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THE DISOWNED — VOLUME 02

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The Disowned — Volume 02

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Содержание

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
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CHAPTER XI

He who would know mankind must be at home with all men.
STEPHEN MONTAGUE.

We left Clarence safely deposited in his little lodgings. Whether from the heat of his apartment or the restlessness a migration of beds produces in certain constitutions, his slumbers on the first night of his arrival were disturbed and brief. He rose early and descended to the parlour; Mr. de Warens, the nobly appellatived foot-boy, was laying the breakfast-cloth. From three painted shelves which constituted the library of "Copperas Bower," as its owners gracefully called their habitation, Clarence took down a book very prettily bound; it was "Poems by a Nobleman." No sooner had he read two pages than he did exactly what the reader would have done, and restored the volume respectfully to its place. He then drew his chair towards the window, and wistfully eyed sundry ancient nursery maids, who were leading their infant charges to the "fresh fields and pastures new" of what is now the Regent's Park.

In about an hour Mrs. Copperas descended, and mutual

compliments were exchanged; to her succeeded Mr. Copperas, who was well scolded for his laziness: and to them, Master Adolphus Copperas, who was also chidingly termed a naughty darling for the same offence. Now then Mrs. Copperas prepared the tea, which she did in the approved method adopted by all ladies to whom economy is dearer than renown, namely, the least possible quantity of the soi-disant Chinese plant was first sprinkled by the least possible quantity of hot water; after this mixture had become as black and as bitter as it could possibly be without any adjunct from the apothecary's skill, it was suddenly drenched with a copious diffusion, and as suddenly poured forth—weak, washy, and abominable,—into four cups, severally appertaining unto the four partakers of the matutinal nectar.

Then the conversation began to flow. Mrs. Copperas was a fine lady, and a sentimentalist,—very observant of the little niceties of phrase and manner. Mr. Copperas was a stock-jobber and a wit,—loved a good hit in each capacity; was very round, very short, and very much like a John Dory; and saw in the features and mind of the little Copperas the exact representative of himself.

"Adolphus, my love," said Mrs. Copperas, "mind what I told you, and sit upright. Mr. Linden, will you allow me to cut you a leetle piece of this roll?"

"Thank you," said Clarence, "I will trouble you rather for the whole of it."

Conceive Mrs. Copperas's dismay! From that moment she saw

herself eaten out of house and home; besides, as she afterwards observed to her friend Miss Barbara York, the "vulgarity of such an amazing appetite!"

"Any commands in the city, Mr. Linden?" asked the husband; "a coach will pass by our door in a few minutes,—must be on 'Change in half an hour. Come, my love, another cup of tea; make haste; I have scarcely a moment to take my fare for the inside, before coachee takes his for the outside. Ha! ha! ha! Mr. Linden."

"Lord, Mr. Copperas," said his helpmate, "how can you be so silly? setting such an example to your son, too; never mind him, Adolphus, my love; fie, child! a'n't you ashamed of yourself? never put the spoon in your cup till you have done tea: I must really send you to school to learn manners. We have a very pretty little collection of books here, Mr. Linden, if you would like to read an hour or two after breakfast,—child, take your hands out of your pockets,—all the best English classics I believe,—'Telemachus,' and Young's 'Night Thoughts,' and 'Joseph Andrews,' and the 'Spectator,' and Pope's Iliad, and Creech's Lucretius; but you will look over them yourself! This is Liberty Hall, as well as Copperas Bower, Mr. Linden!"

"Well, my love," said the stock-jobber, "I believe I must be off. Here Tom, Tom (Mr. de Warens had just entered the room with some more hot water, to weaken still further "the poor remains of what was once "—the tea!), Tom, just run out and stop the coach; it will be by in five minutes."

"Have not I prayed and besought you, many and many a

time, Mr. Copperas," said the lady, rebukingly, "not to call De Warens by his Christian name? Don't you know that all people in genteel life, who only keep one servant, invariably call him by his surname, as if he were the butler, you know?"

