

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

SANDRA
BELLONI,
VOLUME 3

George Meredith
Sandra Belloni. Volume 3

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Sandra Belloni – Volume 3:

Содержание

CHAPTER XVIII	4
CHAPTER XIX	13
CHAPTER XX	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	29

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CHAPTER XVIII

Meantime Wilfrid was leading a town-life and occasionally visiting Stornley. He was certainly not in love with Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, but he was in harness to that lady. In love we have some idea whither we would go: in harness we are simply driven, and the destination may be anywhere. To be reduced to this condition (which will happen now and then in the case of very young men who are growing up to something, and is, if a momentary shame to them, rather a sign of promise than not) the gentle male need not be deeply fascinated. Lady Charlotte was not a fascinating person. She did not lay herself out to attract. Had she done so, she would have failed to catch Wilfrid, whose soul thirsted for poetical refinement and filmy delicacies in a woman. What she had, and what he knew that he wanted, and could only at intervals assume by acting as if he possessed it, was a victorious aplomb, which gave her a sort of gallant glory in his sight. He could act it well before his sisters, and here and there a damsel; and coming fresh from Lady Charlotte's school, he had recently done so with success, and had seen the ladies feel toward him, as he felt under his instructress in the

art. Some nature, however, is required for every piece of art. Wilfrid knew that he had been brutal in his representation of the part, and the retrospect of his conduct at Brookfield did not satisfy his remorseless critical judgement. In consequence, when he again saw Lady Charlotte, his admiration of that one prized characteristic of hers paralyzed him. She looked, and moved, and spoke, as if the earth were her own. She was a note of true music, and he felt himself to be an indecisive chord; capable ultimately of a splendid performance, it might be, but at present crying out to be played upon. This is the condition of a man in harness, whom wiflings may call what they will. He is subjugated: not won. In this state of subjugation he will joyfully sacrifice as much as a man in love. For, having no consolatory sense of happiness, such as encircles and makes a nest for lovers, he seeks to attain some stature, at least, by excesses of apparent devotion. Lady Charlotte believed herself beloved at last. She was about to strike thirty; and Rumour, stalking with a turban of cloud on her head,—enough that this shocking old celestial dowager, from condemnation had passed to pity of the dashing lady. Beloved at last! After a while there is no question of our loving; but we thirst for love, if we have not had it. The key of Lady Charlotte will come in the course of events. She was at the doubtful hour of her life, a warm-hearted woman, known to be so by few, generally consigned by devout-visaged Scandal (for who save the devout will dare to sit in the chair of judgement?) as a hopeless rebel against conventional laws; and worse than that, far worse,

—though what, is not said.

At Stornley the following letter from Emilia hit its mark:—

Dear Mr. Wilfrid,

"It is time for me to see you. Come when you have read this letter. I cannot tell you how I am, because my heart feels beating in another body. Pray come; come now. Come on a swift horse. The thought of you galloping to me goes through me like a flame that hums. You will come, I know. It is time. If I write foolishly, do forgive me. I can only make sure of the spelling, and I cannot please you on paper, only when I see you."

The signature of 'Emilia Alessandra Belloni' was given with her wonted proud flourish.

Wilfrid stared at the writing. "What! all this time she has been thinking the same thing!" Her constancy did not swim before him in alluring colours. He regarded it as a species of folly. Disgust had left him. The pool of Memory would have had to be stirred to remind him of the pipe-smoke in her hair. "You are sure to please me when you see me?" he murmured. "You are very confident, young lady!" So much had her charm faded. And then he thought kindly of her, and that a meeting would not be good for her, and that she ought to go to Italy and follow her profession. "If she grows famous," whispered coxcombry, "why then oneself will take a little of the praises given to her." And that seemed eminently satisfactory. Men think in this way when you have loved them, ladies. All men? No; only the coxcombs; but it is to these that you give your fresh affection. They are, as it were, the

band of the regiment of adorers, marching ahead, while we sober working soldiers follow to their music. "If she grows famous, why then I can bear in mind that her heart was once in my possession: and it may return to its old owner, perchance." Wilfrid indulged in a pleasant little dream of her singing at the Opera-house, and he, tied to a ferocious, detested wife, how softly and luxuriously would he then be sighing for the old time! It was partly good seed in his nature, and an apprehension of her force of soul, that kept him from a thought of evil to her. Passion does not inspire dark appetite. Dainty innocence does, I am told. Things are tested by the emotions they provoke. Wilfrid knew that there was no trifling with Emilia, so he put the letter by, commenting thus "she's right, she doesn't spell badly." Behind, which, to those who have caught the springs of his character, volumes may be seen.

