

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

DIANA OF THE
CROSSWAYS,
VOLUME 5

George Meredith

Diana of the Crossways. Volume 5

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CHAPTER XXXVI IS CONCLUSIVE AS TO THE HEARTLESSNESS OF WOMEN WITH BRAINS

Hymenaeal rumours are those which might be backed to run a victorious race with the tale of evil fortune; and clearly for the reason that man's livelier half is ever alert to speed them. They travel with an astonishing celerity over the land, like flames of the dry beacon-faggots of old time in announcement of the invader or a conquest, gathering as they go: wherein, to say nothing of their vastly wider range, they surpass the electric wires. Man's nuptial half is kindly concerned in the launch of a new couple; it is the business of the fair sex: and man himself (very strangely, but nature quickens him still) lends a not unfavouring eye to the preparations of the matrimonial vessel for its oily descent into the tides, where billows will soon be rising, captain and mate soon discussing the fateful question of who is commander. We consent, it appears, to hope again for mankind; here is another chance! Or else, assuming the happiness of the pair, that pomp of ceremonial, contrasted with the little wind-blown candle they carry between them, catches at our weaker fibres.

After so many ships have foundered, some keel up, like poisoned fish, at the first drink of water, it is a gallant spectacle, let us avow; and either the world perpetuating it is heroic or nature incorrigible in the species. Marriages are unceasing. Friends do it, and enemies; the unknown contractors of this engagement, or armistice, inspire an interest. It certainly is both exciting and comforting to hear that man and woman are ready to join in a mutual affirmative, say Yes together again. It sounds like the end of the war.

The proclamation of the proximate marriage of a young Minister of State and the greatest heiress of her day; notoriously 'The young Minister of State' of a famous book written by the beautiful, now writhing, woman madly enamoured of him—and the heiress whose dowry could purchase a Duchy; this was a note to make the gossips of England leap from their beds at the midnight hour and wag tongues in the market-place. It did away with the political hubbub over the Tonans article, and let it noise abroad like nonsense. The Hon. Percy Dacier espouses Miss Asper; and she rescues him from the snares of a siren, he her from the toils of the Papists. She would have gone over to them, she was going when, luckily for the Protestant Faith, Percy Dacier intervened with his proposal. Town and country buzzed the news; and while that dreary League trumpeted about the business of the nation, a people suddenly become Oriental chattered of nothing but the blissful union to be celebrated in princely state, with every musical accessory, short of Operatic.

Lady Wathin was an active agent in this excitement. The excellent woman enjoyed marriages of High Life: which, as there is presumably wealth to support them, are manifestly under sanction: and a marriage that she could consider one of her own contrivance, had a delicate flavour of a marriage in the family; not quite equal to the seeing a dear daughter of her numerous progeny conducted to the altar, but excelling it in the pomp that bids the heavens open. She and no other spread the tidings of Miss Asper's debating upon the step to Rome at the very instant of Percy Dacier's declaration of his love; and it was a beautiful struggle, that of the half-dedicated nun and her deep-rooted earthly passion, love prevailing! She sent word to Lady Dunstane: 'You know the interest I have always taken in dear Constance Aspen' etc.; inviting her to come on a visit a week before the end of the month, that she might join in the ceremony of a wedding 'likely to be the grandest of our time.' Pitiful though

it was, to think of the bridal pair having but eight or ten days at the outside, for a honeymoon, the beauty of their 'mutual devotion to duty' was urged by Lady Wathin upon all hearers.

Lady Dunstane declined the invitation. She waited to hear from her friend, and the days went by; she could only sorrow for her poor Tony, divining her state. However little of wrong in the circumstances, they imposed a silence on her decent mind, and no conceivable shape of writing would transmit condolences. She waited, with a dull heartache: by no means grieving at Dacier's engagement to the heiress; until Redworth animated her, as the bearer of rather startling intelligence, indirectly relating to the soul she loved. An accident in the street had befallen Mr. Warwick. Redworth wanted to know whether Diana should be told of it, though he had no particulars to give; and somewhat to his disappointment, Lady Dunstane said she would write. She delayed, thinking the accident might not be serious; and the information of it to Diana surely would be so. Next day at noon her visitor was Lady Wathin, evidently perturbed and anxious to say more than she dared: but she received no assistance. After beating the air in every direction, especially dwelling on the fond reciprocal affection of the two devoted lovers, to be united within three days' time, Lady Wathin said at last: 'And is it not shocking! I talk of a marriage and am appalled by a death. That poor man died last night in the hospital. I mean poor Mr. Warwick. He was recovering, getting strong and well, and he was knocked down at a street-crossing and died last night. It is a warning to us!'

