

## **CHAPTER LV - THE ADVENTURES OF A FAITHFUL MAID**

IT was about five o'clock on Saturday afternoon. The funeral was over. The unfortunate young Irish gentleman was now lying in the cemetery of Auteuil in a grave purchased in perpetuity. His name, age, and rank were duly inscribed in the registers, and the cause of his death was vouched for by the English physician who had attended him at the request of his family. He was accompanied, in going through the formalities, by the respectable woman who had nursed the sick man during his last seizure. Everything was perfectly in order. The physician was the only mourner at the funeral. No one was curious about the little procession. A funeral, more or less, excites no attention.

The funeral completed, the doctor gave orders for a single monument to be put in memory of Lord Harry Norland, thus prematurely cut off. He then returned to the cottage, paid and dismissed the nurse, taking her address in case he should find an opportunity, as he hoped, to recommend her among his numerous and distinguished clientele, and proceeded to occupy himself in setting everything in order before giving over the key to the landlord. First of all he removed the medicine bottles from the cupboard with great care, leaving nothing. Most of the bottles he threw outside into the dust-hole; one or two he placed in a fire which he made for the purpose in the kitchen: they were shortly reduced to two or three lumps of molten glass. These contained, no doubt, the mysteries and secrets of Science. Then he went into every room and searched in every possible place for any letters or papers which might have been left about. Letters left about are always indiscreet, and the consequences of an indiscretion may be far-reaching and incalculable. Satisfied at last that the place was perfectly cleared, he sat down in the salon and continued his business correspondence with the noble family and the solicitors. Thus engaged, he heard footsteps outside, footsteps on the gravel, footsteps on the doorstep. He got up, not without the slightest show of nervousness, and opened the door. Lord Harry was right. There stood the woman who had been his first nurse--the woman who overheard and watched--the woman who suspected. The suspicion and the intention of watching were legible in her eyes still. She had come back to renew her watch.

In her hand she carried her box, which she had lugged along from the place where the omnibus had deposited her. She made as if she were stepping in; but the big form of the doctor barred the way.

"Oh!" he said carelessly, "it is you. Who told you to come back?"

"Is my mistress at home?"

"No; she is not." He made no movement to let her pass.

"I will come in, please, and wait for her."

He still stood in the way.

"What time will she return?"

"Have you heard from her?"

"No."

"Did she leave orders that you were to follow her?"

"No; none that I received. I thought--"

"Servants should never think. They should obey."

"I know my duty, Dr. Vimpany, without learning it from you. Will you let me pass?"

He withdrew, and she entered.

"Come in, by all means," he said, "if you desire my society for a short time. But you will not find your mistress here."

"Not here! Where is she, then?"

"Had you waited in London for a day or two you would, I dare say, have been informed. As it is, you have had your journey for nothing."

"Has she not been here?"

"She has not been here."

"Dr. Vimpany," said the woman, driven to desperation, "I don't believe you! I am certain she has been here. What have you done with her?"

"Don't you believe me? That is sad, indeed. But one cannot always help

these wanderings. You do not believe me? Melancholy, truly!"

"You may mock as much as you like. Where is she?"

"Where, indeed?"

"She left London to join his lordship. Where is he?"

"I do not know. He who would answer that question would be a wise man indeed."

"Can I see him?"

"Certainly not. He has gone away. On a long journey. By himself."

"Then I shall wait for him. Here!" she added with decision. "In this house!"

"By all means."

She hesitated. There was an easy look about the doctor which she did not like.

"I believe," she said, "that my mistress is in the house. She must be in the house. What are you going to do with her? I believe you have put her somewhere."

"Indeed!"

"You would do anything! I will go to the police."

"If you please."

"Oh! doctor, tell me where she is!"

"You are a faithful servant: it is good, in these days, to find a woman so zealous on account of her mistress. Come in, good and faithful. Search the house all over. Come in--what are you afraid of? Put down your box, and go and look for your mistress." Fanny obeyed. She ran into the house, opened the doors of the salon and the dining-room one after the other: no one was there. She ran up the stairs and looked into her mistress's room: nothing was there, not even a ribbon or a hair-pin, to show the recent presence of a woman. She looked into Lord Harry's room. Nothing was there. If a woman leaves hairpins about, a man leaves his toothbrush: nothing at all was

there. Then she threw open the armoire in each room: nothing behind the doors. She came downstairs slowly, wondering what it all meant.