He put the letter by. Two days later, at noon, the card of Captain Gambier was brought to him in the billiard-room,—on it was written:

"Miss Belloni waits on horseback to see you." Wilfrid thought "Waits!" and the impossibility of escape gave him a notion of her power.

"So, you are letting that go on," said Lady Charlotte, when she heard that Emilia and the captain were in company.

"There is no fear for her whatever."

"There is always fear when a man gives every minute of his time to that kind of business," retorted her ladyship.

Wilfrid smiled the smile of the knowing. Rivalry with

Gambier (and successful too!) did not make Emilia's admiration so tasteless. Some one cries out: "But, what a weak creature is this young man!" I reply, he was at a critical stage of his career. All of us are weak in the period of growth, and are of small worth before the hour of trial. This fellow had been fattening all his life on prosperity; the very best dish in the world; but it does not prove us. It fattens and strengthens us, just as the sun does. Adversity is the inspector of our constitutions; she simply tries our muscle and powers of endurance, and should be a periodical visitor. But, until she comes, no man is known. Wilfrid was not absolutely engaged to Lady Charlotte (she had taken care of that), and being free, and feeling his heart beat in more lively fashion, he turned almost delightedly to the girl he could not escape from. As when the wriggling eel that has been prodded by the countryman's fork, finds that no amount of wriggling will release it, to it twists in a knot around the imprisoning prong. This simile says more than I mean it to say, but those who understand similes will know the measure due to them.

There sat Emilia on her horse. "Has Gambier been giving her lessons?" thought Wilfrid. She sat up, well-balanced; and, as he approached, began to lean gently forward to him. A greeting 'equal to any lady's,' there was no doubt. This was the point Emilia had to attain, in his severe contemplation. A born lady, on her assured level, stood a chance of becoming a Goddess; but ladyship was Emilia's highest mark. Such is the state of things to the sentimental fancy when girls are at a disadvantage.

She smiled, and held out both hands. He gave her one, nodding kindly, but was too confused to be the light-hearted cavalier. Lady Charlotte walked up to her horse's side, after receiving Captain Gambier's salute, and said: "Come, catch hold of my hands and jump."

"No," replied Emilia; "I only came to see him."

"But you will see him, and me in the bargain, if you stay."

"I fancy she has given her word to return early," interposed Wilfrid.

"Then we'll ride back with her," said Lady Charlotte. "Give me five minutes. I'll order a horse out for you."

She smiled, and considerately removed the captain, by despatching him to the stables.

A quivering dimple of tenderness hung for a moment in Emilia's cheeks, as she looked upon Wilfrid. Then she said falteringly, "I think they wish to be as we do."

"Alone?" cried Wilfrid.

"Yes; that is why I brought him over. He will come anywhere with me."

"You must be mistaken."

"No; I know it."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No; Mr. Powys did."

"Told you that Lady Charlotte—"

"Yes. Not, is; but, was. And he used that word...there is no word like it,...he said 'her lover'—Oh! mine!" Emilia lifted her

arms. Her voice from its deepest fall had risen to a cry.

Wilfrid caught her as she slipped from her saddle. His heart was in a tumult; stirred both ways: stirred with wrath and with love. He clasped her tightly.

"Am I?—am I?" he breathed.

"My lover!" Emilia murmured.

He was her slave again.

For, here was something absolutely his own. His own from the roots; from the first growth of sensation. Something with the bloom on it: to which no other finger could point and say: "There is my mark."

(And, ladies, if you will consent to be likened to a fruit, you must bear with these observations, and really deserve the stigma. If you will smile on men, because they adore you as vegetable products, take what ensues.)

