GEORGE MEREDITH

THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY RICHMOND. VOLUME 6

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CHAPTER XXXIX
I SEE MY FATHER TAKING THE TIDE AND AM CARRIED ON IT MYSELF

My father stood in the lobby of the Opera, holding a sort of open court, it appeared to me, for a cluster of gentlemen hung round him; and I had presently to bow to greetings which were rather of a kind to flatter me, leading me to presume that he was respected as well as marvelled at. The names of Mr. Serjeant Wedderburn, Mr. Jennings, Lord Alton, Sir Weeton Slater, Mr. Monterez Williams, Admiral Loftus, the Earl of Witlington, were among those which struck my ear, and struck me as good ones. I could not perceive anything of the air of cynical satellites in these gentlemen—on the contrary, they were cordially deferential. I felt that he was encompassed by undoubted gentlemen, and my warmer feelings to my father

returned when I became sensible of the pleasant sway he held over the circle, both in speaking and listening. His sympathetic smile and semi-droop of attention; his readiness, when occasion demanded it, to hit the key of the subject and help it on with the right word; his air of unobtrusive appreciation; his sensibility to the moment when the run of conversation depended upon him—showed inimitable art coming of natural genius; and he did not lose a shade of his superior manner the while. Mr. Serjeant Wedderburn, professionally voluble, a lively talker, brimming with anecdote, but too sparkling, too prompt, too full of personal relish of his point, threw my father's urbane supremacy into marked relief; and so in another fashion did the Earl of Witlington, 'a youth in the season of guffaws,' as Jorian DeWitt described him, whom a jest would seize by the throat, shaking his sapling frame. Jorian strolled up to us goutily. No efforts of my father's would induce him to illustrate his fame for repartee, so it remained established. 'Very pretty waxwork,' he said to me of our English beauties swimming by. 'Now, those women, young Richmond, if they were inflammable to the fiftieth degree, that is, if they had the fiftieth part of a Frenchwoman in them, would have canvassed society on the great man's account long before this, and sent him to the top like a bubble. He wastes his time on them. That fat woman he's bowing to is Viscountess Sedley, a porcine empress, widow of three, with a soupcon of bigamy to flavour them. She mounted from a grocer's shop, I am told. Constitution has done everything

for that woman. So it will everywhere—it beats the world! Now he's on all-fours to Lady Rachel Stokes, our pure aristocracy; she walks as if she were going through a doorway, and couldn't risk an eyelid. I 'd like to see her tempting St. Anthony. That's little Wreckham's wife: she's had as many adventures as Gil Blas before he entered the Duke of Lerma's service.' He reviewed several ladies, certainly not very witty when malignant, as I remembered my father to have said of him. 'The style of your Englishwoman is to keep the nose exactly at one elevation, to show you're born to it. They daren't run a gamut, these women. These Englishwomen are a fiction! The model of them is the nursery-miss, but they're like the names of true lovers cut on the bark of a tree—awfully stiff and longitudinal with the advance of time. We've our Lady Jezebels, my boy! They're in the pay of the bishops, or the police, to make vice hideous. The rest do the same for virtue, and get their pay for it somewhere, I don't doubt; perhaps from the newspapers, to keep up the fiction. I tell you, these Englishwomen have either no life at all in them, or they're nothing but animal life. 'Gad, how they dizen themselves! They've no other use for their fingers. The wealth of this country's frightful!'

Jorian seemed annoyed that he could not excite me to defend my countrywomen; but I had begun to see that there was no necessity for the sanguine to encounter the bilious on their behalf, and was myself inclined to be critical. Besides I was engaged in watching my father, whose bearing toward the ladies

he accosted did not dissatisfy my critical taste, though I had repeated fears of seeing him overdo it. He summoned me to an introduction to the Countess Szezedy, a merry little Hungarian dame.

'So,' said she at once, speaking German, 'you are to marry the romantic head, the Princess Ottilia of Eppenwelzen! I know her well. I have met her in Vienna. Schone Seele, and bas bleu! It's just those that are won with a duel. I know Prince Otto too.' She prattled away, and asked me whether the marriage was to take place in the Summer. I was too astounded to answer.

