LOS
INQUILINOS DE LA MALORIA.

[Pg 1]

CAPÍTULO I.

UNA LARK.

" HAY un 'Viejo Tom', ¿no? Cógelo, y vasos y agua fría, *aquí* ", dijo Cleve a su criado, quien, paciente, cortés, somnoliento, esperaba a su amo. "Antes te gustaba, y aquí hay puros"; y sacudió una ducha sobre el mantel de su salón. "¿Y a dónde querías ir a esta hora de la noche?"

"Para Wright, para ver el final del gran juego de billar, Seller y Culverin, ya sabes; tengo dos libras".

"No me importa si voy contigo, ahora mismo. ¿Qué es esto? ¿Cuándo diablos vino esto?" Cleve había recogido y de una pálida mirada leyó una pequeña nota que estaba sobre la mesa; y luego repitió con bastante frialdad[Pg 2]-

"Digo, ¿cuándo vino esto?"

"Antes de la una, señor, creo", dijo Shepperd.

"Consígueme mi abrigo", y Shepperd desapareció.

"Molestarán a *la muerte* ", dijo, de mal humor. "Mira, tienes las cosas aquí, y puros. No estaré a cinco minutos. Si estoy más tiempo, no me esperes, pero termina esto primero".

Cleve se había subido el cuello de la chaqueta exterior, se lo abrochó en la barbilla, se bajó una especie de gorra de viaje hasta la frente y se marchó, muy pálido y ansioso.

No regresó en cinco minutos; ni en diez, veinte o cuarenta minutos. El "Old Tom" de la botella se había agotado; Sedley miró su reloj; no podía esperar más.

Cuando salió a la losa, sintió el agradable estímulo del curioso "Viejo Tom" lo suficiente como para hacer una pequeña pausa conveniente con el fin de recordar con claridad las direcciones geográficas de las salas de billar de Wright, adonde, en consecuencia, se paseaba. hacia el este, a lo largo de calles desiertas y

resonantes, con un policía aquí y allá metiéndose en un área, o merodeando a lo largo de su marcha de servicio de dos millas por hora, y de vez en cuando deleitado por la música sobrenatural de gatos enfermos de amor entre los techos .[Pg 3]

Estas calles y plazas, entre las que de alguna manera se había perdido, habían sido en su día los lugares frecuentados y los barrios de la moda, un mundo de hadas, siempre migrando ante la marcha constante de los negocios. Sedley había perdido la cuenta. Si se hubiera contentado con pasar por Ludgate-hill, habría estado en Wright's media hora antes. Sedley no conocía estas viejas plazas sucias y respetables; ni siquiera había visto a un policía en los últimos veinte minutos, y en ese momento era bastante de la opinión del abogado irlandés de que la vida no es lo suficientemente larga para atajos.

En una calle silenciosa pasó junto a un carruaje que estaba junto a una lámpara. El conductor de la acera lo miró con dureza. Sedley no era solo un ser romántico; también tenía su humor jocoso y le encantaba la alondra cuando llegaba. Le devolvió la mirada al muchacho con una mirada tan significativa, aflojando el paso.

"¿Bien?" dijo Sedley.

"¡Bien!" respondió el conductor.

"¡Capital!" respondió Sedley.

"¿Eres tú él?" preguntó el conductor, después de una pausa.

"No, ¿serás *tú* ?" respondió Sedley.

El conductor pareció un poco desconcertado y miró a Sedley con duda; Sedley miró dentro del carruaje, que, sin embargo, estaba vacío, y luego[Pg 4]la casa en cuyas barandillas estaba; pero estaba oscuro de arriba a abajo.

Tenía pensamientos de subirse y aprovechar el vehículo; pero al ver que el procedimiento no era particularmente divertido y que le gustaba más caminar, se limitó a decir, señalando el carruaje con la cabeza:

"Mucho espacio."

"Espacio suficiente, creo."

"¿Cuánto tiempo piensas esperar?"

"Mientras me paguen".

"Dale mi amor a tu madre".

"Temo que no lo valga."

"Cuídate, por *mi* bien".

Sin duda hubo una réplica digna de un diálogo tan vivo; pero Sedley no pudo oír con claridad mientras caminaba, mirando a la luna y pensando en lo hermosa que solía brillar, y sin duda entonces brillaba, en el destellante mar azul de Cardyllian y sobre las montañas brumosas. Y pensó en su linda prima Agnes Etherage; y "Sí", dijo para sí mismo, acelerando el paso, "si gano esas dos libras en Wright's, pondré dos libras, las dos libras que debería haber perdido, es decir, no hay nada extravagante en eso ... y darle a la pequeña Agnes algo bonito; dije que lo haría; y aunque era sólo una broma, sigue siendo una promesa ".[Pg 5]

Some tradesmen's bills that morning had frightened him, and as he periodically did, he had bullied himself into resolutions of economy, out of which he ingeniously reasoned himself again. "What shall it be? I'll look in to-morrow at Dymock and Rose's—they have lots of charming little French trifles. Where the deuce are we now?"

He paused, and looking about him, and then down a stable-lane between two old-fashioned houses of handsome dimensions, he saw a fellow in a great coat loitering slowly down it, and looking up vigilantly at the two or three windows in the side of the mansion.

"A robbery, by George!" thought Sedley, as he marked the prowling vigilance of the man, and his peculiar skulking gait.

He had no sort of weapon about him, not even a stick; but he is one of the best sparrers extant, and thinks pluck and "a fist-full of fives" well worth a revolver.

Sedley hitched his shoulders, plucked off the one glove that remained on, and followed him softly a few steps, dogging him down the lane, with that shrewd, stern glance which men exchange in the prize-ring. But when on turning about the man in the surtout saw that he was observed, he confirmed Sedley's suspicions by first[Pg 6] pausing irresolutely, and ultimately withdrawing suddenly round the angle.

Sedley had not expected this tactique. For whatever purpose, the man had been plainly watching the house, and it was nearly three o'clock. Thoroughly blooded now for a "lark," Sedley followed swiftly to the corner, but could not see him; so, as he returned, a low window in the side wall opened, and a female voice said, "Are you there?"

"Yes," replied Tom Sedley, confidentially drawing near.

"Take this."

"All right"—and thereupon he received first a bag and then a box, each tolerably heavy.

Sedley was amused. A mystification had set in; a quiet robbery, and he the receiver. He thought of dropping the booty down the area of the respectable house round the corner, but just then the man in the surtout emerged from the wing, so to speak, and marching slowly up the perspective of the lane, seemed about to disturb him, but once more changed his mind, and disappeared.

"What is to happen next?" wondered Tom Sedley. In a few minutes a door which opens from the back yard or garden of the house from which he had received his burthen, opened[Pg 7] cautiously, and a woman in a cloak stepped out, carrying another bag, a heavy one it also seemed, and beckoning to him, said, so soon as he was sufficiently near—

"Is the carriage come?"

"Yes'm," answered Tom, touching his hat, and affecting as well as he could the ways of a porter or a cabman.

"When they comes," she resumed, "you'll bring us to where it is, mind, and fetch the things with you—and mind ye, no noise nor talking, and walk as light as you can."

"All right," said Tom, in the same whisper in which she spoke.

It could not be a robbery—Tom had changed his mind; there was an air of respectability about the servant that conflicted with that theory, and the discovery that the carriage was waiting to receive the party was also against it.

Tom was growing more interested in his adventure; and entering into the fuss and mystery of the plot.

"Come round, please, and show me where the carriage stands," said the woman, beckoning to Tom, who followed her round the corner.

She waited for him, and laid her hand on his elbow, giving him a little jog by way of caution.

"Hush—not a word above your breath, mind,"[Pg 8] she whispered; "*I* see that's it; well, it needn't come no nearer, mind."

"All right, ma'am."

"And there's the window," she added in a still more cautious whisper, and pointing with a nod and a frown at a window next the hall door, through the shutter of which a dim light was visible.

"Ha!" breathed Tom, looking wise, "and all safe *there*?"

"We're never sure; sometimes awake; sometimes not; sometimes quiet; sometimes quite wild-like; and the window pushed open, for hair! Hoffle he is!"

"And always was," hazarded Tom.

"Wuss now, though," whispered she, shaking her head ruefully, and she returned round the angle of the house and entered the door through which she had issued, and Tom set down his load not far from the same point.

Before he had waited many minutes the same door re-opened, and two ladies, as he judged them to be from something in their air and dress, descended the steps together, followed by the maid carrying the black-leather bag as before. They stopped just under the door, which the servant shut cautiously and locked; and then these three female figures stood for a few seconds[Pg 9] whispering together; and after that they turned and walked up the lane towards Tom Sedley, who touched his hat as they approached, and lifted his load again.

The two ladies were muffled in cloaks. The taller wore no hat or bonnet; but had instead a shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, hood-wise. She walked, leaning upon the shorter lady, languidly, like a person very weak, or in pain, and the maid at the other side, placed her arm tenderly round her waist, under her mufflers, and aided her thus as she walked. They crossed the street at the end of the stable-lane, and walked at that side toward the carriage. The maid signed to Tom, who carried his luggage quickly to its destination on the box, and was in time to open the carriage-door.

"Don't you mind," said the woman, putting Tom unceremoniously aside, and herself aiding the taller lady into the old-fashioned carriage. As she prepared to get in, Tom for a moment fancied a recognition; something in the contour of the figure, muffled as it was, for a second struck him; and at the same moment all seemed like a dream, and he stepped backward involuntarily in amazement. Had he not seen the same gesture. The arm, exactly so, and that slender hand in a gardening glove, holding[Pg 10] a tiny trowel, under the dark foliage of old trees.

The momentary gesture was gone. The lady leaning back, a muffled figure, in the corner of the carriage, silent. Her companion, who he thought looked sharply at him, from within, now seated herself beside her; and the maid also from her place inside, told him from the window—

"Dile que conduzca ahora donde él sabe, rápido", y ella abrió la ventanilla.

Tom estaba demasiado interesado ahora para dejar ir el hilo de su aventura. Así que subió a la caja junto al conductor y entregó el pedido que acababa de recibir.

Se alejó conduciendo rápidamente, hacia la ciudad, a través de calles silenciosas y vacías. Tom perdió rápidamente la orientación; las lámparas de gas se hicieron escasas y espaciadas; se encontraba entre callejuelas y arcos, y calles sobrias y melancólicas, como nunca había sospechado que existieran en una región así.

Aquí el conductor giró de repente por un camino estrecho entre viejos muros de ladrillo, con matas de hierba sucia aquí y allá en la parte superior, y las gastadas líneas de mortero recubiertas de musgo aterciopelado. Este corto pasaje terminaba en dos altos pilares de ladrillo, coronados por bolas de piedra gastadas y cubiertas de musgo.

Tom saltó y empujó hacia atrás las puertas de hierro oxidado, y condujeron hacia un[Pág. 11]patio melancólico; y Tom tronó ante una puerta de vestíbulo alta y estrecha, entre pilastras astilladas y gastadas de la misma piedra blanca, coronada por una heráldica tallada, medio borrada.

De pie en lo alto de los escalones tuvo que repetir su llamado, hasta que la cavernosa mansión vieja retumbó con el eco, antes de que una luz indicara la aproximación de un ser vivo para saludarlos.

Tom abrió la puerta del carruaje y bajó los escalones, tal vez un poco torpemente, pero estaba cumpliendo con sus deberes maravillosamente.

El grupo entró en el espacioso salón revestido de madera, en el que había un viejo banco de madera, en el que, al parecer, se sentó alegremente la enferma. Una gran puerta tallada se abría a un segundo vestíbulo o vestíbulo cuadrado, a través del cual el rayo de la única vela miraba con oscuridad y tocaba los macizos pasamanos de una amplia escalera.

Esta debe haber sido la casa de un gran hombre en su día, un Lord Canciller, tal vez, una de esas mansiones hogarthianas en las que hombres como mi Lord Squanderfield podrían haber vivido en los primeros días de George.

"¿Cómo pudo un hombre haber sido tan idiota", pensó Sedley, lleno de momentáneo asombro, "como para construir un palacio como este en un lugar así?"

"¡Dios mío! ¡Qué lugar, qué extraño[Pág. 12] lugar! "susurró la señora mayor," ¿adónde vamos a ir? "

"Arriba, por favor", dijo la mujer con un candelabro de latón en la mano.

"Espero que haya fuego, más luz y ... ¿y el consuelo adecuado allí?"

"¡Oh! Sí, por favor; todo lo que quieras, por favor."

"Ven, querida", dijo tiernamente la anciana, dando su brazo a la lánguida figura que descansaba en el pasillo.

Así que, guiados e iluminados por la criada, la siguieron por la gran escalera del pozo.

[Pág. 13]

CAPITULO DOS.

UNA NUEVA VOZ.

LAS damas subieron, conducidas por la doncella con la vela, y seguidas de cerca por su propio criado, y nuestro amigo Tom Sedley iba detrás, tirando de la caja y la bolsa con él.

En la escalera había una gran galería desde la que se abrían muchas puertas. Tom Sedley se detuvo junto a la barandilla para recibir órdenes y depositó su equipaje a su lado. La criada dejó la vela sobre una mesa y abrió una de estas puertas altas, a través de la cual vio un ángulo del apartamento, un fuego ardiendo en la rejilla y un agradable esplendor de velas; Vio que el piso estaba alfombrado y las ventanas con cortinas, y aunque sólo se veía una esquina de una habitación grande, se veían muebles que indicaban comodidad general.

En un gran sillón, al otro lado de la chimenea, estaba sentada la dama que lo había emocionado con un repentino recuerdo. Ella se había retirado[Pág. 14]el chal que colgaba en forma de capucha sobre su cabeza, y ya no había duda. Allí estaba la Beatrice Cenci, su Guido, muy pálida, agonizante, pensó ella, con sus manos blancas entrelazadas y sus hermosos ojos vueltos hacia arriba en una agonía de oración.

La anciana, la señorita Sheckleton, se acercó, se inclinó sobre ella, la besó tiernamente y acarició con suavidad su rico cabello castaño sobre sus sienes, le habló suavemente al oído, levantó la mano entre las suyas, la besó y dibujó. en una silla cercana a la de ella, se sentó a su lado, murmurando en su oído con un rostro de tal bondad y compasión, que Tom Sedley la amaba por eso.

La señorita Sheckleton miró hacia arriba y observó que la puerta se abría, y Tom creyó que lo percibía en la perspectiva a través de ella, porque ella se levantó de repente, la cerró y él no vio más. Tom no había descubierto en la mirada de la anciana ningún signo de reconocimiento y, en aras de las apariencias, se había

abrochado la bata gris sobre el cuello y el pecho para ocultar las evidencias de su traje de baile; sus botas relucientes, sin embargo, eran dolorosamente llamativas, pero para esa incongruencia no había ayuda.

Y ahora el criado que les había dejado entrar le dijo a Tom que llevara la caja y la bolsa a la habitación de los criados, adonde ella lo condujo a través de la galería.[Pág. 15]

There was a large fire, which was pleasant, a piece of matting on the floor, a few kitchen utensils ranged near the fire-place, a deal table, and some common kitchen chairs. Dismal enough would the room have looked, notwithstanding its wainscoting, had it not been for the glow diffused by the fire.

By this fire, on a kitchen chair, and upon his own opera hat, which he wished specially to suppress, sat Tom Sedley, resolved to see his adventure one hour or so into futurity, before abandoning it, and getting home to his bed, and in the meantime doing his best to act a servant, as he fancied such a functionary would appear in his moments of ease unbending in the kitchen or the servants' hall. The maid who had received the visitors in the hall, Anne Evans by name, square, black-haired, slightly pitted with smallpox, and grave, came and sat down at the other side of the fire, and eyed Tom Sedley in silence.

Now and then Tom felt uncomfortably about his practical joke, which was degenerating into a deception. But an hour or so longer could not matter much; and might he not make himself really useful if the services of a messenger were required?

Anne Evans was considering him in silence,[Pg 16] and he turned a little more toward the fire, and poked it, as he fancied a groom would poke a fire for his private comfort.

"Are you servant to the ladies?" at last she asked.

Tom smiled at the generality of the question, but interpreting in good faith—

"No," said he, "I came with the carriage."

"Servant to the gentleman?" she asked.

"What gentleman?"

"You know well."

Tom had not an idea, but could not well say so. He therefore poked the fire again, and said, "Go on, miss; I'm listening."

She did not go on, however, for some time, and then it was to say—

"My name is Anne Evans. What may your name be?"

"Can't tell that. I left my name at home," said Tom, mysteriously.

"Won't tell?"

"Can't."

"I'm only by the month. Come in just a week to-morrow," observed Anne Evans.

"They'll not part with you in a month, Miss Evans. No; they has some taste and feelin' among them. I wouldn't wonder if you was here for ever!" said Tom, with enthusiasm;[Pg 17] "and what's this place, miss—this house I mean—whose house is it?"

"Can't say, only I hear it's bought for a brewery, to be took down next year."

"Oh, criky!" said Tom; "that's a pity."

There was a short pause.

"I saw you 'ide your 'at," said Anne Evans.

"Not 'ide it," said Tom; "only sits on it—always sits on my 'at."

Tom produced it, let it bounce up like a jack-in-a-box, and shut it down again.

Miss Evans was neither amused nor surprised.

"Them's hopera 'ats—first quality—they used to come in boxes on 'em, as long as from here to you, when I was at Mr. Potterton's, the hatter. Them's for gents—they air—and not for servants."

"The gov'nor gives me his old uns," said Tom, producing the best fib he could find.

"And them French boots," she added, meditatively.

"Perquisite likewise," said Tom.

Miss Anne Evans closed her eyes, and seemed disposed to take a short nap in her chair. But on a sudden she opened them to say—

"I think you're the gentleman himself."

"The old gentleman?" said Tom.

"No. The young un."[Pg 18]

"I'm jest what I tell you, not objectin' to the compliment all the same," said Tom.

"And a ring on your finger?"

"A ring on my finger—yes. I wear it two days in the week. My grand-uncle's ring, who was a gentleman, being skipper of a coal brig."

"What's the lady's name?"

"Can't tell, Miss Evans; dussn't."

"Fuss about nothin'!" said she, and closed her eyes again, and opened them in a minute more, to add, "but I think you're him, and that's *my* belief."

"No, I ain't miss, as you'll see, by-and-by."

"Tisn't nothin' to me, only people *is* so close."

The door opened, and a tall woman in black, with a black net cap on, came quietly but quickly into the room.

"You're the man?" said she, with an air of authority, fixing her eyes askance on Tom.

"Yes 'm, please."

"Well, you don't go on no account, for you'll be wanted just now."

"No, ma'am."

"Where's the box and bag you're in charge of?"

"Out here," said Tom.

"Hish, man, quiet; don't you know there's sickness? Walk easy, *can't* you? *please*, consider."

Tom followed her almost on tip-toe to the spot where the parcels lay.[Pg 19]

"Gently now; into this room, please," and she led the way into that sitting-room into which Tom Sedley had looked some little time since, from the stair-head.

The beautiful young lady was gone, but Miss Sheckleton was standing at the further door of the room with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised in prayer, and her pale cheeks wet with tears.

Hearing the noise, she gently closed the door, and hastily drying her eyes, whispered, "Set them down *there*," pointing to a sofa, on which Tom placed them accordingly. "Thanks—that will do. You may go."

When Sedley had closed the door—

"Oh, Mrs. Graver," whispered Anne Sheckleton, clasping her wrists in her trembling fingers, "is she *very* ill?"

"Well, ma'am, she *is* ill."

"But, oh, my God, you don't think we are going to lose her?" she whispered wildly, with her imploring gaze in the nurse's eyes.

"Oh, no, please God, ma'am, it will all be right. You must not fuss yourself, ma'am. You must not let her see you like this, on no account."

"¿Debo llamarlo ahora?"

"No, señora; él solo estaría en el camino. *Le* diré cuándo; y su hombre está aquí, listo para partir,[Pág. 20]en cualquier momento. Debo volver con ella ahora, señora. ¡Hish! "

Y la Sra. Graver desapareció con un leve roce de su vestido y ningún sonido de pasos. Ese pájaro solemne flotaba silenciosamente alrededor de las camas de los enfermos, y sólo se oía, por así decirlo, el batir de sus alas.

Y luego, en un minuto más, entró la señorita Sheckleton, después de secarse los ojos con mucho cuidado.

Y ahora se oyó un fuerte golpe en la puerta del pasillo, que resonó sordamente en la casa. Era el doctor Grimshaw, que acababa de quitarse el abrigo y estaba dando cuerda a su reloj, cuando esta citación lo llamó desde su propia cama, y también estaba aquí después de un largo día de trabajo, para empezar de nuevo y Espera el amanecer en esta cámara de dolor.

Entró, y la señorita Sheckleton sintió que la luz y la esperanza entraron en la habitación con él. Florido, corpulento, afable, de paso ligero y esperanzador, de modales buenos, decididos y joviales, inspiraba confianza y parecía hacerse cargo, no sólo del caso, sino de la dolencia misma.

La señorita Sheckleton conocía a este buen médico y le estrechó la mano con gusto; y la reconoció con una mirada vacilante que parecía hacer una pregunta, pero no estaba destinado a hacerlo, y habló alegremente con la paciente, y le dio sus instrucciones a la enfermera, y en aproximadamente media hora le dijo más.[Pág. 21] buena Anne Sheckleton que sería mejor que dejara al paciente.

Así, con la docilidad que inspira un médico capaz, la buena Anne Sheckleton obedeció, y en la habitación contigua, a veces rezando, a veces de pie y escuchando, a veces vagando de un punto a otro, en la más mínima inquietud, esperó y observó durante más de un minuto. hora, que le pareció más larga que una noche entera, y finalmente llamó muy suavemente a la puerta, habiendo

llegado un momento de calma en la habitación del enfermo, y no pudiendo soportar más su suspenso.

Se abrió un poco de la puerta y Anne Sheckleton vio el lado de la nariz recta de la señora Graver, uno de sus ojos arrugados y su boca sombría.

"¿Como es ella?" susurró la señorita Sheckleton, sintiéndose como si ella misma estuviera a punto de morir.

—Bastante bien, señora —respondió la enfermera, pero con una espantosa mirada de falta de sinceridad, bajo la cual el corazón de la anciana se hundió y se hundió, como si se hubiera hundido.

"Una palabra para el Dr. Grimshaw", susurró, con labios blancos.

"No *puede* , señora", murmuró la enfermera, severamente, ya punto de cerrarle la puerta en la cara.

"Espera, *espera* ", susurró la voz del amable y viejo doctor Grimshaw, y entró en la siguiente[Pág. 22] habitación para la señorita Sheckleton, cerrando la puerta tras él.

"¡Oh, doctor!" ella jadeó.

"Bueno, señorita Sheckleton, espero que le vaya muy bien; le acabo de dar algo, un ligero estimulante, y tengo plena confianza en que todo saldrá bien. No se sienta incómoda, no está sucediendo. mal."

—Oh, doctor Grimshaw, ¿debo llamarlo? Él nunca me perdonará; y le prometí, querida Margaret, que lo enviaría.

" *No lo* envíe, bajo *ninguna cuenta* todavía. No lo traiga aquí, está mejor lejos. Le diré cuándo enviar".

El doctor abrió la puerta.

"¿Sigues callado?"

"Sí, señor", susurró la Sra. Graver.

De nuevo cerró la puerta.

—Parece una criatura agradable. ¿Pariente tuyo? preguntó el Doctor.

"Mi primo."

"¿Cuándo se casó?"

"Hace un año."

"¿Nunca alguna tendencia al consumo?"

"Nunca."

"¿Nada que la haga sentir baja o débil? ¿Está histérica?"

"No, apenas eso, pero nervioso y excitable."[Pág. 23]

"Lo sé; muy bien. Creo que le irá muy bien. Si algo sale mal, te lo haré saber. Ahora quédate en silencio."

Y cerró la puerta, y ella escuchó sus pasos moverse suavemente sobre el piso de la habitación contigua, tan grande era el silencio; y ella se arrodilló y oró mientras la gente indefensa ora en terrible peligro; y pasó más tiempo, y más, lentamente, muy lentamente. Oh, ¿llegaría alguna vez el amanecer y volvería la luz del día?

Voices and moans she heard from the room. Again she prayed on her knees to the throne of mercy, in the agony of her suspense, and now over the strange roofs spread the first faint gray of the coming dawn; and there came a silence in the room, and on a sudden was heard a new tiny voice crying.

"The little child!" cried old Anne Sheckleton, springing to her feet, with clasped hands, in the anguish of delight, and such a gush of tears—as she looked up, thanking God with her smiles—as comes only in such moments.

Margaret's clear voice faintly said something; Anne could not hear what.

"A boy," answered the cheery voice of Doctor Grimshaw.

"Oh! he'll be so glad!" answered the faint clear voice in a kind of rapture.[Pg 24]

"Of course he will," replied the same cheery voice. And another question came, too low for old Anne Sheckleton's ears.

"A *beautiful* boy! as fine a fellow as you could desire to look at. Bring him here, nurse."

"Oh! the darling!" said the same faint voice. "I'm so *happy*."

"Thank God! thank God! thank God!" sobbed delighted Anne Sheckleton, her cheeks still streaming in showers of tears as she stood waiting at the door for the moment of admission, and hearing the sweet happy tones of Margaret's voice sounding in her ears like the voice of one who had just now died, heard faintly through the door of heaven.

For thus it has been, and thus to the end, it will be—the "sorrow" of the curse is remembered no more, "for joy that a man is born into the world."

[Pg 25]

CHAPTER III.

CLEVE COMES.

TOM SEDLEY was dozing in his chair, by the fire, when he was roused by Mrs. Graver's voice.

"You'll take this note at once, please, to your master; there's a cab at the door, and the lady says you mustn't make no delay."

It took some seconds to enable Tom to account for the scene, the actor and his own place of repose, his costume, and the tenor of the strange woman's language. In a little while, however, he recovered the context, and the odd passage in his life became intelligible.

Still half asleep, Tom hurried down-stairs, and in the hall, with a shock, read the address, "Cleve Verney, Esq." At the hall-door steps he found a cab, into which he jumped, telling the man to drive to Cleve Verney's lodgings.

There were expiring lights in the drawing-room, the blinds of which were up, and as the[Pg 26] cab stopped at the steps a figure appeared at one of the windows, and Cleve Verney opened it, and told the driver, "Don't mind knocking, I'll go down."

"Come up-stairs," said Cleve, as he stood at the open door, addressing Sedley, and mistaking him for the person whom he had employed.

Up ran Tom Sedley at his heels.

"Hollo! *Sedley*—what brings *you* here?" said Cleve, when Tom appeared in the light of the candles. "You don't mean to say the ball has been going on till now—or is it a scrape?"

"Nothing—only this I've been commissioned to give you," and he placed Miss Sheckleton's note in his hand.

Cleve had looked wofully haggard and anxious as Tom entered. But his countenance changed now to an ashy paleness, and there was no mistaking his extreme agitation.

He opened the note—a very brief one it seemed—and read it.

"Thank God!" he said with a great sigh, and then he walked to the window and looked out, and returned again to the candles and read the note once more.

"How did you know I was up, Tom?"

"The lights in the windows."

"Yes. Don't let the cab go."[Pg 27]

Cleve was getting on his coat, and speaking like a man in a dream.

"I say, Tom Sedley, how did *you* come by this note?" he said, with a sudden pause, and holding Miss Sheckleton's note in his fingers.

"Well, quite innocently," hesitated Sedley.

"How the devil was it, sir? Come, you may as well—by heaven, Sedley, you *shall* tell me the truth!"

Tom looked on his friend Cleve, and saw his eyes gleaming sharply on him, and his face very white.

"Of course I'll tell you, Cleve," said Tom, and with this exordium he stumbled honestly through his story, which by no means quieted Cleve Verney.

"¡Tú p ... el pequeño Paul Pry!" dijó el. —Bueno, ahora se ha apoderado de un secreto, como el hombre de la máscara de hierro, y por ... ... será mejor que lo guarde.

Un hombre que ya se culpa a sí mismo a medias, y se encuentra en una posición que odia y condena, soportará mucho más el lenguaje duro, e incluso la execración, que en cualquier otra circunstancia imaginable.

No puedes culparme ni la mitad de lo que me culpo a mí mismo. Te aseguro, Cleve, que lo siento muchísimo. Fue una simple broma, al principio, y luego[Pág. 28]—Cuando vi esa hermosa — esa jovencita— "

"No hables más de esa dama; soy su marido. *Ahí* lo tienes todo, y si se lo susurras a un mortal, puedes *arruinarme* ; ¡pero uno u otro de nosotros morirá por eso!"

Cleve hablaba en un estado de exasperación positiva.

—¡Susurra! ¡Dímelo! No me entiendes en lo más mínimo, Cleve —dijo Tom, recobrándose y volviéndose un poco altivo; "No susurro ni digo cosas; y en cuanto a atrevimiento o no atrevimiento, no sé a qué te refieres; y espero que, si llegara la ocasión de *morir* , me fiera tan poco como cualquier otro".

"Voy a este maldito lugar ahora. No me importa mucho lo que hagas: casi desearía que me dispararas".

Golpeó la mesa con la mano, no mirando a Tom Sedley, sino con una rabia demacrada a través de la ventana y hacia el este gris; y sin decirle nada más a Sedley, bajó corriendo y cerró la puerta del vestíbulo con un estruendo que mostró más su temperamento que su prudencia, y Tom lo vio saltar al taxi y alejarse.

La distancia es realmente considerable, pero en el intenso ensueño de Cleve el tiempo y el espacio se contrajeron, y antes de que él imaginara que habían logrado la mitad[Pág. 29] En el camino, se encontró en la puerta alta y pilastras y escalones manchados de la vieja casa de ladrillos rojos.

Anne Evans, medio despierta, esperaba su llegada en los escalones. Subió corriendo las escaleras, bajo su encubierto escrutinio; y, en obediencia al gesto de advertencia de la Sra. Graver, cuando ella lo recibió con la mano levantada y su ceño fruncido "Hish" en la parte superior de las escaleras, frenó el paso y en un susurro hizo sus ansiosas preguntas. Ella iba muy bien.

"Debo ver a la señorita Sheckleton, la anciana, ¿dónde está?" instó Cleve.

"Aquí, señor, por favor" —y la Sra. Graver abrió una puerta, y encontró a la cansada Miss Sheckleton atándose el sombrero y cubriéndose con la capa.

—¡Oh! Cleve, querido —ahora lo llamaba Cleve—, estoy tan encantada; le está yendo *muy* bien; el médico está bastante *satisfecho* con ella, y es un niño, Cleve, y ... y le deseo alegría con todo mi corazón."

Y mientras hablaba, la amable anciana le estrechaba ambas manos y le sonreía a su hermoso rostro, como la luz del sol; pero ese hermoso rostro, aunque sonreía oscuramente sobre ella, le parecía extrañamente triste e incluso preocupado.[Pág. 30]

—Y Cleve, querido, mi *querido* señor Verney, *lo* siento mucho, pero debo irme de inmediato. Le preparo el chocolate por la mañana, y a veces lo pide a las siete y media. Este miserable ataque que ha él aquí, y el riesgo en el que se encuentra en todos los días que se quede en esta ciudad, que *es tan* molesto y si no debería estar en casa y listo para verlo cuando él llama, que estaría seguro de algo sospechoso.; y realmente no veo nada más que la ruina de su temperamento y violencia hacia todos nosotros, si supiera cómo es. Así que adiós, y que Dios los bendiga. El médico dice que cree que puede verla en muy poco tiempo. tiempo, media hora más o menos, si tienes mucho cuidado de no dejar que se excite o se agite; y, que Dios te bendiga, estaré de regreso, por un rato, en una o dos horas ".

De modo que desapareció aquella anciana bondadosa, agitada, preocupada y feliz; y Cleve se quedó de nuevo con sus meditaciones.

"¿Dónde está el doctor?" preguntó Cleve al criado.

—En la sala de estar, por favor, señor, escribiendo; ha llegado su carruaje, señor, por favor.

Y diciendo esto, la señora Anne Evans abrió oficiosamente la puerta y entró Cleve. El médico, que había escrito una receta y acababa de dejar la pluma, se estaba poniendo el guante.[Pág. 31]

Cleve no tenía idea de que iba a ver al doctor Grimshaw. Él y la señorita Sheckleton habían acordado otro médico con el que no conocía. Sin embargo, resultó que ese caballero se encontraba ahora de viaje en una interesante visita, en una mansión de campo, y el doctor Grimshaw fue convocado inesperadamente.

Cleve se sorprendió desagradablemente, porque ya conocía a ese buen hombre, y creía que no estaba registrado en su memoria en su haber. Creo que si el ojo del médico no se hubiera dirigido hacia la puerta cuando entró, Cleve Verney se habría retirado; pero eso no serviría ahora.

"¿Doctor Grimshaw?" dijo Cleve.

"Sí señor;" dijo el anciano caballero.

"Creo, doctor Grimshaw, ¿me conoce?"

"Oh, sí, señor; por supuesto que sí"; dijo el doctor, con una sonrisa incómoda, un poco amarga, y una leve reverencia, "Sr. Verney, sí". Y el médico hizo una pausa, mirándolo, poniéndose el otro guante y esperando una pregunta.

Me han dicho que su paciente, el doctor Grimshaw, está muy bien.

"Nicely, sir—very nicely now. I was a little uncomfortable about her just at one time, but[Pg 32] doing very well now; and it's a boy—a fine child. Good morning, sir."

He had taken up his hat.

"And Doctor Grimshaw, just one word. May I beg, as a matter of professional *honour*, that this—all this, shall be held as strictly *secret*—everything connected with it as strictly confidential?"

The doctor looked down on the carpet with a pained countenance. "Certainly, sir," he said, drily. "That's all, I suppose? Of course, Mr. Verney, I shan't—since such I suppose to be the wish of all parties—mention the case."

"Of *all* parties, certainly; and it is in tenderness to others, not to myself, that I make the request."

"I'm sorry it should be necessary, sir;" said Doctor Grimshaw, almost sternly. "I know Miss Sheckleton and her family; this poor young lady, I understand, is a cousin of hers. I am *sorry*, sir, upon her account, that any mystery should be desirable."

"It *is* desirable, and, in fact, *indispensable*, sir," said Cleve, a little stiffly, for he did not see what right that old doctor had to assume a lecturer's tone toward him.

"No one shall be compromised by me, sir," said the doctor, with a sad and offended bow.[Pg 33]

Y el Doctor condujo a casa bastante cansado. Me temo que a Cleve no le importaba mucho a quién podía comprometer, siempre que él mismo estuviera seguro. Pero incluso de él mismo se ocultaba el egoísmo absoluto, que tonificaba un carácter lo suficientemente apasionado e impetuoso como para simular inconscientemente las gracias de la magnanimidad y la ternura.

Cleve imaginaba que las preocupaciones que se apoderaban de su espíritu eran para Margaret, y cuando a veces casi lamentaba su matrimonio, que su remordimiento era principalmente por ella, que toda su precaución y delicadeza eran exigidas por su devoción a los intereses de su joven esposa. y que el largo sistema de misterio y engaño, bajo el cual suspiraba su espíritu orgulloso y franco, se practicaba únicamente para su beneficio.

Así que Cleve era en su propia mente una especie de héroe: abnegado, dispuesto, si era necesario, a liberarse, por amor a su amor y su libertad, de todas las intoxicaciones y enervamientos de su vida inglesa, y *fortis colonus* , para cavar el glebe de Canadá o esquilar las ovejas de Australia. No era consciente de que todas estas eran quimeras de la falta de sinceridad, que la ambición era el aliento de sus narices y que su ídolo era ... él mismo.

Y si se equivoca a sí mismo, no lo confundan los demás también, y vístalo de la nobleza[Pág. 34]de su propia adoración? ¿Será que las luces, la música y el incienso que lo rodean no sean más que tributos de una hermosa superstición, y que el ídolo en medio sea frío y mudo?

Cleve, para hacerle justicia, se emocionó en esta ocasión. Él hizo, ¿debo decir? - anhelo contemplarla de nuevo. Hubo un resurgimiento de la ternura, y esperó con verdadera impaciencia para verla.

La vio, solo un pequeño destello de luz en la habitación a oscuras; se paró junto a la cama, estrechando esa hermosa mano que Dios le había encomendado, sonriendo en ese hermoso rostro que sonreía de nuevo amor indecible en el suyo.

