

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE AMAZING
MARRIAGE.
VOLUME 4

George Meredith

The Amazing Marriage. Volume 4

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Содержание

CHAPTER XXIX	5
CHAPTER XXX	10
CHAPTER XXXI	15
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	16

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CHAPTER XXIX

CARINTHIA IN WALES

An August of gales and rains drove Atlantic air over the Welsh highlands. Carinthia's old father had impressed on her the rapture of 'smelling salt' when by chance he stood and threw up his nostrils to sniff largely over a bed of bracken, that reminded him of his element, and her fancy would be at strain to catch his once proud riding of the seas. She felt herself an elder daughter of the beloved old father, as she breathed it in full volume from the billowy West one morning early after sunrise and walked sisterly with the far-seen inexperienced little maid, whom she saw trotting beside him through the mountain forest, listening, storing his words, picturing the magnetic, veined great gloom of an untasted world.

This elder daughter had undergone a shipwreck; but clear proof that she had not been worsted was in the unclouded liveliness of the younger one gazing forward. Imaginative creatures who are courageous will never be lopped of the hopeful portion of their days by personal misfortune. Carinthia could animate both; it would have been a hurt done to a living human soul had she suffered the younger self to run overcast. Only, the gazing forward had become interdicted to her experienced self. Nor could she vision a future having any horizon for her child. She saw it in bleak squares, and snuggled him between dangers weathered and dangers apprehended.

The conviction that her husband hated her had sunk into her nature. Hating the mother, he would not love her boy. He was her boy, and strangely bestowed, not beautifully to be remembered rapturously or gratefully, and with deep love of the father. She felt the wound recollection dealt her. But the boy was her one treasure, and no treasure to her husband. They were burdens, and the heir of his House, child of a hated mother, was under perpetual menace from an unscrupulous tyrannical man. The dread and antagonism were first aroused by the birth of her child. She had not known while bearing him her present acute sensation of the hunted flying and at bay. Previously, she could say: I did wrong here; I did wrong there. Distrust had brought the state of war, which allows not of the wasting of our powers in confessions.

Her husband fed her and he clothed her; the limitation of his bounty was sharply outlined. Sure of her rectitude, a stranger to the world, she was not very sensible of dishonour done to her name. It happened at times that her father inquired of her how things were going with his little Carin; and then revolt sprang up and answered on his behalf rather fiercely. She was, however, prepared for any treaty including forgiveness, if she could be at peace in regard to her boy, and have an income of some help to her brother. Chillon was harassed on all sides; she stood incapable of aiding; so foolishly feeble in the shadow of her immense longing to strive for him, that she could think her husband had purposely lamed her with an infant. Her love of her brother, now the one man she loved, laid her insufficiency on the rack and tortured imbecile cries from it.

On the contrary, her strange husband had blest her with an infant. Everything was pardonable to him if he left her boy untouched in the mother's charge. Much alone as she was, she raised the dead to pet and cherish her boy. Chillon had seen him and praised him. Mrs. Owain Wythan, her neighbour over a hill, praised him above all babes on earth, poor childless woman!

She was about to cross the hill and breakfast with Mrs. Wythan. The time for the weaning of the babe approached, and had as prospect beyond it her dull fear that her husband would say the mother's work was done, and seize the pretext to separate them: and she could not claim a longer

term to be giving milk, because her father had said: 'Not a quarter of a month more than nine for the milk of the mother'—or else the child would draw an unsustaining nourishment from the strongest breast. She could have argued her exceptional robustness against another than he. But the dead father wanting to build a great race of men and women ruled.

Carinthia knelt at the cradle of a princeling gone from the rich repast to his alternative kingdom.

'You will bring him over when he wakes,' she said to Madge. 'Mrs. Wythan would like to see him every day. Martha can walk now.'

'She can walk and hold a child in her two arms, my lady,' said Madge. 'She expects miners popping up out of the bare ground when she sees no goblins.'

'They!—they know him, they would not hurt him, they know my son,' her mistress answered.

The population of the mines in revolt had no alarms for her. The works were empty down below. Men sat by the wayside brooding or strolled in groups, now and then loudly exercising their tongues; or they stood in circle to sing hymns: melancholy chants of a melancholy time for all.