'No date is yet fixed,' my father struck in.

'It's the talk of London,' she said.

Before I could demand explanations of my father with regard to this terrible rumour involving Ottilia, I found myself in the box of the City widow, Lady Sampleman, a grievous person, of the complexion of the autumnal bramble-leaf, whose first words were: 'Ah! the young suitor! And how is our German princess?' I had to reply that the theme was more of German princes than princesses in England. 'Oh! but,' said she, 'you are having a—shall I call it—national revenge on them? "I will take one of your princesses," says you; and as soon as said done! I'm dying for a sight of her portrait. Captain DeWitt declares her heavenly—I mean, he says she is fair and nice, quite a lady-that of course! And never mind her not being rich. You can do the decoration to the match. H'm,' she perused my features; 'pale! Lovelorn? Excuse an old friend of your father's. One of his very oldest, I'd

say, if it didn't impugn. As such, proud of your alliance. I am. I speak of it everywhere— everywhere.'

Here she dramatized the circulation of the gossip. 'Have you heard the news? No, what? Fitz-George's son marries a princess of the German realm. Indeed! True as gospel. And how soon? In a month; and now you will see the dear, neglected man command the Court . . . .'

I looked at my father: I felt stifling with confusion and rage. He leant over to her, imparting some ecstatic news about a great lady having determined to call on her to regulate the affairs of an approaching grand Ball, and under cover of this we escaped.

'If it were not,' said he, 'for the Chassediane—you are aware, Richie, poor Jorian is lost to her?—he has fallen at her quicksilver feet. She is now in London. Half the poor fellow's income expended in bouquets! Her portrait, in the character of the widow Lefourbe, has become a part of his dressing apparatus; he shaves fronting her playbill. His first real affaire de coeur, and he is forty-five! So he is taken in the stomach. That is why love is such a dangerous malady for middle age. As I said, but for Jenny Chassediane, our Sampleman would be the fortune for Jorian. I have hinted it on both sides. Women, Richie, are cleverer than the illustrious Lord Nelson in not seeing what their inclinations decline to see, and Jorian would do me any service in the world except that one. You are restless, my son?'

I begged permission to quit the house, and wait for him outside. He, in return, begged me most urgently to allow myself

to be introduced to Lady Edbury, the stepmother of Lord Destrier, now Marquis of Edbury; and, using conversational pressure, he adjured me not to slight this lady, adding, with more significance than the words conveyed, 'I am taking the tide, Richie.' The tide took me, and I bowed to a lady of impressive languor, pale and young, with pleasant manners, showing her character in outline, like a glove on the hand, but little of its quality. She accused my father of coming direct from 'that person's' box. He replied that he never forsook old friends. 'You should,' was her rejoinder. It suggested to me an image of one of the sister Fates cutting a thread.

My heart sank when, from Lady Edbury too, I heard the allusion to Germany and its princess. 'Some one told me she was dark?'

'Blonde,' my father corrected the report.

Lady Edbury 'thought it singular for a German woman of the Blood to be a brunette. They had not much dark mixture among them, particularly in the North. Her name? She had forgotten the name of the princess.'

My father repeated: 'The Princess Ottilia, Princess of Eppenwelzen-

Sarkeld.'

'Brunette, you say?'

'The purest blonde.'

'A complexion?'

'A complexion to dazzle the righteous!'

Lady Edbury threw a flying glance in a mirror: 'The unrighteous you leave to us then?'

They bandied the weariful shuttlecock of gallantry. I bowed and fled. My excuse was that I had seen Anna Penrhys in an upper tier of boxes, and I made my way to her, doubting how I should be welcomed. 'The happy woman is a German princess, we hear!' she set me shivering. Her welcome was perfectly unreserved and friendly.

