

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

THE AMAZING
MARRIAGE.
VOLUME 5

George Meredith
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CHAPTER XXXIX

THE RED WARNING

FROM A SON OF VAPOUR

Desiring loneliness or else Lord Feltre's company, Fleetwood had to grant a deferred audience at home to various tradesmen, absurdly fussy about having the house of his leased estate of Calesford furnished complete and habitable on the very day stipulated by his peremptory orders that the place should be both habitable and hospitable. They were right, they were excused; grand entertainments of London had been projected, and he fell into the weariful business with them, thinking of Henrietta's insatiable appetite for the pleasures. He had taken the lease of this burdensome Calesford, at an eight-miles' drive from the Northwest of town, to gratify the devouring woman's taste which was, to have all the luxuries of the town in a framework of country scenery.

Gower Woodseer and he were dining together in the evening.

The circumstance was just endurable, but Gower would play the secretary, and doggedly subjected him to hear a statement of the woeful plight of Countess Livia's affairs. Gower, commissioned to examine them, remarked: 'If we have all the figures!'

'If we could stop the bleeding!' Fleetwood replied. 'Come to the Opera to-night; I promised. I promised Abrane for to-morrow. There's no end to it. This gambling mania's a flux. Not one of them except your old enemy, Corby, keeps clear of it; and they're at him for subsidies, as they are at me, and would be at you or any passenger on the suspected of a purse. Corby shines among them.'

That was heavy judgement enough, Gower thought. No allusion to Esslemont ensued. The earl ate sparingly, and silently for the most part.

He was warmed a little at the Opera by hearing Henrietta's honest raptures over her Columelli in the Pirata. But Lord Brailstone sat behind her, and their exchange of ecstasies upon the tattered pathos of

E il mio tradito amor,
was not moderately offensive.

His countenance in Henrietta's presence had to be studied and interpreted by Livia. Why did it darken? The demurest of fuliginous intriguers argued that Brail stone was but doing the spiring required of him, and would have to pay the penalty unrewarded, let him Italianize as much as he pleased. Not many months longer, and there would be the bit of an outburst,

the whiff of scandal, perhaps a shot, and the rupture of an improvident alliance, followed by Henrietta's free hand to the moody young earl, who would then have possession of the only woman he could ever love: and at no cost. Jealousy of a man like Brailstone, however infatuated the man, was too foolish. He must perceive how matters were tending? The die-away acid eyeballs-at-the-ceiling of a pair of fanatics per la musica might irritate a husband, but the lover should read and know. Giddy as the beautiful creature deprived of her natural aliment seems in her excuseable hunger for it, she has learnt her lesson, she is not a reeling libertine.

Brailstone peered through his eyelashes at the same shadow of a frown where no frown sat on his friend's brows. Displeasure was manifest, and why? Fleetwood had given him the dispossessing shrug of the man out of the run, and the hint of the tip for winning, with the aid of operatic arias; and though he was in Fleetwood's books ever since the prize-fight, neither Fleetwood nor the husband nor any skittishness of a timorous wife could stop the pursuer bent to capture the fairest and most inflaming woman of her day.

'I prefer your stage Columelli,' Fleetwood said.

'I come from exile!' said Henrietta; and her plea in excuse of ecstasies wrote her down as confessedly treasonable to the place quitted.

Ambrose Mallard entered the box, beholding only his goddess Livia. Their eyebrows and inaudible lips conversed eloquently.

He retired like a trumped card on the appearance of M. de St. Ombre. The courtly Frenchman won the ladies to join him in whipping the cream of the world for five minutes, and passed out before his flavour was exhausted. Brailstone took his lesson and departed, to spy at them from other boxes and heave an inflated shirt-front. Young Cressett, the bottle of effervescence, dashed in, and for him Livia's face was motherly. He rattled a tale of the highway robbery of Sir Meeson Corby on one of his Yorkshire moors. The picture of the little baronet arose upon the narration, and it amused. Chumley Potts came to 'confirm every item,' as he said. 'Plucked Corby clean. Pistol at his head. Quite old style. Time, ten P.M. Suspects Great Britain, King, Lords and Commons, and buttons twenty times tighter. Brosey Mallard down on him for a few fighting men. Perfect answer to Brosey.'

'Mr. Mallard did not mention the robbery,' Henrietta remarked.

'Feared to shock: Corby such a favoured swain,' Potts accounted for the omission.

'Brosey spilling last night?' Fleetwood asked.

'At the palazzo, we were,' said Potts. 'Luck pretty fair first off.

Brosey did his trick, and away and away and away went he! More old Brosey wins, the wiser he gets. I stayed.' He swung to Gower: 'Don't drink dry Sillery after two A.M. You read me?'

'Egyptian, but decipherable,' said Gower.

