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NIGHT AND MORNING, VOLUME 5

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Night and Morning, Volume 5

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Night and Morning, Volume 5:

Содержание

Edward Bulwer Lytton
Night and Morning, Volume 5

Book V

CHAPTER I

"Per ambages et ministeria deorum."—PETRONTUS.
[Through the mysteries and ministerings of the gods.]

Mr. Roger Morton was behind his counter one drizzling, melancholy day. Mr. Roger Morton, alderman, and twice mayor of his native town, was a thriving man. He had grown portly and corpulent. The nightly potations of brandy and water, continued year after year with mechanical perseverance, had deepened the roses on his cheek. Mr. Roger Morton was never intoxicated—he "only made himself comfortable." His constitution was strong; but, somehow or other, his digestion was not as good as it might be. He was certain that something or other disagreed with him. He left off the joint one day—the pudding another. Now he avoided vegetables as poison—and now he submitted with a sigh to the doctor's interdict of his cigar. Mr. Roger Morton never thought of leaving off the brandy and water: and he would have

resented as the height of impertinent insinuation any hint upon that score to a man of so sober and respectable a character.

Mr. Roger Morton was seated—for the last four years, ever since his second mayoralty, he had arrogated to himself the dignity of a chair. He received rather than served his customers. The latter task was left to two of his sons. For Tom, after much cogitation, the profession of an apothecary had been selected. Mrs. Morton observed, that it was a genteel business, and Tom had always been a likely lad. And Mr. Roger considered that it would be a great comfort and a great saving to have his medical adviser in his own son.

The other two sons and the various attendants of the shop were plying the profitable trade, as customer after customer, with umbrellas and in pattens, dropped into the tempting shelter—when a man, meanly dressed, and who was somewhat past middle age, with a careworn, hungry face, entered timidly. He waited in patience by the crowded counter, elbowed by sharp-boned and eager spinsters—and how sharp the elbows of spinsters are, no man can tell who has not forced his unwelcome way through the agitated groups in a linendraper's shop!—the man, I say, waited patiently and sadly, till the smallest of the shopboys turned from a lady, who, after much sorting and shading, had finally decided on two yards of lilac-coloured penny riband, and asked, in an insinuating professional tone,—

"What shall I show you, sir?"

"I wish to speak to Mr. Morton. Which is he?"

"Mr. Morton is engaged, sir. I can give you what you want."

"No—it is a matter of business—important business." The boy eyed the napless and dripping hat, the gloveless hands, and the rusty neckcloth of the speaker; and said, as he passed his fingers through a profusion of light curls "Mr. Morton don't attend much to business himself now; but that's he. Any cravats, sir?"

The man made no answer, but moved where, near the window, and chatting with the banker of the town (as the banker tried on a pair of beaver gloves), sat still—after due apology for sitting—Mr. Roger Morton.

The alderman lowered his spectacles as he glanced grimly at the lean apparition that shaded the spruce banker, and said,—

"Do you want me, friend?"

"Yes, sir, if you please;" and the man took off his shabby hat, and bowed low.

"Well, speak out. No begging petition, I hope?"

"No, sir! Your nephews—"

The banker turned round, and in his turn eyed the newcomer. The linendraper started back.

"Nephews!" he repeated, with a bewildered look. "What does the man mean?

Wait a bit."

"Oh, I've done!" said the banker, smiling. "I am glad to find we agree so well upon this question: I knew we should. Our member will never suit us if he goes on in this way. Trade must take care

of itself. Good day to You!"

"Nephews!" repeated Mr. Morton, rising, and beckoning to the man to follow him into the back parlour, where Mrs. Morton sat casting up the washing bills.

"Now," said the husband, closing the door, "what do you mean, my good fellow?"

"Sir, what I wish to ask you is-if you can tell me what has become of—of the young Beau—, that is, of your sister's sons. I understand there were two—and I am told that—that they are both dead. Is it so?"

"What is that to you, friend?"

"An please you, sir, it is a great deal to them!"

"Yes—ha! ha! it is a great deal to everybody whether they are alive or dead!" Mr. Morton, since he had been mayor, now and then had his joke. "But really—"

"Roger!" said Mrs. Morton, under her breath—"Roger!"

"Yes, my dear."

"Come this way—I want to speak to you about this bill." The husband approached, and bent over his wife. "Who's this man?"

"I don't know."

"Depend on it, he has some claim to make-some bills or something. Don't commit yourself—the boys are dead for what we know!"

Mr. Morton hemmed and returned to his visitor.

"To tell you the truth, I am not aware of what has become of the young men."

"Then they are not dead—I thought not!" exclaimed the man, joyously.

"That's more than I can say. It's many years since I lost sight of the only one I ever saw; and they may be both dead for what I know."

"Indeed!" said the man. "Then you can give me no kind of—of—hint like, to find them out?"

"No. Do they owe you anything?"

"It does not signify talking now, sir. I beg your pardon."

"Stay—who are you?"

"I am a very poor man, sir."

Mr. Morton recoiled.

"Poor! Oh, very well—very well. You have done with me now. Good day— good day. I'm busy."

The stranger pecked for a moment at his hat—turned the handle of the door-peered under his grey eyebrows at the portly trader, who, with both hands buried in his pockets, his mouth pursed up, like a man about to say "No" fidgeted uneasily behind Mrs. Morton's chair. He sighed, shook his head, and vanished.

Mrs. Morton rang the bell-the maid-servant entered. "Wipe the carpet, Jenny;—dirty feet! Mr. Morton, it's a Brussels!"

"It was not my fault, my dear. I could not talk about family matters before the whole shop. Do you know, I'd quite forgot those poor boys. This unsettles me. Poor Catherine! she was so fond of them. A pretty boy that Sidney, too. What can have become of them? My heart rebukes me. I wish I had asked the

man more."

"More!—why he was just going to beg."

"Beg—yes—very true!" said Mr. Morton, pausing irresolutely; and then, with a hearty tone, he cried out, "And, damme, if he had begged, I could afford him a shilling! I'll go after him." So saying, he hastened back through the shop, but the man was gone—the rain was falling, Mr. Morton had his thin shoes on—he blew his nose, and went back to the counter. But, there, still rose to his memory the pale face of his dead sister; and a voice murmured in his ear, "Brother, where is my child?"

"Pshaw! it is not my fault if he ran away. Bob, go and get me the county paper."

Mr. Morton had again settled himself, and was deep in a trial for murder, when another stranger strode haughtily into the shop. The new-comer, wrapped in a pelisse of furs, with a thick moustache, and an eye that took in the whole shop, from master to boy, from ceiling to floor, in a glance, had the air at once of a foreigner and a soldier. Every look fastened on him, as he paused an instant, and then walking up to the alderman, said,—

"Sir, you are doubtless Mr. Morton?"

"At your commands, sir," said Roger, rising involuntarily.

"A word with you, then, on business."

"Business!" echoed Mr. Morton, turning rather pale, for he began to think himself haunted; "anything in my line, sir? I should be—"

The stranger bent down his tall stature, and hissed into Mr.

Morton's foreboding ear:

"Your nephews!"

