ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

DEVEREUX — VOLUME 04

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Devereux — Volume 04

Бульвер-Литтон Э. Д.

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton
Devereux — Volume 04

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

A RE-ENTRANCE INTO LIFE THROUGH THE EBON GATE, AFFLICTION

MONTHS passed away before my senses returned to me. I rose from the bed of suffering and of madness calm, collected, immovable,—altered, but tranquil. All the vigilance of justice had been employed to discover the murderers, but in vain. The packet was gone; and directly I, who alone was able to do so, recovered enough to state the loss of that document, suspicion naturally rested on Gerald, as on one whom that loss essentially benefited. He came publicly forward to anticipate inquiry. He proved that he had not stirred from home during the whole week in which the event had occurred. That seemed likely enough to others; it is the tools that work, not the instigator,—the bravo, not the employer; but I, who saw in him not only the robber, but that fearful rival who had long threatened Isora that my bridals should be stained with blood, was somewhat staggered by the undeniable proofs of his absence from the scene of that night; and I was still more bewildered in conjecture by remembering that, so far as their disguises and my own hurried and confused observation could allow me to judge, the person of neither villain, still less that of Isora's murderer, corresponded with the proportions and height of Gerald. Still, however, whether mediately or immediately—whether as the executor or the designer—not a doubt remained on my mind that against his head was justice due. I directed inquiry towards Montreuil: he was abroad at the time of my recovery; but, immediately on his return, he came forward boldly and at once to meet and even to court the inquiry I had instituted; he did more,—he demanded on what ground, besides my own word, it rested that this packet had ever been in my possession; and, to my surprise and perplexity, it was utterly impossible to produce the smallest trace of Mr. Marie Oswald. His half-brother, the attorney, had died, it is true, just before the event of that night; and it was also true that he had seen Marie on his death-bed; but no other corroboration of my story could be substantiated, and no other information of the man obtained; and the partisans of Gerald were not slow in hinting at the great interest I had in forging a tale respecting a will, about the authenticity of which I was at law.

The robbers had entered the house by a back-door, which was found open. No one had perceived their entrance or exit, except Desmarais, who stated that he heard a cry; that he, having spent the greater part of the night abroad, had not been in bed above an hour before he heard it; that he rose and hurried towards my room, whence the cry came; that he met two men masked on the stairs; that he seized one, who struck him in the breast with a poniard, dashed him to the ground, and escaped; that he then immediately alarmed the house, and, the servants accompanying him, he proceeded, despite his wound, to my apartment, where he found Isora and myself bleeding and lifeless, with the escritoire broken open.

The only contradiction to this tale was, that the officers of justice found the escritoire not broken open, but unlocked; and yet the key which belonged to it was found in a pocketbook in my clothes, where Desmarais said, rightly, I always kept it. How, then, had the escritoire been unlocked? it was supposed by the master-keys peculiar to experienced burglars; this diverted suspicion into a

new channel, and it was suggested that the robbery and the murder had really been committed by common housebreakers. It was then discovered that a large purse of gold, and a diamond cross, which the escritoire contained, were gone. And a few articles of ornamental /bijouterie/ which I had retained from the wreck of my former profusion in such baubles, and which were kept in a room below stairs, were also missing. The circumstances immediately confirmed the opinion of those who threw the guilt upon vulgar and mercenary villains, and a very probable and plausible supposition was built on this hypothesis. Might not this Oswald, at best an adventurer with an indifferent reputation, have forged this story of the packet in order to obtain admission into the house, and reconnoitre, during the confusion of a wedding, in what places the most portable articles of value were stowed? A thousand opportunities, in the opening and shutting of the house-doors, would have allowed an ingenious villain to glide in; nay, he might have secreted himself in my own room, and seen the place where I had put the packet: certain would he then be that I had selected for the repository of a document I believed so important that place where all that I most valued was secured; and hence he would naturally resolve to break open the escritoire, above all other places, which, to an uninformed robber, might have seemed not only less exposed to danger, but equally likely to contain articles of value. The same confusion which enabled him to enter and conceal himself would have also enabled him to withdraw and introduce his accomplice. This notion was rendered probable by his insisting so strongly on my not opening the packet within a certain time; had I opened it immediately, I might have perceived that a deceit had been practised, and not have hoarded it in that place of security which it was the villain's object to discover. Hence, too, in opening the escritoire, he would naturally retake the packet (which other plunderers might not have cared to steal), as well as things of more real price,—naturally retake it, in order that his previous imposition might not be detected, and that suspicion might be cast upon those who would appear to have an interest in stealing a packet which I believed to be so inestimably important.