"Now, that is too good, my love," said Copperas. "I will call poor Tom by any surname you please, but I really can't pass him off for a butler! Ha—ha—ha—you must excuse me there, my love!"

"And pray, why not, Mr. Copperas? I have known many a butler bungle more at a cork than he does; and pray tell me who did you ever see wait better at dinner?"

"He wait at dinner, my love! it is not he who waits."

"Who then, Mr. Copperas?"

"Why we, my love; it's we who wait for dinner; but that's the cook's fault, not his."

"Pshaw! Mr. Copperas; Adolphus, my love, sit upright, darling."

Here De Warens cried from the bottom of the stairs, —"Measter, the coach be coming up."

"There won't be room for it to turn then," said the facetious Mr. Copperas, looking round the apartment as if he took the words literally.

"What coach is it, boy?"

Now that was not the age in which coaches scoured the city every half hour, and Mr. Copperas knew the name of the coach as well as he knew his own.

"It be the Swallow coach, sir."

"Oh, very well: then since I have swallowed in the roll, I will now roll in the Swallow—ha—ha—ha! Good-by, Mr. Linden."

No sooner had the witty stock-jobber left the room than Mrs. Copperas seemed to expand into a new existence. "My husband, sir," said she, apologetically, "is so odd, but he's an excellent sterling character; and that, you know, Mr. Linden, tells more in the bosom of a family than all the shining qualities which captivate the imagination. I am sure, Mr. Linden, that the moralist is right in admonishing us to prefer the gold to the tinsel. I have now been married some years, and every year seems happier than the last; but then, Mr. Linden, it is such a pleasure to contemplate the growing graces of the sweet pledge of our mutual love.—Adolphus, my dear, keep your feet still, and take your hands out of your pockets!"

A short pause ensued.

"We see a great deal of company," said Mrs. Copperas, pompously, "and of the very best description. Sometimes we are favoured by the society of the great Mr. Talbot, a gentleman of immense fortune and quite the courtier: he is, it is true, a little eccentric in his dress: but then he was a celebrated beau in his young days. He is our next neighbour; you can see his house out of the window, just across the garden—there! We have also, sometimes, our humble board graced by a very elegant friend of mine, Miss Barbara York, a lady of very high connections, her first cousin was a lord mayor.—Adolphus, my dear, what are

you about? Well, Mr. Linden, you will find your retreat quite undisturbed; I must go about the household affairs; not that I do anything more than superintend, you know, sir; but I think no lady should be above consulting her husband's interests; that's what I call true old English conjugal affection. Come, Adolphus, my dear."

And Clarence was now alone. "I fear," thought he, "that I shall get on very indifferently with these people. But it will not do for me to be misanthropical, and (as Dr. Latinas was wont to say) the great merit of philosophy, when we cannot command circumstances, is to reconcile us to them."

CHAPTER XII

A retired beau is one of the most instructive spectacles in the world.
STEPHEN MONTAGUE.

It was quite true that Mrs. Copperas saw a great deal of company, for at a certain charge, upon certain days, any individual might have the honour of sharing her family repast; and many, of various callings, though chiefly in commercial life, met at her miscellaneous board. Clarence must, indeed, have been difficult to please, or obtuse of observation, if, in the variety of her guests, he had not found something either to interest or amuse him. Heavens! what a motley group were accustomed, twice in the week, to assemble there! the little dining-parlour seemed a human oven; and it must be owned that Clarence was no slight magnet of attraction to the female part of the guests. Mrs. Copperas's bosom friend in especial, the accomplished Miss Barbara York, darted the most tender glances on the handsome young stranger; but whether or not a nose remarkably prominent and long prevented the glances from taking full effect, it is certain that Clarence seldom repaid them with that affectionate ardour which Miss Barbara York had ventured to anticipate. The only persons indeed for whom he felt any sympathetic attraction were of the same sex as himself. The one was Mr. Talbot,