'Mr. Redworth happened to hear of it at his Club, near which the accident occurred, and he called at the hospital. Mr. Warwick was then alive,' said Lady Dunstane; adding: 'Well, if prevention is better than cure, as we hear! Accidents are the specific for averting the maladies of age, which are a certain crop!'

Lady Wathin's eyelids worked and her lips shut fast at the cold-hearted remark void of meaning. She sighed. 'So ends a life of misery, my dear!'

'You are compassionate.'

'I hope so. But . . . Indeed I must speak, if you will let me. I think of the living.'

Lady Dunstane widened her eyes. 'Of Mrs. Warwick?'

'She has now the freedom she desired. I think of others. Forgive me, but Constance Asper is to me as a daughter. I have perhaps no grounds for any apprehension. Love so ardent, so sincere, was never shown by bridegroom elect: and it is not extraordinary to those acquainted with dear Constance. But—one may be a worshipped saint and experience defection. The terrible stories one hears of a power of fascination almost . . . !' Lady Wathin hung for the word.

'Infernal,' said Lady Dunstane, whose brows had been bent inquiringly. 'Have no fear. The freedom you allude to will not be used to interfere with any entertainment in prospect. It was freedom my friend desired. Now that her jewel is restored to her, she is not the person to throw it away, be sure. And pray, drop the subject.'

'One may rely . . . you think?'

'Oh! Oh!'

'This release coming just before the wedding . . . !'

'I should hardly suppose the man to be the puppet you depict, or indicate.'

'It is because men—so many—are not puppets that one is conscious of alarm.'

'Your previous remark,' said Lady Dunstane, 'sounded superstitious. Your present one has an antipodal basis. But, as for your alarm, check it: and spare me further. My friend has acknowledged powers. Considering that, she does not use them, you should learn to respect her.'

Lady Wathin bowed stiffly. She refused to partake of lunch, having, she said, satisfied her conscience by the performance of a duty and arranged with her flyman to catch a train. Her cousin Lady Dunstane smiled loftily at everything she uttered, and she felt that if a woman like this Mrs. Warwick could put division between blood-relatives, she could do worse, and was to be dreaded up to the hour of the nuptials.

'I meant no harm in coming,' she said, at the shaking of hands.

'No, no; I understand,' said her hostess: 'you are hen-hearted over your adopted brood. The situation is perceptible and your intention creditable.'

As one of the good women of the world, Lady Wathin in departing was indignant at the tone and dialect of a younger woman not modestly concealing her possession of the larger brain. Brains in women she both dreaded and detested; she believed them to be devilish. Here were instances:—they had driven poor Sir Lukin to evil courses, and that poor Mr. Warwick straight under the wheels of a cab. Sir Lukin's name was trotting in public with a naughty Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett's: Mrs. Warwick might still trim her arts to baffle the marriage. Women with brains, moreover, are all heartless: they have no pity for distress, no horror of catastrophes, no joy in the happiness of the deserving. Brains in men advance a household to station; but brains in women divide it and are the wrecking of society. Fortunately Lady Wathin knew she could rally a powerful moral contingent, the aptitude of which for a one-minded cohesion enabled it to crush those fractional daughters of mischief. She was a really good woman of the world, heading a multitude; the same whom you are accustomed to hear exalted; lucky in having had a guided girlhood, a thick-curtained prudence; and in having stock in the moral funds, shares in the sentimental tramways. Wherever the world laid its hoards or ran its lines, she was found, and forcible enough to be eminent; though at fixed hours of the day, even as she washed her hands, she abjured worldliness: a performance that cleansed her. If she did not make morality appear loveable to the objects of her dislike, it was owing to her want of brains to see the origin, nature and right ends of morality. But a world yet more deficient than she, esteemed her cordially for being a bulwark of the present edifice; which looks a solid structure when the microscope is not applied to its components.