What gave a still greater colour to this supposition was the fact that none of the servants had seen Oswald leave the house, though many had seen him enter. And what put his guilt beyond a doubt in the opinion of many, was his sudden and mysterious disappearance. To my mind, all these circumstances were not conclusive. Both the men seemed taller than Oswald; and I knew that that confusion which was so much insisted upon, had not—thanks to my singular fastidiousness in those matters—existed. I was also perfectly convinced that Oswald could not have been hidden in my room while I locked up the packet; and there was something in the behaviour of the murderer utterly unlike that of a common robber actuated by common motives.

All these opposing arguments were, however, of a nature to be deemed nugatory by the world; and on the only one of any importance in their estimation, namely, the height of Oswald being different from that of the robbers, it was certainly very probable that, in a scene so dreadful, so brief, so confused, I should easily be mistaken. Having therefore once flowed in this direction, public opinion soon settled into the full conviction that Oswald was the real criminal, and against Oswald was the whole strength of inquiry ultimately, but still vainly, bent. Some few, it is true, of that kind class who love family mysteries, and will not easily forego the notion of a brother's guilt for that of a mere vulgar housebreaker, still shook their heads and talked of Gerald; but the suspicion was vague and partial, and it was only in the close gossip of private circles that it was audibly vented.

I had formed an opinion by no means favourable to the innocence of Mr. Jean Desmarais; and I took especial care that the Necessitarian, who would only have thought robbery and murder pieces of ill-luck, should undergo a most rigorous examination. I remembered that he had seen me put the packet into the escritoire; and this circumstance was alone sufficient to arouse my suspicion. Desmarais bared his breast gracefully to the magistrate. "Would a man, Sir," he said, "a man of my youth, suffer such a scar as that, if he could help it?" The magistrate laughed: frivolity is often a rogue's best policy, if he did but know it. One finds it very difficult to think a coxcomb can commit robbery and murder. Howbeit Desmarais came off triumphantly; and immediately after this examination,

which had been his second one, and instigated solely at my desire, he came to me with a blush of virtuous indignation on his thin cheeks. "He did not presume," he said, with a bow profounder than ever, "to find fault with Monsieur le Comte; it was his fate to be the victim of ungrateful suspicion: but philosophical truths could not always conquer the feelings of the man, and he came to request his dismissal." I gave it him with pleasure.

I must now state my own feelings on the matter; but I shall do so briefly. In my own mind, I repeat, I was fully impressed with the conviction that Gerald was the real and the head criminal; and thrice did I resolve to repair to Devereux Court, where he still resided, to lie in wait for him, to reproach him with his guilt, and at the sword's point in deadly combat to seek its earthly expiation. I spare the reader a narration of the terrible struggles which nature, conscience, all scruples and prepossessions of education and of blood, held with this resolution, the unholiness of which I endeavoured to clothe with the name of justice to Isora. Suffice it to say that this resolution I forewent at last; and I did so more from a feeling that, despite my own conviction of Gerald's guilt, one rational doubt rested upon the circumstance that the murderer seemed to my eyes of an inferior height to Gerald, and that the person whom I had pursued on the night I had received that wound which brought Isora to my bedside, and who, it was natural to believe, was my rival, appeared to me not only also slighter and shorter than Gerald, but of a size that seemed to tally with the murderer's.

This solitary circumstance, which contradicted my other impressions, was, I say, more effectual in making me dismiss the thought of personal revenge on Gerald than the motives which virtue and religion should have dictated. The deep desire of vengeance is the calmest of all the passions, and it is the one which most demands certainty to the reason, before it releases its emotions and obeys their dictates. The blow which was to do justice to Isora I had resolved should not be dealt till I had obtained the most utter certainty that it fell upon the true criminal. And thus, though I cherished through all time and through all change the burning wish for retribution, I was doomed to cherish it in secret, and not for years and years to behold a hope of attaining it. Once only I vented my feelings upon Gerald. I could not rest or sleep or execute the world's objects till I had done so; but when they were thus once vented, methought I could wait the will of time with a more settled patience, and I re-entered upon the common career of life more externally fitted to fulfil its duties and its aims.

That single indulgence of emotion followed immediately after my resolution of not forcing Gerald into bodily contest. I left my sword, lest I might be tempted to forget my determination. I rode to Devereux Court; I entered Gerald's chamber, while my horse stood unstalled at the gate. I said but few words, but each word was a volume. I told him to enjoy the fortune he had acquired by fraud, and the conscience he had stained with murder. "Enjoy them while you may," I said, "but know that sooner or later shall come a day when the blood that cries from earth shall be heard in Heaven,—and /your/ blood shall appease it. Know, if I seem to disobey the voice at my heart, I hear it night and day; and I only live to fulfil at one time its commands."

I left him stunned and horror-stricken. I flung myself on my horse, and cast not a look behind as I rode from the towers and domains of which I had been despoiled. Never from that time would I trust myself to meet or see the despoiler. Once, directly after I had thus braved him in his usurped hall, he wrote to me. I returned the letter unopened. Enough of this: the reader will now perceive what was the real nature of my feelings of revenge; and will appreciate the reasons which throughout this history will cause me never or rarely to recur to those feelings again, until at least he will perceive a just hope of their consummation.