"May I look in the spare room?" she asked, expecting to be roughly refused.

"By all means--by all means," said the doctor, blandly. "You know your way about. If there is anything left belonging to your mistress or to you, pray take it."

She tried one more question.

"How is my patient? How is Mr. Oxbye?"

"He is gone."

"Gone? Where has he gone to? Gone?"

"He went away yesterday--Friday. He was a grateful creature. I wish we had more such grateful creatures as well as more such faithful servants. He said something about finding his way to London in order to thank you properly. A good soul, indeed!"

"Gone?" she repeated. "Why, on Thursday morning I saw him--" She checked herself in time.

"It was on Wednesday morning that you saw him, and he was then recovering rapidly."

"But he was far too weak to travel."

"You may be quite certain that I should not have allowed him to go away unless he was strong enough."

Fanny made no reply. She had seen with her own eyes the man lying still and white, as if in death; she had seen the new nurse rushing off, crying that he was dead. Now she was told that he was quite well, and that he had gone away! But it was no time for thought.

She was on the point of asking where the new nurse was, but she remembered in time that it was best for her to know nothing, and to awaken no suspicions. She opened the door of the spare room and looked in. Yes; the man was gone--dead or alive--and there were no traces left of his presence. The place was cleared up; the cupboard stood with open doors,

empty; the bed was made; the curtain pushed back; the sofa was in its place against the wall; the window stood open. Nothing in the room at all to show that there had been an occupant only two days before. She stared blankly. The dead man was gone, then. Had her senses altogether deceived her? Was he not dead, but only sleeping? Was her horror only a thing of imagination? Behind her, in the hall, stood the doctor, smiling, cheerful.

She remembered that her first business was to find her mistress. She was not connected with the Dane. She closed the door and returned to the hall.

"Well," asked the doctor, "have you made any discoveries? You see that the house is deserted. You will perhaps learn before long why. Now what will you do? Will you go back to London?"

"I must find her ladyship."

The doctor smiled.

"Had you come here in a different spirit," he said, "I would have spared you all this trouble. You come, however, with suspicion written on your face. You have always been suspecting and watching. It may be in a spirit of fidelity to your mistress; but such a spirit is not pleasing to other people, especially when there is not a single person who bears any resentment towards that mistress. Therefore, I have allowed you to run over the empty house, and to satisfy your suspicious soul. Lady Harry is not hidden here. As for Lord Harry--but you will hear in due time no doubt. And now I don't mind telling you that I have her ladyship's present address."

"Oh! What is it?"

"She appears to have passed through Paris on her way to Switzerland two days ago, and has sent here her address for the next fortnight. She has now, I suppose, arrived there. The place is Berne; the Hotel ----. But how do I know that she wants you?"

"Of course she wants me."

"Or of course you want her? Very good. Yours is the responsibility, not mine. Her address is the Hotel d'Angleterre. Shall I write it down for you? There it is. 'Hotel d'Angleterre, Berne.' Now you will not forget. She will remain there for one fortnight only. After that, I cannot say whither she may go. And, as all her things have been sent away, and as I am going away, I am not likely to hear."

"Oh I must go to her. I must find her!" cried the woman earnestly; "if it is only to make sure that no evil is intended for her."

"That is your business. For my own part, I know of no one who can wish her ladyship any evil."

"Is my lord with her?"

"I don't know whether that is your business. I have already told you that he is gone. If you join your mistress in Berne, you will very soon find out if he is there as well." Something in his tone made Fanny look up quickly. But his face revealed nothing. "What shall you do then?" asked the doctor. "You must make up your mind quickly whether you will go back to England or whether you will go on to Switzerland. You cannot stay here, because I am putting together the last things, and I shall give the landlord the key of the house this evening. All the bills are paid, and I am going to leave the place."

"I do not understand. There is the patient," she murmured vaguely. "What does it mean? I cannot understand."