Supposing Percy Dacier a dishonourable tattler as well as an icy lover, and that Lady Wathin, through his bride, had become privy to the secret between him and Diana? There is reason to think that she would have held it in terror over the baneful woman, but not have persecuted her: for she was by no means the active malignant of theatrical plots. No, she would have charged it upon the possession of brains by women, and have had a further motive for inciting the potent dignitary her husband to employ his authority to repress the sex's exercise of those fell weapons, hurtful alike to them and all coming near them.

So extreme was her dread of Mrs. Warwick, that she drove from the London railway station to see Constance and be reassured by her tranquil aspect.

Sweet Constance and her betrothed Percy were together, examining a missal.

Lady Dunstane despatched a few words of the facts to Diana. She hoped to hear from her; rather hoped, for the moment, not to see her. No answer came. The great day of the nuptials came and passed. She counted on her husband's appearance the next morning, as the good gentleman made a point of visiting her, to entertain the wife he adored, whenever he had a wallet of gossip that would overlay the blank of his absence. He had been to the church of the wedding—he did not say with whom: all the world was there; and he rapturously described the ceremony, stating that it set women weeping and caused him to behave like a fool.

'You are impressionable,' said his wife.

He murmured something in praise of the institution of marriage—when celebrated impressively, it seemed.

'Tony calls the social world "the theatre of appetites," as we have it at present,' she said; 'and the world at a wedding is, one may reckon, in the second act of the hungry tragicomedy.'

'Yes, there's the breakfast,' Sir Lukin assented. Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett was much more intelligible to him: in fact, quite so, as to her speech.

Emma's heart now yearned to her Tony: Consulting her strength, she thought she might journey to London, and on the third morning after the Dacier-Asper marriage, she started.

Diana's door was open to Arthur Rhodes when Emma reached it.

'Have you seen her?' she asked him.

His head shook dolefully. 'Mrs. Warwick is unwell; she has been working too hard.'

'You also, I'm afraid.'

'No.' He could deny that, whatever the look of him.

'Come to me at Copsley soon,' said she, entering to Danvers in the passage.

'My mistress is upstairs, my lady,' said Danvers. 'She is lying on her bed.'

'She is ill?'

'She has been lying on her bed ever since.'

'Since what?' Lady Dunstane spoke sharply.

Danvers retrieved her indiscretion. 'Since she heard of the accident, my lady.'

'Take my name to her. Or no: I can venture.'

'I am not allowed to go in and speak to her. You will find the room quite dark, my lady, and very cold. It is her command. My mistress will not let me light the fire; and she has not eaten or drunk of anything since . . . She will die, if you do not persuade her to take nourishment: a little, for a beginning. It wants the beginning.'

Emma went upstairs, thinking of the enigmatical maid, that she must be a good soul after all. Diana's bedroom door was opened slowly.

'You will not be able to see at first, my lady,' Danvers whispered. 'The bed is to the left, and a chair. I would bring in a candle, but it hurts her eyes. She forbids it.'

Emma stepped in. The chill thick air of the unlighted London room was cavernous. She almost forgot the beloved of her heart in the thought that a living woman had been lying here more than two days and nights, fasting. The proof of an uttermost misery revived the circumstances within her to render her friend's presence in this desert of darkness credible. She found the bed by touch, silently, and distinguished a dark heap on the bed; she heard no breathing. She sat and listened; then she stretched out her hand and met her Tony's. It lay open. It was the hand of a drowned woman.

Shutters and curtains and the fireless grate gave the room an appalling likeness to the vaults.

So like to the home of death it seemed, that in a few minutes the watcher had lost count of time and kept but a wormy memory of the daylight. She dared not speak, for some fear of startling; for the worse fear of never getting answer. Tony's hand was lifeless. Her clasp of it struck no warmth.

She stung herself with bitter reproaches for having let common mundane sentiments, worthy of a Lady Wathin, bar her instant offer of her bosom to the beloved who suffered in this depth of mortal agony. Tony's love of a man, as she should have known, would be wrought of the elements of our being: when other women named Happiness, she said Life; in division, Death. Her body lying still upon the bed here was a soul borne onward by the river of Death.

The darkness gave sight after a while, like a curtain lifting on a veil: the dead light of the underworld. Tony lay with her face up, her underlip dropped; straight from head to feet. The outline of her face, without hue of it, could be seen: sign of the hapless women that have souls in love. Hateful love of men! Emma thought, and was; moved to feel at the wrist for her darling's pulse. He has, killed her! the thought flashed, as, with pangs chilling her frame, the pressure at the wrist continued insensible of the faintest beat. She clasped it, trembling, in pain to stop an outcry.