I went with a quiet air and a set brow into the world. It was a time of great political excitement. Though my creed forbade me the open senate, it could not deprive me of the veiled intrigue. St. John found ample employment for my ambition; and I entered into the toils and objects of my race with a seeming avidity more eager and engrossing than their own. In what ensues, you will perceive a great change in the character of my memoirs. Hitherto, I chiefly portrayed to you /myself/. I bared open to you my heart and temper,—my passions, and the thoughts which belong to our passions. I shall now

rather bring before you the natures and the minds of others. The lover and the dreamer are no more! The satirist and the observer; the derider of human follies, participating while he derides; the worldly and keen actor in the human drama,—these are what the district of my history on which you enter will portray me. From whatever pangs to me the change may have been wrought, you will be the gainer by that change. The gaudy dissipation of courts; the vicissitudes and the vanities of those who haunt them; the glittering jest and the light strain; the passing irony or the close reflection; the characters of the great; the colloquies of wit,—these are what delight the temper, and amuse the leisure more than the solemn narrative of fated love. As the monster of the Nile is found beneath the sunniest banks and in the most freshening wave, the stream may seem to wander on in melody and mirth,—the ripple and the beam; but /who/ shall tell what lurks, dark, and fearful, and ever vigilant, below!

CHAPTER II

AMBITIOUS PROJECTS

IT is not my intention to write a political history, instead of a private biography. No doubt in the next century there will be volumes enough written in celebration of that era which my contemporaries are pleased to term the greatest that in modern times has ever existed. Besides, in the private and more concealed intrigues with which I was engaged with St. John, there was something which regard for others would compel me to preserve in silence. I shall therefore briefly state that in 1712 St. John dignified the peerage by that title which his exile and his genius have rendered so illustrious.

I was with him on the day this honour was publicly announced. I found him walking to and fro his room, with his arms folded, and with a very peculiar compression of his nether lip, which was a custom he had when anything greatly irritated or disturbed him.

"Well," said he, stopping abruptly as he saw me,—"well, considering the peacock Harley brought so bright a plume to his own nest, we must admire the generosity which spared this gay dunghill feather to mine!"

"How?" said I, though I knew the cause of his angry metaphor. St. John used metaphors in speech scarcely less than in writing.

"How?" cried the new peer, eagerly, and with one of those flashing looks which made his expression of indignation the most powerful I ever saw; "how! Was the sacred promise granted to me of my own collateral earldom to be violated; and while the weight, the toil, the difficulty, the odium of affairs, from which Harley, the despotic dullard, shrank alike in imbecility and fear, had been left exclusively to my share, an insult in the shape of an honour to be left exclusively to my reward? You know my disposition is not to overrate the mere baubles of ambition; you know I care little for titles and for orders in themselves: but the most worthless thing becomes of consequence if made a symbol of what is of value, or designed as the token of an affront. Listen: a collateral earldom falls vacant; it is partly promised me. Suddenly I am dragged from the House of Commons, where I am all powerful; I am given—not this earldom, which, as belonging to my house, would alone have induced me to consent to a removal from a sphere where my enemies allow I had greater influence than any single commoner in the kingdom,—I am given, not this, but a miserable compromise of distinction, a new and an inferior rank; given it against my will; thrust into the Upper House to defend what this pompous driveller, Oxford, is forced to forsake; and not only exposed to all the obloquy of a most infuriate party opposed to me, but mortified by an intentional affront from the party which, heart and soul, I have supported. You know that my birth is to the full as noble as Harley's; you know that my influence in the Lower House is far greater; you know that my name in the country, nay, throughout Europe, is far more popular; you know that the labour allotted to me has been far more weighty; you know that the late Peace of Utrecht is entirely my framing, that the foes to the measure direct all their venom against me, that the friends of the measure heap upon me all the honour: when, therefore, this exact time is chosen for breaking a promise formerly made to me; when a pretended honour, known to be most unpalatable to me, is thrust upon me; when, at this very time, too, six vacant ribbons of the garter flaunt by me,—one resting on the knee of this Harley, who was able to obtain an earldom for himself,—the others given to men of far inferior pretensions, though not inferior rank to my own, —myself markedly, glaringly passed by: how can I avoid feeling that things despicable in themselves are become of a vital power, from the evident intention that they should be insults to me? The insects we despise as they buzz around us become dangerous when they settle on ourselves and we feel their sting! But," added Bolingbroke, suddenly relapsing into a smile, "I have long wanted a nickname: I have now found one for myself. You know Oxford is called 'The Dragon;' well, henceforth call me

'St. George;' for, as sure as I live, will I overthrow the Dragon. I say this in jest, but I mean it in earnest. And now that I have discharged my bile, let us talk of this wonderful poem, which, though I have read it a hundred times, I am never wearied of admiring."