"My good creature," he replied roughly, "what the devil does it matter to me whether you understand or whether you do not understand? Her ladyship is, as I have told you, at Berne. If you please to follow her there, do so. It is your own affair, not mine. If you prefer to go back to London, do so. Still--your own affair. Is there anything else to say?"

Nothing. Fanny took up her box--this time the doctor did not offer to carry it for her.

"Where are you going?" he asked. "What have you decided?"

"I can get round by the Chemin de Fer de Ceinture to the Lyons station. I shall take the first cheap train which will take me to Berne."

"Bon voyage!" said the doctor, cheerfully, and shut the door.

It is a long journey from Paris to Berne even for those who can travel first class and express--that is, if sixteen hours can be called a long journey. For those who have to jog along by third class, stopping at all the little country stations, it is a long and tedious journey indeed. The longest journey ends at last. The train rolled slowly into the station of Berne, and Fanny descended with her box. Her wanderings were over for the present. She would find her

mistress and be at rest.

She asked to be directed to the Hotel d'Angleterre. The Swiss guardian of the peace with the cocked hat stared at her. She repeated the question.

"Hotel d'Angleterre?" he echoed. "There is no Hotel d'Angleterre in Berne."

"Yes, yes; there is. I am the maid of a lady who is staying at that hotel."

"No; there is no Hotel d'Angleterre," he reported. "There is the Hotel Bernehof."

"No." She took out the paper and showed it to him--"Lady Harry Norland, Hotel d'Angleterre, Berne."

"There is the Hotel de Belle Vue, the Hotel du Faucon, the Hotel Victoria, the Hotel Schweizerhof. There is the Hotel schrodol, the Hotel Schneider, the Pension Simkin."

Fanny as yet had no other suspicion than that the doctor had accidentally written a wrong name. Her mistress was at Berne: she would be in one of the hotels. Berne is not a large place. Very good; she would go round to the hotels and inquire. She did so. There are not, in fact, more than half a dozen hotels in Berne where an English lady could possibly stay. Fanny went to every one of these. No one had heard of any such lady: they showed her the lists of their visitors. She inquired at the post-office. No lady of that name had asked for letters. She asked if there were any pensions, and went round them all--uselessly.

No other conclusion was possible. The doctor had deceived her wilfully. To get her out of the way he sent her to Berne. He would have sent her to Jericho if her purse had been long enough to pay the fare. She was tricked.

She counted her money. There was exactly twenty-eight shillings and tenpence in her purse.

She went back to the cheapest (and dirtiest) of the pensions she had visited. She stated her case--she had missed milady her mistress--she must stay until she should receive orders to go on, and money--would they take her in until one or the other arrived? Certainly. They would take her in, at five francs a day, payable every morning in advance.

She made a little calculation--she had twenty-eight and tenpence; exactly

thirty-five francs--enough for seven days. If she wrote to Mrs. Vimpany at once she could get an answer in five days.

She accepted the offer, paid her five shillings, was shown into a room, and was informed that the dinner was served at six o'clock.

Very good. Here she could rest, at any rate, and think what was to be done. And first she wrote two letters--one to Mrs. Vimpany and one to Mr. Mountjoy.

In both of these letters she told exactly what she had found: neither Lord Harry nor his wife at the cottage, the place vacated, and the doctor on the point of going away. In both letters she told how she had been sent all the way into Switzerland on a fool's errand, and now found herself planted there without the means of getting home. In the letter to Mrs. Vimpany she added the remarkable detail that the man whom she had seen on the Thursday morning apparently dead, whose actual poisoning she thought she had witnessed, was reported on the Saturday to have walked out of the cottage, carrying his things, if he had any, and proposing to make his way to London in order to find out his old nurse. "Make what you can out of that," she said. "For my own part, I understand nothing."

In the letter which she wrote to Mr. Mountjoy she added a petition that he would send her money to bring her home. This, she said, her mistress she knew would willingly defray.

She posted these letters on Tuesday, and waited for the answers.

Mrs. Vimpany wrote back by return post.