'It is Emmy,' said the voice.

Emma's heart sprang to heaven on a rush of thanks.

'My Tony,' she breathed softly.

She hung for a further proof of life in the motionless body. 'Tony!' she said.

The answer was at her hand, a thread-like return of her clasp.

'It is Emmy come to stay with you, never to leave you.'

The thin still answer was at her hand a moment; the fingers fell away.

A deep breath was taken twice to say:

'Don't talk to me.'

Emma retained the hand. She was warned not to press it by the deadness following its effort to reply.

But Tony lived; she had given proof of life. Over this little wavering taper in the vaults Emma cowered, cherishing the hand, silently hoping for the voice.

It came: 'Winter.'

'It is a cold winter, Tony.'

'My dear will be cold.'

'I will light the fire.'

Emma lost no time in deciding to seek the match-box. The fire was lit and it flamed; it seemed a revival in the room. Coming back to the bedside, she discerned her Tony's lacklustre large dark eyes and her hollow cheeks: her mouth open to air as to the drawing-in of a sword; rather as to the releaser than the sustainer. Her feet were on the rug her maid had placed to cover them. Emma leaned across the bed to put them to her breast, beneath her fur mantle, and held them there despite the half-animate tug of the limbs and the shaft of iciness they sent to her very heart. When she had restored them to some warmth, she threw aside her bonnet and lying beside Tony, took her in her arms, heaving now and then a deep sigh.

She kissed her cheek.

'It is Emmy.'

'Kiss her.'

'I have no strength.'

Emma laid her face on the lips. They were cold; even the breath between them cold.

'Has Emmy been long . . .?'

'Here, dear? I think so. I am with my darling.'

Tony moaned. The warmth and the love were bringing back her anguish.

She said: 'I have been happy. It is not hard to go.'

Emma strained to her. 'Tony will wait for her soul's own soul to go, the two together.'

There was a faint convulsion in the body. 'If I cry, I shall go in pain.'

'You are in Emmy's arms, my beloved.'

Tony's eyes closed for forgetfulness under that sensation. A tear ran down from her, but the pain was lag and neighboured sleep, like the pleasure.

So passed the short winter day, little spoken.

Then Emma bethought her of a way of leading Tony to take food, and she said: 'I shall stay with you; I shall send for clothes; I am rather hungry. Don't stir, dear. I will be mistress of the house.'

She went below to the kitchen, where a few words in the ear of a Frenchwoman were sufficient to waken immediate comprehension of what was wanted, and smart service: within ten minutes an appetizing bouillon sent its odour over the bedroom. Tony, days back, had said her last to the act of eating; but Emma sipping at the spoon and expressing satisfaction, was a pleasant picture. The bouillon smelt pleasantly.

'Your servants love you,' Emma said.

'Ah, poor good souls.'

'They crowded up to me to hear of you. Madame of course at the first word was off to her pots. And we English have the habit of calling ourselves the practical people!—This bouillon is consummate.—However, we have the virtues of barbarians; we can love and serve for love. I never tasted anything so good. I could become a glutton.'

'Do,' said Tony.

'I should be ashamed to "drain the bowl" all to myself: a solitary toper is a horrid creature, unless he makes a song of it.'

'Emmy makes a song of it to me.'

'But "pledge me" is a noble saying, when you think of humanity's original hunger for the whole. It is there that our civilizing commenced, and I am particularly fond of hearing the call. It is grandly historic. So pledge me, Tony. We two can feed from one spoon; it is a closer, bond than the loving cup. I want you just to taste it and excuse my gluttony.'

Tony murmured, 'No.' The spoon was put to her mouth. She sighed to resist. The stronger will compelled her to move her lips. Emma fed her as a child, and nature sucked for life.

The first effect was a gush of tears.