"Ah—'The Rape of the Lock'. It is indeed beautiful, but I am not fond of poetry now. By the way, how is it that all our modern poets speak to the taste, the mind, the judgment, and never to the /feelings/? Are they right in doing so?"

"My friend, we are now in a polished age. What have feelings to do with civilization?"

"Why, more than you will allow. Perhaps the greater our civilization, the more numerous our feelings. Our animal passions lose in excess, but our mental gain; and it is to the mental that poetry should speak. Our English muse, even in this wonderful poem, seems to me to be growing, like our English beauties, too glitteringly artificial: it wears /rouge/ and a hoop!"

"Ha! ha!—yes, they ornament now, rather than create; cut drapery, rather than marble. Our poems remind me of the ancient statues. Phidias made them, and Bubo and Bombax dressed them in purple. But this does not apply to young Pope, who has shown in this very poem that he can work the quarry as well as choose the gems. But see, the carriage awaits us. I have worlds to do; first there is Swift to see; next, there is some exquisite Burgundy to taste; then, too, there is the new actress: and, by the by, you must tell me what you think of Bentley's Horace; we will drive first to my bookseller's to see it; Swift shall wait; Heavens! how he would rage if he heard me. I was going to say what a pity it is that that man should have so much littleness of vanity; but I should have uttered a very foolish sentiment if I had!"

"And why?"

"Because, if he had not so much littleness perhaps he would not be so great: what but vanity makes a man write and speak, and slave, and become famous? Alas!" and here St. John's countenance changed from gayety to thought; "'tis a melancholy thing in human nature that so little is good and noble, both in itself and in its source! Our very worst passions will often produce sublimer effects than our best. Phidias (we will apply to him for another illustration) made the wonderful statue of Minerva for his country; but, in order to avenge himself on that country, he eclipsed it in the far more wonderful statue of the Jupiter Olympius. Thus, from a vicious feeling emanated a greater glory than from an exalted principle; and the artist was less celebrated for the monument of his patriotism than for that of his revenge! But, /allons, mon cher/, we grow wise and dull. Let us go to choose our Burgundy and our comrades to share it."

However with his characteristic affectation of bounding ambition, and consequently hope, to no one object in particular, and of mingling affairs of light importance with those of the most weighty, Lord Bolingbroke might pretend not to recur to, or to dwell upon, his causes of resentment, from that time they never ceased to influence him to a great, and for a statesman an unpardonable, degree. We cannot, however, blame politicians for their hatred, until, without hating anybody, we have for a long time been politicians ourselves; strong minds have strong passions, and men of strong passions must hate as well as love.

The next two years passed, on my part, in perpetual intrigues of diplomacy, combined with an unceasing though secret endeavour to penetrate the mystery which hung over the events of that dreadful night. All, however, was m vain. I know not what the English police may be hereafter, but, in my time, its officers seem to be chosen, like honest Dogberry's companions, among "the most senseless and fit men." They are, however, to the full, as much knaves as fools; and perhaps a wiser posterity will scarcely believe that, when things of the greatest value are stolen, the owners, on applying to the chief magistrate, will often be told that no redress can be given there, while one of the officers will engage to get back the goods, upon paying the thieves a certain sum in exchange: if this is refused, your effects are gone forever! A pretty state of internal government!

It was about a year after the murder that my mother informed me of an event which tore from my heart its last private tie; namely, the death of Aubrey. The last letter I had received from him

has been placed before the reader; it was written at Devereux Court, just before he left it forever. Montreuil had been with him during the illness which proved fatal, and which occurred in Ireland. He died of consumption; and when I heard from my mother that Montreuil dwelt most glowingly upon the devotion he had manifested during the last months of his life, I could not help fearing that the morbidity of his superstition had done the work of physical disease. On this fatal news, my mother retired from Devereux Court to a company of ladies of our faith, who resided together, and practised the most ascetic rules of a nunnery, though they gave not to their house that ecclesiastical name. My mother had long meditated this project, and it was now a melancholy pleasure to put it into execution. From that period I rarely heard from her, and by little and little she so shrank from all worldly objects that my visits, and I believe even those of Gerald, became unwelcome and distasteful.

As to my lawsuit, it went on gloriously, according to the assertions of my brisk little lawyer, who had declared so emphatically that he liked making quick work of a suit. And, at last, what with bribery and feeing and pushing, a day was fixed for the final adjustment of my claim. It came—the cause was heard and lost! I should have been ruined, but for one circumstance; the old lady, my father's godmother, who had witnessed my first and concealed marriage, left me a pretty estate near Epsom. I turned it into gold, and it was fortunate that I did so soon, as the reader is about to see.