—¡Oh! Cleve, cariño ... ¡oh, Cleve! Estoy tan feliz.

Las manos lánguidas se cruzan sobre las suyas, los ojos anhelantes, y la sonrisa, miran hacia arriba. Es como el encuentro de la amada después de un naufragio.

Y mira, Cleve; y con un leve movimiento de la mano, ella retira una colcha de seda, y él ve en un sueño profundo a un bebé, y la hermosa sonrisa de la joven maternidad cae sobre él como una bendición y una caricia. "¿No es un amor? ¡ *Pobrecita* ! ¡Qué tranquilo duerme!"[Pág. 35]Creo que es la cosita más querida que jamás se haya visto: ¡ *nuestro* pequeño bebé! "

¿Hay algo más bonito que la joven madre sonriendo, en esta hora de su huida, sobre el tesoro que ha encontrado? El don maravilloso, a la vista del cual brota una nueva fuente de amor, que nunca, mientras permanece la vida, deja de fluir. Al contemplar semejante espectáculo en silencio, creo que escucho los pies de los ángeles alrededor de la cama; creo que veo sus hermosos ojos sonriendo en el rostro del pequeño mortal y sus benditas manos levantadas sobre la cabeza de la hermosa y joven madre. .

[Pág. 36]

CAPITULO IV.

EL REMORDIMIENTO DEL AMOR

"Enséñame, arboledas, algún arte para aliviar mi dolor,Algunos resentimientos suaves que pueden no dejar manchaPor su amado nombre, y luego me quejaré ".

PRÓXIMO El día, después de la cena, Lord Verney le dijo a Cleve, mientras estaban sentados los dos solos: "Te vi anoche en casa de Lady Dorminster. Te vi ... sobre eso. Me parece que vas a demasiados lugares, con la Casa para asistir a; te quedas demasiado tiempo; uno puede mirar adentro, ya sabes. A veces uno se encuentra con una persona; tuve una conversación muy interesante anoche, por

ejemplo, con el embajador de Francia. Nadie capta mejor una indirecta; son muy buenos oyentes, los franceses, y esa es la forma en que recogen tanta información y opiniones, y cosas así. Me tomé una taza de té y hablamos de ello durante media hora, hasta que tuve bien las ideas delante de él. Un hombre muy capaz, una persona brillante, y parecía ... parecía ir conmigo ... al respecto ... y muy bien informado sobre nuestra historia ... y cosas ... y ... y ... mirándote, me sorprendió ... tú. estás buscando un buen trato cortado,[Pág. 37]sobre eso — y — y como si estuvieras haciendo demasiado. Y dije, ya sabes, debes mirar a tu alrededor y ver si hay algún joven que te guste, que sea adecuado, y ese tipo de cosas; pero sabes que no debes fatigarte, y no quiero apresurarte; sólo es un paso que debe dar con miras a fortalecer su posición, en última instancia. Y —y — escuché que es demasiado tarde para pensar en Ethel — eso habría sido muy lindo, me sorprendió; pero eso ahora está fuera de discusión, tengo entendido; de hecho, es cierto, aunque el mundo aún no lo sepa; y por lo tanto debemos considerar alguna otra alianza; y no veo ninguna prisa muy violenta. Debemos mirar alrededor ... y ... y ... querrás algo de dinero, Cleve, cuando hayas tomado una decisión.

"Siempre eres demasiado bueno", dijo Cleve.

—Yo ... quiero decir con tu *esposa* ... sobre eso; y Lord Verney tosió un poco. "Nunca hay ningún daño en un poco de dinero; cuanto más obtienes, más puedes hacer. Siempre fui de esa opinión. El conocimiento es poder y el dinero es poder, aunque de diferentes maneras; esa fue siempre mi idea. Sin embargo, en este momento, en particular, lo que quiero dejar claro en su mente es que no hay nada muy urgente en cuanto al tiempo; podemos permitirnos un poco de tiempo. El lema de Onslow, usted[Pág. 38]lo sé, *lo* transmite, y tu madre estaba relacionada con los Onslow ".

It would not be easy to describe how the words of his noble uncle relieved Cleve Verney. Every sentence lifted a load from his burthen, or cut asunder some knot in the cordage of his bonds. He had not felt so much at ease since his hated conversation with Lord Verney in the library.

Not very long after this, Cleve made the best speech by many degrees he had ever spoken—a really forcible reply upon a subject he had very carefully made up, of which, in fact, he was a master. His uncle was very much pleased, and gave his hearers to understand pretty distinctly from what fountain he had drawn his inspiration, and promised them better things still, now that he had got him fairly in harness, and had him into his library, and they put their heads together; and he thought his talking with him a little did him no harm, Cleve's voice was so good, he could make himself heard—you must be able to reach their ears or you can hardly hope to make an impression; and Lord Verney's physician insisted on his sparing his throat.

So Lord Verney was pleased. Cleve was Lord Verney's throat, and the throat emitted good speeches, and everyone knew where the head was.[Pg 39] Not that Cleve was deficient; but Cleve had very unusual advantages.

Tom Sedley and Cleve were on rather odd terms now. Cleve kept up externally their old intimacy when they met. But he did not seek him out in those moods which used to call for honest Tom Sedley, when they ran down the river together to Greenwich, when Cleve was lazy, and wanted to hear the news, and say what he liked, and escape from criticism of every kind, and enjoy himself indolently.

For Verney now there was a sense of constraint wherever Tom Sedley was. Even in Tom's manner there was a shyness. Tom had learned a secret, which he had not confided to him. He knew he was safe in Tom Sedley's hands. Still he was in his power, and Sedley knew it, and that galled his pride, and made an estrangement.

In the early May, "when winds are sweet though they unruly be," Tom Sedley came down again to Cardyllian. Miss Charity welcomed him with her accustomed emphasis upon the Green. How very pretty Agnes looked. But how cold her ways had grown.

He wished she was not so pretty—so *beautiful*, in fact. It pained him, and somehow he had grown strange with her; and she was changed, grave, and silent, rather, and, as it seemed, care[Pg 40]less quite whether he was there or not, although he could never charge her with positive unkindness, much less with rudeness. He wished she would be rude. He would have liked to upbraid her. But her gentle, careless cruelty was a torture that justified no complaint, and admitted no redress.

He could talk volubly and pleasantly enough for hours with Charity, not caring a farthing whether he pleased her or not, and thinking only whether Agnes, who sat silent at her work, liked his stories and was amused by his fun; and went away elated for a whole night and day because a joke of his had made her laugh. Never had Tom felt more proud and triumphant in all his days.

But when Charity left the room to see old Vane Etherage in the study, a strange silence fell upon Tom. You could hear each stitch of her tambour-work. You could hear Tom's breathing. He fancied she might hear the beating of his heart. He was ashamed of his silence. He could have been eloquent had he spoken from that loaded heart. But he dare not, and failing this he must be silent.

By this time Tom was always thinking of Agnes Etherage, and wondering at the perversity of fate. He was in love. He could not cheat himself into any evasion of that truth—a tyrant[Pg 41] truth that had ruled him mercilessly; and there was she

pining for love of quite another, and bestowing upon him, who disdained it, all the treasure of her heart, while even a look would have been cherished with gratitude by Sedley.

What was the good of his going up every day to Hazelden, Tom Sedley thought, to look at her, and talk to Charity, and laugh, and recount entertaining gossip, and make jokes, and be agreeable, with a heavy and strangely suffering heart, and feel himself every day more and more in love with her, when he knew that the sound of Cleve's footsteps, as he walked by, thinking of himself, would move her heart more than all Tom Sedley, adoring her, could say in his lifetime?

What a fool he was! Before Cleve appeared she was fancy free; no one else in the field, and his opportunities unlimited. He had lapsed his time, and occasion had spread its wings and flown.

"What beautiful sunshine! What do you say to a walk on the Green?" said Tom to Charity, and listening for a word from Agnes. She raised her pretty eyes and looked out, but said nothing.

"Yes. I think it would be very nice; and there is no wind. What do *you* say, Agnes?"

"I don't know. I'm lazy to-day, I think, and I have this to finish," said Agnes.

"But you ought to take a walk, Agnes; it[Pg 42] would do you good; and Thomas Sedley and I are going for a walk on the Green."

"Pray, do," pleaded Tom, timidly.

Agnes smiled and shook her head, looking out of the window, and, making no other answer, resumed her work.

"You are *very* obstinate," remarked Charity.

"Yes, and lazy, like the donkeys on the Green, where you are going; but you don't want me particularly—I mean *you*, Charrie—and Mr. Sedley, I know, will excuse me, for I really feel that it would tire me to-day. It would tire me to death," said Agnes, winding up with an emphasis.

"Well, *I'll* go and put on my things, and if you *like* to come you *can* come, and if you don't you can stay where you are. But I wish you would not be a fool. It is a beautiful day, and nothing on earth to prevent you."

"I don't like the idea of a walk to-day. I know I should feel tired immediately, and have to bring you back again; and I've really grown interested in this little bit of work, and I feel as if I must finish it to-day."

"Why *need* you finish it to-day? You *are* such a goose, Agnes," said Charity, marching out of the room.

Tom remained there standing, his hat in his[Pg 43] hand, looking out of the window—longing to speak, his heart being full, yet not knowing how to begin, or how to go on if he had begun.

Agnes worked on diligently, and looked out from the window at her side over the shorn grass and flower-beds, through the old trees in the foreground—over the tops of the sloping forest, with the back-ground of the grand Welsh mountains, and a glimpse of the estuary, here and there, seen through the leaves, stretching far off, in dim gold and gray.

"You like that particular window," said Tom, making a wonderful effort; "I mean, why do you like always to sit there?" He spoke in as careless a way as he could, looking still out of his window, which commanded a different view.

"This window! oh, my frame stands here always, and when one is accustomed to a particular place, it puts one out to change."

Then Agnes dropped her pretty eyes again to her worsted, and worked and hummed very faintly a little air, and Tom's heart swelled within him, and he hummed as faintly the same gay air.

"I thought perhaps you liked that view?" said Tom Sedley, arresting the music.

She looked out again.

"Well, it's very pretty."

"The best from these windows; some people[Pg 44] think, I believe, the prettiest view you have," said Tom, gathering force, "the water is always so pretty."

"Yes, the water," she assented listlessly.

"Quite a romantic view," continued Sedley, a little bitterly.

"Yes, every pretty view *is* romantic," she acquiesced, looking out for a moment again. "If one knew exactly what *romantic* means—it's a word we use so often, and so vaguely."

"And can't you define it, Agnes?"

"Define it? I really don't think I could."

"Well, that does surprise me."

"You are so much more clever than I, of course it does."

"No, quite the contrary; you are clever—I'm serious, I assure you—and I'm a dull fellow, and I know it quite well—*I* can't define it; but *that* doesn't surprise me."

"Then we are both in the same case; but I won't allow it's stupidity—the idea is quite undefinable, and that is the real difficulty. You can't describe the perfume of a violet, but you know it quite well, and I really think flowers a more interesting subject than romance."

"Oh, really! not, surely, than the romance of *that* view. It *is* so romantic!"

"You seem quite in love with it," said she,[Pg 45] with a little laugh, and began again with a grave face to stitch in the glory of her saint in celestial yellow worsted.

"The water—yes—and the old trees of Ware, and just that tower, at the angle of the house."

Agnes just glanced through her window, but said nothing.

"I think," said Sedley, "if *I* were peopling this scene, you know, I should put my hero in that Castle of Ware—that is, if I could invent a romance, which, of course, I couldn't." He spoke with a meaning, I think.

"Why should there be heroes in romances?" asked Miss Agnes, looking nevertheless toward Ware, with her hand and the needle resting idly upon the frame. "Don't you think a romance ought to resemble reality a little; and do you ever find such a monster as a hero in the world? *I* don't expect to see one, I know," and she laughed again, but Tom thought, a little bitterly, and applied once more diligently to her work, and hummed a few bars of her little air again.

And Tom, standing now in the middle of the room, leaning on the back of a chair, by way of looking still upon the landscape which they had been discussing, was really looking, unobserved, on her, and thinking that there was not in all the world so pretty a creature.[Pg 46]

Charity opened the door, equipped for the walk, and bearing an alpaca umbrella, such as few gentlemen would like to walk with in May Fair.

"Well, you won't come, I see. I think you are very obstinate. Come, Thomas Sedley. Good-bye, Agnes;" and with these words the worthy girl led forth my friend Tom, and as they passed the corner of the house, he saw Agnes standing in the window, looking out sadly, with her fingertips against the pane.

"She's lonely, poor little thing!" thought he, with a pang. "Why wouldn't she come? Listlessness—apathy, I suppose. How selfish and odious any trifling with a girl's affections is;" and then aloud to Charity, walking by her side, he

continued, "You have not seen Cleve since the great day of Lord Verney's visit, I suppose?"

"No, nothing of him, and don't desire to see him. He has been the cause of a great deal of suffering, as you see, and I think he has behaved *odiously*. She's very odd; she doesn't choose to confide in me. I don't think it's nice or kind of her, but, of course, it's her own affair; only this is plain to me, that she'll never think of any one else now but Cleve Verney."

"It's an awful pity," said Tom Sedley, quite sincerely.

They were walking down that steep and soli[Pg 47]tary road, by which Vane Etherage had made his memorable descent a few months since, now in deep shadow under the airy canopy of transparent leaves, and in total silence, except for the sounds, far below, of the little mill-stream struggling among the rocks.

"Don't you know Mr. Cleve Verney pretty well?"

"Intimately—that is, I *did*. I have not lately seen so much of him."

"And do you think, Thomas Sedley, that he will ever come forward?" said blunt Miss Charity.

"Well, I happen to know that Cleve Verney has no idea of anything of the kind. In fact, I should be deceiving you, if I did not say distinctly that I know he won't."

Tom iba a decir que *no puede* , pero se contuvo. Sin embargo, creo que no lamentó tener la oportunidad de testificar sobre este hecho y dejar a Cleve Verney fuera del campo de las conjeturas como posible candidato.

"Entonces debo decir", dijo la señorita Charity, sonrojándose alegremente, "que el señor Verney es un villano".

Desde esta posición fuerte, Tom no pudo desalojarla, y al descubrir que la protesta lo involucraba en un riesgo de clasificación similar, abandonó a Cleve a su suerte.[Pág. 48]

Caminaron arriba y abajo del Green hasta que la señorita Flood espió y arrestó a Charity Etherage, y se la llevó a una visita de filantropía en su carruaje, y Tom Sedley transfirió su cargo a la exigente e imperiosa señorita Flood; y se sintió extrañamente indignado con ella, y caminó por el Green, desilusionado y desamparado. ¿No era la hermana de Charity Agnes? Mientras caminaba con ella, podía hablar de Agnes. Todavía estaba en el halo de Hazelden y cerca de Agnes. Pero ahora estaba a la deriva, en la oscuridad. Se sentó, mirando hacia los bosques de las tierras altas que indicaban a Hazelden, y suspiró con un dolor

mucho más real del que jamás había suspirado hacia Malory; y pensó mal en entrometerse con la señorita Flood, que se había llevado a su compañera. Después de un tiempo, se alejó hacia Malory, con la intención de visitar a su vieja amiga Rebecca Mervyn y pensando en Agnes Etherage.

[Pág. 49]

CAPITULO V.

SEÑORA. EL SUEÑO DE MERVYN.

SE encontró, en poco tiempo, bajo las ventanas de la casa del mayordomo. La vieja Rebecca Mervyn estaba sentada en el banco junto a la puerta, manejando sus agujas de tejer; ella levantó los ojos al escuchar sus pasos.

"¡Ha, ha venido!" —dijo, poniendo las manos en las rodillas y clavando su mirada oscura y salvaje en él—, debería haberlo sabido, un sueño tan extraño debe haber tenido un significado.

—A veces lo han hecho, señora, creo. Espero que esté bastante bien, señora Mervyn.

"No, señor, no estoy bien."

"Lo siento mucho, realmente lo siento, señora", dijo Tom Sedley. "A menudo he pensado que este debe ser un lugar muy húmedo e insalubre, demasiado lleno de árboles; dicen que nada es más perjudicial para la salud. Seguro que estarías mucho mejor en cualquier otro lugar".

"En ningún otro lugar; mi próximo movimiento será el último. No me importa cuán pronto, señor."[Pág. 50]

"Reza, no te dejes llevar por el desánimo; no debes hacerlo", dijo Tom.

"Dígame qué es, señor; porque sé que ha venido a decirme algo".

—No, se lo aseguro; simplemente para preguntarle cómo está y si puedo serle de alguna utilidad.

"¡Oh, señor, de qué sirve? - *no* ."

¿Quieres que le dé algún mensaje a ese tipo, Dingwell? Te ruego que me utilices de cualquier forma que te parezca. He oído que está a punto de marcharse de Inglaterra de nuevo.

"Me alegro", exclamó la anciana. "¿Por qué lo digo? No me alegro de nada, pero estoy seguro de que es mejor. ¿Qué negocios podrían tener él, el señor Larkin y ese judío con mi hijo, que, gracias a Dios, está en el cielo y fuera del alcance de sus manos, manos *malvadas* , me atrevería a decir ".

"Así que prefiero pensar también, señora; y el Sr. Larkin lo intentó, ¿verdad?"

—Larkin; ... sí, ese era el nombre. Vino aquí, señor, sobre la vez que lo vi; y habló mucho de mi pobre hijito. Está muerto, ya sabe, pero no se lo dije. . Le prometí a Lady Verney que no le diría nada a los extraños; entonces todos se enojan. Creo que el Sr. Larkin estaba enojado. Pero yo no hablo, y usted me aconsejó que me callara, y aunque dijo que era su abogado , No respondería una palabra ".[Pág. 51]

"No tengo ninguna duda de que actuó con prudencia, señora Mervyn; no puede ser demasiado cautelosa al mantener una comunicación con esas personas".

—Se lo diría, señor, si me atrevo; pero lo he prometido, y no me *atrevo* . Hasta que la anciana Lady Verney se haya ido, no me atrevo. No sé nada de papeles legales, ¡pobrecita mía! ¿Yo? Y *ella* no podía entenderlos a medias. Así que se lo prometí. *Tú* los entenderías. Tiempo suficiente, tiempo suficiente ".

"Debería ser muy feliz, cuando quieras", dijo Tom, haciendo lista su erudición legal.

"Y usted, señor, ha venido a decirme algo, ¿qué es?"

"Le aseguro que no tengo nada en particular que decir; simplemente llamé para preguntar cómo está".

-Nada más innecesaria, señor; ¿cómo puede ser una pobre anciana solitaria, cuya última esperanza ha perecido y la ha dejado sola en el mundo? Durante veinte años, más, *más* de veinte, he estado mirando, día y noche; y ahora Señor, no miro más al mar. Nunca volveré a ver esos promontorios. Me siento aquí, señor, de un día para otro, pensando; y, oh, Dios mío, desearía que todo hubiera terminado ".

"Siempre que me quieras, debería ser muy feliz, y esta es mi dirección".

"¿Y no tienes nada que decirme?"[Pág. 52]

"No, señora, nada más de lo que dije."

"It was wonderful: I dreamed last night I was looking toward Pendillion, watching as I used; the moon was above the mountain, and I was standing by the water, so that the sea came up to my feet, and I saw a speck of white far away, and something told me it was his sail at last, and nearer and nearer, very fast it came; and I walked out in the shallow water, with my arms stretched out to meet it, and when it came very near, I saw it was Arthur himself coming upright in his shroud, his feet on the water, and with his feet, hands, and face, as white as snow, and his arms stretched to meet mine; and I felt I was going to die; and I covered my eyes with my hands, praying to God to receive me, expecting his touch; and I heard the rush of the water about his feet, and a voice—it was *yours*, not his—said, 'Look at me,' and I did look, and saw you, and you looked like a man that had been drowned—your face as white as his, and your clothes dripping, and sand in your hair; and I stepped back, saying, 'My God! how have you come here?' and you said, 'Listen, I have great news to tell you;' and I waked with a shock. I don't believe in dreams more I believe than other people, but this troubles me still."

"Well, thank God, I have had no accident by[Pg 53] land or by water," said Tom Sedley, smiling in spite of himself at the awful figure he cut in the old lady's vision; "and I have no news to tell, and I think it will puzzle those Jews and lawyers to draw me into their business, whatever it is. I don't like that sort of people; you need never be afraid of me, ma'am, I detest them."

"Afraid of *you*, sir! Oh no. You have been very kind. See, this view here is under the branches; you can't see the water from this, only those dark paths in the wood; and I walk round sometimes through that hollow and on the low road toward Cardyllian in the evening, when no one is stirring, just to the ash tree, from which you can see the old church and the churchyard; and oh! sir, I wish I were lying there."

"You must not be talking in that melancholy way, ma'am," said Tom, kindly; "I'll come and see you again if you allow me; I think you are a great deal too lonely here; you ought to go out in a boat, ma'am, and take a drive now and then, and just rattle about a little, and you can't think how much good it would do you; and—I must go—and I hope I shall find you a great deal better when I come back"—and with these words he took his leave, and as he walked along the low narrow road that leads by the inland track to Cardyllian, of which old Rebecca Mervyn spoke,[Pg 54] whom should he encounter but Miss Charity coming down the hill at a brisk pace with Miss Flood in that lady's pony-carriage. Smiling, hat in hand, he got himself well against the wall to let them pass; but the ladies drew up, and Miss Charity had a message to send home if he, Thomas Sedley, would be so good as to call at Jones's they would find a messenger, merely to tell Agnes

that she was going to dine with Miss Flood, and would not be home till seven o'clock.

So Tom Sedley undertook it; smiled and bowed his adieus, and then walked faster toward the town, and instead of walking direct to Mrs. Jones's, sauntered for a while on the Green, and bethought him what mistakes such messengers as Mrs. Jones could provide sometimes make, and so resolved himself to be Miss Charity's Mercury.

Sedley felt happier, with an odd kind of excited and unmeaning happiness, as he walked up the embowered steep toward Hazelden, than he had felt an hour or two before while walking down it. When he reached the little flowery platform of closely-mown grass, on which stands the pretty house of Hazelden, he closed the iron gate gently and looked toward the drawing-room windows that reach the grass, and felt a foolish flutter at his heart as he saw that the frame stood in Agnes's window without its mistress.[Pg 55]

"Reading now, I suppose," whispered Tom, as if he feared to disturb her. "She has changed her place and she is reading;" and he began to speculate whether she sat on the ottoman, or on the sofa, or in the cushioned arm-chair, with her novel in her hands. But his sidelong glances could not penetrate the panes, which returned only reflections of the sky or black shadow, excepting of the one object, the deserted frame which stood close to their surface.

There was a time, not long ago either, when Tom Sedley would have run across the grass to the drawing-room windows, and had he seen Agnes within would have made a semi-burglarious entry through one of them. But there had come of late, on a sudden, a sort of formality in his relations with Agnes; and so he walked round by the hall-door, and found the drawing-rooms empty, and touching the bell, learned that Miss Agnes had gone out for a walk.

"I've a message to give her from Miss Charity; have you any idea which way she went?"

He found himself making excuses to the servant for his inquiry. A short time since he would have asked quite frankly where she was, without dreaming of a reason; but now had grown, as I say, a reserve, which has always the more harmless incidents of guilt. He was apprehensive of sus[Pg 56]picion; he was shy even of this old servant, and was encountering this inquiry by an explanation of his motives.

"I saw her go by the beech-walk, sir," said the man.

"Oh! thanks; very good."

And he crossed the grass, and entered the beech-walk, which is broad and straight, with towering files of beech at each side, and a thick screen of underwood and evergreens, and turning the clump of rhododendrons at the entrance of the walk, he found himself, all on a sudden, quite close to Agnes, who was walking toward him.

She stopped. He fancied she changed colour: had she mistaken him for some one else?

"Well, Agnes, I see the sun and the flowers prevailed, though we couldn't; and I'm glad, at all events, that you have had a little walk."

"Oh! yes, after all, I couldn't really resist; and is Charity coming?"

"No, you are not to expect her till tea-time. She's gone with Miss Flood somewhere, and she sent me to tell you."

"Oh! thanks;" and Agnes hesitated, looking towards home, as if she intended returning.

"You may as well walk once more up and down; it does look so jolly, doesn't it?" said Tom; "pray do, Agnes."[Pg 57]

"Well, yes, once more I will; but that is all, for I really am a little tired."

They set out in silence, and Tom, with a great effort, said,—

"I wonder, Agnes, you seem so cold, I mean so unfriendly, with me; I think you do; and you must be quite aware of it; you must, *indeed*, Agnes. I *think* if you knew half the pain you are giving me—I really do—that you wouldn't."

The speech was very inartificial, but it had the merit of going direct to the point, and Miss Agnes began,—

"I haven't been at all unfriendly."

"Oh! but you *have—indeed* you have—you are quite *changed*. And I don't know what I have done—I wish you'd tell me—to deserve it; because—even if there was—another—anything—no matter what—I'm an old friend, and I think it's very unkind; *you* don't perceive it, perhaps, but you are awfully changed."

Agnes laughed a very little, and she answered, looking down on the walk before her, as Sedley thought, with a very pretty blush; and I believe there was.

"It is a very serious accusation, and I don't deserve it. No, indeed, and even if it were true, it rather surprises me that it should in the least interest you; because

we down here have seen so[Pg 58] little of you that we might very reasonably suspect that you had begun to forget us."

"Well, I *have* been an *awful* fool, it is quite true, and you have punished me, not more than I deserve; but I think you might have remembered that you had not on earth a better friend—I mean a more earnest one—particularly *you*, Agnes, than I."

"I really don't know what I have done," pleaded she, with another little laugh.

"I was here, you know, as intimate almost as a brother. I don't say, of course, there are not many things I had no right to expect to hear anything about; but if I had, and been thought worthy of confidence, I would at all events have spoken honestly. But—may I speak quite frankly, Agnes? You won't be offended, will you?"

"No; I shan't—I'm quite sure."

"Well, it was only this—you *are* changed, Agnes, you know you are. Just this moment, for instance, you were going home, only because *I* came here, and you fancied I might join you in your walk; and this change began when Cleve Verney was down here staying at Ware, and used to walk with you on the Green."

Agnes stopped short at these words and drew back a step, looking at Sedley with an angry surprise.[Pg 59]

"I don't understand you—I'm certain I don't. I can't conceive what you mean," she said.

Sedley paused in equal surprise.

"I—I beg pardon; I'm awfully sorry—you'll never know *how* sorry—if I have said anything to vex you; but I *did* think it was some influence or something connected with that time."

"I really don't pretend to understand you," said Agnes, coldly, with eyes, however, that gleamed resentfully. "I do recollect perfectly Mr. Cleve Verney's walking half-a-dozen times with Charity and me upon the Green, but what that can possibly have to do with your fancied wrongs, I cannot imagine. I fancied you were a friend of Mr. Verney's."

"So I was—so I am; but no such friend as I am of yours—*your* friend, Agnes. There's no use in saying it; but, Agnes, I'd die for you—I would indeed."

"I thought it very strange, your coming so very seldom to inquire for papa, when he was so poorly last year, when you were at Cardyllian. *He* did not seem to

mind it; but considering, as you say, how much you once used to be here, it did strike me as very unkind—I may as well say what I really thought—not only unkind, but rude. So that if there has been any change, you need not look to other people for the cause of it."[Pg 60]

"If you knew how I blame myself for that, I think, bad as it was, you'd forgive me."

"I think it showed that you did not very much care what became of us."

"Oh! Agnes, you did not think that—you never thought it. Unless *you* are happy, I *can't* be happy, nor even then unless I think you have forgiven me; and I think if I could be sure you liked me ever so little, even in the old way, I should be one of the happiest fellows in the world. I don't make any excuses—I was the stupidest fool on earth—I only throw myself on your mercy, and ask you to forgive me."

"I've nothing to forgive," said Agnes, with a cruel little laugh, but changing colour.

"Well—well, *forget*—oh, *do*! and shake hands like your old self. You've no idea how miserable I have been."

Lowering her eyes, with a very beautiful blush and a smile—a little shy, and so gratified—and a little silvery laugh, Agnes relented, and did give her hand to Tom Sedley.

"Oh, Agnes! Oh, Agnes! I'm so happy and so grateful! Oh, Agnes, you won't take it away—just for a moment."

She drew her hand to remove it, for Tom was exceeding his privilege, and kissing it.

"*Now* we are friends," said Agnes, laughing.[Pg 61]

"Are we *quite* friends?"

"Yes, quite."

"You must not take your hand away—one moment more. Oh, Agnes! I can never tell you—never, how I love you. You are my darling, Agnes, and I can't live without you."

Agnes said something—was it reproof or repulse? He only knew that the tones were very sad and gentle, and that she was drawing her hand away.

"Oh, darling, I adore you! You would not make me miserable for life. There is nothing I won't do—nothing I won't try—if you'll only say you like me—ever so

little. Do sit down here just for a moment"—there was a rustic seat beside them—"only for a moment."

She did sit down, and he beside her. That "moment" of Tom Sedley's grew as such moments will, like the bean that Jack sowed in his garden, till it reached—Titania knows whither! I know that Miss Charity on her return surprised it still growing.

"I made the tea, Agnes, fancying you were in your room. I've had such a search for you. I really think you might have told Edward where you were going. Will you drink tea with us, Thomas Sedley, this evening? though I am afraid you'll find it perfectly cold."[Pg 62]

Si la señorita Charity hubiera sido sospechosa o romántica, habría visto con una mirada a los rostros de los jóvenes lo que había sucedido; pero al no tener ninguna de las dos cosas, y estar bastante preocupada con su teoría sobre Cleve Verney, y sin haber soñado nunca con que Tom Sedley pudiera *debutar* en Hazelden en el personaje de un amante, traía a sus prisioneros a casa con sólo un vago sentido de vez en cuando. que había algo un poco extraño en sus modales o en sus propias percepciones, y comentó, mirando con un poco de curiosidad a Tom, en referencia a alguna pregunta suya:

"Te hice esa pregunta dos veces sin respuesta, y ahora dices algo totalmente sin sentido".

[Pág. 63]

CAPITULO VI.

TOM TIENE UNA "HABLA" CON EL ALMIRANTE.

" ¿SE *lo* dirás?" susurró Sedley a Agnes.

"Oh, no. ¿ *Tú?* ", Suplicó.

Ambos miraron a Charity, que estaba preparando la cena del perrito con pan y leche en un platillo.

—Entraré a ver a papá y tú hablarás con ella —dijo Agnes.

Lo que hizo Tom Sedley, tanto para su asombro que dejó el platillo en la mesa junto a ella, escuchó y conversó durante media hora; y los gritos del caniche, y

los saltos salvajes y arañazos en su codo, finalmente le recordaron que había sido olvidado por completo.

Entonces, mientras su dueña se disculpaba sinceramente con el pobre Bijou, y supervisaba sus atenciones al pan y la leche, ahora colocados en el suelo, entró Agnes, y se levantó de Charity, la besó con una sonrisa franca y radiante y dijo:[Pág. 64]-

"Estoy *demasiado* contenta, Agnes siempre fui. *Tan* aficionado a Thomas Sedley, y me *pregunto* que nunca se le ocurrió antes."

Todos estaban tomados de la mano en un anillo en ese momento.

"¿Y qué crees que dirá el señor Etherage?" preguntó Tom.

"¡Papá! Por *supuesto* que estará *encantado* ", dijo la señorita Charity. "Le gustas *mucho* ."

"Pero sabes, Agnes podría hacerlo mucho mejor. Ella es un tesoro, no hay nadie que no se enorgullezca de ella, y nadie podría evitar enamorarse de ella, y el Ad… Me refiero al Sr. Etherage, puede pensar que soy tan presuntuoso y, ya sabes, él puede pensar que soy demasiado pobre ".

"Si quieres decir que papá se opondría a ti porque sólo tienes cuatrocientos al año, piensas muy mal en él. Sé *que* no me gustaría estar conectado con nadie en quien yo pensara tan mal, porque ese tipo de cosa que considero realmente *perversa* ; y lamento pensar que papá era perverso. Entraré y le contaré todo lo que ha sucedido en este momento ".

En un suspenso terrible, la hermosa Agnes y Tom Sedley, con la mano de ella entre las suyas, estaban uno al lado del otro, mirando seriamente la puerta doble que los separaba de esta conferencia.

En unos minutos escucharon a Vane Etherage[Pág. 65] la voz se elevó a un tono de bravuconería irritable, y luego la réplica de la señorita Charity con un énfasis estridente.

"¡Oh, Dios mío! Está muy enojado. ¿Qué hacemos?" -exclamó la pobre Agnes, desesperada.

"Lo *sabía* , lo *sabía* , *dije* cómo sería, no puede soportar la idea, piensa que es una audacia. Sabía que debía hacerlo, y realmente creo que perderé la razón. No pude ... No *podría* vivir. ¡Oh! Agnes, no *podría* si él lo previene.

Entró la señorita Charity, muy roja y enojada.

"No es más que en una de sus ánimos impares. No me importa una *palabra* que dice esta noche. Él será muy diferente, se le *ve* , por la mañana. Vamos a sentarse aquí, y tener un buen hablar de ello, hasta que sea hora de que te vayas; y verás que tengo razón. Estoy *sorprendida* —continuó con severidad— de que hable como lo hizo esta noche. Lo considero bastante ¡Mundano y *malvado* ! Pero me contenté con decirle que no pensaba ni una palabra de lo que decía, y que *sabía* que no, y que me lo diría por la mañana; y en lugar de sentirlo, como pensé que haría, dijo algo intolerablemente grosero ".

El viejo Etherage, aproximadamente una hora después, cuando estaban todos en un animado debate, se acercó arrastrando los pies a la puerta.[Pág. 66]y metió la cabeza, y miró sorprendido al ver a Tom, quien pareció alarmado al verlo. Y el anciano les dio las buenas noches a todos con el ceño fruncido, y poco después lo oyeron irse hacia su dormitorio y se sintieron aliviados.

Se sentaron terriblemente tarde, y el anciano criado, que se asomaba a la habitación con más frecuencia de lo deseado al final de la sesión, parecía pálido y aturdido por la somnolencia; y por fin Charity, impresionado por la espantosa resignación de su semblante, miró el reloj francés sobre la repisa de la chimenea y eyaculó:

"Why, merciful goodness! is it possible? A quarter to one! It *can't possibly be*. Thomas Sedley, *will* you look at your watch, and tell us what o'clock it really is?"

His watch corroborated the French clock.

"*If* papa heard this! I really can't the least *conceive* how it happened. I did not think it could have been *eleven*. Well, it is *undoubtedly* the *oddest* thing that *ever* happened in this house!"

In the morning, between ten and eleven, when Tom Sedley appeared again at the drawing-room windows, he learned from Charity, in her own emphatic style of narration, what had since taken place, which was not a great deal, but still was uncomfortably ambiguous.[Pg 67]

She had visited her father at his breakfast in the study, and promptly introduced the subject of Tom Sedley, and he broke into this line of observation—

"I'd like to know what the deuce Tom Sedley means by talking of business to girls. I'd like to know it. I say, if he has anything to say, why doesn't he *say* it, that's what *I* say. Here I *am*. What has he to *say*. I don't object to hear him, be it sense or be it nonsense—out with it! That's my maxim; and be it sense or be it nonsense, I won't have it at second-*hand*. That's *my* idea."

Acting upon this, Miss Charity insisted that he ought to see Mr. Etherage; and, with a beating heart, he knocked at the study door, and asked an audience.

"Come in," exclaimed the resonant voice of the Admiral. And Tom Sedley obeyed.

The Admiral extended his hand, and greeted Tom kindly, but gravely.

"Fine day, Mr. Sedley; very fine, sir. It's an odd thing, Tom Sedley, but there's more really fine weather up here, at Hazelden, than anywhere else in Wales. More sunshine, and a *deal* less rain. You'd hardly believe, for you'd fancy on this elevated ground we should naturally have *more* rain, but it's *less*, by several inches, than[Pg 68] anywhere else in Wales! And there's next to no damp—the hygrometer tells *that*. And a curious thing, you'll have a southerly wind up here when it's blowing from the east on the estuary. You can see it, by Jove! Now just look out of that window; did you ever see such sunshine as that? There's a clearness in the air up here—at the *other* side, if you go up, you get *mist*—but there's something about it here that I would not change for any place in the world."