She asked the name of the lady whose box I had quitted, and after bending her opera-glass on it for a moment, said, with a certain air of satisfaction, 'She is young'; which led me to guess that Lady Edbury was reputed to be Anna's successor; but why the latter should be flattered by the former's youth was one of the mysteries for me then. Her aunt was awakened from sleep by the mention of my name. 'Is the man here?' she exclaimed, starting. Anna smiled, and talked to me of my father, saying, that she was glad to see me at his right hand, for he had a hard battle to fight. She spoke of him with affectionate interest in his fortunes; no better proof of his generosity as well as hers could have been given me. I promised her heartily I would not be guilty of letting our intimacy drop, and handed the ladies down to the crush-room, where I saw my father leading Lady Edbury to her carriage, much observed. Destrier, the young marquis, coming in to meet the procession from other haunts, linked his arm to his friend Witlington's, and said something in my hearing of old 'Duke Fitz,' which provoked, I fancied, signs of amusement

equivalent to tittering in a small ring of the select assembly. Lady Sampleman's carriage was called. 'Another victim,' said a voice. Anna Penrhys walked straight out to find her footman and carriage for herself.

I stood alone in the street, wondering, fretting, filled with a variety of ugly sensations, when my father joined me humming an air of the opera. 'I was looking for Jorian, Richie. He had our Sampleman under his charge. He is off to the Chassediane. Well! And well, Richie, you could not bear the absence from your dada? You find me in full sail on the tide. I am at home, if our fortunes demand it, in a little German principality, but there is,' he threw out his chest, 'a breadth in London; nowhere else do I breathe with absolute freedom—so largely: and this is my battlefield. By the way, Lady Edbury accounts you complete; which is no more to say than that she is a woman of taste. The instance: she positively would not notice that you wear a dress-coat of a foreign cut. Correct it to-morrow; my tailor shall wait on you. I meant to point out to you that when a London woman has not taken note of that, the face and the man have made the right impression on her. Richie, dear boy, how shall I speak the delight I have in seeing you! My arm in yours, old Richie! strolling home from the Fashion: this seems to me what I dreamt of! All in sound health at the Grange? She too, the best of women?'

'I have come on very particular business,' I interposed briefly.

He replied, 'I am alive to you, Richie; speak.'

'The squire has seen my bankers' book. He thinks I've been

drawing rather wildly: no doubt he's right. He wants some sort of explanation. He consents to an interview with you. I have come to ask you to go down to him, sir.'

'To-morrow morning, without an hour's delay, my dear boy. Very agreeable will be the sight of old Riversley. And in the daylight!'

'He prefers to meet you at Bulsted. Captain Bulsted offers his house for the purpose. I have to warn you, sir, that we stand in a very exceptional position. The squire insists upon having a full account of the money rendered to him.'

'I invite him to London, Richie. I refer him to Dettermain and Newson.

I request him to compute the value of a princess.'

'You are aware that he will not come to your invitation.'

'Tell me, then, how is he to understand what I have established by the expenditure, my son? I refer him to Dettermain and Newson.'

'But you must know that he sets his face against legal proceedings involving exposure.'

'But surely, Richie, exposure is the very thing we court. The innocent, the unjustly treated, court it. We would be talked about; you shall hear of us! And into the bargain an hereditary princess. Upon my faith, Mr. Beltham, I think you have mighty little to complain of.'

My temper was beginning to chafe at the curb. 'As regards any feeling about the money, personally, sir, you know I have none.

But I must speak of one thing. I have heard to-night, I confess with as much astonishment as grief, the name . . . I could not have guessed that I should hear the princess's name associated with mine, and quite openly.'

'As a matter of course.' He nodded, and struck out a hand in wavy motion.

'Well, sir, if you can't feel for her or her family, be good enough to think of me, and remember that I object to it.'

'For you all,' said he, buoyantly; 'I feel for you all, and I will act for you all. I bring the princess to your arms, my dear boy. You have written me word that the squire gives her a royal dowry—have you not? My combinations permit of no escape to any one of you. Nay, 'tis done. I think for you—I feel for you—I act for you. By heaven, you shall be happy! Sigh, Richie, sigh; your destiny is now entrusted to me!'