The queen died; and a cloud already began to look menacing to the eyes of the Viscount Bolingbroke, and therefore to those of the Count Devereux. "We will weather out the shower," said Bolingbroke.

"Could not you," said I, "make our friend Oxford the Talapat?"[1] and Bolingbroke laughed. All men find wit in the jests broken on their enemies!

One morning, however, I received a laconic note from him, which, notwithstanding its shortness and seeming gayety, I knew well signified that something not calculated for laughter had occurred. I went, and found that his new Majesty had deprived him of the seals and secured his papers. We looked very blank at each other. At last, Bolingbroke smiled. I must say that, culpable as he was in some points as a politician,—culpable, not from being ambitious (for I would not give much for the statesman who is otherwise), but from not having inseparably linked his ambition to the welfare of his country, rather than to that of a party; for, despite of what has been said of him, his ambition was never selfish,—culpable as he was when glory allured him, he was most admirable when danger assailed him![2] and, by the shade of that Tully whom he so idolized, his philosophy was the most conveniently worn of any person's I ever met. When it would have been in the way—at the supper of an actress, in the /levees/ of a court, in the boudoir of a beauty, in the arena of the senate, in the intrigue of the cabinet—you would not have observed a seam of the good old garment. But directly

[1] A thing used by the Siamese for the same purpose as we now use the umbrella. A work descriptive of Siam, by M. de la Loubere, in which the Talapat is somewhat minutely described, having been translated into English, and having excited some curiosity, a few years before Count Devereux now uses the word, the allusion was probably familiar.—ED.

[2] I know well that it has been said otherwise, and that Bolingbroke has been accused of timidity for not staying in England, and making Mr. Robert Walpole a present of his head. The elegant author of "De Vere" has fallen into a very great though a very hackneyed error, in lauding Oxford's political character, and condemning Bolingbroke's, because the former awaited a trial and the latter shunned it. A very little reflection might perhaps have taught the accomplished novelist that there could be no comparison between the two cases, because there was no comparison between the relative danger of Oxford and Bolingbroke. Oxford, as their subsequent impeachment proved, was far more numerously and powerfully supported than his illustrious enemy: and there is really no earthly cause for doubting the truth of Bolingbroke's assertion; namely, that "He had received repeated and certain information that a resolution was taken, by those who had power to execute it, to pursue him to the scaffold." There are certain situations in which a brave and a good man should willingly surrender life—but I humbly opine that there may sometimes exist a situation in which he should preserve it; and if ever man was placed in that latter situation, it was Lord Bolingbroke. To choose unnecessarily to put one's head under the axe, without benefiting any but one's enemies by the act, is, in my eyes, the proof of a fool, not a hero; and to attack a man for not placing his head in that agreeable and most useful predicament—for preferring, in short, to live for a world, rather than to perish by a faction—appears to be a mode of arguing that has a wonderful resemblance to nonsense. When Lord Bolingbroke was impeached, two men only out of those numerous retainers in the Lower House who had been wont so loudly to applaud the secretary of state, in his prosecution of those very measures for which he was now to be condemned,—two men only, General Ross and Mr. Hungerford, uttered a single syllable in defence of the minister disgraced.—ED.

it was wanted—in the hour of pain, in the day of peril, in the suspense of exile, in (worst of all) the torpor of tranquillity—my extraordinary friend unfolded it piece by piece, wrapped himself up in it, sat down, defied the world, and uttered the most beautiful sentiments upon the comfort and luxury of his raiment, that can possibly be imagined. It used to remind me, that same philosophy of his, of the enchanted tent in the Arabian Tale, which one moment lay wrapped in a nut-shell, and the next covered an army.

Bolingbroke smiled, and quoted Cicero, and after an hour's conversation, which on his part was by no means like that of a person whose very head was in no enviable state of safety, he slid at once from a sarcasm upon Steele into a discussion as to the best measures to be adopted. Let me be brief on this point. Throughout the whole of that short session, he behaved in a manner more delicately and profoundly wise than, I think, the whole of his previous administration can equal. He sustained with the most unflagging, the most unwearied, dexterity, the sinking spirits of his associates. Without an act, or the shadow of an act, that could be called time-serving, he laid himself out to conciliate the king, and to propitiate Parliament; with a dignified prudence which, while it seemed above petty pique, was well calculated to remove the appearance of that disaffection with which he was charged, and discriminated justly between the king and the new administration, he lent his talents to the assistance of the monarch by whom his impeachment was already resolved on, and aided in the settlement of the civil list while he was in full expectation of a criminal accusation.

The new Parliament met, and all doubt was over. An impeachment of the late administration was decided upon. I was settling bills with my little lawyer one morning, when Bolingbroke entered my room. He took a chair, nodded to me not to dismiss my assistant, joined our conversation, and when conversation was merged in accounts, he took up a book of songs, and amused himself with it till my business was over and my disciple of Coke retired. He then said, very slowly, and with a slight yawn, "You have never been at Paris, I think?"