the old gentleman whom Mrs. Copperas had described as the perfect courtier; the other, a young artist of the name of Warner. Talbot, to Clarence's great astonishment (for Mrs. Copperas's eulogy had prepared him for something eminently displeasing) was a man of birth, fortune, and manners peculiarly graceful and attractive. It is true, however, that, despite of his vicinity, and Mrs. Copperas's urgent solicitations, he very seldom honoured her with his company, and he always cautiously sent over his servant in the morning to inquire the names and number of her expected guests; nor was he ever known to share the plenteous board of the stock-jobber's lady whenever any other partaker of its dainties save Clarence and the young artist were present. The latter, the old gentleman really liked; and as for one truly well born and well bred there is no vulgarity except in the mind, the slender means, obscure birth, and struggling profession of Warner were circumstances which, as they increased the merit of a gentle manner and a fine mind, spoke rather in his favour than the reverse. Mr. Talbot was greatly struck by Clarence Linden's conversation and appearance; and indeed there was in Talbot's tastes so strong a bias to aristocratic externals that Clarence's air alone would have been sufficient to win the good graces of a man who had, perhaps, more than most courtiers of his time, cultivated the arts of manner and the secrets of address.

"You will call upon me soon?" said he to Clarence, when, after dining one day with the Copperases and their inmate, he rose to return home. And Clarence, delighted with the urbanity

and liveliness of his new acquaintance, readily promised that he would.

Accordingly the next day Clarence called upon Mr. Talbot. The house, as Mrs. Copperas had before said, adjoined her own, and was only separated from it by a garden. It was a dull mansion of brick, which had disdained the frippery of paint and whitewashing, and had indeed been built many years previously to the erection of the modern habitations which surrounded it. It was, therefore, as a consequence of this priority of birth, more sombre than the rest, and had a peculiarly forlorn and solitary look. As Clarence approached the door, he was struck with the size of the house; it was of very considerable extent, and in the more favourable situations of London, would have passed for a very desirable and spacious tenement. An old man, whose accurate precision of dress bespoke the tastes of the master, opened the door, and after ushering Clarence through two long, and, to his surprise, almost splendidly furnished rooms, led him into a third, where, seated at a small writing-table, he found Mr. Talbot. That person, one whom Clarence then little thought would hereafter exercise no small influence over his fate, was of a figure and countenance well worthy the notice of a description.

His own hair, quite white, was carefully and artificially curled, and gave a Grecian cast to features whose original delicacy, and exact though small proportions, not even age could destroy. His eyes were large, black, and sparkled with almost youthful vivacity; and his mouth, which was the best feature he possessed,

developed teeth white and even as rows of ivory. Though small and somewhat too slender in the proportions of his figure, nothing could exceed the ease and the grace of his motions and air; and his dress, though singularly rich in its materials, eccentric in its fashion, and from its evident study, unseemly to his years, served nevertheless to render rather venerable than ridiculous a mien which could almost have carried off any absurdity, and which the fashion of the garb peculiarly became. The tout ensemble was certainly that of a man who was still vain of his exterior, and conscious of its effect; and it was as certainly impossible to converse with Mr. Talbot for five minutes without merging every less respectful impression in the magical fascination of his manner.

"I thank you, Mr. Linden," said Talbot, rising, "for your accepting so readily an old man's invitation. If I have felt pleasure in discovering that we were to be neighbours, you may judge what that pleasure is to-day at finding you my visitor."

Clarence, who, to do him justice, was always ready at returning a fine speech, replied in a similar strain, and the conversation flowed on agreeably enough. There was more than a moderate collection of books in the room, and this circumstance led Clarence to allude to literary subjects; these Mr. Talbot took up with avidity, and touched with a light but graceful criticism upon many of the then modern and some of the older writers. He seemed delighted to find himself understood and appreciated by Clarence, and every moment of Linden's visit served to ripen

their acquaintance into intimacy. At length they talked upon Copperas Bower and its inmates.

