

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**THE DISOWNED —
VOLUME 08**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон
The Disowned — Volume 08

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Содержание

CHAPTER LXXXII	5
CHAPTER LXXXIII	9
CHAPTER LXXXIV	10
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	12

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

The Disowned — Volume 08

CHAPTER LXXXII

*Plot on thy little hour, and skein on skein
Weave the vain mesh, in which thy subtle soul
Broods on its venom! Lo! behind, before,
Around thee, like an armament of cloud,
The black Fate labours onward*

—ANONYMOUS.

The dusk of a winter's evening gathered over a room in Crauford's house in town, only relieved from the closing darkness by an expiring and sullen fire, beside which Mr. Bradley sat, with his feet upon the fender, apparently striving to coax some warmth into the icy palms of his spread hands. Crauford himself was walking up and down the room with a changeful step, and ever and anon glancing his bright, shrewd eye at the partner of his fraud, who, seemingly unconscious of the observation he underwent, appeared to occupy his attention solely with the difficulty of warming his meagre and withered frame.

"Ar'n't you very cold there, sir?" said Bradley, after a long pause, and pushing himself farther into the verge of the dying embers, "may I not ring for some more coals?"

"Hell and the—: I beg your pardon, my good Bradley, but you vex me beyond patience; how can you think of such trifles when our very lives are in so imminent a danger?"

"I beg your pardon, my honoured benefactor, they are indeed in danger!"

"Bradley, we have but one hope,—fidelity to each other. If we persist in the same story, not a tittle can be brought home to us,— not a tittle, my good Bradley; and though our characters may be a little touched, why, what is a character? Shall we eat less, drink less, enjoy less, when we have lost it? Not a whit. No, my friend, we will go abroad: leave it to me to save from the wreck of our fortunes enough to live upon like princes."

"If not like peers, my honoured benefactor."

"Sdeath!—yes, yes, very good,—he! he! he! if not peers. Well, all happiness is in the senses, and Richard Crauford has as many senses as Viscount Innisdale; but had we been able to protract inquiry another week, Bradley, why, I would have been my Lord, and you Sir John."

"You bear your losses like a hero, sir," said Mr. Bradley. To be sure: there is no loss, man, but life,—none; let us preserve that— and it will be our own fault if we don't—and the devil take all the rest. But, bless me, it grows late, and, at all events, we are safe for some hours; the inquiry won't take place till twelve to-morrow, why should we not feast till twelve to-night? Ring, my good fellow: dinner must be nearly ready."

"Why, honoured sir," said Bradley, "I want to go home to see my wife and arrange my house. Who knows but I may sleep in Newgate to-morrow?"

Crauford, who had been still walking to and fro, stopped abruptly at this speech; and his eye, even through the gloom, shot out a livid and fierce light, before which the timid and humble glance of Mr. Bradley quailed in an instant.

"Go home!—no, my friend, no: I can't part with you tonight, no, not for an instant. I have many lessons to give you. How are we to learn our parts for to-morrow, if we don't rehearse them beforehand? Do you not know that a single blunder may turn what I hope will be a farce into a

tragedy? Go home!—pooh! pooh! why, man, I have not seen my wife, nor put my house to rights, and if you do but listen to me I tell you again and again that not a hair of our heads can be touched."

"You know best, honoured sir; I bow to your decision."

"Bravo, honest Brad! and now for dinner. I have the most glorious champagne that ever danced in foam to your lip. No counsellor like the bottle, believe me!"

And the servant entering to announce dinner, Crauford took Bradley's arm, and leaning affectionately upon it, passed through an obsequious and liveried row of domestics to a room blazing with light and plate. A noble fire was the first thing which revived Bradley's spirit; and, as he spread his hands over it before he sat down to the table, he surveyed, with a gleam of gladness upon his thin cheeks, two vases of glittering metal formerly the boast of a king, in which were immersed the sparkling genii of the grape.

Crauford, always a gourmand, ate with unusual appetite, and pressed the wine upon Bradley with an eager hospitality, which soon somewhat clouded the senses of the worthy man. The dinner was removed, the servants retired, and the friends were left alone.

"A pleasant trip to France!" cried Crauford, filling a bumper. "That's the land for hearts like ours. I tell you what, little Brad, we will leave our wives behind us, and take, with a new country and new names, a new lease of life. What will it signify to men making love at Paris what fools say of them in London? Another bumper, honest Brad,—a bumper to the girls! What say you to that, eh?"