Lady Charlotte did no more than double the time she had asked for. The party were soon at a quiet canter up the lanes; but entering a broad furzy common with bramble-plots and oak-shaws, the Amazon flew ahead. Emilia's eyes were so taken with her, that she failed to observe a tiny red-flowing runlet in the clay, with yellow-ridged banks almost baked to brick. Over it she was borne, but at the expense of a shaking that caused her to rely on her hold of the reins, ignorant of the notions of a horse outstripped. Wilfrid looked to see that the jump had been accomplished, and was satisfied. Gambier was pressing his hack to keep a respectable second.

Lady Charlotte spun round suddenly, crying, "Catch the mare!" and galloped back to Emilia, who was deposited on a bush of bramble. Dismounting promptly, the lady said: "My child, you're not hurt?"

"Not a bit." Emilia blinked.

"Not frightened?"

"Not a bit," was half whispered.

"That's brave. Now jump on your feet. Tell me why you rode over to us this morning. Quick. Don't hesitate."

"Because I want Wilfrid to see his sister Cornelia," came the answer, with the required absence of indecision.

Emilia ran straightway to meet Wilfrid approaching; and as both her hands, according to her fashion, were stretched out to him to assure him of her safety and take his clasp, forgetful of the instincts derived from riding-habits, her feet became entangled; she trod herself down, falling plump forward and looking foolish—perhaps for the first time in her life plainly feeling so.

"Up! little woman," said Lady Charlotte, supporting her elbow.

"Now, Sir Wilfrid, we part here; and don't spoil her courage, now she has had a spill, by any 'assiduous attentions' and precautions. She's sure to take as many as are needed. If Captain Gambler thinks I require an escort, he may offer."

The captain, taken by surprise, bowed, and flowed in ardent commonplace.

Wilfrid did not look of a wholesome colour.

"Do you return?" he stammered; not without a certain aspect of righteous reproach.

"Yes. You will ride over to us again, probably, in a day or two? Captain Gambler will see me safe from the savage admirers that crowd this country, if I interpreted him rightly."

Emilia was lifted to her seat. Lady Charlotte sprang unassisted to hers. "Ta-ta!" she waved her fingers from her lips. The pairs then separated; one couple turning into green lanes, the other dipping to blue hills.

CHAPTER XIX

Gossip of course was excited on the subject of the choice of a partner made by the member for the county. Cornelia placed her sisters in one of their most pleasing of difficulties. She had not as yet pledged her word. It was supposed that she considered it due to herself to withhold her word for a term. The rumour in the family was, that Sir Twickenham appreciated her hesitation, and desired that he might be intimately known before he was finally accepted. When the Tinleys called, they heard that Cornelia's acceptance of the baronet was doubtful. The Copleys, on the other hand, distinctly understood that she had decided in his favour. Owing to the amiable dissension between the Copleys and the Tinleys, each party called again; giving the ladies of Brookfield further opportunity for studying one of the levels from which they had risen. Arabella did almost all the fencing with Laura Tinley, contemptuously as a youth of station returned from college will turn and foil an ill-conditioned villager, whom formerly he has encountered on the green.

"Had they often met, previous to the...the proposal?" inquired Laura; and laughed: "I was going to say 'popping.'"

"Pray do not check yourself, if a phrase appears to suit you," returned

Arabella.

"But it was in the neighbourhood, was it not?"

"They have met in the neighbourhood."

"At Richford?"

"Also at Richford."

"We thought it was sudden, dear; that's all."

"Why should it not be?"

"Perhaps the best things are, it is true."

"You congratulate us upon a benefit?"

"He is to be congratulated seriously. Naturally. When she decides, let me know early, I do entreat you, because...well, I am of a different opinion from some people, who talk of another attachment, or engagement, and I do not believe in it, and have said so."

Rising to depart, Laura Tinley resumed: "Most singular! You are aware, of course, that poor creature, our organist—I ought to say yours—who looked (it was Mr. Sumner I heard say it—such a good thing!)" as if he had been a gentleman in another world, and was the ghost of one in this:" really one of the cleverest things! but he is clever!—Barrett's his name: Barrett and some: musical name before it, like Handel. I mean one that we are used to. Well, the man has totally and unexpectedly thrown up his situation."

"His appointment," said Arabella. Permitting no surprise to be visible, she paused: "Yes. I don't think we shall give our consent to her filling the post."