The rising of the curtain drew his habitual groan from Potts, and he fled to colloque with the goodly number of honest fellows

in the house of music who detested 'squallery.' Most of these afflicted pilgrims to the London conservatory were engaged upon the business of the Goddess richly inspiring the Heliconian choir, but rendering the fountain-waters heady. Here they had to be, if they would enjoy the spectacle of London's biggest and choicest bouquet: and in them, too, there was an unattached air during Potts' cooling discourse of turf and tables, except when he tossed them a morsel of tragedy, or the latest joke, not yet past the full gallop on its course. Their sparkle was transient; woman had them fast. Compelled to think of them as not serious members of our group, he assisted at the crush-room exit, and the happy riddance of the beautiful cousins dedicated to the merry London midnights' further pastures.

Fleetwood's word was extracted, that he would visit the 'palazzo' within a couple of hours.

Potts exclaimed: 'Good. You promise. Hang me, if I don't think it 's the only certain thing a man can depend upon in this world.'

He left the earl and Gower Woodseer to their lunatic talk. He still had his ideas about the association of the pair. 'Hard-headed player of his own game, that Woodseer, spite of his Mumbo-Jumbo-oracle kind of talk.'

Mallard's turn of luck downward to the deadly drop had come under Potts' first inspection of the table. Admiring his friend's audacity, deploring his rashness, reproving his persistency, Potts allowed his verdict to go by results; for it was clear that Mallard

and Fortune were in opposition. Something like real awe of the tremendous encounter kept him from a plunge or a bet. Mallard had got the vertigo, he reported the gambler's launch on dementedness to the earl. Gower's less experienced optics perceived it. The plainly doomed duellist with the insensible Black Goddess offered her all the advantages of the Immortals challenged by flesh. His effort to smile was a line cut awry in wood; his big eyes were those of a cat for sociability; he looked cursed, and still he wore the smile. In this condition, the gambler runs to emptiness of everything he has, his money, his heart, his brains, like a coal-truck on the incline of the rails to a collier.

Mallard applied to the earl for a loan of fifty guineas. He had them and lost them, and he came, not begging, blustering for a second supply; quite in the wrong tone, Potts knew. Fleetwood said: 'Back it with pistols, Brosey'; and, as Potts related subsequently, 'Old Brosey had the look of a staked horse.'

Fortune and he having now closed the struggle, perforce of his total disarmament, he regained the wits we forfeit when we engage her. He said to his friend Chummy: 'Abrane tomorrow? Ah, yes, punts a Thames waterman. Start of—how many yards? Sunbury-Walton: good reach. Course of two miles: Braney in good training. Straight business? I mayn't be there. But you, Chummy, you mind, old Chums, all cases of the kind, safest back the professional. Unless—you understand!'

Fleetwood could not persuade Gower to join the party. The philosopher's pretext of much occupation masked a bashfully

sentimental dislike of the flooding of quiet country places by the city's hordes. 'You're right, right,' said Fleetwood, in sympathy, resigned to the prospect of despising his associates without a handy helper. He named Esslemont once, shot up a look at the sky, and glanced it Eastward.

Three coaches were bound for Sunbury from a common starting-point at nine of the morning. Lord Fleetwood, Lord Brailstone, and Lord Simon Pitscrew were the whips. Two hours in advance of them, the earl's famous purveyors of picnic feasts bowled along to pitch the riverside tent and spread the tables. Our upper and lower London world reported the earl as out on another of his expeditions: and, say what we will, we must think kindly of a wealthy nobleman ever to the front to enliven the town's dusty eyes and increase Old England's reputation for pre-eminence in the Sports.

He is the husband of the Whitechapel Countess—got himself into that mess; but whatever he does, he puts the stamp of style on it. He and the thing he sets his hand to, they're neat, they're finished, they're fitted to trot together, and they've a shining polish, natural, like a lily of the fields; or say Nature and Art, like the coat of a thoroughbred led into the paddock by his groom, if you're of that mind.

Present at the start in Piccadilly, Gower took note of Lord Fleetwood's military promptitude to do the work he had no taste for, and envied the self-compression which could assume so pleasant an air. He heard here and there crisp comments on his

lordship's coach and horses and personal smartness; the word 'style,' which reflects handsomely on the connoisseur conferring it, and the question whether one of the ladies up there was the countess. His task of unearthing and disentangling the monetary affairs of 'one of the ladies' compelled the wish to belong to the party soon to be towering out of the grasp of bricks, and delightfully gay, spirited, quick for fun. A fellow, he thought, may brood upon Nature, but the real children of Nature—or she loves them best—are those who have the careless chatter, the ready laugh, bright welcome for a holiday. In catching the hour, we are surely the bloom of the hour? Why, yes, and no need to lose the rosy wisdom of the children when we wrap ourselves in the patched old cloak of the man's.

On he went to his conclusions; but the Dame will have none of them, though here was a creature bent on masonry-work in his act of thinking, to build a traveller's-rest for thinkers behind him; while the volatile were simply breaking their bubbles.

He was discontented all day, both with himself and the sentences he coined. A small street-boy at his run along the pavement nowhither, distanced him altogether in the race for the great Secret; precipitating the thought, that the conscious are too heavily handicapped. The unburdened unconscious win the goal. Ay, but they leave no legacy. So we must fret and stew, and look into ourselves, and seize the brute and scourge him, just to make one serviceable step forward: that is, utter a single sentence worth the pondering for guidance.

