

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**PELHAM — VOLUME
02**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Pelham — Volume 02

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Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton

Pelham — Volume 02

CHAPTER XIX

*Alea sequa vorax species certissima furti
Non contenta bonis, animum quoque perfida mergit;—
Furca, furax—infamis, iners, furiosa, ruina.*

Petrarch: Dial.

I dined the next day at the Freres Provencaux; an excellent restaurateur's, by-the-by, where one gets irreproachable gibier, and meets no English. After dinner, I strolled into the various gambling houses, with which the Palais Royal abounds.

In one of these, the crowd and heat were so great, that I should immediately have retired if I had not been struck with the extreme and intense expression of interest in the countenance of one of the spectators at the rouge et noir table. He was a man about forty years of age; his complexion was dark and sallow; the features prominent, and what are generally called handsome; but there was a certain sinister expression in his eyes and mouth, which rendered the effect of his physiognomy rather disagreeable than prepossessing. At a small distance from him, and playing, with an air which, in its carelessness and nonchalance, formed a remarkable contrast to the painful anxiety of the man I have just described, sat Mr. Thornton.

At first sight, these two appeared to be the only Englishmen present besides myself; I was more struck by seeing the former in that scene, than I was at meeting Thornton there; for there was something distingue in the mien of the stranger, which suited far worse with the appearance of the place, than the bourgeois air and dress of my ci-devant second.

"What! another Englishman?" thought I, as I turned round and perceived a thick, rough great coat, which could possibly belong to no continental shoulders. The wearer was standing directly opposite the seat of the swarthy stranger; his hat was slouched over his face; I moved in order to get a clearer view of his countenance. It was the same person I had seen with Thornton that morning. Never to this moment have I forgotten the stern and ferocious expression with which he was gazing upon the keen and agitated features of the gambler opposite. In the eye and lip there was neither pleasure, hatred, nor scorn, in their simple and unalloyed elements; but each seemed blent and mingled into one deadly concentration of evil passions.

This man neither played, nor spoke, nor moved. He appeared utterly insensible of every feeling in common with those around. There he stood, wrapt in his own dark and inscrutable thoughts, never, for one instant, taking his looks from the varying countenance which did not observe their gaze, nor altering the withering character of their almost demoniacal expression. I could not tear myself from the spot. I felt chained by some mysterious and undefinable interest; my attention was first diverted into a new channel, by a loud exclamation from the dark visaged gambler at the table; it was the first he had uttered, notwithstanding his anxiety; and, from the deep, thrilling tone in which it was expressed, it conveyed a keen sympathy with the overcharged feelings which it burst from.

With a trembling hand, he took from an old purse the few Napoleons that were still left there. He set them all at one hazard, on the rouge. He hung over the table with a dropping lip; his hands were tightly clasped in each other; his nerves seemed strained into the last agony of excitement. I ventured to raise my eyes upon the gaze, which I felt must still be upon the gambler—there it was fixed, and stern as before; but it now conveyed a deeper expression of joy than of the other passions which were

there met. Yet a joy so malignant and fiendish, that no look of mere anger or hatred could have so chilled my heart. I dropped my eyes. I redoubled my attention to the cards—the last two were to be turned up. A moment more!—the fortune was to the noir. The stranger had lost! He did not utter a single word. He looked with a vacant eye on the long mace, with which the marker had swept away his last hopes, with his last coin, and then, rising, left the room, and disappeared.

The other Englishman was not long in following him. He uttered a short, low, laugh, unobserved, perhaps, by any one but myself; and, pushing through the atmosphere of sacres and mille tonnerres, which filled that pandaemonium, strode quickly to the door. I felt as if a load had been taken from my bosom, when he was gone.

CHAPTER XX

Reddere personae scit convenientia cuique.
—*Horace: Ars Poetica.*

I was loitering over my breakfast the next morning, and thinking of the last night's scene, when Lord Vincent was announced.

"How fares the gallant Pelham?" said he, as he entered the room.

"Why, to say the truth," I replied, "I am rather under the influence of blue devils this morning, and your visit is like a sun-beam in November."

"A bright thought," said Vincent, "and I shall make you a very pretty little poet soon; publish you in a neat octavo, and dedicate you to Lady D—e. Pray, by the by, have you ever read her plays? You know they were only privately printed?"