Laura let it be seen that her adversary was here a sentence too quick for her.

"Ah! you mean your little Miss Belloni?"

"Was it not of her you were thinking?"

"When?" asked Laura, shamefully bewildered.

"When you alluded to Mr. Barrett's vacant place."

"Not at the moment."

"I thought you must be pointing to her advancement."

"I confess it was not in my mind."

"In what consisted the singularity, then?"

"The singularity?"

"You prefaced your remarks with the exclamation, 'Singular!'"

Laura showed that Arabella had passed her guard. She hastened to compliment her on her kindness to Emilia, and so sheathed her weapon for the time, having just enjoyed a casual inspection of Mrs. Chump entering the room, and heard the brogue an instant.

"Irish!" she whispered, smiling, with a sort of astonished discernment of the nationality, and swept through the doorway: thus conveying forcibly to Arabella her knowledge of what the ladies of Brookfield were enduring: a fine Parthian shot.

That Cornelia should hold a notable county man, a baronet and owner of great acres, in a state between acceptance and rejection, was considered high policy by the ladies, whom the idea of it elevated; and they encouraged her to pursue this course, without having a suspicion, shrewd as they were, that it was followed for any other object than the honour of the family. But Mr. Pole was in the utmost perplexity, and spoke of baronets as things almost holy, to be kneeled to, prayed for. He was profane. "I thought,

papa," said Cornelia, "that women conferred the favour when they gave their hands!"

It was a new light to the plain merchant. "How should you say if a

Prince came and asked for you?"

"Still that he asked a favour at my hands."

"Oh!" went Mr. Pole, in the voice of a man whose reason is outraged. The placidity of Cornelia's reply was not without its effect on him, nevertheless. He had always thought his girls extraordinary girls, and born to be distinguished. "Perhaps she has a lord in view," he concluded: it being his constant delusion to suppose that high towering female sense has always a practical aim at a material thing. He was no judge of the sex in its youth. "Just speak to her," he said to Wilfrid.

Wilfrid had heard from Emilia that there was a tragic background to this outward placidity; tears on the pillow at night and long vigils. Emilia had surprised her weeping, and though she obtained no confidences, the soft mood was so strong in the stately lady, that she consented to weep on while Emilia clasped her. Petitioning on her behalf to Wilfrid for aid, Emilia had told him the scene; and he, with a man's stupidity, alluded to it, not thinking what his knowledge of it revealed to a woman.

"Why do you vacillate, and keep us all in the dark as to what you mean?" he began.

"I am not prepared," said Cornelia; the voice of humility issuing from a monument.

"One of your oracular phrases! Are you prepared to be straightforward in your dealings?"

"I am prepared for any sacrifice, Wilfrid."

"The marrying of a man in his position is a sacrifice!"

"I cannot leave papa."

"And why not?"

"He is ill. He does not speak of it, but he is ill. His actions are strange. They are unaccountable."

"He has an old friend to reside in his house?"

"It is not that. I have noticed him. His mind...he requires watching."

"And how long is it since you made this discovery?"

"One sees clearer perhaps when one is not quite happy."

"Not happy! Then it's for him that you turn the night to tears?"

Cornelia closed her lips. She divined that her betrayer must be close in his confidence. She went shortly after to Emilia, whose secret at once stood out bare to a kindled suspicion. There was no fear that Cornelia would put her finger on it accusingly, or speak of it directly. She had the sentimentalist's profound respect for the name and notion of love. She addressed Emilia vaguely, bidding her keep guard on her emotions, and telling her there was one test of the truth of masculine protestations; this, Will he marry you? The which, if you are poor, is a passably infallible test. Emilia sucked this in thoughtfully. She heard that lovers were false. Why, then of course they were not like her lover! Cornelia finished what she deemed her duty, and departed, while

Emilia thought: "I wonder whether he could be false to me;" and she gave herself shrewd half-delicious jarrings of pain, forcing herself to contemplate the impossible thing.

