

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**PAUL CLIFFORD —
VOLUME 05**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон
Paul Clifford — Volume 05

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Paul Clifford — Volume 05

CHAPTER XXII

Outlaw. Stand, sir, and throw us that you have about you!

Val. Ruffians, forego that rude, uncivil touch!

The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

On leaving the scene in which he had been so unwelcome a guest, Clifford hastened to the little inn where he had left his horse. He mounted and returned to Bath. His thoughts were absent, and he unconsciously suffered the horse to direct its course whither it pleased. This was naturally towards the nearest halting-place which the animal remembered; and this halting-place was at that illustrious tavern, in the suburbs of the town, in which we have before commemorated Clifford's re-election to the dignity of chief. It was a house of long-established reputation; and here news of any of the absent confederates was always to be obtained. This circumstance, added to the excellence of its drink, its ease, and the electric chain of early habits, rendered it a favourite haunt, even despite their present gay and modish pursuits, with Tomlinson and Pepper; and here, when Clifford sought the pair at unseasonable hours, was he for the most part sure to find them. As his meditations were interrupted by the sudden stopping of his horse beneath the well-known sign, Clifford, muttering an angry malediction on the animal, spurred it onward in the direction of his own home. He had already reached the end of the street, when his resolution seemed to change, and muttering to himself, "Ay, I might as well arrange this very night for our departure!" he turned his horse's head backward, and was once more at the tavern door. He threw the bridle over an iron railing, and knocking with a peculiar sound at the door, was soon admitted.

Are ——— and ——— here?" asked he of the old woman, as he entered, mentioning the cant words by which, among friends, Tomlinson and Pepper were usually known.

"They are both gone on the sharps to-night," replied the old lady, lifting her unsnuffed candle to the face of the speaker with an intelligent look; Oliver (the moon) is sleepy, and the lads will take advantage of his nap."

"Do you mean," answered Clifford, replying in the same key, which we take the liberty to paraphrase, "that they are out on any actual expedition?"

"To be sure," rejoined the dame. "They who lag late on the road may want money for supper!"

"Ha! which road?"

"You are a pretty fellow for captain!" rejoined the dame, with a good-natured sarcasm in her tone. "Why, Captain Gloak, poor fellow! knew every turn of his men to a hair, and never needed to ask what they were about. Ah, he was a fellow! none of your girl-faced mudgers, who make love to ladies, forsooth,—a pretty woman need not look far for a kiss when he was in the room, I warrant, however coarse her duds might be; and lauk! but the captain was a sensible man, and liked a cow as well as a calf."

"So, so! on the road, are they?" cried Clifford, musingly, and without heeding the insinuated attack on his decorum. "But answer me, what is the plan? Be quick!"

"Why," replied the dame, "there's some swell cove of a lord gives a blow-out to-day; and the lads, dear souls! think to play the queer on some straggler."

Without uttering a word, Clifford darted from the house, and was remounted before the old lady had time to recover her surprise.

"If you want to see them," cried she, as he put spurs to his horse, "they ordered me to have supper ready at———" The horse's hoofs drowned the last words of the dame; and carefully rebolting the door, and muttering an invidious comparison between Captain Clifford and Captain Gloak, the good landlady returned to those culinary operations destined to rejoice the hearts of Tomlinson and Pepper.

Return we ourselves to Lucy. It so happened that the squire's carriage was the last to arrive; for the coachman, long uninitiated among the shades of Warlock into the dissipation of fashionable life, entered on his debut at Bath, with all the vigorous heat of matured passions for the first time released, into the festivities of the ale-house, and having a milder master than most of his comrades, the fear of displeasure was less strong in his aurigal bosom than the love of companionship; so that during the time this gentleman was amusing himself, Lucy had ample leisure for enjoying all the thousand-and-one reports of the scene between Mauleverer and Clifford which regaled her ears. Nevertheless, whatever might have been her feelings at these pleasing recitals, a certain vague joy predominated over all. A man feels but slight comparative happiness in being loved, if he know that it is in vain; but to a woman that simple knowledge is sufficient to destroy the memory of a thousand distresses, and it is not till she has told her heart again and again that she is loved, that she will even begin to ask if it be in vain.