"No," said I, (for in good truth, had his lordship interrogated me touching any other literary production, I should have esteemed it a part of my present character to return the same answer.)

"No!" repeated Vincent; "permit me to tell you, that you must never seem ignorant of any work not published. To be recherche, one must always know what other people don't—and then one has full liberty to sneer at the value of what other people do know. Renounce the threshold of knowledge. There every new proselyte can meet you. Boast of your acquaintance with the sanctum, and not one in ten thousand can dispute it with you. Have you read Monsieur de C—'s pamphlet?"

"Really," said I, "I have been so busy."

"Ah, mon ami!" cried Vincent, "the greatest sign of an idle man is to complain of being busy. But you have had a loss: the pamphlet is good. C—, by the way, has an extraordinary, though not an expanded mind; it is like a citizen's garden near London: a pretty parterre here, and a Chinese pagoda there; an oak tree in one corner, and a mushroom bed in the other. You may traverse the whole in a stride; it is the four quarters of the globe in a mole-hill. Yet every thing is good in its kind; and is neither without elegance nor design in its arrangement."

"What do you think," said I, "of the Baron de—, the minister of—?"

"Of him!" replied Vincent—

"His soul
Still sits at squat, and peeps not from its hole."

"It is dark and bewildered—full of dim visions of the ancient regime;—it is a bat hovering about the chambers of an old ruin. Poor, antique little soul! but I will say nothing more about it,—

"For who would be satirical
Upon a thing so very small"
as the soul of the Baron de—?"

Finding Lord Vincent so disposed to the biting mood, I immediately directed his rabies towards Mr. Aberton, for whom I had a most inexpressible contempt.

"Aberton," said Vincent, in answer to my question, if he knew that aimable attache—"Yes! a sort of man who, speaking of the English embassy, says we—who sticks his best cards on his chimney-piece, and writes himself billets-doux from duchesses. A duodecimo of 'precious conceits,' bound in calf-skin—I know the man well; does he not dress decently, Pelham?"

"His clothes are well made," said I; "but no man can dress well with those hands and feet!"

"Ah!" said Vincent, "I should think he went to the best tailor, and said, 'give me a collar like Lord So

and So's,'; one who would not dare to have a new waistcoat till it had been authoritatively patronized, and who took his fashions, like his follies, from the best proficient. Such fellows are always too ashamed of themselves not to be proud of their clothes—like the Chinese mariners, they burn incense before the needle!"

"And Mr. Howard de Howard," said I, laughing, "what do you think of him?"

"What! the thin secretary?" cried Vincent.

"He is the mathematical definition of a straight line—length without breadth. His inseparable friend, Mr. Aberton, was running up the Rue St. Honore yesterday in order to catch him."

"Running!" cried I, "just like common people—when were you or I ever seen running?"

"True," continued Vincent; "but when I saw him chasing that meagre apparition, I said to Bennington, 'I have found out the real Peter Schlemil!' 'Who?' (asked his grave lordship, with serious naivete) 'Mr. Aberton,' said I; 'don't you see him running after his shadow?' But the pride of the lean thing is so amusing! He is fifteenth cousin to the duke, and so his favourite exordium is, 'Whenever I succeed to the titles of my ancestors.' It was but the other day, that he heard two or three silly young men discussing church and state, and they began by talking irreligion—(Mr. Howard de Howard is too unsubstantial not to be spiritually inclined)—however he only fidgeted in his chair. They then proceeded to be exceedingly disloyal. Mr. Howard de Howard fidgeted again;—they then passed to vituperations on the aristocracy—this the attenuated pomposity (*magni nominis umbra*) could brook no longer. He rose up, cast a severe look on the abashed youths, and thus addressed them—'Gentlemen, I have sate by in silence, and heard my King derided, and my God blasphemed; but now in attacking the aristocracy, I can no longer refrain from noticing so obviously intentional an insult. You have become personal.' But did you know, Pelham, that he is going to be married?"

"No," said I. "I can't say that I thought such an event likely. Who is the intended?"

"A Miss—, a girl with some fortune. 'I can bring her none,' said he to the father, 'but I can make her Mrs. Howard de Howard.'"