Gower imagined the fun upon middle Thames: the vulcan face of Captain Abrane; the cries of his backers, the smiles of the ladies, Lord Fleetwood's happy style in the teeth of tattlean Aurora's chariot for overriding it. One might hope, might almost see, that he was coming to his better senses on a certain subject. As for style overriding the worst of indignities, has not Scotia given her poet to the slack dependant of the gallows-tree, who so rantingly played his jig and wheeled it round in the shadow of that institution? Style was his, he hit on the right style to top the situation, and perpetually will he slip his head out of the noose to dance the poet's verse.

In fact, style is the mantle of greatness; and say that the greatness is beyond our reach, we may at least pray to have the mantle.

Strangest of fancies, most unphilosophically, Gower conceived a woman's love as that which would bestow the gift upon a man so bare of it as he. Where was the woman? He embraced the idea of the sex, and found it resolving to a form of one. He stood humbly before the one, and she waned into swarms of her sisters. So did she charge him with the loving of her sex, not her. And could it be denied, if he wanted a woman's love just to give him a style? No, not that, but to make him feel proud of himself. That was the heart's way of telling him a secret in owning to a weakness. Within it the one he had thought of forthwith obtained her lodgement. He discovered this truth, in this roundabout way, and knew it a truth by the warm fireside

glow the contemplation of her cast over him.

Dining alone, as he usually had to do, he was astonished to see the earl enter his room.

'Ah, you always make the right choice!' Fleetwood said, and requested him to come to the library when he had done eating.

Gower imagined an accident. A metallic ring was in the earl's voice.

One further mouthful finished dinner, for Gower was anxious concerning the ladies. He joined the earl and asked.

'Safe. Oh yes. We managed to keep it from them,' said Fleetwood.

'Nothing particular, perhaps you'll think. Poor devil of a fellow!

Father and mother alive, too! He did it out of hearing, that 'a one merit. Mallard: Ambrose Mallard. He has blown his brains out.'

Seated plunged in the armchair, with stretched legs and eyes at the black fire-grate, Fleetwood told of the gathering under the tent, and Mallard seen, seen drinking champagne; Mallard no longer seen, not missed.

'He killed himself three fields off. He must have been careful to deaden the sound. Small pocket-pistol hardly big enough to—but anything serves. Couple of brats came running up to Chummy Potts:—"Gentleman's body bloody in a ditch." Chummy came to me, and we went. Clean dead; —in the mouth, pointed up; hole through the top of the skull. We're crockery!

crockery! I had to keep Chummy standing. I couldn't bring him back to our party. We got help at a farm; the body lies there. And that's not the worst. We found a letter to me in his pocket pencilled his last five minutes. I don't see what he could have done except to go. I can't tell you more. I had to keep my face, rowing and driving back. "But where is Mr. Potts? Where can Mr. Mallard be?" Queer sensation, to hear the ladies ask! Give me your hand.'

The earl squeezed Gower's hand an instant; and it was an act unknown for him to touch or bear a touch; it said a great deal.

Late at night he mounted to Gower's room. The funeral of the day's impressions had not been shaken off. He kicked at it and sunk under it as his talk rambled. 'Add five thousand,' he commented, on the spread of Livia's papers over the table. 'I've been having an hour with her. Two thousand more, she says. Better multiply by two and a half for a woman's confession. We have to trust to her for some of the debts of honour. See her in the morning. No one masters her but you. Mind, the first to be clear of must be St. Ombre. I like the fellow; but these Frenchmen — they don't spare women. Ambrose,'—the earl's eyelids quivered. 'Jealousy fired that shot. Quite groundless. She 's cool as a marble Venus, as you said. Go straight from her house to Esslemont. I don't plead a case. Make the best account you can of it. Say—you may say my eyes are opened. I respect her. If you think that says little, say more. It can't mean more. Whatever the Countess of Fleetwood may think due to her, let her name it. Say my view

of life, way of life, everything in me, has changed. I shall follow you. I don't expect to march over the ground. She has a heap to forgive. Her father owns or boasts, in that book of his Rose Mackrell lent me, he never forgave an injury.'

Gower helped the quotation, rubbing his hands over it, for cover of his glee at the words he had been hearing. 'Never forgave an injury without a return blow for it. The blow forgives. Good for the enemy to get it. He called his hearty old Pagan custom "an action of the lungs" with him. And it's not in nature for injuries to digest in us. They poison the blood, if we try. But then, there's a manner of hitting back. It is not to go an inch beyond the exact measure, Captain Kirby warns us.'

Fleetwood sighed down to a low groan.

'Lord Feltre would have an answer for you. She's a wife; and a wife hitting back is not a pleasant—well, petticoats make the difference. If she's for amends, she shall exact them; and she may be hard to satisfy, she shall have her full revenge. Call it by any other term you like. I did her a wrong. I don't defend myself; it 's not yet in the Law Courts. I beg to wipe it out, rectify it—choose your phrase—to the very fullest. I look for the alliance with her to . . .'