Mr. Morton was literally dumb-stricken. Yes, he certainly was haunted! He stared at this second questioner, and fancied that there was something very supernatural and unearthly about him. He was so tall, and so dark, and so stern, and so strange. Was it the Unspeakable himself come for the linendraper? Nephews again! The uncle of the babes in the wood could hardly have been more startled by the demand!

"Sir," said Mr. Morton at last, recovering his dignity and somewhat peevishly,—"sir, I don't know why people should meddle with my family affairs. I don't ask other folks about their nephews. I have no nephew that I know of."

"Permit me to speak to you, alone, for one instant." Mr. Morton sighed, hitched up his trousers, and led the way to the parlour, where Mrs. Morton, having finished the washing bills, was now engaged in tying certain pieces of bladder round certain pots of preserves. The eldest Miss Morton, a young woman of five or six-and-twenty, who was about to be very advantageously married to a young gentleman who dealt in coals and played the violin (for N– was a very musical town), had just joined her for the purpose of extorting "The Swiss Boy, with variations," out of a sleepy little piano, that emitted a very painful cry under the awakening fingers of Miss Margaret Morton.

Mr. Morton threw open the door with a grunt, and the stranger pausing at the threshold, the full flood of sound (key C) upon

which "the Swiss Boy" was swimming along, "kine" and all, for life and death, came splash upon him.

"Silence! can't you?" cried the father, putting one hand to his ear, while with the other he pointed to a chair; and as Mrs. Morton looked up from the preserves with that air of indignant suffering with which female meekness upbraids a husband's wanton outrage, Mr. Roger added, shrugging his shoulders,—

"My nephews again, Mrs. K!"

Miss Margaret turned round, and dropped a courtesy. Mrs. Morton gently let fall a napkin over the preserves, and muttered a sort of salutation, as the stranger, taking off his hat, turned to mother and daughter one of those noble faces in which Nature has written her grant and warranty of the lordship of creation.

"Pardon me," he said, "if I disturb you. But my business will be short. I have come to ask you, sir, frankly, and as one who has a right to ask it, what tidings you can give me of Sidney Morton?"

"Sir, I know nothing whatever about him. He was taken from my house, about twelve years since, by his brother. Myself, and the two Mr. Beauforts, and another friend of the family, went in search of them both.

My search failed."

"And theirs?"

"I understood from Mr. Beaufort that they had not been more successful. I have had no communication with those gentlemen since. But that's neither here nor there. In all probability, the elder of the boys—who, I fear, was a sad character—corrupted and

ruined his brother; and, by this time, Heaven knows what and where they are."

"And no one has inquired of you since—no one has asked the brother of Catherine Morton, nay, rather of Catherine Beaufort—where is the child intrusted to your care?"

This question, so exactly similar to that which his superstition had rung on his own ears, perfectly appalled the worthy alderman. He staggered back-stared at the marked and stern face that lowered upon him—and at last cried,—

"For pity's sake, sir, be just! What could I do for one who left me of his own accord?—"

"The day you had beaten him like a dog. You see, Mr. Morton, I know all."

"And what are you?" said Mr. Morton, recovering his English courage, and feeling himself strangely browbeaten in his own house;—"What and who are you, that you thus take the liberty to catechise a man of my character and respectability?"

"Twice mayor—" began Mrs. Morton.

"Hush, mother!" whispered Miss Margaret,—"don't work him up."

"I repeat, sir, what are you?"

"What am I?—your nephew! Who am I? Before men, I bear a name that I have assumed, and not dishonoured—before Heaven I am Philip Beaufort!"

Mrs. Morton dropped down upon her stool. Margaret murmured "My cousin!" in a tone that the ear of the musical

coal-merchant might not have greatly relished. And Mr. Morton, after a long pause, came up with a frank and manly expression of joy, and said:—

"Then, sir, I thank Heaven, from my heart, that one of my sister's children stands alive before me!"

"And now, again, I—I whom you accuse of having corrupted and ruined him —him for whom I toiled and worked—him, who was to me, then, as a last surviving son to some anxious father —I, from whom he was reft and robbed —I ask you again for Sidney—for my brother!"

"And again, I say, that I have no information to give you—that—Stay a moment-stay. You must pardon what I have said of you before you made yourself known. I went but by the accounts I had received from Mr. Beaufort. Let, me speak plainly; that gentleman thought, right or wrong, that it would be a great thing to separate your brother from you. He may have found him—it must be so—and kept his name and condition concealed from us all, lest you should detect it. Mrs. M., don't you think so?"

"I'm sure I'm so terrified I don't know what to think," said Mrs. Morton, putting her hand to her forehead, and see-sawing herself to and fro upon her stool.

"But since they wronged you—since you—you seem so very —very—"

"Very much the gentleman," suggested Miss Margaret. "Yes, so much the gentleman;—well off, too, I should hope, sir,"—and the experienced eye of Mr. Morton glanced at the costly sables

that lined the pelisse,– "there can be no difficulty in your learning from Mr. Beaufort all that you wish to know. And pray, sir, may I ask, did you send any one here to-day to make the very inquiry you have made?"

"I?—No. What do you mean?"

"Well, well—sit down—there may be something in all this that you may make out better than I can."

And as Philip obeyed, Mr. Morton, who was really and honestly rejoiced to see his sister's son alive and apparently thriving, proceeded to relate pretty exactly the conversation he had held with the previous visitor. Philip listened earnestly and with attention. Who could this questioner be? Some one who knew his birth—some one who sought him out?—some one, who—Good Heavens! could it be the long-lost witness of the marriage?

As soon as that idea struck him, be started from his seat and entreated Morton to accompany him in search of the stranger. "You know not," he said, in a tone impressed with that energy of will in which lay the talent of his mind,—"you know not of what importance this may be to my prospects—to your sister's fair name. If it should be the witness returned at last! Who else, of the rank you describe, would be interested in such inquiries? Come!"

"What witness?" said Mrs. Morton, fretfully. "You don't mean to come over us with the old story of the marriage?"

"Shall your wife slander your own sister, sir? A marriage there

was—God yet will proclaim the right—and the name of Beaufort shall be yet placed on my mother's gravestone. Come!"

"Here are your shoes and umbrella, pa," cried Miss Margaret, inspired by Philip's earnestness.

"My fair cousin, I guess," and as the soldier took her hand, he kissed the unreluctant cheek—turned to the door—Mr. Morton placed his arm in his, and the next moment they were in the street.

When Catherine, in her meek tones, had said, "Philip Beaufort was my husband," Roger Morton had disbelieved her. And now one word from the son, who could, in comparison, know so little of the matter, had almost sufficed to convert and to convince the sceptic. Why was this? Because—Man believes the Strong!

CHAPTER II

"—Quid Virtus et quid Sapientia possit Utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulssem." HOR.

["He has proposed to us Ulysses as a useful example of how much may be accomplished by Virtue and Wisdom."]

Meanwhile the object of their search, on quitting Mr. Morton's shop, had walked slowly and sadly on, through the plashing streets, till he came to a public house in the outskirts and on the high road to London. Here he took shelter for a short time, drying himself by the kitchen fire, with the license purchased by fourpenny-worth of gin; and having learned that the next coach to London would not pass for some hours, he finally settled himself in the Ingle, till the guard's horn should arouse him. By the same coach that the night before had conveyed Philip to N–, had the very man he sought been also a passenger!