'I daresay I'm wasting my breath, sir, but I protest against false pretences. You know well that you have made use of the princess's name for your own purposes.'

'Most indubitably, Richie, I have; and are they not yours? I must have social authority to succeed in our main enterprise. Possibly the princess's name serves for a temporary chandelier to cast light on us. She belongs to us. For her sake, we are bringing the house she enters into order. Thus, Richie, I could tell Mr. Beltham: you and he supply the money, the princess the name, and I the energy, the skilfulness, and the estimable cause. I pay the princess for the use of her name with the dowry, which is

royal; I pay you with the princess, who is royal too; and I, Richie, am paid by your happiness most royally. Together, it is past contest that we win.—Here, my little one,' he said to a woman, and dropped a piece of gold into her hand, 'on condition that you go straight home.' The woman thanked him and promised. 'As I was observing, we are in the very tide of success. Curious! I have a slight inclination to melancholy. Success, quotha? Why, hundreds before us have paced the identical way homeward at night under these lamps between the mansions and the park. The bare thought makes them resemble a double line of undertakers. The tomb is down there at the end of them—costly or not. At the age of four, on my birthday, I was informed that my mother lay dead in her bed. I remember to this day my astonishment at her not moving. "Her heart is broken," my old nurse said. To me she appeared intact. Her sister took possession of me, and of her papers, and the wedding-ring—now in the custody of Dettermain and Newson—together with the portraits of both my parents; and she, poor soul, to sustain me, as I verily believe—she had a great idea of my never asking unprofitably for anything in life—bartered the most corroborative of the testificatory documents, which would now make the establishment of my case a comparatively light task. Have I never spoken to you of my boyhood? My maternal uncle was a singing-master and master of elocution. I am indebted to him for the cultivation of my voice. He taught me an effective delivery of my sentences. The English of a book of his called The Speaker is still to my mind a model of

elegance. Remittances of money came to him from an unknown quarter; and, with a break or two, have come ever since up to this period. My old nurse-heaven bless her— resumed the occupation of washing. I have stood by her tub, Richie, blowing bubbles and listening to her prophecies of my exalted fortune for hours. On my honour, I doubt, I seriously doubt, if I have ever been happier. I depend just now—I have to avow it to you—slightly upon stimulants . . . of a perfectly innocuous character. Mrs. Waddy will allow me a pint of champagne. The truth is, Richie —you see these two or three poor pensioners of mine, honi soit qui mal y pense—my mother has had hard names thrown at her. The stones of these streets cry out to me to have her vindicated. I am not tired; but I want my wine.'

He repeated several times before he reached his housedoor, that he wanted his wine, in a manner to be almost alarming. His unwonted effort of memory, the singular pictures of him which it had flashed before me, and a sort of impatient compassion, made me forget my wrath. I saw him take his restorative at one draught. He lay down on a sofa, and his valet drew his boots off and threw a cloak over him. Lying there, he wished me gaily good-night. Mrs. Waddy told me that he had adopted this system of sleeping for the last month. 'Bless you, as many people call on him at night now as in the day,' she said; and I was induced to suppose he had some connection with the Press. She had implicit faith in his powers of constitution, and would affirm, that he had been the death of dozens whom the attraction had duped to imitate

his habits. 'He is now a Field- Marshal on his campaign.' She betrayed a twinkle of humour. He must himself have favoured her with that remark. The report of the house-door frequently shutting in the night suggested the passage of his aides-de- camp.

Early in the morning, I found him pacing through the open doors of the dining-room and the library dictating to a secretary at a desk, now and then tossing a word to Dettermain and Newson's chief clerk. The floor was strewn with journals. He wore Hessian boots; a voluminous black cloak hung loosely from his shoulders.