She was in this state when Mrs. Chump came across her, and with a slight pressure of a sovereign into her hand, said: "There, it's for you, little Belloni! and I see ye've been thinkin' me one o' the scrape-hards and close-fists. It's Pole who keeps me low, on purpose. And I'm a wretch if I haven't my purse full, so you see I'm all in the dark in the house, and don't know half so much as the sluts o' the kitchen. So, ye'll tell me, little Belloni, is Arr'bella goin' to marry Mr. Annybody? And is Cornelia goin' to marry Sir Tickleham? And whether Mr. Wilfrud's goin' to marry Lady Charlotte Chill'nworth? Becas, my dear, there's Arr'bella, who's sharp, she is, as a North-easter in January, (which Chump 'd cry out for, for the sake of his ships, poor fella—he kneelin' by 's bedside in a long nightgown and lookin' just twice what he was!) she has me like a nail to my vary words, and shows me that nothin' can happen betas o' what I've said. And Cornelia—if ye'll fancy a tall codfish on its tail: 'Mrs. Chump, I beg ye'll not go to believe annything of me.' So I says to her, 'Cornelia! my dear! do ye think, now, it's true that Chump went and marrud his cook, that ye treat me so? becas my father,' I tell her, 'he dealt in porrk in a large way, and I was a fine woman, full of the arr'stocracy, and Chump a little puffed-out bladder of a man.' So then she says: 'Mrs. Chump, I listen to no gossup: listen you to no gossup. 'And Mr. Wilfrud, my dear, he sends me on the flat o' my back,

laughin'. And Ad'la she takes and turns me right about, so that I don't see the thing I'm askin' after; and there's nobody but you, little Belloni, to help me, and if ye do, ye shall know what the crumple of paper sounds like."

Mrs. Chump gave a sugary suck with her tongue. Emilia returned the money to her.

"Ye're foolush!" said Mrs. Chump. "A shut fist's good in fight and bad in friendship. Do ye know that? Open your hand."

"Excuse me," persisted Emilia.

"Pooh! take the money, or I'll say ye're in a conspiracy to make me blindman's-buff of the parrrty. Take ut."

"I don't want it."

"Maybe, it's not enough?"

"I don't want any, ma'am."

"Ma'am, to the deuce with ye! I'll be callin' ye a forr'ner in a minute,

I will."

Emilia walked away from a volley of terrific threats.

For some reason, unfathomed by her, she wanted to be alone with Wilfrid and put a question to him. No other, in sooth, than the infallible test. Not, mind you, that she wished to be married. But something she had heard (she had forgotten what it was) disturbed her, and that recent trifling with pain, in her excess of happiness, laid her open to it. Her heart was weaker, and fluttered, as if with a broken wing. She thought, "if I can be near him to lean against him for one full hour!" it would make her

strong again. For, she found that if her heart was rising on a broad breath, suddenly, for no reason that she knew, it seemed to stop in its rise, break, and sink, like a wind-beaten billow. Once or twice, in a quick fear, she thought: "What is this? Is this a malady coming before death?" She walked out gloomily, thinking of the darkness of the world to Wilfrid, if she should die. She plucked flowers, and then reproached herself with plucking them. She tried to sing. "No, not till I have been with him alone," she said, chiding her voice to silence. A shadow crossed her mind, as a Spring-mist dulls the glory of May. "Suppose all singing has gone from me—will he love wretched me?"

By-and-by she met him in the house. "Come out of doors to-night," she whispered.

Wilfrid's spirit of intrigue was never to be taken by surprise. "In the wood, under the pine, at nine," he replied.

"Not there," said Emilia, seeing this place mournfully dark from

Cornelia's grief. "It is too still; say, where there's water falling. One can't be unhappy by noisy water."

Wilfrid considered, and named Wilming Weir. "And there we'll sit and you'll sing to me. I won't dine at home, so they won't susp-a-fancy anything.—Soh! and you want very much to be with me, my bird? What am I?" He bent his head.

"My lover."

He pressed her hand rapturously, half-doubting whether her pronunciation of the word had not a rather too confident twang.

Was it not delightful, he asked her, that they should be thus one to the other, and none know of it. She thought so too, and smiled happily, promising secrecy, at his request; for the sake of continuing so felicitous a life.

"You, you know, have an appointment with Captain Gambier, and, I with Lady Charlotte Chillingworth," said he. "How dare you make appointments with a captain of hussars?" and he bent her knuckles fondly.

Emilia smiled as before. He left her with a distinct impression that she did not comprehend that part of her lesson.

