

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**NIGHT AND
MORNING, VOLUME 4**

Эдвард Джордж Бульвер-Литтон **Night and Morning, Volume 4**

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Edward Bulwer Lytton

Night and Morning, Volume 4

Book IV

CHAPTER I

"O that sweet gleam of sunshine on the lake!"
WILSON'S City of the Plague

If, reader, you have ever looked through a solar microscope at the monsters in a drop of water, perhaps you have wondered to yourself how things so terrible have been hitherto unknown to you—you have felt a loathing at the limpid element you hitherto deemed so pure—you have half fancied that you would cease to be a water-drinker; yet, the next day you have forgotten the grim life that started before you, with its countless shapes, in that teeming globule; and, if so tempted by your thirst, you have not shrunk from the lying crystal, although myriads of the horrible Unseen are mangling, devouring, gorging each other in the liquid you so tranquilly imbibe; so is it with that ancestral and master element called Life. Lapped in your sleek comforts, and lolling on the sofa of your patent conscience—when, perhaps

for the first time, you look through the glass of science upon one ghastly globule in the waters that heave around, that fill up, with their succulence, the pores of earth, that moisten every atom subject to your eyes or handled by your touch—you are startled and dismayed; you say, mentally, "Can such things be? I never dreamed of this before! I thought what was invisible to me was non-existent in itself—I will remember this dread experiment." The next day the experiment is forgotten.—The Chemist may purify the Globule—can Science make pure the World?

Turn we now to the pleasant surface, seen in the whole, broad and fair to the common eye. Who would judge well of God's great designs, if he could look on no drop pendent from the rose-tree, or sparkling in the sun, without the help of his solar microscope?

It is ten years after the night on which William Gawtreys perished:—I transport you, reader, to the fairest scenes in England,—scenes consecrated by the only true pastoral poetry we have known to Contemplation and Repose.

Autumn had begun to tinge the foliage on the banks of Winandermere. It had been a summer of unusual warmth and beauty; and if that year you had visited the English lakes, you might, from time to time, amidst the groups of happy idlers you encountered, have singled out two persons for interest, or, perhaps, for envy. Two who might have seemed to you in peculiar harmony with those serene and soft retreats, both young—both beautiful. Lovers you would have guessed them to be; but such lovers as Fletcher might have placed under the care of his "Holy

Shepherdess"— forms that might have reclined by

"The virtuous well, about whose flowery banks
The nimble-footed fairies dance their rounds
By the pale moonshine."

For in the love of those persons there seemed a purity and innocence that suited well their youth and the character of their beauty. Perhaps, indeed, on the girl's side, love sprung rather from those affections which the spring of life throws upward to the surface, as the spring of earth does its flowers, than from that concentrated and deep absorption of self in self, which alone promises endurance and devotion, and of which first love, or rather the first fancy, is often less susceptible than that which grows out of the more thoughtful fondness of maturer years. Yet he, the lover, was of so rare and singular a beauty, that he might well seem calculated to awake, to the utmost, the love which wins the heart through the eyes.

But to begin at the beginning. A lady of fashion had, in the autumn previous to the year in which our narrative re-opens, taken, with her daughter, a girl then of about eighteen, the tour of the English lakes. Charmed by the beauty of Winandermere, and finding one of the most commodious villas on its banks to be let, they had remained there all the winter. In the early spring a severe illness had seized the elder lady, and finding herself, as she slowly recovered, unfit for the gaieties of a London season, nor unwilling, perhaps,—for she had been a

beauty in her day—to postpone for another year the debut of her daughter, she had continued her sojourn, with short intervals of absence, for a whole year. Her husband, a busy man of the world, with occupation in London, and fine estates in the country, joined them only occasionally, glad to escape the still beauty of landscapes which brought him no rental, and therefore afforded no charm to his eye.

In the first month of their arrival at Winandermere, the mother and daughter had made an eventful acquaintance in the following manner.