You may be sure Tom did not dispute any of these points.

"By Jove, Tom Sedley, it would be a glorious day for a sail round the point of Penruthyn. I'd have been down with the tide, sir, this morning if I had been as I was ten years ago; but a fellow doesn't like to be lifted into his yacht, and the girls did not care for sailing; so I sold her. There wasn't such a boat—take her for everything—in the *world—never*!"

"The *Feather*; wasn't she, sir?" said Tom.

"The *Feather*! that she was, sir. A name pretty well known, I venture to think. Yes, the *Feather* was her name."

"I *have*, sir; yes, indeed, often heard her spoken of," said Tom, who had heard one or two of the boatmen of Cardyllian mention her with a guarded sort of commendation. I never could[Pg 69] learn, indeed, that there was anything very remarkable about the boat; but Tom would just then have backed any assertion of the honest Admiral's with a loyal alacrity, bordering, I am afraid, upon unscrupulousness.

"There are the girls going out with their trowels, going to poke among those flowers; and certainly, I'll do them justice to say, their garden prospers. I don't see such flowers *any*where; do you?"

"*Nowhere!*" said Tom, with enthusiasm.

"By, there they're at it—grubbing and raking. And, by-the-by, Tom, what was that? Sit down for a minute."

Tom felt as if he was going to choke, but he sat down.

"What was that—some nonsense Charity was telling me last night?"

Thus invited, poor Sedley, with many hesitations, and wanderings, and falterings, did get through his romantic story. And Mr. Etherage did not look pleased by the recital; on the contrary, he carried his head unusually high, and looked hot and minatory, but he did not explode. He continued looking on the opposite wall, as he had done as if he were eyeing a battle there, and he cleared his voice.

"As I understand it, sir, there's not an income[Pg 70] to make it at all prudent. I don't want my girls to marry; I should, in fact, miss them very much; but if they do, there ought to be a settlement, don't you see? there should be a settlement, for *I* can't do so much for them as people suppose. The property is settled, and the greater part goes to my grand-nephew after me; and I've invested, as you know, all my stock and money in the quarry at Llanrwyd; and if she married you, she should live in London the greater part of the year. And I don't see how you could get on upon what you both have; I don't, sir. And I must say, I think you ought to have spoken to me before paying your addresses, sir. I don't think that's unreasonable; on the contrary, I think it *reasonable, perfectly* so, and only right and fair. And I must go further, sir; I must say this, I don't see, sir, without a proper competence, what pretensions you had to address my child."

"None, sir; none in the world, Mr. Etherage. I know, sir, I've been thinking of my presumption ever since. I betrayed myself into it, sir; it was a kind of surprise. If I had reflected I should have come to you, sir; but—but you have no idea, sir, how I adore her." Tom's eye wandered after her through the window, among the flowers. "Or what it would be to me to—to have to"——

Tom Sedley faltered, and bit his lip, and[Pg 71] started up quickly and looked at an engraving of old Etherage's frigate, which hung on the study wall.

He looked at it for some time steadfastly. Never was man so affected by the portrait of a frigate, you would have thought. Vane Etherage saw him dry his eyes stealthily two or three times, and the old gentleman coughed a little, and looked out of the window, and would have got up, if he could, and stood close to it.

"It's a beautiful day, certainly; wind coming round a bit to the south, though—south by east; that's always a squally wind with us; and—and—I assure you I like you, Tom; upon my honour I do, Tom Sedley—better, sir, than any young fellow I know. I think I *do*—I am *sure*, in fact, I do. But this thing—it wouldn't do—it

really wouldn't; no, Tom Sedley, it wouldn't *do*; if you reflect you'll see it. But, of course, you may get on in the world. Rome wasn't built in a day."

"It's very kind of you, sir; but the time's so long, and so many chances," said Sedley, with a sigh like a sob; "and when I go away, sir, the sooner I die, the happier for me."

Tom turned again quickly toward the frigate—the *Vulcan*—and old Etherage looked out of the window once more, and up at the clouds.[Pg 72]

"Yes," said the admiral, "it will; we shall have it from south by east. And, d'ye hear, Tom Sedley? I—I've been thinking there's no need to make any fuss about this—this thing; just let it be as if you had never said a word about it, do you mind, and come here just as usual. Let us put it out of our heads; and if you find matters improve, and still wish it, there's nothing to prevent your speaking to me; only Agnes is perfectly free, you understand, and you are not to make any change in your demeanour—a—or—I mean to be more with my daughters, or anything *marked*, you understand. People begin to talk here, you know, in the club-house, on very slight grounds! and—and—you understand now; and there mustn't be any nonsense; and I like you, sir—I like you, Thomas Sedley; I do—I do, indeed, sir."

And old Vane Etherage gave him a very friendly shake by the hand, and Tom thanked him gratefully, and went away reprieved, and took a walk with the girls, and told them, as they expressed it, *everything*; and Vane Etherage thought it incumbent on him to soften matters a little by asking him to dinner; and Tom accepted; and when they broke up after tea, there was another mistake discovered about the hour, and Miss Charity most emphatically announced that[Pg 73] it was *perfectly unaccountable*, and must *never* occur again; and I hope, for the sake of the venerable man who sat up, resigned and affronted, to secure the hall-door and put out the lamps after the party had broken up, that these irregular hours were kept no more at Hazelden.

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CHAPTER VII.

ARCADIAN RED BRICK, LILAC, AND LABURNUM.

AS time proceeds, renewal and decay, its twin principles of mutation, are everywhere and necessarily active, applying to the moral as well as to the material world. Affections displace and succeed one another. The most beautiful are often the first to die. Characteristics in their beginning, minute and unsubstantial as the fairy brood that people the woodland air, enlarge and materialize till they usurp the dominion of the whole man, and the people and the world are changed.

Sir Booth Fanshawe is away at Paris just now, engaged in a great negotiation, which is to bring order out of chaos, and inform him at last what he is really worth *per annum*. Margaret and her cousin, Miss Sheckleton, have revisited England; their Norman retreat is untenanted for the present.

With the sorrow of a great concealment upon her, with other sorrows that she does not tell, Margaret looks sad and pale.[Pg 75]

In a small old suburban house, that stands alone, with a rural affectation, on a little patch of shorn grass, embowered in lilacs and laburnums, and built of a deep vermillion brick, the residence of these ladies is established.

It is a summer evening, and a beautiful little boy, more than a year old, is sprawling, and babbling, and rolling, and laughing on the grass upon his back. Margaret, seated on the grass beside him, prattles and laughs with him, and rolls him about, delighted, and adoring her little idol.

Old Anne Sheckleton, sitting on the bench, smiling happily, under the window, which is clustered round with roses, contributes her quota of nonsense to the prattle.

In the midst of this comes a ring at the bell in the jessamine-covered wall, and a tidy little maid runs out to the green door, opens it, and in steps Cleve Verney.

Margaret is on her feet in a moment, with the light of a different love, something of the old romance, in the glad surprise, "Oh, darling, it is you!" and her arms are about his neck, and he stoops and kisses her fondly, and in his face for a moment, is reflected the glory of that delighted smile.

"Yes, darling. Are you better?"

"Oh, yes—ever so much; I'm always well[Pg 76] when you are here; and look, see our poor little darling."

"So he is."

"We have had such fun with him—haven't we, Anne? I'm sure he'll be so like you."

"Is this in his favour, cousin Anne?" asked Cleve, taking the old lady's hand.

"Why should it not?" said she gaily.

"A question—well, I take the benefit of the doubt," laughed Cleve. "No, darling," he said to Margaret, "you mustn't sit on the grass; it is damp; you'll sit beside our Cousin Anne, and be prudent."

So he instead sat down on the grass, and talked with them, and prattled and romped with the baby by turns, until the nurse came out to convey him to the nursery, and he was handed round to say what passes for "Good night," and give his tiny paw to each in turn.

"You look tired, Cleve, darling."

"So I am, my Guido; can we have a cup of tea?"

"Oh, yes. I'll get it in a moment," said active Anne Sheckleton.

"It's too bad disturbing you," said Cleve.

"No trouble in the world," said Anne, who wished to allow them a word together; "besides, I must kiss baby in his bed."[Pg 77]

"Yes, darling, I *am* tired," said Cleve, taking his place beside her, so soon as old Anne Sheckleton was gone. "That old man"——

"Lord Verney, do you mean?"

"Yes; he has begun plaguing me again."

"What is it about, darling?"

"Oh, fifty things; he thinks, among others, I ought to marry," said Cleve, with a dreary laugh.

"Oh, I thought he had given up that," she said, with a smile that was very pale.

"So he did for a time; but I think he's possessed. If he happens to take up an idea that's likely to annoy other people, he never lets it drop till he teases them half to death. He thinks I should marry *money* and political connection, and I don't know what all, and I'm quite tired of the whole thing. What a vulgar little box this is—isn't it, darling? I almost wish you were back again in that place in France."

"But I can see you so much oftener here, Cleve," pleaded Margaret, softly, with a very sad look.

"And where's the good of seeing me here, dear Margaret? Just consider, I always come to you anxious; there's always a risk, besides, of discovery."

"Where you are is to me a paradise."

"Oh, darling, do *not* talk rubbish. This[Pg 78] vulgar, odious little place! No place can be *either—quite*, of course—where *you* are. But you must see what it is—a paradise"—and he laughed peevishly—"of red brick, and lilacs, and laburnums—a paradise for old Mr. Dowlas, the tallow-chandler."

There was a little tremor in Margaret's lip, and the water stood in her large eyes; her hand was, as it were, on the coffin-edge; she was looking in the face of a dead romance.

"Now, you really must not shed tears over *that* speech. You are too much given to weeping, Margaret. What have I said to vex you? It merely amounts to this, that we live just now in the future; we can't well deny *that*, darling. But the time will come at last, and my queen enjoy her own."

And so saying he kissed her, and told her to be a good little girl; and from the window Miss Sheckleton handed them tea, and then she ran up to the nursery.

"You *do* look very tired, Cleve," said Margaret, looking into his anxious face.

"I *am* tired, darling," he said, with just a degree of impatience in his tone; "I said so—horribly tired."

"I wish so much you were liberated from that weary House of Commons."[Pg 79]

"Now, my wise little woman is talking of what she doesn't understand—not the least; besides, what would you have me turn to? I should be totally without resource and pursuit—don't you see? We must be reasonable. No, it is not that in the least that tires me, but I'm really overwhelmed with anxieties, and worried by my uncle, who wants me to marry, and thinks I can marry whom I please—that's all."

"I sometimes think, Cleve, I've spoiled your fortunes," with a great sigh, said Margaret, watching his face.

"Now, where's the good of saying that, my little woman? I'm only talking of my uncle's teasing me, and wishing he'd let us both alone."

Here came a little pause.

"Is that the baby?" said Margaret, raising her head and listening.

"I don't hear our baby or any one else's," said Cleve.

"I fancied I heard it cry, but it wasn't."

"You must think of me more, and of that child less, darling—you must, indeed," said Cleve, a little sourly.

I think the poor heart was pleased, thinking this jealousy; but I fear it was rather a splenetic impulse of selfishness, and that the baby was, in his eyes, a bore pretty often.[Pg 80]

"Does the House sit to-night, Cleve, darling?"

"Does it, indeed? Why it's sitting now. We are to have the second reading of the West India Bill on to-night, and I must be there—yes—in an hour"—he was glancing at his watch—"and heaven knows at what hour in the morning we shall get away."

And just at this moment old Anne Sheckleton joined them. "She's coming with more tea," she said, as the maid emerged with a little tray, "and we'll place our cups on the window-stone when we don't want them. Now, Mr. Verney, is not this a charming little spot just at this light?"

"I almost think it is," said Cleve, relenting. The golden light of evening was touching the formal poplars, and the other trees, and bringing out the wrinkles of the old bricks duskily in its flaming glow.

"Sí, sólo durante unos quince minutos en las veinticuatro horas, cuando el clima es particularmente favorable, *tiene* una especie de pintoresquismo holandés; pero, en general, no es el tipo de casa de campo que elegiría para un permanente palomar. Debería temer que mis palomas se ahoguen con el polvo ".

"No, no hay polvo aquí; es la callejuela más tranquila y selvática del mundo".[Pág. 81]

"Que es un lugar amplio", dijo Cleve. "Bueno, entonces con humo."

"Ni tampoco fumar."

"Pero lo olvidé, el amor no muere del humo ni de nada más", dijo Cleve.

"No, por supuesto, el amor es eterno", dijo Margaret.

—Exactamente; el rey nunca muere. ¿Les roix meurent-ils? Quelquefois, madame. ¡Ay, la teoría y los hechos entran en conflicto! El amor es eterno en abstracto, pero nada es más mortal que un amor particular —dijo Cleve.

"Si lo cree así, me pregunto si alguna vez quisiera casarse", dijo Margaret, y un leve tinte enrojeció sus mejillas.

"Eso pensé y, sin embargo, deseaba casarme", dijo Cleve. "Es perecedero, pero no puedo vivir sin él", le dio unas palmaditas en la mejilla y soltó una risita bastante fría.

"No, el amor nunca muere", dijo Margaret, con un destello de su antiguo espíritu feroz. "Pero puede que lo maten".

"Es terrible matar cualquier cosa", dijo Cleve.

"Matar el amor", respondió, "es el peor asesinato de todos".

"Un verdadero asesinato", asintió, con una sonrisa y un ligero encogimiento de hombros; "una vez muerto, nunca revive".

"Te gusta mucho hablar, como si pudiera perder[Pág. 82] "Tu amor", dijo ella con altivez, "como si, si yo te molestara, nunca pudieras perdonar".

"El perdón no tiene nada que ver con eso, mi pobre mujercita. Yo no llamé a mi amor a la existencia más de lo que lo hice yo mismo; y si muriera, ya sea de forma natural o violenta, no podría llamarlo a la vida más de lo que podría hacerlo Cleopatra. o Napoleón Bonaparte. Es un principio, ¿no ves? que viene tan directo como la vida del cielo. No podemos crearlo, no podemos restaurarlo; y realmente sobre el amor, es peor que mortal, porque , como dije, estoy seguro de que *no* tiene resurrección, no, no tiene resurrección ".

"Eso me parece una razón", dijo, fijando sus grandes ojos sobre él con un resentimiento salvaje "por las que debe apreciarlo *muy* mucho mientras viva."

"¿Y yo *no* , cariño?" dijo, colocando sus brazos alrededor de su cuello y atrayéndola con cariño hacia su pecho, y en la emoción de esa efusión momentánea estaba algo del viejo sentimiento cuando perderla habría sido desesperación, ganar su cielo, y parecía como si el olor de los bosques de Malory y la suave brisa del mar los rodeaba por un momento.

Y ahora se ha ido, se ha ido a esa aburrida Casa, perdido para ella, entregado a su ambición, que parece absorberlo cada vez más; y[Pág. 83] sigue sonriendo a su hermoso bebé, con gran recelo en su corazón, al no ver a Cleve durante veinticuatro horas más.

Cuando Cleve entró en la casa, se encontró con el viejo coronel Thongs, en algún momento el látigo de los "outs".

"¿Has oído hablar del viejo Snowdon?"

"No."

"¡En el gabinete, por Jove!"

"¿De Verdad?"

"Hecho. Pregúntale a tu tío."

"Por Jove, *es* muy inesperado; nadie pensó en él; pero me atrevo a decir que lo hará muy bien".

"Pronto lo intentaremos".

Que *era* una *muy* cita extraña. Pero Lord Snowdon fue anunciado; un hombre aburrido, pero laborioso; un hombre que había ocupado cargos menores en diferentes períodos de su vida, y se presumía que tenía un conocimiento competente de los asuntos. Un hombre aburrido, debido todo a su torpeza, muy por debajo de muchos, y elegido como compromiso negativo para el puesto vacante en el Gabinete, por el que se disputaban dos entusiastas y brillantes competidores.

"Lo veo todo", pensó Cleve; "Esa es la razón por la que Caroline Oldys y Lady Wimbledon estarán en Ware este otoño, y yo me casaré con la sobrina de un ministro del gabinete".

Cleve se burló, pero se sintió muy incómodo.

[Pág. 84]

CAPITULO VIII

EL TRIUMVIRATO.

THAT night Lord Verney waited to hear the debate in the Commons—waited for the division,—and brought Cleve home with him in his brougham.

He explained to Cleve on the way how much better the debate might have been. He sometimes half regretted his seat in the Commons; there were so many things unsaid that ought to have been said, and so many things said that had better have been omitted. And at last he remarked—

"Your uncle Arthur, my unfortunate brother, had a great natural talent for speaking. It's a talent of the Verney's—about it. We all have it; and *you* have got it also; it is a gift of very decided importance in debate; it can hardly be over-estimated in that respect. Poor Arthur might have done very well, but he didn't, and he's gone—about it; and I'm very glad, for your own[Pg 85] sake, you are

cultivating it; and it would be a very great misfortune, I've been thinking, if our family were not to marry, and secure a transmission of those hereditary talents and—and things—and—what's your opinion of Miss Caroline Oldys? I mean, quite frankly, what sort of wife you think she would make."

"Why, to begin with, she's been out a long time; but I fancy she's gentle—and foolish; and I believe her mother bullies her."

"I don't know what you call bullying, my good sir; but she appears to me to be a very affectionate mother; and as to her being foolish—about it—I can't perceive it; on the contrary, I've conversed with her a good deal—and things—and I've found her very superior indeed to any young woman I can recollect having talked to. She takes an interest in things which don't interest or—or—interest other young persons; and she likes to be instructed about affairs—and, my dear Cleve, I think where a young person of merit—either rightly or wrongly interpreting what she conceives to be your attentions—becomes decidedly *épris* of you, she ought to be—a—*considered*—her feelings, and things; and I thought I might as well mention my views, and go—about it—straight to the point; and I think you will perceive that it is reasonable, and that's the[Pg 86] position—about it; and you know, Cleve, in these circumstances you may reckon upon me to do anything in reason that may still lie in my power—about it."

"You have always been too kind to me."

"You shall find me so still. Lady Wimbledon takes an interest in you, and Miss Caroline Oldys will, I undertake to say, more and more decidedly as she comes to know you better."

And so saying, Lord Verney leaned back in the brougham as if taking a doze, and after about five minutes of closed eyes and silence he suddenly wakened up and said—

"It is, in fact, it strikes me, high time, Cleve, you should marry—about it—and you must have money, too; you want money, and you shall have it."

"I'm afraid money is not one of *Caroline's* strong points."

"You need not trouble yourself upon that point, sir; if *I*'m satisfied I fancy *you* may. I've quite enough for both, I presume; and—and so, we'll let that matter rest."

And the noble lord let himself rest also, leaning stiffly back with closed eyes, and nodding and swaying silently with the motion of the carriage.

I believe he was only ruminating after his[Pg 87] manner in these periods of apparent repose. He opened his eyes again, and remarked—

"I have talked over this affair carefully with Mr. Larkin—a most judicious and worthy person—about it—and you can talk to him, and so on, when he comes to town, and I should rather wish you to do so."

Lord Verney relapsed into silence and the semblance, at least, of slumber.

"So Larkin's at the bottom of it; I knew he was," thought Cleve, with a pang of hatred which augured ill for the future prospects of that good man. "He has made this alliance for the Oldys and Wimbledon faction, and I'm Mr. *Larkin's parti*, and am to settle the management of everything upon him; and what a judicious diplomatist he is—and how he has put his foot in it. A blundering hypocritical coxcomb—D—n him."

Then his thoughts wandered away to Larkin, and to his instrument, Mr. Dingwell, "who looks as if he came from the galleys. We have heard nothing of him for a year or more. Among the Greek and Malay scoundrels again, I suppose; the Turks are too good for him."

But Mr. Dingwell had not taken his departure, and was not thinking of any such step *yet*, at least. He had business still on his hands, and a mission unaccomplished.[Pg 88]

Still in the same queer lodgings, and more jealously shut up during the daytime than ever, Mr. Dingwell lived his odd life, professing to hate England—certainly in danger there—he yet lingered on for a set purpose, over which he brooded and laughed in his hermitage.

To so chatty a person as Mr. Dingwell solitude for a whole day was irksome. Sarah Rumble was his occasional resource, and when she brought him his cup of black coffee he would make her sit down by the wall, like a servant at prayers, and get from her all the news of the dingy little neighbourhood, with a running commentary of his own flighty and savage irony, and he would sometimes entertain her, between the whiffs of his long pipe, with talk of his own, which he was at no pains to adapt to her comprehension, and delivered rather for his own sole entertainment.

"The world, the flesh, and the devil, ma'am. The two first we know pretty well—hey? the other we take for granted. I suppose there *is* somebody of the sort. We are all pigs, ma'am—unclean animals—and this is a sty we live in—slime and abomination. Strong delusion is, unseen, circling in the air. Our ideas of beauty, delights of sense, vanities of intellect—all a most comical and frightful cheat—egad! What fun we must be, ma'am, to the spirits who *have* sight[Pg 89] and intellect! I think, ma'am, we're meant for their pantomime—don't you? Our airs, and graces, and dignities, and compliments, and beauties, and dandies—our

metal coronets, and lawn sleeves, and whalebone wigs—fun, ma'am, lots of fun! And here we are, a wonderful work of God. Eh? Come, ma'am—a word in your ear—all *putrefaction*—pah! nothing clean but fire, and that makes us roar and vanish—a very odd position we're placed in; hey, ma'am?"

Mr. Dingwell had at first led Sarah Rumble a frightful life, for she kept the door where the children were peremptorily locked, at which he took umbrage, and put her on fatigue duty, more than trebling her work by his caprices, and requiting her with his ironies and sneers, finding fault with everything, pretending to miss money out of his desk, and every day threatening to invoke Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, and invite an incursion of the police, and showing in his face, his tones—his jeers pointed and envenomed by revenge—that his hatred was active and fiendish.

But Sarah Rumble was resolute. He was not a desirable companion for childhood of either sex, and the battle went on for a considerable time; and poor Sarah in her misery besought Messrs. Levi and Goldshed, with many tears and prayers, that he might depart from her; and Levi looked[Pg 90] at Goldshed, and Goldshed at Levi, quite gravely, and Levi winked, and Goldshed nodded, and said, "A bad boy;" and they spoke comfortably, and told her they would support her, but Mr. Dingwell must remain her inmate, but they'd take care he should do her no harm.

Mr. Dingwell had a latch-key, which he at first used sparingly and timidly; with time, however, his courage grew, and he was out more or less every night. She used to hear him go out after the little household was in bed, and sometimes she heard him lock the hall-door, and his step on the stairs when the sky was already gray with the dawn.

And gradually finding company such as he affected out of doors, I suppose, he did not care so much for the seclusion of his fellow-lodgers, and ceased to resent it almost, and made it up with Sarah Rumble.

And one night, having to go up between one and two for a match-box to the lobby, she encountered Mr. Dingwell coming down. She was dumb with terror, for she did not know him, and took him for a burglar, he being somehow totally changed—she was too confused to recollect exactly, only that he had red hair and whiskers, and looked stouter.

She did not know him in the least till he[Pg 91] laughed. She was near fainting, and leaned with her shoulder to the corner of the wall; and he said—

"I've to put on these; you keep my secret, mind; you may lose me my life, else."

And he took her by the chin, and gave her a kiss, and then a slap on the cheek that seemed to her harder than play, for her ear tingled with it for an hour after,

and she uttered a little cry of fright, and he laughed, and glided out of the hall-door, and listened for the tread of a policeman, and peeped slily up and down the court; and then, with his cotton umbrella in his hand, walked quietly down the passage and disappeared.

Sarah Rumble feared him all the more for this little rencontre and the shock she had received, for there was a suggestion of something felonious in his disguise. She was, however, a saturnine and silent woman, with few acquaintances, and no fancy for collecting or communicating news. There was a spice of danger, too, in talking of this matter; so she took counsel of the son of Sirach, who says, "If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee, and, behold, it will not burst thee."

Sarah Rumble kept his secret, and henceforward, at such hours kept close, when in the deep silence of the night she heard the faint creak of[Pg 92] his stealthy shoe upon the stair, and avoided him as she would a meeting with a ghost.

Whatever were his amusements, Messrs. Goldshed and Levi grumbled savagely at the cost of them. They grumbled because grumbling was a principle of theirs in carrying on their business.

"No matter how it turns out, keep always grumbling to the man who led you into the venture, especially if he has a claim to a share of the profits at the close."

So whenever Mr. Larkin saw Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, he heard mourning and imprecation. The Hebrews shook their heads at the Christian, and chaunted a Jeremiad, in duet, together, and each appealed to the other for the confirmation of the dolorous and bitter truths he uttered. And the iron safe opened its jaws and disgorged the private ledger of the firm, which ponderous and greasy tome was laid on the desk with a pound, and opened at this transaction—the matter of Dingwell, Verney, &c.; and Mr. Levi would run his black nail along the awful items of expenditure that filled column after column.

"Look at that—look here—look, will you?—look, I say: you never sawed an account like that—never—all this here—look—down—and down—and down—and down—"[Pg 93]

"Enough to frighten the Bank of England!" boomed Mr. Goldshed.

"Look down thish column," resumed Levi, "and thish, and thish, and thish—there's nine o' them—and not one stiver on th' other side. Look, look, look, look, *look*! Daam, it'sh all a quaag, and a quickshand—nothing but shink and shwallow, and give ush more"—and as he spoke Levi was knocking the knuckles of his long lean fingers fiercely upon the empty columns, and eyeing Larkin with a rueful ferocity, as if he had plundered and half-murdered him and his partner, who sat there innocent as the babes in the wood.

Mr. Larkin knew quite well, however, that so far from regretting their investment, they would not have sold their ventures under a very high figure indeed.

"And that beast Dingwell, talking as if he had us all in quod, by ——, and always whimperin', and whinin', and swearin' for more—why you'd say, to listen to his rot, 'twas *him* had *us* under his knuckle—you would—the lunatic!"

"And may I ask what he wants just at present?" inquired Mr. Larkin.

"What he always wants, and won't be easy never till he gets it—a walk up the mill, sir, and his head cropped, and six months' solitary, and a touch of corporal now and again. I never[Pg 94] saw'd a cove as wanted a teazin' more; that's what he wants. What he's looking for, of course, is different, only he shan't get it, nohow. And I think, looking at that book there, as I showed you this account in—considering what me and the gov'nor here has done—'twould only be fair you should come down with summut, if you goes in for the lottery, with other gentlemen as pays their pool like bricks, and never does modest, by no chance."

"He has pushed that game a little too far," said Mr. Larkin; "I have considered his feelings a great deal too much."

"Yesh, but *we* have feelinsh. The *Gov'nor* has feelinsh; I have *feelinsh*. Think what state our feelinsh is in, lookin' at that there account," said Mr. Levi, with much pathos.

Mr. Larkin glanced toward the door, and then toward the window.

"We are quite *alone*?" said he, mildly.

"Yesh, without you have the devil in your pocket, as old Dingwell saysh," answered Levi, sulkily.

"For there are subjects of a painful nature, as you know, gentlemen, connected with this particular case," continued Mr. Larkin.

"Awful painful; but we'll sta-an' it," said Goldshed, with unctuous humour; "we'll sta-an'[Pg 95] it, but wishes it over quick;" and he winked at Levi.

"Yesh, he wishes it over quick," echoed Levi; "the gov'nor and me, we wishes it over quick."

"And so do I, *most* assuredly; but we must have a little patience. If deception does lurk here—and you know I warned you I suspected it—we must not prematurely trouble Lord Verney."

"He might throw up the sponge, he might, I *know*," said Levi, with a nod.

"I don't know what course Lord Verney might think it right in such a case to adopt; I only know that until I am in a position to reduce suspicion to certainty, it would hardly consist with right feeling to torture his mind upon the subject. In the meantime he is—a—growing"——

"Growing warm in his berth," said Goldshed.

"Establishing himself, I should say, in his position. He has been incurring, I need hardly tell you, enormous expense in restoring (I might say *re-building*) the princely mansions of Ware, and of Verney House. He applied much ready money to that object, and has charged the estates with nearly sixty thousand pounds besides." Mr. Larkin lowered his tones reverentially at the mention of so considerable a sum.[Pg 96]

"I know Sirachs, did nigh thirty thoushand o' that," said Mr. Goldshed.

"And that tends to—to—as I may say, *steady* him in his position; and I may mention, in confidence, gentlemen, that there are other measures on the *tapis*" (he pronounced taypis) "which will further and still more decidedly fix him in his position. It would pain us all deeply, gentlemen, that a premature disclosure of my uneasiness should inspire his lordship with a panic in which he might deal ruinously with his own interests, and, in fact, as you say, Mr. Levi, throw up the—the"——

"Sponge," said Levi, reflectively.

"But I may add," said Mr. Larkin, "that I am impatiently watching the moment when it may become my duty to open my suspicions fully to Lord Verney; and that I have reason to know that that moment cannot now be distant."

"Here's Tomlinshon comin' up, gov'nor," said Mr. Levi, jumping off the table on which he had been sitting, and sweeping the great ledger into his arms, he pitched it into its berth in the safe, and locked it into that awful prison-house.

"I said he would," said Goldshed, with a lazy smile, as he unlocked a door in the lumbering office table at which he sat. "Don't bring out[Pg 97] them overdue renewals; we'll not want them till next week."

Mr. Tomlinson, a tall, thin man, in faded drab trousers, with a cotton umbrella swinging in his hand, and a long careworn face, came striding up the court.

"You won't do *that* for him?" asked Levi.

"No, not to-day," murmured Mr. Goldshed, with a wink. And Mr. Tomlinson's timid knock and feeble ring at the door were heard.

And Mr. Larkin put on his well-brushed hat, and pulled on his big lavender gloves, and stood up at his full length, in his black glossy coat, and waistcoat and trowsers of the accustomed hue, and presents the usual lavender-tinted effect, and a bland simper rests on his lank cheeks, and his small pink eyes look their adieux upon Messrs. Goldshed and Levi, on whom his airs and graces are quite lost; and with his slim silk umbrella between his great finger and thumb, he passes loftily by the cotton umbrella of Mr. Tomlinson, and fancies, with a pardonable egotism, that that poor gentleman, whose head is full of his bill-book and renewals, and possible executions, and preparing to deceive a villanous omniscience, and to move the compassion of Pandemonium—is thinking of *him*, and mistaking[Pg 98] him, possibly, for a peer, or for some other type of British aristocracy.

The sight of that unfortunate fellow, Tomlinson, with a wife, and a seedy hat, and children, and a cotton umbrella, whose little business was possibly about to be knocked about his ears, moved a lordly pity in Mr. Larkin's breast, and suggested contrasts, also, of many kinds, that were calculated to elate his good humour; and as he stepped into the cab, and the driver waited to know "where," he thought he might as well look in upon the recluse of Rosemary Court, and give him, of course with the exquisite tact that was peculiar to him, a hint or two in favour of reason and moderation; for really it *was quite* true what Mr. Levi had said about the preposterous presumption of a person in Mr. Dingwell's position affecting the airs of a dictator.

So being in the mood to deliver a lecture, to the residence of that uncomfortable old gentleman he drove, and walked up the flagged passage to the flagged court-yard, and knocked at the door, and looked up at the square ceiling of sickly sky, and strode up the narrow stairs after Mrs. Rumble.

"How d'ye do, sir? Your *soul*, particularly, quite well, I trust. Your spiritual concerns flourishing to-day?" was the greeting of Mr. Dingwell's mocking voice.[Pg 99]

"Thanks, Mr. Dingwell; I'm very well," answered Mr. Larkin, with a bow which was meant to sober Mr. Dingwell's mad humour.

Sarah Rumble, as we know, had a defined fear of Mr. Dingwell, but also a vague terror; for there was a great deal about him ill-omened and mysterious. There was a curiosity, too, active within her, intense and rather ghastly, about all that concerned him. She did not care, therefore, to get up and go away from the small hole in the carpet which she was darning on the lobby, and through the door she heard faintly some talk she didn't understand, and Mr. Dingwell's voice, at a high pitch, said—

"D—— you, sir, do you think I'm a fool? Don't you think I've *your letter*, and a copy of my own? If we draw swords, egad, sir, mine's the longer and sharper, as you'll feel. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, lawk!" gasped Sarah Rumble, standing up, and expecting the clash of rapiers.

"Your face, sir, is as white and yellow—you'll excuse me—as an old turban. I beg your pardon; but I want you to understand that I see you're frightened, and that I won't be bullied *by* you."

"I don't suppose, sir, you meditate totally ruining yourself," said Mr. Larkin, with dignity.

"I tell you, sir, if anything goes wrong with me, I'll make a clean breast of it—*everything*[Pg 100]—ha, ha, ha!—upon my honour—and we two shall grill together."

Larkin had no idea he was going in for so hazardous and huge a game when he sat down to play. His vision was circumscribed, his prescience small. He looked at the beast he had imported, and wished him in a deep grave in Scutari, with a turbaned-stone over his head, the scheme quashed, and the stakes drawn.

But wishing would not do. The spirit was evoked—in nothing more manageable than at first; on the contrary, rather more insane. Nerve was needed, subtlety, patience, and he must manage him.

"Why the devil did you bring me here, sir, if you were not prepared to treat me properly? You know my circumstances, and you want to practise on my misfortunes, you vile rogue, to mix me up in your fraudulent machinations."

"Pray, sir, not so loud. Do—*do* command yourself," remonstrated Larkin, almost affectionately.

"Do you think I'm come all this way, at the risk of my life, to be *your* slave, you shabby, canting attorney? I'd better be where I was, or in kingdom come. By Allah! sir, you *have* me, and I'm your *master*, and you shan't buy my soul for a piastre."[Pg 101]

There came a loud knock at the hall-door, and if it had been a shot and killed them both, the debaters in the drawing-room could not have been more instantaneously breathless.

Down glided Sarah Rumble, who had been expecting this visit, to pay the taxman.

And she had hardly taken his receipt, when Mr. Larkin, very pink, endeavouring to smile in his discomfiture, and observing with a balmy condescension, "A sweet day, Mrs. Rumble," appeared in the hall, shook his ears a little, and adjusted his hat, and went forth, and Rosemary Court saw him no more for some time.

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CHAPTER IX.

IN VERNEY HOUSE.

MR. LARKIN got into his cab, and ordered the cabman, in a loud voice, to drive to Verney House.

"Didn't he know Verney House? He thought every cabman in London knew Verney House! The house of Lord Viscount Verney, in —— Square. Why it fills up a whole side of it!"

He looked at his watch. He had thirty-seven minutes to reach it in. It was partly to get rid of a spare half hour, that he had paid his unprofitable visit to Rosemary Court.

Mr. Larkin registered a vow to confer no more with Mr. Dingwell. He eased his feelings by making a note of this resolution in that valuable little memorandum book which he carried about with him in his pocket.

"*Saw Mr. Dingwell this day—as usual impracticable and ill-bred to a hopeless degree—waste of time and worse—resolved that this gentleman being[Pg 103] inaccessible to reason, is not to be argued, but DEALT with, should occasion hereafter arise for influencing his conduct.*"

Somewhere about Temple Bar, Mr. Larkin's cab got locked in a string of vehicles, and he put his head out of window, not being sorry for an opportunity of astonishing the citizens by calling to the driver—

"I say, my good fellow, can't you get on? I told Lord Verney to expect me at half-past one. Do, pray, get me out of this, *any* way, and you shall have a gratuity of half-a-crown. Verney House is a good way from this. *Do* try. His lordship will be as much obliged to you as I am."

Mr. Larkin's assiduities and flatteries were, in truth, telling upon Lord Verney, with whom he was stealing into a general confidence which alarmed many people, and which Cleve Verney hated more than ever.

With the pretty mansion of Hazelden, the relations, as Lord Verney would have said of the House of Ware, were no longer friendly. This was another instance of the fragility of human arrangements, and the vanity of human hopes. The altar had been erected, the swine sacrificed, and the augurs and haruspices on both sides had predicted nothing but amity and concord. Game, fruit, and venison, went and came,—"Much good[Pg 104] may it do your good heart." "It was ill-killed," &c. Master Shallow and Master Page could not have been more courteous on such occasions. But on the *fête champêtre* had descended a sudden procella. The roses were whirling high in the darkened air, the flatteries and laughter were drowned in thunder, and the fiddles and glasses smashed with hailstones as large as potatoes.

