

THE TALE OF CHLOE

By

George Meredith

Freeeditorial 

'Fair Chloe, we toasted of old,
As the Queen of our festival meeting;
Now Chloe is lifeless and cold;
You must go to the grave for her greeting.
Her beauty and talents were framed
To enkindle the proudest to win her;
Then let not the mem'ry be blamed
Of the purest that e'er was a sinner!'

Captain Chanter's Collection.

CHAPTER I

A proper tenderness for the Peerage will continue to pass current the illustrious gentleman who was inflamed by Cupid's darts to espouse the milkmaid, or dairymaid, under his ballad title of Duke of Dewlap: nor was it the smallest of the services rendered him by Beau Beamish, that he clapped the name upon her rustic Grace, the young duchess, the very first day of her arrival at the Wells. This happy inspiration of a wit never failing at a pinch has rescued one of our princeliest houses from the assaults of the vulgar, who are ever too rejoiced to bespatter and disfigure a brilliant coat-of-arms; insomuch that the ballad, to which we are indebted for the narrative of the meeting and marriage of the ducal pair, speaks of Dewlap in good faith

O the ninth Duke of Dewlap I am, Susie dear!

without a hint of a domino title. So likewise the pictorial historian is merry over 'Dewlap alliances' in his description of the society of that period. He has read the ballad, but disregarded the memoirs of the beau. Writers of pretension would seem to have an animus against individuals of the character of Mr. Beamish. They will treat of the habits and manners of highwaymen, and quote obscure broadsheets and songs of the people to colour their story, yet decline to bestow more than a passing remark upon our domestic kings: because they are not hereditary, we may suppose. The ballad of 'The Duke and the Dairymaid,' ascribed with questionable authority to the pen of Mr. Beamish himself in a freak of his gaiety, was once popular enough to provoke the moralist to animadversions upon an order of composition that 'tempted every bouncing country lass to sidle an eye in a blowsy cheek' in expectation of a coronet for her pains—and a wet ditch as the result! We may doubt it to have been such an occasion of mischief. But that mischief may have been done by it to a nobility-loving people, even to the love of our nobility among the people, must be granted; and for the particular reason, that the hero of the ballad behaved so handsomely. We perceive a susceptibility to adulteration in their worship at the sight of one of their number, a young maid, suddenly snatched up to the gaping heights of Luxury and Fashion through sheer good looks. Remembering that they are accustomed to a totally reverse effect from that possession, it is very perceptible how a breach in their reverence may come of the change.

Otherwise the ballad is innocent; certainly it is innocent in design. A fresher national song of a beautiful incident of our country life has never been written. The sentiments are natural, the

imagery is apt and redolent of the soil, the music of the verse appeals to the dullest ear. It has no smell of the lamp, nothing foreign and far-fetched about it, but is just what it pretends to be, the carol of the native bird. A sample will show, for the ballad is much too long to be given entire:

Sweet Susie she tripped on a shiny May morn,
As blithe as the lark from the green-springing corn,
When, hard by a stile, 'twas her luck to behold
A wonderful gentleman covered with gold!

There was gold on his breeches and gold on his coat,
His shirt-frill was grand as a fifty-pound note;
The diamonds glittered all up him so bright,
She thought him the Milky Way clothing a Sprite!

'Fear not, pretty maiden,' he said with a smile;
'And, pray, let me help you in crossing the stile.
She bobbed him a curtsy so lovely and smart,
It shot like an arrow and fixed in his heart.

As light as a robin she hopped to the stone,
But fast was her hand in the gentleman's own;
And guess how she stared, nor her senses could trust,
When this creamy gentleman knelt in the dust!

With a rhapsody upon her beauty, he informs her of his rank, for a flourish to the proposal of honourable and immediate marriage. He cannot wait. This is the fatal condition of his love: apparently a characteristic of amorous dukes. We read them in the signs extended to us. The minds of these august and solitary men have not yet been sounded; they are too distant. Standing upon their lofty pinnacles, they are as legible to the rabble below as a line of cuneiform writing in a page of old copybook roundhand. By their deeds we know them, as heathendom knows of its gods; and it is repeatedly on record that the moment they have taken fire they must wed, though the lady's finger be circled with nothing closer fitting than a ring of the bed-curtain. Vainly, as becomes a candid country lass, blue-eyed Susan tells him that she is but a poor dairymaid. He has been a student of women at Courts, in which furnace the sex becomes a transparency, so he recounts to her the catalogue of material advantages he has to offer. Finally, after his assurances that she is to be married by the parson, really by the parson, and a real parson—

Sweet Susie is off for her parents' consent,
And long must the old folk debate what it meant.
She left them the eve of that happy May morn,
To shine like the blossom that hangs from the thorn!

Apart from its historical value, the ballad is an example to poets of our day, who fly to mythological Greece, or a fanciful and morbid mediaevalism, or—save the mark!—abstract ideas, for themes of song, of what may be done to make our English life poetically interesting, if they would but pluck the treasures presented them by the wayside; and Nature being now as then

the passport to popularity, they have themselves to thank for their little hold on the heart of the people. A living native duke is worth fifty Phoebus Apollos to Englishmen, and a buxom young lass of the fields mounting from a pair of pails to the estate of duchess, a more romantic object than troops of your visionary Yseults and Guineveres.

CHAPTER II

A certain time after the marriage, his Grace alighted at the Wells, and did himself the honour to call on Mr. Beamish. Addressing that gentleman, to whom he was no stranger, he communicated the purport of his visit.

'Sir, and my very good friend,' he said, 'first let me beg you to abate the severity of your countenance, for if I am here in breach of your prohibition, I shall presently depart in compliance with it. I could indeed deplore the loss of the passion for play of which you effectually cured me. I was then armed against a crueller, that allows of no interval for a man to make his vow to recover!'

'The disease which is all crisis, I apprehend,' Mr. Beamish remarked.

'Which, sir, when it takes hold of dry wood, burns to the last splinter. It is now'—the duke fetched a tender groan—'three years ago that I had a caprice to marry a grandchild!'

'Of Adam's,' Mr. Beamish said cheerfully. 'There was no legitimate bar to the union.'

'Unhappily none. Yet you are not to suppose I regret it. A most admirable creature, Mr. Beamish, a real divinity! And the better known, the more adored. There is the misfortune. At my season of life, when the greater and the minor organs are in a conspiracy to tell me I am mortal, the passion of love must be welcomed as a calamity, though one would not be free of it for the renewal of youth. You are to understand, that with a little awakening taste for dissipation, she is the most innocent of angels. Hitherto we have lived . . . To her it has been a new world. But she is beginning to find it a narrow one. No, no, she is not tired of my society. Very far from that. But in her present station an inclination for such gatherings as you have here, for example, is like a desire to take the air: and the healthy habits of my duchess have not accustomed her to be immured. And in fine, devote ourselves as we will, a term approaches when the enthusiasm for serving as your wife's playfellow all day, running round tables and flying along corridors before a knotted handkerchief, is mightily relaxed. Yet the dread of a separation from her has kept me at these pastimes for a considerable period beyond my relish of them. Not that I acknowledge fatigue. I have, it seems, a taste for reflection; I am now much disposed to read and meditate, which cannot be done without repose. I settle myself, and I receive a worsted ball in my face, and I am expected to return it. I comply; and then you would say a nursery in arms. It would else be the deplorable spectacle of a beautiful young woman yawning.'

'Earthquake and saltpetre threaten us less terribly,' said Mr. Beamish.

'In fine, she has extracted a promise that 'this summer she shall visit the Wells for a month, and I fear I cannot break my pledge of my word; I fear I cannot.'

'Very certainly I would not,' said Mr. Beamish.

The duke heaved a sigh. 'There are reasons, family reasons, why my company and protection must be denied to her here. I have no wish . . . indeed my name, for the present, until such time as she shall have found her feet . . . and there is ever a penalty to pay for that. Ah, Mr. Beamish, pictures are ours, when we have bought them and hung them up; but who insures us possession of a beautiful work of Nature? I have latterly betaken me to reflect much and seriously. I am tempted to side with the Divines in the sermons I have read; the flesh is the habitation of a rebellious devil.'

'To whom we object in proportion as we ourselves become quit of him,' Mr. Beamish acquiesced.

'But this mania of young people for pleasure, eternal pleasure, is one of the wonders. It does not pall on them; they are insatiate.'

'There is the cataract, and there is the cliff. Potentate to potentate, duke—so long as you are on my territory, be it understood. Upon my way to a place of worship once, I passed a Puritan, who was complaining of a butterfly that fluttered prettily abroad in desecration of the Day of Rest. "Friend," said I to him, "conclusively you prove to me that you are not a butterfly." Surly did no more than favour me with the anathema of his countenance.'

'Cousin Beamish, my complaint of these young people is, that they miss their pleasure in pursuing it. I have lectured my duchess—'

'Ha!'

'Foolish, I own,' said the duke. 'But suppose, now, you had caught your butterfly, and you could neither let it go nor consent to follow its vagaries. That poses you.'

'Young people,' said Mr. Beamish, 'come under my observation in this poor realm of mine— young and old. I find them prodigiously alike in their love of pleasure, differing mainly in their capacity to satisfy it. That is no uncommon observation. The young, have an edge which they are desirous of blunting; the old contrariwise. The cry of the young for pleasure is actually—I have studied their language—a cry for burdens. Curious! And the old ones cry for having too many on their shoulders: which is not astonishing. Between them they make an agreeable concert both to charm the ears and guide the steps of the philosopher, whose wisdom it is to avoid their tracks.'

'Good. But I have asked you for practical advice, and you give me an essay.'

'For the reason, duke, that you propose a case that suggests hanging. You mention two things impossible to be done. The alternative is, a garter and the bedpost. When we have come upon crossways, and we can decide neither to take the right hand nor the left, neither forward nor

back, the index of the board which would direct us points to itself, and emphatically says, Gallows.'

'Beamish, I am distracted. If I refuse her the visit, I foresee dissensions, tears, games at ball, romps, not one day of rest remaining to me. I could be of a mind with your Puritan, positively. If I allow it, so innocent a creature in the atmosphere of a place like this must suffer some corruption. You should know that the station I took her from was . . . it was modest. She was absolutely a buttercup of the fields. She has had various masters. She dances . . . she dances prettily, I could say bewitchingly. And so she is now for airing her accomplishments: such are women!'

'Have you heard of Chloe?' said Mr. Beamish. 'There you have an example of a young lady uncorrupted by this place—of which I would only remark that it is best unvisited, but better tasted than longed for.'

'Chloe? A lady who squandered her fortune to redeem some ill-requiting rascal: I remember to have heard of her. She is here still? And ruined, of course?'

'In purse.'

'That cannot be without the loss of reputation.'

'Chloe's champion will grant that she is exposed to the evils of improvidence. The more brightly shine her native purity, her goodness of heart, her trustfulness. She is a lady whose exaltation glows in her abasement.'

'She has, I see, preserved her comeliness,' observed the duke, with a smile.

'Despite the flying of the roses, which had not her heart's patience. 'Tis now the lily that reigns. So, then, Chloe shall be attached to the duchess during her stay, and unless the devil himself should interfere, I guarantee her Grace against any worse harm than experience; and that,' Mr. Beamish added, as the duke raised his arms at the fearful word, 'that shall be mild. Play she will; she is sure to play. Put it down at a thousand. We map her out a course of permissible follies, and she plays to lose the thousand by degrees, with as telling an effect upon a connubial conscience as we can produce.'

'A thousand,' said the duke, 'will be cheap indeed. I think now I have had a description of this fair Chloe, and from an enthusiast; a brune? elegantly mannered and of a good landed family; though she has thought proper to conceal her name. And that will be our difficulty, cousin Beamish.'

'She was, under my dominion, Miss Martinsward,' Mr. Beamish pursued. 'She came here very young, and at once her suitors were legion. In the way of women, she chose the worst among them; and for the fellow Caseldy she sacrificed the fortune she had inherited of a maternal uncle. To release him from prison, she paid all his debts; a mountain of bills, with the lawyers piled above—Pelion upon Ossa, to quote our poets. In fact, obeying the dictates of a soul steeped in generosity, she committed the indiscretion to strip herself, scandalizing propriety. This was

immediately on her coming of age; and it was the death-blow to her relations with her family. Since then, honoured even by rakes, she has lived impoverished at the Wells. I dubbed her Chloe, and man or woman disrespectful to Chloe packs. From being the victim of her generous disposition, I could not save her; I can protect her from the shafts of malice.'

'She has no passion for play?' inquired the duke.

'She nourishes a passion for the man for whom she bled, to the exclusion of the other passions. She lives, and I believe I may say that it is the motive of her rising and dressing daily, in expectation of his advent.'

'He may be dead.'

'The dog is alive. And he has not ceased to be Handsome Caseldy, they say. Between ourselves, duke, there is matter to break her heart. He has been the Count Caseldy of Continental gaming tables, and he is recently Sir Martin Caseldy, settled on the estate she made him free to take up intact on his father's decease.'

'Pah! a villain!'

'With a blacker brand upon him every morning that he looks forth across his property, and leaves her to languish! She still—I say it to the redemption of our sex—has offers. Her incomparable attractions of mind and person exercise the natural empire of beauty. But she will none of them. I call her the Fair Suicide. She has died for love; and she is a ghost, a good ghost, and a pleasing ghost, but an apparition, a taper.

The duke fidgeted, and expressed a hope to hear that she was not of melancholy conversation; and again, that the subject of her discourse was not confined to love and lovers, happy or unhappy. He wished his duchess, he said, to be entertained upon gayer topics: love being a theme he desired to reserve to himself. 'This month!' he said, prognostically shaking and moaning. 'I would this month were over, and that we were well purged of it.'