One evening, as they were walking on their lawn, which sloped to the lake, they heard the sound of a flute, played with a skill so exquisite as to draw them, surprised and spellbound, to the banks. The musician was a young man, in a boat, which he had moored beneath the trees of their demesne. He was alone, or, rather, he had one companion, in a large Newfoundland dog, that sat watchful at the helm of the boat, and appeared to enjoy the music as much as his master. As the ladies approached the spot, the dog growled, and the young man ceased, though without seeing the fair causes of his companion's displeasure. The sun, then setting, shone full on his countenance as he looked round; and that countenance was one that might have haunted the nymphs of Delos; the face of Apollo, not as the hero, but the shepherd—not of the bow, but of the lute—not the Python-slayer, but the young dreamer by shady places—he whom the sculptor has portrayed leaning idly against the tree—the boy-god whose home is yet on

earth, and to whom the Oracle and the Spheres are still unknown.

At that moment the dog leaped from the boat, and the elder lady uttered a faint cry of alarm, which, directing the attention of the musician, brought him also ashore. He called off his dog, and apologised, with a not ungraceful mixture of diffidence and ease, for his intrusion. He was not aware the place was inhabited—it was a favourite haunt of his—he lived near. The elder lady was pleased with his address, and struck with his appearance. There was, indeed, in his manner that indefinable charm, which is more attractive than mere personal appearance, and which can never be imitated or acquired. They parted, however, without establishing any formal acquaintance. A few days after, they met at dinner at a neighbouring house, and were introduced by name. That of the young man seemed strange to the ladies; not so theirs to him. He turned pale when he heard it, and remained silent and aloof the rest of the evening. They met again and often; and for some weeks—nay, even for months—he appeared to avoid, as much as possible, the acquaintance so auspiciously begun; but, by little and little, the beauty of the younger lady seemed to gain ground on his diffidence or repugnance. Excursions among the neighbouring mountains threw them together, and at last he fairly surrendered himself to the charm he had at first determined to resist.

This young man lived on the opposite side of the lake, in a quiet household, of which he was the idol. His life had been one of almost monastic purity and repose; his tastes

were accomplished, his character seemed soft and gentle; but beneath that calm exterior, flashes of passion—the nature of the poet, ardent and sensitive—would break forth at times. He had scarcely ever, since his earliest childhood, quitted those retreats; he knew nothing of the world, except in books—books of poetry and romance. Those with whom he lived—his relations, an old bachelor, and the cold bachelor's sisters, old maids—seemed equally innocent and inexperienced. It was a family whom the rich respected and the poor loved—inoffensive, charitable, and well off. To whatever their easy fortune might be, he appeared the heir. The name of this young man was Charles Spencer; the ladies were Mrs. Beaufort, and Camilla her daughter.

Mrs. Beaufort, though a shrewd woman, did not at first perceive any danger in the growing intimacy between Camilla and the younger Spencer. Her daughter was not her favourite—not the object of her one thought or ambition. Her whole heart and soul were wrapped in her son Arthur, who lived principally abroad. Clever enough to be considered capable, when he pleased, of achieving distinction, good-looking enough to be thought handsome by all who were on the *qui vive* for an advantageous match, good-natured enough to be popular with the society in which he lived, scattering to and fro money without limit,—Arthur Beaufort, at the age of thirty, had established one of those brilliant and evanescent reputations, which, for a few years, reward the ambition of the fine gentleman. It was precisely the reputation that the mother could appreciate, and

which even the more saving father secretly admired, while, ever respectable in phrase, Mr. Robert Beaufort seemed openly to regret it. This son was, I say, everything to them; they cared little, in comparison, for their daughter. How could a daughter keep up the proud name of Beaufort? However well she might marry, it was another house, not theirs, which her graces and beauty would adorn. Moreover, the better she might marry the greater her dowry would naturally be,—the dowry, to go out of the family! And Arthur, poor fellow! was so extravagant, that really he would want every sixpence. Such was the reasoning of the father. The mother reasoned less upon the matter. Mrs. Beaufort, faded and meagre, in blonde and cashmere, was jealous of the charms of her daughter; and she herself, growing sentimental and lachrymose as she advanced in life, as silly women often do, had convinced herself that Camilla was a girl of no feeling.