A general election had come and gone, and in that brief civil war old Vane Etherage was found at the wrong side. In Lord Verney's language neighbour meant something like vassal, and Etherage who had set up his banner and arrayed his power on the other side, was a rebel—the less forgivable that he had, as was authentically demonstrated, by this step himself inflicted that defeat in the county which had wounded Lord Verney to the quick.

So silence descended upon the interchange of civil speeches; the partridges and pheasants, winged from Ware in a new direction, and old Vane Etherage stayed his friendly hand also; and those tin cases of Irish salmon, from the old gentleman's fisheries, packed in ice, as fresh as if they had sprung from the stream only half an hour before, were no longer known at Ware; and those wonderful fresh figs, green and purple, which Lord Verney affected, for which Hazelden[Pg 105] is famous, and which Vane Etherage was fond of informing his guests were absolutely unequalled in any part of the known world! England could not approach them for bulk and ripeness, nor foreign parts—and he had eaten figs wherever figs grow—for aroma and flavour, no longer crossed the estuary. Thus this game of beggar-my-neighbour began. Lord Verney recalled his birds, and Mr. Etherage withdrew his figs. Mr. Etherage lost his great black grapes; and Lord Verney sacrificed his salmon, and in due time Lord Verney played a writ, and invited an episode in a court of law, and another, more formidable, in the Court of Chancery.

So the issues of the war were knit again, and Vane Etherage was now informed by his lawyers there were some very unpleasant questions mooted affecting the title to the Windermore estate, for which he payed a trifling rent to the Verneys.

So, when Larkin went into Verney House, he was closeted with its noble master for a good while, and returning to a smaller library—devoted to blue books and pamphlets—where he had left a despatch-box and umbrella during his wait for admission to his noble client, he found Cleve busy there.

"Oh, Mr. Larkin. How d'ye do? Anything[Pg 106] to say to me?" said the handsome young man, whose eye looked angry though he smiled.

"Ah, thanks. No—*no*, Mr. Verney. I hope and trust I see you well; but no, I had not any communication to make. Shall I be honoured, Mr. Verney, with any communication from you?"

"I've nothing to say, thanks, except of course to say how much obliged I am for the very particular interest you take in my affairs."

"I should be eminently gratified, Mr. Verney, to merit your approbation; but I fear, sir, as yet I can hardly hope to have merited your thanks," said Mr. Larkin, modestly.

"You won't let me thank you; but I quite understand the nature and extent of your kindness. My uncle is by no means so reserved, and he has told me very frankly the care you have been so good as to take of me. He's more obliged even than I am, and so, I am told, is Lady Wimbledon also."

Cleve had said a great deal more than at starting he had at all intended. It would have been easy to him to have dismissed the attorney without allusion to the topic that made him positively hateful in his eyes; but it was not easy to hint at it, and quite command himself also, and the result illustrated the general fact that total abstinence is easier than moderation.[Pg 107]

Now the effect of this little speech of Cleve's upon the attorney, was to abash Mr. Larkin, and positively to confound him, in a degree quite unusual in a Christian so armed on most occasions with that special grace called presence of mind. The blood mounted to his hollow cheeks, and up to the summit of his tall bald head; his eyes took their rat-like character, and looked dangerously in his for a second, and then down to the floor, and scanned his own boots; and he bit his lip, and essayed a little laugh, and tried to look innocent, and broke down in the attempt. He cleared his voice once or twice to speak, but said nothing; and all this time Cleve gave him no help whatsoever, but enjoyed his evident confusion with an angry sneer.

"I hope Mr. Cleve Verney," at length Mr. Larkin began, "where duty and expediency pull in opposite directions, I shall always be found at the right side."

"The winning side at all events," said Cleve.

"The *right* side, I venture to repeat. It has been my misfortune to be misunderstood more than once in the course of my life. It is our duty to submit to misinterpretation, as to other afflictions, patiently. I hope I have done so. My first duty is to my client."

"*I*'m no client of yours, sir."[Pg 108]

"Well, conceding that, sir, to your *uncle*—to Lord *Verney*, I will say—to his views of what the interests of his house demand, and to his feelings."

"Lord Verney has been good enough to consult *me*, hitherto, upon this subject; a not quite unnatural confidence, I venture to think; more than you seem to suspect. He seems to think, and so do I, that I've a voice in it, and has not left me absolutely in the hands—in a matter of so much importance and delicacy—of his country lawyer."

"I had no power in this case, sir; not even of mentioning the subject to you, who certainly, in one view, are more or less affected by it."

"Thank you for the concession," sneered Cleve.

"I make it unaffectedly, Mr. Cleve Verney," replied Larkin, graciously.

"My uncle, Lord Verney, has given me leave to talk to you upon the subject. I venture to decline that privilege. I prefer speaking to him. He seems to think that *I* ought to be allowed to advise a little in the matter, and that with every respect for *his* wishes; *mine* also are entitled to be a little considered. Should I ever talk to you, Mr. Larkin, it shan't be to ask your advice. I'm detaining you, sir, and I'm also a little busy myself."[Pg 109]

Mr. Larkin looked at the young man a second or two a little puzzled; but encountering only a look of stern impatience, he made his best bow, and the conference ended.

A few minutes later, in came our old friend, Tom Sedley.

"Oh! Sedley! Very glad to see you here; but I thought you did not want to see my uncle just now; and this is the most likely place, except the library, to meet him in."

"He's gone; I saw him go out this moment. I should not have come in otherwise; and you mustn't send me away, dear Cleve, I'm in such awful trouble. Everything has gone wrong with us at Hazelden. You know that quarrying company—the slates, that *odious* fellow, Larkin, led him into, before the election and all the other annoyances began."

"You mean the Llanrwyd company?"

"Yes; so I do."

"But that's quite ruined, you know. Sit down."

"I know. He has lost—frightfully—and Mr. Etherage must pay up ever so much in calls beside; and unless he can get it on a mortgage of the Windermore estate, he can't possibly pay them—and I've been trying, and the result is just this—they won't lend it anywhere till the litigation is settled."[Pg 110]

"Well, what can I do?" said Cleve, yawning stealthily into his hand, and looking very tired. I am afraid these tragic confidences of Tom Sedley's did not interest Cleve very much; rather bored him, on the contrary.

"They won't lend, I say, while this litigation is pending."

"Depend upon it they won't," acquiesced Cleve.

"And in the meantime, you know, Mr. Etherage would be ruined."

"Well, I see; but, I say again, what can I do?"

"I want you to try if anything can be done with Lord Verney," said Tom, beseechingly.

"Talk to my uncle? I wish, dear Tom, you could teach me how to do that."

"It can't do any harm, Cleve—it can't," urged Tom Sedley, piteously.

"Nor one particle of good. You might as well talk to that picture—I do assure you, you might."

"But it could be no pleasure to him to ruin Mr. Etherage!"

"I'm not so sure of that; between ourselves, forgiving is not one of his weaknesses."

"But I say it's quite impossible—an old family, and liked in the county—it would be a scandal for ever!" pleaded Tom Sedley, distractedly.[Pg 111]

"Not worse than that business of Booth Fanshawe," said Cleve, looking down; "no, he never forgives anything. I don't think he perceives he's taking a revenge; he has not *mind* enough for repentance," said Cleve, who was not in good humour with his uncle just then.

"Won't you try? you're such an eloquent fellow, and there's really so much to be said."

"I do assure you, there's no more use than in talking to the chimney-piece; if you make a point of it, of course, I will; but, by Jove, you could hardly choose a worse advocate just now, for he's teasing me to do what I *can't* do. If you heard my miserable story, it would make you laugh; it's like a thing in a *petite comédie*, and it's breaking my heart."

"Well, then, you'll try—won't you try?" said Tom, overlooking his friend's description of his own troubles.

"Yes; as you desire it, I'll try; but I don't expect the slightest good from it, and possibly some mischief," he replied.

"A thousand thanks, my dear Cleve; I'm going down to-night. Would it be too much to ask you for a line, or, if it's *good* news, a telegram to Llwynan."

"I may safely promise you that, I'm sorry to say, without risk of trouble. You mustn't think[Pg 112] me unkind, but it would be cruel to let you hope when there is not, really, a chance."

So Tom drove away to his club, to write his daily love letter to Agnes Etherage, in time for post; and to pen a few lines for old Vane Etherage, and try to speak comfortably to that family, over whose pretty home had gathered so awful a storm.

[Pg 113]

CHAPTER X.

A THUNDER-STORM

"That night a child might understandThe de'il had business on his hand."

I ENDED my last chapter with mention of a metaphoric storm; but a literal storm broke over the city of London on that night, such as its denizens remembered for many a day after. The lightning seemed, for more than an hour, the continuous pulsations of light from a sulphurous furnace, and the thunder pealed with the cracks and rattlings of one long roar of artillery. The children, waked by the din, cried in their beds in terror, and Sarah Rumble got her dress about her, and said her prayers in panic.

After a while the intervals between the awful explosions were a little more marked, and Miss Rumble's voice could be heard by the children, comforting and reassuring in the brief lulls; although had they known what a fright their comforter was herself in, their confidence in her would have been impaired.[Pg 114]

Perhaps there was a misgiving in Sarah Rumble's mind that the lightnings and thunders of irate heaven were invoked by the presence of her mysterious lodger. Was even she herself guiltless, in hiding under her roof-tree that impious old sinner, whom Rosemary Court disgorged at dead of night, as the churchyard does a ghost—about whose past history—whose doings and whose plans, except that they were wicked—she knew no more than about those of an evil spirit, had she chanced, in one of her spectre-seeing moods, to spy one moving across the lobby.

His talk was so cold and wicked; his temper so fiendish; his nocturnal disguises and outgoings so obviously pointed to secret guilt; and his relations with the meek Mr. Larkin, and with those potent Jews, who, grumbling and sullen, yet submitted to his caprices, as genii to those of the magician who has the secret of command,—that Mr. Dingwell had in her eyes something of a supernatural horror surrounding him. In the thunderstorm, Sarah Rumble vowed secretly to reconsider the religious propriety of harbouring this old man; and amid these qualms, it was with something of fear and anger that, in a silence between the peals of the now subsiding storm, she heard the creak of his shoe upon the stair.

That even on such a night, with the voice of[Pg 115] divine anger in the air, about his ears, he could not forego his sinister excursion, and for once at these hours remain decorously in his rooms! Her wrath overcame her fear of him. She would *not* have her house burnt and demolished over her head, with thunderbolts, for *his* doings.

She went forth, with her candle in her hand, and stood at the turn of the banister, confronting Mr. Dingwell, who, also furnished with a candle, was now about midway down the last flight of stairs.

"Egeria, in the thunder!" exclaimed the hard, scoffing tones of Mr. Dingwell; whom, notwithstanding her former encounter with him, she would hardly have recognised in his ugly disguise.

"A hoffle night for anyone to go out, sir," she said, rather sternly, with a courtesy at the same time.

"Hoffle, ¿verdad?" —dijo el señor Dingwell, divertido, con fingida gravedad.

"El más hoffmin, señor, creo que lo ha recordado."

—Bueno, señora, no está *lloviendo* ; saqué la mano por la ventana. No hay nada de esa lluvia torrencial, señora, que le da a un compañero reumatismo. Espero que no haya una niebla inusual, ¿verdad?

" *Ahí* , señor;" exclamó ella, mientras otro fuerte[Pág. 116]El repique resonó sobre Rosemary Court, con un resplandor azul a través de la ventana del vestíbulo y la luz del ventilador en el vestíbulo. Hizo una pausa, se llevó la mano a los ojos hasta que se calmó y luego murmuró una eyaculación.

—Me gustan los truenos, querida. Me recuerda su nombre, querida señorita Rumble; y prolongó el nombre con una pronunciación ondulante. "Shakespeare, ya sabes, quien dice todo mejor que nadie en el mundo, hace que ese notable anciano, el Rey Lear, diga: '¡Trueno, *retumba* tu estómago!' Por supuesto, *yo* no diría *que* en un salón, o para vosotros, pero a reyes son tan refinado que puedan decir cosas *que* no pueden, y un genio como Shakespeare lo golpea fuera ".

"No saldría, señor, en una noche así, sin estar muy segura de que se trataba de algo *bueno* ", dijo la señorita Rumble, muy pálida.

"Usted trabaja bajo electrofobia, querida señora, y lo confunde con piedad. No le tengo ni un poco de miedo a ese tipo de artillería, señora. Aquí estamos, dos o tres millones de personas en esta ciudad. y dos o tres millones de disparos, y ya veremos en los periódicos, me atrevo a decir, no tres disparos dicen. ¿No crees que si Júpiter realmente quería hacer travesuras, podría hacer algo mejor?

"Lo sé, señor, debería enseñarnos" —aquí hizo una mueca y se detuvo; por otra mirada, seguido[Pág. 117]por otro bramido del trueno, "largo, fuerte y profundo", interpuesto. "Debe enseñarnos algo de temor piadoso, si no lo tenemos por naturaleza".

El señor Dingwell miró su reloj.

"¡Oh! Sr. Dingwell, es Hoffle. Ojalá sólo lo viera, señor."

"¿ *Ves* el *trueno,* eh?"

"Mi pobre madre. Ella siempre nos hacía arrodillarnos y decir nuestras oraciones — lo haría — mientras el trueno estaba".

—Habría tenido oraciones bastante largas esta noche. Cómo le deben haber dolido las rodillas, ¡vaya! No me extraña que lo tema, señorita Sarah.

—Y lo *hago* , señor Dingwell, y debería hacerlo. Creo que todos los demás pecadores deberían temerlo también.

" *Me* refiero a *mí* ."

"Y te advierto de la ira venidera".

Aquí hubo otro aplauso terrible.

"Hoffle es, Sr. Dingwell, y una advertencia para *usted* , enviado especial, tal vez."

"No es justo molestar a toda la ciudad para *mí* , ¿no crees?"

"Es un anciano, Sr. Dingwell."

"Y usted es una anciana, señorita Sarah", dijo, sin importarle que otras personas le recordaran sus años, aunque en ocasiones se llamaba a sí mismo en broma un viejo "niño", "tan viejo como Abra.[Pág. 118]esposa de Ham, de quien eres homónimo, aunque todavía no te has posado sobre un Abraham, ni has llegado a ser madre de una gran nación ".

—Suficientemente mayor para ser lo bastante bueno, como solía decir mi pobre madre, señor; de verdad lo soy; y lamento mucho, señor Dingwell, verle, en esta media noche, empeñado en no hacer nada bueno. Me temo que señor ... oh, señor, señor, ¿no cree usted, con esos sonidos en sus oídos, señor Dingwell?

"El trueno más formidable, mi querida Sarah, procede de la lengua plateada de la mujer. Puedo soportar cualquier otro. *Me* asusta. Así que, por favor, si me place, me refugiaré al aire libre y saldré, y repite una oración ".

Y con un asentimiento y una sonrisa, después de haber tenido bastantes tonterías, pasó junto a la señorita Rumble, quien le hizo una cortesía horrorizada, y, dejando la vela en la mesa del vestíbulo, dijo, tocándose los falsos bigotes con la punta de los dedos: "No te preocupes, ni una palabra sobre esto, por mi alma, es *mejor que* no lo hagas ."

Hizo otra cortesía. Se detuvo y la miró en busca de una respuesta.

"¿No puedes *hablar* ?" él dijo.

"No, señor, claro, ni una palabra", titubeó.

"¡Buena niña!" dijo, y abrió la puerta, con la llave del pestillo en el bolsillo, en la oscuridad total, que fue iluminada instantáneamente por[Pág. 119] el relámpago, y otro terrible rugido de trueno estalló sobre sus cabezas.

"¡La voz del cielo en advertencia!" murmuró para sí, mientras permanecía de pie junto a la barandilla, deslumbrada por el brillo y escuchando la reverberación que resonaba en sus oídos. "Le ruego a Dios que pueda regresar todavía".

El miró por encima de su hombro.

—Otro tiro, señorita Rumble, falló de nuevo, ya ve. Él asintió con la cabeza, se paró sobre las baldosas y cerró la puerta. Escuchó sus pasos en el silencio que siguió, atravesando el patio.

"Oh dear! but I wish he *was* gone, right out—a hoffle old man he is. There's a weight on my conscience like, and a fright in my heart, there is, ever since he camed into the 'ouse. He is so presumptious. To see that hold man made hup with them rings and whiskers, like a robber or a play-actor! And defyin' the blessed thunder of heaven—a walking hout, a mockin' and darin' it, at these hours—Oh *law*!"

The interjection was due to another flash and peal.

"I wouldn't wonder—no more I would—if that flash was the death o' 'im!"

[Pg 120]

CHAPTER XI.

THE PALE HORSE.

SALLY RUMBLE knocked at the usual hour at the old man's door next morning.

"Come in, ma'am," he answered, in a weary, peevish voice. "Open the window-shutter, and give me some light, and hand me my watch, please."

All which she did.

"I have not closed my eyes from the time I lay down."

"Not ailing, sir, I hope?"

"Just allow me to count, and I'll tell you, my dear."

He was trying his pulse.

"Just as I thought, egad. The pale horse in the Revelation, ma'am, he's running a gallop in my pulse; it has been threatening the last three days, and now I'm in for it, and I should not be surprised, Miss Sally, if it ended in a funeral in our alley."[Pg 121]

"God forbid, sir."

"Amen, with all my heart. Ay, the pale horse; my head's splitting; oblige me with the looking-glass, and a little less light will answer. Thank you—very good. Just draw the curtain open at the foot of the bed; please, hold it nearer—thank you. Yes, a ghost, ma'am—ha, ha—at last, I do suppose. My eyes, too—I've seen pits, with the water drying up, hollow—ay, ay; sunk—and—now—did you see? Well, look at my tongue—here"—and he made the demonstration; "you never saw a worse tongue than *that*, I fancy; that tongue, ma'am, is eloquent, *I* think."

"Please God, sir, you'll soon be better."

"Draw the curtain a bit more; the light falls oddly, or—does it?—my face. Did you ever see, ma'am, a face so nearly the colour of a coffin-plate?"

"Don't be talking, sir, please, of no such thing," said Sally Rumble, taking heart of grace, for women generally pluck up a spirit when they see a man floored by sickness. "I'll make you some whey or barley-water, or would you like some weak tea better?"

"Ay; will you draw the curtain close again, and take away the looking-glass? Thanks. I believe I've drunk all the water in the carafe. Whey—well, I suppose it's the right thing; *caudle*[Pg 122] when we're coming *in*, and *whey*, ma'am, when we're going *out*. Baptism of Infants, Burial of the Dead! My poor mother, how she did put us through the prayer-book, and Bible—Bible. Dear me."

"There's a very good man, sir, please—the Rev. Doctor Bartlett, though he's gone rather old. He came in, and read a deal, and prayed, every day with my sister when she was sick, poor thing."

"Bartlett? What's his Christian name? You need not speak loud—it plays the devil with my head."

"The Reverend Thomas Bartlett, please, sir."

"Of Jesus?"

"What, sir, please?"

"Jesus *College*."

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir."

"Is he old?"

"Yes, sir, past seventy."

"Ha—well I don't care a farthing about him," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Will you, please, have in the apothecary, sir? I'll fetch him directly, if you wish."

"No—*no* apothecary, *no* clergyman; I don't believe in the Apostles' Creed, ma'am, and I do believe in the jokes about apothecaries. If I'm to go, I'll go quietly, if you please."[Pg 123]

Honest Sally Rumble was heavy at heart to see this old man, who certainly did look ghastly enough to suggest ideas of the undertaker and the sexton, in so unsatisfactory a plight as to his immortal part. Was he a Jew?—there wasn't a hair on his chin—or a Roman Catholic?—or a member of any one of those multitudinous forms of faith which she remembered in a stout volume, adorned with woodcuts, and entitled "A Dictionary of all Religions," in a back parlour of her grand-uncle, the tallow-chandler?

"Give me a glass of cold water, ma'am," said the subject of her solicitude.

"Thank you—that's the best drink—*slop*, I think you call it—a sick man can swallow."

Sally Rumble coughed a little, and fidgeted, and at last she said: "Please, sir, would you wish I should fetch any other sort of a minister?"

"Don't plague me, pray; I believe in the prophet Rabelais and *je m'en vais chercher un grand peutêtre*—the two great chemists, Death, who is going to analyse, and Life, to re-combine me. I tell you, ma'am, my head is bursting; I'm very ill; I'll talk no more."

She hesitated. She lingered in the room, in her great perplexity; and Mr. Dingwell lay back, with a groan.

"I'll tell you what you may do: go down to[Pg 124] your landlord's office, and be so good as to say to either of those d——d Jew fellows—I don't care which—that I am as you see me; it mayn't signify, it may blow over; but I've an idea it is serious; and tell them I said they had better know that I am *very ill*, and that I've taken no step about it."

With another weary groan Mr. Dingwell let himself down on his pillow, and felt worse for his exertion, and very tired and stupid, and odd about the head, and would have been very glad to fall asleep; and with one odd pang of fear, sudden and cold, at his heart, he thought, "I'm going to die—I'm going to die—at last—I'm going to die."

The physical nature in sickness acquiesces in death; it is the instructed mind that recoils; and the more versed about the unseen things of futurity, unless when God, as it were, prematurely glorifies it, the more awfully it recoils.

Mr. Dingwell was not more afraid than other sinners who have lived for the earthy part of their nature, and have taken futurity pretty much for granted, and are now going to test by the stake of *themselves* the value of their loose guesses.

No; he had chanced a great many things, and they had turned out for the most part better than he expected. Oh! no; the whole court,[Pg 125] and the adjoining lanes, and, in short, the whole city of London, must go as he would—lots of company, it was not to be supposed it was anything very bad—and he was so devilish tired, *over*-fatigued—queer—worse than sea-sickness—that headache—fate—the change—an end—what was it? At all events, a rest, a sleep—sleep—could not be very bad; lots of sleep, sir, and the chance—the chance—oh, yes, things go pretty well, and I have not had my good luck yet. I wish I could sleep a bit—yes, let kingdom-come be all sleep—and so a groan, and the brain duller, and more pain, and the immense fatigue that demands the enormous sleep.

When Sarah Rumble returned, Mr. Dingwell seemed, she thought, a great deal heavier. He made no remark, as he used to do, when she entered the room. She came and stood by the bed-side, but he lay with his eyes closed, not asleep; she could see by the occasional motion of his lips, and the fidgety change of his posture, and his weary groanings. She waited for a time in silence.

"Better, sir?" she half-whispered, after a minute or two.

"No," he said, wearily.

Another silence followed, and then she asked, "Would you like a drink, Mr. Dingwell, sir?"[Pg 126]

"Yes—water."

So he drank a very little, and lay down again.

Miss Sarah Rumble stayed in the room, and nearly ten minutes passed without a word.

"What did he say?" demanded Mr. Dingwell so abruptly that Sarah Rumble fancied he had been dreaming.

"Who, sir, please?"

"The Jew—landlord," he answered.

"Mr. Levi's a-coming up, sir, please—he expected in twenty minutes," replied she.

Mr. Dingwell groaned; and two or three minutes more elapsed, and silence seemed to have re-established itself in the darkened chamber, when Mr. Dingwell raised himself up with a sudden effort, and he said—

"Sarah Rumble, fetch me my desk." Which she did, from his sitting-room.

"Put your hand under the bolster, and you'll find two keys on a ring, and a pocket-book. *Yes.* Now, Sarah Rumble, unlock that desk. Very good. Put out the papers on the coverlet before me; first bolt the door. Thank you, ma'am. There are a parcel of letters among those, tied across with a red silk cord—just so. Put them in my hand—thank you—and place all the rest back again neatly—*neatly*, if you please. Now[Pg 127] lock the desk; replace it, and come here; but first give me pen and ink, and bolt the door—try it again."

And as she did so he scrawled an address upon the blank paper in which these letters were wrapt.

The brown visage of his grave landlady was graver than ever, as she returned to listen for further orders.

"Mrs. Sarah Rumble, I take you for an honest person; and as I may die this time, I make a particular request of *you*—take this little packet, and slip it between the feather-bed and the mattress, as near the centre as your arm will reach—thank you—remember it's there. If I die, ma'am, you'll find a ten-pound note wrapped about it, which I give to you; you need not thank—that will do. The letters addressed as they are you will deliver, without showing them, or *saying one word to anyone* but to the gentleman himself, into whose hands you must deliver them. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, please; I'm listening."

"Well, *attend*. There are two Jew gentlemen—your landlord, Mr. Levi, and the *old* Jew, who have been with me once or twice—you know *them*; that makes *two*; and there is Mr. Larkin, the tall gentleman who has been twice here with[Pg 128] them, with the lavender waistcoat and trousers, the eye-glass with the black ribbon, the black frock coat—heigho! oh, dear, my head!—the red grizzled whiskers, and bald head."

"The religious gentleman, please, sir?"

"Exactly; the religious gentleman. Well, *attend*. The two Jews and the religious gentleman together make *three*; and those three gentlemen are *robbers*."

"*What*, sir?"

"*Robbers*—robbers! Don't you know what '*robbers*' means? They are all three *robbers*. Now, I don't think they'll want to fiddle with my money till I'm dead."

"Oh, Lord, sir!"

"'Oh, Lord!' of course. That will do. They won't touch my money till I'm dead, if they trust you; but they *will* want my desk—at least Larkin will. I shan't be able to look after things, for my head is very bad, and I shall be too drowsy—soon knocked up; so give 'em the desk, if they ask for it, and these keys from under the pillow; and if they ask you if there are any other papers, say *no*; and don't you tell them one word about the letters you've put between the beds here. If you betray me—you're a religious woman—yes—and believe in God—may God d—n you; and He will, for you'll be accessory to[Pg 129] the villany of those three miscreants. And now I've done what in me lies; and that is all—my last testament."

And Mr. Dingwell lay down wearily. Sarah Rumble knew that he was very ill; she had attended people in fever, and seen them die. Mr. Dingwell was already perceptibly worse. As she was coming up with some whey, a knock came to the door, and opening it she saw Mr. Levi, with a very surly countenance, and his dark eyes blazing fiercely on her.

"How'sh Dingwell now?" he demanded, before he had time to enter, and shut the door; "*worse*, is he?"

"Well, he's duller, sir."

"In his bed? Shut the door."

"Yes, sir, please. Didn't get up this morning. He expected you two hours ago, sir."

Levi nodded.

"What doctor did you fetch?" he asked.

"No doctor, please, sir. I thought you and *him* would choose."

Levi no respondió; de modo que ella no supo por su rostro hosco, que no sufrió ningún cambio, si lo aprobaba o no. El miro su reloj.

"¿Larkin no estuvo aquí hoy?"

"¿Sr. Larkin? No, señor, por favor."[Pág. 130]

"Muéstrame la habitación de Dingwell, hasta que lo vea", dijo el judío con tristeza.

Así que la siguió escaleras arriba y entró en la habitación oscura sin esperar ninguna invitación, se acercó a la ventana y abrió un poco la contraventana.

"¿Para qué sirve?" refunfuñó Dingwell indistintamente desde su cama.

"Así que lo has hecho y lo has hecho", dijo el judío, acercándose con las manos en los bolsillos y mirándolo desde lejos como si fuera un caballo mullido.

Dingwell no estaba en condiciones de replicar sobre este hombrecito moreno, que lo miró con una mezcla de disgusto y maldad.

"¿Cuánto tiempo ha estado de esta manera?" —dijo el judío, mirando a Sarah Rumble con el ceño fruncido.

—Sólo hoy en la cama, por favor, señor; pero se ha visto muy mal estos dos o tres días, señor.

"¿Lo respaldas para la *fiebre* ?"

"Creo que es *fiebre* , señor."

"¿Supongo que ramitas la fiebre lo suficientemente rápido? ¿Has visto mucha fiebre en tu tiempo?"

"Sí, señor, por favor."

"Es *ish* . Fiebre, el diez a uno en los años cincuenta la muerte Negro va, ma'am- *mi* suerte Míralo ahí, d -. N él, he'sh lo tiene."[Pág. 131]

Levi lo miró con mal humor por un momento con ojos que brillaban como carbones.

"Siempre estás yendo a este lugar de esos malditos agujeros; siempre hay fiebre y todo lo que hay allí, gran cabra vieja".

Dingwell hizo un esfuerzo por levantarse y murmuró, medio despierto:

"Déjame, hablaré con él, cómo te atreves, cuando esté mejor, *tranquilo* ", y volvió a inclinar la cabeza.

"Cuando lo *estés* , maldito te hundas. Mira todo lo que hemos perdido por ti".

Se quedó mirando a Dingwell salvajemente.

" *Morirá* ", exclamó, haciendo un gesto de enojo, casi un trasero, con la cabeza hacia el paciente, y repitió su predicción con un juramento furioso.

Mira, enviarás a la botica por ese cloruro de lima, vinagres y esas cosas ... o ... no; debes esperar aquí, porque Larkin vendrá; y no lo dejes ir, claro. Yo y El señor Goldshed llegará en un santiamén. Dígale que viene el médico, y nosotros ... y les enviaré cosas del boticario, y usted las pondrá en platos en el suelo y en las mesas. dinero, y maldito mal, pero no voy a tomar este-salir o' esta sala, si *me* puede ayudar ".[Pág. 132]

Y entró en el salón, cerró la puerta de Dingwell y escupió en el suelo, y luego abrió la ventana.

" *Morirá, ¿ crees* que morirá?" exclamó de nuevo.

"Está en manos de Dios, señor", dijo Sally Rumble.

"No estará mucho tiempo allí, morirá, digo que lo *hará* , lo hará"; y el pequeño judío maldijo y pateó el suelo, se puso el sombrero en la cabeza y bajó corriendo las escaleras, en un paroxismo de negocios y furia.

[Pág. 133]

CAPITULO XII.

EN EL CUAL VISITAN SUS AMIGOS A LOS ENFERMOS.

EL SR. LEVI , cuando Sarah Rumble le dio el mensaje de su inquilino, no lo hizo, como él dijo, "valientemente una vuelta de medio centavo". No podría estar muy enfermo si pudiera enviar a su asistente al aire libre y entregar los términos en los que debían comunicarse sus mensajes. El diagnóstico del Sr. Levi fue que el ataque del Sr. Dingwell fue en la región de la cartera o el bolsillo, y que la "evasión" fue simplemente para reunir a los socios y al Sr. Larkin con el fin de extraer más dinero.

El señor Larkin estaba en la ciudad y había escrito al hotel de ese caballero; también se lo había dicho al señor Goldshed, que tenía el mismo punto de vista y se reía en su diapasón perezoso sobre la débil invención del enemigo.

Levi accordingly took the matter very easily, and hours had passed before his visit, which was made pretty late in the afternoon, and he was smiling over his superior sagacity in seeing[Pg 134] through Dingwell's little dodge, as he walked into the court, when an officious little girl, in her mother's bonnet, running by his knee, said, pompously—

"You'd better not go there, sir."

"And why so, chickabiddy?" inquired Mr. Levi, derisively.

"No, you'd better not; there's a gentleman as has took the fever there."

"Where?" said Mr. Levi, suddenly interested.

"In Mrs. Rumble's."

"*Is* there?—how do you know?"

"Lucy Maria Rumbles, please, sir, she told me, and he's *very bad*."

The fashion of Levi's countenance was changed as he turned from her suddenly, and knocked so sharply at the door that the canary, hanging from the window in his cage over the way, arrested his song, and was agitated for an hour afterwards.

So Mr. Levi was now thoroughly aroused to the danger that had so suddenly overcast his hopes, and threatened to swallow in the bottomless sea of death the golden stake he had ventured.

It was not, nevertheless, until eight o'clock in the evening, so hard a thing is it to collect three given men [what then must be the office of whip[Pg 135] to Whig or Tory side of the House?] that the two Jews and Mr. Larkin were actually assembled in Mr. Dingwell's bed-room, now reeking with disinfectants and prophylactic fluids.

The party were in sore dismay, for the interesting patient had begun to maunder very preposterously in his talk. They listened, and heard him say—

"That's a lie—I say, I'd nail his tongue to the table. Bells won't ring for it—lots of bells in England; you'll not find 'em *here*, though."

And then it went off into a mumbling, and Mr. Goldshed, who was listening disconsolately, exclaimed, "My eyesh!"

"Well, how do you like it, guv'nor? I said he'd walk the plank, and so he will," said Levi. "He will—he will;" and Levi clenched his white teeth, with an oath.

"*There*, Mr. Levi, *pray*, pray, none of *that*," said Mr. Larkin.

The three gentlemen were standing in a row, from afar off observing the patient, with an intense scrutiny of a gloomy and, I may say, a savage kind.

"He was an unfortunate agent—no energy, except for his pleasures," resentfully resumed Mr. Larkin, who was standing furthest back of the three speculators.

"Indolent, impracticable enough to[Pg 136] ruin fifty cases; and now here he lies in a fever, contracted, you think, Mr. Levi, in some of his abominable haunts."

Mr. Larkin did not actually say "d—— him," but he directed a very dark, sharp look upon his acquaintance in the bed.

"Abawminable, to be sure, abawminable. Bah! It's all true. The hornies has their eye on him these seven weeks past—curse the beasht," snarled Mr. Levi, clenching his fists in his pockets, "and every da—a—m muff that helped to let me in for this here rotten business."

"Meaning *me*, sir?" said Mr. Larkin, flushing up to the top of his head a fierce pink.

Levi answered nothing, and Mr. Larkin did not press his question.

It is very easy to be companionable and good-humoured while all goes pleasantly. It is failure, loss, and disappointment, that try the sociable qualities; even those three amiable men felt less amicable under the cloud than they had under the sunshine.

So they all three looked in their several ways angrily and thoughtfully at the gentleman in the typhus fever, who said rather abruptly—

"She killed herself, sir; foolish 'oman! Capital dancing, gentlemen! Capital dancing, ladies![Pg 137] Capital—capital—admirable dancing. God help us!" and so it sunk again into mumbling.

"Capital da-a-ancing, and who pays the piper?" asked Mr. Goldshed, with a rather ferocious sneer. "It has cost us fifteen hundred to two thousand!"

"And a doctor," suggested Levi.

"Doctor, the devil! I say; I've paid through the nose," or, as he pronounced that organ through which his metallic declamation droned, *noshe*. "It's Mr. Larkin's turn now; it's all da-a-am rot; a warm fellow like you, Mr. Larkin, putting all the loss on me; how can I sta-a-an' that—sta-a-an' all the losses, and share the profits—ba-a-ah, sir; that couldn't pay nohow."

"I think," said Mr. Larkin, "it may be questionable how far a physician would be, just in this imminent stage of the attack, at all useful, or even desirable; but, Miss Rumble, if I understand you, he is quite *compos*—I mean, quite, so to speak, in his senses, in the early part of the day."

He paused, and Miss Rumble from the other side of the bed contributed her testimony.

"Well, that being so," began Mr. Larkin, but stopped short as Mr. Dingwell took up his parable, forgetting how wide of the mark the sick man's interpolations were.[Pg 138]

"That's a vulture over there—devilish odd birds," said Mr. Dingwell's voice, with an unpleasant distinctness; "you just tie a turban on a stick," and then he was silent.

Mr. Larkin cleared his voice and resumed—

"Well, as I was saying, when the attack, whatever it is, has developed itself, a medical man may possibly be available; but in the mean time, as he is spared the possession of his faculties, and we all agree, gentlemen, whatever particular form of faith may be respectively ours, that some respect is due to futurity; I would say, that a clergyman, at all events, might make him advantageously a visit to-morrow, and afford him an opportunity at least of considering the interests of his soul."

"Oh! da—a—m his shoul, it's his *body*. We must try to keep him together," said Mr. Goldshed, impatiently. "If he dies the money's all lost, every shtiver; if he don't, he's a sound speculation; we must raise a doctor among us, Mr. Larkin."

"It is highly probable indeed that before long the unfortunate gentleman may require medical advice," said Mr. Larkin, who had a high opinion of the "speculation," whose pulse was at this moment unfortunately at a hundred and twenty. "The fever, my dear sir, if such it be, will have declared itself in a day or two; in the meantime, nursing[Pg 139] is all that is really needful, and Miss Rumble, I have no doubt, will take care that the unhappy gentleman is properly provided in that respect."

The attorney, who did not want at that moment to be drawn into a discussion on contributing to expenses, smiled affectionately on Miss Rumble, to whom he assigned the part of good Samaritan.

"He'll want some one at night, sir, please; I could not undertake myself, sir, for both day and night," said brown Miss Rumble, very quietly.