How would her father have acted by these men? He would have been among them. Dissensions in his mine were vapours of a day. Lords behaved differently. Carinthia fancied the people must regard their master as a foreign wizard, whose power they felt, without the chance of making their cry to him heard. She, too, dealt with a lord. It was now his wish for her to leave the place where she had found some shreds of a home in the thought of being useful. She was gathering the people's language; many of their songs she could sing, and please them by singing to them. They were not suspicious of her; at least, their women had open doors for her; the men, if shy, were civil. She had only to go below, she was greeted in the quick tones of their speech all along the street of the slate- roofs.

But none loved the castle, and she as little, saving the one room in it where her boy lay. The grey of Welsh history knew a real castle beside the roaring brook frequently a torrent. This was an eighteenth century castellated habitation on the verge of a small wood midway up the height, and it required a survey of numberless happy recollections to illumine its walls or drape its chambers. The permanently lighted hearth of a dear home, as in that forsaken unfavoured old white house of the wooded Austrian crags, it had not. Rather it seemed a place waiting for an ill deed to be done in it and stop all lighting of hearths thereafter.

Out on the turf of the shaven hills, her springy step dispersed any misty fancies. Her short-winged hive set to work in her head as usual, building scaffoldings of great things to be done by Chillon, present evils escaped. The rolling big bade hills with the riding clouds excited her as she mounted, and she was a figure of gladness on the ridge bending over to hospitable Plas Llwyn, where the Wythans lived, entertaining rich and poor alike.

They had led the neighbourhood to call on the discarded Countess of Fleetwood.

A warm strain of arms about her neck was Carinthia's welcome from Mrs. Wythan lying along the couch in her boudoir; an established invalid, who yearned sanely to life, and caught a spark of it from the guest eyed tenderly by her as they conversed.

'Our boy?—our Chillon Kirby till he has his baptism names; he is well?

I am to see him?'

'He follows me. He sleeps almost through the night now.'

'Ah, my dear,' Mrs. Wythan sighed, imagining: 'It would disappoint me if he did not wake me.'

'I wake at his old time and watch him.'

Carinthia put on the baby's face in the soft mould of slumber.

'I see him!' Mrs. Wythan cried. 'He is part mine. He has taught Owain to love babies.'

A tray of breakfast was placed before the countess. 'Mr. Wythan is down among his men?' she said.

'Every morning, as long as this agitation lasts. I need not say good appetite to you after your walk. You have no fear of the men, I know. Owain's men are undisturbed; he has them in hand. Absentee masters can't expect continued harmony. Dear, he tells me Mr. Edwards awaits the earl.'

Drinking her tea, Carinthia's eyelids shut; she set down her cup, 'If he must come,' she said. 'He wishes me to leave. I am to go again where I have no friends, and no language to learn, and can be of no use. It is not for me that I dread his coming. He speaks to command. The men ask to be heard. He will have submission first. They do not trust him. His coming is a danger. For me, I should wish him to come. May I say . . ?'

'Your Rebecca bids you say, my darling.'

'It is, I am with the men because I am so like them. I beg to be heard. He commands obedience. He is a great nobleman, but I am the daughter of a greater man, and I have to say, that if those poor miners do harm, I will not stand by and see an anger against injustice punished. I wish his coming, for him to agree upon the Christian names of the boy. I feel his coming will do me, injury in making me offend him worse. I would avoid that. Oh, dear soul! I may say it to you:—he cannot hurt me any more. I am spared loving him when I forgive him; and I do. The loving is the pain. That is gone by.'

Mrs. Wythan fondled and kissed Carinthia's hand.

'Let me say in my turn; I may help you, dear. You know I have my husband's love, as he mine. Am I, have I ever been a wife to him? Here I lie, a dead weight, to be carried up and down, all of a wife that Owain has had for years. I lie and pray to be taken, that my good man, my proved good man, may be free to choose a healthy young woman and be rewarded before his end by learning what a true marriage is. The big simpleton will otherwise be going to his grave, thinking he was married! I see him stepping about softly in my room, so contented if he does not disturb me, and he crushes me with a desire to laugh at him while I worship. I tricked him into marrying the prostrate invalid I am, and he can't discover the trick, he will think it's a wife he has, instead of a doctor's doll. Oh! you have a strange husband, it has been a strange marriage for you, but you have your invincible health, you have not to lie and feel the horror of being a deception to a guileless man, whose love blindfolds him. The bitter ache to me is, that I can give nothing. You abound in power to give.'

Carinthia lifted her open hands for sign of their emptiness.