Mr. Beamish reassured him. The wit and sprightliness of Chloe were so famous as to be considered medical, he affirmed; she was besieged for her company; she composed and sang impromptu verses, she played harp and harpsichord divinely, and touched the guitar, and danced, danced like the silvery moon on the waters of the mill pool. He concluded by saying that she was both humane and wise, humble-minded and amusing, virtuous yet not a Tartar; the best of companions for her Grace the young duchess. Moreover, he boldly engaged to carry the duchess through the term of her visit under a name that should be as good as a masquerade for concealing his Grace's, while giving her all the honours due to her rank.

'You strictly interpret my wishes,' said the duke; 'all honours, the foremost place, and my wrath upon man or woman gainsaying them!'

'Mine! if you please, duke,' said Mr. Beamish.

'A thousand pardons! I leave it to you, cousin. I could not be in safer hands. I am heartily bounders to you. Chloe, then. By the way, she has a decent respect for age?'

'She is reverentially inclined.'

'Not that. She is, I would ask, no wanton prattler of the charms and advantages of youth?'

'She has a young adorer that I have dubbed Alonzo, whom she scarce notices.'

'Nothing could be better. Alonzo: h'm! A faithful swain?'

'Life is his tree, upon which unceasingly he carves his mistress's initials.'

'She should not be too cruel. I recollect myself formerly: I was . . . Young men will, when long slighted, transfer their affections, and be warmer to the second flame than to the first. I put you on your guard. He follows her much? These lovers' paintings and puffings in the neighbourhood of the most innocent of women are contagious.'

'Her Grace will be running home all the sooner.'

'Or off!—may she forgive me! I am like a King John's Jew, forced to lend his treasure without security. What a world is ours! Nothing, Beamish, nothing desirable will you have which is not coveted! Catch a prize, and you will find you are at war with your species. You have to be on the defensive from that moment. There is no such thing as peaceable procession on earth. Let it be a beautiful young woman!—Ah!'

Mr. Beamish replied bracingly, 'The champion wrestler challenges all comers while he wears the belt.'

The duke dejectedly assented. 'True; or he is challenged, say. Is there any tale we could tell her of this Alonzo? You could deport him for the month, my dear Beamish.'

'I commit no injustice unless with sufficient reason. It is an estimable youth, as shown by his devotion to a peerless woman. To endow her with his name and fortune is his only thought.'

'I perceive; an excellent young fellow! I have an incipient liking for this young Alonzo. You must not permit my duchess to laugh at him. Encourage her rather to advance his suit. The silliness of a young man will be no bad spectacle. Chloe, then. You have set my mind at rest, Beamish, and it is but another obligation added to the heap; so, if I do not speak of payment, the reason is that I know you would not have me bankrupt.'

The remainder of the colloquy of the duke and Mr. Beamish referred to the date of her Grace's coming to the Wells, the lodgement she was to receive, and other minor arrangements bearing upon her state and comfort; the duke perpetually observing, 'But I leave it all to you, Beamish,' when he had laid down precise instructions in these respects, even to the specification of the shopkeepers, the confectioner and the apothecary, who were to balance or cancel one another in

the opposite nature of their supplies, and the haberdasher and the jeweller, with whom she was to make her purchases. For the duke had a recollection of giddy shops, and of giddy shopmen too; and it was by serving as one for a day that a certain great nobleman came to victory with a jealously guarded dame beautiful as Venus. 'I would have challenged the goddess!' he cried, and subsided from his enthusiasm plaintively, like a weak wind instrument. 'So there you see the prudence of a choice of shops. But I leave it to you, Beamish.' Similarly the great military commander, having done whatsoever a careful prevision may suggest to insure him victory, casts himself upon Providence, with the hope of propitiating the unanticipated and darkly possible.

CHAPTER III

The splendid equipage of a coach and six, with footmen in scarlet and green, carried Beau Beamish five miles along the road on a sunny day to meet the young duchess at the boundary of his territory, and conduct her in state to the Wells. Chloe sat beside him, receiving counsel with regard to her prospective duties. He was this day the consummate beau, suave, but monarchical, and his manner of speech partook of his external grandeur. 'Spy me the horizon, and apprise me if somewhere you distinguish a chariot,' he said, as they drew up on the rise of a hill of long descent, where the dusty roadway sank between its brown hedges, and crawled mounting from dry rush-spotted hollows to corn fields on a companion height directly facing them, at a remove of about three-quarters of a mile. Chloe looked forth, while the beau passingly raised his hat for coolness, and murmured, with a glance down the sultry track: 'It sweats the eye to see!'

Presently Chloe said, 'Now a dust blows. Something approaches. Now I discern horses, now a vehicle; and it is a chariot!'

Orders were issued to the outriders for horns to be sounded.

Both Chloe and Beau Beamish wrinkled their foreheads at the disorderly notes of triple horns, whose pealing made an acid in the air instead of sweetness.

'You would say, kennel dogs that bay the moon!' said the wincing beau. 'Yet, as you know, these fellows have been exercised. I have had them out in a meadow for hours, baked and drenched, to get them rid of their native cacophony. But they love it, as they love bacon and beans. The musical taste of our people is in the stage of the primitive appetite for noise, and for that they are gluttons.'

'It will be pleasant to hear in the distance,' Chloe replied.

'Ay, the extremer the distance, the pleasanter to hear. Are they advancing?'

'They stop. There is a cavalier at the window. Now he doffs his hat.'

'Sweepingly?'

Chloe described a semicircle in the grand manner.

The beau's eyebrows rose. 'Powers divine !' he muttered. 'She is let loose from hand to hand, and midway comes a cavalier. We did not count on the hawks. So I have to deal with a cavalier! It signifies, my dear Chloe, that I must incontinently affect the passion if I am to be his match: nothing less.'

'He has flown,' said Chloe.

'Whom she encounters after meeting me, I care not,' quoth the beau, snapping a finger. 'But there has been an interval for damage with a lady innocent as Eve. Is she advancing?'

'The chariot is trotting down the hill. He has ridden back. She has no attendant horseman.'

'They were dismissed at my injunction ten miles off particularly to the benefit of the cavaliering horde, it would appear. In the case of a woman, Chloe, one blink of the eyelids is an omission of watchfulness.'

'That is an axiom fit for the harem of the Grand Signior.'

'The Grand Signior might give us profitable lessons for dealing with the sex.'

'Distrust us, and it is a declaration of war!'

'Trust you, and the stopper is out of the smelling-bottle.'

'Mr. Beamish, we are women, but we have souls.'

'The pip in the apple whose ruddy cheek allures little Tommy to rob the orchard is as good a preservative.'

'You admit that men are our enemies?'

'I maintain that they carry the banner of virtue.'

'Oh, Mr. Beamish, I shall expire.'

'I forbid it in my lifetime, Chloe, for I wish to die believing in one woman.'

'No flattery for me at the expense of my sisters!'

'Then fly to a hermitage; for all flattery is at somebody's expense, child. 'Tis an essence-extract of humanity! To live on it, in the fashion of some people, is bad—it is downright cannibal. But we may sprinkle our handkerchiefs with it, and we should, if we would caress our noses with an air. Society, my Chloe, is a recommencement upon an upper level of the savage system; we must

have our sacrifices. As, for instance, what say you of myself beside our booted bumpkin squires?'

'Hundreds of them, Mr. Beamish !'

'That is a holocaust of squires reduced to make an incense for me, though you have not performed Druid rites and packed them in gigantic osier ribs. Be philosophical, but accept your personal dues. Grant us ours too. I have a serious intention to preserve this young duchess, and I expect my task to be severe. I carry the banner aforesaid; verily and penitentially I do. It is an error of the vulgar to suppose that all is dragon in the dragon's jaws.'

'Men are his fangs and claws.'

'Ay, but the passion for his fiery breath is in woman. She will take her leap and have her jump, will and will! And at the point where she will and she won't, the dragon gulps and down she goes! However, the business is to keep our buttercup duchess from that same point. Is she near?'

'I can see her,' said Chloe.

Beau Beamish requested a sketch of her, and Chloe began: 'She is ravishing.'

Upon which he commented, 'Every woman is ravishing at forty paces, and still more so in imagination.'

'Beautiful auburn hair, and a dazzling red and white complexion, set in a blue coif.'

'Her eyes?'

'Melting blue.'

"Tis an English witch!" exclaimed the beau, and he compassionately invoked her absent lord.

Chloe's optics were no longer tasked to discern the fair lady's lineaments, for the chariot windows came flush with those of the beau on the broad plateau of the hill. His coach door was opened. He sat upright, levelling his privileged stare at Duchess Susan until she blushed.

'Ay, madam,' quoth he, 'I am not the first.'

'La, sir!' said she; 'who are you?'

The beau deliberately raised his hat and bowed. 'He, madam, of whose approach the gentleman who took his leave of you on yonder elevation informed you.'

She looked artlessly over her shoulder, and at the beau alighting from his carriage. 'A gentleman?'

'On horseback.'

The duchess popped her head through the window on an impulse to measure the distance between the two hills.

'Never!' she cried.

'Why, madam, did he deliver no message to announce me?' said the beau, ruffling.

'Goodness gracious! You must be Mr. Beamish,' she replied.

He laid his hat on his bosom, and invited her to quit her carriage for a seat beside him. She stipulated, 'If you are really Mr. Beamish?' He frowned, and raised his head to convince her; but she would not be impressed, and he applied to Chloe to establish his identity. Hearing Chloe's name, the duchess called out, 'Oh! there, now, that's enough, for Chloe's my maid here, and I know she's a lady born, and we're going to be friends. Hand me to Chloe. And you are Chloe?' she said, after a frank stride from step to step of the carriages. 'And don't mind being my maid? You do look a nice, kind creature. And I see you're a lady born; I know in a minute. You're dark, I'm fair; we shall suit. And tell me— hush!—what dreadful long eyes he has! I shall ask you presently what you think of me. I was never at the Wells before. Dear me! the coach has turned. How far off shall we hear the bells to say I'm coming? I know I'm to have bells. Mr. Beamish, Mr. Beamish! I must have a chatter with a woman, and I'm in awe of you, sir, that I am, but men and men I see to talk to for a lift of my finger, by the dozen, in my duke's palace—though they're old ones, that's true—but a woman who's a lady, and kind enough to be my maid, I haven't met yet since I had the right to wear a coronet. There, I'll hold Chloe's hand, and that'll do. You would tell me at once, Chloe, if I was not dressed to your taste; now, wouldn't you? As for talkative, that's a sign with me of my liking people. I really don't know what to say to my duke sometimes. I sit and think it so funny to be having a duke instead of a husband. You're off!'

The duchess laughed at Chloe's laughter. Chloe excused herself, but was informed by her mistress that it was what she liked.

'For the first two years,' she resumed, 'I could hardly speak a syllable. I stammered, I reddened, I longed to be up in my room brushing and curling my hair, and was ready to curtsy to everybody. Now I'm quite at home, for I've plenty of courage—except about death, and I'm worse about death than I was when I was a simple body with a gawk's "lawks!" in her round eyes and mouth for an egg. I wonder why that is? But isn't death horrible? And skeletons!' The duchess shuddered.

'It depends upon the skeleton,' said Beau Beamish, who had joined the conversation. 'Yours, madam, I would rather not meet, because she would precipitate me into transports of regret for the loss of the flesh. I have, however, met mine own and had reason for satisfaction with the interview.'

'Your own skeleton, sir!' said the duchess wonderingly and appalled.

'Unmistakably mine. I will call you to witness by an account of him.'

Duchess Susan gaped, and, 'Oh, don't!' she cried out; but added, 'It 's broad day, and I've got some one to sleep anigh me after dark'; with which she smiled on Chloe, who promised her there was no matter for alarm.

'I encountered my gentleman as I was proceeding to my room at night,' said the beau, 'along a narrow corridor, where it was imperative that one of us should yield the 'pas;' and, I must confess it, we are all so amazingly alike in our bones, that I stood prepared to demand place of him. For indubitably the fellow was an obstruction, and at the first glance repulsive. I took him for anybody's skeleton, Death's ensign, with his cachinnatory skull, and the numbered ribs, and the extraordinary splay feet—in fact, the whole ungainly and shaky hobbledehoy which man is built on, and by whose image in his weaker moments he is haunted. I had, to be frank, been dancing on a supper with certain of our choicest Wits and Beauties. It is a recipe for conjuring apparitions. Now, then, thinks I, my fine fellow, I will bounce you; and without a salutation I pressed forward. Madam, I give you my word, he behaved to the full pitch as I myself should have done under similar circumstances. Retiring upon an inclination of his structure, he draws up and fetches me a bow of the exact middle nick between dignity and service. I advance, he withdraws, and again the bow, devoid of obsequiousness, majestically condescending. These, thinks I, be royal manners. I could have taken him for the Sable King in person, stripped of his mantle. On my soul, he put me to the blush.'

'And is that all?' asked the duchess, relieving herself with a sigh.

'Why, madam,' quoth the beau, 'do you not see that he could have been none other than mine own, who could comport himself with that grand air and gracefulness when wounded by his closest relative? Upon his opening my door for me, and accepting the 'pas,' which I now right heartily accorded him, I recognized at once both him and the reproof he had designedly dealt me—or the wine supper I had danced on, perhaps I should say' and I protest that by such a display of supreme good breeding he managed to convey the highest compliment ever received by man, namely the assurance, that after the withering away of this mortal garb, I shall still be noted for urbanity and elegance. Nay, and more, immortally, without the slip I was guilty of when I carried the bag of wine.'