"*There!* That'sh it!" exclaimed Levi, with a vicious chuckle, and a scowl, extending his open hand energetically toward Miss Rumble, and glaring from Mr. Larkin to his partner.

"Nothing but *pay*; down with the dust, Goldshed and Levi. Bleed like a pair o' beashtly pigs, Goldshed and Levi, *do*! There's death in that fellow's face, I say. It's all bosh, doctors and nurses; throwing good money after bad, and then, five pounds to bury him, drat him!"

"Bury? ho, no! the parish, the workhoushe-authorities shall bury him," said Mr. Goldshed, briskly.

"Dead—dead—dead, as a Mameluke—dead as a Janizary—eh? eh?—bowstrung!" exclaimed, Mr. Dingwell, and went off into an indistinct conversation in a foreign language.

"Stuff a stocking down his throat, will you?"[Pg 140] urged Mr. Levi; a duty, however, which no one undertook.

"I see that cove's booked; he looks just like old Solomon's looked when *he* had it. It isn't no use; all rot, throwing good money arter bad, I say; let him be; let him die."

"I'll *not* let him die; no, he shan't. I'll *make* him pay. I made the Theatre of Fascination pay," said Mr. Goldshed serenely, alluding to a venture of his devising, by which the partnership made ever so much money in spite of a prosecution and heavy fines and other expenses.

"I say 'tisn't my principle to throw up the game, by no means—*no*—with my ball in hand, and the stakes in the pocket—*never*!"

Here Mr. Goldshed wagged his head slowly with a solemn smile, and Mr. Dingwell, from the bed, said with a moan—

"Move it, will you? That way—I wish you'd help—b-bags, sir—sacks, sir—awfully hard lying—full of ears and—ay—*noses*—egad!—why not? cut them all off, I say. D—n the Greeks! Will you move it? *Do* move that sack—it hurts his ribs—ribs—*I* never got the bastinado."

"Not but what you deserved it," remarked Mr. Levi.

And Mr. Dingwell's babbling went on, but too indistinctly to be unravelled.[Pg 141]

"I say," continued Mr. Goldshed, sublimely, "if that 'ere speculative thing in the bed there comes round, and gets all square and right, I'll make him pay. I'm not funked—who's afraid—wiry old brick!"

"I think so," acquiesced Mr. Larkin with gentle solemnity; "Mr. Dingwell is certainly, as you say, wiry. There are many things in his favour, and Providence, Mr. Goldshed—Providence is over us all."

"Providence, to be sure," said Mr. Goldshed, who did not disdain help from any quarter. "Where does he keep his money, ma'am?"

"Under his bolster, please, sir—under his head," answered Sarah Rumble.

"Take it out, please," said Mr. Goldshed.

She hesitated.

"*Give* the man hish money, woman, ca-a-ant you?" bawled Mr. Levi fiercely, and extending his arm toward the bed.

"You had better—*yes*, ma'am, the money belongs to Messrs. Goldshed and Levi," said Mr. Larkin, interposing in the character of the *vir pietate gravis*.

Sally Rumble, recollecting Mr. Dingwell's direction, "Let 'em have the money, too, if they press for it," obeyed, and slid her hand under his bolster, and under his head, from the other side[Pg 142] where she was standing; and Dingwell, feeling the motion, I suppose, raised his head and stared with sunken eyes dismally at the three gentlemen, whom he plainly did not recognise, or possibly saw in the shapes of foxes, wolves, or owls, which Æsop would have metaphorically assigned them, and with a weary groan he closed his wandering eyes again, and sank down on the pillow.

Miss Rumble drew forth a roll of bank-notes with a string tied round them.

"Take the money, Levi," said Goldshed, drawing a step backward.

"Take it yourself, guv'nor," said Levi, waving back Miss Sally Rumble, and edging back a little himself.

"Well," said Goldshed, quietly, "I see you're afraid of that infection."

"I believe you," answered Levi.

"So am I," said Goldshed, uneasily.

"And no wonder!" added Mr. Larkin, anticipating himself an invitation to accept the questionable trust.

"Put them notes down on the table there," said Mr. Goldshed.

And the three gentlemen eyed the precious roll of paper as I have seen people at a chemical lecture eye the explodable compounds on the professor's table.[Pg 143]

"I tell you what, ma'am," said Goldshed, "you'll please get a dry bottle and a cork, and put them notes into it, and cork it down, ma'am, and give it to Mr. Levi."

"And count them first, please, Miss Rumble—shan't she, Mr. Goldshed?" suggested Mr. Larkin.

"What for?—isn't the money ours?" howled Mr. Levi, with a ferocious stare on the attorney's meek face.

"Only, Mr. Goldshed, with a view to distinctness, and to prevent possible confusion in any future account," said Mr. Larkin, who knew that Dingwell had got money from the Verneys, and thought that if there was anything recovered from the wreck he had as good a right to his salvage as another.

Mr. Goldshed met his guileless smile with an ugly sneer, and said—

"Oh, count them, to be sure, for the gentleman. It isn't a ha'penny to me."

So Miss Rumble counted seventy-five pounds in bank notes and four pounds in gold, which latter Mr. Goldshed committed to her in trust for the use of the patient, and the remainder were duly bottled and corked down according to Mr. Goldshed's grotesque precaution, and in this enclosure Mr. Levi consented to take the money in hand, and so it was deposited for the night in the iron[Pg 144] safe in Messrs. Goldshed and Levi's office, to be uncorked in the morning by old Rosenthal, the cashier, who would, no doubt, be puzzled by the peculiarity of the arrangement, and with the aid of a cork-screw, lodged to the credit of the firm.

Mr. Goldshed next insisted that Dingwell's life, fortunately for that person, was too important to the gentlemen assembled there to be trifled with; and said that sage—

"We'll have the best doctor in London—six pounds' worth of *him*—d'y see? And under him a clever *young* doctor to look in four times a day, and we'll arrange with the young 'un on the principal of no cure no pay—that is, we'll give fifty pounds this day six weeks, if the party in bed here is alive at that date."

And upon this basis I believe an arrangement was actually completed. The great Doctor Langley, when he called, and questioned Miss Rumble, and inspected the patient, told Mr. Levi, who was in waiting, that the old gentleman had been walking about in a fever for more than a week before he took to his bed, and that the chances were very decidedly against his recovery.

A great anxiety overcame Mr. Larkin like a summer cloud, and the serene sunshine of that religious mind was overcast with storm and[Pg 145] blackness. For the recovery of Mr. Dingwell were offered up, in one synagogue at least, prayers as fervent as any ever made for that of our early friend Charles Surface, and it was plain that never was patriarch, saint, or hero, mourned as the venerable Mr. Dingwell would be, by at least three estimable men, if the fates were to make away with him on this critical occasion.

The three gentlemen, as they left his room on the evening I have been describing, cast their eyes upon Mr. Dingwell's desk, and hesitated, and looked at one another, darkly, for a moment in silence.

"There'sh no reason why we shouldn't," drawled Mr. Goldshed.

"I object to the removal of the desk," said Mr. Larkin, with a shake of his head, closing his eyes, and raising his hand as if about to pronounce a benediction on the lid of it. "If he's spared it might become a very serious thing—I decidedly object."

"Who want'sh to take the man's desk!" drawled Mr. Goldshed, surlily.

"Who want'sh to take it?" echoed Levi, and stared at him with an angry gape.

"But there will be no harm, I shay, in looking what paper'sh there," continued Mr. Goldshed. "Does he get letters?"[Pg 146]

"Only two, sir, please, as I can remember, since he came here."

"By po-sht, or by ha-a-an'?" inquired Goldshed.

"By 'and, sir, please; it was your Mr. Solomons as fetched 'em here, sir."

He lifted up the desk, swayed it gently, and shook it a little, looking at it as if it were a musical box about to strike up, and so set it down again softly. "There'sh papersh in that box," he hummed thoughtfully to himself.

"I think I may speak here," said Mr. Larkin, looking up sadly and loftily, as he placed his hat upon his bald head, "with some little authority as a professional man—if in no higher capacity—and I may take upon myself to say, that by no possibility can the contents of that desk affect the very simple and, in a certain sense, direct transactions in which our clients' interests, and in a degree ours also, are involved, and I object on higher grounds still, I hope, to any irregularity as respects that desk."

"If you're confident, Mr. Larkinsh, there'sh nothing in it can affect the bushiness we're on, I would not give you a cancel' Queen's head for the lot."

"Perfectly confident, my dear Mr. Goldshed."[Pg 147]

"He'sh perfectly confident," repeated Mr. Levi in his guv'nor's ear, from over his shoulder.

"Come along then," said Mr. Goldshed, shuffling slowly out of the room, with his hands in his pockets.

"It's agreed then, gentlemen, there's no tampering with the desk?" urged Mr. Larkin, entreatingly.

"Shertainly," said Mr. Goldshed, beginning to descend the stairs.

"Shertainly," repeated Mr. Levi, following him.

And the three gentlemen, in grave and friendly guise, walked away together, over the flagged court. Mr. Larkin did not half like taking the arms of these gentlemen, but the quarter of the town was not one where he was likely to meet any of either the spiritual or the terrestrial aristocracy with whom he desired specially to stand well. So he moved along conscious, not unpleasantly, of the contrast which a high-bred gentleman must always present in juxtaposition with such persons as Goldshed and Levi. They walked through the dingy corridor called Caldwell Alley, and through Ive's Lane, and along the market, already flaring and glaring with great murky jets of gas wavering in the darkening stalls, and thence by the turn to the left into[Pg 148] the more open street, where the cab-stand is, and then having agreed to dine together at the "Three Roses" in Milk Lane in half an hour, the gentlemen parted—Messrs. Goldshed and Levi to fly in a cab to meet their lawyer at their office, and Mr. Larkin to fly westward to his hotel, to inquire for a letter which he expected. So smiling they parted; and, so soon as Mr. Larkin was quite out of sight, Mr. Levi descended from their cab, and with a few parting words which he murmured in Mr. Goldshed's ear, left him to drive away by himself, while he retraced his steps at his leisure to Rosemary Court, and finding the door of Miss Rumble's house open with Lucy Maria at it, entered and walked straight up to Mr. Dingwell's drawing-room, with a bunch of small keys in his hand, in his coat-pocket.

He had got just two steps into the room towards the little table on which the patient's desk stood, when from the other side of that piece of furniture, and the now open desk, there rose up the tall form of Mr. Jos. Larkin, of the Lodge.

The gentlemen eyed one another for a few seconds in silence, for the surprise was great. Mr. Larkin did not even set down the parcel of letters, which he had been sorting like a hand at[Pg 149] whist, when Mr. Levi had stepped in to divert his attention.

"I thought, Mr. Larkinsh, I might as well drop in just to give you a lift," said Levi, with an elaborate bow, a politeness, and a great smile, that rather embarrassed the good attorney.

"Certainly, Mr. Levi, I'm always happy to see you—always happy to see *any* man—I have never done anything I am ashamed of, nor shrunk from any duty, nor do I mean to do so now."

"Your hands looksh pretty full."

"Yes, sir, *pretty* tolerably full, sir," said Mr. Larkin, placing the letters on the desk; "and I may add so do *yours*, Mr. Levi; those keys, as you observe, might have given one a lift in opening this desk, had I not preferred the *other* course," said Mr. Larkin, loftily, "of simply requesting Mr. Dingwell's friend, the lady at present in charge of his papers, to afford me, at her own discretion, such access to the papers possibly affecting my client as I may consider necessary or expedient, as his legal adviser."

"You have changed your view of your duty, rather; haven't you, Mr. Larkinsh?"

"No, sir, *no*; simply my action on a point of expediency. Of course, there was some weight, too, sir, in the suggestions made by a gentleman of Mr. Goldshed's experience and judgment; and[Pg 150] I don't hesitate to say that his—his ideas had their proper weight with me. And I may say, once for all, Mr. Levi, I'll not be hectored, or lectured, or *bullied* by you, Mr. Levi," added Mr. Larkin, in a new style, feeling, perhaps, that his logical and moral vein was not quite so happy as usual.

"Don't frighten ush, Larkins, pray don't, only just give me leave to see what them letters is about," said Levi, taking his place by him; "did you put any of them in your pocket?"

"No, sir; upon my *soul*, Mr. Levi, I did no such thing," said Mr. Larkin, with a heartiness that had an effect upon the Jew. "The occasion is so serious that I hardly regret having used the expression," said Mr. Larkin, who had actually blushed at his own oath. "There was just one letter possibly worth looking at."

"That da-a-am foolish letter you wrote him to Constantinople?"

"I wrote him *no* foolish letter, sir. I wrote him no letter, sir, I should fear to have posted on the market cross, or read from the pulpit, Mr. Levi. I only wonder, knowing all you do of Mr. Dingwell's unfortunate temper, and reckless habits of assertion, that you should attach the smallest weight to an expression thrown out by him in one of his diabolical and—and—lament[Pg 151]able frenzies. As to my having abstracted a letter of his—an imputation at which I smile—I can, happily, cite evidence other than my own." He waved his hand toward Miss Rumble. "This lady has happily, I will say, been in the room during my very brief examination of my client's half-dozen papers. Pray, madam, have I taken one of these—or, in fact, put it in my pocket?"

"No, sir, please," answered Miss Rumble, who spoke in good faith, having, with a lively remembrance of Mr. Dingwell's description of the three gentlemen who

had visited the sick that day, as "three robbers," kept her eye very steadily upon the excellent Mr. Larkin, during the period of his search.

Mr. Levi would have liked to possess that letter. It would have proved possibly a useful engine in the hands of the Firm in future dealings with the adroit and high-minded Mr. Larkin. It was not to be had, however, if it really existed at all; and when some more ironies and moralities had been fired off on both sides, the gentlemen subsided into their ordinary relations, and ultimately went away together to dine on turtle, sturgeon, salmon, and I know not what meats, at the famous "Three Roses" in Milk Lane.

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CHAPTER XIII.

MR. DINGWELL THINKS OF AN EXCURSION.

IF Mr. Dingwell had been the most interesting, beautiful, and, I will add, wealthy of human beings, instead of being an ugly and wicked old bankrupt, Messrs. Goldshed, Levi, and Larkin could not have watched the progress of his complaint with greater trepidation, or hailed the first unequivocal symptoms of his recovery with more genuine delight. I doubt if any one of them would have experienced the same intense happiness at the restoration of wife, child, or parent.

They did not, it is true, re-assemble in Mr. Dingwell's apartments in Rosemary Court. There was not one of those gentlemen who did not set a proper value upon his own life; and they were content with the doctor's report. In due course, the oracle pronounced Mr. Dingwell out of danger, but insisted on change of air.

Well, that could be managed, of course. It *must* be managed, for did not the doctor say, that[Pg 153] without it the patient might not ultimately recover. If it could have been dispensed with, the risk would have been wisely avoided. But Mr. Dingwell's recovery depended on it, and Mr. Dingwell must be *made* to recover.

¿A dónde deberían enviarlo? El malhechor oculta celosamente el tesoro robado o el cuerpo asesinado; pero no más encogiéndose que el señor Dingwell por aquellos caballeros que lo tenían a cargo. Lo suficientemente seguro estuvo mientras permaneció en su lúgubre reclusión en Rosemary Court, donde yacía tan cómodamente como Asmodeus en el frasco del mago, y seguro contra todos

menos algunos accidentes como la irrupción del estudiante Don Cleophas Leandro Peres Zambullo, a través del tragaluz. . Pero, ¿dónde se encontraba una vivienda rural, saludable y al mismo tiempo suficientemente secreta? Y si se les ocurriera algo parecido a aquél donde los demonios del agua jugaban sus travesuras ...

"En un páramo salvaje, todo marrón y sombrío,Donde cría el urogallo que frecuenta los páramos,Allí estaba una antigua viviendaLa casa de campo de Lord Hoppergollop.

"Aquí reinó el silencio con labios de cola,Y sin ser molestada, mantuvo su ley,Ahorre cuando el búho gritó: '¡Uy! whoo! ¡Whoo! 'O el cuervo ronco graznó: «¡Caw! ¡graznar! ¡graznar!"'[Pág. 154]

Si digo que encontraron una mansión tan elegible para su propósito, ¿era probable que su impracticable e incorregible amigo, el Sr. Dingwell, consintiera en pasar seis semanas en la "mansión desierta" con tanta paciencia como nos dicen que Molly Dumpling?

Yo creo que no. Y cuando el médico hablaba del aire del campo, el paciente bromeaba malhumorado sobre el "bosquecillo de chimeneas" y "el lado dulce y sombrío de Pall Mall".

"Creo, señora Rumble", dijo un día, "no voy a morir en esta pelea en todos los casos. Me veo mejor, creo, ¿eh?"

"Se ve muy mal, señor, por favor. No veo ninguna mejora", dijo Sarah Rumble.

—Bueno, señora, intente mantener mi ánimo en alto, gracias. Me callo demasiado, esa es la única causa *ahora* . Si pudiera asustarme un poco por la noche.

"Dios no lo quiera, señor."

"Gracias, señora, de nuevo. Digo que si pudiera salir un poco pronto recuperaría las fuerzas; pero sentado en este gran sillón acolchado podría estar en la cama; no puedo salir en el durante el día, ya sabes, demasiados enemigos. La lechuza ha estado mudando, señora, diabólicamente enferma, la lechuza muda. Si el viejo pájaro pudiera aletear un poco. Estoy viviendo como un *monje* , iba a decir[Pág. 155]—Eg, ojalá lo fuera. Dame esos malditos amargos; no me han hecho nada bueno, gracias ".

"Si tuviera que ir al campo, señor", insinuó la señorita Sarah Rumble.

"Sí, si lo *fuera* , como tú lo expresas, moriría en una semana. Si el aire pudiera haberme matado, la curiosa atmósfera de esta encantadora corte me habría

matado hace mucho tiempo. No soy una de esas plantas de aire Señora. Lo que quiero es un pequeño estímulo, señora, un poco de diversión, cualquier cosa de esta prisión; y no voy a ponerme en cuclillas en un páramo, ni a descansar en un bosque, para complacer a una manada. de tipos a los que no les importa si estoy en la cinta, siempre que puedan sacarme cuando quieran. ¡Mi salud, de hecho! Simplemente me quieren fuera del camino. ¡Mi salud! Su consideración por mí es realmente conmovedora. Aún no nos importan los amargos. Es hora de mi clarete ".

Lo bebió y pareció dormitar un poco. La Sra. Rumble colocó rápidamente los frascos de medicamentos y otras cosas que habían sido sacadas de sus lugares, de vez en cuando mirando el rostro hundido del anciano, en su siesta de muerte, con la barbilla hundida en el pecho, la popa la talla de su frente maciza, las líneas repulsivas de un egoísmo siniestro y una cierta sombra maligna, hacían que ese rostro en su reposo fuera singularmente desagradable.

De repente se despertó.[Pág. 156]

—Digo, señora Rumble, he estado pensando ... ¿qué pasa con ese anciano clérigo que mencionó? Que el señor Bartlett. Creo que *lo* veré ... suponga que me sermonea; sus duras palabras no me romperán los huesos, y Creo que me divertirá, así que también puedes hacer que entre en cualquier momento, no me importa cuándo ".

Sarah Rumble se alegró mucho de darle una oportunidad a su malvado inquilino, tal como fue, y al día siguiente, alrededor de la una, un anciano clérigo de aspecto amable, con cabello fino y blanco, llamó a su puerta y fue admitido. . Fue el reverendo Thomas Bartlett.

"No puedo levantarme, señor, para recibirlo; me disculpa, pero todavía estoy muy enfermo", dijo el Sr. Dingwell.

"Por favor, no se mueva, señor", dijo el clérigo.

"No *puedo* ", dijo el Sr. Dingwell. "¿ Sería *tan* amable de sentarse en esa silla, cerca del fuego? Lo que tengo que decir es privado y, por favor, hablaremos muy bajo. Mi cabeza aún no se ha recuperado".

"Ciertamente", dijo el anciano, colocándose como deseaba Dingwell.

—Muchas gracias, señor. Ahora puedo arreglármelas. ¿No se llama Thomas, señor, el reverendo Thomas Bartlett? —dijo el señor Dingwell, mirándolo con astucia por debajo de sus cejas blancas.

"Ese es mi nombre, señor."[Pág. 157]

" *Mi* Dingwell de nombre. No me acuerdo? Voy a tratar de llevarlo a su mente. Hace unos veinticinco de nueve años que usted fuera uno de los curas de San Wyther de en los campos?"

—Sí, señor, lo estaba —respondió el clérigo, fijando a su vez la mirada inquisitivamente en él.

"I was the witness—do you remember me, now—to the ceremony, when that unfortunate fellow, Verney, married Miss—I have a note of her name—hang it!—Rebecca, was it?—*Yes*, *Rebecca*—it was Rebecca Mervyn. You married Verney to Miss Mervyn, and *I* witnessed it."

"I remember very well, sir, that a gentleman did accompany Mr. Verney; and I remember the marriage extremely well, because there occurred very distressing circumstances respecting that Mr. Verney not very long after, which fixed that marriage in my mind; but having seen you once only, sir, I can't pretend to recollect your face."

"There has been some time, too, sir, since then," said Mr. Dingwell, with a cynical sneer, and a shrug. "But I think I should have recognized you; that's perhaps owing to my having a remarkably retentive memory for faces; however it's of no great consequence here. It isn't a matter of identification at all. I only want to know, as Verney's dead, whether you can tell what has become of that poor lady, or can find[Pg 158] any clue to her whereabouts—there was a baby—a little child—if they are still living."

"She did write to me twice, sir, within a few years after the marriage. He treated her very ill, sir," said the clergyman.

"Infamously, I fancy," said Dingwell; "and how long ago was that, sir?"

"Oh! a long time; twenty—ay, five—ay, eight-and-twenty years since," said the old gentleman.

Dingwell laughed.

His visitor stared.

"Yes, it's a good while," said Mr. Dingwell; "and looking over that gulf, sir, you may fill your glass, and sing—

"'Many a lad I liked is dead,And many a lass grown old.'

Eight-and-twenty years! Gad, sir, she's had time to grow gray; and to be dead and buried; and to serve a handsome period of her term in purgatory. I forgot,

though; *you* don't follow me there. I was thinking of the French curé, who made part of my journey here with me."

"No, sir; Church of England, thank God; the purest faith; the most scriptural, I believe, on earth. You, sir, I assume, are of the same Church," said he.[Pg 159]

"Well, I can't say I am, sir; nor a Catholic, nor a Quaker," said the invalid.

"I hope, sir, there's no tendency to rationalism?"

"No, sir, I thank you; to no ism whatsoever invented by any other man; Dingwellism for Dingwell; Smithism for Smith. Every man has a right to his opinion, in my poor judgment."

"And pray, sir, if neither Romanist nor Protestant, what *are* you?" inquired the clergyman, as having a right to ask.

"*Porcus de gruge epicuri*, at your service," said the sick man, with a feeble smirk.

"I had hoped, sir, it might have been for some profitable purpose you had sent for me," said the disappointed pastor.

"Well, sir, I was baptized in the Church of England, although I don't subscribe the Articles; so I served in your regiment, you see, though I don't wear the uniform any longer."

"I thought, sir, you might have wished some conversation upon religious subjects."

"And haven't we had it, sir?—sorry we don't agree. I'm too old to turn out of my own way; but, though I can't learn yours, I shall be happy to teach you something of mine, if you wish it."

"I think, sir, as I have other calls to make," said the old clergyman, much offended, and rising[Pg 160] to take his leave as he spoke. "I had better wish you a good afternoon."

"Pray, sir, stay a moment; I never knew a clergyman in such a hurry before to leave a sick man; as no man knows, according to your theory, when he's going to be converted—and how should I? The mildew of death is whitening each of us at this moment; the last golden sands are running out. D— it, give me a chance."

This incongruous harangue was uttered so testily—even fiercely—that the good clergyman was puzzled, and began to doubt in what state his fever might have left Mr. Dingwell's brain.

"Don't you see, sir? Do sit down—a little patience won't do either of us any harm."

"Certainly, sir," hesitated the clergyman, looking hard at him, "but I have not a great deal of time."

"Nor I a great deal of strength; I shan't keep you long, sir."

The Rev. Thomas Bartlett sat down again, and glanced meekly an invitation to Mr. Dingwell to begin.

"Nine-and-twenty years, sir, since you married that unlucky pair. Now, I need not say by what particular accidents, for the recollection is painful, I was in after-life thrown into the society of that unfortunate ill-used dog, poor[Pg 161] Arthur Verney; I knew him intimately. I was the only friend he had left, and I was with him when he died, infamously neglected by all his family. He had just got his half-yearly payment of a beggarly annuity, on which he subsisted; *he*—the rightful Viscount Verney, and the head of his family—ha, ha, ha! By Jove, sir, I can't help laughing, though I pity him. Having that little sum in his hand, said he to me, 'You take charge of this for my son, if you can find him; and I rely on your friendship to look him up if ever you revisit England; this is for him; and he was baptized by the Rev. Thomas Bartlett, as my wife wrote to tell me just eight-and-twenty years ago, and he, no doubt, can enable you to trace him.' That's what *he* said—what say *you*, sir?"

"Old Lady Verney placed the child in charge of the gentleman who then managed the Verney property. I heard all about it from a Mr. Wynne Williams, a Welsh lawyer. The child died when only a year old; you know *he* would have been the heir apparent."

"Poor Arthur said *no*, sir. I asked him—a Scotch marriage, or some of those crooked wed-locks on which they found bigamies and illegitimacies. 'No,' Arthur said, 'he has no technical case, and he may be miserably poor; this is all I can do, and I charge you with it.' It[Pg 162] was very solemn, sir. Where does that lawyer live?"

"At this moment I can't recollect, sir—some place near which the Verneys have estates."

"Cardyllian?"

"The very place, sir."

"I know it, sir; I've been there when I was a boy. And his name was *Wynne* Williams?"

"I *think* it was," said the clergyman.

"And you have nothing more to say about the poor child?" asked Mr. Dingwell.

"There *is* nothing more, I fancy, sir," said Mr. Bartlett. "Can I give you any more information?"

"Not any, sir, that I can think of at present. Many thanks, Mr. Bartlett, for your obliging call. Wait a moment for the servant."

And Mr. Dingwell, thinking fiercely, rang his hand-bell long and viciously.

"Ha! Mrs. Rumble; you'll show this gentleman out. Good-bye, sir, and many thanks."

"Good day, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha! It's a good subject, and a fertile!" muttered Mr. Dingwell, so soon as he was alone.

For the rest of that evening Mr. Dingwell seemed to find ample amusement in his own thoughts, and did not trouble Mrs. Rumble with[Pg 163] that contemptuous and cynical banter, which she was obliged to accept, when he pleased, for conversation.

The only thing she heard him say was—"I'll go *there*."

Now Malory had already been proved to be a safe hiding place for a gentleman in Mr. Dingwell's uncomfortable circumstances. The air was unexceptionable, and Lord Verney was easily persuaded to permit the old man to sojourn, for a few weeks, in the Steward's House, under the care of old Mrs. Mervyn's servant, aided by one provided by Messrs. Goldshed and Levi.

There were two rooms in the steward's house which old Mrs. Mervyn never used, and some furniture removed from the Dower House adjoining, rendered them tolerably comfortable. A letter from old Lady Verney opened and explained the request, which amounted to a command, that she would permit the invalid, in whom Lord Verney took an interest, to occupy, for a fortnight or so, the spare rooms in the Steward's House.

So all was made ready, and the day fixed for Mr. Dingwell's arrival.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

MR. DINGWELL, already much more like himself, having made the journey by easy stages, was approaching Malory by night, in a post-chaise. Fatigue, sickness, or some other cause, perhaps, exasperated his temper specially that night.

Well made up in mufflers, his head was frequently out at the window.

"The old church, by Jove!" he muttered, with a dismal grin, as going slowly down the jolty hill: beneath the ancient trees, the quaint little church of Llanderris and its quiet churchyard appeared at the left of the narrow road, white in the moonlight.

"A new crop of fools, fanatics, and hypocrites come up, since I remember them, and the old ones gone down to enrich that patch of ground and send up their dirty juice in nettles, and thistles, and docks. 'In sure and certain hope.' Why should not they, the swine! as well as their[Pg 165] masters, cunning, and drunken, and sneaks. I'd like to pay a fellow to cut their epitaphs. Why should I spare them a line of truth. Here I am, plain Mr. Dingwell. They don't care much about me; and when my Lord Verney went down the other day, to show them what a fool they have got for a master, amid congenial rejoicings, I don't hear that they troubled their heads with many regrets for my poor friend Arthur. Ha! There's the estuary, and Pendillion. These things don't change, my Lord Verney. Pity Lord Verney doesn't wear as well as Pendillion. There is Ware, over the water, if we had light to see it—to think of that shabby little whey-faced fool! Here we are; these are the trees of Malory, egad!"

And with a shrug he repeated Homer's words, which say—"As are the generations of leaves, such are those of men."

Up the avenue of Malory they were driving, and Dingwell looked out with a dismal curiosity upon the lightless front of the old house.

"Cheerful reception!" he muttered. "Suppose we pick a hole in your title—a hole in your *pocket*—hey!"

Dingwell's servant was at the door of the steward's house as they drew up, and helped the snarling old invalid down.[Pg 166]

When he got to the room the servant said—

"There's coffee, and everythink as you desired."

"I'll take breath first, if you please—coffee afterwards."

"Mrs. Mervyn hopes, sir, as how you'll parding her to-night, being so late, and not in good 'ealth herself, which she would been hup to receive you hotherwise," said the man, delivering his message eloquently.

"Quite time enough to-morrow, and to-morrow—and to-morrow; and I don't care if our meeting creeps away, as that remarkable person, William Shakespeare, says—'in this petty pace.' This is more comfortable, egad! than Rosemary Court. I don't care, I say, if it creeps in that pretty pace, till we are both in heaven. What's Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba? So help me off with these things."

Lord Verney, on whom, in his moods, Mr. Dingwell commented so fully, was dispensing his hospitalities just then, on the other side of the estuary, at his princely mansion of Ware. The party was, it is true, small—very small, in fact. Lady Wimbledon had been there, and the Hon. Caroline Oldys, but they were now visiting Cardyllian at the Verney Arms.

Mr. Jos. Larkin, to his infinite content, was at Ware, and deplored the unchristian feelings dis[Pg 167]played by Mr. Wynne Williams, whom he had by this time formally supplanted in the management of Lord Verney's country affairs, and who had exhibited "a nasty feeling," he "might say a petulance quite childish," last Sunday, when Mr. Larkin had graced Cardyllian Church with his personal devotions, and refused to vacate, in his favour, the small pew which he held as proprietor of Plasdwllyn, but which Mr. Larkin chose to think he occupied in virtue of his former position of solicitor to Lord Verney.

Cleve Verney being still in London, received one morning from his uncle the following short and astounding note, as he sat at breakfast:—

"MY DEAR CLEVE—The time having arrived for taking that step, which the stability of our house of Verney has long appeared to demand, all preliminaries being satisfactorily adjusted, and the young lady and Lady Wimbledon, with a very small party of their relations, as you may have observed by the public papers, at present at the hotel of Cardyllian, nothing remains unaccomplished by way of preparation, but your presence at Ware, which I shall expect on Friday next, when you can meet Miss Caroline Oldys in those new and more defined relations which our contemplated alliance suggests. That event is[Pg 168] arranged to take place on the Wednesday following. Mr. Larkin, who reports to me the substance of a conversation with you, and who has my instructions to apprise you fully of any details you may desire to be informed of, will see you on the morning of to-morrow, in the library at Verney House, at a quarter-past eleven o'clock. He leaves Ware by the mail train to-night. You will observe that the marriage, though not strictly private, is to be conducted without *éclat*, and has

not been anywhere announced. This will explain my not inviting you to bring down any friend of yours to Ware for the occasion."

So it ends with the noble lord's signature, and a due attestation of the state of his affections towards Cleve.

Con el final de la carta de su tío, llegó también el final del desayuno de ese joven caballero, que apenas había comenzado.

Cleve no se levantó y soltó un juramento. Al contrario, estaba sentado muy quieto, con algo, casi una sonrisa, en su rostro pálido y paciente. Al poco rato dobló la carta con cuidado y se la guardó en el bolsillo. Luego se levantó y se acercó a la ventana para contemplar el terreno en la parte trasera de Verney House, y las hojas hollín y los gorriones que la embellecían. por[Pág. 169] Durante mucho tiempo disfrutó de esa vista, y luego dio una caminata rápida durante casi media hora por las calles, calles adormiladas y formales, en ese barrio de la ciudad, con poco riesgo de interrupción.

Su esposa, ¡qué infierno estaba ahora en esa palabra! ¿y por qué? Otro hombre habría encontrado en él una fuente de poder y consuelo. Su esposa, su hijo pequeño, estaban ahora en Francia. Pensó en ambos con bastante amargura. Se alegraba de que estuvieran tan lejos. Margaret habría percibido la miseria de su mente. Ella le habría estado haciendo preguntas, y él ni la habría divulgado ni la habría consultado. En el motivo de esta reserva, que armonizaba con su carácter, puede haber entremezclado la sospecha de que *su* interés y el de ella no hubieran necesitado, en esta crisis, el mismo tratamiento.

Eran alrededor de las once cuando volvió a entrar en Verney House. Dentro de un cuarto de hora más estaría con él aquel abogado canalla, a cuyas vulgares maquinaciones atribuía su actual y complicada miseria.

Sin ningún plan, sólo odiando a ese abominable cristiano, y resuelto a no traicionar ni pensamientos ni emociones que pudieran llevarlo a sospechar, aunque sea débilmente, la verdad, finalmente lo oyó anunciar, como oye un hombre que ha visto su sentencia de muerte. el acercamiento del verdugo.[Pág. 170] El Sr. Larkin entró, con su sombrero bien cepillado en la mano, su calva brillando como con gloria, una sonrisa mansa en sus labios, una observación encogida de rata en sus ojos.

"¡Oh! Sr. Larkin", dijo el Sr. Cleve Verney, con una sonrisa. Mi tío dijo que lo buscarías hoy. A menudo hemos hablado del asunto juntos, ya sabes, mi tío y yo, y no estoy seguro de que puedas decirme muchas cosas que no sé ya. Siéntate, reza ".

—Gracias. Creo que fue principalmente para hacerle saber lo que puede hacer por *usted* . No necesito decirle, mi querido señor Verney, lo generoso que es lord Verney, y qué tío, señor Verney, ha sido para *ti* ".

Aquí hubo una pequeña mirada de los ojos rosados en el techo, y una momentánea elevación de su gran mano, y un suave y admirado movimiento de la cabeza calva.

—No; por supuesto. Es enteramente como su abogado, señor, al tanto de los detalles que le ha ordenado que me mencione, que habla de su llamada aquí. Recibí una carta esta mañana.

—Exactamente. Era para mencionar que aunque no podía, por supuesto, con prudencia, dadas las circunstancias, pensar en *resolver* nada, lo que equivale, de hecho, a una alienación, un paso que en justicia para él y la integridad de los[Pág. 171]propiedades familiares, no podía ceder ni contemplar; él todavía —y desea que al mismo tiempo se entienda, estrictamente, como su intención actual— quiere concederle una asignación de mil libras al año ".

"Más bien una pequeña asignación, ¿no crees, para que un hombre con un asiento en la Casa se case?" observó Cleve.

"Perdóneme, pero él no contempla su matrimonio inmediato, Sr. Verney", respondió Larkin.

—Más bien un cambio repentino de planes, considerando que fijó el miércoles próximo, por carta —dijo Cleve, con una leve mueca de desprecio.

—Perdóneme de nuevo, pero eso se refería a su propio matrimonio, el matrimonio contemplado por Lord Verney con la honorable señorita Oldys.

"¡Oh!" —dijo Cleve, mirando fijamente hacia la mesa. "¡Oh! Por supuesto."

"Esa alianza se celebrará el miércoles, como se propone".

El señor Larkin hizo una pausa y Cleve sintió que sus ojos odiosos leían su semblante. Cleve no pudo evitar palidecer, pero no había ningún otro síntoma visible de su consternación.