"You will find your host and hostess," said the gentleman, "certainly of a different order from the persons with whom it is easy to see you have associated; but, at your happy age, a year or two may be very well thrown away upon observing the manners and customs of those whom, in later life, you may often be called upon to conciliate or perhaps to control. That man will never be a perfect gentleman who lives only with gentlemen. To be a man of the world, we must view that world in every grade and in every perspective. In short, the most practical art of wisdom is that which extracts from things the very quality they least appear to possess; and the actor in the world, like the actor on the stage, should find 'a basket-hilted sword very convenient to carry milk in.' [See the witty inventory of a player's goods in the "Tatler."] As for me, I have survived my relations and friends. I cannot keep late hours, nor adhere to the unhealthy customs of good society; nor do I think that, to a man of my age and habits, any remuneration would adequately repay the sacrifice of health or comfort. I am, therefore, well content to sink into a hermitage in an obscure corner of this great town, and only occasionally to revive my 'past remembrances of higher state,' by admitting a few old acquaintances to drink my bachelor's tea and talk over the news of the day. Hence, you see, Mr. Linden, I pick up two or three novel anecdotes of state and scandal, and maintain my importance at Copperas Bower by retailing them second-hand.

Now that you are one of the inmates of that abode, I shall be more frequently its guest. By the by, I will let you into a secret: know that I am somewhat a lover of the marvellous, and like to indulge a little embellishing exaggeration in any place where there is no chance of finding me out. Mind, therefore, my dear Mr. Linden, that you take no ungenerous advantage of this confession; but suffer me, now and then, to tell my stories my own way, even when you think truth would require me to tell them in another."

"Certainly," said Clarence, laughing; "let us make an agreement: you shall tell your stories as you please, if you will grant me the same liberty in paying my compliments; and if I laugh aloud at the stories, you shall promise me not to laugh aloud at the compliments."

"It is a bond," said Talbot; "and a very fit exchange of service it is. It will be a problem in human nature to see who has the best of it: you shall pay your court by flattering the people present, and I mine by abusing those absent. Now, in spite of your youth and curling locks, I will wager that I succeed the best; for in vanity there is so great a mixture of envy that no compliment is like a judicious abuse: to enchant your acquaintance, ridicule his friends."

"Ah, sir," said Clarence, "this opinion of yours is, I trust, a little in the French school, where brilliancy is more studied than truth, and where an ill opinion of our species always has the merit of passing for profound."

Talbot smiled, and shook his head. "My dear young friend,"

said he, "it is quite right that you, who are coming into the world, should think well of it; and it is also quite right that I, who am going out of it, should console myself by trying to despise it. However, let me tell you, my young friend, that he whose opinion of mankind is not too elevated will always be the most benevolent, because the most indulgent, to those errors incidental to human imperfection to place our nature in too flattering a view is only to court disappointment, and end in misanthropy. The man who sets out with expecting to find all his fellow-creatures heroes of virtue will conclude by condemning them as monsters of vice; and, on the contrary, the least exacting judge of actions will be the most lenient. If God, in His own perfection, did not see so many frailties in us, think you He would be so gracious to our virtues?"

"And yet," said Clarence, "we remark every day examples of the highest excellence."

"Yes," replied Talbot, "of the highest but not of the most constant excellence. He knows very little of the human heart who imagines we cannot do a good action; but, alas! he knows still less of it who supposes we can be always doing good actions. In exactly the same ratio we see every day the greatest crimes are committed; but we find no wretch so depraved as to be always committing crimes. Man cannot be perfect even in guilt."

In this manner Talbot and his young visitor conversed, till Clarence, after a stay of unwarrantable length, rose to depart.

"Well," said Talbot, "if we now rightly understand each other,

we shall be the best friends in the world. As we shall expect great things from each other sometimes, we will have no scruple in exacting a heroic sacrifice every now and then; for instance, I will ask you to punish yourself by an occasional tete-a-tete with an ancient gentleman; and, as we can also by the same reasoning pardon great faults in each other, if they are not often committed, so I will forgive you, with all my heart, whenever you refuse my invitations, if you do not refuse them often. And now farewell till we meet again."

