bore to Gertrude. To you—to any other man, it might seem no extraordinary hardship to leave her even for an uncertain period—to me it was like tearing away the very life from my heart.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.