Wilfrid had just bled his father of a considerable sum of money; having assured him that he was the accepted suitor of Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, besides making himself pleasant in allusion to Mrs. Chump, so far as to cast some imputation on his sisters' judgement for not perceiving the virtues of the widow. The sum was improvidently large. Mr. Pole did not hear aright when he heard it named. Even at the repetition, he went: "Eh?" two or three times, vacantly. The amount was distinctly nailed to his ear: whereupon he said, "Ah!—yes! you young fellows want money: must have it, I suppose. Up from the bowels of the earth Up from the—: you're sure they're not playing the fool with you, over there?"

Wilfrid understood the indication to Stornley. "I think you need have no fear of that, sir." And so his father thought, after an examination of the youth, who was of manly shape, and had a fresh, non-fatuous, air.

"Well, if that's all right..." sighed Mr. Pole. "Of course you'll always know that money's money. I wish your sisters wouldn't lose their time, as they do. Time's worth more than money. What sum?"

"I told you, sir, I wanted—there's the yacht, you know, and a lot of tradesmen's bills, which you don't like to see standing:—about—perhaps I had better name the round sum. Suppose you write down eight hundred. I shan't want more for some months. If you fancy it too much..."

Mr. Pole had lifted his head. But he spoke nothing. His lips and brows were rigid in apparent calculation. Wilfrid kept his position for a minute or so; and then, a little piqued, he moved about. He had inherited the antipathy to the discussion of the money question, and fretted to find it unnecessarily prolonged.

"Shall I come to you on this business another time, sir?"

"No, God bless my soul!" cried his father; "are you going to keep this hanging over me for ever? Eight hundred, you said." He mumbled: "salary of a chief clerk of twenty years' standing. Eight: twice four:—there you have it exactly."

"Will you send it me in a letter?" said Wilfrid, out of patience.

"I'll send it you in a letter," assented his father. Upon which Wilfrid changed his mind. "I can take a chair, though. I can easily wait for it now."

"Save trouble, if I send it. Eh?"

"Do you wish to see whether you can afford it, sir?"

"I wish to see you show more sense—with your confounded

'afford.' Have you any idea of bankers' books?—bankers' accounts?" Mr. Pole fished his cheque-book from a drawer and wrote Wilfrid's name and the sum, tore out the leaf and tossed it to him. "There, I've written to-day. Don't present it for a week." He rubbed his forehead hastily, touching here and there a paper to put it scrupulously in a line with the others. Wilfrid left him, and thought: "Kind old boy! Of course, he always means kindly, but I think I see a glimpse of avarice as a sort of a sign of age coming on. I hope he'll live long!"

Wilfrid was walking in the garden, imagining perhaps that he was thinking, as the swarming sensations of little people help them to imagine, when Cornelia ran hurriedly up to him and said: "Come with me to papa. He's ill: I fear he is going to have a fit."

"I left him sound and well, just now," said Wilfrid. "This is your mania."

"I found him gasping in his chair not two minutes after you quitted him.

Dearest, he is in a dangerous state!"

Wilfrid stepped back to his father, and was saluted with a ready "Well?" as he entered; but the mask had slipped from half of the old man's face, and for the first time in his life Wilfrid perceived that he had become an old man.

"Well, sir, you sent for me?" he said.

"Girls always try to persuade you you're ill—that's all," returned Mr. Pole. His voice was subdued; but turning to Cornelia, he fired up: "It's preposterous to tell a man who carries

on a business like mine, you've observed for a long while that he's queer!—There, my dear child, I know that you mean well. I shall look all right the day you're married."

This allusion, and the sudden kindness, drew a storm of tears to

Cornelia's eyelids.

"Papa! if you will but tell me what it is!" she moaned.

A nervous frenzy seemed to take possession of him. He ordered her out of the room.

She was gone, but his arm was still stretched out, and his expression of irritated command did not subside.

Wilfrid took his arm and put it gently down on the chair, saying: "You're not quite the thing to-day, sir."

"Are you a fool as well?" Mr. Pole retorted. "What do you know of, to make me ill? I live a regular life. I eat and drink just as you all do; and if I have a headache, I'm stunned with a whole family screaming as hard as they can that I'm going to die. Damned hard! I say, sir, it's—" He fell into a feebleness.