The poor fellow was sickly and wearied out: he had settled into a doze, when he was suddenly wakened by the wheels of a coach and the trampling of horses. Not knowing how long he had slept, and imagining that the vehicle he had awaited was at the door, he ran out. It was a coach coming from London, and the driver was joking with a pretty barmaid who, in rather short petticoats, was fielding up to him the customary glass. The man, after satisfying himself that his time was not yet come, was turning back to the

fire, when a head popped itself out of the window, and a voice cried, "Stars and garters! Will—so that's you!" At the sound of the voice the man halted abruptly, turned very pale, and his limbs trembled. The inside passenger opened the door, jumped out with a little carpet-bag in his hand, took forth a long leathern purse from which he ostentatiously selected the coins that paid his fare and satisfied the coachman, and then, passing his arm through that of the acquaintance he had discovered, led him back into the house.

"Will—Will," he whispered, "you have been to the Mortons. Never moind— let's hear all. Jenny or Dolly, or whatever your sweet praetty name is— a private room and a pint of brandy, my dear. Hot water and lots of the grocery. That's right."

And as soon as the pair found themselves, with the brandy before them, in a small parlour with a good fire, the last comer went to the door, shut it cautiously, flung his bag under the table, took off his gloves, spread himself wider and wider before the fire, until he had entirely excluded every ray from his friend, and then suddenly turning so that the back might enjoy what the front had gained, he exclaimed.

"Damme, Will, you're a praetty sort of a broather to give me the slip in that way. But in this world every man for his-self!"

"I tell you," said William, with something like decision in his voice, "that I will not do any wrong to these young men if they live."

"Who asks you to do a wrong to them?—booby! Perhaps I

may be the best friend they may have yet—ay, or you too, though you're the ungratefulest whimsicallist sort of a son of a gun that ever I came across. Come, help yourself, and don't roll up your eyes in that way, like a Muggletonian asoide of a Fye-Fye!"

Here the speaker paused a moment, and with a graver and more natural tone of voice proceeded:

"So you did not believe me when I told you that these brothers were dead, and you have been to the Mortons to learn more?"

"Yes."

"Well, and what have you learned?"

"Nothing. Morton declares that he does not know that they are alive, but he says also that he does not know that they are dead."

"Indeed," said the other, listening with great attention; "and you really think that he does not know anything about them?"

"I do, indeed."

"Hum! Is he a sort of man who would post down the rhino to help the search?"

"He looked as if he had the yellow fever when I said I was poor," returned William, turning round, and trying to catch a glimpse at the fire, as he gulped his brandy and water.

"Then I'll be d–d if I run the risk of calling. I have done some things in this town by way of business before now; and though it's a long time ago, yet folks don't forget a haundsome man in a hurry—especially if he has done 'em! Now, then, listen to me. You see, I have given this matter all the 'tention in my power. 'If the lads be dead,' said I to you, 'it is no use burning one's fingers

by holding a candle to bones in a coffin. But Mr. Beaufort need not know they are dead, and we'll see what we can get out of him; and if I succeeds, as I think I shall, you and I may hold up our heads for the rest of our life.' Accordingly, as I told you, I went to Mr. Beaufort, and—'Gad, I thought we had it all our own way. But since I saw you last, there's been the devil and all. When I called again, Will, I was shown in to an old lord, sharp as a gimblet. Hang me, William, if he did not frighten me out of my seven senses!"

Here Captain Smith (the reader has, no doubt, already discovered that the speaker was no less a personage) took three or four nervous strides across the room, returned to the table, threw himself in a chair, placed one foot on one hob, and one on the other, laid his finger on his nose, and, with a significant wink, said in a whisper, "Will, he knew I had been lagged! He not only refused to hear all I had to say, but threatened to prosecute—persecute, hang, draw, and quarter us both, if we ever dared to come out with the truth."

"But what's the good of the truth if the boys are dead?" said William, timidly.

The captain, without heeding this question, continued, as he stirred the sugar in his glass, "Well, out I sneaked, and as soon as I had got to my own door I turned round and saw Sharp the runner on the other side of the way—I felt deuced queer. However, I went in, sat down, and began to think. I saw that it was up with us, so far as the old uns were concerned; and it might be worth

while to find out if the young uns really were dead."

"Then you did not know that after all! I thought so. Oh, Jerry!"

"Why, look you, man, it was not our interest to take their side if we could make our bargain out of the other. 'Cause why? You are only one witness—you are a good fellow, but poor, and with very shaky nerves, Will. You does not know what them big wigs are when a roan's caged in a witness-box—they flank one up, and they flank one down, and they bully and bother, till one's like a horse at Astley's dancing on hot iron. If your testimony broke down, why it would be all up with the case, and what then would become of us? Besides," added the captain, with dignified candour, "I have been lagged, it's no use denying it; I am back before my time. Inquiries about your respectability would soon bring the bulkies about me. And you would not have poor Jerry sent back to that d–d low place on t'other side of the herring-pond, would you?"

"Ah, Jerry!" said William, kindly placing his hand in his brother's, you know I helped you to escape; I left all to come over with you."

"So you did, and you're a good fellow; though as to leaving all, why you had got rid of all first. And when you told me about the marriage, did not I say that I saw our way to a snug thing for life? But to return to my story. There is a danger in going with the youngsters. But since, Will,—since nothing but hard words is to be got on the other side, we'll do our duty, and I'll find them out, and do the best I can for us—that is, if they be yet above

ground. And now I'll own to you that I think I knows that the younger one is alive."

"You do?"

"Yes! But as he won't come in for anything unless his brother is dead, we must have a hunt for the heir. Now I told you that, many years ago, there was a lad with me, who, putting all things together—seeing how the Beauforts came after him, and recollecting different things he let out at the time—I feel pretty sure is your old master's Hopeful. I know that poor Will Gawtrey gave this lad the address of Old Gregg, a friend of mine. So after watching Sharp off the sly, I went that very night, or rather at two in the morning, to Gregg's house, and, after brushing up his memory, I found that the lad had been to him, and gone over afterwards to Paris in search of Gawtrey, who was then keeping a matrimony shop. As I was not rich enough to go off to Paris in a pleasant, gentlemanlike way, I allowed Gregg to put me up to a noice quiet little bit of business. Don't shake your head—all safe—a rural affair! That took some days. You see it has helped to new rig me," and the captain glanced complacently over a very smart suit of clothes. "Well, on my return I went to call on you, but you had flown. I half suspected you might have gone to the mother's relations here; and I thought, at all events, that I could not do better than go myself and see what they knew of the matter. From what you say I feel I had better now let that alone, and go over to Paris at once; leave me alone to find out. And faith, what with Sharp and the old lord, the sooner I quit

England the better."

"And you really think you shall get hold of them after all? Oh, never fear my nerves if I'm once in the right; it's living with you, and seeing you do wrong, and hearing you talk wickedly, that makes me tremble."

"Bother!" said the captain, "you need not crow over me. Stand up, Will; there now, look at us two in the glass! Why, I look ten years younger than you do, in spite of all my troubles. I dress like a gentleman, as I am; I have money in my pocket; I put money in yours; without me you'd starve. Look you, you carried over a little fortune to Australia—you married—you farmed—you lived honestly, and yet that d–d shilly-shally disposition of yours, 'ticed into one speculation to-day, and scared out of another to-morrow, ruined you!"