'I am just settling the evening papers,' he said after greeting me, with a show of formality in his warmth; and immediately added, 'That will do, Mr. Jopson. Put in a note—" Mr. Harry Lepel Richmond of Riversley and Twn-y-glas, my son, takes no step to official distinction in his native land save through the ordinary Parliamentary channels." Your pardon, Richie; presently. I am replying to a morning paper.'

'What's this? Why print my name?' I cried.

'Merely the correction of an error. I have to insist, my dear boy, that you claim no privileges: you are apart from them. Mr. Jopson, I beseech you, not a minute's delay in delivering that. Fetch me from the printer's my pamphlet this afternoon. Mr. Jacobs, my compliments to Dettermain and Newson: I request them to open proceedings instanter, and let the world know of it. Good-morning, gentlemen.'

And now, turning to me, my father fenced me with the whole

weight of his sententious volubility, which was the force of a river. Why did my name appear in the papers? Because I was his son. But he assured me that he carefully separated me from public companionship with his fortunes, and placed me on the side of my grandfather, as a plain gentleman of England, the heir of the most colossal wealth possible in the country.

'I dis-sociate you from me, Richie, do you see? I cause it to be declared that you need, on no account, lean on me. Jopson will bring you my pamphlet—my Declaration of Rights—to peruse. In the Press, in Literature, at Law, and on social ground, I meet the enemy, and I claim my own; by heaven, I do! And I will down to the squire for a distraction, if you esteem it necessary, certainly. Half-a-dozen . words to him. Why, do you maintain him to be insensible to a title for you? No, no. And ask my friends. I refer him to any dozen of my friends to convince him I have the prize almost in my possession. Why, dear boy, I have witnesses, living witnesses, to the ceremony. Am I, tell me, to be deprived of money now, once again, for the eleventh time? Oh! And put aside my duty to you, I protest I am bound in duty to her who bore me—you have seen her miniature: how lovely that dear woman was! how gentle!—bound in duty to her to clear her good name. This does not affect you . . . '

'Oh, but it does,' he allowed me to plead.

'Ay, through your love for your dada.'

He shook me by both hands. I was touched with pity, and at the same time in doubt whether it was not an actor that swayed

me; for I was discontented, and could not speak my discontent; I was overborne, overflowed. His evasion of the matter of my objections relating to the princess I felt to be a palpable piece of artfulness, but I had to acknowledge to myself that I knew what his argument would be, and how overwhelmingly his defence of it would spring forth. My cowardice shrank from provoking a recurrence to the theme. In fact, I submitted consciously to his masterful fluency and emotional power, and so I was carried on the tide with him, remaining in London several days to witness that I was not the only one. My father, admitting that money served him in his conquest of society, and defying any other man to do as much with it as he did, replied to a desperate insinuation of mine, 'This money I spend I am actually putting out to interest as much as, or more than, your grandad.' He murmured confidentially, 'I have alarmed the Government. Indeed, I have warrant for saying I am in communication with its agents. They are bribing me; they are positively bribing me, Richie. I receive my stipend annually. They are mighty discreet. So am I. But I push them hard. I take what they offer: I renounce none of my claims.'

Janet wrote that it would be prudent for me to return.

'I am prepared,' my father said. 'I have only to meet Mr. Beltham in a room—I stipulate that it shall be between square walls—to win him. The squire to back us, Richie, we have command of the entire world. His wealth, and my good cause, and your illustrious union—by the way, it is announced definitely

in this morning's paper.'

Dismayed, I asked what was announced.

'Read,' said he. 'This will be something to hand to Mr. Beltham at our meeting. I might trace it to one of the embassies, Imperial or Royal. No matter—there it is.'

I read a paragraph in which Ottilia's name and titles were set down; then followed mine and my wealthy heirship, and—woe was me in the perusing of it!—a roundabout vindication of me as one not likely to be ranked as the first of English commoners who had gained the hand of an hereditary foreign princess, though it was undoubtedly in the light of a commoner that I was most open to the congratulations of my countrymen upon my unparalleled felicity. A display of historical erudition cited the noble inferiors by birth who had caught princesses to their arms—Charles, Humphrey, William, John. Under this list, a later Harry!