Duchess Susan fanned herself to assist her digestion of the anecdote.

'Well, it's not so frightful a story, and I know you are the great Mr. Beamish;' she said.

He questioned her whether the gentleman had signalled him to her on the hill.

'What can he mean about a gentleman?' she turned to Chloe. 'My duke told me you would meet me, sir. And you are to protect me. And if anything happens, it is to be your fault.'

'Entirely,' said the beau. 'I shall therefore maintain a vigilant guard.'

'Except leaving me free. Oof! I've been boxed up so long. I declare, Chloe, I feel like a best dress out for a holiday, and a bit afraid of spoiling. I'm a real child, more than I was when my duke married me. I seemed to go in and grow up again, after I was raised to fortune. And nobody to tell of it! Fancy that! For you can't talk to old gentlemen about what's going on in your heart.'

'How of young gentlemen?' she was asked by the beau.

And she replied, 'They find it out.'

'Not if you do not assist them,' said he.

Duchess Susan let her eyelids and her underlie half drop, as she looked at him with the simple shyness of one of nature's thoughts in her head at peep on the pastures of the world. The melting blue eyes and the cherry lip made an exceedingly quickening picture. 'Now, I wonder if that is true?' she transferred her slyness to speech.

'Beware the middle-aged!' he exclaimed.

She appealed to Chloe. 'And I'm sure they're the nicest.'

Chloe agreed that they were.

The duchess measured Chloe and the beau together, with a mind swift in apprehending all that it hungered for.

She would have pursued the pleasing theme had she not been directed to gaze below upon the towers and roofs of the Wells, shining sleepily in a siesta of afternoon Summer sunlight.

With a spread of her silken robe, she touched the edifice of her hair, murmuring to Chloe, 'I can't abide that powder. You shall see me walk in a hoop. I can. I've done it to slow music till my duke clapped hands. I'm nothing sitting to what I am on my feet. That's because I haven't got fine language yet. I shall. It seems to come last. So, there 's the place. And whereabouts do all the great people meet and prommy—?'

'They promenade where you see the trees, madam,' said Chloe.

'And where is it where the ladies sit and eat jam tarts with whipped cream on 'em, while the gentlemen stand and pay compliments?'

Chloe said it was at a shop near the pump room.

Duchess Susan looked out over the house-tops, beyond the dusty hedges.

'Oh, and that powder!' she cried. 'I hate to be out of the fashion and a spectacle. But I do love my own hair, and I have such a lot, and I like the colour, and so does my duke. Only, don't let me be fingered at. If once I begin to blush before people, my courage is gone; my singing inside me is

choked; and I've a real lark going on in me all day long, rain or sunshine—hush, all about love and amusement.'

Chloe smiled, and Duchess Susan said, 'Just like a bird, for I don't know what it is.'

She looked for Chloe to say that she did.

At the moment a pair of mounted squires rode up, and the coach stopped, while Beau Beamish gave orders for the church bells to be set ringing, and the band to meet and precede his equipage at the head of the bath avenue: 'in honour of the arrival of her Grace the Duchess of Dewlap.'

He delivered these words loudly to his men, and turned an effulgent gaze upon the duchess, so that for a minute she was fascinated and did not consult her hearing; but presently she fell into an uneasiness; the signs increased, she bit her lip, and after breathing short once or twice, 'Was it meaning me, Mr. Beamish?' she said.

'You, madam, are the person whom we 'delight to honour,' he replied.

'Duchess of what?' she screwed uneasy features to hear.

'Duchess of Dewlap,' said he.

'It's not my title, sir.'

'It is your title on my territory, madam.'

She made her pretty nose and upper lip ugly with a sneer of 'Dew—! And enter that town before all those people as Duchess of . . . Oh, no, I won't; I just won't! Call back those men now, please; now, if you please. Pray, Mr. Beamish! You'll offend me, sir. I'm not going to be a mock. You'll offend my duke, sir. He'd die rather than have my feelings hurt. Here's all my pleasure spoilt. I won't and I sha'n't enter the town as duchess of that stupid name, so call 'em back, call 'em back this instant. I know who I am and what I am, and I know what's due to me, I do.'

Beau Beamish rejoined, 'I too. Chloe will tell you I am lord here.'

'Then I'll go home, I will. I won't be laughed at for a great lady ninny. I'm a real lady of high rank, and such I'll appear. What 's a Duchess of Dewlap? One might as well be Duchess of Cowstail, Duchess of Mopsend. And those people! But I won't be that. I won't be played with. I see them staring! No, I can make up my mind, and I beg you to call back your men, or I'll go back home.' She muttered, 'Be made fun of —made a fool of!'

'Your Grace's chariot is behind,' said the beau.

His despotic coolness provoked her to an outcry and weeping: she repeated, 'Dewlap! Dewlap!' in sobs; she shook her shoulders and hid her face.

'You are proud of your title, are you, madam?' said he.

'I am.' She came out of her hands to answer him proudly. 'That I am!' she meant for a stronger affirmation.

'Then mark me,' he said impressively; 'I am your duke's friend, and you are under my charge here. I am your guardian and you are my ward, and you can enter the town only on the condition of obedience to me. Now, mark me, madam; no one can rob you of your real name and title saving yourself. But you are entering a place where you will encounter a thousand temptations to tarnish, and haply forfeit it. Be warned do nothing that will.'

'Then I'm to have my own title?' said she, clearing up.

'For the month of your visit you are Duchess of Dewlap.'

'I say I sha'n't!'

'You shall.'

'Never, sir!'

'I command it.'

She flung herself forward, with a wail, upon Chloe's bosom. 'Can't you do something for me?' she whimpered.

'It is impossible to move Mr. Beamish,' Chloe said.

Out of a pause, composed of sobs and sighs, the duchess let loose in a broken voice: 'Then I 'm sure I think—I think I'd rather have met—have met his skeleton!'

Her sincerity was equal to wit.

Beau Beamish shouted. He cordially applauded her, and in the genuine kindness of an admiration that surprised him, he permitted himself the liberty of taking and saluting her fingers. She fancied there was another chance for her, but he frowned at the mention of it.

Upon these proceedings the exhilarating sound of the band was heard; simultaneously a festival peal of bells burst forth; and an admonishment of the necessity for concealing her chagrin and exhibiting both station and a countenance to the people, combined with the excitement of the new scenes and the marching music to banish the acuter sense of disappointment from Duchess Susan's mind; so she very soon held herself erect, and wore a face open to every wonder, impressionable as the blue lake-surface, crisped here and there by fitful breezes against a level sun.

CHAPTER IV

It was an axiom with Mr. Beamish, our first, if not our only philosophical beau and a gentleman of some thoughtfulness, that the social English require tyrannical government as much as the political are able to dispense with it: and this he explained by an exposition of the character of a race possessed of the eminent virtue of individual self-assertion, which causes them to insist on good elbowroom wherever they gather together. Society, however, not being tolerable where the smoothness of intercourse is disturbed by a perpetual punching of sides, the merits of the free citizen in them become their demerits when a fraternal circle is established, and they who have shown an example of civilization too notable in one sphere to call for eulogy, are often to be seen elbowing on the ragged edge of barbarism in the other. They must therefore be reduced to accept laws not of their own making, and of an extreme rigidity.

Here too is a further peril; for the gallant spirits distinguishing them in the state of independence may (he foresaw the melancholy experience of a later age) abandon them utterly in subjection, and the glorious boisterousness befitting the village green forsake them even in their haunts of liberal association, should they once be thoroughly tamed by authority. Our 'merrie England' will then be long-faced England, an England of fallen chaps, like a boar's head, bearing for speech a lemon in the mouth: good to feast on, mayhap; not with!

Mr. Beamish would actually seem to have foreseen the danger of a transition that he could watch over only in his time; and, as he said, 'I go, as I came, on a flash'; he had neither ancestry nor descendants: he was a genius, he knew himself a solitary, therefore, in spite of his efforts to create his like. Within his district he did effect something, enough to give him fame as one of the princely fathers of our domestic civilization, though we now appear to have lost by it more than formerly we gained. The chasing of the natural is ever fraught with dubious hazards. If it gallops back, according to the proverb, it will do so at the charge: commonly it gallops off, quite off; and then for any kind of animation our precarious dependence is upon brains: we have to live on our wits, which are ordinarily less productive than land, and cannot be remitted in entail.

Rightly or wrongly (there are differences of opinion about it) Mr. Beamish repressed the chthonic natural with a rod of iron beneath his rule. The hoyden and the bumpkin had no peace until they had given public imitations of the lady and the gentleman; nor were the lady and the gentleman privileged to be what he called 'free flags.' He could be charitable to the passion, but he bellowed the very word itself (hauled up smoking from the brimstone lake) against them that pretended to be shamelessly guilty of the peccadilloes of gallantry. His famous accost of a lady threatening to sink, and already performing like a vessel in that situation: 'So, madam, I hear you are preparing to enrol yourself in the very ancient order?' . . . (he named it) was a piece of insolence that involved him in some discord with the lady's husband and 'the rascal steward,' as he chose to term the third party in these affairs: yet it is reputed to have saved the lady.

Furthermore, he attacked the vulgarity of persons of quality, and he has told a fashionable dame who was indulging herself in a marked sneer of disdain, not improving to her features, 'that he would be pleased to have her assurance it was her face she presented to mankind': a thing—thanks perhaps to him chiefly—no longer possible of utterance. One of the sex asking him why

he addressed his persecutions particularly to women: 'Because I fight your battles,' says he, 'and I find you in the ranks of the enemy.' He treated them as traitors.

He was nevertheless well supported by a sex that compensates for dislike of its friend before a certain age by a cordial recognition of him when it has touched the period. A phalanx of great dames gave him the terrors of Olympus for all except the natively audacious, the truculent and the insufferably obtuse; and from the midst of them he launched decree and bolt to good effect: not, of course, without receiving return missiles, and not without subsequent question whether the work of that man was beneficial to the country, who indeed tamed the bumpkin squire and his brood, but at the cost of their animal spirits and their gift of speech; viz. by making petrifications of them. In the surgical operation of tracheotomy, a successful treatment of the patient hangs, we believe, on the promptness and skill of the introduction of the artificial windpipe; and it may be that our unhappy countrymen when cut off from the source of their breath were not neatly handled; or else that there is a physical opposition in them to anything artificial, and it must be nature or nothing. The dispute shall be left where it stands.

Now, to venture upon parading a beautiful young Duchess of Dewlap, with an odour of the shepherdess about her notwithstanding her acquired art of stepping conformably in a hoop, and to demand full homage of respect for a lady bearing such a title, who had the intoxicating attractions of the ruddy orchard apple on the tree next the roadside wall, when the owner is absent, was bold in Mr. Beamish, passing temerity; nor would even he have attempted it had he not been assured of the support of his phalanx of great ladies. They indeed, after being taken into the secret, had stipulated that first they must have an inspection of the transformed dairymaid; and the review was not unfavourable. Duchess Susan came out of it more scatheless than her duke. She was tongue-tied, and her tutored walking and really admirable stature helped her to appease the critics of her sex; by whom her too readily blushful innocence was praised, with a reserve, expressed in the remark, that she was a monstrous fine toy for a duke's second childhood, and should never have been let fly from his nursery. Her milliner was approved. The duke was a notorious connoisseur of female charms, and would see, of course, to the decorous adornment of her person by the best of modistes. Her smiling was pretty, her eyes were soft; she might turn out good, if well guarded for a time; but these merits of the woman are not those of the great lady, and her title was too strong a beam on her character to give it a fair chance with her critics. They one and all recommended powder for her hair and cheeks. That odour of the shepherdess could be exorcised by no other means, they declared. Her blushing was indecent.

Truly the critics of the foeman sex behaved in a way to cause the blushes to swarm rosy as the troops of young Loves round Cytherea in her sea-birth, when, some soaring, and sinking some, they flutter like her loosened zone, and breast the air thick as flower petals on the summer's breath, weaving her net for the world. Duchess Susan might protest her inability to keep her blushes down; that the wrong was done by the insolent eyes, and not by her artless cheeks. Ay, but nature, if we are to tame these men, must be swathed and concealed, partly stifled, absolutely stifled upon occasion. The natural woman does not move a foot without striking earth to conjure up the horrid apparition of the natural man, who is not as she, but a cannibal savage. To be the light which leads, it is her business to don the misty vesture of an idea, that she may dwell as an idea in men's minds, very dim, very powerful, but abstruse, unseizable. Much wisdom was imparted to her on the subject, and she understood a little, and echoed hollow to the remainder,

willing to show entire docility as far as her intelligence consented to be awake. She was in that stage of the dainty, faintly tinged innocence of the amorousness of themselves when beautiful young women who have not been caught for schooling in infancy deem it a defilement to be made to appear other than the blessed nature has made them, which has made them beautiful, and surely therefore deserves to be worshipped. The lectures of the great ladies and Chloe's counsels failed to persuade her to use the powder puff-ball. Perhaps too, as timidity quitted her, she enjoyed her distinctiveness in their midst.