'My brother would not want, if I could give. He may have to sell out of. the army, he thinks, fears; and I must look on. Our mother used to say she had done something for her country in giving a son like Chillon to the British army. Poor mother! Our bright opening days all seem to end in rain. We should turn to Mr. Wythan for a guide.'

'He calls you Morgan le Fay christianized.'

'What I am!' Carinthia raised and let fall her head. 'An example makes dwarfs of us. When Mr. Wythan does penance for temper by descending into his mine and working among his men for a day with the pick, seated, as he showed me down below, that is an example. If I did like that, I should have no firedamp in the breast, and not such a task to forgive, that when I succeed I kill my feelings.'

The entry of Madge and Martha, the nurse-girl, with the overflowing armful of baby, changed their converse into melodious exclamations.

'Kit Ines has arrived, my lady,' Madge said. 'I saw him on the road and stopped a minute.'

Mrs. Wythan studied Carinthia. Her sharp invalid's ears had caught the name. She beckoned. 'The man who—the fighting man?'

'It will be my child this time,' said Carinthia; 'I have no fear for myself.' She was trembling, though her features were hard for the war her lord had declared, as it seemed. 'Did he tell you his business here?' she asked of Madge.

'He says, to protect you, my lady, since you won't leave.'

'He stays at the castle?'

'He is to stay there, he says, as long as the Welsh are out.'

'The "Welsh" are misunderstood by Lord Fleetwood,'

Mrs. Wythan said to Carinthia. 'He should live among them. They will not hurt their lady. Protecting may be his intention; but we will have our baby safe here. Not?' she appealed. 'And baby's mother. How otherwise?'

'You read my wishes,' Carinthia rejoined. 'The man I do not think a bad man. He has a master. While I am bound to my child I must be restful, and with the man at the castle Martha's goblins would jump about me day and night. My boy makes a coward of his mother.'

'We merely take a precaution, and I have the pleasure of it,' said her hostess. 'Give orders to your maid not less than a fortnight. It will rejoice my husband so much.'

As with the warmly hospitable, few were the words. Madge was promised by her mistress plenty of opportunities daily for seeing Kit Ines, and her mouth screwed to one of women's dimples at a corner. She went off in a cart to fetch boxes, thinking: We are a hunted lot! So she was not mildly disposed for the company of Mr. Kit on her return to the castle.

England's champion light-weight thought it hard that his, coming down to protect the castle against the gibbering heathen Welsh should cause a clearing out, and solitariness for his portion.

'What's the good of innocence if you 're always going to suspect a man!' he put it, like a true son of the pirates turned traders. 'I've got a paytron, and a man in my profession must have a paytron, or where is he? Where's his money for a trial of skill? Say he saves and borrows and finds the lump to clap it down, and he's knocked out o' time. There he is, bankrup', and a devil of a licking into the bargain. That 's the cream of our profession, if a man has got no paytron.'

No prize-ring can live without one. The odds are too hard on us. My lady ought to take into account I behaved respectful when I was obliged to do my lord's orders and remove her from our haunts, which wasn't to his taste. Here I'm like a cannon for defending the house, needs be, and all inside flies off scarified.'

'It strikes me, Kit Ines, a man with a paytron is no better than a tool of a man,' said Madge.

'And don't you go to be sneering at honest tools,' Ines retorted. 'When will women learn a bit of the world before they're made hags of by old Father Wear-and-Tear! A young woman in her prime, you Madge! be such a fool as not see I serve tool to stock our shop.'

'Your paytron bid you steal off with my lady's child, Kit Ines, you'd do it to stock your shop.'

Ines puffed. 'If you ain't a girl to wallop the wind! Fancy me at that game! Is that why my lady—but I can't be suspected that far? You make me break out at my pores. My paytron's a gentleman: he wouldn't ask and I couldn't act such a part. Dear Lord! it'd have to be stealing off, for my lady can use a stick; and put it to the choice between my lady and her child and any paytron living, paytron be damned, I'd say, rather'n go against my notions of honour. Have you forgot all our old talk about the prize-ring, the nursery of honour in Old England?'

'That was before you sold yourself to a paytron, Kit Ines.'

'Ah! Women wants mast-heading off and on, for 'em to have a bit of a look-out over life as it is. They go stewing over books of adventure and drop into frights about awful man. Take me, now; you had a no small admiration for my manly valour once, and you trusted yourself to me, and did you ever repent it?—owning you're not the young woman to tempt to t' other way.'