"Jerry! Jerry!" cried William, writhing; "don't—don't."

"But it's all true, and I wants to cure you of preaching. And then, when you were nearly run out, instead of putting a bold face on it, and setting your shoulder to the wheel, you gives it up—you sells what you have—you bolts over, wife and all, to Boston, because some one tells you you can do better in America—you are out of the way when a search is made for you—years ago when you could have benefited yourself and your master's family without any danger to you or me—nobody can find you; 'cause why, you could not bear that your old friends in England, or in the colony either, should know that you were turned a slave-driver in Kentucky. You kick up a mutiny among the niggers

by moaning over them, instead of keeping 'em to it—you get kicked out yourself—your wife begs you to go back to Australia, where her relations will do something for you—you work your passage out, looking as ragged as a colt from grass— wife's uncle don't like ragged nephews-in-law—wife dies broken-hearted — and you might be breaking stones on the roads with the convicts, if I, myself a convict, had not taken compassion on you. Don't cry, Will, it is all for your own good—I hates cant! Whereas I, my own master from eighteen, never stooped to serve any other—have dressed like a gentleman—kissed the pretty girls —drove my pheaton—been in all the papers as 'the celebrated Dashing Jerry'—never wanted a guinea in my pocket, and even when lagged at last, had a pretty little sum in the colonial bank to lighten my misfortunes. I escape,—I bring you over— and here I am, supporting you, and in all probability, the one on whom depends the fate of one of the first families in the country. And you preaches at me, do you? Look you, Will;—in this world, honesty's nothing without force of character! And so your health!"

Here the captain emptied the rest of the brandy into his glass, drained it at a draught, and, while poor William was wiping his eyes with a ragged blue pocket-handkerchief, rang the bell, and asked what coaches would pass that way to –, a seaport town at some distance. On hearing that there was one at six o'clock, the captain ordered the best dinner the larder would afford to be got ready as soon as possible; and, when they were again alone, thus

accosted his brother:—

"Now you go back to town—here are four shiners for you. Keep quiet— don't speak to a soul—don't put your foot in it, that's all I beg, and I'll find out whatever there is to be found. It is damnably out of my way embarking at –, but I had best keep clear of Lunnon. And I tell you what, if these youngsters have hopped the twig, there's another bird on the bough that may prove a goldfinch after all—Young Arthur Beaufort: I hear he is a wild, expensive chap, and one who can't live without lots of money. Now, it's easy to frighten a man of that sort, and I cha'n't have the old lord at his elbow."

"But I tell you, that I only care for my poor master's children."

"Yes; but if they are dead, and by saying they are alive, one can make old age comfortable, there's no harm in it—eh?"

"I don't know," said William, irresolutely. "But certainly it is a hard thing to be so poor at my time of life; and so honest a man as I've been, too!"

Captain Smith went a little too far when he said that "honesty's nothing without force of character." Still, Honesty has no business to be helpless and draggle-tailed;—she must be active and brisk, and make use of her wits; or, though she keep clear or the prison, 'tis no very great wonder if she fall on the parish.

CHAPTER III

"Mitis.—This Macilente, signior, begins to be more sociable on a sudden." Every Man out of his Humour.

"Punt. Signior, you are sufficiently instructed.

"Fast. Who, I, sir?"—Ibid.

After spending the greater part of the day in vain inquiries and a vain search, Philip and Mr. Morton returned to the house of the latter.

"And now," said Philip, "all that remains to be done is this: first give to the police of the town a detailed description of the man; and secondly, let us put an advertisement both in the county journal and in some of the London papers, to the effect, that if the person who called on you will take the trouble to apply again, either personally or by letter, he may obtain the information sought for. In case he does, I will trouble you to direct him to—yes—to Monsieur de Vaudemont, according to this address."

"Not to you, then?"

"It is the same thing," replied Philip, drily. "You have confirmed my suspicions, that the Beauforts know some thing of my brother. What did you say of some other friend of the family who assisted in the search?"

"Oh,—a Mr. Spencer! an old acquaintance of your mother's." Here Mr. Morton smiled, but not being encouraged in a joke,

went on, "However, that's neither here nor there; he certainly never found out your brother. For I have had several letters from him at different times, asking if any news had been heard of either of you."

And, indeed, Spencer had taken peculiar pains to deceive the Mortons, whose interposition he feared little less than that of the Beauforts.

"Then it can be of no use to apply to him," said Philip, carelessly, not having any recollection of the name of Spencer, and therefore attaching little importance to the mention of him.

"Certainly, I should think not. Depend on it, Mr. Beaufort must know."

"True," said Philip. "And I have only to thank you for your kindness, and return to town."

"But stay with us this day—do—let me feel that we are friends. I assure you poor Sidney's fate has been a load on my mind ever since he left. You shall have the bed he slept in, and over which your mother bent when she left him and me for the last time."

These words were said with so much feeling, that the adventurer wrung his uncle's hand, and said, "Forgive me, I wronged you—I will be your guest."

Mrs. Morton, strange to say, evinced no symptoms of ill-humour at the news of the proffered hospitality. In fact, Miss Margaret had been so eloquent in Philip's praise during his absence, that she suffered herself to be favourably impressed.

Her daughter, indeed, had obtained a sort of ascendency over Mrs. M. and the whole house, ever since she had received so excellent an offer. And, moreover, some people are like dogs —they snarl at the ragged and fawn on the well-dressed. Mrs. Morton did not object to a nephew *de facto*, she only objected to a nephew in *forma pauperis*. The evening, therefore, passed more cheerfully than might have been anticipated, though Philip found some difficulty in parrying the many questions put to him on the past. He contented himself with saying, as briefly as possible, that he had served in a foreign service, and acquired what sufficed him for an independence; and then, with the ease which a man picks up in the great world, turned the conversation to the prospects of the family whose guest he was. Having listened with due attention to Mrs. Morton's eulogies on Tom, who had been sent for, and who drank the praises on his own gentility into a very large pair of blushing ears,—also, to her self-felicitations on Miss Margaret's marriage,—*item*, on the service rendered to the town by Mr. Roger, who had repaired the town-hall in his first mayoralty at his own expense,– *item*, to a long chronicle of her own genealogy, how she had one cousin a clergyman, and how her great-grandfather had been knighted,—*item*, to the domestic virtues of all her children,—*item*, to a confused explanation of the chastisement inflicted on Sidney, which Philip cut short in the middle; he asked, with a smile, what had become of the Plaskwiths. "Oh!" said Mrs. Morton, "my brother Kit has retired from business. His son-in-law, Mr. Plimmins, has succeeded."

"Oh, then, Plimmins married one of the young ladies?"

"Yes, Jane—she bad a sad squint!—Tom, there is nothing to laugh at,– we are all as God made us,—'Handsome is as handsome does,'—she has had three little uns!"

"Do they squint too?" asked Philip; and Miss Margaret giggled, and Tom roared, and the other young men roared too. Philip had certainly said something very witty.

This time Mrs. Morton administered no reproof; but replied pensively

"Natur is very mysterious—they all squint!"