Miss Beaufort was, indeed, of a character singularly calm and placid; it was the character that charms men in proportion, perhaps, to their own strength and passion. She had been rigidly brought up—her affections had been very early chilled and subdued; they moved, therefore, now, with ease, in the serene path of her duties. She held her parents, especially her father, in reverential fear, and never dreamed of the possibility of resisting one of their wishes, much less their commands. Pious, kind, gentle, of a fine and never-ruffled temper, Camilla, an admirable daughter, was likely to make no less admirable a wife; you might depend on her principles, if ever you could doubt her

affection. Few girls were more calculated to inspire love. You would scarcely wonder at any folly, any madness, which even a wise man might commit for her sake. This did not depend on her beauty alone, though she was extremely lovely rather than handsome, and of that style of loveliness which is universally fascinating: the figure, especially as to the arms, throat, and bust, was exquisite; the mouth dimpled; the teeth dazzling; the eyes of that velvet softness which to look on is to love. But her charm was in a certain prettiness of manner, an exceeding innocence, mixed with the most captivating, because unconscious, coquetry. With all this, there was a freshness, a joy, a virgin and bewitching candour in her voice, her laugh—you might almost say in her very movements. Such was Camilla Beaufort at that age. Such she seemed to others. To her parents she was only a great girl rather in the way. To Mrs. Beaufort a rival, to Mr. Beaufort an encumbrance on the property.

CHAPTER II

* * * *"The moon*

*Saddening the solemn night, yet with that sadness
Mingling the breath of undisturbed Peace."*

WILSON: City of the Plague

* * * *"Tell me his fate.*

Say that he lives, or say that he is dead

But tell me—tell me!

* * * * *

I see him not—some cloud envelopes him."

—Ibid.

One day (nearly a year after their first introduction) as with a party of friends Camilla and Charles Spencer were riding through those wild and romantic scenes which lie between the sunny Winandermere and the dark and sullen Wastwater, their conversation fell on topics more personal than it had hitherto done, for as yet, if they felt love, they had never spoken of it.

The narrowness of the path allowed only two to ride abreast, and the two to whom I confine my description were the last of the little band.

"How I wish Arthur were here!" said Camilla; "I am sure you would like him."

"Are you? He lives much in the world—the world of which I know nothing.

Are we then characters to suit each other?"

"He is the kindest—the best of human beings!" said Camilla, rather evasively, but with more warmth than usually dwelt in her soft and low voice.

"Is he so kind?" returned Spencer, musingly. "Well, it may be so. And who would not be kind to you? Ah! it is a beautiful connexion that of brother and sister—I never had a sister!"

"Have you then a brother?" asked Camilla, in some surprise, and turning her ingenuous eyes full on her companion.

Spencer's colour rose—rose to his temples: his voice trembled as he answered, "No;—no brother!" then, speaking in a rapid and hurried tone, he continued, "My life has been a strange and lonely one. I am an orphan. I have mixed with few of my own age: my boyhood and youth have been spent in these scenes; my education such as Nature and books could bestow, with scarcely any guide or tutor save my guardian—the dear old man! Thus the world, the stir of cities, ambition, enterprise,—all seem to me as things belonging to a distant land to which I shall never wander. Yet I have had my dreams, Miss Beaufort; dreams of which these solitudes still form a part—but solitudes not unshared. And lately I have thought that those dreams might be prophetic. And you—do you love the world?"

"I, like you, have scarcely tried it," said Camilla, with a sweet laugh. "but I love the country better,—oh! far better than what

little I have seen of towns. But for you," she continued with a charming hesitation, "a man is so different from us,—for you to shrink from the world—you, so young and with talents too—nay, it is true!—it seems to me strange."

"It may be so, but I cannot tell you what feelings of dread—what vague forebodings of terror seize me if I carry my thoughts beyond these retreats. Perhaps my good guardian—"

"Your uncle?" interrupted Camilla.

"Ay, my uncle—may have contributed to engender feelings, as you say, strange at my age; but still—"

"Still what!"

"My earlier childhood," continued Spencer, breathing hard and turning pale, "was not spent in the happy home I have now; it was passed in a premature ordeal of suffering and pain. Its recollections have left a dark shadow on my mind, and under that shadow lies every thought that points towards the troublous and labouring career of other men. But," he resumed after a pause, and in a deep, earnest, almost solemn voice,— "but after all, is this cowardice or wisdom? I find no monotony—no tedium in this quiet life. Is there not a certain morality—a certain religion in the spirit of a secluded and country existence? In it we do not know the evil passions which ambition and strife are said to arouse. I never feel jealous or envious of other men; I never know what it is to hate; my boat, my horse, our garden, music, books, and, if I may dare to say so, the solemn gladness that comes from the hopes of another life,— these fill up every hour with thoughts

and pursuits, peaceful, happy, and without a cloud, till of late, when—when—"

"When what?" said Camilla, innocently.