"Lord, sir, you are so facetious, so witty! It must be owned that a black eye is a great temptation,—Lira-lira, la-la!" and Mr. Bradley's own eyes rolled joyously.

"Bravo, Brad!—a song, a song! but treason to King Burgundy! Your glass is—"

"Empty, honoured sir, I know it!—Lira-lira la!—but it is easily filled! We who have all our lives been pouring from one vessel into another know how to keep it up to the last!

'Courage then, cries the knight, we may yet be forgiven,
Or at worst buy the bishop's reversion in heaven;
Our frequent escapes in this world show how true 't is
That gold is the only Elixir Salutis.

Derry down, Derry down.'

'All you who to swindling conveniently creep,
Ne'er piddle; by thousands the treasury sweep
Your safety depends on the weight of the sum,
For no rope was yet made that could tie up a plum.

Derry down, etc."

[From a ballad called "The Knight and the Prelate."]

"Bravissimo, little Brad!—you are quite a wit! See what it is to have one's faculties called out. Come, a toast to old England, the land in which no man ever wants a farthing who has wit to steal it,—'Old England forever!' your rogue is your only true patriot!" and Crauford poured the remainder of the bottle, nearly three parts full, into a beaker, which he pushed to Bradley. That convivial gentleman emptied it at a draught, and, faltering out, "Honest Sir John!—room for my Lady Bradley's carriage," dropped down on the floor insensible.

Crauford rose instantly, satisfied himself that the intoxication was genuine, and giving the lifeless body a kick of contemptuous disgust, left the room, muttering, "The dull ass, did he think it was on his back that I was going to ride off? He! he! he! But stay, let me feel my pulse. Too fast by twenty strokes! One's never sure of the mind if one does not regulate the body to a hair! Drank too much; must take a powder before I start."

Mounting by a back staircase to his bedroom, Crauford unlocked a chest, took out a bundle of clerical clothes, a large shovel hat, and a huge wig. Hastily, but not carelessly, induing himself in these articles of disguise, he then proceeded to stain his fair cheeks with a preparation which soon gave them a swarthy hue. Putting his own clothes in the chest, which he carefully locked (placing the key in his pocket), he next took from a desk on his dressing-table a purse; opening this, he extracted a diamond of great size and immense value, which, years before, in preparation of the event that had now taken place, he had purchased.

His usual sneer curled his lip as he gazed at it. "Now," said he, "is it not strange that this little stone should supply the mighty wants of that grasping thing, man? Who talks of religion, country, wife, children? This petty mineral can purchase them all! Oh, what a bright joy speaks out in your white cheek, my beauty! What are all human charms to yours? Why, by your spell, most magical of talismans, my years may walk, gloating and revelling, through a lane of beauties, till they fall into the grave! Pish! that grave is an ugly thought,— a very, very ugly thought! But come, my sun of hope, I must eclipse you for a while! Type of myself, while you hide, I hide also; and when I once more let you forth to the day, then shine out Richard Crauford,—shine out!" So saying, he sewed the diamond carefully in the folds of his shirt; and, rearranging his dress, took the cooling powder, which he weighed out to a grain, with a scrupulous and untrembling hand; descended the back stairs; opened the door, and found himself in the open street.

The clock struck ten as he entered a hackney-coach and drove to another part of London. "What, so late!" thought he; "I must be at Dover in twelve hours: the vessel sails then. Humph! some danger yet! What a pity that I could not trust that fool! He! he! he!—what will he think tomorrow, when he wakes and finds that only one is destined to swing!"

The hackney-coach stopped, according to his direction, at an inn in the city. Here Crauford asked if a note had been left for Dr. Stapylton. One (written by himself) was given to him.

"Merciful Heaven!" cried the false doctor, as he read it, "my daughter is on a bed of death!"

The landlord's look wore anxiety; the doctor seemed for a moment paralyzed by silent woe. He recovered, shook his head piteously, and ordered a post-chaise and four on to Canterbury without delay.

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody good!" thought the landlord, as he issued the order into the yard.

The chaise was soon out; the doctor entered; off went the post-boys; and Richard Crauford, feeling his diamond, turned his thoughts to safety and to France.

A little, unknown man, who had been sitting at the bar for the last two hours sipping brandy and water, and who from his extreme taciturnity and quiet had been scarcely observed, now rose. "Landlord," said he, "do you know who that gentleman is?"

"Why," quoth Boniface, "the letter to him was directed, 'For the Rev.

Dr. Stapylton; will be called for.'"