He sprang up and traversed the room: 'We're all guilty of mistakes at starting: I speak of men. Women are protected; and if they're not, there's the convent for them, Feltre says. But a man has to live it on before the world; and this life, with these flies of fellows . . . I fell into it in some way. Absolutely like the

first bird I shot as a youngster, and stood over the battered head and bloody feathers, wondering! There was Ambrose Mallard—the same splintered bones—blood—come to his end; and for a woman; that woman the lady bearing the title of half-mother to me. God help me! What are my sins? She feels nothing, or about as much as the mortuary paragraph of the newspapers, for the dead man; and I have Ambrose Mallard's look at her and St. Ombre talking together, before he left the tent to cross the fields. Borrow, beg, or steal for money to play for her! and not a glimpse of the winning post.

St. Ombre 's a cool player; that 's at the bottom of the story. He's cool because play doesn't bite him, as it did Ambrose. I should say the other passion has never bitten him. And he's alive and presentable; Ambrose under a sheet, with Chummy Potts to watch. Chummy cried like a brat in the street for his lost mammy. I left him crying and sobbing. They have their feelings, these "children of vapour," as you call them. But how did I fall into the line with a set I despised? She had my opinion of her gamblers, and retorted that young Cressett's turn for the fling is my doing. I can't swear it's not. There's one of my sins. What's to wipe them out! She has a tender feeling for the boy; confessed she wanted governing. Why; she's young, in a way. She has that particular vice of play. She might be managed. Here's a lesson for her! Don't you think she might? The right man,—the man she can respect, fancy incorruptible! He must let her see he has an eye for tricks. She's not responsible for—his mad passion was the

cause, cause of everything he did. The kind of woman to send the shaft. You called her "Diana seated." You said, "She doesn't hunt, she sits and lets fly her arrow." Well, she showed feeling for young Cressett, and her hit at me was an answer. It struck me on the mouth. But she's an eternal anxiety. A man she respects. A man to govern her!'

Fleetwood hurried his paces. 'I couldn't have allowed poor Ambrose. Besides, he had not a chance—never had in anything. It wants a head, wants the man who can say no to her. "The Reveller's Aurora," you called her. She has her beauty, yes. She respects you. I should be relieved—a load off me! Tell her, all debts paid; fifty thousand invested, in her name and her husband's. Tell her, speak it, there's my consent—if only the man to govern her! She has it from me, but repeat it, as from me. That sum and her portion would make a fair income for the two. Relieved? By heaven, what a relief! Go early. Coach to Esslemont at eleven. Do my work there. I haven't to repeat my directions. I shall present myself two days after. I wish Lady Fleetwood to do the part of hostess at Calesford. Tell her I depute you to kiss my son for me. Now I leave you. Good-night. I shan't sleep. I remember your saying, "bad visions come under the eyelids." I shall keep mine open and read—read her father's book of the Maxims; I generally find two or three at a dip to stimulate. No wonder she venerates him. That sort of progenitor is your "permanent aristocracy." Hard enemy. She must have some of her mother in her, too. Abuse me to her, admit the justice of

reproaches, but say, reason, good feeling—I needn't grind at it. Say I respect her. Advise her to swallow the injury—not intended for insult. I don't believe anything higher than respect can be offered to a woman. No defence of me to her, but I'll tell you, that when I undertook to keep my word with her, I plainly said—never mind; good-night. If we meet in the morning, let this business rest until it 's done. I must drive to help poor Chums and see about the Inquest.'

Fleetwood nodded from the doorway. Gower was left with humming ears.

CHAPTER XL

RECORD OF MINOR INCIDENTS

They went to their beds doomed to lie and roam as the solitaires of a sleepless night. They met next day like a couple emerging from sirocco deserts, indisposed for conversation or even short companionship, much of the night's dry turmoil in their heads. Each would have preferred the sight of an enemy; and it was hardly concealed by them, for they inclined to regard one another as the author of their infernal passage through the drear night's wilderness.

Fleetwood was the civiller; his immediate prospective duties being clear, however abhorrent. But he had inflicted a monstrous disturbance on the man he meant in his rash, decisive way to elevate, if not benefit. Gower's imagination, foreign to his desires and his projects, was playing juggler's tricks with him, dramatizing upon hypotheses, which mounted in stages and could pretend to be soberly conceivable, assuming that the earl's wild hints overnight were a credible basis. He transported himself to his first view of the Countess Livia, the fountain of similes born of his prostrate adoration, close upon the invasion and capture of him by the combined liqueurs in the giddy Batlen lights; and joining the Arabian magic in his breast at the time with the more magical reality now proposed as a sequel to it, he

entered the land where dreams confess they are outstripped by revelations.

Yet it startled him to hear the earl say: 'You'll get audience at ten; I've arranged; make the most of the situation to her. I refuse to help. I foresee it 's the only way of solving this precious puzzle. You do me and every one of us a service past paying. Not a man of her set worth. . . . She—but you'll stop it; no one else can. Of course, you've had your breakfast. Off, and walk yourself into a talkative mood, as you tell me you do.'

'One of the things I do when I've nobody to hear,' said Gower, speculating whether the black sprite in this young nobleman was for sending him as a rod to scourge the lady: an ingenious device, that smelt of mediaeval Courts and tickled his humour.

'Will she listen?' he said gravely.