"When I have longed, but did not dare to ask another, if to share such a lot would content her!"

He bent, as he spoke, his soft blue eyes full upon the blushing face of her whom he addressed, and Camilla half smiled and half sighed:

"Our companions are far before us," said she, turning away her face, "and see, the road is now smooth." She quickened her horse's pace as she said this; and Spencer, too new to women to interpret favourably her evasion of his words and looks, fell into a profound silence which lasted during the rest of their excursion.

As towards the decline of day he bent his solitary way home, emotions and passions to which his life had hitherto been a stranger, and which, alas! he had vainly imagined a life so tranquil would everlastingly restrain, swelled his heart.

"She does not love me," he muttered, half aloud; "she will leave me, and what then will all the beauty of the landscape seem in my eyes? And how dare I look up to her? Even if her cold, vain mother—her father, the man, they say, of forms and scruples, were to consent, would they not question closely of my true birth and origin? And if the one blot were overlooked, is there no other? His early habits and vices, his?—a brother's—his unknown career terminating at any day, perhaps, in shame, in crime, in exposure, in the gibbet,—will they overlook this?"

As he spoke, he groaned aloud, and, as if impatient to escape himself, spurred on his horse and rested not till he reached the belt of trim and sober evergreens that surrounded his hitherto happy home.

Leaving his horse to find its way to the stables, the young man passed through rooms, which he found deserted, to the lawn on the other side, which sloped to the smooth waters of the lake.

Here, seated under the one large tree that formed the pride of the lawn, over which it cast its shadow broad and far, he perceived his guardian poring idly over an oft-read book, one of those books of which literary dreamers are apt to grow fanatically fond—books by the old English writers, full of phrases and conceits half quaint and half sublime, interspersed with praises of the country, imbued with a poetical rather than orthodox religion, and adorned with a strange mixture of monastic learning and aphorisms collected from the weary experience of actual life.

To the left, by a greenhouse, built between the house and the lake, might be seen the white dress and lean form of the eldest spinster sister, to whom the care of the flowers—for she had been early crossed in love—was consigned; at a little distance from her, the other two were seated at work, and conversing in whispers, not to disturb their studious brother, no doubt upon the nephew, who was their all in all. It was the calmest hour of eve, and the quiet of the several forms, their simple and harmless occupations—if occupations they might be called—the breathless foliage rich in the depth of summer; behind, the

old-fashioned house, unpretending, not mean, its open doors and windows giving glimpses of the comfortable repose within; before, the lake, without a ripple and catching the gleam of the sunset clouds,—all made a picture of that complete tranquillity and stillness, which sometimes soothes and sometimes saddens us, according as we are in the temper to woo CONTENT.

The young man glided to his guardian and touched his shoulder,—“Sir, may I speak to you?—Hush! they need not see us now! it is only you I would speak with.”

The elder Spencer rose; and, with his book still in his hand, moved side by side with his nephew under the shadow of the tree and towards a walk to the right, which led for a short distance along the margin of the lake, backed by the interlaced boughs of a thick copse.

“Sir!” said the young man, speaking first, and with a visible effort, “your cautions have been in vain! I love this girl—this daughter of the haughty Beauforts! I love her—better than life I love her!”

“My poor boy,” said the uncle tenderly, and with a simple fondness passing his arm over the speaker's shoulder, “do not think I can chide you—I know what it is to love in vain!”

“In vain!—but why in vain?” exclaimed the younger Spencer, with a vehemence that had in it something of both agony and fierceness. “She may love me—she shall love me!” and almost for the first time in his life, the proud consciousness of his rare gifts of person spoke in his kindled eye and dilated stature. “Do

they not say that Nature has been favourable to me?—What rival have I here?—Is she not young?—And (sinking his voice till it almost breathed like music) is not love contagious?"