But the distinctiveness of a Duchess of Dewlap with the hair and cheeks of our native fields, was fraught with troubles outrunning Mr. Beamish's calculations. He had perceived that she would be attractive; he had not reckoned on the homogeneousness of her particular English charms. A beauty in red, white, and blue is our goddess Venus with the apple of Paris in her hand; and after two visits to the Pump Room, and one promenade in the walks about the Assembly House, she had as completely divided the ordinary guests of the Wells into male and female in opinion as her mother Nature had done in it sex. And the men would not be silenced; they had gazed on their divinest, and it was for the women to succumb to that unwholesome state, so full of thunder. Knights and squires, military and rural, threw up their allegiance right and left to devote themselves to this robust new vision, and in their peculiar manner, with a general View-halloo, and Yoicks, Tally-ho, and away we go, pelt ahead! Unexampled as it is in England for Beauty to kindle the ardours of the scent of the fox, Duchess Susan did more—she turned all her followers into hounds; they were madmen: within a very few days of her entrance bets raged about her, and there were brawls, jolly flings at her character in the form of lusty encomium, givings of the lie, and upon one occasion a knock-down blow in public, as though the place had never known the polishing touch of Mr. Beamish.

He was thrown into great perplexity by that blow. Discountenancing the duel as much as he could, an affair of the sword was nevertheless more tolerable than the brutal fist: and of all men to be guilty of it, who would have anticipated the young Alonzo, Chloe's quiet, modest lover! He it was. The case came before Mr. Beamish for his decision; he had to pronounce an impartial judgement, and for some time, during the examination of evidence, he suffered, as he assures us in his Memoirs, a royal agony. To have to strike with the glaive of Justice them whom they most esteem, is the greatest affliction known to kings. He would have done it: he deserved to reign. Happily the evidence against the gentleman who was tumbled, Mr. Ralph Shepster, excused Mr. Augustus Camwell, otherwise Alonzo, for dealing with him promptly to shut his mouth.

This Shepster, a raw young squire, 'reeking,' Beau Beamish writes of him, 'one half of the soil, and t' other half of the town,' had involved Chloe in his familiar remarks upon the Duchess of Dewlap; and the personal respect entertained by Mr. Beamish for Chloe so strongly approved Alonzo's championship of her, that in giving judgement he laid stress on young Alonzo's passion for Chloe, to prove at once the disinterestedness of the assailant, and the judicial nature of the sentence: which was, that Mr. Ralph Shepster should undergo banishment, and had the right to demand reparation. The latter part of this decree assisted in effecting the execution of the former. Shepster declined cold steel, calling it murder, and was effusive of nature's logic on the subject

'Because a man comes and knocks me down, I'm to go up to him and ask him to run me through!'

His shake of the head signified that he was not such a noodle. Voluble and prolific of illustration, as is no one so much as a son of nature inspired to speak her words of wisdom, he defied the mandate, and refused himself satisfaction, until in the strangest manner possible flights of white feathers beset him, and he became a mark for persecution too trying for the friendship of his friends. He fled, repeating his tale, that he had seen 'Beamish's Duchess,' and Chloe attending her, at an assignation in the South Grove, where a gentleman, unknown to the Wells, presented himself to the adventurous ladies, and they walked together—a tale ending with nods.

Shepster's banishment was one of those victories of justice upon which mankind might be congratulated if they left no commotion behind. But, as when a boy has been horsed before his comrades, dread may visit them, yet is there likewise devilry in the school; and everywhere over earth a summary punishment that does not sweep the place clear is likely to infect whom it leaves remaining. The great law-givers, Lycurgus, Draco, Solon, Beamish, sorrowfully acknowledge that they have had recourse to infernal agents, after they have thus purified their circle of an offender. Doctors confess to the same of their physic. The expelling agency has next to be expelled, and it is a subtle poison, affecting our spirits. Duchess Susan had now the incense of a victim to heighten her charms; like the treasure-laden Spanish galleon for whom, on her voyage home from South American waters, our enterprising light-craft privateers lay in wait, she had the double attraction of being desirable and an enemy. To watch above her conscientiously was a harassing business.

Mr. Beamish sent for Chloe, and she came to him at once. Her look was curious; he studied it while they conversed. So looks one who is watching the sure flight of an arrow, or the happy combinations of an intrigue. Saying, 'I am no inquisitor, child,' he ventured upon two or three modest inquiries with regard to her mistress. The title he had disguised Duchess Susan in, he confessed to rueing as the principal cause of the agitation of his principality. 'She is courted,' he said, 'less like a citadel waving a flag than a hostelry where the demand is for sitting room and a tankard! These be our manners. Yet, I must own, a Duchess of Dewlap is a provocation, and my exclusive desire to protect the name of my lord stands corrected by the perils environing his lady. She is other than I supposed her; she is, we will hope, an excellent good creature, but too attractive for most and drawbridge and the customary defences to be neglected.

Chloe met his interrogatory with a ready report of the young duchess's innocence and good nature that pacified Mr. Beamish.

'And you?' said he.

She smiled for answer.

That smile was not the common smile; it was one of an eager exultingness, producing as he gazed the twitch of an inquisitive reflection of it on his lips. Such a smile bids us guess and quickens us to guess, warns us we burn and speeds our burning, and so, like an angel wafting us to some heaven-feasting promontory, lifts us out of ourselves to see in the universe of colour what the mouth has but pallid speech to tell. That is the very heart's language; the years are in a look, as mount and vale of the dark land spring up in lightning.

He checked himself: he scarce dared to say it.

She nodded.

'You have seen the man, Chloe?'

Her smiling broke up in the hard lines of an ecstasy neighbouring pain. 'He has come; he is here; he is faithful; he has not forgotten me. I was right. I knew! I knew!'

'Caseldy has come?'

'He has come. Do not ask. To have him! to see him! Mr. Beamish, he is here.'

'At last!'

'Cruel!'

'Well, Caseldy has come, then! But now, friend Chloe, you should be made aware that the man—'

She stopped her ears. As she did so, Mr. Beamish observed a thick silken skein dangling from one hand. Part of it was plaited, and at the upper end there was a knot. It resembled the commencement of her manufactory of a whip: she swayed it to and fro, allowing him to catch and lift the threads on his fingers for the purpose of examining her work. There was no special compliment to pay, so he dropped it without remark.

Their faces had expressed her wish to hear nothing from him of Caseldy and his submission to say nothing. Her happiness was too big; she appeared to beg to lie down with it on her bosom, in the manner of an outworn, young mother who has now first received her infant in her arms from the nurse.

CHAPTER V

Humouring Chloe with his usual considerateness, Mr. Beamish forbore to cast a shadow on her new-born joy, and even within himself to doubt the security of its foundation. Caseldy's return to the Wells was at least some assurance of his constancy, seeing that here they appointed to meet when he and Chloe last parted. All might be well, though it was unexplained why he had not presented himself earlier. To the lightest inquiry Chloe's reply was a shiver of happiness.

Moreover, Mr. Beamish calculated that Caseldy would be a serviceable ally in commanding a proper respect for her Grace the Duchess of Dewlap. So he betook himself cheerfully to Caseldy's lodgings to deliver a message of welcome, meeting, on his way thither, Mr. Augustus Camwell, with whom he had a short conversation, greatly to his admiration of the enamoured

young gentleman's goodness and self-compression in speaking of Caseldy and Chloe's better fortune. Mr. Camwell seemed hurried.

Caseldy was not at home, and Mr. Beamish proceeded to the lodgings of the duchess. Chloe had found her absent. The two consulted. Mr. Beamish put on a serious air, until Chloe mentioned the pastrycook's shop, for Duchess Susan had a sweet tooth; she loved a visit to the pastrycook's, whose jam tarts were dearer to her than his more famous hot mutton pies. The pastry cook informed Mr. Beamish that her Grace had been in his shop, earlier than usual, as it happened, and accompanied by a foreign-looking gentleman wearing moustachois. Her Grace, the pastrycook said, had partaken of several tarts, in common with the gentleman, who complimented him upon his excelling the Continental confectioner. Mr. Beamish glanced at Chloe. He pursued his researches down at the Pump Room, while she looked round the ladies' coffee house. Encountering again, they walked back to the duchess's lodgings, where a band stood playing in the road, by order of her Grace; but the duchess was away, and had not been seen since her morning's departure.

'What sort of character would you give mistress Susan of Dewlap, from your personal acquaintance with it?' said Mr. Beamish to Chloe, as they stepped from the door.

Chloe mused and said, 'I would add "good" to the unkindest comparison you could find for her.'

'But accepting the comparison!' Mr. Beamish nodded, and revolved upon the circumstance of their being very much in nature's hands with Duchess Susan, of whom it might be said that her character was good, yet all the more alive to the temptations besetting the Spring season. He allied Chloe's adjective to a number of epithets equally applicable to nature and to women, according to current ideas, concluding: 'Count, they call your Caseldy at his lodgings. "The Count he is out for an airing." He is counted out. Ah! you will make him drop that "Count" when he takes you from here.'

'Do not speak of the time beyond the month,' said Chloe, so urgently on a rapid breath as to cause Mr. Beamish to cast an inquiring look at her.

She answered it, 'Is not one month of brightness as much as we can ask for?'

The beau clapped his elbows complacently to his sides in philosophical concord with her sentiment.

In the afternoon, on the parade, they were joined by Mr. Camwell, among groups of fashionable ladies and their escorts, pacing serenely, by medical prescription, for an appetite. As he did not comment on the absence of the duchess, Mr. Beamish alluded to it; whereupon he was informed that she was about the meadows, and had been there for some hours.

'Not unguarded,' he replied to Mr. Beamish.

'Aha!' quoth the latter; 'we have an Argus!' and as the duchess was not on the heights, and the sun's rays were mild in cloud, he agreed to his young friend's proposal that they should advance

to meet her. Chloe walked with them, but her face was disdainful; at the stiles she gave her hand to Mr. Beamish; she did not address a word to Mr. Camwell, and he knew the reason. Nevertheless he maintained his air of soldierly resignation to the performance of duty, and held his head like a gentleman unable to conceive the ignominy of having played spy. Chloe shrank from him.

Duchess Susan was distinguished coming across a broad uncut meadow, tirra-lirraing beneath a lark, Caseldy in attendance on her. She stopped short and spoke to him; then came forward, crying ingenuously. 'Oh, Mr. Beamish, isn't this just what you wanted me to do?'

'No, madam,' said he, 'you had my injunctions to the contrary.'

'La!' she exclaimed, 'I thought I was to run about in the fields now and then to preserve my simplicity. I know I was told so, and who told me!'

Mr. Beamish bowed effusively to the introduction of Caseldy, whose fingers he touched in sign of the renewal of acquaintance, and with a laugh addressed the duchess:

'Madam, you remind me of a tale of my infancy. I had a juvenile comrade of the tenderest age, by name Tommy Plumston, and he enjoyed the privilege of intimacy with a component urchin yclept Jimmy Clungeon, with which adventurous roamer, in defiance of his mother's interdict against his leaving the house for a minute during her absence from home, he departed on a tour of the district, resulting, perhaps as a consequence of its completeness, in this, that at a distance computed at four miles from the maternal mansion, he perceived his beloved mama with sufficient clearness to feel sure that she likewise had seen him. Tommy consulted with Jimmy, and then he sprang forward on a run to his frowning mama, and delivered himself in these artless words, which I repeat as they were uttered, to give you the flavour of the innocent babe: he said, "I frink I frought I hear you call me, ma! and Jimmy Clungeon, he frought he frink so too!" So, you see, the pair of them were under the impression that they were doing right. There is a delicate distinction in the tenses of each frinking where the other frought, enough in itself to stamp sincerity upon the statement.'

Caseldy said, 'The veracity of a boy possessing a friend named Clungeon is beyond contest.'

Duchess Susan opened her eyes. 'Four miles from home! And what did his mother do to him?'

'Tommy's mama,' said Mr. Beamish, and with the resplendent licence of the period which continued still upon tolerable terms with nature under the compromise of decorous 'Oh-fie!' flatly declared the thing she did.

'I fancy, sir, that I caught sight of your figure on the hill yonder about an hour or so earlier,' said Caseldy to Mr. Camwell.

'If it was at the time when you were issuing from that wood, sir, your surmise is correct,' said the young gentleman.

'You are long-sighted, sir!'

'I am, sir.'

'And so am I.'

'And I,' said Chloe.

'Our Chloe will distinguish you accurately at a mile, and has done it,' observed Mr. Beamish.

'One guesses tiptoe on a suspicion, and if one is wrong it passes, and if one is right it is a miracle,' she said, and raised her voice on a song to quit the subject.

'Ay, ay, Chloe; so then you had a suspicion, you rogue, the day we had the pleasure of meeting the duchess, had you?' Mr. Beamish persisted.

Duchess Susan interposed. 'Such a pretty song! and you to stop her, sir!'

Caseldy took up the air.

'Oh, you two together!' she cried. 'I do love hearing music in the fields; it is heavenly. Bands in the town and voices in the green fields, I say! Couldn't you join Chloe, Mr Count, sir, before we come among the people, here where it 's all so nice and still. Music! and my heart does begin so to pit-a-pat. Do you sing, Mr. Alonzo?'

'Poorly,' the young gentleman replied.

'But the Count can sing, and Chloe's a real angel when she sings; and won't you, dear?' she implored Chloe, to whom Caseldy addressed a prelude with a bow and a flourish of the hand.

Chloe's voice flew forth. Caseldy's rich masculine matched it. The song was gay; he snapped his finger at intervals in foreign style, singing big-chested, with full notes and a fine abandonment, and the quickest susceptibility to his fair companion's cunning modulations, and an eye for Duchess Susan's rapture.

Mr. Beamish and Mr. Camwell applauded them.

'I never can tell what to say when I'm brimming'; the duchess let fall a sigh. 'And he can play the flute, Mr. Beamish. He promised me he would go into the orchestra and play a bit at one of your nice evening delicious concerts, and that will be nice—Oh!'