"Ah," said the little man, yawning, "I shall have a long night's work of it. Have you another chaise and four in the yard?"

"To be sure, sir, to be sure!" cried the landlord in astonishment.

"Out with it, then! Another glass of brandy and water,—a little stronger, no sugar!"

The landlord stared; the barmaid stared; even the head-waiter, a very stately person, stared too.

"Hark ye," said the little man, sipping his brandy and water, "I am a deuced good-natured fellow, so I'll make you a great man to-night; for nothing makes a man so great as being let into a great secret. Did you ever hear of the rich Mr. Crauford?"

"Certainly: who has not?"

"Did you ever see him?"

"No! I can't say I ever did."

"You lie, landlord: you saw him to-night."

"Sir!" cried the landlord, bristling up.

The little man pulled out a brace of pistols, and very quietly began priming them out of a small powder-flask.

The landlord started back; the head-waiter cried "Rape!" and the barmaid "Murder!"

"Who the devil are you, sir?" cried the landlord.

"Mr. Tickletrout! the celebrated officer,—thief-taker, as they call it. Have a care, ma'am, the pistols are loaded. I see the chaise is out; there's the reckoning, landlord."

"O Lord! I'm sure I don't want any reckoning: too great an honour for my poor house to be favoured with your company; but [following the little man to the door] whom did you please to say you were going to catch?"

"Mr. Crauford, alias Dr. Stapylton."

"Lord! Lord! to think of it,—how shocking! What has he done?"

"Swindled, I believe."

"My eyes! And why, sir, did not you catch him when he was in the bar?"

"Because then I should not have got paid for my journey to Dover. Shut the door, boy; first stage on to Canterbury." And, drawing a woollen nightcap over his ears, Mr. Tickletrout resigned himself to his nocturnal excursion.

On the very day on which the patent for his peerage was to have been made out, on the very day on which he had afterwards calculated on reaching Paris, on that very day was Mr. Richard Crauford lodged in Newgate, fully committed for a trial of life and death.

CHAPTER LXXXIII

*There, if, O gentle love! I read aright
The utterance that sealed thy sacred bond,
'T was listening to those accents of delight
She hid upon his breast those eyes, beyond
Expression's power to paint, all languishingly fond.*

—CAMPBELL.

"And you will positively leave us for London," said Lady Flora, tenderly, "and to-morrow too!" This was said to one who under the name of Clarence Linden has played the principal part in our drama, and whom now, by the death of his brother succeeding to the honours of his house, we present to our reader as Clinton L'Estrange, Earl of Ulswater.

They were alone in the memorable pavilion; and though it was winter the sun shone cheerily into the apartment; and through the door, which was left partly open, the evergreens, contrasting with the leafless boughs of the oak and beech, could be just descried, furnishing the lover with some meet simile of love, and deceiving the eyes of those willing to be deceived with a resemblance to the departed summer. The unusual mildness of the day seemed to operate genially upon the birds,—those children of light and song; and they grouped blithely beneath the window and round the door, where the hand of the kind young spirit of the place had so often ministered to their wants. Every now and then, too, you might hear the shrill glad note of the blackbird keeping measure to his swift and low flight, and sometimes a vagrant hare from the neighbouring preserves sauntered fearlessly by the half-shut door, secure, from long experience, of an asylum in the vicinity of one who had drawn from the breast of Nature a tenderness and love for all its offspring.

Her lover sat at Flora's feet; and, looking upward, seemed to seek out the fond and melting eyes which, too conscious of their secret, turned bashfully from his gaze. He had drawn her arm over his shoulder; and clasping that small and snowy hand, which, long coveted with a miser's desire, was at length won, he pressed upon it a thousand kisses, sweeter beguilers of time than even words. All had been long explained; the space between their hearts annihilated; doubt, anxiety, misconstruction, those clouds of love, had passed away, and left not a wreck to obscure its heaven.

"And you will leave us to-morrow; must it be to-morrow?"

"Ah! Flora, it must; but see, I have your lock of hair—your beautiful, dark hair—to kiss, when I am away from you, and I shall have your letters, dearest,—a letter every day; and oh! more than all, I shall have the hope, the certainty, that when we meet again, you will be mine forever."

"And I, too, must, by seeing it in your handwriting, learn to reconcile myself to your new name. Ah! I wish you had been still Clarence,—only Clarence. Wealth, rank, power,—what are all these but rivals to poor Flora?"

Lady Flora sighed, and the next moment blushed; and, what with the sigh and the blush, Clarence's lips wandered from the hands to the cheek, and thence to a mouth on which the west wind seemed to have left the sweets of a thousand summers.