"I do not doubt that she may love you—who would not?—but—but—the parents, will they ever consent?" "Nay!" answered the lover, as with that inconsistency common to passion, he now argued stubbornly against those fears in another to which he had just before yielded in himself,— "Nay!—after all, am I not of their own blood?—Do I not come from the elder branch?—Was I not reared in equal luxury and with higher hopes?— And my mother—my poor mother—did she not to the last maintain our birthright—her own honour?—Has not accident or law unjustly stripped us of our true station?—Is it not for us to forgive spoliation?—Am I not, in fact, the person who descends, who forgets the wrongs of the dead—the heritage of the living?"

The young man had never yet assumed this tone—had never yet shown that he looked back to the history connected with his birth with the feelings of resentment and the remembrance of wrong. It was a tone contrary to his habitual calm and contentment—it struck forcibly on his listener— and the elder Spencer was silent for some moments before he replied, "If you feel thus (and it is natural), you have yet stronger reason to struggle against this unhappy affection."

"I have been conscious of that, sir," replied the young man, mournfully. "I have struggled!—and I say again it is in vain! I turn, then, to face the obstacles! My birth—let us suppose

that the Beauforts overlook it. Did you not tell me that Mr. Beaufort wrote to inform you of the abrupt and intemperate visit of my brother—of his determination never to forgive it? I think I remember something of this years ago."

"It is true!" said the guardian; "and the conduct of that brother is, in fact, the true cause why you never ought to reassume your proper name!— never to divulge it, even to the family with whom you connect yourself by marriage; but, above all, to the Beauforts, who for that cause, if that cause alone, would reject your suit."

The young man groaned—placed one hand before his eyes, and with the other grasped his guardian's arm convulsively, as if to check him from proceeding farther; but the good man, not divining his meaning, and absorbed in his subject, went on, irritating the wound he had touched.

"Reflect!—your brother in boyhood—in the dying hours of his mother, scarcely saved from the crime of a thief, flying from a friendly pursuit with a notorious reprobate; afterwards implicated in some discreditable transaction about a horse, rejecting all—every hand that could save him, clinging by choice to the lowest companions and the meanest-habits, disappearing from the country, and last seen, ten years ago—the beard not yet on his chin—with that same reprobate of whom I have spoken, in Paris; a day or so only before his companion, a coiner—a murderer—fell by the hands of the police! You remember that when, in your seventeenth year, you evinced some desire to

retake your name—nay, even to re-find that guilty brother—I placed before you, as a, sad, and terrible duty, the newspaper that contained the particulars of the death and the former adventures of that wretched accomplice, the notorious Gawtreys. And,—telling you that Mr. Beaufort had long since written to inform me that his own son and Lord Lilburne had seen your brother in company with the miscreant just before his fate—nay, was, in all probability, the very youth described in the account as found in his chamber and escaping the pursuit—I asked you if you would now venture to leave that disguise—that shelter under which you would for ever be safe from the opprobrium of the world—from the shame that, sooner or later, your brother must bring upon your name!"

"It is true—it is true!" said the pretended nephew, in a tone of great anguish, and with trembling lips which the blood had forsaken. "Horrible to look either to his past or his future! But—but—we have heard of him no more—no one ever has learned his fate. Perhaps—perhaps" (and he seemed to breathe more freely)—"my brother is no more!"

And poor Catherine—and poor Philip—had it come to this? Did the one brother feel a sentiment of release, of joy, in conjecturing the death—perhaps the death of violence and shame—of his fellow-orphan? Mr. Spencer shook his head doubtingly, but made no reply. The young man sighed heavily, and strode on for several paces in advance of his protector, then, turning back, he laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Sir," he said in a low voice and with downcast eyes, you are right: this disguise—this false name—must be for ever borne! Why need the Beauforts, then, ever know who and what I am? Why not as your nephew— nephew to one so respected and exemplary—proffer my claims and plead my cause?"