"Alas, poor girl!" said I, "I fear that her happiness will hang upon a slender thread. But suppose we change the conversation: first, because the subject is so meagre, that we might easily wear it out, and secondly, because such jests may come home. I am not very corpulent myself."

"Bah!" said Vincent, "but at least you have bones and muscles. If you were to pound the poor secretary in a mortar, you might take him all up in a pinch of snuff."

"Pray, Vincent," said I, after a short pause, "did you ever meet with a Mr. Thornton, at Paris?"

"Thornton, Thornton," said Vincent, musingly; "what, Tom Thornton?"

"I should think, very likely," I replied; "just the sort of man who would be Tom Thornton—has a broad face, with a colour, and wears a spotted neckcloth; Tom—what could his name be but Tom?"

"Is he about five-and-thirty?" asked Vincent, "rather short, and with reddish coloured hair and whiskers?"

"Precisely," said I; "are not all Toms alike?"

"Ah," said Vincent, "I know him well: he is a clever, shrewd fellow, but a most unmitigated rascal. He is the son of a steward in Lancashire, and received an attorney's education; but being a humorous, noisy fellow, he became a great favourite with his father's employer, who was a sort of Mecaenas to cudgel players, boxers, and horse jockies. At his house, Thornton met many persons of rank, but of a taste similar to their host's: and they, mistaking his vulgar coarseness for honesty, and his quaint proverbs for wit, admitted him into their society. It was with one of them that I have seen him. I believe of late, that his character has been of a very indifferent odour: and whatever has brought him among the English at Paris—those white-washed abominations—those 'innocent blacknesses,' as Charles Lamb calls chimney sweepers, it does not argue well for his professional occupations. I should think, however, that he manages to live here; for wherever there are English fools, there are fine pickings for an English rogue."

"Ay," said I, "but are there enough fools here, to feed the rogues?"

"Yes, because rogues are like spiders, and eat each other, when there is nothing else to catch; and Tom Thornton is safe, as long as the ordinary law of nature lasts, that the greater knave preys on the lesser, for there cannot possibly be a greater knave than he is. If you have made his acquaintance, my dear Pelham, I advise you most soberly to look to yourself, for if he doth not steal, beg, or borrow of you, Mr. Howard de Howard will grow fat, and even Mr. Aberton cease to be a fool. And now, most noble Pelham, farewell. Il est plus aise d'etre sage pour les autres que de l'etre pour soi-meme."

CHAPTER XXI

*This is a notable couple—and have met
But for some secret knavery.*

—The Tanner of Tyburn.

I had now been several weeks in Paris, and I was not altogether dissatisfied with the manner in which they had been spent. I had enjoyed myself to the utmost, while I had, as much as possible, combined profit with pleasure; viz. if I went to the Opera in the evening, I learned to dance in the morning; if I drove to a soiree at the Duchesse de Perpignan's, it was not till I had fenced an hour at the Salon des Assauts d'Armes; and if I made love to the duchess herself it was sure to be in a position I had been a whole week in acquiring from my master of the graces; in short, I took the greatest pains to complete my education. I wish all young men who frequented the Continent for that purpose, could say the same.

One day (about a week after the conversation with Vincent, recorded in my last chapter) I was walking slowly along one of the paths in the Jardin des Plantes, meditating upon the various excellencies of the Rocher de Cancale and the Duchesse de Perpignan, when I perceived a tall man, with a thick, rough coat, of a dark colour (which I recognized long before I did the face of the wearer) emerging from an intersecting path. He stopped for a few moments, and looked round as if expecting some one. Presently a woman, apparently about thirty, and meanly dressed, appeared in an opposite direction. She approached him; they exchanged a few words, and then, the woman taking his arm, they struck into another path, and were soon out of sight. I suppose that the reader has already discovered that this man was Thornton's companion in the Bois de Boulogne, and the hero of the Salon de Jeu, in the Palais Royal. I could not have supposed that so noble a countenance, even in its frowns, could ever have wasted its smiles upon a mistress of that low station to which the woman who had met him evidently belonged. However, we all have our little foibles, as the Frenchman said, when he boiled his grandmother's head in a pipkin.