"My dear Fanny," she said, "I have read your letter with the greatest interest. I am not only afraid that some villainy is afloat, but I am perfectly sure of it. One can only hope and pray that her ladyship may be kept out of its influence. You will be pleased to hear that Mr. Mountjoy is better. As soon as he was sufficiently recovered to stand the shock of violent emotion, I put Lady Harry's letter into his hands. It was well that I had kept it from him, for he fell into such a violence of grief and indignation that I thought he would have had a serious relapse. 'Can any woman,' he cried, 'be justified in going back to an utterly unworthy husband until he has proved a complete change? What if she had received a thousand letters of penitence? Penitence should be shown by acts, not words: she should have waited.' He wrote her a letter, which he showed me. 'Is there,' he asked, 'anything in the letter which could justly offend her?' I could find nothing. He told her, but I fear



too late, that she risks degradation--perhaps worse, if there is anything worse--if she persists in returning to her unworthy husband. If she refuses to be guided by his advice, on the last occasion on which he would presume to offer any device, he begged that she would not answer. Let her silence say--No. That was the substance of his letter. Up to the present moment no answer has been received from Lady Harry. Nor has he received so much as an acknowledgment of the letter. What can be understood by this silence? Clearly, refusal.

"You must return by way of Paris, though it is longer than by Basle and Laon. Mr. Mountjoy, I know, will send you the money you want. He has told me as much. 'I have done with Lady Harry,' he said. 'Her movements no longer concern me, though I can never want interest in what she does. But since the girl is right to stick to her mistress, I will send her the money--not as a loan to be paid back by Iris, but as a gift from myself.'

"Therefore, my dear Fanny, stop in Paris for one night at least, and learn what has been done if you can. Find out the nurse, and ask her what really happened. With the knowledge that you already possess, it will be hard, indeed, if we cannot arrive at the truth. There must be people who supplied things to the cottage--the restaurant, the pharmacien, the laundress. See them all--you know them already, and we will put the facts together. As for finding her ladyship, that will depend entirely upon herself. I shall expect you back in about a week. If anything happens here I shall be able to tell you when you arrive.

"Yours affectionately,

L. Vimpany."

This letter exactly coincided with Fanny's own views. The doctor was now gone. She was pretty certain that he was not going to remain alone in the cottage; and the suburb of Passy, though charming in many ways, is not exactly the place for a man of Dr. Vimpany's temperament. She would stay a day, or even two days or more, if necessary, at Passy. She would make those inquiries.

The second letter, which reached her the same day, was from Mr. Mountjoy. He told her what he had told Mrs. Vimpany: he would give her the money, because he recognised the spirit of fidelity which caused Fanny to go first to Paris and then to Berne.

But he could not pretend to any right to interference in the affairs of Lord

and Lady Harry Norland. He enclosed a mandat postal for a hundred and twenty-five francs, which he hoped would be sufficient for her immediate wants.

She started on her return-journey on the same day--namely, Saturday. On Sunday evening she was in a pension at Passy, ready to make those inquiries. The first person whom she sought out was the rentier--the landlord of the cottage. He was a retired tradesman--one who had made his modest fortune in a charcuterie and had invested it in house property. Fanny told him that she had been lady's-maid to Lady Harry Norland, in the recent occupancy of the cottage, and that she was anxious to know her present address.

"Merci, mon Dieu! que sais-je? What do I know about it?" he replied. "The wife of the English milord is so much attached to her husband that she leaves him in his long illness--"

"His long illness?"

"Certainly--Mademoiselle is not, perhaps, acquainted with the circumstances--his long illness; and does not come even to see his dead body after he is dead. There is a wife for you--a wife of the English fashion!"

Fanny gasped.

"After he is dead! Is Lord Harry dead? When did he die?"

"But, assuredly, Mademoiselle has not heard? The English milord died on Thursday morning, a week and more ago, of consumption, and was buried in the cemetery of Auteuil last Saturday. Mademoiselle appears astonished."

"En effet, Monsieur, I am astonished."

"Already the tombstone is erected to the memory of the unhappy young man, who is said to belong to a most distinguished family of Ireland. Mademoiselle can see it with her own eyes in the cemetery."

"One word more, Monsieur. If Monsieur would have the kindness to tell her who was the nurse of milord in his last seizure?"