"They are proud—so it is said—and worldly;—you know my family was in trade—still—but—" and here Mr. Spencer broke off from a tone of doubt into that of despondency, "but, recollect, though Mrs. Beaufort may not remember the circumstance, both her husband and her son have seen me— have known my name. Will they not suspect, when once introduced to you, the stratagem that has been adopted?—Nay, has it not been from that very fear that you have wished me to shun the acquaintance of the family? Both Mr. Beaufort and Arthur saw you in childhood, and their suspicion once aroused, they may recognise you at once; your features are developed, but not altogether changed. Come, come!—my adopted, my dear son, shake off this fantasy betimes: let us change the scene: I will travel with you—read with you—go where—"

"Sir—sir!" exclaimed the lover, smiting his breast, "you are ever kind, compassionate, generous; but do not—do not rob me of hope. I have never—thanks to you—felt, save in a momentary dejection, the curse of my birth. Now how heavily it falls! Where shall I look for comfort?"

As he spoke, the sound of a bell broke over the translucent air and the slumbering lake: it was the bell that every eve and morn

summoned that innocent and pious family to prayer. The old man's face changed as he heard it—changed from its customary indolent, absent, listless aspect, into an expression of dignity, even of animation.

"Hark!" he said, pointing upwards; "Hark! it chides you. Who shall say,

'Where shall I look for comfort' while God is in the heavens?"

The young man, habituated to the faith and observance of religion, till they had pervaded his whole nature, bowed his head in rebuke; a few tears stole from his eyes.

"You are right, father—," he said tenderly, giving emphasis to the deserved and endearing name. "I am comforted already!"

So, side by side, silently and noiselessly, the young and the old man glided back to the house. When they gained the quiet room in which the family usually assembled, the sisters and servants were already gathered round the table. They knelt as the loiterers entered. It was the wonted duty of the younger Spencer to read the prayers; and, as he now did so, his graceful countenance more hushed, his sweet voice more earnest than usual, in its accents: who that heard could have deemed the heart within convulsed by such stormy passions? Or was it not in that hour—that solemn commune—soothed from its woe? O beneficent Creator! thou who inspirest all the tribes of earth with the desire to pray, hast Thou not, in that divinest instinct, bestowed on us the happiest of Thy gifts?

CHAPTER III

"Bertram. I mean the business is not ended, as fearing to hear of it hereafter.

*"1st Soldier. Do you know this Captain Dumain?"
All's Well that Ends Well.*

One evening, some weeks after the date of the last chapter, Mr. Robert Beaufort sat alone in his house in Berkeley Square. He had arrived that morning from Beaufort Court, on his way to Winandermere, to which he was summoned by a letter from his wife. That year was an agitated and eventful epoch in England; and Mr. Beaufort had recently gone through the bustle of an election—not, indeed, contested; for his popularity and his property defied all rivalry in his own county.

The rich man had just dined, and was seated in lazy enjoyment by the side of the fire, which he had had lighted, less for the warmth—though it was then September—than for the companionship;—engaged in finishing his madeira, and, with half-closed eyes, munching his devilled biscuits. "I am sure," he soliloquised while thus employed, "I don't know exactly what to do,—my wife ought to decide matters where the girl is concerned; a son is another affair—that's the use of a wife. Humph!"

"Sir," said a fat servant, opening the door, "a gentleman wishes to see you upon very particular business."

"Business at this hour! Tell him to go to Mr. Blackwell."

"Yes, sir."

"Stay! perhaps he is a constituent, Simmons. Ask him if he belongs to the county."

"Yes, Sir."

"A great estate is a great plague," muttered Mr. Beaufort; "so is a great constituency. It is pleasanter, after all, to be in the House of Lords. I suppose I could if I wished; but then one must rat—that's a bore. I will consult Lilburne. Humph!"

The servant re-appeared. "Sir, he says he does belong to the county."

"Show him in!—What sort of a person?"

"A sort of gentleman, sir; that is," continued the butler, mindful of five shillings just slipped within his palm by the stranger, "quite the gentleman."

"More wine, then—stir up the fire."

In a few moments the visitor was ushered into the apartment. He was a man between fifty and sixty, but still aiming at the appearance of youth. His dress evinced military pretensions; consisting of a blue coat, buttoned up to the chin, a black stock, loose trousers of the fashion called Cossacks, and brass spurs. He wore a wig, of great luxuriance in curl and rich auburn in hue; with large whiskers of the same colour slightly tinged with grey at the roots. By the imperfect light of the room it was not perceptible that the clothes were somewhat threadbare, and that the boots, cracked at the side, admitted glimpses of no very white

hosiery within. Mr. Beaufort, reluctantly rising from his repose and gladly sinking back to it, motioned to a chair, and put on a doleful and doubtful semi-smile of welcome. The servant placed the wine and glasses before the stranger;—the host and visitor were alone.