Emma lay with her that night, when the patient was, the better sleeper. But during the night at intervals she had the happiness of feeling Tony's hand travelling to make sure of her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN EXHIBITION OF SOME CHAMPIONS OF THE STRICKEN LADY

Close upon the hour of ten every morning the fortuitous meeting of two gentlemen at Mrs. Warwick's hosedoor was a signal for punctiliously stately greetings, the salutation of the raised hat and a bow of the head from a position of military erectness, followed by the remark: 'I trust you are well, sir': to which the reply: 'I am very well, sir, and trust you are the same,' was deemed a complimentary fulfilment of their mutual obligation in presence. Mr. Sullivan Smith's initiative imparted this exercise of formal manners to Mr. Arthur Rhodes, whose renewed appearance, at the minute of his own arrival, he viewed, as he did not conceal, with a disappointed and a reproving eye. The inquiry after the state of Mrs. Warwick's health having received its tolerably comforting answer from the footman, they left their cards in turn, then descended the doorsteps, faced for the performance of the salute, and departed their contrary ways.

The pleasing intelligence refreshed them one morning, that they would be welcomed by Lady Dunstane. Thereupon Mr. Sullivan Smith wheeled about to Mr. Arthur Rhodes and observed to him: 'Sir, I might claim, by right of seniority, to be the foremost of us two in offering my respects to the lady, but the way is open to you.'

'Sir,' said Mr. Arthur Rhodes, 'permit me to defer to your many superior titles to that distinction.'

'The honour, sir, lies rather in the bestowing than in the taking.'

'I venture to think, sir, that though I cannot speak pure Castilian, I require no lesson from a Grandee of Spain in acknowledging the dues of my betters.'

'I will avow myself conquered, sir, by your overpowering condescension,' said Mr. Sullivan Smith; 'and I entreat you—to ascribe my acceptance of your brief retirement to the urgent character of the business I have at heart.'

He laid his fingers on the panting spot, and bowed.

Mr. Arthur Rhodes, likewise bowing, deferentially fell to rearward.

'If I mistake not,' said the Irish gentleman, 'I am indebted to Mr.

Rhodes; and we have been joint participators in the hospitality of Mrs. Warwick's table.'

The English gentleman replied: 'It was there that I first had the pleasure of an acquaintance which is graven on my memory, as the words of the wise king on tablets of gold and silver.'

Mr. Sullivan Smith gravely smiled at the unwonted match he had found in ceremonious humour, in Saxonland, and saying: 'I shall not long detain you, Mr. Rhodes,' he passed through the doorway.

Arthur waited for him, pacing up and down, for a quarter of an hour, when a totally different man reappeared in the same person, and was the Sullivan Smith of the rosy beaming features and princely heartiness. He was accosted: 'Now, my dear boy, it's your turn to try if you have a chance, and good luck go with ye. I've said what I could on your behalf, for you're one of ten thousand in this country, you are.'

Mr. Sullivan Smith had solemnified himself to proffer a sober petition within the walls of the newly widowed lady's house; namely, for nothing less than that sweet lady's now unfettered hand: and it had therefore been perfectly natural to him, until his performance ended with the destruction of his hopes, to deliver himself in the high Castilian manner. Quite unexpected, however, was the reciprocal loftiness of tone spontaneously adopted by the young English squire, for whom, in consequence, he conceived a cordial relish; and as he paced in the footsteps of Arthur, anxious to quiet his curiosity by hearing how it had fared with one whom he had to suppose the second applicant, he kept ejaculating:

'Not a bit! The fellow can't be Saxon! And she had a liking for him. She's nigh coming of the age when a woman takes to the chicks. Better he than another, if it's to be any one. For he's got fun in him; he carries his own condiments, instead of borrowing from the popular castors, as is their way over here. But I might have known there 's always sure to be salt and savour in the man she covers with her wing. Excepting, if you please, my dear lady, a bad shot you made at a rascal cur, no more worthy of you than Beelzebub of Paradise. No matter! The daughters' of Erin must share the fate of their mother Isle, that their tears may shine in the burst of sun to follow. For personal and patriotic motives, I would have cheered her and been like a wild ass combed and groomed and tamed by the adorable creature. But her friend says there 's not a whisk of a chance for me, and I must roam the desert, kicking up, and worshipping the star I hail brightest. They know me not, who think I can't worship. Why, what were I without my star? At best a pickled porker.'

Sullivan Smith became aware of a ravishing melodiousness in the soliloquy, as well as a clean resemblance in the simile. He would certainly have proceeded to improvise impassioned verse, if he had not seen Arthur Rhodes on the pavement. 'So, here's the boy. Query, the face he wears.'

'How kind of you to wait,' said Arthur.

'We'll call it sympathy, for convenience,' rejoined Sullivan Smith.

'Well, and what next?'

'You know as much as I do. Thank heaven, she is recovering.'