The paragraph closed by fixing the nuptials to take place before the end of the Season.

I looked at my father to try a struggle with him. The whole man was efflorescent.

'Can't it be stopped?' I implored him.

He signified the impossibility in a burst of gesticulations, motions of the mouth, smiling frowns; various patterns of an absolute negative beating down opposition.

'Things printed can never be stopped, Richie. Our Jorian compares them to babies baptized. They have a soul from that

moment, and go on for ever!—an admirable word of Jorian's. And a word to you, Richie. Will you swear to me by the veracity of your lover's heart, that paragraph affords you no satisfaction? He cannot swear it!' my father exclaimed, seeing me swing my shoulder round, and he made me feel that it would have been a false oath if I had sworn it. But I could have sworn, that I had rather we two were at the bottom of the sea than that it should come under the princess's eyes. I read it again. It was in print. It looked like reality. It was at least the realization of my dream. But this played traitor and accused me of being crowned with no more than a dream. The sole practical thing I could do was to insist on our starting for Riversley immediately, to make sure of my own position. 'Name your hour, Richie,' my father said confidently: and we waited.

A rather plainer view of my father's position, as I inclined to think, was afforded to me one morning at his breakfast-table, by a conversation between him and Jorian DeWitt, who brought me a twisted pink note from Mdlle. Chassediane, the which he delivered with the air of a dog made to disgorge a bone, and he was very cool to me indeed. The cutlets of Alphonse were subject to snappish criticism. 'I assume,' he said, 'the fellow knew I was coming?'

'He saw it in my handwriting of yesterday,' replied my father. 'But be just to him, acknowledge that he is one of the few that perform their daily duties with a tender conscience.'

'This English climate has bedevilled the fellow! He peppers

his dishes like a mongrel Indian reared on mangoes.'

'Ring him up, ring him up, Jorian. All I beg of you is not to disgust him with life, for he quits any service in the world to come to me, and, in fact, he suits me.'

'Exactly so: you spoil him.'

My father shrugged. 'The state of the case is, that your stomach is growing delicate, friend Jorian.'

'The actual state of the case being, that my palate was never keener, and consequently my stomach knows its business.'

'You should have tried the cold turbot with oil and capers.'

'Your man had better stick to buttered eggs, in my opinion.'

'Say, porridge!'

'No, I'll be hanged if I think he's equal to a bowl of porridge.'

'Careme might have confessed to the same!'

'With this difference,' cried Jorian in a heat, 'that he would never have allowed the thought of any of your barbarous messes to occur to a man at table. Let me tell you, Roy, you astonish me: up till now I have never known you guilty of the bad taste of defending a bad dish on your own board.'

'Then you will the more readily pardon me, Jorian.'

'Oh, I pardon you,' Jorian sneered, tripped to the carpet by such ignoble mildness. 'A breakfast is no great loss.'

My father assured him he would have a serious conversation with Alphonse, for whom he apologized by saying that Alphonse had not, to his knowledge, served as hospital cook anywhere, and was therefore quite possibly not sufficiently solicitous for

appetites and digestions of invalids.

Jorian threw back his head as though to discharge a spiteful sarcasm with good aim; but turning to me, said, 'Harry, the thing must be done; your father must marry. Notoriety is the season for a pick and choice of the wealthiest and the loveliest. I refuse to act the part of warming-pan any longer; I refuse point blank. It's not a personal feeling on my part; my advice is that of a disinterested friend, and I tell you candidly, Roy, set aside the absurd exhibition of my dancing attendance on that last rose of Guildhall,—egad, the alderman went like Summer, and left us the very picture of a fruity Autumn,—I say you can't keep her hanging on the tree of fond expectation for ever. She'll drop.'

'Catch her, Jorian; you are on guard.'

'Upwards of three hundred thousand, if a penny, Roy Richmond! Who? I?

I am not a fortune-hunter.'

'Nor am I, friend Jorian.'

'No, it 's because you're not thorough: you 'll fall between the stools.'