'You wouldn't have found me talking to you here if I had.'

'And here I'm left to defend an empty castle, am I?'

'Don't drink or you'll have your paytron on you. He's good use there.'

'I ask it, can I see my lady?'

'Drunk nor sober you won't. Serve a paytron, be a leper, you'll find, with all honest folk.'

Ines shook out an execrating leg at the foul word. 'Leper, you say? You say that? You say leper to me?'

'Strut your tallest, Kit Ines. It's the money rattles in your pocket says it.'

'It's my reputation for decent treatment of a woman lets you say it,

Madge Winch.'

'Stick to that as long as your paytron consents. It's the one thing you've got left.'

'Benefit, you hussy, and mind you don't pull too stiff.'

'Be the woman and have the last word!'

His tongue was checked. He swallowed the exceeding sourness of a retort undelivered, together with the feeling that she beat him in the wrangle by dint of her being an unreasonable wench.

Madge huffed away to fill her boxes.

He stood by the cart, hands deep down his pockets, when she descended. She could have laughed at the spectacle of a champion prize-fighter out of employ, hulking idle, because he was dog to a paytron; but her contempt of him declined passing in small change.

'So you're off. What am I to tell my lord when he comes?' Kit growled.

'His yacht's fetching for a Welsh seaport.'

She counted it a piece of information gained, and jumped to her seat, bidding the driver start. To have pretty well lost her character for a hero changed into a patron's dog, was a thought that outweighed the show of incivility. Some little distance away, she reproached herself for not having been so civil as to inquire what day my lord was expected, by his appointment. The girl reflected on the strangeness of a body of discontented miners bringing my lord and my lady close, perhaps to meet.

CHAPTER XXX

REBECCA WYTHAN

The earl was looked for at the, chief office of the mines, and each day an expectation of him closed in disappointment, leaving it to be surmised that there were more serious reasons for his continued absence during a crisis than any discussed; whether indeed, as when a timepiece neglects to strike the hour which is, by the reckoning of natural impatience, past, the capital charge of 'crazy works' must not be brought against a nobleman hitherto precise upon business, of a just disposition, fairly humane. For though he was an absentee sucking the earth through a tube, in Ottoman ease, he had never omitted the duty of personally attending on the spot to grave cases under dispute. The son of the hardheaded father came out at a crisis; and not too highhandedly: he could hear an opposite argument to the end. Therefore, since he refused to comply without hearing, he was wanted on the spot imperatively, now.

Irony perusing History offers the beaten and indolent a sugary acid in the indication of the spites and the pranks, the whims and the tastes, at the springs of main events. It is, taken by itself, destructive nourishment. But those who labour in the field to shovel the clods of earth to History, would be wiser of their fellows for a minor dose of it. Mr. Howell Edwards consulting with Mr. Owain Wythan on the necessity, that the earl should instantly keep his promise to appear among the men and stop the fermentation, as in our younger days a lordly owner still might do by small concessions and the physical influence—the nerve- charm—could suppose him to be holding aloof for his pleasure or his pride; perhaps because of illness or inability to conceive the actual situation at a distance. He mentioned the presence of the countess, and Mr. Wythan mentioned it, neither of them thinking a rational man would so play the lunatic as to let men starve, and wreck precious mines, for the sake of avoiding her.

Sullen days went by. On these days of the slate-cloud or the leaden- winged, Carinthia walked over the hills to her staring or down-eyed silent people, admitted without a welcome at some doors, rejected at some. Her baskets from the castle were for the most part received as graciously. She continued to direct them for delivery where they were needed, and understood why a charity that supplied the place of justice was not thanked. She and her people here were one regarding the master, as she had said. They could not hurt her sensitiveness, she felt too warmly with them. And here it was not the squalid, flat, bricked east- corner of London at the close of her daily pilgrimage. Up from the solitary street of the slate-roofs, she mounted a big hill and had the life of high breathing. A perpetual escape out of the smoky, grimy city mazes was trumpeted to her in the winds up there: a recollected contrast lightened the skyless broad spaces overhead almost to sunniness. Having air of the hills and activity for her limbs, she made sunshine for herself. Regrets were at no time her nestlings.