'Is that all?'

'Why, what more?'

Arthur was jealously, inspected.

'You look open-hearted, my dear boy.' Sullivan Smith blew the sound of a reflected ahem. 'Excuse me for cornemusing in your company,' he said. 'But seriously, there was only one thing to pardon your hurrying to the lady's door at such a season, when the wind tells tales to the world. She's down with a cold, you know.'

'An influenza,' said Arthur.

The simplicity of the acquiescence was vexatious to a champion desirous of hostilities, to vindicate the lady, in addition to his anxiety to cloak her sad plight.

'She caught it from contact with one of the inhabitants of this country. 'Tis the fate of us Irish, and we're condemned to it for the sin of getting tired of our own. I begin to sneeze when I land at Holyhead. Unbutton a waistcoat here, in the hope of meeting a heart, and you're lucky in escaping a pulmonary attack of no common severity, while the dog that infected you scampers off, to celebrate his honeymoon mayhap. Ah, but call at her house in shoals, the world 'll soon be saying it's worse than a coughing cold. If you came to lead her out of it in triumph, the laugh 'd be with you, and the lady well covered. D' ye understand?'

The allusion to the dog's honeymoon had put Arthur Rhodes on the track of the darting cracker-metaphor.

'I think I do,' he said. 'She will soon be at Copsley—Lady Dunstane's house, on the hills—and there we can see her.'

'And that's next to the happiness of consoling—if only it had been granted! She's not an ordinary widow, to be caught when the tear of lamentation has opened a practicable path or water-way to the poor nightcapped jewel within. So, and you're a candid admirer, Mr. Rhodes! Well, and I'll be one with you; for there's not a star in the firmament more deserving of homage than that lady.'

'Let's walk in the park and talk of her,' said Arthur. 'There's no sweeter subject to me.'

His boyish frankness rejoiced Sullivan Smith. 'As long as you like!—nor to me!' he exclaimed. 'And that ever since I first beheld her on the night of a Ball in Dublin: before I had listened to a word of her speaking: and she bore her father's Irish name:—none of your Warwicks and your . . . But let the cur go barking. He can't tell what he's lost; perhaps he doesn't care. And after inflicting his hydrophobia on her tender fame! Pooh, sir; you call it a civilized country, where you and I and dozens

of others are ready to start up as brothers of the lady, to defend her, and are paralyzed by the Law. 'Tis a law they've instituted for the protection of dirty dogs—their majority!

'I owe more to Mrs. Warwick than to any soul I know,' said Arthur.

'Let 's hear,' quoth Sullivan Smith; proceeding: 'She's the Arabian Nights in person, that's sure; and Shakespeare's Plays, tragic and comic; and the Book of Celtic History; and Erin incarnate—down with a cold, no matter where; but we know where it was caught. So there's a pretty library for who's to own her now she's enfranchized by circumstances; and a poetical figure too!'

He subsided for his companion to rhapsodize.

Arthur was overcharged with feeling, and could say only: 'It would be another world to me if I lost her.'

'True; but what of the lady?'

'No praise of mine could do her justice.'

'That may be, but it's negative of yourself, and not a portrait of the object. Hasn't she the brain of Socrates—or better, say Minerva, on the bust of Venus, and the remainder of her finished off to an exact resemblance of her patronymic Goddess of the bow and quiver?'

'She has a wise head and is beautiful.'

'And chaste.'

Arthur reddened: he was prepared to maintain it, could not speak it.

'She is to us in this London, what the run of water was to Theocritus in Sicily: the nearest to the visibly divine,' he said, and was applauded.

'Good, and on you go. Top me a few superlatives on that, and I 'm your echo, my friend. Isn't the seeing and listening to her like sitting under the silvery canopy of a fountain in high Summer?'

'All the comparisons are yours,' Arthur said enviously.

'Mr. Rhodes, you are a poet, I believe, and all you require to loosen your tongue is a drop of Bacchus, so if you will do me the extreme honour to dine with me at my Club this evening, we'll resume the toast that should never be uttered dry. You reprove me justly, my friend.'

Arthur laughed and accepted. The Club was named, and the hour, and some items of the little dinner: the birds and the year of the wines.