Mr. Morton conducted Philip to his chamber. There it was, fresh, clean, unaltered—the same white curtains, the same honeysuckle paper as when Catherine had crept across the threshold.

"Did Sidney ever tell you that his mother placed a ring round his neck that night?" asked Mr. Morton.

"Yes; and the dear boy wept when he said that he had slept too soundly to know that she was by his side that last, last time. The ring—oh, how well I remember it! she never put it off till then; and often in the fields—for we were wild wanderers together in that day—often when his head lay on my shoulder, I felt that ring still resting on his heart, and fancied it was a talisman—a blessing. Well, well-good night to you!" And he shut the door on his uncle, and was alone.

CHAPTER IV

"The Man of Law, ...
And a great suit is like to be between them."

BEN JONSON: Staple of News.

On arriving in London, Philip went first to the lodging he still kept there, and to which his letters were directed; and, among some communications from Paris, full of the politics and the hopes of the Carlists, he found the following note from Lord Lilburne:—

"DEAR SIR,—When I met you the other day I told you I had been threatened with the gout. The enemy has now taken possession of the field. I am sentenced to regimen and the sofa. But as it is my rule in life to make afflictions as light as possible, so I have asked a few friends to take compassion on me, and help me 'to shuffle off this mortal coil' by dealing me, if they can, four by honours. Any time between nine and twelve to-night, or to-morrow night, you will find me at home; and if you are not better engaged, suppose you dine with me to-day—or rather dine opposite to me—and excuse my Spartan broth. You will meet (besides any two or three friends whom an impromptu invitation may find disengaged) my sister, with Beaufort and their daughter: they only arrived in town this morning, and are kind enough 'to

nurse me,' as they call it,—that is to say, their cook is taken ill! "Yours, "LILBURNE "Park Lane, Sept. —"

"The Beauforts. Fate favors me—I will go. The date is for to-day."

He sent off a hasty line to accept the invitation, and finding he had a few hours yet to spare, he resolved to employ them in consultation with some lawyer as to the chances of ultimately regaining his inheritance— a hope which, however wild, he had, since his return to his native shore, and especially since he had heard of the strange visit made to Roger Morton, permitted himself to indulge. With this idea he sallied out, meaning to consult Liancourt, who, having a large acquaintance among the English, seemed the best person to advise him as to the choice of a lawyer at once active and honest,—when he suddenly chanced upon that gentleman himself.

"This is lucky, my dear Liancourt. I was just going to your lodgings."

"And I was coming to yours to know if you dine with Lord Lilburne. He told me he had asked you. I have just left him. And, by the sofa of Mephistopheles, there was the prettiest Margaret you ever beheld."

"Indeed!—Who?"

"He called her his niece; but I should doubt if he had any relation on this side the Styx so human as a niece."

"You seem to have no great predilection for our host."

"My dear Vaudemont, between our blunt, soldierly natures,

and those wily, icy, sneering intellects, there is the antipathy of the dog to the cat."

"Perhaps so on our side, not on his—or why does he invite us?"

"London is empty; there is no one else to ask. We are new faces, new minds to him. We amuse him more than the hackneyed comrades he has worn out. Besides, he plays—and you, too. Fie on you!"

"Liancourt, I had two objects in knowing that man, and I pay to the toll for the bridge. When I cease to want the passage, I shall cease to pay the toll."

"But the bridge may be a draw-bridge, and the moat is devilish deep below. Without metaphor, that man may ruin you before you know where you are."

"Bah! I have my eyes open. I know how much to spend on the rogue whose service I hire as a lackey's; and I know also where to stop. Liancourt," he added, after a short pause, and in a tone deep with suppressed passion, "when I first saw that man, I thought of appealing to his heart for one who has a claim on it. That was a vain hope. And then there came upon me a sterner and deadlier thought—the scheme of the Avenger! This Lilburne—this rogue whom the world sets up to worship—ruined, body and soul ruined—one whose name the world gibbets with scorn! Well, I thought to avenge that man. In his own house—amidst you all—I thought to detect the sharper, and brand the cheat!"

"You startle me!—It has been whispered, indeed, that Lord

Lilburne is dangerous,—but skill is dangerous. To cheat!—an Englishman!—a nobleman!—impossible!"

"Whether he do or not," returned Vaudemont, in a calmer tone, "I have foregone the vengeance, because he is—"

"Is what?"

"No matter," said Vaudemont aloud, but he added to himself, —"Because he is the grandfather of Fanny!"

"You are very enigmatical to-day."

"Patience, Liancourt; I may solve all the riddles that make up my life, yet. Bear with me a little longer. And now can you help me to a lawyer?—a man experienced, indeed, and of repute, but young, active, not overladen with business;—I want his zeal and his time, for a hazard that your monopolists of clients may not deem worth their devotion."

"I can recommend you, then, the very man you require. I had a suit some years ago at Paris, for which English witnesses were necessary. My *avocat* employed a solicitor here whose activity in collecting my evidence gained my cause. I will answer for his diligence and his honesty."

"His address?"

"Mr. Barlow—somewhere by the Strand—let me see—Essex-yes, Essex Street."

"Then good-bye to you for the present.—You dine at Lord Lilburne's too?"

"Yes. Adieu till then."

Vaudemont was not long before he arrived at Mr. Barlow's;

a brass-plate announced to him the house. He was shown at once into a parlour, where he saw a man whom lawyers would call young, and spinsters middle-aged— viz., about two-and-forty; with a bold, resolute, intelligent countenance, and that steady, calm, sagacious eye, which inspires at once confidence and esteem.

Vaudemont scanned him with the look of one who has been accustomed to judge mankind—as a scholar does books—with rapidity because with practice. He had at first resolved to submit to him the heads of his case without mentioning names, and, in fact, he so commenced his narrative; but by degrees, as he perceived how much his own earnestness arrested and engrossed the interest of his listener, he warmed into fuller confidence, and ended by a full disclosure, and a caution as to the profoundest secrecy in case, if there were no hope to recover his rightful name, he might yet wish to retain, unannoyed by curiosity or suspicion, that by which he was not discreditably known.

"Sir," said Mr. Barlow, after assuring him of the most scrupulous discretion,—"sir, I have some recollection of the trial instituted by your mother, Mrs. Beaufort"—and the slight emphasis he laid on that name was the most grateful compliment be could have paid to the truth of Philip's recital. "My impression is, that it was managed in a very slovenly manner by her lawyer; and some of his oversights we may repair in a suit instituted by yourself. But it would be absurd to conceal from you the great difficulties that beset us—your mother's suit, designed to

establish her own rights, was far easier than that which you must commence—viz., an action for ejectment against a man who has been some years in undisturbed possession. Of course, until the missing witness is found out, it would be madness to commence litigation. And the question, then, will be, how far that witness will suffice? It is true, that one witness of a marriage, if the others are dead, is held sufficient by law. But I need not add, that that witness must be thoroughly credible. In suits for real property, very little documentary or secondary evidence is admitted. I doubt even whether the certificate of the marriage on which —in the loss or destruction of the register—you lay so much stress, would be available in itself. But if an examined copy, it becomes of the last importance, for it will then inform us of the name of the person who extracted and examined it. Heaven grant it may not have been the clergyman himself who performed the ceremony, and who, you say, is dead; if some one else, we should then have a second, no doubt credible and most valuable witness. The document would thus become available as proof, and, I think, that we should not fail to establish our case."