My father remarked that he should visit this upon Mr. Alphonse.

'You shook off that fine Welsh girl, and she was in your hand —the act of a madman!' Jorian continued. 'You're getting older: the day will come when you're a flat excitement. You know the first Lady Edbury spoilt one of your best chances when you had the market. Now you're trifling with the second. She's the head

of the Light Brigade, but you might fix her down, if she's not too much in debt. You 're not at the end of your run, I dare say. Only, my good Roy, let me tell you, in life you mustn't wait for the prize of the race till you touch the goal—if you prefer metaphor. You generally come forward about every seven years or so. Add on another seven, and women'll begin to think. You can't beat Time, mon Roy.'

'So,' said my father, 'I touch the goal, and women begin to think, and I can't beat time to them. Jorian, your mind is in a state of confusion. I do not marry.'

'Then, Roy Richmond, hear what a friend says . . .'

'I do not marry, Jorian, and you know my reasons.'

'Sentiments!'

'They are a part of my life.'

'Just as I remarked, you are not thorough. You have genius and courage out of proportion, and you are a dead failure, Roy; because, no sooner have you got all Covent Garden before you for the fourth or fifth time, than in go your hands into your pockets, and you say—No, there's an apple I can't have, so I'll none of these; and, by the way, the apple must be tolerably withered by this time. And you know perfectly well (for you don't lack common sense at a shaking, Roy Richmond), that you're guilty of simple madness in refusing to make the best of your situation. You haven't to be taught what money means. With money—and a wife to take care of it, mind you—you are pre-eminently the man for which you want to be recognized. Without it—Harry 'll

excuse me, I must speak plainly—you're a sort of a spectacle of a bob-cherry, down on your luck, up on your luck, and getting dead stale and never bitten; a familiar curiosity'

Jorian added, 'Oh, by Jove! it's not nice to think of.' My father said: 'Harry, I am sure, will excuse you for talking, in your extreme friendliness, of matters that he and I have not—and they interest us deeply—yet thought fit to discuss. And you may take my word for it, Jorian, that I will give Alphonse his medical dose. I am quite of your opinion that the kings of cooks require it occasionally. Harry will inform us of Mdlle. Chassediane's commands.'

The contents of the letter permitted me to read it aloud. She desired to know how she could be amused on the Sunday.

'We will undertake it,' said my father. 'I depute the arrangements to you, Jorian. Respect the prejudices, and avoid collisions, that is all.'

Captain DeWitt became by convenient stages cheerful, after the pink slip of paper had been made common property, and from a seriously-advising friend, in his state of spite, relapsed to the idle and shadow-like associate, when pleased. I had to thank him for the gift of fresh perceptions. Surely it would be as well if my father could get a woman of fortune to take care of him!

We had at my request a consultation with Dettermain and Newson on the eve of the journey to Riversley, Temple and Jorian DeWitt assisting. Strange documentary evidence was unfolded and compared with the date of a royal decree: affidavits

of persons now dead; a ring, the ring; fans, and lace, and handkerchiefs with notable initials; jewelry stamped 'To the Divine Anastasia' from an adoring Christian name: old brown letters that shrieked 'wife' when 'charmer' seemed to have palled; oaths of fidelity ran through them like bass notes. Jorian held up the discoloured sheets of ancient paper saying:

'Here you behold the mummy of the villain Love.' Such love as it was—the love of the privileged butcher for the lamb. The burden of the letters, put in epigram, was rattlesnake and bird. A narrative of Anastasia's sister, Elizabeth, signed and sealed, with names of witnesses appended, related in brief bald English the history of the events which had killed her. It warmed pathetically when dwelling on the writer's necessity to part with letters and papers of greater moment, that she might be enabled to sustain and educate her sister's child. She named the certificate; she swore to the tampering with witnesses. The number and exact indication of the house where the ceremony took place was stated —a house in Soho;—the date was given, and the incident on that night of the rape of the beautiful Miss Armett by mad Lord Beaumaris at the theatre doors, aided by masked ruffians, after Anastasia's performance of Zamira.