Look backward only to correct an error of conduct for the next attempt, says one of her father's Maxims; as sharply bracing for women as for men. She did not look back to moan. Now that her hunger for the safety of her infant was momentarily quieted, she could see Kit Ines hanging about the lower ground, near the alehouse, and smile at Madge's comparison of him to a drummed-out soldier, who would like to be taken for a holiday pensioner.

He saluted; under the suspicion of his patron's lady his legs were hampered, he dared not approach her; though his innocence of a deed not proposed to him yet—and all to stock that girl Madge's shop, if done! knocked at his ribs with fury to vindicate himself before the lady and her maid. A gentleman met them and conducted them across the hills.

And two Taffy gentlemen would hardly be sufficient for the purpose, supposing an ill-used Englishman inclined to block their way!—What, and play footpad, Kit Ines? No, it's just a game in the head. But a true man hates to feel himself suspected. His refuge is the beer of the country.

Next day there were the two gentlemen to conduct the lady and her maid; and Taffy the first walks beside the countess; and that girl Madge trudges along with no other than my lord's Mr. Woodseer, chattering like a watering-can on a garden-bed: deuce a glance at Kit Ines. How can she keep it up and the gentleman no more than nodding? How does he enjoy playing second fiddle with the maid while Mr. tall brown-face Taffy violins it to her ladyship a stone's throw in front? Ines had less curiosity to know the object of Mr. Woodseer's appearance on the scene. Idle, unhandsomely treated, and a cave of the yawns, he merely commented on his observations.

'Yes, there he is, don't look at him,' Madge said to Gower; 'and whatever he's here for, he has a bad time of it, and rather more than it's pleasant for him to think over, if a slave to a "paytron" thinks at all. I won't judge him; my mistress is bitten with the fear for the child, worse than ever. And the earl, my lord, not coming, and he wanting her to move again, seems to her he durstn't do it here and intends to snap at the child on the road. She-'s forced to believe anything of such a husband and father. And why does he behave so? I can't spell it. He's kind to my Sally—you've seen the Piccadilly shop?—because she was . . . she did her best in love and duty for my lady. And behaves like a husband hating his wife's life on earth! Then he went down with good Mr. Woodseer, and called on Sally, pretending to inquire, after she was kidnapped by that Kit Ines acting to please his paytron, he must be shown up to the room where she slept, and stands at the door and peeps in, Sally's letter says, and asks if he may enter the room. He went to the window looking on the chimneys she used to see, and touched an ornament over the fireplace, called grandfather's pigtail case—he was a sailor; only a ridiculous piece of china, that made my lady laugh about the story of its holding a pigtail. But he turns it over because she did—Sally told him. He couldn't be pretending when he bought the beautiful shop and stocked it for Sally. He gets her lots of customers; and no rent to pay till next Michaelmas a year. She's a made woman through him. He said to her, he had heard from Mr. Woodseer the Countess of Fleetwood called her sister; he shook her hand.'

'The Countess of Fleetwood called both of you her sisters, I think,' said Gower.

'I'm her servant. I'd rather serve her than have a fortune.'

'You were born with a fortune one would like to have a nibble at, Madge.'

'I can't lay hand on it, then.'

'It's the capacity for giving, my dear.'

'Please, Mr. Gower, don't say that; you'll make me cry. He keeps his wife so poor she hasn't a shilling of her own; she wearies about her brother; she can't help. He can spend hundreds on my Sally for having been good to her, in our small way—it's a fairy tale; and he won't hear of money for his wife, except that she's never to want for anything it can buy.'

'You give what it can't buy.'

'Me. I'm "a pugilist's wench"—I've heard myself called. She was the first who gave me a lift; never mind me. Have you come to take her away? She'd trust herself and the child to you.'

'Take her?—reason with her as to the best we can do. He holds off from a meeting just now. I fancy he's wearing round to it. His keeping his wife without money passes comprehension. After serving him for a few months, I had a store invested to support me for years—as much as I need before I join the ranks of the pen. I was at my reading and writing and drowsing, and down he rushes: I'm in harness again. I can't say it's dead waste of time; besides I pick up an independence for the days ahead. But I don't respect myself for doing the work. Here's the difference between us two servants, Madge: I think of myself, and you don't.'

'The difference is more like between the master and mistress we serve, Mr. Gower.'

'Well, I'd rather be the woman in this case.'

'You know the reputation I've got. And can only just read, and can't spell. My mistress teaches me bits of German and French on her walks.'