It surprised him to meet Mr. Redworth at the table of his host. A greater surprise was the partial thaw in Redworth's bearing toward him. But, as it was partial, and he a youth and poor, not even the genial influences of Bacchus could lift him to loosen his tongue under the repressing presence of the man he knew to be his censor, though Sullivan Smith encouraged him with praises and opportunities. He thought of the many occasions when Mrs. Warwick's art of management had produced a tacit harmony between them. She had no peer. The dinner failed of the pleasure he had expected from it. Redworth's bluntness killed the flying metaphors, and at the end of the entertainment he and Sullivan Smith were drumming upon politics.

'Fancies he has the key of the Irish difficulty!' said the latter, clapping hand on his shoulder, by way of blessing, as they parted at the Club-steps.

Redworth asked Arthur Rhodes the way he was going, and walked beside him.

'I suppose you take exercise; don't get colds and that kind of thing,' he remarked in the old bullying fashion; and changed it abruptly. 'I am glad to have met you this evening. I hope you'll dine with me one day next week. Have you seen Mrs. Warwick lately?'

'She is unwell; she has been working too hard,' said Arthur.

'Seriously unwell, do you mean?'

'Lady Dunstane is at her house, and speaks of her recovering.'

'Ah. You've not seen her?'

'Not yet.'

'Well, good-night.'

Redworth left him, and only when moved by gratitude to the lad for his mention of Mrs. Warwick's 'working too hard,' as the cause of her illness, recollected the promised dinner and the need for having his address.

He had met Sullivan Smith accidentally in the morning and accepted the invitation to meet young Rhodes, because these two, of all men living, were for the moment dearest to him, as Diana Warwick's true and simple champions; and he had intended a perfect cordiality toward them both; the end being a semi-wrangle with the patriot, and a patronizing bluntness with the boy; who, by the way, would hardly think him sincere in the offer of a seat at his table. He owned himself incomplete. He never could do the thing he meant, in the small matters not leading to fortune. But they led to happiness! Redworth was guilty of a sigh: for now Diana Warwick stood free; doubly free, he was reduced to reflect in a wavering dubiousness. Her more than inclination for Dacier, witnessed by him, and the shot of the world, flying randomly on the subject, had struck this cuirassier, making light of his armour, without causing any change of his habitual fresh countenance. As for the scandal, it had never shaken his faith in her nature. He thought of the passion. His heart struck at Diana's, and whatever might by chance be true in the scandal affected him little, if but her heart were at liberty. That was the prize he coveted, having long read the nature of the woman and wedded his spirit to it. She would complete him.

Of course, infatuated men argue likewise, and scandal does not move them. At a glance, the lower instincts and the higher spirit appear equally to have the philosophy of overlooking blemishes. The difference between appetite and love is shown when a man, after years of service, can hear and see, and admit the possible, and still desire in worship; knowing that we of earth are begrimed and must be cleansed for presentation daily on our passage through the miry ways, but that our souls, if flame of a soul shall have come of the agony of flesh, are beyond the baser mischances: partaking of them indeed, but sublimely. Now Redworth believed in the soul of Diana. For him it burned, and it was a celestial radiance about her, unquenched by her shifting fortunes, her wilfulnesses and, it might be, errors. She was a woman and weak; that is, not trained for strength. She was a soul; therefore perpetually pointing to growth in purification. He felt it, and even discerned it of her, if he could not have phrased it. The something sovereignty characteristic that aspired in Diana enchained him. With her, or rather with his thought of her soul, he understood the right union of women and men, from the roots to the flowering heights of that rare graft. She gave him comprehension of the meaning of love: a word in many mouths, not often explained. With her, wound in his idea of her, he perceived it to signify a new start in our existence, a finer shoot of the tree stoutly planted in good gross earth; the senses running their live sap, and the minds companioned, and the spirits made one by the whole-natured conjunction. In Booth, a happy prospect for the sons and daughters of Earth, divinely indicating more than happiness: the speeding of us, compact of what we are, between the ascetic rocks and the sensual whirlpools, to the creation of certain nobler races, now very dimly imagined.

Singularly enough, the man of these feelings was far from being a social rebel. His Diana conjured them forth in relation to her, but was not on his bosom to enlighten him generally. His notions of citizenship tolerated the female Pharisees, as ladies offering us an excellent social concrete where quicksands abound, and without quite justifying the Lady Wathins and Constance Aspers of the world, whose virtues he could set down to accident or to acid blood, he considered them supportable and estimable where the Mrs. Fryar-Gunnetts were innumerable, threatening to become a majority; as they will constantly do while the sisterhood of the chaste are wattled in formalism and throned in sourness.