It seemed singular and almost unnatural to Linden that a man like Talbot, of birth, fortune, and great fastidiousness of taste and temper, should have formed any sort of acquaintance, however slight and distant, with the facetious stock-jobber and his wife; but the fact is easily explained by a reference to the vanity which we shall see hereafter made the ruling passion of Talbot's nature. This vanity, which branching forth into a thousand eccentricities, displayed itself in the singularity of his dress, the studied yet graceful warmth of his manner, his attention to the minutiae of life, his desire, craving and insatiate, to receive from every one, however insignificant, his obolus of admiration,—this vanity, once flattered by the obsequious homage it obtained from the wonder and reverence of the Copperases, reconciled his taste to the disgust it so frequently and necessarily conceived; and, having in great measure resigned his former acquaintance and wholly outlived his friends, he was contented to purchase the applause which had become to him a necessary of life at the

humble market more immediately at his command.

There is no dilemma in which Vanity cannot find an expedient to develop its form, no stream of circumstances in which its buoyant and light nature will not rise to float upon the surface. And its ingenuity is as fertile as that of the player who (his wardrobe allowing him no other method of playing the fop) could still exhibit the prevalent passion for distinction by wearing stockings of different colours.

CHAPTER XIII

Who dares
Interpret then my life for me as 't were
One of the undistinguishable many?

COLERIDGE: Wallenstein.

The first time Clarence had observed the young artist, he had taken a deep interest in his appearance. Pale, thin, undersized, and slightly deformed, the sanctifying mind still shed over the humble frame a spell more powerful than beauty. Absent in manner, melancholy in air, and never conversing except upon subjects on which his imagination was excited, there was yet a gentleness about him which could not fail to conciliate and prepossess; nor did Clarence omit any opportunity to soften his reserve, and wind himself into his more intimate acquaintance. Warner, the only support of an aged and infirm grandmother (who had survived her immediate children), was distantly related to Mrs. Copperas; and that lady extended to him, with ostentatious benevolence, her favour and support. It is true that she did not impoverish the young Adolphus to enrich her kinsman, but she allowed him a seat at her hospitable board, whenever it was not otherwise filled; and all that she demanded in return was a picture of herself, another of Mr. Copperas, a

third of Master Adolphus, a fourth of the black cat, and from time to time sundry other lesser productions of his genius, of which, through the agency of Mr. Brown, she secretly disposed at a price that sufficiently remunerated her for whatever havoc the slender appetite of the young painter was able to effect.

By this arrangement, Clarence had many opportunities of gaining that intimacy with Warner which had become to him an object; and though the painter, constitutionally diffident and shy, was at first averse to, and even awed by, the ease, boldness, fluent speech, and confident address of a man much younger than himself, yet at last he could not resist the being decoyed into familiarity; and the youthful pair gradually advanced from companionship into friendship. There was a striking contrast between the two: Clarence was bold and frank, Warner close and timid. Both had superior abilities; but the abilities of Clarence were for action, those of Warner for art: both were ambitious; but the ambition of Clarence was that of circumstances rather than character. Compelled to carve his own fortunes without sympathy or aid, he braced his mind to the effort, though naturally too gay for the austerity, and too genial for the selfishness of ambition. But the very essence of Warner's nature was the feverish desire of fame: it poured through his veins like lava; it preyed as a worm upon his cheek; it corroded his natural sleep; it blackened the colour of his thoughts; it shut out, as with an impenetrable wall, the wholesome energies and enjoyments and objects of living men; and, taking from him all the vividness

of the present, all the tenderness of the past, constrained his heart to dwell forever and forever amidst the dim and shadowy chimeras of a future he was fated never to enjoy.

But these differences of character, so far from disturbing, rather cemented their friendship; and while Warner (notwithstanding his advantage of age) paid involuntary deference to the stronger character of Clarence, he, in his turn, derived that species of pleasure by which he was most gratified, from the affectionate and unenvious interest Clarence took in his speculations of future distinction, and the unwearying admiration with which he would sit by his side, and watch the colours start from the canvas, beneath the real though uncultured genius of the youthful painter.