'He promised you, madam, did he so?' said the beau. 'Was it on your way to the Wells that he promised you?'

'On my way to the Wells!' she exclaimed softly. 'Why, how could anybody promise me a thing before ever he saw me? I call that a strange thing to ask a person. No, to-day, while we were

promenading; and I should hear him sing, he said. He does admire his Chloe so. Why, no wonder, is it, now? She can do everything; knit, sew, sing, dance—and talk! She's never uneasy for a word. She makes whole scenes of things go round you, like a picture peep-show, I tell her. And always cheerful. She hasn't a minute of grumps; and I'm sometimes a dish of stale milk fit only for pigs.

With your late hours here, I'm sure I want tickling in the morning, and Chloe carols me one of her songs, and I say, "There's my bird!"

Mr. Beamish added, 'And you will remember she has a heart.'

'I should think so!' said the duchess.

'A heart, madam!'

'Why, what else?'

Nothing other, the beau, by his aspect, was constrained to admit.

He appeared puzzled by this daughter of nature in a coronet; and more on her remarking, 'You know about her heart, Mr. Beamish.'

He acquiesced, for of course he knew of her life-long devotion to Caseldy; but there was archness in her tone. However, he did not expect a woman of her education to have the tone perfectly concordant with the circumstances. Speaking tentatively of Caseldy's handsome face and figure, he was pleased to hear the duchess say, 'So I tell Chloe.'

'Well,' said he, 'we must consider them united; they are one.'

Duchess Susan replied, 'That's what I tell him; she will do anything you wish.'

He repeated these words with an interjection, and decided in his mind that they were merely silly. She was a real shepherdess by birth and nature, requiring a strong guard over her attractions on account of her simplicity; such was his reading of the problem; he had conceived it at the first sight of her, and always recurred to it under the influence of her artless eyes, though his theories upon men and women were astute, and that cavalier perceived by long-sighted Chloe at Duchess Susan's coach window perturbed him at whiles. Habitually to be anticipating the simpleton in a particular person is the sure way of being sometimes the dupe, as he would not have been the last to warn a neophyte; but abstract wisdom is in need of an unappeased suspicion of much keenness of edge, if we would have it alive to cope with artless eyes and our prepossessed fancy of their artlessness.

'You talk of Chloe to him?' he said.

She answered. 'Yes, that I do. And he does love her! I like to hear him. He is one of the gentlemen who don't make me feel timid with them.'

She received a short lecture on the virtues of timidity in preserving the sex from danger; after which, considering that the lady who does not feel timid with a particular cavalier has had no sentiment awakened, he relinquished his place to Mr. Camwell, and proceeded to administer the probe to Caseldy.

That gentleman was communicatively candid. Chloe had left him, and he related how, summoned home to England and compelled to settle a dispute threatening a lawsuit, he had regretfully to abstain from visiting the Wells for a season, not because of any fear of the attractions of play—he had subdued the frailty of the desire to play—but because he deemed it due to his Chloe to bring her an untroubled face, and he wished first to be the better of the serious annoyances besetting him. For some similar reason he had not written; he wished to feast on her surprise. 'And I had my reward,' he said, as if he had been the person principally to suffer through that abstinence. 'I found—I may say it to you, Mr. Beamish love in her eyes. Divine by nature, she is one of the immortals, both in appearance and in steadfastness.'

They referred to Duchess Susan. Caseldy reluctantly owned that it would be an unkindness to remove Chloe from attendance on her during the short remaining term of her stay at the Wells; and so he had not proposed it, he said, for the duchess was a child, an innocent, not stupid by any means; but, of course, her transplanting from an inferior to an exalted position put her under disadvantages.

Mr. Beamish spoke of the difficulties of his post as guardian, and also of the strange cavalier seen at her carriage window by Chloe.

Caseldy smiled and said, 'If there was one—and Chloe is rather long—sighted—we can hardly expect her to confess it.'

'Why not, sir, if she be this piece of innocence?' Mr. Beamish was led to inquire.

'She fears you, sir,' Caseldy answered. 'You have inspired her with an extraordinary fear of you.'

'I have?' said the beau: it had been his endeavour to inspire it, and he swelled somewhat, rather with relief at the thought of his possessing a power to control his delicate charge, than with our vanity; yet would it be audacious to say that there was not a dose of the latter. He was a very human man; and he had, as we have seen, his ideas of the effect of the impression of fear upon the hearts of women. Something, in any case, caused him to forget the cavalier.

They were drawn to the three preceding them, by a lively dissension between Chloe and Mr. Camwell.

Duchess Susan explained it in her blunt style: 'She wants him to go away home, and he says he will, if she'll give him that double skein of silk she swings about, and she says she won't, let him ask as long as he pleases; so he says he sha'n't go, and I'm sure I don't see why he should; and she says he may stay, but he sha'n't have her necklace, she calls it. So Mr. Camwell snatches, and Chloe fires up. Gracious, can't she frown!—at him. She never frowns at anybody but him.'

Caseldy attempted persuasion on Mr. Camwell's behalf. With his mouth at Chloe's ear, he said, 'Give it; let the poor fellow have his memento; despatch him with it.'

'I can hear! and that is really kind,' exclaimed Duchess Susan.

'Rather a missy-missy schoolgirl sort of necklace,' Mr. Beamish observed; 'but he might have it, without the dismissal, for I cannot consent to lose Alonzo. No, madam,' he nodded at the duchess.

Caseldy continued his whisper: 'You can't think of wearing a thing like that about your neck?'

'Indeed,' said Chloe, 'I think of it.'

'Why, what fashion have you over here?'

'It is not yet a fashion,' she said.

'A silken circlet will not well become any precious pendant that I know of.'

'A bag of dust is not a very precious pendant,' she said.

'Oh, a memento mori!' cried he.

And she answered, 'Yes.'

He rallied her for her superstition, pursuing, 'Surely, my love, 'tis a cheap riddance of a pestilent, intrusive jaloux. Whip it into his hands for a mittimus.'

'Does his presence distress you?' she asked.

'I will own that to be always having the fellow dogging us, with his dejected leer, is not agreeable. He watches us now, because my lips are close by your cheek. He should be absent; he is one too many. Speed him on his voyage with the souvenir he asks for.'

'I keep it for a journey of my own, which I may have to take,' said Chloe.

'With me?'

'You will follow; you cannot help following me, Caseldy.'

He speculated on her front. She was tenderly smiling. 'You are happy, Chloe?'

'I have never known such happiness,' she said. The brilliancy of her eyes confirmed it.

He glanced over at Duchess Susan, who was like a sunflower in the sun. His glance lingered a moment. Her abundant and glowing young charms were the richest fascination an eye like his could dwell on. 'That is right,' said he. 'We will be perfectly happy till the month ends. And after it? But get us rid of Monsieur le Jeune; toss him that trifle; I spare him that. 'Twill be bliss to him, at the cost of a bit of silk thread to us. Besides, if we keep him to cure him of his passion here, might it not be —these boys veer suddenly, like the winds of Albion, from one fair object to t' other—at the cost of the precious and simple lady you are guarding? I merely hint. These two affect one another, as though it could be. She speaks of him. It shall be as you please, but a trifle like that, my Chloe, to be rid of a green eye!'

'You much wish him gone?' she said.

He shrugged. 'The fellow is in our way.'

'You think him a little perilous for my innocent lady?'

'Candidly, I do.'

She stretched the half-plaited silken rope in her two hands to try the strength of it, made a second knot, and consigned it to her pocket.

At once she wore her liveliest playfellow air, in which character no one was so enchanting as Chloe could be, for she became the comrade of men without forfeit of her station among sage sweet ladies, and was like a well-mannered sparkling boy, to whom his admiring seniors have given the lead in sallies, whims, and fights; but pleasanter than a boy, the soft hues of her sex toned her frolic spirit; she seemed her sex's deputy, to tell the coarser where they could meet, as on a bridge above the torrent separating them, gaily for interchange of the best of either, unfired and untempted by fire, yet with all the elements which make fire burn to animate their hearts.

'Lucky the man who wins for himself that life-long cordial!' Mr. Beamish said to Duchess Susan.

She had small comprehension of metaphorical phrases, but she was quick at reading faces; and comparing the enthusiasm on the face of the beau with Caseldy's look of troubled wonderment and regret, she pitied the lover conscious of not having the larger share of his mistress's affections. When presently he looked at her, the tender-hearted woman could have cried for very compassion, so sensible did he show himself of Chloe's preference of the other.

CHAPTER VI

That evening Duchess Susan played at the Pharaoh table and lost eight hundred pounds, through desperation at the loss of twenty. After encouraging her to proceed to this extremity, Caseldy checked her. He was conducting her out of the Play room when a couple of young squires of the Shepster order, and primed with wine, intercepted her to present their condolences, which they

performed with exaggerated gestures, intended for broad mimicry of the courtliness imported from the Continent, and a very dulcet harping on the popular variations of her Christian name, not forgetting her singular title, 'my lovely, lovely Dewlap!'

She was excited and stunned by her immediate experience in the transfer of money, and she said, 'I'm sure I don't know what you want.'

'Yes!' cried they, striking their bosoms as guitars, and attempting the posture of the thrummer on the instrument; 'she knows. She does know. Handsome Susie knows what we want.' And one ejaculated, mellifluously, 'Oh!' and the other 'Ah!' in flagrant derision of the foreign ways they produced in boorish burlesque—a self-consolatory and a common trick of the boor.

Caseldy was behind. He pushed forward and bowed to them. 'Sirs, will you mention to me what you want?'

He said it with a look that meant steel. It cooled them sufficiently to let him place the duchess under the protectorship of Mr. Beamish, then entering from another room with Chloe; whereupon the pair of rustic bucks retired to reinvigorate their valiant blood.

Mr. Beamish had seen that there was cause for gratitude to Caseldy, to whom he said, 'She has lost?' and he seemed satisfied on hearing the amount of the loss, and commissioned Caseldy to escort the ladies to their lodgings at once, observing, 'Adieu, Count!'

'You will find my foreign title of use to you here, after a bout or two,' was the reply.

'No bouts, if possibly to be avoided; though I perceive how the flavour of your countship may spread a wholesome alarm among our rurals, who will readily have at you with fists, but relish not the tricky cold weapon.'

Mr. Beamish haughtily bowed the duchess away.

Caseldy seized the opportunity while handing her into her sedan to say, 'We will try the fortune-teller for a lucky day to have our revenge.'

She answered: 'Oh, don't talk to me about playing again ever; I'm nigh on a clean pocket, and never knew such a sinful place as this. I feel I've tumbled into a ditch. And there's Mr. Beamish, all top when he bows to me. You're keeping Chloe waiting, sir.'

'Where was she while we were at the table?'

'Sure she was with Mr. Beamish.'

'Ah!' he groaned.

'The poor soul is in despair over her losses to-night,' he turned from the boxed-up duchess to remark to Chloe. 'Give her a comfortable cry and a few moral maxims.'

'I will,' she said. 'You love me, Caseldy?'

'Love you? I? Your own? What assurance would you have?'

'None, dear friend.'

Here was a woman easily deceived.

In the hearts of certain men, owing to an intellectual contempt of easy dupes, compunction in deceiving is diminished by the lightness of their task; and that soft confidence which will often, if but passingly, bid betrayers reconsider the charms of the fair soul they are abandoning, commends these armoured knights to pursue with redoubled earnest the fruitful ways of treachery. Their feelings are warm for their prey, moreover; and choosing to judge their victim by the present warmth of their feelings, they can at will be hurt, even to being scandalized, by a coldness that does not waken one suspicion of them. Jealousy would have a chance of arresting, for it is not impossible to tease them back to avowed allegiance; but sheer indifference also has a stronger hold on them than a dull, blind trustfulness. They hate the burden it imposes; the blind aspect is only touching enough to remind them of the burden, and they hate it for that, and for the enormous presumption of the belief that they are everlastingly bound to such an imbecile. She walks about with her eyes shut, expecting not to stumble, and when she does, am I to blame? The injured man asks it in the course of his reasoning.

He recurs to his victim's merits, but only compassionately, and the compassion is chilled by the thought that she may in the end start across his path to thwart him. Thereat he is drawn to think of the prize she may rob him of; and when one woman is an obstacle, the other shines desirable as life beyond death; he must have her; he sees her in the hue of his desire for her, and the obstacle in that of his repulsion. Cruelty is no more than the man's effort to win the wished object.

She should not leave it to his imagination to conceive that in the end the blind may awaken to thwart him. Better for her to cast him hence, or let him know that she will do battle to keep him. But the pride of a love that has hardened in the faithfulness of love cannot always be wise on trial.

Caseldy walked considerably in the rear of the couple of chairs. He saw on his way what was coming. His two young squires were posted at Duchess Susan's door when she arrived, and he received a blow from one of them in clearing a way for her. She plucked at his hand. 'Have they hurt you?' she asked.

'Think of me to-night thanking them and heaven for this, my darling,' he replied, with a pressure that lit the flying moment to kindle the after hours.

Chloe had taken help of one of her bearers to jump out. She stretched a finger at the unruly intruders, crying sternly, 'There is blood on you— come not nigh me!' The loftiest harangue would not have been so cunning to touch their wits. They stared at one another in the clear moonlight. Which of them had blood on him? As they had not been for blood, but for rough fun,

and something to boast of next day, they gesticulated according to the first instructions of the dancing master, by way of gallantry, and were out of Caseldy's path when he placed himself at his liege lady's service. 'Take no notice of them, dear,' she said.

'No, no,' said he; and 'What is it?' and his hoarse accent and shaking clasp of her arm sickened her to the sensation of approaching death.