"Never: you are enchanted with that gay city."

"Yes, but when I was last there, the good people flattered my vanity enough to bribe my taste. I shall be able to form a more unbiased and impartial judgment in a few days."

"A few days!"

"Ay, my dear Count: does it startle you? I wonder whether the pretty De Tencin will be as kind to me as she was, and whether /tout le monde/ (that most exquisite phrase for five hundred people) will rise now at the Opera on my entrance. Do you think that a banished minister can have any, the smallest resemblance to what he was when in power? By Gumdragon, as our friend Swift so euphoniously and elegantly says, or swears, by Gumdragon, I think not! What altered Satan so after his fall? what gave him horns and a tail? Nothing but his disgrace. Oh! years, and disease, plague, pestilence, and famine never alter a man so much as the loss of power."

"You say wisely; but what am I to gather from your words? is it all over with us in real earnest?"

"Us! with /me/ it is indeed all over: /you/ may stay here forever. I must fly: a packet-boat to Calais, or a room in the Tower, I must choose between the two. I had some thoughts of remaining and confronting my trial: but it would be folly; there is a difference between Oxford and me. He has friends, though out of power: I have none. If they impeach him, he will escape; if they impeach me, they will either shut me up like a rat in a cage, for twenty years, till, old and forgotten, I tear my heart out with my confinement, or they will bring me at once to the block. No, no: I must keep myself for another day; and, while they banish me, I will leave the seeds of the true cause to grow up till my return. Wise and exquisite policy of my foes,—'/Frustra Cassium amovisti, si gliscere et vigere Brutorum emulos passurus es.'[3] But I have no time to lose: farewell, my friend; God bless you; you are saved from these storms; and even intolerance, which prevented the exercise of your genius, preserves you now from the danger of having applied that genius to the welfare of your country.

[3] "Vainly have you banished Cassius, if you shall suffer the rivals of the Brutuses to spread themselves and flourish."

Heaven knows, whatever my faults, I have sacrificed what I loved better than all things—study and pleasure—to her cause. In her wars I served even my enemy Marlborough, in order to serve her; her peace I effected, and I suffer for it. Be it so, I am

"'Fidens animi atque in utrumque paratus.'[4]

"Once more I embrace you; farewell."

"Nay," said I, "listen to me; you shall not go alone. France is already, in reality, my native country: there did I receive my birth; it is no hardship to return to my /natale solum/; it is an honour to return in the company of Henry St. John. I will have no refusal: my law case is over; my papers are few; my money I will manage to transfer. Remember the anecdote you told me yesterday of Anaxagoras, who, when asked where his country was, pointed with his finger to heaven. It is applicable, I hope, as well to me as to yourself: to me, uncelebrated and obscure; to you, the senator and the statesman."

In vain Bolingbroke endeavoured to dissuade me from this resolution; he was the only friend fate had left me, and I was resolved that misfortune should not part us. At last he embraced me tenderly, and consented to what he could not resist. "But you cannot," he said, "quit England to-morrow night, as I must."

"Pardon me," I answered, "the briefer the preparation, the greater the excitement, and what in life is equal to /that/?"

"True," answered Bolingbroke; "to some natures, too restless to be happy, excitement can compensate for all,—compensate for years wasted, and hopes scattered,—compensate for bitter regret at talents perverted and passions unrestrained. But we will talk philosophically when we have more leisure. You will dine with me to-morrow: we will go to the play together; I promised poor Lucy that I would see her at the theatre, and I cannot break my word; and an hour afterwards we will commence our excursion to Paris. And now I will explain to you the plan I have arranged for our escape."

[4] "Confident of soul and prepared for either fortune."

CHAPTER III

THE REAL ACTORS SPECTATORS TO THE FALSE ONES

IT was a brilliant night at the theatre. The boxes were crowded to excess. Every eye was directed towards Lord Bolingbroke, who, with his usual dignified and consummate grace of manner, conversed with the various loiterers with whom, from time to time, his box was filled.

"Look yonder," said a very young man, of singular personal beauty, "look yonder, my Lord, what a panoply of smiles the Duchess wears to-night, and how triumphantly she directs those eyes, which they say were once so beautiful, to your box."

"Ah," said Bolingbroke, "her Grace does me too much honour: I must not neglect to acknowledge her courtesy; "and, leaning over the box, Bolingbroke watched his opportunity till the Duchess of Marlborough, who sat opposite to him, and who was talking with great and evidently joyous vivacity to a tall, thin man, beside her, directed her attention, and that of her whole party, in a fixed and concentrated stare, to the imperilled minister. With a dignified smile Lord Bolingbroke then put his hand to his heart, and bowed profoundly; the Duchess looked a little abashed, but returned the courtesy quickly and slightly, and renewed her conversation.