Gower took a new observation of this girl, whom he had not regarded as like himself, a pushing blade among the grasses. He proposed to continue her lessons, if she cared to learn; saying it could be done in letters.

'I won't be ashamed of writing, if you mean it,' said she. 'My mistress will have a usefuller servant. She had a strange honeymoon of a marriage, if ever was—and told me t' other day she was glad because it brought us together—she a born lady!'

'A fling-above born ladies. She's quick as light to hit on a jewel where there is one, whether it shines or not. She stands among the Verities of the world.'

'Yes,' Madge said, panting for more. 'Do speak of her. When you praise her, I feel she's not wasted. Mistress; and friend and wife—if he'd let her be; and mother; never mother like her. The boy 'll be a sturdy. She'll see he has every chance. He's a lucky little one to have that mother.'

'You think her handsome, Madge?'

Gower asked it, wishing to hear a devotee's confusion of qualities and looks.

The question was a drop on lower spheres, and it required definitions, to touch the exact nature of the form of beauty, and excuse a cooler tone on the commoner plane. These demanded language. She rounded the difficulty, saying: 'You see engravings of archery; that 's her figure— her real figure. I think her face . . . I can't describe . . . it flashes.'

'That's it,' said Gower, delighted with his perception of a bare mind at work and hitting the mark perforce of warmth. 'When it flashes, it's unequalled. There's the supremacy of irregular lines. People talk of perfect beauty: suitable for paintings and statues. Living faces, if they're to show the soul, which is the star on the peak of beauty, must lend themselves to commotion. Nature does it in a breezy tree or over ruffled waters. Repose has never such splendid reach as animation— I mean, in the living face. Artists prefer repose. Only Nature can express the uttermost beauty with her gathering and tuning of discords. Well, your mistress has that beauty. I remember my impression when I saw her first on her mountains abroad. Other beautiful faces of women go pale, grow stale. The diversified in the harmony of the flash are Nature's own, her radiant, made of her many notes, beyond our dreams to reproduce. We can't hope to have a true portrait of your mistress. Does Madge understand?'

The literary dose was a strong one for her; but she saw the index, and got a lift from the sound. Her bosom heaved. 'Oh, I do try, Mr. Gower. I think I do a little. I do more while you're talking. You are good to talk so to me. You should have seen her the night she went to meet my lord at those beastly Gardens Kit Ines told me he was going to. She was defending him. I've no words. You teach me what's meant by poetry. I couldn't understand that once.'

Their eyes were on the countess and her escort in advance. Gower's praises of her mistress's peculiar beauty set the girl compassionately musing. His eloquence upon the beauty was her clue.

Carinthia and Mr. Wythan started at a sharp trot in the direction of the pair of ponies driven by a groom along the curved decline of the narrow roadway. His whip was up for signal.

It concerned the house and the master of it. His groom drove rapidly down, while he hurried on the homeward way, as a man will do, with the dread upon him that his wife's last breath may have been yielded before he can enfold her.

Carinthia walked to be overtaken, not daring to fever her blood at a swifter pace; 'lamed with an infant,' the thought recurred.

'She is very ill, she has fainted, she lies insensible,' Madge heard from her of Mrs. Wythan. 'We were speaking of her when the groom appeared. It has happened twice. They fear the third. He fears it, though he laughs at a superstition. Now step, I know you like walking, Mr. Woodseer. Once I left you behind.'

'I have the whole scene of the angel and the cripple,' Gower replied.

'O that day!'

They 'were soon speculating on the unimpressible house in its clump of wood midway below, which had no response for anxieties.

A maid-servant at the garden gate, by Mr. Wythan's orders, informed Carinthia that her mistress had opened her eyes: There was a hope of weathering the ominous third time. But the hope was a bird of short flight from bush to bush until the doctor should speak to confirm it. Even the child was under the shadow of the house. Carinthia had him in her arms, trusting to life as she hugged him, and seeing innumerable darts out of all regions assailing her treasure.

'She wishes to have you,' Mr. Wythan came and said to her. 'Almost her first word. The heart is quickening. She will live for me if she can.'

He whispered it. His features shot the sparkle.

Rebecca Wythan had strength to press Carinthia's hand faintly. She made herself heard: 'No pain.' Her husband sat upright, quite still, attentive for any sign. His look of quiet pleasure ready to show, sprightliness dwelt on her. She returned the look, unable to give it greeting. Past the sense of humour, she wanted to say: 'See the poor simple fellow who will think it a wife that he has!' She did but look.