'She will listen; she has not to learn you admire. You admit she has helped to trim and polish, and the rest. She declares you're incorruptible. There's the ground open. I fling no single sovereign more into that quicksand, and I want not one word further on the subject. I follow you to Esslemont. Pray, go.'

Fleetwood pushed into the hall. A footman was ordered to pack and deposit Mr. Woodseer's portmanteau at the coach-office.

'The principal point is to make sure we have all the obligations,' Gower said.

'You know the principal point,' said the earl. 'Relieve me.'

He faced to the opening street door. Lord Feltre stood in the

framing of it—a welcome sight. The 'monastic man of fashion,' of Gower's phrase for him, entered, crooning condolences, with a stretched waxen hand for his friend, a partial nod for Nature's worshipper—inefficient at any serious issue of our human affairs, as the earl would now discover.

Gower left the two young noblemen to their greetings. Happily for him, philosophy, in the present instance, after a round of profundities, turned her lantern upon the comic aspect of his errand. Considering the Countess Livia, and himself, and the tyrant, who benevolently and providentially, or sardonically, hurled them to their interview, the situation was comic, certainly, in the sense of its being an illumination of this life's odd developments. For thus had things come about, that if it were possible even to think of the lady's condescending, he, thanks to the fair one he would see before evening, was armed and proof against his old infatuation or any renewal of it. And he had been taught to read through the beautiful twilighted woman, as if she were burnt paper held at the fire consuming her. His hopes hung elsewhere. Nevertheless, an intellectual demon-imp very lively in his head urged him to speculate on such a contest between them, and weigh the engaging forces. Difficulties were perceived, the scornful laughter on her side was plainly heard; but his feeling of savage mastery, far from beaten down, swelled so as to become irritable for the trial; and when he was near her house he held a review of every personal disadvantage he could summon, incited by an array of limping deficiencies that flattered their arrogant

leader with ideas of the power he had in spite of them.

In fact, his emancipation from sentiment inspired the genial mood to tease. Women, having to encounter a male adept at the weapon for the purpose, must be either voluble or supportingly proud to keep the skin from shrinking: which is a commencement of the retrogression; and that has frequently been the beginning of a rout. Now the Countess Livia was a lady of queenly pose and the servitorial conventional speech likely at a push to prove beggarly. When once on a common platform with a man of agile tongue instigated by his intellectual demon to pursue inquiries into her moral resources, after a ruthless exposure of the wrecked material, she would have to be, after the various fashions, defiant, if she was to hold her own against pressure; and seeing, as she must, the road of prudence point to conciliation, it was calculable that she would take it. Hence a string of possible events, astounding to mankind, but equally calculable, should one care to give imagination headway. Gower looked signally Captain Abrane's 'fiddler' while he waited at Livia's house door. A studious intimacy with such a lady was rather like the exposure of the silver moon to the astronomer's telescope.

The Dame will have nought of an interview and colloquy not found mentioned in her collection of ballads, concerning a person quite secondary in Dr. Glossop's voluminous papers. She as vehemently prohibits a narration of Gower Woodseer's proposal some hours later, for the hand of the Countess of Fleetwood's transfixed maid Madge, because of the insignificance of the

couple; and though it was a quaint idyll of an affection slowly formed, rationally based while seeming preposterous, tending to bluntly funny utterances on both sides. The girl was a creature of the enthusiasms, and had lifted that passion of her constitution into higher than the worship of sheer physical bravery. She had pitied Mr. Gower Woodseer for his apparently extreme, albeit reverential, devotion to her mistress. The plainly worded terms of his asking a young woman of her position and her reputation to marry him came on her like an intrusion of dazzling day upon the closed eyelids of the night, requiring time, and her mistress's consent, and his father's expressed approval, before she could yield him an answer that might appear a forgetfulness of her station, her ignorance, her damaged character. Gower protested himself, with truth, a spotted pard, an ignoramus, and an outcast of all established classes, as the worshipper of Nature cannot well avoid being.

'But what is it you like me for, Mr. Gower?' Madge longed to know, that she might see a way in the strange land where he had planted her after a whirl; and he replied: 'I 've thought of you till I can say I love you because you have naturally everything I shoot at.'

The vastness of the compliment drove her to think herself empty of anything.

He named courage, and its offspring, honesty, and devotedness, constancy.

Her bosom rose at the word.

'Yes, constancy,' he repeated; and 'growing girls have to "turn corners," as you told me once.'

'I did?' said she, reddening under a memory, and abashed by his recollection of a moment she knew to have been weak with her, or noisy of herself.

Madge went straightway to her mistress and related her great event, in the tone of a confession of crime. Her mistress's approbation was timidly suggested rather than besought.

It came on a flood. Carinthia's eyes filled; she exclaimed: 'Oh, that good man!—he chooses my Madge for wife. She said it, Rebecca said it. Mrs. Wythan saw and said Mr. Woodseer loved my Madge. I hear her saying it. Then yes, and yes, from me for both your sakes, dear girl. He will have the faithfullest, he will have the kindest—Oh! and I shall know there can be a happy marriage in England.'