"Faith, my Lord," cried the young gentleman who had before spoken, "you managed that well! No reproach is like that which we clothe in a smile, and present with a bow."

"I am happy," said Lord Bolingbroke, "that my conduct receives the grave support of a son of my political opponent."

"/Grave/ support, my Lord! you are mistaken: never apply the epithet grave to anything belonging to Philip Wharton. But, in sober earnest, I have sat long enough with you to terrify all my friends, and must now show my worshipful face in another part of the house. Count Devereux, will you come with me to the Duchess's?"

"What! the Duchess's immediately after Lord Bolingbroke's!—the Whig after the Tory: it would be as trying to one's assurance as a change from the cold bath to the hot to one's constitution."

"Well, and what so delightful as a trial in which one triumphs? and a change in which one does not lose even one's countenance?"

"Take care, my Lord," said Bolingbroke, laughing; "those are dangerous sentiments for a man like you, to whom the hopes of two great parties are directed, to express so openly, even on a trifle and in a jest."

"'Tis for that reason I utter them. I like being the object of hope and fear to men, since my miserable fortune made me marry at fourteen, and cease to be aught but a wedded thing to the women. But sup with me at the Bedford,—you, my Lord, and the Count."

"And you will ask Walpole, Addison, and Steele,[5] to join us, eh?" said Bolingbroke. "No, we have other engagements for to-night; but we shall meet again soon."

And the eccentric youth nodded his adieu, disappeared, and a minute afterwards was seated by the side of the Duchess of Marlborough.

"There goes a boy," said Bolingbroke, "who, at the age of fifteen, has in him the power to be the greatest man of his day, and in all probability will only be the most singular. An obstinate man is sure of doing well; a wavering or a whimsical one (which is the same thing) is as uncertain, even in his elevation, as a shuttlecock. But look to the box at the right: do you see the beautiful Lady Mary?"

"Yes," said Mr. Trefusis, who was with us, "she has only just come to town. 'Tis said she and Ned Montagu live like doves."

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[5] All political opponents of Lord Bolingbroke.

"How!" said Lord Bolingbroke; "that quick, restless eye seems to have very little of the dove in it."

"But how beautiful she is!" said Trefusis, admiringly. "What a pity that those exquisite hands should be so dirty! It reminds me" (Trefusis loved a coarse anecdote) "of her answer to old Madame de Noailles, who made exactly the same remark to her. 'Do you call my hands dirty?' cried Lady Mary, holding them up with the most innocent /naivete/. 'Ah, Madame, /si vous pouviez voir mes pieds!'"

"/Fi donc/," said I, turning away; "but who is that very small, deformed man behind her,—he with the bright black eye?"

"Know you not?" said Bolingbroke; "tell it not in Gath!—'tis a rising sun, whom I have already learned to worship,—the young author of the 'Essay on Criticism,' and 'The Rape of the Lock.' Egad, the little poet seems to eclipse us with the women as much as with the men. Do you mark how eagerly Lady Mary listens to him, even though the tall gentleman in black, who in vain endeavours to win her attentions, is thought the handsomest gallant in London? Ah, Genius is paid by smiles from all females but Fortune; little, methinks, does that young poet, in his first intoxication of flattery and fame, guess what a lot of contest and strife is in store for him. The very breath which a literary man respires is hot with hatred, and the youthful proselyte enters that career which seems to him so glittering, even as Dame Pliant's brother in the 'Alchemist' entered town,—not to be fed with luxury, and diet on pleasure, but 'to learn to quarrel and live by his wits.'"

The play was now nearly over. With great gravity Lord Bolingbroke summoned one of the principal actors to his box, and bespoke a play for the next week; leaning then on my arm, he left the theatre. We hastened to his home, put on our disguises, and, without any adventure worth recounting, effected our escape and landed safely at Calais.

CHAPTER IV

PARIS.—A FEMALE POLITICIAN AND AN ECCLESIASTICAL ONE.—SUNDRY OTHER MATTERS

THE ex-minister was received both at Calais and at Paris with the most gratifying honours: he was then entirely the man to captivate the French. The beauty of his person, the grace of his manner, his consummate taste in all things, the exceeding variety and sparkling vivacity of his conversation, enchanted them. In later life he has grown more reserved and profound, even in habitual intercourse; and attention is now fixed to the solidity of the diamond, as at that time one was too dazzled to think of anything but its brilliancy.