Carinthia spoke his name, 'Mr. Wythan,' by chance, and Rebecca breathed heavily until she formed the words: 'Owain to me.'

'To me,' Owain added.

The three formed a chain of clasped hands.

It was in the mind of the sick lady to disburden herself of more than her weakness could utter, so far was she above earthly links. The desire in her was to be quit of the flesh, bearing a picture of her husband as having the dues of his merits.

Her recovered strength next day brought her nearer to our laws. 'You will call him Owain, Carinthia?' she said. 'He is not one to presume on familiarity. I must be going soon. I cannot leave him the wife I would choose. I can leave him the sister. He is a sure friend. He is the knightly man women dream of. I harp on it because I long for testimony that I leave him to have some reward. And this may be, between two so pure at heart as you two.'

'Dear soul friend, yes, and Owain, yes, I can say it,' Carinthia rejoined. 'Brother? I have only my Chillon. My life is now for him. I am punished for separating myself from the son of my father. I have no heart for a second brother. What I can give to my friend I will. I shall love you in him, if I am to lose you.'

'Not Owain—it was I was the wretch refused to call on the lonely lady at the castle until I heard she had done a romantic little bit of thing— hushed a lambkin's bleating. My loss! my loss! And I could afford it so poorly. Since then Carinthia has filled my days. I shudder to leave you and think of your going back to the English. Their sneer withers. They sent you down among us as a young woman to be shunned.'

'I did wildly, I was ungoverned, I had one idea,' said Carinthia. 'One idea is a bullet, good for the day of battle to beat the foe, father tells us. It was a madness in me. Now it has gone, I see all round. I see straight, too. With one idea, we see nothing—nothing but itself. Whizz! we go. I did. I shall no longer offend in that way. Mr. Gower Woodseer is here from my lord.'

'With him the child will be safe.'

'I am not alarmed. It is to request—they would have me gone, to prepare the way for my lord.'

'You have done, it; he has the castle to himself. I cannot-spare you. A tyrant ordering you to go should be defied. My Lord Fleetwood puts lightning into my slow veins.'

'We have talked: we shall be reproved by the husband and the doctor,' said Carinthia.

Sullen days continued and rolled over to night at the mines. Gower's mission was rendered absurd by the countess's withdrawal from the castle. He spoke of it to Mr. Wythan once, and the latter took a big breath and blew such a lord to the winds. 'Persuade our guest to leave us, that the air may not be tainted for her husband when he comes? He needn't call; he's not obliged to see her. She's offered Esslemont to live in? I believe her instinct's right—he has designs on the child. A little

more and we shall have a mad dog in the fellow. He doubles my work by keeping his men out. If she were away we should hear of black doings. Twenty dozen of his pugilists wouldn't stop the burning.'

They agreed that persuasions need not be addressed to the countess. She was and would remain Mr. Wythan's guest. As for the earl, Gower inclined to plead hesitatingly, still to plead, on behalf of a nobleman owning his influence and very susceptible to his wisdom, whose echo of a pointed saying nearly equalled the satisfaction bestowed by print. The titled man affected the philosopher in that manner; or rather, the crude philosopher's relish of brilliant appreciation stripped him of his robe. For he was with Owain Wythan at heart to scorn titles which did not distinguish practical offices. A nation bowing to them has gone to pith, for him; he had to shake himself, that he might not similarly stick; he had to do it often. Objects elevated even by a decayed world have their magnetism for us unless we nerve the mind to wakeful repulsion. He protested he had reason to think the earl was humanizing, though he might be killing a woman in the process. 'Could she wish for better?' he asked, with at least the gravity of the undermining humourist; and he started Owain to course an idea when he remarked of Lord Fleetwood: 'Imagine a devil on his back on a river, flying a cherub.'

Owain sparkled from the vision of the thing to wrath with it.

'Ay, but while he's floating, his people are edging on starvation. And I've a personal grievance. I keep, you know, open hall, bread and cheese and beer, for poor mates. His men are favouring us with a call. We have to cart treble from the town. If I straighten the sticks he dies to bend, it'll be a grievance against me—and a fig for it! But I like to be at peace with my neighbours, and waft them "penillion" instead of dealing the "cleddyfal" of Llewellyn.'