Upstairs Duchess Susan made a show of embracing her. Both were trembling. The duchess ascribed her condition to those dreadful men. 'What makes them be at me so?' she said.

And Chloe said, 'Because you are beautiful.'

'Am I?'

'You are.'

'I am?'

'Very beautiful; young and beautiful; beautiful in the bud. You will learn to excuse them, madam.'

'But, Chloe—' The duchess shut her mouth. Out of a languid reverie, she sighed: 'I suppose I must be! My duke—oh, don't talk of him. Dear man! he's in bed and fast asleep long before this. I wonder how he came to let me come here.'

I did bother him, I know. Am I very, very beautiful, Chloe, so that men can't help themselves?'

'Very, madam.'

'There, good-night. I want to be in bed, and I can't kiss you because you keep calling me madam, and freeze me to icicles; but I do love you, Chloe.'

'I am sure you do.'

'I'm quite certain I do. I know I never mean harm. But how are we women expected to behave, then? Oh, I'm unhappy, I am.'

'You must abstain from playing.'

'It's that! I've lost my money—I forgot. And I shall have to confess it to my duke, though he warned me. Old men hold their fingers up—so! One finger: and you never forget the sight of it, never. It's a round finger, like the handle of a jug, and won't point at you when they're lecturing, and the skin's like an old coat on gaffer's shoulders—or, Chloe! just like, when you look at the nail, a rumpled counterpane up to the face of a corpse. I declare, it's just like! I feel as if I didn't a bit mind talking of corpses tonight. And my money's gone, and I don't much mind. I'm a wild girl again, handsomer than when that—he is a dear, kind, good old nobleman, with his funny old

finger: "Susan! Susan!" I'm no worse than others. Everybody plays here; everybody superior. Why, you have played, Chloe.'

'Never!'

'I've heard you say you played once, and a bigger stake it was, you said, than anybody ever did play.'

'Not money.'

'What then?'

'My life.'

'Goodness—yes! I understand. I understand everything to-night—men too. So you did!—They're not so shamefully wicked, Chloe. Because I can't see the wrong of human nature—if we're discreet, I mean. Now and then a country dance and a game, and home to bed and dreams. There's no harm in that, I vow. And that's why you stayed at this place. You like it, Chloe?'

'I am used to it.'

'But when you're married to Count Caseldy you'll go?'

'Yes, then.'

She uttered it so joylessly that Duchess Susan added, with intense affectionateness, 'You're not obliged to marry him, dear Chloe.'

'Nor he me, madam.'

The duchess caught at her impulsively to kiss her, and said she would undress herself, as she wished to be alone.

From that night she was a creature inflamed.

CHAPTER VII

The total disappearance of the pair of heroes who had been the latest in the conspiracy to vex his delicate charge, gave Mr. Beamish a high opinion of Caseldy as an assistant in such an office as he held. They had gone, and nothing more was heard of them. Caseldy confined his observations on the subject to the remark that he had employed the best means to be rid of that kind of worthies; and whether their souls had fled, or only their bodies, was unknown. But the duchess had quiet promenades with Caseldy to guard her, while Mr. Beamish counted the remaining days

of her visit with the impatience of a man having cause to cast eye on a clock. For Duchess Susan was not very manageable now; she had fits of insurgency, and plainly said that her time was short, and she meant to do as she liked, go where she liked, play when she liked, and be an independent woman—if she was so soon to be taken away and boxed in a castle that was only a bigger sedan.

Caseldy protested he was as helpless as the beau. He described the annoyance of his incessant running about at her heels in all directions amusingly, and suggested that she must be beating the district to recover her 'strange cavalier,' of whom, or of one that had ridden beside her carriage half a day on her journey to the Wells, he said she had dropped a sort of hint. He complained of the impossibility of his getting an hour in privacy with his Chloe.

'And I, accustomed to consult with her, see too little of her,' said Mr. Beamish. 'I shall presently be seeing nothing, and already I am sensible of my loss.'

He represented his case to Duchess Susan:—that she was for ever driving out long distances and taking Chloe from him, when his occupation precluded his accompanying them; and as Chloe soon was to be lost to him for good, he deeply felt her absence.

The duchess flung him enigmatical rejoinders: 'You can change all that, Mr. Beamish, if you like, and you know you can. Oh, yes, you can. But you like being a butterfly, and when you've made ladies pale you're happy: and there they're to stick and wither for you. Never!—I've that pride. I may be worried, but I'll never sink to green and melancholy for a man.'

She bridled at herself in a mirror, wherein not a sign of paleness was reflected.

Mr. Beamish meditated, and he thought it prudent to speak to Caseldy manfully of her childish suspicions, lest she should perchance in like manner perturb the lover's mind.

'Oh, make your mind easy, my dear sir, as far as I am concerned,' said Caseldy. 'But, to tell you the truth, I think I can interpret her creamy ladyship's innuendos a little differently and quite as clearly. For my part, I prefer the pale to the blowsy, and I stake my right hand on Chloe's fidelity. Whatever harm I may have the senseless cruelty— misfortune, I may rather call it—to do that heavenly-minded woman in our days to come, none shall say of me that I was ever for an instant guilty of the baseness of doubting her purity and constancy. And, sir, I will add that I could perfectly rely also on your honour.'

Mr. Beamish bowed. 'You do but do me justice. But, say, what interpretation?'

'She began by fearing you,' said Caseldy, creating a stare that was followed by a frown. 'She fancies you neglect her. Perhaps she has a woman's suspicion that you do it to try her.'

Mr. Beamish frenetically cited his many occupations. 'How can I be ever dancing attendance on her?' Then he said, 'Pooh,' and tenderly fingered the ruffles of his wrist. 'Tush, tush,' said he, 'no, no: though if it came to a struggle between us, I might in the interests of my old friend, her lord, whom I have reasons for esteeming, interpose an influence that would make the exercise of my

authority agreeable. Hitherto I have seen no actual need of it, and I watch keenly. Her eye has been on Colonel Poltermore once or twice his on her. The woman is a rose in June, sir, and I forgive the whole world for looking—and for longing too. But I have observed nothing serious.'

'He is of our party to the beacon-head to-morrow,' said Caseldy. 'She insisted that she would have him; and at least it will grant me furlough for an hour.'

'Do me the service to report to me,' said Mr. Beamish.

In this fashion he engaged Caseldy to supply him with inventions, and prepared himself to swallow them. It was Poltermore and Poltermore, the Colonel here, the Colonel there until the chase grew so hot that Mr. Beamish could no longer listen to young Mr. Camwell's fatiguing drone upon his one theme of the double-dealing of Chloe's betrothed. He became of her way of thinking, and treated the young gentleman almost as coldly as she. In time he was ready to guess of his own acuteness that the 'strange cavalier' could have been no other than Colonel Poltermore. When Caseldy hinted it, Mr. Beamish said, 'I have marked him.' He added, in highly self-satisfied style, 'With all your foreign training, my friend, you will learn that we English are not so far behind you in the art of unravelling an intrigue in the dark.' To which Caseldy replied, that the Continental world had little to teach Mr. Beamish.

Poor Colonel Poltermore, as he came to be called, was clearly a victim of the sudden affability of Duchess Susan. The transformation of a stiff military officer into a nimble Puck, a runner of errands and a sprightly attendant, could not pass without notice. The first effect of her discriminating condescension on this unfortunate gentleman was to make him the champion of her claims to breeding. She had it by nature, she was Nature's great lady, he would protest to the noble dames of the circle he moved in; and they admitted that she was different in every way from a bourgeoisie elevated by marriage to lofty rank: she was not vulgar. But they remained doubtful of the perfect simplicity of a young woman who worked such changes in men as to render one of the famous conquerors of the day her agitated humble servant. By rapid degrees the Colonel had fallen to that. When not by her side, he was ever marching with sharp strides, hurrying through rooms and down alleys and groves until he had discovered and attached himself to her skirts. And, curiously, the object of his jealousy was the devoted Alonzo! Mr. Beamish laughed when he heard of it. The lady's excitement and giddy mien, however, accused Poltermore of a stage of success requiring to be combated immediately. There was mention of Duchess Susan's mighty wish to pay a visit to the popular fortune-teller of the hut on the heath, and Mr. Beamish put his veto on the expedition. She had obeyed him by abstaining from play of late, so he fully expected, that his interdict would be obeyed; and besides the fortune-teller was a rogue of a sham astrologer known to have foretold to certain tender ladies things they were only too desirous to imagine predestined by an extraordinary indication of the course of planets through the zodiac, thus causing them to sin by the example of celestial conjunctions—a piece of wanton impiety. The beau took high ground in his objections to the adventure. Nevertheless, Duchess Susan did go. She drove to the heath at an early hour of the morning, attended by Chloe, Colonel Poltermore, and Caseldy. They subsequently breakfasted at an inn where gipsy repasts were occasionally served to the fashion, and they were back at the wells as soon as the world was abroad. Their surprise then was prodigious when Mr. Beamish, accosting them full in assembly, inquired whether they were satisfied with the report of their fortunes, and yet more when he

positively proved himself acquainted with the fortunes which had been recounted to each of them in privacy.

'You, Colonel Poltermore, are to be in luck's way up to the tenth milestone,—where your chariot will overset and you will be lamed for life.'

'Not quite so bad,' said the Colonel cheerfully, he having been informed of much better.

'And you, Count Caseldy, are to have it all your own way with good luck, after committing a deed of slaughter, with the solitary penalty of undergoing a visit every night from the corpse.'

'Ghost,' Caseldy smilingly corrected him.

'And Chloe would not have her fortune told, because she knew it!' Mr. Beamish cast a paternal glance at her. 'And you, madam,' he bent his brows on the duchess, 'received the communication that "All for Love" will sink you as it raised you, put you down as it took you up, furnish the feast to the raven gentleman which belongs of right to the golden eagle?'

'Nothing of the sort! And I don't believe in any of their stories,' cried the duchess, with a burning face.

'You deny it, madam?'

'I do. There was never a word of a raven or an eagle, that I'll swear, now.'

'You deny that there was ever a word of "All for Love"? Speak, madam.'

'Their conjuror's rigmarole!' she murmured, huffing. 'As if I listened to their nonsense!'

'Does the Duchess of Dewlap dare to give me the lie?' said Mr. Beamish.

'That's not my title, and you know it,' she retorted.

'What's this?' the angry beau sang out. 'What stuff is this you wear?' He towered and laid hand on a border of lace of her morning dress, tore it furiously and swung a length of it round him: and while the duchess panted and trembled at an outrage that won for her the sympathy of every lady present as well as the championship of the gentlemen, he tossed the lace to the floor and trampled on it, making his big voice intelligible over the uproar: 'Hear what she does! 'Tis a felony! She wears the stuff with Betty Worcester's yellow starch on it for mock antique! And let who else wears it strip it off before the town shall say we are disgraced— when I tell you that Betty Worcester was hanged at Tyburn yesterday morning for murder!'

There were shrieks.

Hardly had he finished speaking before the assembly began to melt; he stood in the centre like a pole unwinding streamers, amid a confusion of hurrying dresses, the sound and whirl and drift

whereof was as that of the autumnal strewn leaves on a wind rising in November. The troops of ladies were off to bereave themselves of their fashionable imitation old lace adornment, which denounced them in some sort abettors and associates of the sanguinary loathed wretch, Mrs. Elizabeth Worcester, their benefactress of the previous day, now hanged and dangling on the gallows-tree.

Those ladies who wore not imitation lace or any lace in the morning, were scarcely displeased with the beau for his exposure of them that did. The gentlemen were confounded by his exhibition of audacious power. The two gentlemen highest upon violently resenting his brutality to Duchess Susan, led her from the room in company with Chloe.

'The woman shall fear me to good purpose,' Mr. Beamish said to himself.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Camwell was in the ante-room as Chloe passed out behind the two incensed supporters of Duchess Susan.

'I shall be by the fir-trees on the Mount at eight this evening,' she said.

'I will be there,' he replied.

'Drive Mr. Beamish into the country, that these gentlemen may have time to cool.'

He promised her it should be done.

Close on the hour of her appointment, he stood under the fir-trees, admiring the sunset along the western line of hills, and when Chloe joined him he spoke of the beauty of the scene.

'Though nothing seems more eloquently to say farewell,' he added, with a sinking voice.

'We could say it now, and be friends,' she answered.

'Later than now, you think it unlikely that you could forgive me, Chloe.'

'In truth, sir, you are making it hard for me.'

'I have stayed here to keep watch; for no pleasure of my own,' said he.

'Mr. Beamish is an excellent protector of the duchess.'

'Excellent; and he is cleverly taught to suppose she fears him greatly; and when she offends him, he makes a display of his Jupiter's awfulness, with the effect on woman of natural spirit which

you have seen, and others had foreseen, that she is exasperated and grows reckless. Tie another knot in your string, Chloe.'

She looked away, saying, 'Were you not the cause? You were in collusion with that charlatan of the heath, who told them their fortunes this morning. I see far, both in the dark and in the light.'

'But not through a curtain. I was present.'

'Hateful, hateful business of the spy! You have worked a great mischief Mr. Camwell. And how can you reconcile it to, your conscience that you should play so base a part?'

'I have but performed my duty, dear madam.'

'You pretend that it is your devotion to me! I might be flattered if I saw not so abject a figure in my service. Now have I but four days of my month of happiness remaining, and my request to you is, leave me to enjoy them. I beseech you to go. Very humbly, most earnestly, I beg your departure. Grant it to me, and do not stay to poison my last days here. Leave us to-morrow. I will admit your good intentions. I give you my hand in gratitude. Adieu, Mr. Camwell.'