I myself was, at that time, the sort of person that is always taken by a pretty face, however coarse may be the garments which set it off; and although I cannot say that I ever stooped so far as to become amorous of a chambermaid, yet I could be tolerably lenient to any man under thirty who did. As a proof of this gentleness of disposition, ten minutes after I had witnessed so unsuitable a rencontre, I found myself following a pretty little bourgeoisie into a small sort of cabaret, which was, at the time I speak of (and most probably still is), in the midst of the gardens. I sat down, and called for my favourite drink of lemonade; the little grisette, who was with an old woman, possibly her mother, and un beau gros garçon, probably her lover, sat opposite, and began, with all the ineffable coquetries of her country, to divide her attention between the said garçon and myself. Poor fellow, he seemed to be very little pleased by the significant glances exchanged over his right shoulder, and, at last, under pretence of screening her from the draught of the open window, placed himself exactly between us. This, however ingenious, did not at all answer his expectations; for he had not sufficiently taken into consideration, that I also was endowed with the power of locomotion; accordingly I shifted my chair about three feet, and entirely defeated the countermarch of the enemy.

But this flirtation did not last long; the youth and the old woman appeared very much of the same opinion as to its impropriety; and accordingly, like experienced generals, resolved to conquer by a retreat; they drank up their orgeat—paid for it—placed the wavering regiment in the middle, and left me master of the field. I was not, however, of a disposition to break my heart at such an

occurrence, and I remained by the window, drinking my lemonade, and muttering to myself, "After all, women are a great bore."

On the outside of the cabaret, and just under my window, was a bench, which for a certain number of sous, one might appropriate to the entire and unparticipated use of one's self and party. An old woman (so at least I suppose by her voice, for I did not give myself the trouble of looking, though, indeed as to that matter, it might have been the shrill treble of Mr. Howard de Howard) had been hitherto engrossing this settlement with some gallant or other. In Paris, no women are too old to get an amant, either by love or money. In a moment of tenderness, this couple paired off, and were immediately succeeded by another. The first tones of the man's voice, low as they were, made me start from my seat. I cast one quick glance before I resumed it. The new pair were the Englishman I had before noted in the garden, and the female companion who had joined him.

"Two hundred pounds, you say?" muttered the man; "we must have it all."

"But," said the woman, in the same whispered voice, "he says, that he will never touch another card."

The man laughed. "Fool," said he, "the passions are not so easily quelled—how many days is it since he had this remittance from England?"

"About three," replied the woman.

"And it is absolutely the very last remnant of his property?"

"The last."

"I am then to understand, that when this is spent there is nothing between him and beggary?"

"Nothing," said the woman, with a half sigh.

The man laughed again, and then rejoined in an altered tone, "Then, then will this parching thirst be quenched at last. I tell you, woman, that it is many months since I have known a day—night—hour, in which my life has been as the life of other men. My whole soul has been melted down into one burning, burning thought. Feel this hand—ay, you may well start—but what is the fever of the frame to that within?"

Here the voice sunk so low as to be inaudible. The woman seemed as if endeavouring to sooth him; at length she said—"But poor Tyrrell—you will not, surely, suffer him to die of actual starvation?"

The man paused for a few moments, and then replied—"Night and day, I pray to God, upon my bended knees, only one unvarying, unceasing prayer, and that is—'When the last agonies shall be upon that man—when, sick with weariness, pain, disease, hunger, he lies down to die—when the death-gurgle is in the throat, and the eye swims beneath the last dull film—when remembrance peoples the chamber with Hell, and his cowardice would falter forth its dastard recantation to Heaven—then—may I be there?'"

There was a long pause, only broken by the woman's sobs, which she appeared endeavouring to stifle. At last the man rose, and in a tone so soft that it seemed literally like music, addressed her in the most endearing terms. She soon yielded to their persuasion, and replied to them with interest. "Spite of the stings of my remorse," she said, "as long as I lose not you, I will lose life, honour, hope, even soul itself!"

They both quitted the spot as she said this.

O, that woman's love! how strong is it in its weakness! how beautiful in its guilt!