"A little glass of brandy, I think," Wilfrid suggested; and when Mr. Pole had gathered his mind he assented, begging his son particularly to take precautions to prevent any one from entering the room until he had tasted the reviving liquor.

CHAPTER XX

A half-circle of high-banked greensward, studded with old park-trees, hung round the roar of the water; distant enough from the white-twisting fall to be mirrored on a smooth-heaved surface, while its out-pushing brushwood below drooped under burdens of drowned reed-flags that caught the foam. Keen scent of hay, crossing the dark air, met Emilia as she entered the river-meadow. A little more, and she saw the white weir-piles shining, and the grey roller just beginning to glisten to the moon. Eastward on her left, behind a cedar, the moon had cast off a thick cloud, and shone through the cedar-bars with a yellowish hazy softness, making rosy gold of the first passion of the tide, which, writhing and straining on through many lights, grew wide upon the wonderful velvet darkness underlying the wooded banks. With the full force of a young soul that leaps from beauty seen to unimagined beauty, Emilia stood and watched the picture. Then she sat down, hushed, awaiting her lover.

Wilfrid, as it chanced, was ten minutes late. She did not hear his voice till he had sunk on his knee by her side.

"What a reverie!" he said half jealously. "Isn't it lovely here?"

Emilia pressed his hand, but without turning her face to him, as her habit was. He took it for shyness, and encouraged her with soft exclamations and expansive tenderness.

"I wish I had not come here!" she murmured.

"Tell me why?" He folded his arm about her waist.

"Why did you let me wait?" said she.

Wilfrid drew out his watch; blamed the accident that had detained him, and remarked that there were not many minutes to witness against him.

She appeared to throw off her moodiness. "You are here at last. Let me hold your hand, and think, and be quite silent."

"You shall hold my hand, and think, and be quite silent, my own girl! if you will tell me what's on your mind."

Emilia thought it enough to look in his face, smiling.

"Has any one annoyed you?" he cried out.

"No one."

"Then receive the command of your lord, that you kiss him."

"I will kiss him," said Emilia; and did so.

The salute might have appeased an imperious lord, but was not so satisfactory to an exacting lover. He perceived, however, that, whether as lover or as lord, he must wait for her now, owing to her having waited for him: so, he sat by her, permitting his hand to be softly squeezed, and trying to get at least in the track of her ideas, while her ear was turned to the weir, and her eyes were on the glowing edges of the cedar- tree.

Finally, on one of many deep breaths, she said: "It's over. Why were you late? But, never mind now. Never let it be long again when I am expecting you. It's then I feel so much at his mercy. I mean, if I am where I hear falling water; sometimes thunder."

Wilfrid masked his complete mystification with a caressing

smile; not without a growing respect for the only person who could make him experience the pangs of conscious silliness. You see, he was not a coxcomb.

"That German!" Emilia enlightened him.

"Your old music-master?"

"I wish it, I wish it! I should soon be free from him. Don't you know that dreadful man I told you about, who's like a black angel to me, because there is no music like his? and he's a German! I told you how I first dreamed about him, and then regularly every night, after talking with my father about Italy and his black-yellow Tedeschi, this man came over my pillow and made me call him Master, Master. And he is. He seems as if he were the master of my soul, mocking me, making me worship him in spite of my hate. I came here, thinking only of you. I heard the water like a great symphony. I fell into dreaming of my music. That's when I am at his mercy. There's no one like him. I must detest music to get free from him. How can I? He is like the God of music."

Wilfrid now remembered certain of her allusions to this rival, who had hitherto touched him very little. Perhaps it was partly the lovely scene that lifted him to a spiritual jealousy, partly his susceptibility to a sentimental exaggeration, and partly the mysterious new charm in Emilia's manner, that was as a bordering lustre, showing how the full orb was rising behind her.

"His name?" Wilfrid asked for.

Emilia's lips broke to the second letter of the alphabet; but she

cut short the word. "Why should you hear it? And now that you are here, you drive him away. And the best is," she laughed, "I am sure you will not remember any of his pieces. I wish I could not—not that it's the memory; but he seems all round me, up in the air, and when the trees move all together...you chase him away, my lover!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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