"So, sir," said Mr. Beaufort, languidly, "you are from —shire; I suppose about the canal,—may I offer you a glass of wine?"

"Most hauppy, sir—your health!" and the stranger, with evident satisfaction, tossed off a bumper to so complimentary a toast.

"About the canal?" repeated Mr. Beaufort.

"No, sir, no! You parliament gentlemen must hauve a vaust deal of trouble on your haunds—very foine property I understaund yours is, sir. Sir, allow me to drink the health of your good lady!"

"I thank you, Mr.—, Mr.—, what did you say your name was?—I beg you a thousand pardons."

"No offaunce in the least, sir; no ceremony with me—this is perticler good madeira!"

"May I ask how I can serve you?" said Mr. Beaufort, struggling between the sense of annoyance and the fear to be uncivil. "And pray, had I the honour of your vote in the last election!"

"No, sir, no! It's mauny years since I have been in your part of the world, though I was born there."

"Then I don't exactly see—" began Mr. Beaufort, and stopped with dignity.

"Why I call on you," put in the stranger, tapping his boots with his cane; and then recognising the rents, he thrust both feet under the table.

"I don't say that; but at this hour I am seldom at leisure—not but what I am always at the service of a constituent, that is, a voter! Mr.—, I beg your pardon, I did not catch your name."

"Sir," said the stranger, helping himself to a third glass of wine; "here's a health to your young folk! And now to business." Here the visitor, drawing his chair nearer to his host, assuming a more grave aspect, and dropping something of his stilted pronunciation, continued, "You had a brother?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Beaufort, with a very changed countenance.

"And that brother had a wife!"

Had a cannon gone off in the ear of Mr. Robert Beaufort, it could not have shocked or stunned him more than that simple word with which his companion closed his sentence. He fell back in his chair—his lips apart, his eyes fixed on the stranger. He sought to speak, but his tongue clove to his mouth.

"That wife had two sons, born in wedlock!"

"It is false!" cried Mr. Beaufort, finding a voice at length, and springing to his feet. "And who are you, sir? and what do you mean by—"

"Hush!" said the stranger, perfectly unconcerned, and regaining the dignity of his haw-haw enunciation, "better not let the servants hear aanything. For my pawt, I think servants haue

the longest pair of ears of any persons, not excepting jauckasses; their ears stretch from the pauntry to the parlour. Hush, sir!—perticler good madeira, this!"

"Sir!" said Mr. Beaufort, struggling to preserve, or rather recover, his temper, "your conduct is exceedingly strange; but allow me to say that you are wholly misinformed. My brother never did marry; and if you have anything to say on behalf of those young men—his natural sons—I refer you to my solicitor, Mr. Blackwell, of Lincoln's Inn. I wish you a good evening."

"Sir!—the same to you—I won't trouble you any farther; it was only out of kindness I called—I am not used to be treated so—sir, I am in his majesty's service—sir, you will find that the witness of the marriage is forthcoming; you will think of me then, and, perhaps, be sorry. But I've done, 'Your most obedient humble, sir!'" And the stranger, with a flourish of his hand, turned to the door. At the sight of this determination on the part of his strange guest, a cold, uneasy, vague presentiment seized Mr. Beaufort. There, not flashed, but rather froze, across him the recollection of his brother's emphatic but disbelieved assurances—of Catherine's obstinate assertion of her son's alleged rights—rights which her lawsuit, undertaken on her own behalf, had not compromised;—a fresh lawsuit might be instituted by the son, and the evidence which had been wanting in the former suit might be found at last. With this remembrance and these reflections came a horrible train of shadowy fears,—witnesses, verdict, surrender, spoliation—arrears—ruin!

The man, who had gained the door, turned back and looked at him with a complacent, half-triumphant leer upon his impudent, reckless face.

"Sir," then said Mr. Beaufort, mildly, "I repeat that you had better see Mr. Blackwell."