It was a partially starlight yet a dim and obscure night, for the moon had for the last hour or two been surrounded by mist and cloud, when at length the carriage arrived; and Mauleverer, for the second time that evening playing the escort, conducted Lucy to the vehicle. Anxious to learn if she had seen or been addressed by Clifford, the subtle earl, as he led her to the gate, dwelt particularly on the intrusion of that person, and by the trembling of the hand which rested on his arm, he drew no delicious omen for his own hopes. "However," thought he, "the man goes to-morrow, and then the field will be clear; the girl's a child yet, and I forgive her folly." And with an air of chivalric veneration, Mauleverer bowed the object of his pardon into her carriage.

As soon as Lucy felt herself alone with her father, the emotions so long pent within her forced themselves into vent, is and leaning back against the carriage, she wept, though in silence, tears, burning tears, of sorrow, comfort, agitation, anxiety.

The good old squire was slow in perceiving his daughter's emotion; it would have escaped him altogether, if, actuated by a kindly warming of the heart towards her, originating in his new suspicion of her love for Clifford, he had not put his arm round her neck; and this unexpected caress so entirely unstrung her nerves that Lucy at once threw herself upon her father's breast, and her weeping, hitherto so quiet, became distinct and audible.

"Be comforted, my dear, dear child!" said the squire, almost affected to tears himself; and his emotion, arousing him from his usual mental confusion, rendered his words less involved and equivocal than they were wont to be. "And now I do hope that you won't vex yourself; the young man is indeed—and, I do assure you, I always thought so—a very charming gentleman, there's no denying it. But what can we do? You see what they all say of him, and it really was—we must allow that—very improper in him to come without being asked. Moreover, my dearest child, it is very wrong, very wrong indeed, to love any one, and not know who he is; and—and—but don't cry, my dear love, don't cry so; all will be very well, I am sure,—quite sure!"

As he said this, the kind old man drew his daughter nearer him, and feeling his hand hurt by something she wore unseen which pressed against it, he inquired, with some suspicion that the love might have proceeded to love-gifts, what it was.

"It is my mother's picture," said Lucy, simply, and putting it aside.

The old squire had loved his wife tenderly; and when Lucy made this reply, all the fond and warm recollections of his youth rushed upon him. He thought, too, how earnestly on her death-bed that wife had recommended to his vigilant care their only child now weeping on his bosom: he remembered how, dwelling on that which to all women seems the grand epoch of life, she had said,

"Never let her affections be trifled with,—never be persuaded by your ambitious brother to make her marry where she loves not, or to oppose her, without strong reason, where she does: though she be but a child now, I know enough of her to feel convinced that if ever she love, she will love too well for her own happiness, even with all things in her favour." These words, these recollections, joined to the remembrance of the cold-hearted scheme of William Brandon, which he had allowed himself to favour, and of his own supineness towards Lucy's growing love for Clifford, till resistance became at once necessary and too late, all smote him with a remorseful sorrow, and fairly sobbing himself, he said, "Thy mother, child! ah, would that she were living, she would never have neglected thee as I have done!"

The squire's self-reproach made Lucy's tears cease on the instant; and as she covered her father's hands with kisses, she replied only by vehement accusations against herself, and praises of his too great fatherly fondness and affection. This little burst, on both sides, of honest and simple-hearted love ended in a silence full of tender and mingled thoughts; and as Lucy still clung to the breast of the old man, uncouth as he was in temper, below even mediocrity in intellect, and altogether the last person in age or mind or habit that seemed fit for a confidant in the love of a young and enthusiastic girl, she felt the old homely truth that under all disadvantages there are, in this hollow world, few in whom trust can be so safely reposed, few who so delicately and subtly respect the confidence, as those from whom we spring.

The father and daughter had been silent for some minutes, and the former was about to speak, when the carriage suddenly stopped. The squire heard a rough voice at the horses' heads; he looked forth from the window to see, through the mist of the night, what could possibly be the matter, and he encountered in this action, just one inch from his forehead, the protruded and shining barrel of a horse-pistol. We may believe, without a reflection on his courage, that Mr. Brandon threw himself back into his carriage with all possible despatch; and at the same moment the door was opened, and a voice said, not in a threatening but a smooth accent,—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to disturb you, but want is imperious; oblige me with your money, your watches, your rings, and any other little commodities of a similar nature!"