He took her hand. 'Adieu. I foresee an early separation, and this dear hand is mine while I have it in mine. Adieu. It is a word to be repeated at a parting like ours. We do not blow out our light with one breath: we let it fade gradually, like yonder sunset.'

'Speak so,' said she.

'Ah, Chloe, to give one's life! And it is your happiness I have sought more than your favor.'

'I believe it; but I have not liked the means. You leave us to-morrow?'

'It seems to me that to-morrow is the term.'

Her face clouded. 'That tells me a very uncertain promise.'

'You looked forth to a month of happiness—meaning a month of delusion. The delusion expires to-night. You will awaken to see your end of it in the morning. You have never looked beyond the month since the day of his arrival.'

'Let him not be named, I supplicate you.'

'Then you consent that another shall be sacrificed for you to enjoy your state of deception an hour longer?'

'I am not deceived, sir. I wish for peace, and crave it, and that is all I would have.'

'And you make her your peace-offering, whom you have engaged to serve! Too surely your eyes have been open as well as mine. Knot by knot— I have watched you—where is it?—you have marked the points in that silken string where the confirmation of a just suspicion was too strong for you.'

'I did it, and still I continued merry?' She subsided from her scornfulness on an involuntary 'Ah!' that was a shudder.

'You acted Light Heart, madam, and too well to hoodwink me. Meanwhile you allowed that mischief to proceed, rather than have your crazy lullaby disturbed.'

'Indeed, Mr. Camwell, you presume.'

'The time, and my knowledge of what it is fraught with, demand it and excuse it. You and I, my dear and one only love on earth, stand outside of ordinary rules. We are between life and death.'

'We are so always.'

'Listen further to the preacher: We have them close on us, with the question, Which it shall be to-morrow. You are for sleeping on, but I say no; nor shall that iniquity of double treachery be committed because of your desire to be rocked in a cradle. Hear me out. The drug you have swallowed to cheat yourself will not bear the shock awaiting you tomorrow with the first light. Hear these birds! When next they sing, you will be broad awake, and of me, and the worship and service I would have dedicated to you, I do not . . . it is a spectral sunset of a day that was never to be!—awake, and looking on what? Back from a monstrous villainy to the forlorn wretch who winked at it with knots in a string. Count them then, and where will be your answer to heaven? I begged it of you, to save you from those blows of remorse; yes, terrible!'

'Oh, no!'

'Terrible, I say!'

'You are mistaken, Mr. Camwell. It is my soother. I tell my beads on it.'

'See how a persistent residence in this place has made a Pagan of the purest soul among us! Had you . . . but that day was not to lighten me! More adorable in your errors that you are than others by their virtues, you have sinned through excess of the qualities men prize. Oh, you have a boundless generosity, unhappily enwound with a pride as great. There is your fault, that is the cause of your misery. Too generous! too proud! You have trusted, and you will not cease to trust; you have vowed yourself to love, never to remonstrate, never to seem to doubt; it is too much your religion, rare verily. But bethink you of that inexperienced and most silly good creature who is on the rapids to her destruction. Is she not—you will cry it aloud to-morrow—your victim? You hear it within you now.'

'Friend, my dear, true friend,' Chloe said in her deeper voice of melody, 'set your mind at ease about to-morrow and her. Her safety is assured. I stake my life on it. She shall not be a victim. At

the worst she will but have learnt a lesson. So, then, adieu! The West hangs like a garland of unwatered flowers, neglected by the mistress they adorned. Remember the scene, and that here we parted, and that Chloe wished you the happiness it was out of her power to bestow, because she was of another world, with her history written out to the last red streak before ever you knew her. Adieu; this time adieu for good!

Mr. Camwell stood in her path. 'Blind eyes, if you like,' he said, 'but you shall not hear blind language. I forfeit the poor consideration for me that I have treasured; hate me; better hated by you than shun my duty! Your duchess is away at the first dawn this next morning; it has come to that. I speak with full knowledge. Question her.'

Chloe threw a faltering scorn of him into her voice, as much as her heart's sharp throbs would allow. 'I question you, sir, how you came to this full knowledge you boast of?'

'I have it; let that suffice. Nay, I will be particular; his coach is ordered for the time I name to you; her maid is already at a station on the road of the flight.'

'You have their servants in your pay?'

'For the mine—the countermine. We must grub dirt to match deceivers. You, madam, have chosen to be delicate to excess, and have thrown it upon me to be gross, and if you please, abominable, in my means of defending you. It is not too late for you to save the lady, nor too late to bring him to the sense of honour.'

'I cannot think Colonel Poltermore so dishonourable.'

'Poor Colonel Poltermore! The office he is made to fill is an old one. Are you not ashamed, Chloe?'

'I have listened too long,' she replied.

'Then, if it is your pleasure, depart.'

He made way for her. She passed him. Taking two hurried steps in the gloom of the twilight, she stopped, held at her heart, and painfully turning to him, threw her arms out, and let herself be seized and kissed.

On his asking pardon of her, which his long habit of respect forced him to do in the thick of rapture and repetitions, she said, 'You rob no one.'

'Oh,' he cried, 'there is a reward, then, for faithful love. But am I the man I was a minute back? I have you; I embrace you; and I doubt that I am I. Or is it Chloe's ghost?'

'She has died and visits you.'

'And will again?'

Chloe could not speak for languor.

The intensity of the happiness she gave by resting mutely where she was, charmed her senses. But so long had the frost been on them that their awakening to warmth was haunted by speculations on the sweet taste of this reward of faithfulness to him, and the strange taste of her own unfaithfulness to her. And reflecting on the cold act of speculation while strong arm and glowing mouth were pressing her, she thought her senses might really be dead, and she a ghost visiting the good youth for his comfort. So feel ghosts, she thought, and what we call happiness in love is a match between ecstasy and compliance. Another thought flew through her like a mortal shot: 'Not so with those two! with them it will be ecstasy meeting ecstasy; they will take and give happiness in equal portions.' A pang of jealousy traversed her frame. She made the shrewdness of it help to nerve her fervour in a last strain of him to her bosom, and gently releasing herself, she said, 'No one is robbed. And now, dear friend, promise me that you will not disturb Mr. Beamish.'

'Chloe,' said he, 'have you bribed me?'

'I do not wish him to be troubled.'

'The duchess, I have told you—'

'I know. But you have Chloe's word that she will watch over the duchess and die to save her. It is an oath. You have heard of some arrangements. I say they shall lead to nothing: it shall not take place. Indeed, my friend, I am awake; I see as much as you see. And those. . . after being where I have been, can you suppose I have a regret? But she is my dear and peculiar charge, and if she runs a risk, trust to me that there shall be no catastrophe; I swear it; so, now, adieu. We sup in company to-night. They will be expecting some of Chloe's verses, and she must sing to herself for a few minutes to stir the bed her songs take wing from; therefore, we will part, and for her sake avoid her; do not be present at our table, or in the room, or anywhere there. Yes, you rob no one,' she said, in a voice that curled through him deliciously by wavering; but I think I may blush at recollections, and I would rather have you absent. Adieu! I will not ask for obedience from you beyond to-night. Your word?'

He gave it in a stupor of felicity, and she fled.

CHAPTER IX

Chloe drew the silken string from her bosom, as she descended the dim pathway through the furies, and set her fingers travelling along it for the number of the knots. 'I have no right to be living,' she said. Seven was the number; seven years she had awaited her lover's return; she counted her age and completed it in sevens. Fatalism had sustained her during her lover's absence; it had fast hold of her now. Thereby had she been enabled to say, 'He will come'; and saying, 'He has come,' her touch rested on the first knot in the string. She had no power to

displace her fingers, and the cause of the tying of the knot stood across her brain marked in dull red characters, legible neither to her eye nor to her understanding, but a reviving of the hour that brought it on her spirit with human distinctness, except of the light of day: she had a sense of having forfeited light, and seeing perhaps more clearly. Everything assured her that she saw more clearly than others; she saw too when it was good to cease to live.

Hers was the unhappy lot of one gifted with poet-imagination to throb with the woman supplanting her and share the fascination of the man who deceived. At their first meeting, in her presence, she had seen that they were not strangers; she pitied them for speaking falsely, and when she vowed to thwart this course of evil it to save a younger creature of her sex, not in rivalry. She treated them both with a proud generosity surpassing gentleness. All that there was of selfishness in her bosom resolved to the enjoyment of her one month of strongly willed delusion.

The kiss she had sunk to robbed no one, not even her body's purity, for when this knot was tied she consigned herself to her end, and had become a bag of dust. The other knots in the string pointed to verifications; this first one was a suspicion, and it was the more precious, she felt it to be more a certainty; it had come from the dark world beyond us, where all is known. Her belief that it had come thence was nourished by testimony, the space of blackness wherein she had lived since, exhausting her last vitality in a simulation of infantile happiness, which was nothing other than the carrying on of her emotion of the moment of sharp sour sweet—such as it may be, the doomed below attain for their knowledge of joy—when, at the first meeting with her lover, the perception of his treachery to the soul confiding in him, told her she had lived, and opened out the cherishable kingdom of insensibility to her for her heritage.

She made her tragic humility speak thankfully to the wound that slew her. 'Had it not been so, I should not have seen him,' she said:—Her lover would not have come to her but for his pursuit of another woman.

She pardoned him for being attracted by that beautiful transplant of the fields: pardoned her likewise. 'He when I saw him first was as beautiful to me. For him I might have done as much.'

Far away in a lighted hall of the West, her family raised hands of reproach. They were minute objects, keenly discerned as diminished figures cut in steel. Feeling could not be very warm for them, they were so small, and a sea that had drowned her ran between; and looking that way she had scarce any warmth of feeling save for a white rhaiadr leaping out of broken cloud through branched rocks, where she had climbed and dreamed when a child. The dream was then of the coloured days to come; now she was more infant in her mind, and she watched the scattered water broaden, and tasted the spray, sat there drinking the scene, untroubled by hopes as a lamb, different only from an infant in knowing that she had thrown off life to travel back to her home and be refreshed. She heard her people talk; they were unending babblers in the waterfall. Truth was with them, and wisdom. How, then, could she pretend to any right to live? Already she had no name; she was less living than a tombstone. For who was Chloe? Her family might pass the grave of Chloe without weeping, without moralizing. They had foreseen her ruin, they had foretold it, they noised it in the waters, and on they sped to the plains, telling the world of their prophecy, and making what was untold as yet a lighter thing to do.

The lamps in an irregularly dotted line underneath the hill beckoned her to her task of appearing as the gayest of them that draw their breath for the day and have pulses for the morrow.

CHAPTER X

At midnight the great supper party to celebrate the reconciliation of Mr. Beamish and Duchess Susan broke up, and beneath a soft fair sky the ladies, with their silvery chatter of gratitude for amusement, caught Chloe in their arms to kiss her, rendering it natural for their cavaliers to exclaim that Chloe was blest above mortals. The duchess preferred to walk. Her spirits were excited, and her language smelt of her origin, but the superb fleshly beauty of the woman was aglow, and crying, 'I declare I should burst in one of those boxes—just as if you'd stalled me!' she fanned a wind on her face, and sumptuously spread her spherical skirts, attended by the vanquished and captive Colonel Poltermore, a gentleman manifestly bent on insinuating sly slips of speech to serve for here a pinch of powder, there a match. 'Am I?' she was heard to say. She blew prodigious deep-chested sighs of a coquette that has taken to roaring.

Presently her voice tossed out: 'As if I would!' These vivid illuminations of the Colonel's proceedings were a pasture to the rearward groups, composed of two very grand ladies, Caseldy, Mr. Beamish, a lord, and Chloe.

'You man! Oh!' sprang from the duchess. 'What do I hear? I won't listen; I can't, I mustn't, I oughtn't.'

So she said, but her head careened, she gave him her coy reluctant ear, with total abandonment to the seductions of his whispers, and the lord let fly a peal of laughter. It had been a supper of copious wine, and the songs which rise from wine. Nature was excused by our midnight naturalists.

The two great dames, admonished by the violence of the nobleman's laughter, laid claim on Mr. Beamish to accompany them at their parting with Chloe and Duchess Susan.

In the momentary shuffling of couples incident to adieux among a company, the duchess murmured to Caseldy:

'Have I done it well.'

He praised her for perfection in her acting. 'I am at your door at three, remember.'

'My heart's in my mouth,' said she.

Colonel Poltermore still had the privilege of conducting her the few farther steps to her lodgings.

Caseldy walked beside Chloe, and silently, until he said, 'If I have not yet mentioned the subject—'

'If it is an allusion to money let me not hear it to-night,' she replied.

'I can only say that my lawyers have instructions. But my lawyers cannot pay you in gratitude. Do not think me in your hardest review of my misconduct ungrateful. I have ever esteemed you above all women; I do, and I shall; you are too much above me. I am afraid I am a composition of bad stuff; I did not win a very particularly good name on the Continent; I begin to know myself, and in comparison with you, dear Catherine——'

'You speak to Chloe,' she said. 'Catherine is a buried person. She died without pain. She is by this time dust.'

The man heaved his breast. 'Women have not an idea of our temptations.'

'You are excused by me for all your errors, Caseldy. Always remember that.'

He sighed profoundly. 'Ay, you have a Christian's heart.'

She answered, 'I have come to the conclusion that it is a Pagan's.'

'As for me,' he rejoined, 'I am a fatalist. Through life I have seen my destiny. What is to be, will be; we can do nothing.'

'I have heard of one who expired of a surfeit that he anticipated, nay proclaimed, when indulging in the last desired morsel,' said Chloe.