"But this certificate, how is it ever to be found? I told you we had searched everywhere in vain."

"True; but you say that your mother always declared that the late Mr. Beaufort had so solemnly assured her, even just prior to his decease, that it was in existence, that I have no doubt as to the fact. It may be possible, but it is a terrible insinuation to make, that if Mr. Robert Beaufort, in examining the papers of

the deceased, chanced upon a document so important to him, he abstracted or destroyed it. If this should not have been the case (and Mr. Robert Beaufort's moral character is unspotted —and we have no right to suppose it), the probability is, either that it was intrusted to some third person, or placed in some hidden drawer or deposit, the secret of which your father never disclosed. Who has purchased the house you lived in?"

"Fernside? Lord Lilburne. Mrs. Robert Beaufort's brother."

"Humph—probably, then, he took the furniture and all. Sir, this is a matter that requires some time for close consideration. With your leave, I will not only insert in the London papers an advertisement to the effect that you suggested to Mr. Roger Morton (in case you should have made a right conjecture as to the object of the man who applied to him), but I will also advertise for the witness himself. William Smith, you say, his name is. Did the lawyer employed by Mrs. Beaufort send to inquire for him in the colony?"

"No; I fear there could not have been time for that. My mother was so anxious and eager, and so convinced of the justice of her case—"

"That's a pity; her lawyer must have been a sad driveller."

"Besides, now I remember, inquiry was made of his relations in England. His father, a farmer, was then alive; the answer was that he had certainly left Australia. His last letter, written two years before that date, containing a request for money, which the father, himself made a bankrupt by reverses, could not give, had

stated that he was about to seek his fortune elsewhere—since then they had heard nothing of him."

"Ahem! Well, you will perhaps let me know where any relations of his are yet to be found, and I will look up the former suit, and go into the whole case without delay. In the meantime, you do right, sir—if you will allow me to say it—not to disclose either your own identity or a hint of your intentions. It is no use putting suspicion on its guard. And my search for this certificate must be managed with the greatest address. But, by the way—speaking of identity—there can be no difficulty, I hope, in proving yours."

Philip was startled. "Why, I am greatly altered."

"But probably your beard and moustache may contribute to that change; and doubtless, in the village where you lived, there would be many with whom you were in sufficient intercourse, and on whose recollection, by recalling little anecdotes and circumstances with which no one but yourself could be acquainted, your features would force themselves along with the moral conviction that the man who spoke to them could be no other but Philip Morton—or rather Beaufort."

"You are right; there must be many such. There was not a cottage in the place where I and my dogs were not familiar and half domesticated."

"All's right, so far, then. But I repeat, we must not be too sanguine.

Law is not justice—"

"But God is," said Philip; and he left the room.

CHAPTER V

"Volpone. A little in a mist, but not dejected;
Never—but still myself."

BEN JONSON: Volpone.

"Peregrine. Am I enough disguised?
Mer. Ay. I warrant you.
Per. Save you, fair lady."

—Ibid.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody good. The ill wind that had blown gout to Lord Lilburne had blown Lord Lilburne away from the injury he had meditated against what he called "the object of his attachment." How completely and entirely, indeed, the state of Lord Lilburne's feelings depended on the state of his health, may be seen in the answer he gave to his valet, when, the morning after the first attack of the gout, that worthy person, by way of cheering his master, proposed to ascertain something as to the movements of one with whom Lord Lilburne professed to be so violently in love,—"Confound you, Dykeman!" exclaimed the invalid,—"why do you trouble me about women when I'm in this condition? I don't care if they were all at the bottom of the sea! Reach me the colchicum! I must keep my mind calm."

Whenever tolerably well, Lord Lilburne was careless of his health; the moment he was ill, Lord Lilburne paid himself the greatest possible attention. Though a man of firm nerves, in youth of remarkable daring, and still, though no longer rash, of sufficient personal courage, he was by no means fond of the thought of death—that is, of his *own* death. Not that he was tormented by any religious apprehensions of the Dread Unknown, but simply because the only life of which he had any experience seemed to him a peculiarly pleasant thing. He had a sort of instinctive persuasion that John Lord Lilburne would not be better off anywhere else. Always disliking solitude, he disliked it more than ever when he was ill, and he therefore welcomed the visit of his sister and the gentle hand of his pretty niece. As for Beaufort, he bored the sufferer; and when that gentleman, on his arrival, shutting out his wife and daughter, whispered to Lilburne, "Any more news of that impostor?" Lilburne answered peevishly, "I never talk about business when I have the gout! I have set Sharp to keep a lookout for him, but he has learned nothing as yet. And now go to your club. You are a worthy creature, but too solemn for my spirits just at this moment. I have a few people coming to dine with me, your wife will do the honors, and—*you* can come in the evening." Though Mr. Robert Beaufort's sense of importance swelled and chafed at this very unceremonious *conge*, he forced a smile, and said:—

"Well, it is no wonder you are a little fretful with the gout. I have plenty to do in town, and Mrs. Beaufort and Camilla can

come back without waiting for me."

"Why, as your cook is ill, and they can't dine at a club, you may as well leave them here till I am a little better; not that I care, for I can hire a better nurse than either of them."

"My dear Lilburne, don't talk of hiring nurses; certainly, I am too happy if they can be of comfort to you."

"No! on second thoughts, you may take back your wife, she's always talking of her own complaints, and leave me Camilla: you can't want her for a few days."

"Just as you like. And you really think I have managed as well as I could about this young man,—eh?"

"Yes—yes! And so you go to Beaufort Court in a few days?"

"I propose doing so. I wish you were well enough to come."

"Um! Chambers says that it would be a very good air for me—better than Fernside; and as to my castle in the north, I would as soon go to Siberia. Well, if I get better, I will pay you a visit, only you always have such a stupid set of respectable people about you. I shock them, and they oppress me."

"Why, as I hope soon to see Arthur, I shall make it as agreeable to him as I can, and I shall be very much obliged to you if you would invite a few of your own friends."

"Well, you are a good fellow, Beaufort, and I will take you at your word; and, since one good turn deserves another, I have now no scruples in telling you that I feel quite sure that you will have no further annoyance from this troublesome witness-monger."

"In that case," said Beaufort, "I may pick up a better match

for Camilla!

Good-bye, my dear Lilburne."

"Form and Ceremony of the world!" snarled the peer, as the door closed on his brother-in-law, "ye make little men very moral, and not a bit the better for being so."

It so happened that Vaudemont arrived before any of the other guests that day, and during the half hour which Dr. Chambers assigned to his illustrious patient, so that, when he entered, there were only Mrs. Beaufort and Camilla in the drawing-room.