So delicate a request the squire had not the heart to resist, the more especially as he knew himself without any weapons of defence; accordingly he drew out a purse, not very full, it must be owned,—together with an immense silver hunting-watch, with a piece of black ribbon attached to it.

"There, sir," said he, with a groan, "don't frighten the young lady."

The gentle applicant, who indeed was no other than the specious Augustus Tomlinson, slid the purse into his waistcoat-pocket, after feeling its contents with a rapid and scientific finger.

"Your watch, sir," quoth he,—and as he spoke he thrust it carelessly into his coat-pocket, as a school-boy would thrust a peg-top,—"is heavy; but trusting to experience, since an accurate survey is denied me, I fear it is more valuable from its weight than its workmanship: however, I will not wound your vanity by affecting to be fastidious. But surely the young lady, as you call her,—for I pay you the compliment of believing your word as to her age, inasmuch as the night is too dark to allow me the happiness of a personal inspection,—the young lady has surely some little trinket she can dispense with. 'Beauty when unadorned,' you know, etc."

Lucy, who, though greatly frightened, lost neither her senses nor her presence of mind, only answered by drawing forth a little silk purse, that contained still less than the leathern convenience of the squire; to this she added a gold chain; and Tomlinson, taking them with an affectionate squeeze of the hand and a polite apology, was about to withdraw, when his sagacious eyes were suddenly stricken by the gleam of jewels. The fact was that in altering the position of her mother's picture, which had been set in the few hereditary diamonds possessed by the Lord of Warlock, Lucy had allowed it to hang on the outside of her dress, and bending forward to give the robber her other possessions, the diamonds at once came in full sight, and gleamed the more invitingly from the darkness of the night.

"Ah, madam," said Tomlinson, stretching forth his hand, you would play me false, would you? Treachery should never go unpunished. Favour me instantly with the little ornament round your neck!"

"I cannot,—I cannot!" said Lucy, grasping her treasure with both her hands; "it is my mother's picture, and my mother is dead!"

"The wants of others, madam," returned Tomlinson, who could not for the life of him rob immorally, "are ever more worthy your attention than family prejudices. Seriously, give it, and that instantly; we are in a hurry, and your horses are plunging like devils: they will break your carriage in an instant,—despatch!"

The squire was a brave man on the whole, though no hero; and the nerves of an old fox-hunter soon recover from a little alarm. The picture of his buried wife was yet more inestimable to him than it was to Lucy, and at this new demand his spirit was roused within him.

He clenched his fists, and advancing himself as it were on his seat, he cried in a loud voice,—

"Begone, fellow! I have given you—for my own part I think so—too much already; and, by God, you shall not have the picture!"

"Don't force me to use violence," said Augustus; and putting one foot on the carriage-step, he brought his pistol within a few inches of Lucy's breast, rightly judging, perhaps, that the show of danger to her would be the best method to intimidate the squire. At that instant the valorous moralist found himself suddenly seized with a powerful gripe on the shoulder; and a low voice, trembling with passion, hissed in his ear. Whatever might be the words that startled his organs, they operated as an instantaneous charm; and to their astonishment, the squire and Lucy beheld their assailant abruptly withdraw. The door of the carriage was clapped to, and scarcely two minutes had elapsed before, the robber having remounted, his comrade, hitherto stationed at the horses' heads, set spurs to his own steed, and the welcome sound of receding hoofs smote upon the bewildered ears of the father and daughter.

The door of the carriage was again opened; and a voice, which made Lucy paler than the preceding terror, said,—

"I fear, Mr. Brandon, the robbers have frightened your daughter. There is now, however, nothing to fear; the ruffians are gone."

"God bless me!" said the squire; "why, is that Captain Clifford?"

"It is; and he conceives himself too fortunate to have been of the smallest service to Mr. and Miss Brandon."

On having convinced himself that it was indeed to Mr. Clifford that he owed his safety as well as that of his daughter, whom he believed to have been in a far more imminent peril than she really was,—for to tell thee the truth, reader, the pistol of Tomlinson was rather calculated for show than use, having a peculiarly long bright barrel with nothing in it,—the squire was utterly at a loss how to express his gratitude; and when he turned to Lucy to beg she would herself thank their gallant deliverer, he found that, overpowered with various emotions, she had, for the first time in her life, fainted away.

"Good heavens!" cried the alarmed father, "she is dead,—my Lucy, my Lucy, they have killed her!"