CHAPTER LXXXIV

A Houndsditch man, one of the devil's near kinsmen,—a broker.—Every Man in His Humour.

We have here discovered the most dangerous piece of lechery that ever was known in the commonwealth.—Much Ado about Nothing.

It was an evening of mingled rain and wind, the hour about nine, when Mr. Morris Brown, under the shelter of that admirable umbrella of sea- green silk, to which we have before had the honour to summon the attention of our readers, was, after a day of business, plodding homeward his weary way. The obscure streets through which his course was bent were at no time very thickly thronged, and at the present hour the inclemency of the night rendered them utterly deserted. It is true that now and then a solitary female, holding up, with one hand, garments already piteously bedraggled, and with the other thrusting her umbrella in the very teeth of the hostile winds, might be seen crossing the intersected streets, and vanishing amid the subterranean recesses of some kitchen area, or tramping onward amidst the mazes of the metropolitan labyrinth, till, like the cuckoo, "heard," but no longer "seen," the echo of her retreating pattens made a dying music to the reluctant ear; or indeed, at intervals of unfrequent occurrence, a hackney vehicle jolted, rumbling, bumping over the uneven stones, as if groaning forth its gratitude to the elements for which it was indebted for its fare. Sometimes also a chivalrous gallant of the feline species ventured its delicate paws upon the streaming pavement, and shook, with a small but dismal cry, the raindrops from the pyramidal roofs of its tender ears.

But, save these occasional infringements on its empire, solitude, dark, comfortless, and unrelieved, fell around the creaking footsteps of Mr. Morris Brown. "I wish," soliloquized the worthy broker, "that I had been able advantageously to dispose of this cursed umbrella of the late Lady Waddilove; it is very little calculated for any but a single lady of slender shape, and though it certainly keeps the rain off my hat, it only sends it with a double dripping upon my shoulders. Pish, deuce take the umbrella! I shall catch my death of cold."

These complaints of an affliction that was assuredly sufficient to irritate the naturally sweet temper of Mr. Brown, only ceased as that industrious personage paused at the corner of the street, for the purpose of selecting the driest path through which to effect the miserable act of crossing to the opposite side. Occupied in stretching his neck over the kennel, in order to take the fullest survey of its topography which the scanty and agitated lamps would allow, the unhappy wanderer, lowering his umbrella, suffered a cross and violent gust of wind to rush, as if on purpose, against the interior. The rapidity with which this was done, and the sudden impetus, which gave to the inflated silk the force of a balloon, happening to occur exactly at the moment Mr. Brown was stooping with such wistful anxiety over the pavement, that gentleman, to his inexpressible dismay, was absolutely lifted, as it were, from his present footing, and immersed in a running rivulet of liquid mire, which flowed immediately below the pavement. Nor was this all: for the wind, finding itself somewhat imprisoned in the narrow receptacle it had thus abruptly entered, made so strenuous an exertion to extricate itself, that it turned Lady Waddilove's memorable relic utterly inside out; so that when Mr. Brown, aghast at the calamity of his immersion, lifted his eyes to heaven, with a devotion that had in it more of expostulation than submission, he beheld, by the melancholy lamps, the apparition of his umbrella, —the exact opposite to its legitimate conformation, and seeming, with its lengthy stick and inverted summit, the actual and absolute resemblance of a gigantic wineglass.

"Now," said Mr. Brown, with that ironical bitterness so common to intense despair, "now, that's what I call pleasant."

As if the elements were guided and set on by all the departed souls of those whom Mr. Brown had at any time overreached in his profession, scarcely had the afflicted broker uttered this brief sentence, before a discharge of rain, tenfold more heavy than any which had yet fallen, tumbled down in literal torrents upon the defenceless head of the itinerant.

"This won't do," said Mr. Brown, plucking up courage and splashing out of the little rivulet once more into terra firma, "this won't do: I must find a shelter somewhere. Dear, dear, how the wet runs down me! I am for all the world like the famous dripping well in Derbyshire. What a beast of an umbrella! I'll never buy one again of an old lady: hang me if I do."

As the miserable Morris uttered these sentences, which gushed out, one by one, in a broken stream of complaint, he looked round and round— before, behind, beside—for some temporary protection or retreat. In vain: the uncertainty of the light only allowed him to discover houses in which no portico extended its friendly shelter, and where even the doors seemed divested of the narrow ledge wherewith they are, in more civilized quarters, ordinarily crowned.

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