Hitherto, Warner had bounded his attempts to some of the lesser efforts of the art; he had now yielded to the urgent enthusiasm of his nature, and conceived the plan of an historical picture. Oh! what sleepless nights, what struggles of the teeming fancy with the dense brain, what labours of the untiring thought wearing and intense as disease itself, did it cost the ambitious artist to work out in the stillness of his soul, and from its confused and conflicting images, the design of this long meditated and idolized performance! But when it was designed; when shape upon shape grew and swelled, and glowed from the darkness of previous thought upon the painter's mind; when, shutting his eyes in the very credulity of delight, the whole work arose before him, glossy with its fresh hues, bright, completed, faultless, arrayed as

it were, and decked out for immortality,—oh! then what a full and gushing moment of rapture broke like a released stream upon his soul! What a recompense for wasted years, health, and hope! What a coronal to the visions and transports of Genius: brief, it is true, but how steeped in the very halo of a light that might well be deemed the glory of heaven!

But the vision fades, the gorgeous shapes sweep on into darkness, and, waking from his revery, the artist sees before him only the dull walls of his narrow chamber; the canvas stretched a blank upon its frame; the works, maimed, crude, unfinished, of an inexperienced hand, lying idly around; and feels himself —himself, but one moment before the creator of a world of wonders, the master spirit of shapes glorious and majestical beyond the shapes of men-dashed down from his momentary height, and despoiled both of his sorcery and his throne.

It was just in such a moment that Warner, starting up, saw Linden (who had silently entered his room) standing motionless before him.

"Oh, Linden!" said the artist, "I have had so superb a dream,—a dream which, though I have before snatched some such vision by fits and glimpses, I never beheld so realized, so perfect as now; and—but you shall see, you shall judge for yourself; I will sketch out the design for you;" and, with a piece of chalk and a rapid hand, Warner conveyed to Linden the outline of his conception. His young friend was eager in his praise and his predictions of renown, and Warner listened to him with a fondness which

spread over his pale cheek a richer flush than lover ever caught from the whispers of his beloved.

"Yes," said he, as he rose, and his sunken and small eye flashed out with a feverish brightness, "yes, if my hand does not fail my thought, it shall rival even—" Here the young painter stopped short, abashed at that indiscretion of enthusiasm about to utter to another the hoarded vanities hitherto locked in his heart of hearts as a sealed secret, almost from himself.

"But come," said Clarence, affectionately, "your hand is feverish and dry, and of late you have seemed more languid than you were wont,— come, Warner, you want exercise: it is a beautiful evening, and you shall explain your picture still further to me as we walk."

Accustomed to yield to Clarence, Warner mechanically and abstractedly obeyed; they walked out into the open streets.

"Look around us," said Warner, pausing, "look among this toiling and busy and sordid mass of beings who claim with us the fellowship of clay. The poor labour; the rich feast: the only distinction between them is that of the insect and the brute; like them they fulfil the same end and share the same oblivion; they die, a new race springs up, and the very grass upon their graves fades not so soon as their memory. Who that is conscious of a higher nature would not pine and fret himself away to be confounded with these? Who would not burn and sicken and parch with a delirious longing to divorce himself from so vile a herd? What have their petty pleasures and their mean aims to

atone for the abasement of grinding down our spirits to their level? Is not the distinction from their blended and common name a sufficient recompense for all that ambition suffers or foregoes? Oh, for one brief hour (I ask no more) of living honour, one feeling of conscious, unfearing certainty that Fame has conquered Death! and then for this humble and impotent clay, this drag on the spirit which it does not assist but fetter, this wretched machine of pains and aches, and feverish throbbings, and vexed inquietudes, why, let the worms consume it, and the grave hide—for Fame there is no grave."

At that moment one of those unfortunate women who earn their polluted sustenance by becoming the hypocrites of passions abruptly accosted them.

"Miserable wretch!" said Warner, loathingly, as he pushed her aside; but Clarence, with a kindlier feeling, noticed that her haggard cheek was wet with tears, and that her frame, weak and trembling, could scarcely support itself; he, therefore, with that promptitude of charity which gives ere it discriminates put some pecuniary assistance in her hand and joined his comrade.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.