To open the door nearest to Lucy, to bear her from the carriage in his arms, was to Clifford the work of an instant. Utterly unconscious of the presence of any one else,—unconscious even of what he said, he poured forth a thousand wild, passionate, yet half-audible expressions; and as he bore her to a bank by the roadside, and seating himself supported her against his bosom, it would be difficult perhaps to say, whether something of delight—of burning and thrilling delight—was not mingled with his anxiety and terror. He chafed her small hands in his own; his breath, all trembling and warm, glowed upon her cheek; and once, and but once, his lips drew nearer, and breathing aside the dishevelled richness of her tresses, clung in a long and silent kiss to her own.

Meanwhile, by the help of the footman, who had now somewhat recovered his astonished senses, the squire descended from his carriage, and approached with faltering steps the place where his daughter reclined. At the instant that he took her hand, Lucy began to revive; and the first action, in the bewildered unconsciousness of awaking, was to throw her arm around the neck of her supporter.

Could all the hours and realities of hope, joy, pleasure, in Clifford's previous life have been melted down and concentrated into a single emotion, that emotion would have been but tame to the rapture of Lucy's momentary and innocent caress! And at a later yet no distant period, when in the felon's cell the grim visage of Death scowled upon him, it may be questioned whether his thoughts dwelt not far more often on the remembrance of that delightful moment than on the bitterness and ignominy of an approaching doom.

"She breathes,—she moves,—she wakes!" cried the father; and Lucy, attempting to rise, and recognizing the squire's voice, said faintly,—

"Thank God, my dear father, you are not hurt! And are they really gone? —and where—where are we?"

The squire, relieving Clifford of his charge, folded his child in his arms, while in his own elucidatory manner he informed her where she was, and with whom. The lovers stood face to face to each other; but what delicious blushes did the night, which concealed all but the outline of their forms, hide from the eyes of Clifford!

The honest and kind heart of Mr. Brandon was glad of a release to the indulgent sentiments it had always cherished towards the suspected and maligned Clifford, and turning now from Lucy, it fairly poured itself forth upon her deliverer. He grasped him warmly by the hand, and insisted upon his accompanying them to Bath in the carriage, and allowing the footman to ride his horse. This offer was still pending, when the footman, who had been to see after the health and comfort of his fellow-servant, came to inform the party, in a dolorous accent, of something which, in the confusion and darkness of the night, they had not yet learned,—namely, that the horses and coachman were gone!

"Gone!" said the squire, "gone! Why, the villains can't (for my part, I never believe, though I have heard such wonders of, those sleight of hand) have bagged them!"

Here a low groan was audible; and the footman, sympathetically guided to the spot whence it emanated, found the huge body of the coachman safely deposited, with its face downward, in the middle of the kennel. After this worthy had been lifted to his legs, and had shaken himself into intelligence, it was found that when the robber had detained the horses, the coachman, who required very little to conquer his more bellicose faculties, had—he himself said, by a violent blow from the ruffian, though, perhaps, the cause lay nearer home—quitted the coach-box for the kennel, the horses grew frightened, and after plunging and rearing till he cared no longer to occupy himself with their arrest, the highwayman had very quietly cut the traces, and by the time present, it was not impossible that the horses were almost at the door of their stables at Bath.

The footman who had apprised the squire of this misfortune was, unlike most news-tellers, the first to offer consolation. "There be an excellent public," quoth he, "about a half a mile on, where your honour could get horses; or, mayhap, if Miss Lucy, poor heart, be faint, you may like to stop for the night."

Though a walk of half a mile in a dark night and under other circumstances would not have seemed a grateful proposition, yet at present, when the squire's imagination had only pictured to him the alternatives of passing the night in the carriage or of crawling on foot to Bath, it seemed but a very insignificant hardship; and tucking his daughter's arm under his own, while in a kind voice he told Clifford "to support her on the other side," the squire ordered the footman to lead the way with Clifford's horse, and the coachman to follow or be d—d, whichever he pleased.