Thoughts of Diana made phantoms of the reputable and their reverse alike. He could not choose but think of her. She was free; and he too; and they were as distant as the horizon sail and the aft-floating castaway. Her passion for Dacier might have burnt out her heart. And at present he had no claim to visit her, dared not intrude. He would have nothing to say, if he went, save to answer

questions upon points of business: as to which, Lady Dunstane would certainly summon him when he was wanted.

Riding in the park on a frosty morning, he came upon Sir Lukin, who looked gloomy and inquired for news of Diana Warwick, saying that his wife had forbidden him to call at her house just yet. 'She's got a cold, you know,' said Sir Lukin; adding, 'confoundedly hard on women!—eh? Obligated to keep up a show. And I'd swear, by all that's holy, Diana Warwick hasn't a spot, not a spot, to reproach herself with. I fancy I ought to know women by this time. And look here, Redworth, last night—that is, I mean yesterday evening, I broke with a woman—a lady of my acquaintance, you know, because she would go on scandal-mongering about Diana Warwick. I broke with her. I told her I'd have out any man who abused Diana Warwick, and I broke with her. By Jove! Redworth, those women can prove spitfires. They've bags of venom under their tongues, barley-sugar though they look—and that's her colour. But I broke with her for good. I doubt if I shall ever call on her again. And in point of fact, I won't.'

Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett was described in the colouring of the lady.

Sir Lukin, after some further remarks, rode on, and Redworth mused on a moral world that allows a woman of Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett's like to hang on to it, and to cast a stone at Diana; forgetful, in his championship, that Diana was not disallowed a similar licence.

When he saw Emma Dunstane, some days later, she was in her carriage driving, as she said, to Lawyerland, for an interview with old Mr. Braddock, on her friend's affairs. He took a seat beside her. 'No, Tony is not well,' she replied to his question, under the veil of candour. 'She is recovering, but she—you can understand—suffered a shock. She is not able to attend to business, and certain things have to be done.'

'I used to be her man of business,' Redworth observed.

'She speaks of your kind services. This is mere matter for lawyers.'

'She is recovering?'

'You may see her at Copsley next week. You can come down on Wednesdays or Saturdays?'

'Any day. Tell her I want her opinion upon the state of things.'

'It will please her; but you will have to describe the state of things.'

Emma feared she had said too much. She tried candour again for concealment. 'My poor Tony has been struck down low. I suppose it is like losing a diseased limb:—she has her freedom, at the cost of a blow to the system.'

'She may be trusted for having strength,' said Redworth.'

'Yes.' Emma's mild monosyllable was presently followed by an exclamation: 'One has to experience the irony of Fate to comprehend how cruel it is!' Then she remembered that such language was peculiarly abhorrent to him.

'Irony of Fate!' he echoed her. 'I thought you were above that literary jargon.'

'And I thought I was: or thought it would be put in a dialect practically explicable,' she answered, smiling at the lion roused.

'Upon my word,' he burst out, 'I should like to write a book of Fables, showing how donkeys get into grinding harness, and dogs lose their bones, and fools have their sconces cracked, and all run jabbering of the irony of Fate, to escape the annoyance of tracing the causes. And what are they? nine times out of ten, plain want of patience, or some debt for indulgence. There's a subject:—let some one write, Fables in illustration of the irony of Fate: and I'll undertake to tack-on my grandmother's maxims for a moral to teach of 'em. We prate of that irony when we slink away from the lesson—the rod we conjure. And you to talk of Fate! It's the seed we sow, individually or collectively. I'm bound-up in the prosperity of the country, and if the ship is wrecked, it ruins my fortune, but not me, unless I'm bound-up in myself. At least I hope that's my case.'

He apologized for intruding Mr. Thomas Redworth.

His hearer looked at him, thinking he required a more finely pointed gift of speech for the ironical tongue, but relishing the tonic directness of his faculty of reason while she considered that the application of the phrase might be brought home to him so as to render 'my Grandmother's moral' a conclusion less comfortingly, if quite intelligibly, summary. And then she thought of Tony's piteous instance; and thinking with her heart, the tears insisted on that bitter irony of the heavens, which bestowed the long-withheld and coveted boon when it was empty of value or was but as a handful of spices to a shroud.

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