While Bolingbroke was receiving visits of state, I busied myself in inquiring after a certain Madame de Balzac. The reader will remember that the envelope of that letter which Oswald had brought to me at Devereux Court was signed by the letters C. de B. Now, when Oswald disappeared, after that dreadful night to which even now I can scarcely bring myself to allude, these initials occurred to my remembrance, and Oswald having said they belonged to a lady formerly intimate with my father, I inquired of my mother if she could guess to what French lady such initials would apply. She, with an evident pang of jealousy, mentioned a Madame de Balzac; and to this lady I now resolved to address myself, with the faint hope of learning from her some intelligence respecting Oswald. It was not difficult to find out the abode of one who in her day had played no inconsiderable role in that 'Comedy of Errors,'—the Great World. She was still living at Paris: what Frenchwoman would, if she could help it, live anywhere else? "There are a hundred gates," said the witty Madame de Choisi to me, "which lead into Paris, but only two roads out of it,—the convent, or (odious word!) the grave."

I hastened to Madame Balzac's hotel. I was ushered through three magnificent apartments into one which to my eyes seemed to contain a throne: upon a nearer inspection I discovered it was a bed. Upon a large chair, by a very bad fire—it was in the month of March—sat a tall, handsome woman, excessively painted, and dressed in a manner which to my taste, accustomed to English finery, seemed singularly plain. I had sent in the morning to request permission to wait on her, so that she was prepared for my visit. She rose, offered me her cheek, kissed mine, shed several tears, and in short testified a great deal of kindness towards me. Old ladies who have flirted with our fathers always seem to claim a sort of property in the sons!

Before she resumed her seat she held me out at arm's length.

"You have a family likeness to your brave father," said she, with a little disappointment; "but—"

"Madame de Balzac would add," interrupted I, filling up the sentence which I saw her /bienveillance/ had made her break off, "Madame de Balzac would add that I am not so good-looking. It is true: the likeness is transmitted to me within rather than without; and if I have not my father's privilege to be admired, I have at least his capacities to admire," and I bowed.

Madame de Balzac took three large pinches of snuff. "That is very well said," said she, gravely: "very well indeed! not at all like your father, though, who never paid a compliment in his life. Your clothes, by the by, are in exquisite taste: I had no idea that English people had arrived at such perfection in the fine arts. Your face is a little too long! You admire Racine, of course? How do you like Paris?"

All this was not said gayly or quickly: Madame de Balzac was by no means a gay or a quick person. She belonged to a peculiar school of Frenchwomen, who affected a little languor, a great deal of stiffness, an indifference to forms when forms were to be used by themselves, and an unrelaxing demand of forms when forms were to be observed to them by others. Added to this, they talked plainly upon all matters, without ever entering upon sentiment. This was the school she belonged to; but she possessed the traits of the individual as well as of the species. She was keen, ambitious, worldly, not

unaffectionate nor unkind; very proud, a little of the devotee,—because it was the fashion to be so,—an enthusiastic admirer of military glory, and a most prying, searching, intriguing schemer of politics without the slightest talent for the science.

"Like Paris!" said I, answering only the last question, and that not with the most scrupulous regard to truth. "Can Madame de Balzac think of Paris, and not conceive the transport which must inspire a person entering it for the first time? But I had something more endearing than a stranger's interest to attach me to it: I longed to express to my father's friend my gratitude for the interest which I venture to believe she on one occasion manifested towards me."

"Ah! you mean my caution to you against that terrible De Montreuil.

Yes, I trust I was of service to you /there/."

And Madame de Balzac then proceeded to favour me with the whole history of the manner in which she had obtained the letter she had sent me, accompanied by a thousand anathemas against those /atroces Jesuites/ and a thousand eulogies on her own genius and virtues. I brought her from this subject so interesting to herself, as soon as decorum would allow me; and I then made inquiry if she knew aught of Oswald or could suggest any mode of obtaining intelligence respecting him. Madame de Balzac hated plain, blunt, blank questions, and she always travelled through a wilderness of parentheses before she answered them. But at last I did ascertain her answer, and found it utterly unsatisfactory. She had never seen nor heard anything of Oswald since he had left her charged with her commission to me. I then questioned her respecting the character of the man, and found Mr. Marie Oswald had little to plume himself upon in that respect. He seemed, however, from her account of him, to be more a rogue than a villain; and from two or three stories of his cowardice, which Madame de Balzac related, he appeared to me utterly incapable of a design so daring and systematic as that of which it pleased all persons who troubled themselves about my affairs to suspect him.

Finding at last that no further information was to be gained on this point, I turned the conversation to Montreuil. I found, from Madame de Balzac's very abuse of him, that he enjoyed a great reputation in the country and a great favour at court. He had been early befriended by Father la Chaise, and he was now especially trusted and esteemed by the successor of that Jesuit Le Tellier,—Le Tellier, that rigid and bigoted servant of Loyola, the sovereign of the king himself, the destroyer of the Port Royal, and the mock and terror of the bedevilled and persecuted Jansenists. Besides this, I learned what has been before pretty clearly evident; namely, that Montreuil was greatly in the confidence of the Chevalier, and that he was supposed already to have rendered essential service to the Stuart cause. His reputation had increased with every year, and was as great for private sanctity as for political talent.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.