'He was driven to it.'

'From within.'

Caseldy acquiesced; his wits were clouded, and an illustration even coarser and more grotesque would have won a serious nod and a sigh from him. 'Yes, we are moved by other hands!'

'It is pleasant to think so: and think it of me tomorrow. Will you!' said Chloe.

He promised it heartily, to induce her to think the same of him.

Their separation was in no way remarkable. The pretty formalities were executed at the door, and the pair of gentlemen departed.

'It's quite dark still,' Duchess Susan said, looking up at the sky, and she ran upstairs, and sank, complaining of the weakness of her legs, in a chair of the ante-chamber of her bedroom, where Chloe slept. Then she asked the time of the night. She could not suppress her hushed 'Oh!' of

heavy throbbing from minute to minute. Suddenly she started off at a quick stride to her own room, saying that it must be sleepiness which affected her so.

Her bedroom had a door to the sitting-room, and thence, as also from Chloe's room, the landing on the stairs was reached, for the room ran parallel with both bed-chambers. She walked in it and threw the window open, but closed it immediately; opened and shut the door, and returned and called for Chloe. She wanted to be read to. Chloe named certain composing books. The duchess chose a book of sermons. 'But we're all such dreadful sinners, it's better not to bother ourselves late at night.' She dismissed that suggestion. Chloe proposed books of poetry. 'Only I don't understand them except about larks, and buttercups, and hayfields, and that's no comfort to a woman burning,' was the answer.

'Are you feverish, madam?' said Chloe. And the duchess was sharp on her: 'Yes, madam, I am.'

She reproved herself in a change of tone: 'No, Chloe, not feverish, only this air of yours here is such an exciting air, as the doctor says; and they made me drink wine, and I played before supper—Oh! my money; I used to say I could get more, but now!' she sighed—'but there's better in the world than money. You know that, don't you, you dear? Tell me. And I want you to be happy; that you'll find. I do wish we could all be!' She wept, and spoke of requiring a little music to compose her.

Chloe stretched a hand for her guitar. Duchess Susan listened to some notes, and cried that it went to her heart and hurt her. 'Everything we like a lot has a fence and a board against trespassers, because of such a lot of people in the world,' she moaned. 'Don't play, put down that thing, please, dear. You're the cleverest creature anybody has ever met; they all say so. I wish I—Lovely women catch men, and clever women keep them: I've heard that said in this wretched place, and it's a nice prospect for me, next door to a fool! I know I am.'

'The duke adores you, madam.'

'Poor duke! Do let him be—sleeping so woebegone with his mouth so, and that chin of a baby, like as if he dreamed of a penny whistle. He shouldn't have let me come here. Talk of Mr. Beamish. How he will miss you, Chloe!'

'He will,' Chloe said sadly.

'If you go, dear.'

'I am going.'

'Why should you leave him, Chloe?'

'I must.'

'And there, the thought of it makes you miserable!'

'It does.'

'You needn't, I'm sure.'

Chloe looked at her.

The duchess turned her head. 'Why can't you be gay, as you were at the supper-table, Chloe? You're out to him like a flower when the sun jumps over the hill; you're up like a lark in the dews; as I used to be when I thought of nothing. Oh, the early morning; and I'm sleepy. What a beast I feel, with my grandeur, and the time in an hour or two for the birds to sing, and me ready to drop. I must go and undress.'

She rushed on Chloe, kissed her hastily, declaring that she was quite dead of fatigue, and dismissed her. 'I don't want help, I can undress myself. As if Susan Barley couldn't do that for herself! and you may shut your door, I sha'n't have any frights to-night, I'm so tired out.'

'Another kiss,' Chloe said tenderly.

'Yes, take it'—the duchess leaned her cheek—'but I'm so tired I don't know what I'm doing.'

'It will not be on your conscience,' Chloe answered, kissing her warmly.

Will those words she withdrew, and the duchess closed the door. She ran a bolt in it immediately.

'I'm too tired to know anything I'm doing,' she said to herself, and stood with shut eyes to hug certain thoughts which set her bosom heaving.

There was the bed, there was the clock. She had the option of lying down and floating quietly into the day, all peril past. It seemed sweet for a minute. But it soon seemed an old, a worn, an end-of-autumn life, chill, without aim, like a something that was hungry and toothless. The bed proposing innocent sleep repelled her and drove her to the clock. The clock was awful: the hand at the hour, the finger following the minute, commanded her to stir actively, and drove her to gentle meditations on the bed. She lay down dressed, after setting her light beside the clock, that she might see it at will, and considering it necessary for the bed to appear to have been lain on. Considering also that she ought to be heard moving about in the process of undressing, she rose from the bed to make sure of her reading of the guilty clock. An hour and twenty minutes! she had no more time than that: and it was not enough for her various preparations, though it was true that her maid had packed and taken a box of the things chiefly needful; but the duchess had to change her shoes and her dress, and run at bo-peep with the changes of her mind, a sedative preface to any fatal step among women of her complexion, for so they invite indecision to exhaust their scruples, and they let the blood have its way. Having so short a space of time, she thought the matter decided, and with some relief she flung despairing on the bed, and lay down for good with her duke. In a little while her head was at work reviewing him sternly, estimating him not less accurately than the male moralist charitable to her sex would do. She quitted the bed, with a spring to escape her imagined lord; and as if she had felt him to be there, she lay down no more. A quiet life like that was flatter to her idea than a handsomely bound big book

without any print on the pages, and without a picture. Her contemplation of it, contrasted with the life waved to her view by the timepiece, set her whole system raging; she burned to fly. Providently, nevertheless, she thumped a pillow, and threw the bedclothes into proper disorder, to inform the world that her limbs had warmed them, and that all had been impulse with her. She then proceeded to disrobe, murmuring to herself that she could stop now, and could stop now, at each stage of the advance to a fresh dressing of her person, and moralizing on her singular fate, in the mouth of an observer. 'She was shot up suddenly over everybody's head, and suddenly down she went.' Susan whispered to herself: 'But it was for love!' Possessed by the rosiness of love, she finished her business, with an attention to everything needed that was equal to perfect serenity of mind. After which there was nothing to do, save to sit humped in a chair, cover her face and count the clock-tickings, that said, Yes—no; do—don't; fly— stay; fly—fly! It seemed to her she heard a moving. Well she might with that dreadful heart of hers!

Chloe was asleep, at peace by this time, she thought; and how she envied Chloe! She might be as happy, if she pleased. Why not? But what kind of happiness was it? She likened it to that of the corpse underground, and shrank distastefully.

Susan stood at her glass to have a look at the creature about whom there was all this disturbance, and she threw up her arms high for a languid, not unlovely yawn, that closed in blissful shuddering with the sensation of her lover's arms having wormed round her waist and taken her while she was defenceless. For surely they would. She took a jewelled ring, his gift, from her purse, and kissed it, and drew it on and off her finger, leaving it on. Now she might wear it without fear of inquiries and virtuous eyebrows. O heavenly now—if only it were an hour hence; and going behind galloping horses!

The clock was at the terrible moment. She hesitated internally and hastened; once her feet stuck fast, and firmly she said, 'No'; but the clock was her lord. The clock was her lover and her lord; and obeying it, she managed to get into the sitting-room, on the pretext that she merely wished to see through the front window whether daylight was coming.

How well she knew that half-light of the ebb of the wave of darkness.

Strange enough it was to see it showing houses regaining their solidity of the foregone day, instead of still fields, black hedges, familiar shapes of trees. The houses had no wakefulness, they were but seen to stand, and the light was a revelation of emptiness. Susan's heart was cunning to reproach her duke for the difference of the scene she beheld from that of the innocent open-breasted land. Yes, it was dawn in a wicked place that she never should have been allowed to visit. But where was he whom she looked for? There! The cloaked figure of a man was at the corner of the street. It was he. Her heart froze; but her limbs were strung to throw off the house, and reach air, breathe, and (as her thoughts ran) swoon, well-protected. To her senses the house was a house on fire, and crying to her to escape.

Yet she stepped deliberately, to be sure-footed in a dusky room; she touched along the wall and came to the door, where a foot-stool nearly tripped her. Here her touch was at fault, for though she knew she must be close by the door, she was met by an obstruction unlike wood, and the door seemed neither shut nor open. She could not find the handle; something hung over it.

Thinking coolly, she fancied the thing must be a gown or dressing-gown; it hung heavily. Her fingers were sensible of the touch of silk; she distinguished a depending bulk, and she felt at it very carefully and mechanically, saying within herself, in her anxiety to pass it without noise, 'If I should awake poor Chloe, of all people!' Her alarm was that the door might creak. Before any other alarm had struck her brain, the hand she felt with was in a palsy, her mouth gaped, her throat thickened, the dust-ball rose in her throat, and the effort to swallow it down and get breath kept her from acute speculation while she felt again, pinched, plucked at the thing, ready to laugh, ready to shriek. Above her head, all on one side, the thing had a round white top. Could it be a hand that her touch had slid across? An arm too! this was an arm! She clutched it, imagining that it clung to her. She pulled it to release herself from it, desperately she pulled, and a lump descended, and a flash of all the torn nerves of her body told her that a dead human body was upon her.

At a quarter to four o'clock of a midsummer morning, as Mr. Beamish relates of his last share in the Tale of Chloe, a woman's voice, in piercing notes of anguish, rang out three shrieks consecutively, which were heard by him at the instant of his quitting his front doorstep, in obedience to the summons of young Mr. Camwell, delivered ten minutes previously, with great urgency, by that gentleman's lacquey. On his reaching the street of the house inhabited by Duchess Susan, he perceived many night-capped heads at windows, and one window of the house in question lifted but vacant. His first impression accused the pair of gentlemen, whom he saw bearing drawn swords in no friendly attitude of an ugly brawl that had probably affrighted her Grace, or her personal attendant, a woman capable of screaming, for he was well assured that it could not have been Chloe, the least likely of her sex to abandon herself to the use of their weapons either in terror or in jeopardy. The antagonists were Mr. Camwell and Count Caseldy. On his approaching them, Mr. Camwell sheathed his sword, saying that his work was done. Caseldy was convulsed with wrath, to such a degree as to make the part of an intermediary perilous. There had been passes between them, and Caseldy cried aloud that he would have his enemy's blood. The night-watch was nowhere. Soon, however, certain shopmen and their apprentices assisted Mr. Beamish to preserve the peace, despite the fury of Caseldy and the provocations—'not easy to withstand,' says the chronicler—offered by him to young Camwell. The latter said to Mr. Beamish: 'I knew I should be no match, so I sent for you,' causing his friend astonishment, inasmuch as he was assured of the youth's natural valour.

Mr. Beamish was about to deliver an allocution of reproof to them in equal shares, being entirely unsuspecting of any other reason for the alarum than this palpable outbreak of a rivalry that he would have inclined to attribute to the charms of Chloe, when the house-door swung wide for them to enter, and the landlady of the house, holding clasped hands at full stretch, implored them to run up to the poor lady: 'Oh, she's dead; she's dead, dead!'

Caseldy rushed past her.

'How, dead! good woman?' Mr. Beamish questioned her most incredulously, half-smiling.

She answered among her moans: 'Dead by the neck; off the door—Oh!'

Young Camwell pressed his forehead, with a call on his Maker's name. As they reached the landing upstairs, Caseldy came out of the sitting-room.

'Which?' said Camwell to the speaking of his face.

'She !' said the other.

'The duchess?' Mr. Beamish exclaimed.

But Camwell walked into the room. He had nothing to ask after that reply.

The figure stretched along the floor was covered with a sheet. The young man fell at his length beside it, and his face was downward.

Mr. Beamish relates: "To this day, when I write at an interval of fifteen years, I have the tragic ague of that hour in my blood, and I behold the shrouded form of the most admirable of women, whose heart was broken by a faithless man ere she devoted her wreck of life to arrest one weaker than herself on the descent to perdition. Therein it was beneficently granted her to be of the service she prayed to be through her death. She died to save. In a last letter, found upon her pincushion, addressed to me under seal of secrecy toward the parties principally concerned, she anticipates the whole confession of the unhappy duchess. Nay, she prophesies: "The duchess will tell you truly she has had enough of love!" Those actual words were reiterated to me by the poor lady daily until her lord arrived to head the funeral procession, and assist in nursing back the shattered health of his wife to a state that should fit her for travelling. To me, at least, she was constant in repeating, "No more of love!" By her behaviour to her duke, I can judge her to have been sincere. She spoke of feeling Chloe's eyes go through her with every word of hers that she recollected. Nor was the end of Chloe less effective upon the traitor. He was in the procession to her grave. He spoke to none. There is a line of the verse bearing the superscription, "My Reasons for Dying," that shows her to have been apprehensive to secure the safety of Mr. Camwell:

I die because my heart is dead
To warn a soul from sin I die:
I die that blood may not be shed, etc.

She feared he would be somewhere on the road to mar the fugitives, and she knew him, as indeed he knew himself, no match for one trained in the foreign tricks of steel, ready though he was to dispute the traitor's way. She remembers Mr. Camwell's petition for the knotted silken string in her request that it shall be cut from her throat and given to him.'

Mr. Beamish indulges in verses above the grave of Chloe. They are of a character to cool emotion. But when we find a man, who is commonly of the quickest susceptibility to ridicule as well as to what is befitting, careless of exposure, we may reflect on the truthfulness of feeling by which he is drawn to pass his own guard and come forth in his nakedness; something of the poet's tongue may breathe to us through his mortal stammering, even if we have to acknowledge that a quotation would scatter pathos.

THE END

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