"Sí; la carta era un poco confusa. Me ha estado instando a casarme, y me imaginé que había tomado la decisión de acelerar mi aventura; y[Pág. 172]Es más bien un alivio para mí estar seguro de que es suyo, porque no tengo ninguna prisa, sino todo lo contrario. ¿Hay algo más? "

"Me refería a pedir *que* esa pregunta, el Sr. Verney. Imaginé que posiblemente podría desear poner algunas preguntas para mí. Se me ha encargado, dentro de

ciertos límites, para darle cualquier información que pueda desear." El Sr. Larkin volvió a hacer una pausa.

La sangre de Cleve hirvió. "¡Dentro de ciertos límites, más en la confianza de mi tío que yo, ese abogado vulgar e hipócrita!" Además, imaginaba que el señor Larkin veía lo impactante que era la noticia y que le gustaba, con un mezquino sentido de superioridad, haciéndole sentir que penetraba su afectación de indiferencia.

"Es muy amable de su parte; pero si algo me llama la atención, hablaré con mi tío. Hay temas que me interesarían más que aquellos sobre los que él probablemente hablará con usted".

"Es muy posible", dijo el Sr. Larkin. "¿Y qué debo informar a su señoría como resultado de nuestra conversación?"

"Simplemente la verdad, señor."

Me temo que no quiero dejarme claro. Quería preguntarle si deseaba que añadiera algo. Siempre puede contar conmigo, señor Verney, para transmitir sus opiniones a lord Verney.[Pág. 173] si alguna vez llegara a haber algo, sientes una delicadeza por abrirte a su señoría.

-Sí, le escribiré -respondió Cleve secamente.

Y Cleve Verney se levantó, y el abogado, con una sonrisa boba y una gran reverencia, se marchó.

[Pág. 174]

CAPITULO XV.

RECTOR DE ARCILLA A LA LUZ DE LA LUNA.

As the attorney made his astounding announcement, Cleve had felt as if his brain, in vulgar parlance, *turned*! In a moment the world in which he had walked and lived from his school-days passed away, and a chasm yawned at his feet. His whole future was subverted. A man who dies in delusion, and awakes not to celestial music and the light of paradise, but to the trumpet of judgment and the sight of the abyss, will quail as Cleve did.

How he so well maintained the appearance of self-possession while Mr. Larkin remained, I can't quite tell. Pride, however, which has carried so many quivering souls, with an appearance of defiance, through the press-room to the drop, supported him.

But now that scoundrel was gone. The fury that fired him, the iron constraint that held him firm was also gone, and Cleve despaired.[Pg 175]

Till this moment, when he was called on to part with it all, he did not suspect how entirely his ambition was the breath of his nostrils, or how mere a sham was the sort of talk to which he had often treated Margaret and others about an emigrant's life and the Arcadian liberty of the Antipodes.

The House-of-Commons life—the finest excitement on earth—the growing fame, the peerage, the premiership in the distance—the vulgar fingers of Jos. Larkin had just dropped the extinguisher upon the magic lamp that had showed him these dazzling illusions, and he was left to grope and stumble in the dark among his debts, with an obscure wife on his arm, and a child to plague him also. And this was to be the end! A precarious thousand a-year—dependent on the caprice of a narrow, tyrannical old man, with a young wife at his ear, and a load of debts upon Cleve's shoulders, as he walked over the quag!

It is not well to let any object, apart from heaven, get into your head and fill it. Cleve had not that vein of insanity which on occasion draws men to suicide. In the thread of his destiny that fine black strand was not spun. So blind and deep for a while was his plunge into despair, that I think had that atrabilious poison, which throws out its virus as suddenly as latent plague, and[Pg 176] lays a *felo-de-se* to cool his heels and his head in God's prison, the grave—had a drop or two, I say, of that elixir of death been mingled in his blood, I don't think he would ever have seen another morrow.

But Cleve was not thinking of dying. He was sure—in rage, and blasphemy, and torture, it might be—but still he *was* sure to live on. Well, what was now to be done? Every power must be tasked to prevent the ridiculous catastrophe which threatened him with ruin; neither scruple, nor remorse, nor conscience, nor compunction should stand in the way. We are not to suppose that he is about to visit the Hon. Miss Caroline Oldys with a dagger in one hand and a cup of poison in the other, nor with gunpowder to blow up his uncle and Ware, as some one did Darnley and the house of Kirk of Field. Simply his mind was filled with the one idea, that one way or another the thing *must* be stopped.

It was long before his ideas arranged themselves, and for a long time after no plan of operations which had a promise of success suggested itself. When at

length he did decide, you would have said no wilder or wickeder scheme could have entered his brain.

It was a moonlight night. The scene a flat country, with a monotonous row of poplars[Pg 177] crossing it. This long file of formal trees marks the line of a canal, fronting which at a distance of about a hundred yards stands a lonely brick house, with a few sombre elms rising near it; a light mist hung upon this expansive flat. The soil must have been unproductive, so few farmsteads were visible for miles around. Here and there pools of water glimmered coldly in the moonlight; and patches of rushes and reeds made the fields look ragged and neglected.

Here and there, too, a stunted hedge-row showed dimly along the level, otherwise unbroken, and stretching away into the haze of the horizon. It is a raw and dismal landscape, where a murder might be done, and the scream lose itself in distance unheard—where the highwayman, secure from interruption, might stop and plunder the chance wayfarer at his leisure—a landscape which a fanciful painter would flank with a distant row of gibbets.

The front of this square brick house, with a little enclosure, hardly two yards in depth, and a wooden paling in front, and with a green moss growing damply on the piers and the door-steps, and tinging the mortar between the bricks, looks out upon a narrow old road, along which just then were audible the clink and rattle of an approaching carriage and horses.[Pg 178]

It was past one o'clock. No hospitable light shone from the windows, which on the contrary looked out black and dreary upon the vehicle and steaming horses which pulled up in front of the house.

Out got Cleve and reconnoitred.

"Are you quite sure?"

"Clay Parsonage—yes, sir," said the driver.

Cleve shook the little wooden gate, which was locked; so he climbed the paling, and knocked and rang loud and long at the hall-door.

The driver at last reported a light in an upper window.

Cleve went on knocking and ringing, and the head of the Rev. Isaac Dixie appeared high in the air over the window-stool.

"What do you want, pray?" challenged that suave clergyman from his sanctuary.

"It's I—Cleve Verney. Why do you go to bed at such hours? I must see you for a moment."

"Dear me! my dear, valued pupil! Who could have dreamed?—I shall be down in one moment."

"Thanks—I'll wait;" and then to the driver he said—"I shan't stay five minutes; mind, you're ready to start with me the moment I return."[Pg 179]

Now the hall-door opened. The Rev. Isaac Dixie—for his dress was a compromise between modesty and extreme haste, and necessarily very imperfect—stood in greater part behind the hall-door; a bed-room candlestick in his fingers, smiling blandly on his "distinguished pupil," who entered without a smile, without a greeting—merely saying:—

"Where shall we sit down for a minute, old Dixie?"

Holding his hand with the candle in it across, so as to keep his flowing dressing-gown together; and with much wonder and some misgivings, yet contriving his usual rosy smile, he conducted his unexpected visitor into his "study."

"I've so many apologies to offer, my very honoured and dear friend; this is so miserable, and I fear you are cold. We must get something; we must, really, manage something—some little refreshment."

Dixie placed the candle on the chimney-piece, and looked inquiringly on Cleve.

"There's some sherry, I know, and I *think* there's some brandy."

"There's no one up and about?" inquired Cleve.

"Not a creature," said the Rector; "no one can hear a word, and these are good thick walls."[Pg 180]

"I've only a minute; I know you'd like to be a bishop, Dixie?"

Cleve, with his muffler and his hat still on, was addressing the future prelate, with his elbow on the chimney-piece.

"*Nolo episcopari*, of course, but we *know* you would, and there's no time now for pretty speeches. Now, listen, you shall be *that*, and you shall reach it by two steps—the two best livings in our gift. I always keep my word; and when I set my heart on a thing I bring it about, and so sure as I do any good, I'll bend all my interest to that one object."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie stared hard at him, for Cleve looked strangely, and spoke as sternly as a villain demanding his purse. The Rector of Clay looked horribly

perplexed. His countenance seemed to ask, "Does he mean to give me a mitre or to take my life, or is he quite right in his head?"

"You think I don't mean what I say, or that I'm talking nonsense, or that I'm mad. I'm not mad, it's no nonsense, and no man was ever more resolved to do what he says." And Cleve who was not given to swearing, did swear a fierce oath. "But all this is not for nothing; there's a condition; you must do me a service. It won't cost you much—less trouble, almost, than[Pg 181] you've taken for me to-night, but you *must* do it."

"And may I, my dear and valued pupil, may I ask?" began the rev. gentleman.

"No, you need not ask, for I'll tell you. It's the same sort of service you did for me in France," said Cleve.

"Ah! ah!" ejaculated the clergyman, very uneasily. "For no one but *you*, my dear and admirable pupil, could I have brought myself to take that step, and I trust that you will on reconsideration——"

"You *must* do what I say," said Cleve, looking and speaking with the same unconscious sternness, which frightened the Rector more than any amount of bluster. "I hardly suppose you want to break with me finally, and you don't quite know all the consequences of that step, I fancy."

"Break with *you*? my admirable patron! desert my dear and brilliant pupil in an emergency? *Certainly* not. Reckon upon me, my dear Mr. Verney, when*ever* you need my poor services, to the *uttermost*. To *you all* my loyalty is due, but unless you made a very special point of it, I should hesitate for any other person living, *but* yourself, to incur a second time——"

"Don't you think my dear, d—d old friend, I understand the length, and breadth, and depth,[Pg 182] of your friendship; I know how strong it *is*, and I'll make it *stronger*. It *is* for *me*—yes, in my own case you must repeat the service, as you call it, which you once did me, in another country."

The Rev. Isaac Dixie's rosy cheeks mottled all over blue and yellow; he withdrew his hand from his dressing-gown, with an unaffected gesture of fear; and he fixed a terrified gaze upon Cleve Verney's eyes, which did not flinch, but encountered his, darkly and fixedly, with a desperate resolution.

"Why, you look as much frightened as if I asked you to commit a crime; you marvellous old fool, you hardly think me mad enough for *that*?"

"I hardly know, Mr. Verney, what I think," said Dixie, looking with a horrible helplessness into his face.

"Good God! sir; it can't be anything *wrong*?"

"Come, come, sir; you're more than half asleep. Do you *dare* to think I'd commit myself to any man, by such an idiotic proposal? No one but a lunatic could think of *blasting* himself, as you—but you *can't* suppose it. Do listen, and understand if you can; my wife, to whom you married me, is *dead*, six months ago she *died*; I tell you she's *dead*."[Pg 183]

"¡Dios mío! Estoy muy dolido, y diré *conmocionado* ; la dama fallecida, no debería haber aludido, mi querido alumno, por supuesto; pero ¿debo decir que nunca escuché de esa aflicción?"

"¿Cómo demonios pudiste? ¿No crees que, sabiendo todo lo que haces, lo pondría en los periódicos entre los *muertos* ?"

"No, querida, por supuesto", dijo el reverendo Isaac Dixie, reuniendo apresuradamente su bata. "No, ciertamente."

"No creo que ese tipo de publicación que ni me respondería. Se olvida que es hace dos años y más, un *buen negocio* más. *Yo* no hago sin embargo, y lo que sea *que* fuere, *yo* no quiero que mi tío saber algo al respecto ".

Pero, ya sabe, sólo quise decir que no me lo había dicho; mi querido señor Verney, mi distinguido alumno, verá, ¿no se da cuenta de cuánto está involucrado? Pero *esto* , ¿ no *podría* decirlo? ¿Esto sobre alguien más? Piensa ... piensa.

"No, *no* está en el poder de *nadie* , excepto en el *tuyo* , Dixie;" y Cleve tomó su mano, mirándolo a la cara, y se la retorció con tanta fuerza que el rev. El caballero casi hizo una mueca de dolor por la presión de la administración, cosa que me atrevo a decir que Cleve estaba bastante inconsciente. "Nadie más que *tú* ."

"La pobre, la respetada dama, muerta, por supuesto que me darás una nota a eso[Pág. 184]efecto bajo tu mano; ¿No tendrá ninguna objeción, en este caso, a que obtenga una licencia especial? "

"¡Diablo especial! ¿Estás loco? Vaya, cualquiera podría hacerlo con eso. No, es solo porque es un poco *irregular* , nada más, y exige una confianza mutua implícita, que te he elegido para ello".

Dixie parecía como si el cumplido no fuera un placer puro.

"Sigo pensando que, habiendo realizado el otro, hay cierta torpeza y las penas son terribles", dijo con creciente inquietud, "y me parece que si mi querido Sr.

Verney pudiera poner su mano sobre algún otro amigo humilde, en este caso particular, las ventajas serían obvias ".

"Ven, Dixie," dijo Cleve, "estoy *pasando* , sino que debe decir sí o no, y así decidir si usted ha visto lo último de mí, no puedo pasar la noche dándole mis razones, pero son concluyentes . Si actúas como un hombre sensato, es el último servicio que necesitaré de tus manos, y te recompensaré *espléndidamente* ; si no lo haces, no solo dejo de ser tu amigo, sino que me convierto en tu *enemigo.* . puedo golpear cuando me gusta, ya sabe *que* , y sobre mi alma te voy a romper voy a ver a mi tío mañana por la mañana en Ware, y voy a decirle.[Pág. 185] claramente la totalidad de esa transacción francesa ".

—Pero ... pero por favor, mi querido señor Verney, diga, ¿ me negué ... ¿ me *opongo* ? Puede ordenarme , por supuesto. He incurrido. Puedo decir que ya es un riesgo para usted, un riesgo en la *forma* .

"Exactamente, *en forma* ; y no la aumenta con esta amabilidad, y se asegura mi eterna gratitud. Ahora habla como un hombre sensato. Debe estar en Cardyllian mañana por la noche. Es posible que no pida *nada* de usted; si lo hago, lo más importante es una irregularidad técnica y un secreto, que ambos estamos igualmente interesados en observar. Permanecerá una semana en la mente de Cardyll, y yo, por supuesto, le franquearé allí y de regreso, y mientras permanecer, es asunto mío. Tiene un aspecto político, como le explicaré en breve, y tan pronto como haya traído a mi tío y pueda confesarlo, abrirá el camino rápidamente hacia *su* fortuna. ¿Te veo en Cardyllian mañana por la noche?

—¡De acuerdo, señor! ... de acuerdo, mi querido señor Verney. Estaré allí, mi querido y apreciado alumno ... *sí* .

Ve a Verney Arms; probablemente te estaré cuidando allí; de todos modos te veré antes de la noche.

Verney miró su reloj y repitió "Yo[Pág. 186] te veré mañana ", y sin despedirse, o sin escuchar, como parecía, los cumplidos y bendiciones de despedida del reverendo Isaac Dixie, salió con triste prisa, como si la conferencia no estuviera cerrada, sino suspendida por el paréntesis que se acercaba. de una noche y un día.

De la mesa del vestíbulo, el divino obsequioso tomó la llave de la verja, a la que, en pantuflas y en bata, avanzó tranquilamente y, habiendo dejado salir a su despótica pupila, se despidió con la mano mientras la silla se alejaba. regresó y cerró sus instalaciones y su casa, con una gran carga en el corazón.

[Pág. 187]

CAPITULO XVI.

UNA ALARMA.

Cleve llegó a la estación, a ocho millas de distancia del lúgubre pantano que he descrito, a tiempo para tomar el tren correo. Desde Llwynan no fue directamente a Ware, sino que condujo hasta Cardyllian y se detuvo en el Verney Arms a la mañana siguiente.

A las diez en punto se le vio deambulando por las calles, hablando con viejos amigos, entrando en las tiendas y escuchando los chismes de la ciudad. Cleve tenía una especie de amabilidad que respondía perfectamente a todos los propósitos electorales, y *esa* era la medida de su valor.

¿A quién debería encontrar en Castle Street sino a Tom Sedley? Deben haber llegado en el mismo tren a Llwynan. La vista de Tom sacudió intensamente los nervios de Cleve Verney. Había algo tan extraño en su apariencia y modales que Sedley pensó que estaba enfermo. Se detuvo un rato para hablar con él en la esquina de[Pág. 188] Church Street, pero parecía tan obviamente dispuesto a escapar de él, que Sedley no presionó a su sociedad, sino que accedió con cierto disgusto y asombro por sus nuevas relaciones.

Tom Sedley had been with Wynne Williams about poor Vane Etherage's affairs. Honest Wynne Williams was in no mood to flatter Lord Verney, the management of whose affairs he had, he said, "resigned." The fact was that he had been, little by little, so uncomfortably superseded in his functions by our good friend Jos. Larkin, and the fashion of Lord Verney's countenance was so manifestly changed, that honest Wynne Williams felt that he might as well do a proud thing, and resign, as wait a little longer for the inevitable humiliation of dismissal.

"I'm afraid my friend the admiral is in bad hands; worse hands than Larkin's he could hardly have fallen into. I could tell you things of that fellow, if we had time—of course strictly between ourselves, you know—that would open your eyes. And as to his lordship—well, I suppose most people know something of Lord Verney. I owe him nothing, you know; it's all ended between us, and I wash my hands of him and his concerns. You may talk to him, if you like; but you'll find you might as well argue with the tide in the estuary there. I'd be[Pg 189] devilish glad if I could be of any use; but you see how it is; and to tell you the truth, I'm afraid it must come to a regular smash, unless Lord Verney drops that nasty litigation. There are some charges, you know, upon the property already; and with that litigation hanging over it, I don't see how he's to get money

to pay those calls. It's a bad business, I'm afraid, and an awful pity. Poor old fellow!—a little bit rough, but devilish good-hearted."

Tom Sedley went up to Hazelden. The Etherage girls knew he was coming, and were watching for him at the top of the steep walk.

"I've been talking, as I said I would, to Wynne Williams this morning," he said, after greetings and inquiries made and answered, "and he had not anything important to advise; but he has promised to think over the whole matter."

"And Wynne Williams is *known* to be *the* cleverest lawyer *in the world*," exclaimed Miss Charity, exulting. "I was afraid, on account of his having been so lately Lord Verney's adviser, that he would not have been willing to consult with you. And *will* he use his influence, which must be very great, with Lord Verney?"

"He has none; and he thinks it would be quite useless my talking to him."

"Oh! Is it possible? Well, if he said *that*,[Pg 190] I *never* heard *such* nonsense in the course of my life. I think old Lord Verney was one of the *very nicest* men I *ever* spoke to in the course of my life; and I'm certain it is all that horrid Mr. Larkin, and a great mistake; for Lord Verney is quite a gentleman, and would not do anything so *despicable* as to worry and injure papa by this horrid business, if only you would make him understand it; and I *do* think, Thomas Sedley, you *might* take that trouble for papa."

"I'll go over to Ware, and try to see Lord Verney, if you think my doing so can be of the least use," said Tom, who knew the vanity of arguing with Miss Charity.

"Oh, *do*," said pretty Agnes, and that entreaty was, of course, a command; so without going up to see old Etherage, who was very much broken and ill, his daughters said; and hoping possibly to have some cheering news on his return, Tom Sedley took his leave for the present, and from the pier of Cardyllian crossed in a boat to Ware.

On the spacious steps of that palatial mansion, as Mr. Larkin used to term it, stood Lord Verney, looking grandly seaward, with compressed eyes, like a near-sighted gentleman as he was.

"Oh! is she all right?" said Lord Verney.

"I—I don't know, Lord Verney," replied Tom Sedley. "I came to"[Pg 191]—

"Oh—aw—Mr.—Mr.—how d'ye do, sir," said Lord Verney, with marked frigidity, not this time giving him the accustomed finger.

"I came, Lord Verney, hoping you might possibly give me five minutes, and a very few words, about that unfortunate business of poor Mr. Vane Etherage."

"I'm unfortunately just going out in a boat—about it; and I can't just now afford time, Mr.—a—Mr."—

"*Sedley* is my name," suggested Sedley, who knew that Lord Verney remembered him perfectly.

"Sedley—Mr. Sedley; yes. As I mentioned, I'm going in a boat. I'm sorry I can't possibly oblige you; and it is very natural you, who are so intimate, I believe, with Mr. Etherage, should take that side of the question—about it; but *I*'ve no reason to call those proceedings unfortunate; and—and I don't anticipate—and, in fact, people usually look after their own concerns—about it." Lord Verney, standing on the steps, was looking over Sedley's head, as he spoke, at the estuary and the shipping there.

"I'm sure, Lord Verney, if you knew how utterly ruinous, how really *deplorable*, the consequences of pursuing this thing—I mean the lawsuit against him—may be—I am *sure*—you would stop it all."[Pg 192]

Honest Tom spoke in the belief that in the hesitation that had marked the close of the noble lord's remarks there was a faltering of purpose, whereas there was simply a failure of ideas.

"I can't help your forming opinions, sir, though I have not invited their expression upon my concerns and—and affairs. If you have anything to communicate about those proceedings, you had better see Mr. Larkin, my attorney; he's the proper person. Mr. Etherage has taken a line in the county to wound and injure me, as, of course, he has a perfect right to do; he has taken that line, and I don't see any reason why I should not have what I'm entitled to. There's the principle of government by party, you're aware; and we're not to ask favours of those we seek to wound and injure—about it; and that's my view, and idea, and fixed opinion. I must wish you good morning, Mr. Sedley. I'm going down to my boat, and I decline distinctly any conversation upon the subject of my law business; I decline it *distinctly*, Mr. Sedley—about it," repeated the peer peremptorily; and as he looked a good deal incensed, Tom Sedley wisely concluded it was time to retire; and so his embassage came to an end.

Lord Verney crossed the estuary in his yacht, consulting his watch from time to time, and re[Pg 193]connoitering the green and pier of Cardyllian through his telescope with considerable interest. A little group was assembled near the stair, among whose figures he saw Lady Wimbledon. "Why is not Caroline there?" he

kept asking himself, and all the time searching that little platform for the absent idol of his heart.

Let us deal mercifully with this antiquated romance; and if Miss Caroline Oldys forebore to say, "Go up, thou baldhead," let us also spare the amorous incongruity. Does any young man love with the self-abandonment of an old one? Is any romance so romantic as the romance of an old man? When Sancho looked over his shoulder, and saw his master in his shirt, cutting capers and tumbling head-over-heels, and tearing his hair in his love-madness, that wise governor and man of proverbs forgot the grotesqueness of the exhibition in his awe of that vehement adoration. So let us. When does this noble frenzy exhibit itself in such maudlin transports, and with a self-sacrifice so idolatrously suicidal, as in the old? Seeing, then, that the spirit is so prodigiously willing, let us bear with the spectacle of their infirmities, and when one of these sighing, magnanimous, wrinkled Philanders goes by, let us not hiss, but rather say kindly, "*Vive la bagatelle!*" or, as we say in Ireland, "More power!"[Pg 194]

He was disappointed. Miss Caroline Oldys had a very bad headache, Lady Wimbledon said, and was in her room, in care of her maid, *so* miserable at losing the charming sail to Malory.

Well, the lover was sorely disappointed, as we have said; but there was nothing for it but submission, and to comfort himself with the assurances of Lady Wimbledon that Caroline's headaches never lasted long, and that she was always better for a long time, when they were over. This latter piece of information seemed to puzzle Lord Verney.

"Miss Oldys is always better after an attack than before it," said Cleve, interpreting for his uncle.

"Why, of *course*. That's what Lady Wimbledon means, as I understand it," said Lord Verney, a little impatiently. "It's very sad; you must tell me all about it; but we may hope to find her, you say, quite recovered when we return?"

Cleve was not of the party to Malory. He returned to the Verney Arms. He went up to Lady Wimbledon's drawing-room with a book he had promised to lend her, and found Miss Caroline Oldys.

Yes, she was better. He was very earnest and[Pg 195] tender in his solicitudes. He was looking ill, and was very melancholy.

Two hours after her maid came in to know whether she "pleased to want anything?" and she would have sworn that Miss Caroline had been crying. Mr. Cleve had got up from beside her, and was looking out of the window.

A little later in the day, old Lady Calthorpe, a cousin of Lady Wimbledon's, very feeble and fussy, and babbling in a querulous treble, was pushed out in her Bath-chair, Cleve and Miss Caroline Oldys accompanying, to the old castle of Cardyllian.

On the step of the door of the Verney Arms, as they emerged, whom should they meet, descending from the fly that had borne him from Llwynan, but the Rev. Isaac Dixie. That sleek and rosy gentleman, with flat feet, and large hands, and fascinating smile, was well pleased to join the party, and march blandly beside the chair of the viscountess, invigorating the fainting spirit of that great lady by the balm of his sympathy and the sunshine of his smile.

So into the castle they went, across the nearly obliterated moat, where once a drawbridge hung, now mantled with greenest grass, under the grim arches, where once the clanging portcullis rose and fell, and into the base court, and so under[Pg 196] other arches into the inner court, surrounded by old ivy-mantled walls.

In this seclusion the old Lady Calthorpe stopped her chair to enjoy the sweet air and sunshine, and the agreeable conversation of the divine, and Cleve offered to guide Miss Caroline Oldys through the ruins, an exploration in which she seemed highly interested.

Cleve spoke low and eloquently, but I don't think it was about the architecture. Time passed rapidly, and at last Miss Oldys whispered—

"We've been too long away from Lady Calthorpe. I must go back. She'll think I have deserted her."

So they emerged from the roofless chambers and dim corridors, and Cleve wished from the bottom of his heart that some good or evil angel would put off his uncle's nuptials for another week, and all would be well—*well*!

Yes—what was "well," if one goes to moral ideals for a standard? We must run risks—we must set one side of the book against the other. What is the purpose and the justification of all morality but happiness? The course which involves least misery is alternatively the moral course. And take the best act that ever you did, and place it in that dreadful solvent, the light of God's eye, and how much of its motive will stand[Pg 197] the test? Yes—another week, and all will be well; and has not a fertile mind like his, resource for any future complication, as for this, that may arise?

Captain Shrapnell was not sorry to meet this distinguished party as they emerged, and drew up on the grass at the side, and raised his hat with a reverential smile, as the old lady wheeled by, and throwing a deferential concern suddenly into his countenance, he walked a few paces beside Cleve, while he said—

"You've heard, of course, about your uncle, Lord Verney?"

"No?" answered Cleve, on chance.

"*No?*—Oh?—Why it's half an hour ago. I hope it's nothing serious; but his groom drove down from Malory for the doctor here. Something wrong with his head—suddenly, I understand, and Old Lyster took his box with him, and a bottle of leeches—that looks serious, eh?—along with him."

Shrapnell spoke low, and shook his head.

—Yo ... no escuché ni una palabra. Estuve en el castillo con la anciana lady Calthorpe. Estoy muy sorprendido.

Había algo extraño, el viejo astuto Shrapnell imaginó en la expresión de los ojos de Cleve, que por un momento se encontraron con los suyos. Pero Cleve estaba pálido[Pág. 198] y emocionado, mientras le decía una palabra en voz muy baja a la señorita Oldys, y cruzaba la calle acompañado de Shrapnell, hasta la consulta del médico.

"¡Oh!" —dijo Cleve, entrando apresuradamente y acercándose a un joven delgado y pálido, de cabello negro y lacio, que se detuvo en el proceso de rebuznar una receta en un mortero mientras se acercaba. Tengo entendido que mi tío no está bien, lord Verney, en Malory.

El joven miró al capitán Shrapnell.

"El doctor me dijo que no lo mencionara, señor; pero si *usted entraba* a la trastienda" ...

"Estaré contigo en un momento", dijo Cleve Verney a Shrapnell, al mismo tiempo que entraba en el santuario y, al cerrarse la puerta de vidrio, preguntó: "¿Qué *es* ?"

—El médico pensó que debía ser una apoplejía, señor —murmuró el joven, mirando con los ojos muy abiertos, muy solemnemente, el rostro de Cleve.

"Así que imaginé", y Cleve hizo una pausa, un poco aturdido; "¿Y el médico está ahí, en Malory, *ahora* ?"

"Sí, señor; estará allí un cuarto de hora o más a esta hora", respondió el joven.

Cleve volvió a hacer una pausa.

"No fue *fatal* , ¿todavía estaba vivo?" preguntó muy bajo.

"Sí, señor - seguro."[Pág. 199]

Cleve, olvidándose de cualquier forma de despedida, entró en la tienda.

"Debo conducir hasta Malory", dijo; y llamando a uno de esos carruajes de pony que se pasean en cardyllian, se alejó, con un gesto de la mano hacia el capitán, que estaba profundamente perplejo al leer el verdadero significado de ese hermoso rostro misterioso.

[Pág. 200]

CAPITULO XVII.

UNA NUEVA LUZ.

Por todo Cardyllian, en ese momento, el vizconde estaba muy enfermo, tal vez muriendo, posiblemente muerto. Bajo la transparente sombra verde de los altos árboles viejos, por el estrecho camino hacia Malory, por el que tantas veces había pasado de otro humor, más apasionado, apenas tal vez menos egoísta, que el presente, ahora conducía Cleve, con el cerebro y el corazón perturbados. y ocupado: "caminando, como antes, en una sombra vana, y en vano inquieto". Las margaritas miraron inocentemente como los ojos de los niños, en su mirada oscurecida. ¿Después de todo, el destino se había apiadado de él y estaba allí, con un clip de las inexorables tijeras, una liberación del infierno de su complicación?

Cuando Cleve entró por la puerta de Malory, vio al grupo de Cardyllian marcharse en el yate a su regreso. Lady Wimbledon, resultó, se había quedado a cargo de Lord Verney.[Pág. 201]Al llegar a la casa, Cleve se enteró de que Lord Verney estaba *vivo;* de hecho, estaba mejor.

Combinando las narraciones de Lady Wimbledon y del médico, lo que Cleve descubrió fue lo mismo. Lord Verney, que mostraba una misteriosa urgencia y prisa en su correspondencia, había dado órdenes de que sus cartas lo siguieran a Malory ese día. Una de estas cartas, con un sello negro y un sobre con borde negro, resultó ser una comunicación de considerable interés. Le fue dirigida por el clérigo que estaba a cargo de la conciencia de la pobre anciana Lady Verney, y anunció que su cuidado había terminado y que la Dama Viuda, la madre de Lord Verney, había muerto.

Como el médico que la había atendido se había ido y no había nadie más que los sirvientes en la casa, sintió que era un deber escribir a lord Verney para informarle del triste acontecimiento.

El melancólico acontecimiento no fue gran sorpresa para lord Verney, su maduro hijo de sesenta y cuatro años, que a veces se había preguntado vagamente si viviría tanto como la vieja condesa de Desmond y seguiría dibujando su coyuntura durante cincuenta años después de su propia muerte. . Había sido un buen hijo; no tenía nada que reprocharse. Tenía unos noventa años; la propiedad se liberó de £ 1.500 por año. Ella también había sido una mujer religiosa y era, sin duda,[Pág. 202]feliz. En general, la aflicción fue bastante soportable.

Pero nunca hubo aflicción en un momento más incómodo. Aquí estaba su matrimonio en vísperas de la realización, un secreto tan bien guardado hasta ayer que nadie en la tierra, imaginaba, sino media docena de personas, sabía que se soñaba con algo así. Lord Verney, como otros trágicos en este teatro nuestro, estaba, quizás, un poco más nervioso de lo que parecía, y no le gustaba reír en el lugar equivocado. No quería que lo hablaran o, como él decía, "cualquier broma o cosas al respecto". Y, por lo tanto, deseaba que el evento tomara desprevenida a la humanidad, como lo hizo el Diluvio. Pero esta mañana, con un buen cálculo del tiempo, había enviado cuatro cartas, con destino, como los argosies de Antonio, a diferentes partes remotas del mundo: una a Pau, otra a Lisboa, una tercera a Florencia y una cuarta a Ginebra. , a amigos que probablemente difundirían la noticia en todas las direcciones, lo que no le importaba nada, si tan sólo el evento se desarrollaba en el momento señalado. Con la genialidad de un diplomático, había planeado los despachos que le quedaban, no muchos, para llegar a sus destinos menos lejanos a última hora, anterior a la de su unión. Pero los demás estaban en camino, y supuso que debía pasar un mes o más antes de que[Pág. 203] podría tener lugar con cualquier decoro, y, mientras tanto, todo el mundo estaría disfrutando de la risa de su interesante situación.

Lord Verney se conmovió mucho cuando leyó esta triste carta; era patético y malhumorado, muy conmovido e irritado, y derramó algunas lágrimas. Se retiró para escribir una nota al clérigo, que había anunciado la catástrofe, y fue seguido por Lady Wimbledon, que se consideraba privilegiada, y a ella le expresó sus "ideas y sentimientos" acerca de su "pobre querida madre que se había ido, sobre eso; " y de repente se apoderó de él de un vértigo tan violento que si no hubiera tenido una silla detrás de él, se habría caído al suelo.

Fue algo así como un ataque; Lady Wimbledon estaba aterrorizada; se veía tan espantoso y no respondió nada, solo suspiró laboriosamente y movió sus labios blancos. En su distracción, levantó la ventana y llamó a los sirvientes a gritos; y se fue el carruaje abierto de lord Verney, como hemos visto, a Cardyllian, para el médico.

Cuando llegó Cleve, el ataque se había declarado gota, curado por un baño de mostaza "agradable" en el pie, dejando, sin embargo, su "marca leven" en la cabeza donde había parpadeado, en un ojo irritado.

Aquí había otra molestia. Podría haber terminado[Pág. 204]en una semana, dijo el médico; podría durar un mes. Pero, por el momento, estaba fuera de lugar conmoverlo. Debían idear y hacer que se sintiera lo más cómodo posible. Pero en Malory debe contentarse con quedarse por el momento.

Vio a Cleve durante unos minutos.

y Lord Verney extendió su mano delgada y apretó la de Cleve. Eres muy amable, Cleve, y si me lo permiten te veré mañana y me dirás qué hay en los periódicos.[Pág. 205]porque no me dejan leer; y habrá este funeral, ya sabes, al respecto, tu pobre y querida abuela; ella, por supuesto, será enterrada; tendrás que encargarte de eso, ya sabes; y Larkin, ya sabes, te ahorrará problemas y ... y ... ¡eh! ¡ja, ja — hoo! ¡Muy agradable! ¡Dios mío, qué tortura! ¡Ja! —¡Oh, querido! Bueno, creo que lo he dejado todo bastante claro, y le dirás a Caroline, es solo una gota voladora, sobre eso, y ... y cosas. Así que debo despedirme de ti, querido Cleve, y que Dios te bendiga ".

De modo que Cleve vio a Caroline Oldys en el Verney Arms y habló mucho con ella, en voz baja, mientras la anciana lady Wimbledon dormitaba en su silla y, sin duda, se trataba de la "gota voladora" de su tío.

Aquella noche, nuestro amigo Wynne Williams estaba sentado en su rincón, había un poco de fuego en la chimenea, el aire era fuerte, las cosas para el té sobre la mesa y el tipo acogedor que estaba leyendo una novela, con los pies en pantuflas en el suelo. defensa.

Eran las nueve y media, una hora bastante desenfadada en Cardyllian, cuando el absorto abogado se despertó con un golpe en la puerta.

Creo que ya he mencionado que en esa ciudad de la edad de oro, las puertas de los pasillos permanecen abiertas, en evidencia de "una fe antigua que no conoce engaños", mucho después del anochecer.[Pág. 206]

"Adelante", dijo Wynne Williams; y para su asombro quién debía entrar, no con la convencional sonrisa de saludo, sino pálido, moreno y desconsolado, sino con la alta figura de la señora Rebecca Mervyn.

El honesto Wynne Williams nunca se preocupó por los fantasmas, pero había leído sobre ilusiones espectrales, y la anciana señora Mervyn fomentaba inconscientemente la fantasía de que lo que temía mucho se le había ocurrido y que estaba a punto de convertirse en víctima de ese tipo de situaciones.

alucinación. Ella se paró apenas un paso dentro de la puerta, mirándolo, y él, con su novela, sobre sus rodillas, la miró fijamente.

"Está muerta", dijo la anciana.

" *¿Quién?* ", Exclamó el abogado.

"La viuda Lady Verney", continuó, en lugar de responder.

"I was so much astonished, ma'am, to see you here; you haven't been down in the town these twelve years, I think. I could scarce believe my eyes. Won't you come in, ma'am? Pray do." The attorney by this time was on his legs, and doing the honours, much relieved, and he placed a chair for her. "If it's any business, ma'am, I'll be most happy, or any time you like."