'There are witnesses I know to be still living, Mr. Temple,' my father said, seeing the young student-at-law silent and observant. 'One of them I have under my hand; I feed him. Listen to this.'

He read two or three insufferable sentences from one of the love- epistles, and broke down. I was ushered aside by a member

of the firm to inspect an instrument prepared to bind me as surety for the costs of the appeal. I signed it. We quitted the attorney's office convinced (I speak of Temple and myself) that we had seen the shadow of something.

CHAPTER XL
MY FATHER'S MEETING WITH MY GRANDFATHER

My father's pleasure on the day of our journey to Bulsted was to drive me out of London on a lofty open chariot, with which he made the circuit of the fashionable districts, and caused innumerable heads to turn. I would have preferred to go the way of other men, to be unnoticed, but I was subject to an occasional glowing of undefined satisfaction in the observance of the universally acknowledged harmony existing between his pretensions, his tastes and habits, and his person. He contrived by I know not what persuasiveness and simplicity of manner and speech to banish from me the idea that he was engaged in playing a high stake; and though I knew it, and he more than once admitted it, there was an ease and mastery about him that afforded me some degree of positive comfort still. I was still most securely attached to his fortunes. Supposing the ghost of dead Hector to have hung over his body when the inflamed son of Peleus whirled him at his chariot wheels round Troy, he would, with his natural passions sobered by Erebus, have had some of my reflections upon force and fate, and my partial sense of exhilaration in the tremendous speed of the course during the whole of the period my father termed his Grand Parade. I showed

just such acquiescence or resistance as were superinduced by the variations of the ground. Otherwise I was spell-bound; and beyond interdicting any further public mention of my name or the princess's, I did nothing to thwart him. It would have been no light matter.

We struck a station at a point half-way down to Bulsted, and found little Kiomi there, thunder in her brows, carrying a bundle, and purchasing a railway-ticket, not to travel in our direction. She gave me the singular answer that she could not tell me where her people were; nor would she tell me whither she was going, alone, and by rail. I chanced to speak of Heriot. One of her sheet-lightning flashes shot out. 'He won't be at Bulsted,' she said, as if that had a significance. I let her know we were invited to Bulsted. 'Oh, she 's at home'; Kiomi blinked, and her features twitched like whip-cord. I saw that she was possessed by one of her furies. That girl's face had the art of making me forget beautiful women, and what beauty was by comparison.

It happened that the squire came across us as we were rounding the slope of larch and fir plantation near a part of the Riversley hollows, leading to the upper heath-land, where, behind a semicircle of birches, Bulsted lay. He was on horseback, and called hoarsely to the captain's coachman, who was driving us, to pull up. 'Here, Harry,' he sang out to me, in the same rough voice, 'I don't see why we should bother Captain William. It's a bit of business, not pleasure. I've got the book in my pocket. You ask—is it convenient to step into my bailiff's cottage hard

by, and run through it? Ten minutes 'll tell me all I want to know. I want it done with. Ask.'

My father stood up and bowed, bareheaded.

My grandfather struck his hat and bobbed.

'Mr. Beltham, I trust I see you well.'

'Better, sir, when I've got rid of a damned unpleasant bit o' business.'

'I offer you my hearty assistance.'

'Do you? Then step down and come into my bailiff's.'

'I come, sir.'

My father alighted from the carriage. The squire cast his gouty leg to be quit of his horse, but not in time to check my father's advances and ejaculations of condolence.

'Gout, Mr. Beltham, is a little too much a proof to us of a long line of ancestry.'

His hand and arm were raised in the form of a splint to support the squire, who glared back over his cheekbone, horrified that he could not escape the contact, and in too great pain from arthritic throes to protest: he resembled a burglar surprised by justice. 'What infernal nonsense . . , fellow talking now?' I heard him mutter between his hoppings and dancings, with one foot in the stirrup and a toe to earth, the enemy at his heel, and his inclination half bent upon swinging to the saddle again.

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