She summoned Gower; she clasped his hand, to thank him for appreciating her servant and sister, and for the happiness she had in hearing it; and she gazed at him and the laden brows of her Madge alternately, encouraging him to repeat his recital of his pecuniary means, for the poetry of the fact it verified, feasting on the sketch of a four-roomed cottage and an agricultural labourer's widow for cook and housemaid; Madge to listen to his compositions of the day in the evening; Madge to praise him, Madge to correct his vanity.

Love was out of the count, but Carinthia's leaping sympathy decorated the baldness of the sketch and spied his features

through the daubed mask he chose to wear as a member of the order of husbands, without taking it for his fun. Dry material statements presented the reality she doated to think of. Moreover, the marriage of these two renewed her belief in true marriages, and their intention to unite was evidence of love.

'My journey to England was worth all troubles for the meeting Madge,' she said. 'I can look with pleasure to that day of my meeting her first—the day, it was then!'

She stopped. Madge felt the quivering upward of a whimper to a sob in her breast. She slipped away.

'It's a day that has come round to be repaired, Lady Fleetwood,' said Gower. 'If you will. Will you not? He has had a blow—the death of a friend, violent death. It has broken him. He wants a month or so in your mountains. I have thought him hard to deal with; he is humane. His enormous wealth has been his tempter. Madge and I will owe him our means of livelihood, enough for cottagers, until I carve my way. His feelings are much more independent of his rank than those of most noblemen. He will repeat your kind words to Madge and me; I am sure of it. He has had heavy burdens; he is young, hardly formed yet. He needs a helper; I mean, one allied to him. You forgive me? I left him with a Catholic lord for comforter, who regards my prescript of the study of Nature, when we're in grief, as about the same as an offer of a dish of cold boiled greens. Silver and ivory images are more consoling. Neither he nor I can offer the right thing for Lord Fleetwood. It will be found here. And then your mountains. More

than I, nearly as much as you, he has a poet's ardour for mountain land. He and Mr. Wythan would soon learn to understand one another on that head, if not as to management of mines.'

The pleading was crafty, and it was penetrative in the avoidance of stress. Carinthia shook herself to feel moved. The endeavour chilled her to a notion that she was but half alive. She let the question approach her, whether Chillon could pardon Lord Fleetwood. She, with no idea of benignness, might speak pardon's word to him, on a late autumn evening years hence, perhaps, or to his friends to-morrow, if he would considerately keep distant. She was upheld by the thought of her brother's more honourable likeness to their father, in the certainty of his refusal to speak pardon's empty word or touch an offending hand, without their father's warrant for the injury wiped out; and as she had no wish for that to be done, she could anticipate his withholding of the word.

For her brother at wrestle with his fallen fortunes was now the beating heart of Carinthia's mind. Her husband was a shadow there. He did obscure it, and he might annoy, he was unable to set it in motion. He sat there somewhat like Youth's apprehension of Death:—the dark spot seen mistily at times through people's tears, or visioned as in an ambush beyond the hills; occasionally challenged to stimulate recklessness; oftener overlooked, acknowledged for the undesired remote of life's conditions, life's evil, fatal, ill-assorted yoke-fellow; and if it was in his power to burst out of his corner and be terrible to her, she

could bring up a force unnamed and unmeasured, that being the blood of her father in her veins. Having done her utmost to guard her babe, she said her prayers; she stood for peace or the struggle.

'Does Lord Fleetwood speak of coming here?' she said.

'To-morrow.'

'I go to Croridge to-morrow.'

'Your ladyship returns?'

'Yes, I return Mr. Gower, you have fifty minutes before you dress for dinner.'

He thought only of the exceeding charity of the intimation; and he may be excused for his not seeing the feminine full answer it was, in an implied, unmeditated contrast. He went gladly to find his new comrade, his flower among grass-blades, the wonderful creature astonishing him and surcharging his world by setting her face at him, opening her breast to him, breathing a young man's word of words from a woman's mouth. His flower among grass-blades for a head looking studiously down, she was his fountain of wisdom as well, in the assurance she gave him of the wisdom of his choice.

But Madge had put up the 'prize-fighter's lass,' by way of dolly defence, to cover her amazed confusion when the proposal of this well-liked gentleman to a girl such as she sounded churchy. He knocked it over easily; it left, however, a bee at his ear and an itch to transfer the buzzer's attentions and tease his darling; for she had betrayed herself as right good game. Nor is there happier promise of life-long domestic enlivenment for a prescient man of

Letters than he has in the contemplation of a pretty face showing the sensitiveness to the sting, which is not allowed to poison her temper, and is short of fetching tears. The dear innocent girl gave this pleasing promise; moreover, she could be twisted-to laugh at herself, just a little. Now, the young woman who can do that has already jumped the hedge into the highroad of philosophy, and may become a philosopher's mate in its by-ways, where the minute discoveries are the notable treasures.