"Yes, she's dead," said she again.

"Oh, come in, ma'am—*do*—so is Queen Anne,"[Pg 207] said the attorney, laughing kindly. "I heard *that* early to-day; we *all* heard it, and we're sorry, of course. Sit down, ma'am. But then she was not very far from a hundred, and we're all mortal. Can I do anything for you, ma'am?"

"She was good to me—a proud woman—hard, they used to say; but she was good to me—yes, sir—and so she's gone, at last. She was frightened at them—there was something in them—my poor head—you know—*I* couldn't see it, and I did not care—for the little child was gone; it was only two months old, and she was ninety years; it's a long time, and now she's in her shroud, poor thing! and I may speak to you."

"Do, ma'am—pray; but it's growing late, and hadn't we better come to the point a bit?"

She was sitting in the chair he had placed for her, and she had something under her cloak, a thick book it might be, which she held close in her arms. She placed it on the table and it turned out to be a small tin box with a padlock.

"Papers, ma'am?" he inquired.

"Will you read them, sir, and see what ought to be done—there's the key?"

"Certainly, ma'am;" and having unlocked it, he disclosed two little sheaves of papers, neatly folded and endorsed.

The attorney turned these over rapidly, merely[Pg 208] reading at first the little note of its contents written upon each. "By Jove!" he exclaimed; he looked very serious now, with a frown, and the corners of his mouth drawn down, like a man who witnesses something horrible.

"And, ma'am, how long have you had these?"

"Since Mr. Sedley died."

"I know; that's more than twenty years, I think; did you show them to anyone?"

"Only to the poor old lady who's gone."

"Ay, I see."

There was a paper endorsed "Statement of Facts," and this the attorney was now reading.

"Now, ma'am, do you wish to place these papers in my hands, that I may act upon them as the interests of those who are nearest to you may require?"

She looked at him with a perplexed gaze, and said, "*Yes*, sir, certainly."

"Very well, ma'am; then I must go up to town at once. It's a very serious affair, ma'am, and I'll do my duty by you."

"Can you understand them, sir?"

"N—*no*—that is, I must see counsel in London; I'll be back again in a day or two. Leave it all to me, ma'am, and the moment I know anything for certain, you shall know all about it."

The old woman asked the question as one[Pg 209] speaks in their sleep, without hearing the answer. Her finger was to her lip, and she was looking down with a knitted brow.

"Ay, she was proud—I *promised*—proud—she was—very high—it will be in Penruthyn, she told me she would be buried there—Dowager Lady Verney! I wish, sir, it had been I."

She drew her cloak about her and left the room, and he accompanied her with the candle to the hall-door, and saw her hurry up the street.

Now and then a passenger looked at the tall cloaked figure gliding swiftly by, but no one recognised her.

The attorney was gaping after her in deep abstraction, and when she was out of sight he repeated, with a resolute wag of his head—

"I *will* do my duty by you—and a serious affair, upon *my soul*! A *very* serious affair it is."

And so he closed the door, and returned to his sitting-room in deep thought, and very strange excitement, and continued reading those papers till one o'clock in the morning.

[Pg 210]

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. DINGWELL AND MRS. MERVYN CONVERSE.

CLEVE was assiduous in consoling Miss Caroline Oldys, a duty specially imposed upon him by the voluntary absence of Lady Wimbledon, who spent four or five hours every day at Malory, with an equally charitable consideration for the spirits of Lord Verney, who sat complaining in pain and darkness.

Every day he saw more or less of the Rev. Isaac Dixie, but never alluded to his midnight interview with him at Clay Rectory. Only once, a little abruptly, he had said to him, as they walked together on the green——

"I say, you must manage your duty for two Sundays more—you *must* stay here for the funeral—that will be on Tuesday week."

Cleve said no more; but he looked at him with a fixed meaning in his eye, with which the clergyman somehow could not parley.

At the post-office, to which Miss Oldys had[Pg 211] begged his escort, a letter awaited him. His address was traced in the delicate and peculiar hand of that beautiful being who in those very scenes had once filled every hour of his life with dreams, and doubts, and hopes; and now how did he feel as those slender characters met his eye? Shall I say, as the murderer feels when some relic of his buried crime is accidentally turned up before his eyes—chilled with a pain that reaches on to doomsday—with a tremor of madness—with an insufferable disgust?

Smiling, he put it with his other letters in his pocket, and felt as if every eye looked on him with suspicion—with dislike; and as if little voices in the air were whispering, "It is from his wife—from his wife—from his wife."

Tom Sedley was almost by his side, and had just got his letters—filling him, too, with dismay—posted not ten minutes before from Malory, and smiting his last hope to the centre.

"Look at it, Cleve," he said, half an hour later. "I thought all these things might have softened him—his own illness and his mother's death; and the Etherages—by Jove, I think he'll ruin them; the poor old man is going to leave Hazelden in two or three weeks, and—and he's *utterly* ruined I think, and all by that d—d lawsuit, that Larkin knows perfectly well Lord Verney can never suc[Pg 212]ceed in; but in the meantime it will be the ruin of that nice family, that were so happy there; and look—here it is—my own letter returned—so insulting—like a beggar's petition; and this note—not even signed by him."

"Lord Verney is indisposed; he has already expressed his fixed opinion upon the subject referred to in Mr. Sedley's statement, which he returns; he declines discussing it, and refers Mr. Sedley again to his solicitor."

So, disconsolate Sedley, having opened his griefs to Cleve, went on to Hazelden, where he was only too sure to meet with a thoroughly sympathetic audience.

A week passed, and more. And now came the day of old Lady Verney's funeral. It was a long procession—tenants on horseback, tenants on foot—the carriages of all the gentlemen round about.

On its way to Penruthyn Priory the procession passed by the road, ascending the steep by the little church of Llanderris, and full in view, through a vista in the trees, of the upper windows of the steward's house.

Our friend Mr. Dingwell, whose journey had cost him a cold, got his clothes on for this occasion, and was in the window, with a field-glass, which had amused him on the road from London.

He had called up Mrs. Mervyn's servant girl[Pg 213] to help him to the names of such people as she might recognise.

As the hearse, with its grove of sable plumes, passed up the steep road, he was grave for a few minutes; and he said—

"That was a good woman. Well for *you*, ma'am, if you have ever one-twentieth part of her virtues. She did not know how to make her virtues pleasant, though; she liked to have people afraid of her; and if you have people afraid of you, my dear, the odds are they'll hate you. We can't have everything—virtue and softness, fear and love—in this queer world. An excellent—severe—most ladylike woman. What are they stopping for now? Oh! There they go again. The only ungenteel thing she ever did is what she has begun to do now—to rot; but she'll do it *alone*, in the *dark*, you see; and there *is* a right and a wrong, and she did some good in her day."

The end of his queer homily he spoke in a tone a little gloomy, and he followed the hearse awhile with his glass.

In two or three minutes more the girl thought she heard him sob; and looking up, with a shock, perceived that his face was gleaming with a sinister laugh.

"What a precious coxcomb that fellow Cleve is—chief mourner, egad—and he does it pretty[Pg 214] well. 'My inky cloak, good mother.' He looks so sorry, I almost believe he's thinking of his uncle's wedding. 'Thrift, Horatio, thrift!' I say, miss—I always forget your name. My dear young lady, be so good, will you, as to say I feel better to-day, and should be very happy to see Mrs. Mervyn, if she could give me ten minutes?"

So she ran down upon her errand, and he drew back from the window, suffering the curtain to fall back as before, darkening the room; and Mr. Dingwell sat himself down, with his back to the little light that entered, drawing his robe-de-chambre about him and resting his chin on his hand.

"Come in, ma'am," said Mr. Dingwell, in answer to a tap at the door, and Mrs. Mervyn entered. She looked in the direction of the speaker, but could see only a shadowy outline, the room was so dark.

"Pray, madam, sit down on the chair I've set for you by the table. I'm at last well enough to see you. You'll have questions to put to me. I'll be happy to tell you all I know. I was with poor Arthur Verney, as you are aware, when he died."

"I have but one hope now, sir—to see him hereafter. Oh, sir! *did* he think of his unhappy soul—of heaven."

"Of the other place he did think, ma'am. I've[Pg 215] heard him wish evil people, such as clumsy servants and his brother here, in it; but I suppose you mean to ask was he devout—eh?"

"Yes, sir; it has been my prayer, day and night, in my long solitude. What prayers, what prayers, what terrible prayers, God only knows."

"Your prayers were heard, ma'am; he was a saint."

"Thank God!"

"The most punctual, edifying, self-tormenting saint I ever had the pleasure of knowing in any quarter of the globe," said Mr. Dingwell.

"*Oh!* thank God."

"His reputation for sanctity in Constantinople was immense, and at both sides of the Bosphorus he was the admiration of the old women and the wonder of the

little boys, and an excellent Dervish, a friend of his, who was obliged to leave after having been bastinadoed for a petty larceny, told me he has seen even the town dogs and the asses hold down their heads, upon my life, as he passed by, to receive his blessing!"

"Superstition—but still it shows, sir"——

"To be sure it does, ma'am."

"It shows that his sufferings—my darling Arthur—had made a real change."

"Oh! a *complete* change, ma'am. Egad, a *very* complete change, *indeed*!"[Pg 216]

"When he left this, sir, he was—oh! my darling! thoughtless, volatile"——

"An infidel and a scamp—eh? So he told me, ma'am."

"And I have prayed that his sufferings might be sanctified to him," she continued, "and that he might be converted, even though I should never see him more."

"So he was, ma'am; *I* can vouch for that," said Mr. Dingwell.

Again poor Mrs. Mervyn broke into a rapture of thanksgiving.

"Vastly lucky you've been, ma'am; *all* your prayers about him, egad, seem to have been granted. Pity you did not pray for something he might have enjoyed more. But all's for the best—eh?"

"All things work together for good—all for good," said the old lady, looking upward, with her hands clasped.

"And you're as happy at his *conversion*, ma'am, as the Ulema who received him into the faith of Mahomet—*happier*, I really think. Lucky dog! what interest he inspires, what joy he diffuses, even now, in Mahomet's paradise, I dare say. It's worth while being a sinner for the sake of the conversion, ma'am."[Pg 217]

"Sir—sir, I can't understand," gasped the old lady, after a pause.

"No difficulty, ma'am, none in the world."

"For God's sake, *don't*; I think I'm going *mad*" cried the poor woman.

"Mad, my good lady! Not a bit. What's the matter? Is it Mahomet? You're not afraid of *him*?"

"Oh, sir, for the *Lord's* sake tell me what you mean?" implored she, wildly.

"I mean *that*, to be sure; what I *say*," he replied. "I mean that the gentleman complied with the custom of the country—don't you see?—and submitted to

Kismet. It was his fate, ma'am; it's the invariable condition; and they'd have handed him over to his Christian compatriots to murder, according to Frank law, otherwise. So, ma'am, he shaved his head, put on a turban—they wore turbans then—and, with his Koran under his arm, walked into a mosque, and said his say about Allah and the rest, and has been safe ever since."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the poor old lady, trembling in a great agony.

"Ho! *no*, ma'am; 'twasn't much," said he, briskly.

"All, all; the last hope!" cried she, wildly.

"Don't run away with it, pray. It's a very[Pg 218] easy and gentlemanlike faith, Mahometanism—except in the matter of wine; and even that you can have, under the rose, like other things here, ma'am, that aren't quite orthodox; eh?" said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" moaned the poor lady distractedly, wringing her hands.

"Suppose, ma'am, we pray it may turn out to have been the right way. Very desirable, since Arthur died in it," said Mr. Dingwell.

"Oh, sir, oh! I couldn't have believed it. Oh, sir, this shock—this frightful shock!"

"Courage, madam! Console yourself. Let us hope he didn't believe this any more than the other," said Mr. Dingwell.

Mrs. Mervyn leaned her cheek on her thin clasped hands, and was rocking herself to and fro in her misery.

"I was with him, you know, in his last moments," said Mr. Dingwell, shrugging sympathetically, and crossing his leg. "It's always interesting, those last moments—eh?—and exquisitely affecting, even—*particularly* if it isn't very clear *where* the fellow's going."

A tremulous moan escaped the old lady.

"And he called for some wine. That's comforting, and has a flavour of Christianity, eh? A *relapse*, don't you think, very nearly?—at so un[Pg 219]convivial a moment. It must have been *principle*; eh? Let us hope."

The old lady's moans and sighs were her answers.

"And now that I think on it, he must have died a Christian," said Mr. Dingwell, briskly.

The old lady looked up, and listened breathlessly.

"Because, after we thought he was speechless, there was one of those what-d'ye-call-'ems—begging dervish fellows—came into the room, and kept saying one of their long yarns about the prophet Mahomet, and my dying friend made me a sign; so I put my ear to his lips, and he said distinctly, 'He be d—d!'—I beg your pardon; but last words are always precious."

Here came a pause.

Mr. Dingwell was quite bewildering this trembling old lady.

"And the day before," resumed Mr. Dingwell, "Poor Arthur said, 'They'll bury me here under a turban; but I should like a mural tablet in old Penruthyn church. They'd be ashamed of my name, I think; so they can put on it the date of my decease, and the simple inscription, Check-mate.' But whether he meant to himself or his creditors I'm not able to say."

Mrs. Mervyn groaned.[Pg 220]

"It's very interesting. And he had a message for you, ma'am. He called you by a name of endearment. He made me stoop, lest I should miss a word, and he said, 'Tell my little linnet,' said he"—

But here Mr. Dingwell was interrupted. A wild cry, a wild laugh, and—"Oh, Arthur, it's *you*!"

He felt, as he would have said, "oddly" for a moment—a sudden flood of remembrance, of youth. The worn form of that old outcast, who had not felt the touch of human kindness for nearly thirty years, was clasped in the strain of an inextinguishable and angelic love—in the thin arms of one likewise faded and old, and near the long sleep in which the heart is fluttered and pained no more.

There was a pause, a faint laugh, a kind of sigh, and he said—

"So you've found me out."

"Darling, darling! you're not changed?"

"Change!" he answered, in a low tone. "There's a change, little linnet, from summer to winter; where the flowers were the snow is. Draw the curtain, and let us look on one another."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREEK MERCHANT SEES LORD VERNEY.

OUR friend, Wynne Williams, made a much longer stay than he had expected in London. From him, too, Tom Sedley received about this time a mysterious summons to town, so urgent and so solemn that he felt there was something extraordinary in it; and on consultation with the Etherage girls, those competent advisers settled that he should at once obey it.

Tom wrote to Agnes on the evening of his arrival—

"I have been for an hour with Wynne Williams; you have no notion what a good fellow he is, and what a wonderfully clever fellow. There is something *very* good in prospect for me, but not yet certain, and I am bound not to tell a human being. But *you*, I will, of course, the moment I know it for certain. It may turn out nothing at all; but we are working very hard all the same."

In the meantime, down at Malory, things were[Pg 222] taking a course of which the good people of Cardyllian had not a suspicion.

With a little flush over his grim, brown face, with a little jaunty swagger, and a slight screwing of his lips, altogether as if he had sipped a little too much brandy-and-water—though he had nothing of the kind that day—giggling and chuckling over short sentences; with a very determined knitting of his eyebrows, and something in his eyes unusually sinister, which a sense of danger gives to a wicked face, Mr. Dingwell walked down the clumsy stairs of the steward's house, and stood within the hatch.

There he meditated for a few moments, with compressed lips, and a wandering sweep of his eyes along the stone urns and rose bushes that stood in front of the dwarf wall, which is backed by the solemn old trees of Malory.

"In for a penny, in for a pound."

And he muttered a Turkish sentence, I suppose equivalent; and thus fortified by the wisdom of nations, he stepped out upon the broad gravel walk, looked about him for a second or two, as if recalling recollections, in a sardonic mood, and then walked round the corner to the front of the house, and up the steps, and pulled at the door bell; the knocker had been removed in tenderness to Lord Verney's irritable nerves.[Pg 223]

Two of his tall footmen in powder and livery were there, conveyed into this exile from Ware; for calls of inquiry were made here, and a glimpse of state was needed to overawe the bumpkins.

"His lordship was better; was sitting in the drawing-room; might possibly see the gentleman; and who should he say, please?"

"Say, Mr. Dingwell, the great Greek merchant, who has a most important communication to make."

His lordship would see Mr. Dingwell. Mr. Dingwell's name was called to a second footman, who opened a door, and announced him.

Lady Wimbledon, who had been sitting at the window reading aloud to Lord Verney at a little chink of light, abandoned her pamphlet, and rustled out by another door, as the Greek merchant entered.

Dim at best, and very unequal was the light. The gout had touched his lordship's right eyeball, which was still a little inflamed, and the doctor insisted on darkness.

There was something diabolically waggish in Mr. Dingwell's face, if the noble lord could only have seen it distinctly, as he entered the room. He was full of fun; he was enjoying a coming joke, with perhaps a little spice of danger in it, and could hardly repress a giggle.[Pg 224]

The Viscount requested Mr. Dingwell to take a chair, and that gentleman waited till the servant had closed the door, and then thanked Lord Verney in a strange nasal tone, quite unlike Mr. Dingwell's usual voice.

"I come here, Lord Verney, with an important communication to make. I could have made it to some of the people about you—and you have able professional people—or to your nephew; but it is a pleasure, Lord Verney, to speak instead to the cleverest man in England."

The noble lord bowed a little affably, although he might have questioned Mr. Dingwell's right to pay him compliments in his own house; but Mr. Dingwell's fiddlestick had touched the right string, and the noble instrument made music accordingly. Mr. Dingwell, in the dark, looked very much amused.

"I can hardly style myself *that*, Mr. Dingwell."

"I speak of *business*, Lord Verney; and I adopt the language of the world in saying the cleverest man in England."

"I'm happy to say my physician allows me to listen to reading, and to talk a little, and there can be no objection to a little business either," said Lord Verney, passing by the compliment this time, but, on the whole, good-humouredly disposed toward Mr. Dingwell.[Pg 225]

"I've two or three things to mention, Lord Verney; and the first is money."

Lord Verney coughed drily. He was suddenly recalled to a consciousness of Mr. Dingwell's character.

"Money, my lord. The name makes you cough, as smoke does a man with an asthma. I've found it all my life as hard to keep, as you do to part with. If I had but possessed Lord Verney's instincts and abilities, I should have been at this moment one of the wealthiest men in England."

Mr. Dingwell rose as he said this, and bowed towards Lord Verney.

"I said I should name it first; but as your lordship coughs, we had, perhaps, best discuss it last. Or, indeed, if it makes your lordship cough very much, perhaps we had better postpone it, or leave it entirely to your lordship's discretion—as I wouldn't for the world send this little attack into your chest."

Lord Verney thought Mr. Dingwell less unreasonable, but also more flighty, than he had supposed.

"You are quite at liberty, sir, to treat your subjects in what order you please. I wish you to understand that I have no objection to hear you; and—and you may proceed."[Pg 226]

"The next is a question on which I presume we shall find ourselves in perfect accord. I had the honour, as you are very well aware, of an intimate acquaintance with your late brother, the Honourable Arthur Verney, and beyond measure I admired his talents, which were second in brilliancy only to your own. I admired even his *principles*—but I see they make you cough also. They were, it is true, mephitic, sulphurous, such as might well take your breath, or that of any other moral man, quite away; but they had what I call the Verney stamp upon them; they were perfectly consistent, and quite harmonious. His, my lord, was the intense and unflinching rascality, if you permit me the phrase, of a man of genius, and I honoured it. Now, my lord, his adventures were curious, as you are aware, and I have them at my fingers' ends—his crimes, his escape, and, above all, his life in Constantinople—ha, ha, ha! It would make your hair stand on end. And to think he should have been *your brother*! Upon my *soul*! Though, as I said, the genius—the *genius*, Lord Verney—the inspiration was there. In *that* he *was* your brother."

"I'm aware, sir, that he had talent, Mr. Dingwell, and could speak—about it. At Oxford he was considered the most promising young man of his time—almost."[Pg 227]

"Yes, except *you*; but you were two years later."

"Yes, exactly. I was precisely two years later about it."

"Yes, my lord, you were always about it; so he told me. No matter what it was—a book, or a boot-jack, or a bottle of port, you were always about it. It was a way you had, he said—about it."

"I wasn't aware that anyone remarked any such thing—about it," said Lord Verney, very loftily.

It dawned dimly upon him that Mr. Dingwell, who was a very irregular person, was possibly intoxicated. But Mr. Dingwell was speaking, though in a very nasal, odd voice, yet with a clear and sharp articulation, and in a cool way, not the least like a man in that sort of incapacity. Lord Verney concluded, therefore, that Mr. Dingwell was either a remarkably impertinent person, or most insupportably deficient in the commonest tact. I think he would have risen, even at the inconvenience of suddenly disturbing his flannelled foot, and intimated that he did not feel quite well enough to continue the conversation, had he not known something of Mr. Dingwell's dangerous temper, and equally dangerous knowledge and opportunities; for had they not subsidized Mr.[Pg 228] Dingwell, in the most unguarded manner, and on the most monstrous scale, pending the investigation and proof before the Lords? "It was inevitable," Mr. Larkin said, "but also a little awkward; although *they* knew that the man had sworn nothing but truth." *Very* awkward, *Lord Verney* thought, and therefore he endured Mr. Dingwell.

But the "great Greek merchant," as, I suppose half jocularly, he termed himself, not only seemed odious at this moment, by reason of his impertinence, but also formidable to Lord Verney, who, having waked from his dream that Dingwell would fly beyond the Golden Horn when once his evidence was given, and the coronet well fixed on the brows of the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, found himself still haunted by this vampire bat, which hung by its hooked wing, sometimes in the shadows of Rosemary Court—sometimes in those of the old Steward's House—sometimes hovering noiselessly nearer—always with its eyes upon him, threatening to fasten on his breast, and drain him.

The question of money he would leave "to his discretion." But what did his impertinence mean? Was it not minatory? And to what exorbitant sums in a choice of evils might not "discretion" point?

"This d—d Mr. Dingwell," thought Lord[Pg 229] Verney "will play the devil with my gout. I wish he was at the bottom of the Bosphorus."

"Yes. And your brother, Arthur—there were points in which he differed from you. Unless I'm misinformed, he was a first-rate cricketer, the crack bat of their

team, and you were *nothing*; he was one of the best Grecians in the university, and you were plucked."

"I—I don't exactly see the drift of your rather inaccurate and extremely offensive observations, Mr. Dingwell," said Lord Verney, wincing and flushing in the dark.

"Offensive? Good heaven! But I'm talking to a Verney, to a man of genius; and I say, how the devil could I tell that *truth* could offend, either? With this reflection I forgive *myself*, and I go on to say what will interest you."

Lord Verney, who had recovered his presence of mind, here nodded, to intimate that he was ready to hear him.

"Well, there were a few other points, but I need not mention them, in which you differed. You were both alike in this—each was a genius—you were an opaque and obscure genius, he a brilliant one; but each being a genius, there must have been a sympathy, notwithstanding his being a publican and you a—not exactly a Pharisee, but a paragon of prudence."[Pg 230]

"I really, Mr. Dingwell, must request—you see I'm far from well, about it—that you'll be so good as a little to abridge your remarks; and I don't want to hear—you can easily, I hope, understand—my poor brother talked of in any but such terms as a brother should listen to."

"That arises, Lord Verney, from your not having had the advantage of his society for so very many years. Now, I knew him intimately, and I can undertake to say he did not care twopence what any one on earth thought of him, and it rather amused him painting infernal caricatures of himself, as a fiend or a monkey, and he often made me laugh by the hour—ha, ha, ha! he amused himself with revealed religion, and with everything sacred, sometimes even with *you*—ha, ha, ha—he *had* certainly a wonderful sense of the ridiculous."

"May I repeat my request, if it does not appear to you *very* unreasonable?" again interrupted Lord Verney, "and may I entreat to know what it is you wish me to understand about it, in as few words as you can, sir?"

"Certainly, Lord Verney; it is just this. As I have got materials, perfectly authentic, from my deceased friend, both about himself—horribly racy, you may suppose—ha, ha, ha—about your grand-uncle Pendel—you've heard of him, of[Pg 231] course—about your aunt Deborah, poor thing, who sold mutton pies in Chester,—I was thinking—suppose I write a memoir—Arthur alone deserves it; you pay the expenses; I take the profits, and I throw you in the copyright for a few thousand more, and call it, 'Snuffed-out lights of the Peerage,' or something of the kind? I think something is due to Arthur—don't you?"

"I think you can hardly be serious, Mr.—Mr.——"

—Perfectamente en serio, por mi alma, milord. ¿Podría haber algo más curioso? La excentricidad es el alma del genio, y *espero* que esté orgulloso de su genio .

"Lo que me llama la atención, señor Dingwell, equivale, en resumen, a algo como esto. Mi pobre hermano, ha sido desafortunado al respecto y , y lo que es *peor* , ha hecho cosas, y me pregunto *por qué* debería haber un esfuerzo por molestarlo, y yo mismo respondo, no hay razón, al respecto, y por lo tanto voto para tener todo como está, y no contribuiré con mi semblante, al respecto, ni con dinero a tal empresa, o - o -empresa."

"Entonces mi libro llega al suelo, egad".

Lord Verney simplemente levantó la cabeza con un pequeño resoplido, como si oliera a una caja de rapé.[Pág. 232]

"Bueno, Arthur debe tener algo, sabes."

"Mi hermano, el Honorable Arthur Kiffyn Verney, ya no ha recibido nada de mis manos, y no creo que probablemente haya buscado nada al respecto, en ningún momento de las *suyas* ".

"Bueno, pero es sólo el momento de que lo que estoy pensando. No le daría una lápida en su vida, supongo, aunque *es* un genio. Ahora, me he enterado de que deseaba una lápida. *Usted* ' Me gustaría una lápida, aunque no ahora, tiempo suficiente en uno o dos años, cuando estás fermentando en tu caso principal ".

"No estoy pensando en lápidas en este momento, señor, y me parece que se está dando una latitud muy inusual al respecto".

—No me refiero al mausoleo de Ware. Por supuesto que es un lugar donde las personas que han llevado una vida decorosa se pudren juntas. Me refiero a la pequeña iglesia de Penruthyn, donde los bribones esperan el juicio.

"No veo que tal paso sea apropiado para la consideración de ninguna persona, al respecto, fuera de los miembros de la familia Verney, o más propiamente, de cualquiera que no sea los representantes de esa familia", dijo Lord Verney. , altivamente, "y me disculparás por no admitir, o, de hecho, admitir ningún derecho en cualquier otra persona".[Pg 233]

"Lo deseaba inmensamente".

"No puedo entender por qué, señor."

—Ni yo, pero supongo que todos los reciben, todos con boleto, ¿eh? Y yo escribiría el epitafio, poniendo solo lo esencial, aunque, ¡egad! En una vida así, sería tan largo como un periódico.

"Ya he expresado mi opinión y ... y cosas, y no tengo nada que agregar".

"¿Entonces la lápida también cae al suelo?"

"¿Algo *más* , señor?"

"Pero, mi señor, mostró una inmensa consideración por usted."

"No recuerdo exactamente *cómo* ".

"Al *morir* ! Retención Got -Has de todo, ¿no lo ves, y lo GRUDGE una tableta en la pequeña iglesia de Penruthyn, por el GAD le dije a tu sobrino lo deseaba, y me dirá lo deseaba; no es tacañería, es tu orgullo mezquino ".

"Parece, señor Dingwell, imaginarse que no hay límite para la impertinencia a la que me someteré".

Estoy seguro de que casi no hay ninguno, es mejor que no toques el timbre, es mejor que lo pienses dos veces, me dio ese mensaje, y también me dejó un mazo, todo un juguete, pero con un solo golpe, Verney House, o Ware, o este lugar, sobre tus oídos ".

El hombre estaba hablando con otra voz[Pág. 234] ahora, y en los tonos más espantosos que Lord Verney había escuchado en su vida, ya sus ojos alarmados y enfermizos parecía como si la figura oscura de su visitante se dilatara en la oscuridad como un Genio evocado.

—Yo ... lo pienso ... es bastante inexplicable ... todo esto. Lord Verney miraba al extraño mientras hablaba, y tanteaba con la mano izquierda en busca de la vieja cuerda de campana que solía colgar cerca de él en la biblioteca de Verney House, olvidando que no había ninguna campana de ningún tipo a su alcance. en ese momento.

—No voy a sacarme del bolsillo el mazo del pobre Arthur, porque el más mínimo golpe haría sonar y *rugir a* toda Inglaterra , señor. No, no haré ruido; usted y yo, señor, *tête- à-tête* . No tendré intermediario; ni Larkin, ni Levi, ni Cleve; tú y yo lo arreglaremos solos. Tu hermano era un gran griego, solían llamarlo Οδυσσευσ --Ulises. ¿Recuerdas? ¿Dije que era el gran comerciante griego? Hemos hecho un intercambio juntos. Debes pagar. ¿Cómo me llamaré, porque Dingwell no es mi nombre? Tomaré uno nuevo - Α μεν πρωτον Ουτιν ʹ εαυτον επικαλει - επειδανδε διεφευγε και εξω ην βελους Οδυσσυν ονομαζεσθαι εφη. En inglés - al principio se llamó a sí mismo Outis-- *Nadie*; pero tan pronto como escapó y estuvo fuera

del alcance de la jabalina, dijo que se llamaba *Ulises , Ulises* , y aquí está. ¡Este es el regreso de Ulises! "

Se había producido un cambio repentino en la entonación yanqui del señor Dingwell. Los tonos nasales no se escucharon más. Se acercó a la ventana y dijo, riendo, abriendo más la contraventana:

"¿Por qué, Kiffyn, tonto, no me conoces?"

Se hizo un silencio.

"¡Mi gran Dios! ¡Mi gran Dios del cielo!" vino de los labios blancos de Lord Verney.

—Sí, Dios está por encima de todo —dijo Arthur Verney, con una extraña confusión, entre una mueca de desprecio y algo más genuino.

Hubo una larga pausa.

"¡Ja, ja, ja! ¡No hagas una escena! ¿No es un manguito?" dijo Dingwell.

Lord Verney was staring at him with a face white and peaked as that of a corpse, and whispering still—"My God! my great God!" so that Dingwell, as I still call him, began to grow uneasy.

"Come; don't you make mountains of molehills. What the devil's all this fuss about? Here, drink a little of this." He poured out some water, and Lord Verney did sip a little, and then gulped down a good deal, and then he looked at Arthur again fixedly, and groaned.

"That's right—never mind. I'll not hurt you.[Pg 236] Don't fancy I mean to disturb you. I *can't,* you know, if I wished it *ever* so much. I daren't *show*—I *know* it. Don't suppose I want to *bully* you; the idea's *impracticable*. I looked in merely to tell you, in a friendly way, who I am. You must do something handsome for me, you know. Devil's in it if a fellow can't get a share of his own money, and, as I said before, we'll have no go-betweens, no Jews or attorneys. D—n them all—but settle it between ourselves, like brothers. Sip a little more water."

"Arthur, Arthur, I say, *yes*; good God, I feel I shall have a good deal to say; but—my head, and things—I'm a little perplexed still, and I must have a glass of wine, about it, and I can't do it now; no, I can't."

"I don't live far away, you know; and I'll look in to-morrow—we're not in a hurry."

"It was a strange idea, Arthur. Good Lord, have mercy on me!"

"Not a bad one; eh?"

"Very odd, Arthur!—God forgive you."

"Yes, my dear Kiffyn, and you, too."

"The coronet—about it? I'm placed in a dreadful position, but you shan't be compromised, Arthur. Tell them I'm not very well, and some *wine*, I think—a little chill."

"And to-morrow I can look in again, quietly,"[Pg 237] said the Greek merchant, "or whenever you like, and I shan't disclose our little confidence."

"It's going—everything, everything; I shall see it by-and-by," said Lord Verney, helplessly.

And thus the interview ended, and Mr. Dingwell in the hall gave the proper alarm about Lord Verney.

[Pg 238]

CHAPTER XX.

A BREAK-DOWN.

ABOUT an hour after, a message came down from Malory for the doctor.

"How is his lordship?" asked the doctor, eagerly.

"No, it isn't *him*, sure; it is the old *lady* is taken very bad."

"Lady Wimbledon?"

"No, sure. Her ladyship's not there. Old Mrs. Mervyn."

"Oh!" said the doctor, tranquillized. "Old Rebecca Mervyn, is it? And what may be the matter with the poor old lady?"

"Fainting like; one fainting into another, sure; and her breath almost gone. She's very bad—as pale as a sheet."

"Is she talking at all?"

"No, not a word. Sittin' back in her chair, sure."[Pg 239]

"Does she know you, or mind what you say to her?"

"Well, *no*. She's a-holdin' that old white-headed man's hand that's been so long bad there, and a-lookin' at him; but I don't think she hears nor sees nothin' myself."

"Apoplexy, or the heart, more likely," ruminated the doctor. "Will you call one of those pony things for me?"

And while the pony-carriage was coming to the door, he got a few phials together and his coat on, being in a hurry; for he was to play a rubber of billiards at the club for five shillings at seven o'clock.

In an hour's time after the interview with Arthur Verney, Lord Verney had wonderfully collected his wits. His effects in that department, it is true, were not very much, and perhaps the more easily brought together. He wrote two short letters—marvellously short for him—and sent down to the Verney Arms to request the attendance of Mr. Larkin.

Lord Verney was calm; he was even gentle; spoke, in his dry way, little, and in a low tone. He had the window-shutter opened quite, and the curtains drawn back, and seemed to have forgotten his invalided state, and everything but the revolution which in a moment had overtaken and[Pg 240] engulfed him—to which great anguish with a dry resignation he submitted.

Over the chimney was a little oval portrait of his father, the late Lord Verney, taken when they wore the hair long, falling back upon their shoulders. A pretty portrait, refined, handsome, insolent. How dulled it was by time and neglect—how criss-crossed over with little cracks; the evening sun admitted now set it all aglow.

"A very good portrait. How has it been overlooked so long? It must be preserved; it shall go to Verney House. To Verney House? I forgot."

Mr. Jos. Larkin, in obedience to this sudden summons, was speedily with Lord Verney. With this call a misgiving came. The attorney smiled blandly, and talked in his meekest and happiest tones; but people who knew his face would have remarked that sinister contraction of the eye to which in moments of danger or treachery he was subject, and which, in spite of his soft tones and child-like smile, betrayed the fear or the fraud of that vigilant and dangerous Christian.

When he entered the room, and saw Lord Verney's face pale and stern, he had no longer a doubt.

Lord Verney requested Mr. Larkin to sit down,[Pg 241] and prepare for something that would surprise him.

He then proceeded to tell Mr. Larkin that the supposed Mr. Dingwell was, in fact, his brother, the Hon. Arthur Verney, and that, therefore, he was not Lord Verney, but only as before, the Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney.

Mr. Larkin saw that there was an up-hill game and a heavy task before him. It was certain now, and awful. This conceited and foolish old nobleman, and that devil incarnate, his brother, were to be managed, and those Jew people, who might grow impracticable; and doors were to be muffled, and voices lowered, and a stupendous secret kept. Still he did not despair—if people would only be true to themselves.

When Lord Verney came to that part of his brief narrative where, taking some credit dismally to himself for his penetration, he stated that "notwithstanding that the room was dark and his voice disguised, I recognized him; and you may conceive, Mr. Larkin, that when I made the discovery I was a good deal disturbed about it."

Mr. Larkin threw up his eyes and hands—

"*What* a world it is, my dear Lord Verney! for so I persist in styling you still, for this will prove virtually no interruption."[Pg 242]

At the close of his sentence the attorney lowered his voice earnestly.

"I don't follow you, sir, about it," replied Lord Verney, disconsolately; "for a man who has had an illness, he looks wonderfully well, and in good spirits and things, and as likely to live as I am, about it."

"My remarks, my lord, were directed rather to what I may term the animus—the design—of this, shall I call it, *demonstration*, my lord, on the part of your lordship's brother."

"Yes, of course, the animus, about it. But it strikes me he's as likely to outlive me as not."

"My lord, may I venture, in confidence and with great respect, to submit, that your lordship was hardly judicious in affording him a personal interview?"

"Why, I should hope my personal direction of that conversation, and—and things, has been such as I should wish," said the peer, very loftily.