In silence Clifford offered his arm to Lucy, and silently she accepted the courtesy. The squire was the only talker; and the theme he chose was not ungrateful to Lucy, for it was the praise of her lover. But Clifford scarcely listened, for a thousand thoughts and feelings contested within him; and

the light touch of Lucy's hand upon his arm would alone have been sufficient to distract and confuse his attention. The darkness of the night, the late excitement, the stolen kiss that still glowed upon his lips, the remembrance of Lucy's flattering agitation in the scene with her at Lord Mauleverer's, the yet warmer one of that unconscious embrace, which still tingled through every nerve of his frame, all conspired with the delicious emotion which he now experienced at her presence and her contact to intoxicate and inflame him. Oh, those burning moments in love, when romance has just mellowed into passion, and without losing anything of its luxurious vagueness mingles the enthusiasm of its dreams with the ardent desires of reality and earth! That is the exact time when love has reached its highest point,—when all feelings, all thoughts, the whole soul, and the whole mind, are seized and engrossed,—when every difficulty weighed in the opposite scale seems lighter than dust,—when to renounce the object beloved is the most deadly and lasting sacrifice,—and when in so many breasts, where honour, conscience, virtue, are far stronger than we can believe them ever to have been in a criminal like Clifford, honour, conscience, virtue, have perished at once and suddenly into ashes before that mighty and irresistible fire.

The servant, who had had previous opportunities of ascertaining the topography of the "public" of which he spake, and who was perhaps tolerably reconciled to his late terror in the anticipation of renewing his intimacy with "the spirits of the past," now directed the attention of our travellers to a small inn just before them. Mine host had not yet retired to repose, and it was not necessary to knock twice before the door was opened.

A bright fire, an officious landlady, a commiserate landlord, a warm potation, and the promise of excellent beds, all appeared to our squire to make ample amends for the intelligence that the inn was not licensed to let post-horses; and mine host having promised forthwith to send two stout fellows, a rope, and a cart-horse to bring the carriage under shelter (for the squire valued the vehicle because it was twenty years old), and moreover to have the harness repaired, and the horses ready by an early hour the next day, the good humour of Mr. Brandon rose into positive hilarity. Lucy retired under the auspices of the landlady to bed; and the squire having drunk a bowl of bishop, and discovered a thousand new virtues in Clifford, especially that of never interrupting a good story, clapped the captain on the shoulder, and making him promise not to leave the inn till he had seen him again, withdrew also to the repose of his pillow. Clifford remained below, gazing abstractedly on the fire for some time afterwards; nor was it till the drowsy chambermaid had thrice informed him of the prepared comforts of his bed, that he adjourned to his chamber. Even then it seems that sleep did not visit his eyelids; for a wealthy grazier, who lay in the room below, complained bitterly the next morning of some person walking overhead "in all manner of strides, just for all the world like a happarition in boots."

CHAPTER XXIII

Viola. And dost thou love me?

*Lysander. . . . Love thee, Viola? Do I not fly thee when my being drinks
Light from thine eyes?—that flight is all my answer!*

The Bride, Act ii. sc. 1.

The curtain meditations of the squire had not been without the produce of a resolve. His warm heart at once reopened to the liking he had formerly conceived for Clifford; he longed for an opportunity to atone for his past unkindness, and to testify his present gratitude; moreover, he felt at once indignant at, and ashamed of, his late conduct in joining the popular, and, as he now fully believed, the causeless prepossession against his young friend, and before a more present and a stronger sentiment his habitual deference for his brother's counsels faded easily away. Coupled with these favourable feelings towards Clifford were his sagacious suspicions, or rather certainty, of Lucy's attachment to her handsome deliverer; and he had at least sufficient penetration to perceive that she was not likely to love him the less for the night's adventure. To all this was added the tender recollection of his wife's parting words; and the tears and tell-tale agitation of Lucy in the carriage were sufficient to his simple mind, which knew not how lightly maiden's tears are shed and dried, to confirm the prediction of the dear deceased. Nor were the squire's more generous and kindly feelings utterly unmixed with selfish considerations. Proud, but not the least ambitious, he was always more ready to confer an honour than receive one, and at heart he was secretly glad at the notion of exchanging, as a son-in-law, the polished and unfamiliar Mauleverer for the agreeable and social Clifford. Such in "admired disorder," were the thoughts which rolled through the teeming brain of Joseph Brandon; and before he had turned on his left side, which he always did preparatory to surrendering himself to slumber, the squire had fully come to a determination most fatal to the schemes of the lawyer and the hopes of the earl.

The next morning, as Lucy was knitting

"The loose train of her amber-dropping hair"

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