They had their ramble, agreeable to both, despite the admonitory dose administered to one of them. They might have been espied at a point or two from across the parkpalings; their laughter would have caught an outside pedestrian's hearing. Whatever the case, Owain Wythan, riding down off Croridge, big with news of her brother for the countess, dined at her table, and walking up the lane to the Esslemont Arms on a moonless night, to mount his horse, pitched against an active and, as it was deemed by Gower's observation of his eyes, a scientific fist. The design to black them finely was attributable to the dyeing accuracy of the stroke. A single blow had done it. Mr. Wythan's watch and purse were untouched; and a second look at the swollen blind peepers led Gower to surmise that they were, in the calculation of the striker, his own.

He walked next day to the Royal Sovereign inn. There he came upon the earl driving his phaeton. Fleetwood jumped down, and Gower told of the mysterious incident, as the chief thing he had to tell, not rendering it so mysterious in his narrative style. He

had the art of indicating darkly.

'Ines, you mean?' Fleetwood cried, and he appeared as nauseated and perplexed as he felt. Why should Ines assault Mr. Wythan? It happened that the pugilist's patron had, within the last fifteen minutes, driven past a certain thirty-acre meadow, sight of which on his way to Carinthia had stirred him. He had even then an idea of his old deeds dogging him to bind him, every one of them, the smallest.

'But you've nothing to go by,' he said. 'Why guess at this rascal more than another?'

Gower quoted Mrs. Rundles and the ostler for witnesses to Kit's visit yesterday to the Royal Sovereign, though Kit shunned the bar of the Esslemont Arms.

'I guess pretty clearly, because I suspect he was hanging about and saw me and Madge together.'

'Consolations for failures in town?—by the way, you are complimented, and I don't think you deserved it. However, there was just the chance to stop a run to perdition. But, Madge? Madge? I'd swear to the girl!'

'Not so hard as I,' said Gower, and spoke of the oath to come between the girl and him.

Fleetwood's dive into the girl's eyes drew her before him. He checked a spurt of exclamations.

'You fancy the brute had a crack for revenge and mistook his man?'

'That's what I want her ladyship to know,' said Gower.

'How could you let her hear of it?'

'Nothing can be concealed from her.'

The earl was impressionable to the remark, in his disgust at the incident. It added a touch of a new kind of power to her image.

'She's aware of my coming?'

'To-day or to-morrow.'

They scaled the phaeton and drove.

'You undervalue Lord Feltre. You avoid your adversaries,' Fleetwood now rebuked his hearer. 'It 's an easy way to have the pull of them in your own mind. You might learn from him. He's willing for controversy. Nature-worship—or "aboriginal genuflexion," he calls it; Anglicanism, Methodism; he stands to engage them. It can't be doubted, that in days of trouble he has a faith "stout as a rock, with an oracle in it," as he says; and he's right," men who go into battle require a rock to back them or a staff to lean on." You have your "secret," you think; as far as I can see, it's to keep you from going into any form of battle.'

The new influence at work on the young nobleman was evident, if only in the language used.

Gower answered mildly: 'That can hardly be said of a man who's going to marry.'

'Perhaps not. Lady Fleetwood is aware?'

'Lady Fleetwood does me the honour to approve my choice.'

'You mean, you're dead on to it with this girl?'

'For a year or more.'

'Fond of her?'

'All my heart.'

'In love!'

'Yes, in love. The proof of it is, I 've asked her now I can support her as a cottager leaning on the Three Per Cents.'

'Well, it helps you to a human kind of talk. It carries out your theories. I never disbelieved in your honesty. The wisdom's another matter. Did you ever tell any one, that there's not an act of a man's life lies dead behind him, but it is blessing or cursing him every step he takes?'

'By that,' rejoined Gower, 'I can say Lord Feltre proves there's wisdom in the truisms of devoutness.'

He thought the Catholic lord had gone a step or two to catch an eel.

Fleetwood was looking on the backward of his days, beholding a melancholy sunset, with a grimace in it.

'Lord Feltre might show you the "leanness of Philosophy";— you would learn from hearing him:—"an old gnawed bone for the dog that chooses to be no better than a dog."'

'The vertiginous roast haunch is recommended,' Gower said.

'See a higher than your own head, good sir. But, hang the man! he manages to hit on the thing he wants.' Fleetwood set his face at Gower with cutting heartiness. 'In love, you say, and Madge: and mean it to be the holy business! Well, poor old Chummy always gave you credit for knowing how to play your game. She has given proof she 's a good girl. I don't see why it shouldn't end well. That attack on the Welshman's the bad lookout. Explained,

if you like, but women's impressions won't get explained away. We must down on our knees or they. Her ladyship attentive at all to affairs of the house?'

'Every day with Queeney; at intervals with Leddings.'

'Excellent! You speak like a fellow recording the devout observances of a great dame with her minor and superior, ecclesiastical comforters. Regular at church?'

'Her ladyship goes.'

'A woman without religion, Gower Woodseer, is a weed on the water, or she's hard as nails. We shall see. Generally, Madge and the youngster parade the park at this hour. I drive round to the stables. Go in and offer your version of that rascally dog's trick. It seems the nearest we can come at. He's a sot, and drunken dogs 'll do anything. I've had him on my hands, and I've got the stain of him.'

They trotted through Esslemont Park gates. 'I've got that place, Calesford, on my hands, too,' the earl said, suddenly moved to a liking for his Kentish home.