Vaudemont drew back involuntarily as he recognized in the faded countenance of the elder lady, features associated with one of the dark passages in his earlier life; but Mrs. Beaufort's gracious smile, and urbane, though languid welcome, sufficed to assure him that the recognition was not mutual. He advanced, and again stopped short, as his eye fell upon that fair and still childlike form, which had once knelt by his side and pleaded, with the orphan, for his brother. While he spoke to her, many recollections, some dark and stern—but those, at least, connected with Camilla, soft and gentle-thrilled through his heart. Occupied as her own thoughts and feelings necessarily were with Sidney, there was something in Vaudemont's appearance—his manner, his voice— which forced upon Camilla a strange and undefined interest; and even Mrs. Beaufort was roused from her customary apathy, as she glanced at that dark and commanding face with something between admiration and fear. Vaudemont had scarcely, however,

spoken ten words, when some other guests were announced, and Lord Lilburne was wheeled in upon his sofa shortly afterwards. Vaudemont continued, however, seated next to Camilla, and the embarrassment he had at first felt disappeared. He possessed, when he pleased, that kind of eloquence which belongs to men who have seen much and felt deeply, and whose talk has not been frittered down to the commonplace jargon of the world. His very phraseology was distinct and peculiar, and he had that rarest of all charms in polished life, originality both of thought and of manner. Camilla blushed, when she found at dinner that he placed himself by her side. That evening De Vaudemont excused himself from playing, but the table was easily made without him, and still he continued to converse with the daughter of the man whom he held as his worst foe. By degrees, he turned the conversation into a channel that might lead him to the knowledge he sought.

"It was my fate," said he, "once to become acquainted with an intimate friend of the late Mr. Beaufort. Will you pardon me if I venture to fulfil a promise I made to him, and ask you to inform me what has become of a—a—that is, of Sidney Morton?"

"Sidney Morton! I don't even remember the name. Oh, yes! I have heard it," added Camilla, innocently, and with a candour that showed how little she knew of the secrets of the family; "he was one of two poor boys in whom my brother felt a deep interest —some relations to my uncle. Yes— yes! I remember now. I never knew Sidney, but I once did see his brother."

"Indeed! and you remember—"

"Yes! I was very young then. I scarcely recollect what passed, it was all so confused and strange; but, I know that I made papa very angry, and I was told never to mention the name of Morton again. I believe they behaved very ill to papa."

"And you never learned—never!—the fate of either—of Sidney?"

"Never!"

"But your father must know?"

"I think not; but tell me,"—said Camilla, with girlish and unaffected innocence, "I have always felt anxious to know,—what and who were those poor boys?"

What and who were they? So deep, then, was the stain upon their name, that the modest mother and the decorous father had never even said to that young girl, "They are your cousins—the children of the man in whose gold we revel!"

Philip bit his lip, and the spell of Camilla's presence seemed vanished.

He muttered some inaudible answer, turned away to the card-table, and Liancourt took the chair he had left vacant.

"And how does Miss Beaufort like my friend Vaudemont? I assure you that I have seldom seen him so alive to the fascination of female beauty!"

"Oh!" said Camilla, with her silver laugh, "your nation spoils us for our own countrymen. You forget how little we are accustomed to flattery."

"Flattery! what truth could flatter on the lips of an exile? But you don't answer my question—what think you of Vaudemont? Few are more admired. He is handsome!"

"Is he?" said Camilla, and she glanced at Vaudemont, as he stood at a little distance, thoughtful and abstracted. Every girl forms to herself some untold dream of that which she considers fairest. And Vaudemont had not the delicate and faultless beauty of Sidney. There was nothing that corresponded to her ideal in his marked features and lordly shape! But she owned, reluctantly to herself, that she had seldom seen, among the trim gallants of everyday life, a form so striking and impressive. The air, indeed, was professional—the most careless glance could detect the soldier. But it seemed the soldier of an elder age or a wilder clime. He recalled to her those heads which she had seen in the Beaufort Gallery and other Collections yet more celebrated—portraits by Titian of those warrior statesman who lived in the old Republics of Italy in a perpetual struggle with their kind—images of dark, resolute, earnest men. Even whatever was intellectual in his countenance spoke, as in those portraits, of a mind sharpened rather in active than in studious life;– intellectual, not from the pale hues, the worn exhaustion, and the sunken cheek of the bookman and dreamer, but from its collected and stern repose, the calm depth that lay beneath the fire of the eyes, and the strong will that spoke in the close full lips, and the high but not cloudless forehead.

And, as she gazed, Vaudemont turned round—her eyes fell

beneath his, and she felt angry with herself that she blushed. Vaudemont saw the downcast eye, he saw the blush, and the attraction of Camilla's presence was restored. He would have approached her, but at that moment Mr. Beaufort himself entered, and his thoughts went again into a darker channel.

"Yes," said Liancourt, "you must allow Vaudemont looks what he is—a noble fellow and a gallant soldier. Did you never hear of his battle with the tigress? It made a noise in India. I must tell it you as I have heard it."

And while Laincourt was narrating the adventure, whatever it was, to which he referred, the card-table was broken up, and Lord Lilburne, still reclining on his sofa, lazily introduced his brother-in-law to such of the guests as were strangers to him—Vaudemont among the rest. Mr. Beaufort had never seen Philip Morton more than three times; once at Fernside, and the other times by an imperfect light, and when his features were convulsed by passion, and his form disfigured by his dress. Certainly, therefore, had Robert Beaufort even possessed that faculty of memory which is supposed to belong peculiarly to kings and princes, and which recalls every face once seen, it might have tasked the gift to the utmost to have detected, in the bronzed and decorated foreigner to whom he was now presented, the features of the wild and long-lost boy. But still some dim and uneasy presentiment, or some struggling and painful effort of recollection, was in his mind, as he spoke to Vaudemont, and listened to the cold calm tone of his reply.

"Who do you say that Frenchman is?" he whispered to his brother-in-law, as Vaudemont turned away.

"Oh! a cleverish sort of adventurer—a gentleman; he plays. —He has seen a good deal of the world—he rather amuses me —different from other people. I think of asking him to join our circle at Beaufort Court."

Mr. Beaufort coughed huskily, but not seeing any reasonable objection to the proposal, and afraid of rousing the sleeping hyaena of Lord Lilburne's sarcasm, he merely said:—

"Any one you like to invite:" and looking round for some one on whom to vent his displeasure, perceived Camilla still listening to Liancourt. He stalked up to her, and as Liancourt, seeing her rise, rose also and moved away, he said peevishly, "You will never learn to conduct yourself properly; you are to be left here to nurse and comfort your uncle, and not to listen to the gibberish of every French adventurer. Well, Heaven be praised, I have a son—girls are a great plague!"

"So they are, Mr. Beaufort," sighed his wife, who had just joined him, and who was jealous of the preference Lilburne had given to her daughter.

"And so selfish," added Mrs. Beaufort; "they only care for their own amusements, and never mind how uncomfortable their parents are for want of them."

"Oh! dear mamma, don't say so—let me go home with you— I'll speak to my uncle!"

"Nonsense, child! Come along, Mr. Beaufort;" and the

affectionate parents went out arm in arm. They did not perceive that Vaudemont had been standing close behind them; but Camilla, now looking up with tears in her eyes, again caught his gaze: he had heard all.

"And they ill-treat her," he muttered: "that divides her from them!—she will be left here—I shall see her again." As he turned to depart, Lilburne beckoned to him.

"You do not mean to desert our table?"

"No: but I am not very well to-night—to-morrow, if you will allow me."

"Ay, to-morrow; and if you can spare an hour in the morning it will be a charity. You see," he added in a whisper, "I have a nurse, though I have no children. D'ye think that's love? Bah! sir—a legacy! Good night."