"But certainly. All the world knows the widow La Chaise. It was the widow La Chaise who was called in by the doctor. Ah! there is a man--what a man! What a miracle of science! What devotion to his friend! What admirable

sentiments! Truly, the English are great in sentiments when their insular coldness allows them to speak. This widow can be found--easily found."

He gave Fanny, in fact, the nurse's address. Armed with this, and having got out of the landlord the cardinal fact of Lord Harry's alleged death, the lady's-maid went in search of this respectable widow.

She found her, in her own apartments, a respectable woman indeed, perfectly ready to tell everything that she knew, and evidently quite unsuspecting of anything wrong. She was invited to take charge of a sick man on the morning of Thursday: she was told that he was a young Irish lord, dangerously ill of a pulmonary disorder; the doctor, in fact, informed her that his life hung by a thread, and might drop at any moment, though on the other hand he had known such cases linger on for many months. She arrived as she had been ordered, at midday: she was taken into the sick-room by the doctor, who showed her the patient placidly sleeping on a sofa: the bed had been slept in, and was not yet made. After explaining the medicines which she was to administer, and the times when they were to be given, and telling her something about his diet, the doctor left her alone with the patient.

"He was still sleeping profoundly," said the nurse.

"You are sure that he was sleeping, and not dead?" asked Fanny, sharply.

"Mademoiselle, I have been a nurse for many years. I know my duties. The moment the doctor left me I verified his statements. I proved that the patient was sleeping by feeling his pulse and observing his breath."

Fanny made no reply. She could hardly remind this respectable person that after the doctor left her she employed herself first in examining the cupboards, drawers, armoire, and other things; that she then found a book with pictures, in which she read for a quarter of an hour or so; that she then grew sleepy and dropped the book--

"I then," continued the widow, "made arrangements against his waking--that is to say, I drew back the curtains and turned over the sheet to air the bed"--O Madame! Madame! Surely this was needless!--"shook up the pillows, and occupied myself in the cares of a conscientious nurse until the time came to administer the first dose of medicine. Then I proceeded to awaken my patient. Figure to yourself! He whom I had left tranquilly breathing, with the regularity of a convalescent rather than a dying man, was dead! He was dead!"

"You are sure he was dead?"

"As if I had never seen a dead body before! I called the doctor, but it was for duty only, for I knew that he was dead."

"And then?"

"Then the doctor--who must also have known that he was dead--felt his pulse and his heart, and looked at his eyes, and declared that he was dead."

"And then?"

"What then? If a man is dead he is dead. You cannot restore him to life. Yet one thing the doctor did. He brought a camera and took a photograph of the dead man for the sake of his friends."

"Oh! he took a photograph of--of Lord Harry Norland. What did he do that for?"

"I tell you: for the sake of his friends."

Fanny was more bewildered than ever. Why on earth should the doctor want a photograph of the Dane Oxbye to show the friends of Lord Harry? Could he have made a blunder as stupid as it was uncalled for? No one could possibly mistake the dead face of that poor Dane for the dead face of Lord Harry.

She had got all the information she wanted--all, in fact, that was of any use to her. One thing remained. She would see the grave.

The cemetery of Auteuil is not so large as that of Pere-la-Chaise, nor does it contain so many celebrated persons as the latter--perhaps the greatest cemetery, as regards its illustrious dead, in the whole world. It is the cemetery of the better class. The tombs are not those of Immortals but of Respectables.

Among them Fanny easily found, following the directions given to her, the tomb she was searching after.

On it was written in English, "Sacred to the Memory of Lord Harry Norland, second son of the Marquis of Malven." Then followed the date and the age, and nothing more.

Fanny sat down on a bench and contemplated this mendacious stone.

"The Dane Oxbye," she said, "was growing better fast when I went away. That was the reason why I was sent away. The very next day the doctor, thinking me far away, poisoned him. I saw him do it. The nurse was told that he was asleep, and being left alone presently discovered that he was dead. She has been told that the sick man is a young Irish gentleman. He is buried under the name of Lord Harry. That is the reason I found the doctor alone. And my lady? Where is she?"