He and Gower were struck by a common thought of the extraordinary burdens his indulgence in impulses drew upon him. Present circumstances pictured to Gower the opposing weighed and matured good reason for his choosing Madge, and he complimented himself in his pity for the earl. But Fleetwood, as he reviewed a body of acquaintances perfectly free from the wretched run in harness, though they had their fits and their whims, was pushed to the conclusion that fatalism marked his

particular course through life. He could not hint at such an idea to the unsympathetic fellow, or rather, the burly antagonist to anything of the sort, beside him. Lord Feltre would have understood and appreciated it instantly. Where is aid to be had if we have the Fates against us? Feltre knew the Power, he said, was an example of 'the efficacy of supplications'; he had been 'fatally driven to find the Power,' and had found it—on the road to Rome, of course: not a delectable road for an English nobleman, except that the noise of another convert in pilgrimage on it would deal our English world a lively smack, the very stroke that heavy body wants. But the figure of a 'monastic man of fashion' was antipathetic to the earl, and he flouted an English Protestant mass merely because of his being highly individual, and therefore revolutionary for the minority.

He cast his bitter cud aside. 'My man should have arrived. Lady

Fleetwood at home?'

Gower spoke of her having gone to Croridge in the morning.

'Has she taken the child?'

'She has, yes. For the air of the heights.'

'For greater security. Lady Arpington praises the thoughtful mother.

I rather expected to see the child.'

'They can't be much later,' Gower supposed.

'You don't feel your long separation from "the object"?''

Letting him have his cushion for pins, Gower said 'It needs all

my philosophy:

He was pricked and probed for the next five minutes; not bad rallying, the earl could be smart when he smarted. Then they descended the terrace to meet Lady Fleetwood driving her pony-trap. She gave a brief single nod to the salute of her lord, quite in the town-lady's manner, surprisingly.

CHAPTER XLI

IN WHICH THE FATES ARE SEEN AND A CHOICE OF THE REFUGES FROM THEM

The home of husband and wife was under one roof at last. Fleetwood went, like one deported, to his wing of the house, physically sensible, in the back turned to his wife's along the corridor, that our ordinary comparison for the division of a wedded twain is correct. She was Arctic, and Antarctic he had to be, perforce of the distance she put between them. A removal of either of them from life—or from 'the act of breathing,' as Gower Woodseer's contempt of the talk about death would call it—was an imaginable way of making it a wider division. Ambrose Mallard was far enough from his fatal lady now—farther than the Poles asunder. Ambrose, if the clergy will allow him, has found his peace. . But the road and the means he chose were a madman's.

The blotting of our character, to close our troubles, is the final proof of our being 'sons of vapour,' according to Gower Woodseer's heartless term for poor Ambrose and the lot. They have their souls; and above philosophy, 'natural' or unnatural, they may find a shelter. They can show in their desperation that

they are made of blood, as philosophers rather fail of doing. An insignificant brainless creature like Feltre had wits, by the aid of his religion, to help or be charitable to his fellows, particularly the sinners, in the crisis of life, surpassing any philosopher's.

Information of her ladyship's having inspected the apartments, to see to the minutest of his customary luxuries, cut at him all round. His valet had it from the footmen and maids; and their speaking of it meant a liking for their mistress; and that liking, added to her official solicitude on his behalf, touched a soft place in him and blew an icy wind; he was frozen where he was warmed. Here was evidence of her intending the division to be a fixed gap. She had entered this room and looked about her. He was here to feel her presence in her absence.

Some one or something had schooled her, too. Her large-eyed directness of gaze was the same as at that inn and in Wales, but her easy sedateness was novel, her English, almost the tone of the English world: he gathered it, at least, from the few remarks below stairs.

His desire to be with her was the desire to escape the phantasm of the woman haunting to subjugate him when they were separate. He could kill illusion by magnifying and clawing at her visible angles and audible false notes; and he did it until his recollections joined to the sight of her, when a clash of the thought of what she had been and the thought of what she was had the effect of conjuring a bitter sweet image that was a more seductive illusion. Strange to think, this woman once loved

the man who was not half the value of the man she no longer loved. He took a shot at cynicism, but hit no mark. This woman protected her whole sex.

They sat at the dinner-table alone, thanks to a handsome wench's attractions for a philosopher. Married, and parents of a lusty son, this was their first sitting at table together. The mouth that said 'I guard my rooms' was not obtruded; she talked passingly of her brother, much of Lady Arpington and of old Mr. Woodseer; and, though she reserved a smile, there was no look of a lock on her face. She seemed pleased to be treated very courteously; she returned the stately politeness in exactest measure; very simply, as well. Her face had now an air of homeliness, well suited to an English household interior. She could chat. Any pauses occurring, he was the one guilty of them; she did not allow them to be barrier chasms, or 'strids' for the leap with effort; she crossed them like the mountain maid over a gorge's plank—kept her tones perfectly. Her Madge and Mr. Gower Woodseer made a conversible topic. She was inquisitive for accounts of Spanish history and the land of Spain.

They passed into the drawing-room. She had heard of the fate of the poor child in Wales, she said, without a comment.

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