At last the tension ceased; they had intelligence of the earl's arrival.

His countess was little moved by it; and the reason for that lay in her imagination being absorbed. Henrietta had posted her a journal telling of a deed of Chillon's: no great feat, but precious for its 'likeness to him,' as they phrased it; that is, for the light it cast on their conception of the man. Heading a squadron in a riotous Midland town, he stopped a charge, after fire of a shot from the mob, and galloped up the street to catch a staggering urchin to his saddle-bow, and place the mite in safety. Then it was a simple trot of the hussars ahead; way was made for him.

Now, to see what banquet there is for the big of heart in the world's hot stress, take the view of Carinthia, to whom her brother's thoughtful little act of gentleness at the moment of the red-of-the-powder smoke was divinest bread and wine, when calamity hung around, with the future an unfooted wilderness, her powers untried, her husband her enemy.

CHAPTER XXXI

WE HAVE AGAIN TO DEAL WITH THE EXAMPLES OF OUR YOUNGER MAN

The most urgent of Dames is working herself up to a grey squall in her detestation of imagerial epigrams. Otherwise Gower Woodseer's dash at the quintessential young man of wealth would prompt to the carrying of it further, and telling how the tethered flutterer above a 'devil on his back on a river' was beginning to pull if not drag his withholder and teaser.

Fleetwood had almost a desire to see the small dot of humanity which drew the breath from him;—and was indistinguishably the bubbly grin and gurgle of the nurses, he could swear. He kicked at the bondage to our common fleshly nature imposed on him by the mother of the little animal. But there had been a mother to his father: odd movements of a warmish curiosity brushed him when the cynic was not mounting guard. They were, it seemed, external—no part of him: like blasts of a wayside furnace across wintry air. They were, as it chanced, Nature's woman in him plucking at her separated partner, Custom's man; something of an oriental voluptuary on his isolated regal seat; and he would suck the pleasures without a descent into the stale old ruts where Life's convict couple walk linked to one another, to their issue more.

There was also a cold curiosity to see the male infant such a mother would have. The grandson of Old Lawless might turn out a rascal,—he would be no mean one, no coward.

That mother, too, who must have been a touch astonished to find herself a mother:—Fleetwood laughed a curt bark, and heard rebukes, and pleaded the marriage-trap to the man of his word; devil and cherub were at the tug, or say, dog and gentleman, a survival of the schoolboy—that mother, a girl of the mountains, perhaps wanted no more than smoothing by the world. 'It is my husband' sounded foolish, sounded freshish,—a new note. Would she repeat it? The bit of simplicity would bear repeating once. Gower Woodseer says the creature grows and studies to perfect herself. She's a good way off that, and may spoil herself in the process; but she has a certain power. Her donkey obstinacy in refusing compliance, and her pursuit of 'my husband,' and ability to drench him with ridicule, do not exhibit the ordinary young female. She stamps her impression on the people she meets. Her husband is shaken to confess it likewise, despite a disagreement between them.

He has owned he is her husband: he has not disavowed the consequence. That fellow, Gower Woodseer, might accuse the husband of virtually lying, if he by his conduct implied her distastefulness or worse. By heaven! as felon a deed as could be done. Argue the case anyhow, it should be undone. Let her but cease to madden. For whatever the rawness of the woman, she has qualities; and experience of the facile loves of London very sharply defines her qualities. Think of her as raw, she has the gift of rareness: forget the donkey obstinacy, her character grasps. In the grasp of her character, one inclines, and her husband inclines, to become her advocate. She has only to discontinue maddening.

The wealthy young noble prized any form of rareness wherever it was visible, having no thought of the purchase of it, except with worship. He could listen pleased to the talk of a Methodist minister sewing bootleather. He picked up a roadside tramp and made a friend of him, and valued the fellow's honesty, submitted to his lectures, pardoned his insolence. The sight of Carinthia's narrow bedroom and strip of bed over Sarah Winch's Whitechapel shop had gone a step to drown the bobbing Whitechapel Countess. At least, he had not been hunted by that gaunt chalk-quarry ghost since his peep into the room. Own it! she likewise has things to forgive. Women nurse their larvae of ideas about fair dealing. But observe the distinction: aid if women understood justice they would be the first to proclaim, that when two are tied together, the one who does the other serious injury is more naturally excused than the one who-tenfold abhorrent if a woman!—calls up the grotesque to extinguish both.

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