

## **CHAPTER XXXI.**

Between one and two o'clock, the next afternoon, Benjulia (at work in his laboratory) heard the bell which announced the arrival of a visitor at the house. No matter what the circumstances might be, the servants were forbidden to disturb him at his studies in any other way.

Very unwillingly he obeyed the call, locking the door behind him. At that hour it was luncheon-time in well-regulated households, and it was in the last degree unlikely that Mrs. Gallilee could be the visitor. Getting within view of the front of the house, he saw a man standing on the doorstep. Advancing a little nearer, he recognised Lemuel.

"Hullo!" cried the elder brother.

"Hullo!" answered the younger, like an echo.

They stood looking at each other with the suspicious curiosity of two strange cats. Between Nathan Benjulia, the famous doctor, and Lemuel Benjulia, the publisher's clerk, there was just family resemblance enough to suggest that they were relations. The younger brother was only a little over the ordinary height; he was rather fat than thin; he wore a moustache and whiskers; he dressed smartly--and his prevailing expression announced that he was thoroughly well satisfied with himself. But he inherited Benjulia's gipsy complexion; and, in form and colour, he had Benjulia's eyes.

"How-d'ye-do, Nathan?" he said.

"What the devil brings you here?" was the answer.

Lemuel passed over his brother's rudeness without notice. His mouth curled up at the corners with a mischievous smile.

"I thought you wished to see my letter," he said.

"Why couldn't you send it by post?"

"My wife wished me to take the opportunity of calling on you."

"That's a lie," said Benjulia quietly. "Try another excuse. Or do a new thing. For once, speak the truth."

Without waiting to hear the truth, he led the way into the room in which he had received Ovid. Lemuel followed, still showing no outward appearance of resentment.

"How did you get away from your office?" Benjulia inquired.

"It's easy to get a holiday at this time of year. Business is slack, old boy--"

"Stop! I don't allow you to speak to me in that way."

"No offence, brother Nathan!"

"Brother Lemuel, I never allow a fool to offend me. I put him in his place-- that's all."

The distant barking of a dog became audible from the lane by which the house was approached. The sound seemed to annoy Benjulia. "What's that?" he asked.

Lemuel saw his way to making some return for his brother's reception of him.

"It's my dog," he said; "and it's lucky for you that I have left him in the cab."

"Why?"

"Well, he's as sweet-tempered a dog as ever lived. But he has one fault. He doesn't take kindly to scientific gentlemen in your line of business." Lemuel paused, and pointed to his brother's hands. "If he smelt that, he might try his teeth at vivisection."

The spots of blood which Ovid had once seen on Benjulia's stick, were on his hands now. With unruffled composure he looked at the horrid stains, silently telling their tale of torture.

"What's the use of washing my hands," he answered, "when I am going back to my work?"

He wiped his finger and thumb on the tail of his coat. "Now," he resumed, "if you have got your letter with you, let me look at it."

Lemuel produced the letter. "There are some bits in it," he explained, "which

you had better not see. If you want the truth--that's the reason I brought it myself. Read the first page--and then I'll tell you where to skip."

So far, there was no allusion to Ovid. Benjulia turned to the second page--and Lemuel pointed to the middle of it. "Read as far as that," he went on, "and then skip till you come to the last bit at the end."

On the last page, Ovid's name appeared. He was mentioned, as a "delightful person, introduced by your brother,"--and with that the letter ended. In the first bitterness of his disappointment, Benjulia conceived an angry suspicion of those portions of the letter which he had been requested to pass over unread.

"What has Morpew got to say to you that I mustn't read?" he asked.

"Suppose you tell me first, what you want to find in the letter," Lemuel rejoined. "Morpew is a doctor like you. Is it anything medical?"

Benjulia answered this in the easiest way--he nodded his head.

"Is it Vivisection?" Lemuel inquired slyly.

Benjulia at once handed the letter back, and pointed to the door. His momentary interest in the suppressed passages was at an end. "That will do," he answered. "Take yourself and your letter away."

"Ah," said Lemuel, "I'm glad you don't want to look at it again!" He put the letter away, and buttoned his coat, and tapped his pocket significantly. "You have got a nasty temper, Nathan--and there are things here that might try it."

In the case of any other man, Benjulia would have seen that the one object of these prudent remarks was to irritate him. Misled by his profound conviction of his brother's stupidity, he now thought it possible that the concealed portions of the letter might be worth notice. He stopped Lemuel at the door. "I've changed my mind," he said; "I want to look at the letter again."

"You had better not," Lemuel persisted. "Morpew's going to write a book against you--and he asks me to get it published at our place. I'm on his side, you know; I shall do my best to help him; I can lay my hand on literary fellows who will lick his style into shape--it will be an awful exposure!" Benjulia still held out his hand. With over-acted reluctance, Lemuel

unbuttoned his coat. The distant dog barked again as he gave the letter back. "Please excuse my dear old dog," he said with maudlin tenderness; "the poor dumb animal seems to know that I'm taking his side in the controversy. Bow-wow means, in his language, Fie upon the cruel hands that bore holes in our head and use saws on our backs. Ah, Nathan, if you have got any dogs in that horrid place of yours, pat them and give them their dinner! You never heard me talk like this before--did you? I'm a new man since I joined the Society for suppressing you. Oh, if I only had the gift of writing!"

The effect of this experiment on his brother's temper, failed to fulfil Lemuel's expectations. The doctor's curiosity was roused on the doctor's own subject of inquiry.

"You're quite right about one thing," said Benjulia gravely; "I never heard you talk in this way before. You suggest some interesting considerations, of the medical sort. Come to the light." He led Lemuel to the window--looked at him with the closest attention--and carefully consulted his pulse. Lemuel smiled. "I'm not joking," said Benjulia sternly. "Tell me this. Have you had headaches lately? Do you find your memory failing you?"

As he put those questions, he thought to himself--seriously thought--"Is this fellow's brain softening? I wish I had him on my table!"

Lemuel persisted in presenting himself under a sentimental aspect. He had not forgiven his elder brother's rudeness yet--and he knew, by experience, the one weakness in Benjulia's character which, with his small resources, it was possible to attack.

"Thank you for your kind inquiries," he replied. "Never mind my head, so long as my heart's in the right place. I don't pretend to be clever--but I've got my feelings; and I could put some awkward questions on what you call Medical Research, if I had Morphew to help me."

"I'll help you," said Benjulia--interested in developing the state of his brother's brain.

"I don't believe you," said Lemuel--interested in developing the state of his brother's temper.

"Try me, Lemuel."

"All right, Nathan."

The two brothers returned to their chairs; reduced for once to the same moral level.