"No—no—no!" said Vaudemont to himself, as he walked through the moonlit streets. "No! though my heart burns,—poor murdered felon!—to avenge thy wrongs and thy crimes, revenge cannot come from me—he is Fanny's grandfather and—Camilla's uncle!"

And Camilla, when that uncle had dismissed her for the night, sat down thoughtfully in her own room. The dark eyes of Vaudemont seemed still to shine on her; his voice yet rung in her ear; the wild tales of daring and danger with which Liancourt had associated his name yet haunted her bewildered fancy—she started, frightened at her own thoughts. She took from her bosom some lines that Sidney had addressed to her, and, as she read

and re-read, her spirit became calmed to its wonted and faithful melancholy. Vaudemont was forgotten, and the name of Sidney yet murmured on her lips, when sleep came to renew the image of the absent one, and paint in dreams the fairy land of a happy Future!

CHAPTER VI

"Ring on, ye bells—most pleasant is your chime!"
WILSON. Isle of Palms.

"O fairy child! What can I wish for thee?"—Ibid.

Vaudemont remained six days in London without going to H–, and on each of those days he paid a visit to Lord Lilburne. On the seventh day, the invalid being much better, though still unable to leave his room, Camilla returned to Berkeley Square. On the same day, Vaudemont went once more to see Simon and poor Fanny.

As he approached the door, he heard from the window, partially opened, for the day was clear and fine, Fanny's sweet voice. She was chaunting one of the simple songs she had promised to learn by heart; and Vaudemont, though but a poor judge of the art, was struck and affected by the music of the voice and the earnest depth of the feeling. He paused opposite the window and called her by her name. Fanny looked forth joyously, and ran, as usual, to open the door to him.

"Oh! you have been so long away; but I already know many of the songs: they say so much that I always wanted to say!"

Vaudemont smiled, but languidly.

"How strange it is," said Fanny, musingly, "that there should be so much in a piece of paper! for, after all," pointing to the

open page of her book, "this is but a piece of paper—only there is life in it!"

"Ay," said Vaudemont, gloomily, and far from seizing the subtle delicacy of Fanny's thought—her mind dwelling upon Poetry, and his upon Law,– "ay, and do you know that upon a mere scrap of paper, if I could but find it, may depend my whole fortune, my whole happiness, all that I care for in life?"

"Upon a scrap of paper? Oh! how I wish I could find it! Ah! you look as if you thought I should never be wise enough for that!"

Vaudemont, not listening to her, uttered a deep sigh. Fanny approached him timidly.

"Do not sigh, brother,—I can't bear to hear you sigh. You are changed.

Have you, too, not been happy?"

"Happy, Fanny! yes, lately very happy—too happy!"

"Happy, have you? and I—" the girl stopped short—her tone had been that of sadness and reproach, and she stopped—why, she knew not, but she felt her heart sink within her. Fanny suffered him to pass her, and he went straight to his room. Her eyes followed him wistfully: it was not his habit to leave her thus abruptly. The family meal of the day was over; and it was an hour before Vaudemont descended to the parlour. Fanny had put aside the songs; she had no heart to recommence those gentle studies that had been so sweet,—they had drawn no pleasure, no praise from him. She was seated idly and listlessly beside the silent old

man, who every day grew more and more silent still. She turned her head as Vaudemont entered, and her pretty lip pouted as that of a neglected child. But he did not heed it, and the pout vanished, and tears rushed to her eyes.

Vaudemont was changed. His countenance was thoughtful and overcast. His manner abstracted. He addressed a few words to Simon, and then, seating himself by the window, leant his cheek on his hand, and was soon lost in reverie. Fanny, finding that he did not speak, and after stealing many a long and earnest glance at his motionless attitude and gloomy brow, rose gently, and gliding to him with her light step, said, in a trembling voice,—

"Are you in pain, brother?"

"No, pretty one!"

"Then why won't you speak to Fanny? Will you not walk with her? Perhaps my grandfather will come too."

"Not this evening. I shall go out; but it will be alone."

"Where? Has not Fanny been good? I have not been out since you left. us. And the grave—brother!—I sent Sarah with the flowers—but—"

Vaudemont rose abruptly. The mention of the grave brought back his thoughts from the dreaming channel into which they had flowed. Fanny, whose very childishness had once so soothed him, now disturbed; he felt the want of that complete solitude which makes the atmosphere of growing passion: he muttered some scarcely audible excuse, and quitted the house. Fanny saw him no more that evening. He did not return till midnight. But

Fanny did not sleep till she heard his step on the stairs, and his chamber door close: and when she did sleep, her dreams were disturbed and painful. The next morning, when they met at breakfast (for Vaudemont did not return to London), her eyes were red and heavy, and her cheek pale. And, still buried in meditation, Vaudemont's eye, usually so kind and watchful, did not detect those signs of a grief that Fanny could not have explained. After breakfast, however, he asked her to walk out; and her face brightened as she hastened to put on her bonnet, and take her little basket full of fresh flowers which she had already sent Sarah forth to purchase.

"Fanny," said Vaudemont, as leaving the house, he saw the basket on her arm, "to-day you may place some of those flowers on another tombstone!– Poor child, what natural goodness there is in that heart!—what pity that—"

He paused. Fanny looked delightedly in his face. "You were praising me —you! And what is a pity, brother?"

While she spoke, the sound of the joy-bells was heard near at hand.

"Hark!" said Vaudemont, forgetting her question—and almost gaily—

"Hark!—I accept the omen. It is a marriage peal!"

He quickened his steps, and they reached the churchyard.

There was a crowd already assembled, and Vaudemont and Fanny paused; and, leaning over the little gate, looked on.

"Why are these people here, and why does the bell ring so

merrily?"

"There is to be a wedding, Fanny."

"I have heard of a wedding very often," said Fanny, with a pretty look of puzzlement and doubt, "but I don't know exactly what it means. Will you tell me?—and the bells, too!"

"Yes, Fanny, those bells toll but three times for man! The first time, when he comes into the world; the last time, when he leaves it; the time between when he takes to his side a partner in all the sorrows—in all the joys that yet remain to him; and who, even when the last bell announces his death to this earth, may yet, for ever and ever, be his partner in that world to come—that heaven, where they who are as innocent as you, Fanny, may hope to live and to love each other in a land in which there are no graves!"

"And this bell?"

"Tolls for that partnership—for the wedding!"

"I think I understand you;—and they who are to be wed are happy?"

"Happy, Fanny, if they love, and their love continue. Oh! conceive the happiness to know some one person dearer to you than your own self—some one breast into which you can pour every thought, every grief, every joy! One person, who, if all the rest of the world were to calumniate or forsake you, would never wrong you by a harsh thought or an unjust word, —who would cling to you the closer in sickness, in poverty, in care,– who would sacrifice all things to you, and for whom you would sacrifice all—from whom, except by death, night or day, you

must be never divided —whose smile is ever at your hearth—who has no tears while you are well and happy, and your love the same. Fanny, such is marriage, if they who marry have hearts and souls to feel that there is no bond on earth so tender and so sublime. There is an opposite picture;—I will not draw that! And as it is, Fanny, you cannot understand me!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.