The tempter saw his triumph. "I have a secret to communicate which it is best for you to keep snug. How many people do you wish me to see about it? Come, sir, there is no need of a lawyer; or, if you think so, tell him yourself. Now or never, Mr. Beaufort."

"I can have no objection to hear anything you have to say, sir," said the rich man, yet more mildly than before; and then added, with a forced smile, "though my rights are already too confirmed to admit of a doubt."

Without heeding the last assertion, the stranger coolly walked back, resumed his seat, and, placing both arms on the table and looking Mr. Beaufort full in the face, thus proceeded,—

"Sir, of the marriage between Philip Beaufort and Catherine Morton there were two witnesses: the one is dead, the other went abroad—the last is alive still!"

"If so," said Mr. Beaufort, who, not naturally deficient in cunning and sense, felt every faculty now prodigiously sharpened, and was resolved to know the precise grounds for alarm,— "if so, why did not the man—it was a servant, sir, a man-servant, whom Mrs. Morton pretended to rely on— appear on the trial?"

"Because, I say, he was abroad and could not be found; or,

the search after him miscaurried, from clumsy management and a lack of the rhino."

"Hum!" said Mr. Beaufort—"one witness—one witness, observe, there *is* only one!—does not alarm me much. It is not what a man deposes, it is what a jury believe, sir! Moreover, what has become of the young men? They have never been heard of for years. They are probably dead; if so, I am heir-at-law!"

"I know where one of them is to be found at all events."

"The elder?—Philip?" asked Mr. Beaufort anxiously, and with a fearful remembrance of the energetic and vehement character prematurely exhibited by his nephew.

"Pawdon me! I need not aunswer that question."

"Sir! a lawsuit of this nature, against one in possession, is very doubtful, and," added the rich man, drawing himself up—"and, perhaps very expensive!"

"The young man I speak of does not want friends, who will not grudge the money."

"Sir!" said Mr. Beaufort, rising and placing his back to the fire—"sir! what is your object in this communication? Do you come, on the part of the young man, to propose a compromise? If so, be plain!"

"I come on my own pawt. It rests with you to say if the young men shall never know it!"

"And what do you want?"

"Five hundred a year as long as the secret is kept."

"And how can you prove that there is a secret, after all?"

"By producing the witness if you wish."

"Will he go halves in the L500. a year?" asked Mr. Beaufort artfully.

"That is my affair, sir," replied the stranger.

"What you say," resumed Mr. Beaufort, "is so extraordinary—so unexpected, and still, to me, seems so improbable, that I must have time to consider. If you will call on me in a week, and produce your facts, I will give you my answer. I am not the man, sir, to wish to keep any one out of his true rights, but I will not yield, on the other hand, to imposture."

"If you don't want to keep them out of their rights, I'd best go and tell my young gentlemen," said the stranger, with cool impudence.

"I tell you I must have time," repeated Beaufort, disconcerted. "Besides, I have not myself alone to look to, sir," he added, with dignified emphasis—"I am a father!"

"This day week I will call on you again. Good evening, Mr. Beaufort!"

And the man stretched out his hand with an air of amicable condescension. The respectable Mr. Beaufort changed colour, hesitated, and finally suffered two fingers to be enticed into the grasp of the visitor, whom he ardently wished at that bourne whence no visitor returns.

The stranger smiled, stalked to the door, laid his finger on his lip, winked knowingly, and vanished, leaving Mr. Beaufort a prey to such feelings of uneasiness, dread, and terror, as may be

experienced by a man whom, on some inch or two of slippery rock, the tides have suddenly surrounded.

He remained perfectly still for some moments, and then glancing round the dim and spacious room, his eyes took in all the evidences of luxury and wealth which it betrayed. Above the huge sideboard, that on festive days groaned beneath the hoarded weight of the silver heirlooms of the Beauforts, hung, in its gilded frame, a large picture of the family seat, with the stately porticoes—the noble park—the groups of deer; and around the wall, interspersed here and there with ancestral portraits of knight and dame, long since gathered to their rest, were placed masterpieces of the Italian and Flemish art, which generation after generation had slowly accumulated, till the Beaufort Collection had become the theme of connoisseurs and the study of young genius.

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