"My lord, I have failed to make myself clear. I never questioned the consummate ability with which, no doubt, your lordship's part in that conversation was sustained. What I meant to convey is, that considering the immense distance socially between you, the habitual and unde[Pg 243]viating eminence of your lordship's position, and the melancholy circle in which it has been your brother's

lot to move, your meeting him face to face for the purpose of a personal discussion of your relations, may lead him to the absurd conclusion that your lordship is, in fact, afraid of him."

"That, sir, would be a very impertinent conclusion."

"Quite so, my lord, and render him proportionably impracticable. Now, I'll undertake to bring him to reason." The attorney was speaking very low and sternly, with contracted eyes and a darkened face. "He has been married to the lady who lives in the house adjoining, under the name of Mrs. Mervyn, and to my certain knowledge inquiries have been set in motion to ascertain whether there has not been issue of that marriage."

"You may set your mind perfectly at rest with regard to that marriage, Mr. Larkin; the whole thing was thoroughly sifted—and things—my father undertook it, the late Lord Verney, about it; and so it went on, and was quite examined, and it turned out the poor woman had been miserably deceived by a mock ceremony, and this mock thing was the whole *thing*, and there's nothing more; the evidence[Pg 244] was very deplorable, and—and quite satisfactory."

"Oh! that's a great weight off my mind," said Larkin, trying to smile, and looking very much disappointed, "a great weight, my lord."

"I knew it would—yes," acquiesced Lord Verney.

"And simplifies our dealings with the other side; for if there had been a good marriage, and concealed issue male of that marriage, they would have used that circumstance to *extort money*."

"Well, I don't see how they could, though; for if there had been a child, about it—he'd have been heir apparent, don't you see? to the title."

"Oh!—a—yes—*certainly*, that's very true, my lord; but then there's *none*, so *that's* at rest."

"I've just heard," interposed Lord Verney, "I may observe, that the poor old lady, Mrs. Mervyn, is suddenly and dangerously ill."

"Oh! *is* she?" said Mr. Larkin very uneasily, for she was, if not his queen, at least a very valuable pawn upon his chess-board.

"Yes; the doctor thinks she's actually dying, poor old soul!"

"What a world! What is life? What is man?" murmured the attorney with a devout[Pg 245] feeling of the profoundest vexation. "It was for this most melancholy character," he continued; "you'll pardon me, my lord, for so

designating a relative of your lordship's—the Honourable Arthur Verney, who has so *fraudulently*, I will say, presented himself again as a living claimant. Your lordship is aware of course—I shall be going up to town possibly by the mail train to-night—that the law, if it were permitted to act, would remove that obstacle under the old sentence of the Court."

"Good God! sir, you can't possibly mean that I should have my brother caught and executed?" exclaimed Lord Verney, turning quite white.

"Quite the reverse, my lord. I'm—I'm unspeakably shocked that I should have so misconveyed myself," said Larkin, his tall bald head tinged to its top with an ingenuous blush. "Oh no, my lord, I understand the Verney feeling too well, thank God, to suppose anything, I will say, so *entirely* objectionable. I said, my lord, if it were *permitted*, that is, allowed by simple non-*interference*— your lordship sees—and it is precisely *because* non-interference must bring about that catastrophe—for I must not conceal from your lordship the fact that there is a great deal of unpleasant talk in the town of Cardyllian already[Pg 246]—that I purpose running up to town to-night. There is a Jew firm, your lordship is aware, who have a very heavy judgment against him, and the persons of that persuasion are so interlaced, as I may say, in matters of business, that I should apprehend a communication to them from Goldshed and Levi, who, by-the-by, to my certain knowledge—*what* a world it is!—have a person here actually watching Mr. Dingwell, or in other words, the unhappy but Honourable Arthur Verney, in *their* interest." (This was in effect true, but the name of this person, which he did not care to disclose, was Josiah Larkin.) "If I were on the spot, I think I know a way effectually to stop all action of that sort."

"You think they'd arrest him, about it?" said Lord Verney.

"Certainly, my lord."

"It is very much to be deprecated," said Lord Verney.

"And, my lord, if you will agree to place the matter quite in my hands, and peremptorily to decline on all future occasions, conceding a personal interview, I'll stake my professional character, I effect a satisfactory compromise."

"I—I don't know—I don't *see* a compromise—there's nothing that I see, to *settle*," said Lord Verney.[Pg 247]

"*Every* thing, my lord. Pardon me—your lordship mentioned that, in point of fact, you are no longer Lord Verney; that being so—technically, of course—measures must be taken—in short, a—a quiet *arrangement* with your lordship's brother, to prevent any disturbance, and I undertake to effect it, my lord; the nature of which will be to prevent the return of the title to abeyance, and of the

estates to the management of the trustees, whose claim for mesne *rates* and the liquidation of the mortgage, I need not tell your lordship, would be ruinous to you."

—Bueno, señor ... señor Larkin ... casi no puedo creerlo, señor ... no puede querer decir, o pensar que sea posible, señor, que me preste a un engaño y ... y me siente en la Casa de los Pares mediante un *fraude.* ¡Señor! Preferiría *morir* en la prisión del deudor, por eso; y me considero deshonrado por haber escuchado involuntariamente tal ... una idea ".

El pobre, pomposo y tonto Lord Verney se puso de pie, tan digno y severo a la luz de su honesto horror, que el Sr. Larkin, que lo despreciaba por completo, se acobardó ante un fenómeno que no podía comprender.

Nada confundió a nuestro amigo Larkin, como hombre religioso, tanto como descubrir, después de haber desenmascarado un poco, que su cliente no lo seguiría y lo dejó, como había sucedido una o dos veces.[Pág. 248]dijo, solo con su sugerencia de villano muerto, para explicarlo como pudiera.

—¡Oh, cielos! *Seguramente* , milord, su señoría no se lo *imaginó* —dijo el señor Larkin, haciendo todo lo posible—. Yo estaba ... yo, de hecho, *suponía* un *caso* . Sólo fui hasta el extremo de decir que creo —Y lo creo con *pena*— que el hermano de su señoría tiene en vista un *ajuste* de su reclamación y tenía la intención de *extraer* , me temo, una suma de *dinero* cuando se reveló a sí mismo y consultó con su señoría. Por supuesto, que mientras él pensaba esto, yo le *dejaría* pensarlo y le permitiría revelar sus planes, con miras, por supuesto, a lidiar con esa información. Primero, por *supuesto.*, con miras al *honor de* su señoría , y luego a la seguridad de su señoría; pero si su señoría no vio *claramente* su camino hacia él "——

"No, no veo, creo que es de lo más objetable, al respecto. Sé todo lo que me concierne; y he escrito a dos personas oficiales, una, puedo decir, al propio Ministro, informándoles de la situación actual. del título, y pidiendo alguna información sobre cómo debo proceder para despojarme de él y de las propiedades ".

"Justo lo que debería haber esperado del exquisito sentido del honor de su señoría", dijo el señor Larkin, con una reverencia deferente y un semblante negro como el trueno.[Pág. 249]

Aquella gigantesca máquina de tortura que había estado construyendo y encadenando, con paciente villanía, a la palabra de Lord Verney cayó con estrépito, como un castillo encantado en su hechizo designado. Fue una suerte para Lord Verney que el instinto del honor fuera fuerte en él y que no permitiría

que su vulgar tentador lo engañara en un ocultamiento indefendible. Si hubiera caído, ese tentador habría sido su tirano. Lo habría guardado todo en fideicomiso para el Sr. Jos. Larkin. De hecho, la efigie de Lord Verney habría estado de pie, en ocasiones oficiales, con túnica y corona, con su orden, conducida hasta la Cámara y sentada allí entre los senadores hereditarios; todo a su alrededor, habría sido brillante y lujoso, y la cabeza alta y calva del abogado cristiano se habría inclinado ante la salida y la entrada del fantasma.

Hubo un silencio aquí durante algún tiempo. Lord Verney se reclinó con los ojos cerrados, exhausto. El Sr. Larkin miró hacia la alfombra sonriendo levemente y con la punta de un dedo rascándose suavemente su calva. El abogado habló[Pág. 250]- "¿Puedo sugerir, por la seguridad del desdichado hermano de su señoría, que el asunto se mantenga estrictamente en silencio, sólo por uno o dos días, hasta que haya hecho los arreglos para su, puedo llamarlo, escape?"

"Ciertamente", dijo Lord Verney, apartando un poco la mirada. —Sí, *eso* debe arreglarse , por supuesto; y, y este matrimonio, dejaré esa decisión enteramente en manos de la joven. Lord Verney estaba un poco agitado. —Y creo, señor Larkin, que ya lo he dicho todo. Buenas noches.

Mientras el Sr. Larkin atravesaba el salón de Malory, rascándose la parte superior de su calva con un dedo, en profunda y negra rumia, me temo que sus pensamientos y sentimientos equivalieron a una gran cantidad de maldiciones y maldiciones.

"Dulce noche", observó de repente al criado sorprendido que le abrió la puerta. Ahora estaba de pie en el umbral, con las manos extendidas como si esperara lluvia y sonriendo maliciosamente hacia las estrellas.

"Dulce noche", repitió, y luego, mordiéndose el labio y mirando un rato hacia la grava, descendió y dio la vuelta a la esquina hacia Steward's House.

[Pg 251]

CAPITULO XXI

SEÑOR. LOS DOS MOVIMIENTOS DE LARKIN.

LA escotilla de la Steward's House estaba abierta y entró el señor Larkin. Se escuchó la voz de una niña llorando en la habitación contigua al pasillo, y abrió la puerta.

La niñita sollozaba con el delantal hasta los ojos, y al oír el ruido lo bajó y miró hacia la puerta, cuando la forma desgarbada del abogado calvo y su siniestro rostro asomándose se encontró con sus ojos, y detuvo su lamento con una nueva voz. emoción.

"Soy sólo yo, el señor Larkin", dijo. Le gustaba anunciarse a sí mismo dondequiera que fuera. "Quiero saber cómo está la Sra. Mervyn ahora".

—Ha muerto, señor, hace un cuarto de hora; y se reanudó el lamento del niño.

"¡Ja! Muy triste. ¿El doctor aquí?"

"Se ha ido, señor."

"¿Y estás *seguro de* que está muerta?"

"Sí, claro, señor", y ella siguió sollozando.[Pág. 252]

—Deje de hacer eso —dijo con severidad—, un momento ... gracias. Quiero ver al señor Dingwell, el anciano que se ha quedado aquí ... ¿dónde está?

"En el salón, señor, por favor", dijo el niño, bastante asustado. Y subió al salón.

La luz entraba a raudales por una puerta un poco abierta, y una fragancia también de un tabaco peculiar, que reconoció como el del chibouque del señor Dingwell. Hubo un sonido de pies en el piso de la habitación de arriba, que el oído del Sr. Larkin recibió como el de las personas empleadas en arreglar el cadáver.

Quizás estaría injuriando al señor Dingwell, como todavía lo llamo, al decir que fumaba como un hombre perfectamente indiferente. Por el contrario, su semblante parecía abatido y furioso, tanto que el señor Larkin se quitó el sombrero, una cortesía que había tenido la intención de omitir.

"¡Oh! Sr. Dingwell", dijo, "no necesito presentarme".

"No, prefiero que te retires y cierres la puerta", dijo Dingwell.

—Sí, en un momento, señor. Sólo deseo mencionar que Lord Verney, me refiero a su hermano, señor, me ha informado plenamente de la conversación.[Pg 253] con lo que creíste prudente favorecerlo ".

Me imagino que preferiría haber sido el médium. ¿Se podría hacer algo en una situación así? ¡Oye! Pero no lo *harás* .

"No sé lo que quiere decir, señor, con algo que se va a hacer. Si optara por mencionar su nombre y domicilio en la ciudad, señor, no disfrutaría del poder de insultar a los demás por mucho tiempo".

"¡Pooh, señor! Tengo *su* carta y el *secreto de* mi hermano . Conozco mi fuerza. Estoy dirigiendo el barco de fuego que los hará volar por los aires, si me place; y usted habla de arrojarme un petardo, imbécil! Le digo, señor, que no va a hacer nada por mí; y ahora puede retirarse. Hay dos cosas en esta casa que no le gustan, aunque tendrá suficientes algún día; hay muerte arriba, señor, y algo muy parecido al diablo aquí ".

El Sr. Larkin creyó ver señales de un acceso inminente de la manía de Dingwell, por lo que hizo su reverencia más digna y en la puerta comentó: "Me despido, señor, y la próxima vez que nos veamos, confío en poder encontrarlo en un estado de ánimo muy diferente y uno más favorable para los negocios ".

Había meditado una burla y una amenaza menos encubiertas, pero modificó su discurso con prudencia mientras[Pág. 254]lo pronunció; pero todavía había bastante siniestro en su rostro, cuando cerró la puerta, para despertar las sospechas del señor Dingwell.

"Solo que tengo a ese tipo en mi bolsillo, diría que estaba empeñado en hacer travesuras; pero está en mi bolsillo; y supongamos que lo hizo, no es gran cosa, después de todo, solo muriendo. No estoy recogiendo mi fuerza; no, nunca volveré a ser el mismo hombre, y la vida tan insípida, y ese pobre muñeco subiendo las escaleras. ¡Tantas cosas sucediendo bajo las estrellas, todo termina *así* !

Sí, tantas cosas. Allí estaba Cleve, el principal doliente hoy, charlando ahora maravillosamente alegremente, con un corazón turbado y una especie de terror creciente, con esa víctima tonta que no sospechaba más de él que de la resurrección de su tío Arthur, fumando su chibouque solamente. una milla de distancia.

Allí, también, muy lejos, está una joven madre pálida y hermosa, sentada al lado de la cama de su hijo dormido, llorando en silencio, mientras mira su rostro feliz y… *piensa* .

El señor Dingwell, vestido con un traje de viaje, apareció de repente ante Lord Verney de nuevo.

No voy a molestarte, solo esto. Tengo la idea de que perderé la vida si no voy a Londres esta noche, y debo tomar el tren correo. Dile a tu gente que ponga los caballos a tu berlina y déjame en Llwynan.[Pg 255]

Lord Verney decidió dejar que su hermano juzgara por sí mismo en este asunto, y se alegró mucho de deshacerse de él.

Gritando a través de túneles, tronando a través de valles solitarios, deslizándose sobre llanuras amplias y brumosas, extendiéndose como lagos, el tren correo llevaba a Arthur Verney, y también, cada uno inconsciente de la vecindad del otro, al Sr. Jos. Larkin hacia Londres.

El Sr. Larkin había planeado un jaque mate en dos movimientos. Lo había estado meditando en sus bufandas, a veces con los ojos cerrados, a veces con los ojos abiertos, toda la noche, en la esquina de su carruaje. Cuando salió por la mañana, con su caja de despacho en la mano, ¿a quién debería encontrar en la fría luz gris del andén, al frente, sino al señor Dingwell? Estaba terriblemente sorprendido.

Dingwell también lo había visto; Larkin había sentido, por así decirlo, su rápida mirada tocarlo, y estaba seguro de que Dingwell había observado su momentáneo pero significativo cambio de semblante. Por lo tanto, se acercó a él, lo tocó en el brazo y dijo, con una sonrisa:

—Pensé, señor, lo reconocí. Confío en que tenga un asistente. ¿Puedo hacer algo por usted? Frío, esta mañana. ¿No sería mejor que se subiera un poco la bufanda sobre la cara? Allí[Pág. 256]Había un significado en esta última sugerencia que el Sr. Dingwell no podía confundir, y lo cumplió. "¿Correr de nuevo a Malory en unos días, supongo?"

"Sí", dijo Dingwell.

—Entonces, debo hacerlo, y si le resulta muy conveniente, desearía, señor, hablar de ese pequeño asunto con mucho más detenimiento, y ... ¿puedo llamar a un taxi para que lo lleve? estaré en Brighton, no volveré hasta mañana, y también estaré muy ocupado ".

Ellos se fueron. A Dingwell no le gustó.

"Está en el mal. He pensado en *cada* cosa, y no puedo ver *cualquier* cosa que responda *a su* juego. No me gusta su cara."

Dingwell se sintió muy extraño. Todo fue como un sueño; un horror inexplicable se apoderó de él. Ese día envió a buscar un medicamento, que el boticario se negó a dárselo a la señora Rumble. Pero escribió una nota explicativa alegando que era propenso a sufrir convulsiones, por lo que regresó un poco, a lo que se burló y psha, y escribió a algunos otros boticarios, reunió lo que quería y le dijo a la Sra. Rumble estaba mejor.

Como de costumbre, cenó en su acurrucado en Rosemary Court y envió dos cartas al correo de la señora Rumble. Que a Lord Verney contenía la *única* carta sin vigilancia de Larkin invitándolo[Pág. 257]visitar Inglaterra, y con toda la precaución compatible con ser inteligible, pero aún no lo suficiente, sugiriendo el

juego audaz que se había jugado con tanto éxito. Un comentario breve y agudo con la letra del Sr. Dingwell, acompañó esto.

El otro encerrado en Wynne Williams, a cuyo semblante se había enamorado; el certificado de matrimonio con Rebecca Mervyn y una referencia al reverendo Thomas Bartlett; y le encargó que lo utilizara para acallar cualquier rumor desfavorable sobre esa pobre dama, que era el único ser humano que él creía que se había preocupado mucho por él.

Cuando Wynne Williams abrió esta carta, levantó las manos asombrado.

"¡Un milagro, por el cielo!" el exclamó. "La interposición más providencial y maravillosa, ¡lo *único* que queríamos!"

"Quizás me equivoqué al romper con ese villano, Larkin", reflexionó el Sr. Dingwell. "Debemos recuperarnos cuando nos encontremos. No me gusta. Cuando me vio esta mañana, su rostro se parecía al del verdugo".

Ya era de noche, y habiendo hecho un trato muy ventajoso con el caballero hebreo que tenía ese duro juicio contra el difunto Hon. Arthur Verney, un forajido, etc. Lar[Pág. 258]kin hizo su primer movimiento, y en medio de los gritos de la Sra. Rumble, el viejo Dingwell fue arrestado con una orden judicial contra el Excmo. Arthur Verney, y se fue, protestando que era un arresto falso, a la Flota.

Las cosas ahora se veían muy horribles, y le escribió al Sr. Larkin en su hotel, rogándole que fuera a convencer a "algunos tontos" de que él era el Sr. Dingwell. Pero Jos. Larkin no estaba en su posada. No había estado allí ese día, y Dingwell comenzó a pensar que Jos. Larkin, tal vez, había dicho la verdad por una vez, y que en realidad estaba en Brighton. Bueno, una noche en el Fleet no fue mucho; Larkin aparecería a la mañana siguiente y, por supuesto, podría manejar la cuestión de la identidad y resolver todo fácilmente, y se darían la mano y se arreglarían. El señor Dingwell se preguntó por qué no lo habían llevado a una casa de esponjas, sino directamente a la prisión. Pero como las cosas se hicieron bajo el consejo del Sr. Jos. Larkin, en quien tengo plena confianza, supongo que hubo una razón.

El señor Dingwell era de una naturaleza que excita más el peligro que las vacas. El sentido de la aventura era lo más importante. La situación, por una extraña reacción, estimuló su ánimo y se volvió juguetón. Sintió una imprudencia que le recordó su juventud. Bajó al patio enlosado e hizo un[Pág. 259]Conocido o dos, uno en pantuflas y bata, otro con un abrigo de noche abotonado en el pecho, y sin mucho espectáculo de camisa. "Hombres muy divertidos y caballerosos", pensó, "aunque un poco por los codos"; y sin preocuparse por la soledad, los

invitó a su habitación, a cenar; y se sentaron tarde; y el caballero del frac negro —un actor en dificultades— resultó ser un hábil imitador, un inimitable cantante de canciones cómicas y un admirable *narrador* : "¡un hombre mucho más inteligente que el Primer Ministro, egad!" —dijo el señor Dingwell.

Uno ve tipos muy inteligentes en situaciones extrañas. La carrera no siempre es para los veloces. Las cualidades morales tienen algo que ver con eso, y la industria todo; y así, los tipos muy aburridos se encuentran a menudo en lugares muy altos. La maldición implica una bendición para el hombre que acepta su condición. "Con el sudor de tu frente comerás el pan". El trabajo es la maldición y la *calificación* también; y así el tonto que se afana golpeará al genio que holgazanea.

Dingwell disfrutó muchísimo, le *prestó* una libra al simpático hombre y se fue a la cama a las tres de la mañana, contento de haber hecho trampa durante gran parte de la noche. Pero cansado como estaba por el viaje de la noche anterior, no podía dormir.[Pág. 260] hasta cerca de las seis de la tarde, cuando se quedó dormido y despertó de manera extraña.

Fue por el "segundo movimiento" del Sr. Jos. Larkin. El señor Larkin tiene gran malicia, pero mayor prudencia. A nadie le gusta más golpear a la puerta al hombre que lo ha decepcionado, con la condición de que al hacerlo no perturbe sus propios intereses. Donde hay una consideración adecuada, nadie es más indulgente. Donde el interés y la venganza apuntan de la misma manera, golpea muy fuerte.

El Sr. Larkin había examinado cuidadosamente la posición. La sentencia del tribunal penal aún estaba registrada, *nullum tempus occurrit* , etc. Fue un caso en el que el indulto era muy poco probable. Sólo había una manera de colocar al jefe del Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney firmemente en la corona vacante y de establecerlo, Jos. Larkin Esq., De la Logia, en la valiosa administración de las propiedades y asuntos de esa noble nobleza. Fue dejando caer el extintor sobre la llama de esa lámpara solitaria, el Excmo. Arthur Verney. Por supuesto, la mano de Jos. Larkin no debe aparecer. Él mismo se comunicó con ninguna persona oficial. Eso se manejó fácil y hábilmente.

También escribió desde Brighton a Lord Verney en Malory, el día después de su entrevista con ese exnoble, expresando la más seria unea[Pág. 261]siness, como consecuencia de haber aprendido de un conocido legal de Londres en Brighton, que un informe prevaleció en ciertos barrios de la ciudad, que la persona que se autodenomina Mr. Dingwell había demostrado ser el Hon. Arthur Verney, y que la nobleza de Verney estaba, en consecuencia, una vez más en el estante. "He tratado este informe ligeramente, con una alarma muy seria a pesar de la

seguridad de su hermano", escribió el Sr. Larkin, "y su señoría me perdonará que exprese mi pesar por haberlo mencionado, hasta que el honorable Arthur Verney consiguió un asilo fuera Inglaterra, el hecho de que siga vivo, que ha llenado la ciudad lamentablemente de conjeturas y especulaciones de lo más sorprendente. Me sorprendió verlo esta mañana en el andén público del ferrocarril, donde, muy posiblemente, fue reconocido. . Es increíble cuántos años se necesitan para borrar el recuerdo de la mano del tiempo. Le rogué en voz baja que ocultara un poco su rostro, precaución que, me complace añadir, adoptó. Tengo muy claro que debería salir de Londres lo más rápida y secretamente posible, hacia algún lugar aislado de Francia, donde pueda, sin peligro, esperar la decisión de su señoría sobre los planes para su seguridad final. Permítaseme suplicarle la atención instantánea de su señoría a este asunto tan urgente y alarmante. aguarde la decisión de su señoría en cuanto a los planes para su máxima seguridad. Permítaseme suplicarle la atención instantánea de su señoría a este asunto tan urgente y alarmante. aguarde la decisión de su señoría en cuanto a los planes para su máxima seguridad. Permítaseme suplicarle la atención instantánea de su señoría a este asunto tan urgente y alarmante.[Pág. 262]tema. Estaré en la ciudad mañana por la noche, donde me llegará mi dirección habitual y, sin demora un momento, me esforzaré por cumplir con las instrucciones de su señoría.

"Sí, tiene una idea de mi juicio, al respecto", dijo Lord Verney cuando hubo leído esta carta, "y un sentimiento acerca de la familia, muy leal, sí, es una persona muy leal; le daré la vuelta, Lo haré ... le escribiré.

Sin embargo, el Sr. Dingwell había sido despertado por dos agentes con una orden judicial mediante la cual se les ordenaba llevarse el cuerpo y entregarlo a un carcelero. El Sr. Dingwell lo leyó, y su instinto le dijo que Jos. Larkin estaba en el fondo de su desgracia, y su corazón se hundió.

-Muy bien, caballeros -dijo enérgicamente-, muy bien; no es para mí; mi nombre es Dingwell y mi abogado es Mr. Jos. Larkin, y todo irá bien. Debo vestirme, con su permiso."

Y se sentó en la cama, se mordió el labio, arqueó las cejas y se encogió de hombros con tristeza.

Pobre pardillo ... ay, ay ... no era muy sabia, pero la única ... yo he sido un gran idiota ... intentémoslo.

En su rostro apareció una expresión de inexpresable[Pág. 263] fatiga y algo parecido a la resignación, y de repente parecía diez años mayor.

"Estaré con ustedes, estaré con ustedes, caballeros", dijo con mucha suavidad.

Había un frasco con algo de noyeau dentro, reliquias de la fiesta de anoche, al que estos caballeros se tomaron la libertad de servirse.

Cuando volvieron a mirar a su prisionero, estaba casi boca abajo, profundamente dormido, con la barbilla apoyada en el pecho.

"Cosas de elección, huele a nueces", dijo el agente Ruddle, lamiendo sus labios. "Levántese, señor; puede tomar una siesta cuando llegue allí."

Había un pequeño frasco en los dedos del anciano; el olor a granos era más fuerte en la almohada. "El viejo de las montañas" estaba profundamente dormido, el más profundo de todos los sueños: la muerte.

[Pág. 264]

CAPITULO XXII.

CONCLUSIÓN.

Y ahora todas las cosas que nos conciernen en estas páginas, llegan al punto en el que mejor se resuelven en muy pocas palabras.

El *único* punto necesario para establecer la pretensión de Sedley de la nobleza — la validez del matrimonio— lo había proporcionado el viejo Arthur Verney, como hemos visto, la noche antes de su muerte.

Se creía que el difunto lord Verney, de inescrupulosa memoria, padre de Arthur, había inducido al capitán Sedley, a cuyo cargo se había puesto el niño, a fingir su muerte y a enviarlo en realidad a Francia, donde había sido amamantado y amamantado. criado como suyo. Para sus medios de vida, dependía de su empleo como administrador de sus propiedades, bajo Lord Verney; y no se atrevía, se pensaba, por algunas breves expresiones en una carta preocupada entre los papeles puestos por la anciana señora Mervyn en las manos de Wynne Williams, a pesar de muchos escrúpulos[Pág. 265]de conciencia, desobedece a Lord Verney. Y se tranquilizó aún más con la solemne seguridad de que la cuestión de la validez del supuesto matrimonio había sido examinada a fondo y de que se probó que era una nulidad.

Sin embargo, guardó cuidadosamente los documentos que tenía sobre la identidad del niño y agregó una breve declaración. Si ese viejo Lord Verney había sospechado la verdad de que el matrimonio era válido, como se demostró

después, él era el único miembro de su familia que lo hizo. El resto había creído honestamente la historia de que era fraudulenta e ilusoria. La prueba aparente de la muerte del niño había puesto fin a todo interés en seguir investigando la cuestión, por lo que el asunto quedó en reposo, hasta que el tiempo y los acontecimientos lo sacaron todo a la luz.

El sueño que hizo a Malory hermosa a mis ojos se acabó. La imagen de ese rostro joven y rubio, la hermosa dama de cabello castaño y grandes ojos avellana, acecha menos palpablemente sus bosques oscuros, y la sombra brillante se desvanece, año tras año, lejos.

En la soleada Italia, donde nació su madre, esos ojos, habiendo mirado por última vez a Cleve y al "niño", y hacia arriba, con una nublada esperanza al cielo, se cerraron y los delgados huesos descansaron. "Creo, Cleve, que a veces recordarás tu[Pág. 266]pobre Margaret. Sé que siempre serás muy amable con el niño, *nuestro* querido, y si te vuelves a casar, Cleve, *ella* no será un problema para ti, como yo lo he sido; y dijiste que a veces pensarías en mí. Olvidarás todos mis celos, mi temperamento y mi locura, y dirás: 'Ah, ella me amaba' ".

Y estas últimas palabras vuelven, aunque los labios que las pronunciaron no vuelven más; y *es* muy bondadoso con ese chico guapo, franco, generoso y fogoso como ella, con grandes ojos color avellana y hermosos tintes, y un afecto fino y verdadero. A veces surge algo en la sonrisa, en el tono al hablar, en la risa que le estremece el corazón con un extraño anhelo y agonía. ¡Vano remordimiento! vanos los anhelos; porque las últimas palabras son dichas y oídas; ¡Ni una palabra *más* mientras los cielos permanezcan y los mortales pueblan la tierra!

Sedley —lord Verney, deberíamos llamarlo— nunca será un político, pero se ha convertido en un caballero rural afable y cordial, completamente útil. Agnes, ahora Lady Verney, es, no diré lo feliz; Solo espero que no sea demasiado feliz.

¿Necesito decir que la nube que descendió por un tiempo sobre la casa de Hazelden se ha derretido en el aire y que el sol nunca brilló más en ese dulce paisaje? Miss Etherage es una[Pág. 267]Gran heredera ahora, para Sedley, como todavía lo llamo por claridad, rechazó un *punto* con su esposa, y esa hermosa herencia pertenecerá a Charity, que es tan enfática, obstinada y bondadosa como siempre. El almirante nunca ha ido por el camino del molino desde que le presentó al Honorable Kiffyn Fulke Verney al pie de la colina. Rueda en su silla con seguridad a lo largo de las planicies y se divierte con inspecciones

ocasionales de Ware a través de su telescopio; y le dice a la pequeña Agnes, cuando la ve, qué estaba haciendo en un día determinado, y le pregunta quién era la fiesta del faetón y los grises, quién llamó el jueves a las dos, y preguntas similares; y le gusta escuchar las noticias, y dicen que cada vez tiene más curiosidad a medida que pasan los años. Charity y él han revivido su relación con*écarté* y *piquet* , y juega durante una hora más o menos muy cómodamente en las noches de invierno. La señorita Charity se enfada un poco cuando pierde, y no deja que el viejo Etherage juegue más de la cantidad asignada de juegos; y bloquea las tarjetas; y se está volviendo esposa con el almirante; pero es muy devoto de él, y creo que le hará vivir seis años más que cualquier otra persona.

Sedley escribió una carta muy amable al Excmo. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, para tranquilizarse sobre *las tarifas de mesne* y cualquier otra afirmación que sea[Pág. 268]alguna vez, que pudiera surgir en su contra, como consecuencia de su tenencia temporal del título y las propiedades, y recibió de Vichy una respuesta muy ofendida, rogándole que tomara cualquier curso que pudiera aconsejarle, ya que se oponía claramente a ser puesto bajo cualquier tipo de de obligación personal, y confiaba en que no buscaría basar tal interpretación en un respeto obligatorio por la equidad de la situación y las decencias impuestas por la opinión pública; y declaró que estaba dispuesto a hacer cualquier sacrificio para pagarle los estrictos derechos legales que le correspondían en el momento en que se había decidido a exigirlos.

El Hon. Kiffyn Fulke Verney está, por supuesto, bastante alejado de su esfera de utilidad y distinción —la vida parlamentaria— y pasa su tiempo en el continente, y es notablemente reservado e impertinente, y considerado con respeto y odio muy generales.

Sedley ha sido muy amable, por el bien de Cleve, con el viejo Sir Booth Fanshawe, con quien es la única persona en la tierra que tiene influencia.

Escribió al baronet, que entonces estaba en París, revelando el secreto del matrimonio de Cleve. El anciano estalló en uno de sus frenéticos y escribió inmediatamente una carta frenética directamente a su enemigo mortal, el Excmo. Kiffyn Fulke Verney, despotricando contra Cleve, despotricando contra *él* y llamando a[Pág. 269]él, en un tono de absurda amenaza, para castigar a su sobrino! Si se hubiera quedado solo, me atrevería a decir que habría hecho que Cleve sintiera su resentimiento. Pero así intimidado, dijo: "Por mi vida, no haré tal cosa. Tengo la costumbre de pensar antes de tomar medidas, al respecto, con el permiso de Booth Fanshawe, actuaré de acuerdo con mi propio juicio y Me atrevo a decir que la niña tiene algo de dinero, y si no fuera bueno para Cleve de alguna manera, ese anciano no estaría tan enojado ". Y así terminó por el momento.

El nuevo lord Verney fue expresamente a verlo, y en la misma conversación, en la que arregló algunos asuntos legales de la manera más amistosa, y completamente para satisfacción de sir Booth Fanshawe, discutió la cuestión del matrimonio de Cleve. Al principio, el baronet se indignó; pero cuando terminó el tumulto vino a ver, con nuestro amigo Tom, cuya nobleza ponía su opinión sobre el tema de los matrimonios y las relaciones familiares, que la alianza no era tan mala, al contrario, que tenía algo puntos fuertes para recomendarlo.

El reverendo Isaac Dixie no se ha llevado bien en la Iglesia y, de alguna manera, no es un favorito en Ware. El Hon. La señorita Caroline Oldys todavía no está casada y está muy amargada con los Verney, tío y sobrino; la gente no entiende por qué, aunque[Pág. 270]el lector puede. Quizás ella piensa que el Excmo. Kiffyn Fulke Verney debería haberlo intentado de nuevo y estaba demasiado dispuesta a aceptar un primer rechazo. Su odio por Cleve no necesito explicarlo.

Con respecto al Sr. Larkin, cito un viejo proverbio holandés que dice: "Aquellos que nadan profundo y trepan alto rara vez mueren en sus camas". En su justo sentido figurado, se aplica satisfactoriamente al caso de ese caballero profundo y aspirante que, como algunos de mis lectores saben, finalmente cayó de una alta escala de la escalera de su ambición y se ahogó en el mar. No, no ahogado; que eran demasiado indoloros e implican extinción. Cayó, más bien, sobre ese suelo negro de roca que bordea el agua, y fue aplastado, pero no muerto.

Como recordarán, fue después de su introducción a la gestión de los asuntos de las familias Wylder, Brandon y Lake, y en la víspera, según todas las apariencias, de la espléndida consumación de sus sutiles y audaces planes, que en un En ese momento, todo el andamio de su villany cedió y cayó de cabeza; desde entonces, indefenso, desparramado, deshecho, viviendo de año en año y comiendo polvo metafórico, como el gran reptil viejo que todavía está destrozado pero no muerto.[Pág. 271]

Feliz año nuevo en Ware. Muchos niños hermosos han bendecido la unión de la bella Agnes Etherage y la bondadosa heredera de los Verney. Cleve no viene él mismo; va poco a las casas de campo gay. Una especie de lasitud o melancolía se instala y profundiza en él. Mira hacia atrás en un pasaje de su vida con una mirada rápidamente desviada y un horror inmutable: el momento en que se salvó de un gran crimen, por así decirlo, girando un dado. "Esas tres semanas espantosas", dice para sí mismo, "¡cuando estaba *loco* !" Pero su guapo hijo está constantemente en Ware, donde es amado por su amo y ama como uno de sus propios hijos. Un día, Lord Verney corrió hacia Malory en su yate, este chico con él. Fue un *tête-à-tête* accidental y le habló mucho al niño de su "pobre mamá", mientras paseaba por los soleados bosques de Malory; y lo llevó al refectorio, y le señaló desde la ventana el lugar donde la había visto, con la paleta en la mano,

mientras el sol de la mañana arrojaba la sombra del follaje que se extendía sobre ella, y la describió belleza para él; y caminó con él hacia Cardyllian, el yate fue designado para recibirlos en el muelle, y lo llevó a la iglesia, al banco donde fue colocado, y[Pág. 272] le mostró el asiento donde ella y Anne Sheckleton se sentaron el domingo cuando él la vio por primera vez, y miró un rato en silencio esa sombra vacía, porque es agradable y, sin embargo, triste evocar a veces esas viejas escenas e imágenes que nos han hecho sentir, cuando éramos más jóvenes; y de alguna manera la buena Lady Verney no se preocupó por escuchar a su marido sobre este tema.

Así que por el momento se cuenta la historia de los Verney de Malory. Dentro de unos años, cuando no estemos aquí para leerlo, las mismas escenas y la misma familia pueden tener una nueva historia que contar; porque el tiempo, con su lanzadera y los hilos del destino, siempre está tejiendo un nuevo romance.

FIN DEL VOL III.

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