CHAPTER XXII

*At length the treacherous snare was laid,
Poor pug was caught—to town convey'd;
There sold. How envied was his doom,
Made captive in a lady's room!*

—*Gay's Fables.*

I was sitting alone a morning or two after this adventure, when Bedos entering, announced une dame. This dame was a fine tall thing, dressed out like a print in the Magasin des Modes. She sate herself down, threw up her veil, and, after a momentary pause, asked me if I liked my apartment?

"Very much," said I, somewhat surprised at the nature of the interrogatory.

"Perhaps you would wish it altered in some way?" rejoined the lady.

"Non—mille remerciemens!" said I—"you are very good to be so interested in my accommodation."

"Those curtains might be better arranged—that sofa replaced with a more elegant one," continued my new superintendant.

"Really," said I, "I am too, too much flattered. Perhaps you would like to have my rooms altogether; if so, make at least no scruple of saying it."

"Oh, no," replied the lady, "I have no objection to your staying here."

"You are too kind," said I, with a low bow.

There was a pause of some moments—I took advantage of it.

"I think, Madame, I have the honour of speaking to—to—to—" "The mistress of the hotel," said the lady, quietly. "I merely called to ask you how you did, and hope you were well accommodated."

"Rather late, considering I have been six weeks in the house," thought I, revolving in my mind various reports I had heard of my present visitor's disposition to gallantry. However, seeing it was all over with me, I resigned myself, with the patience of a martyr, to the fate that I foresaw. I rose, approached her chair, took her hand (very hard and thin it was too), and thanked her with a most affectionate squeeze.

"I have seen much English!" said the lady, for the first time speaking in our language.

"Ah!" said I, giving another squeeze.

"You are handsome, garcon," renewed the lady.

"I am so," I replied.

At that moment Bedos entered, and whispered that Madame D'Anville was in the anti-room.

"Good heavens!" said I, knowing her jealousy of disposition, "what is to be done? Oblige me, Madame," seizing the unfortunate mistress of the hotel, and opening the door to the back entrance—"There," said I, "you can easily escape. Bon jour."

Hardly had I closed the door, and put the key in my pocket, before Madame D'Anville entered.

"Do you generally order your servants to keep me waiting in your anti- room?" said she haughtily.

"Not generally," I replied, endeavouring to make my peace; but all my complaisance was in vain—she was jealous of my intimacy with the Duchesse de Perpignan, and glad of any excuse to vent her pique. I am just the sort of man to bear, but never to forgive a woman's ill temper, viz.—it makes no impression on me at the time, but leaves a sore recollection of something disagreeable, which I

internally resolve never again to experience. Madame D'Anville was going to the Luxembourg; and my only chance of soothing her anger was to accompany her.

Down stairs, therefore, we went, and drove to the Luxembourg; I gave Bedos, before my departure, various little commissions, and told him he need not be at home till the evening. Long before the expiration of an hour, Madame D'Anville's ill humour had given me an excuse for affecting it myself. Tired to death of her, and panting for release, I took a high tone—complained of her ill temper, and her want of love—spoke rapidly—waited for no reply, and leaving her at the Luxembourg, proceeded forthwith to Galignani's, like a man just delivered from a strait waistcoat.

Leave me now, for a few minutes, in the reading-room at Galignani's, and return to the mistress of the hotel, whom I had so unceremoniously thrust out of my salon. The passage into which she had been put communicated by one door with my rooms, and by another with the staircase. Now, it had so happened, that Bedos was in the habit of locking the latter door, and keeping the key; the other egress, it will be remembered, I myself had secured; so that the unfortunate mistress of the hotel was no sooner turned into this passage than she found herself in a sort of dungeon, ten feet by five, and surrounded, like Eve in Paradise, by a whole creation— not of birds, beasts, and fishes, but of brooms, brushes, unclean linen, and a wood-basket. What she was to do in this dilemma was utterly inconceivable; scream, indeed, she might, but then the shame and ridicule of being discovered in so equivocal a situation, were somewhat more than our discreet landlady could endure. Besides, such an expose might be attended with a loss the good woman valued more than reputation, viz. lodgers; for the possessors of the two best floors were both Englishwomen of a certain rank; and my landlady had heard such accounts of our national virtue, that she feared an instantaneous emigration of such inveterate prudes, if her screams and situation reached their ears.

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