

## CHAPTER VII

### BEAULIEU

Beautiful as it might be and fashionable as it might be, Morris did not find Beaulieu very entertaining; indeed, in an unguarded moment he confessed to Mary that he "hated the hole." Even the steam launch in which they went for picnics did not console him, fond though he was of the sea; while as for Monte Carlo, after his third visit he was heard to declare that if they wanted to take him there again it must be in his coffin.

The Colonel did not share these views. He was out for a holiday, and he meant to enjoy himself. To begin with, there was the club at Nice, where he fell in with several old comrades and friends. Then, whom should he meet but Lady Rawlins: once, for a little while in the distant past, they had been engaged; until suddenly the young lady, a beauty in her day, jilted him in favour of a wealthy banker of Hebraic origin. Now, many years after, the banker was aged, violent, and uncomely, habitually exceeded in his cups, and abused his wife before the servants. So it came about that to the poor woman the Colonel's courteous, if somewhat sarcastic, consolations were really very welcome. It pleased him also to offer them. The jilting he had long ago forgiven indeed, he blessed her nightly for having taken that view of her obligations, seeing that Jane Millet, as she was then, however pretty her face may once have been, had neither fortune nor connections.

"Yes, my dear Jane," he said to her confidentially one afternoon, "I assure you I often admire your foresight. Now, if you had done the other thing, where should we have been to-day? In the workhouse, I imagine."

"I suppose so," answered Lady Rawlins, meekly, and suppressing a sigh, since for the courtly and distinguished Colonel she cherished a sentimental admiration which actually increased with age; "but you didn't always think like that, Richard." Then she glanced out of the window, and added: "Oh, there is Jonah coming home, and he looks so cross," and the poor lady shivered.

The Colonel put up his eyeglass and contemplated Jonah through the window. He was not a pleasing spectacle. A rather low-class Hebrew who calls himself a Christian, of unpleasant appearance and sinister temper, suffering from the effects of lunch, is not an object to be loved.

"Ah, I see," said the Colonel. "Yes, Sir Jonah ages, doesn't he? as, indeed, we do all of us," and he glanced at the lady's spreading proportions. Then he went on. "You really should persuade him to be tidier in his costume, Jane; his ancestral namesake could scarcely have looked more dishevelled after his sojourn with the whale. Well, it is a small failing; one can't have everything, and on the whole, with your wealth and the rest, you have been a very fortunate woman."

"Oh, Richard, how can you say so?" murmured the wretched Lady Rawlins,

as she took the hand outstretched in farewell. For Jonah in large doses was more than the Colonel could stomach.

Indeed, as the door closed behind him she wiped away a tear, whispering to herself: "And to think that I threw over dear Richard in order to marry that--that--yes, I will say it--that horror!"

Meanwhile, as he strolled down the street, beautifully dressed, and still looking very upright and handsome--for he had never lost his figure--the Colonel was saying to himself:

"Silly old woman! Well, I hope that by now she knows the difference between a gentleman and a half-Christianised, money-hunting, wine-bibbing Jew. However, she's got the fortune, which was what she wanted, although she forgets it now, and he's got a lachrymose, stout, old party. But how beautiful she used to be! My word, how beautiful she used to be! To go to see her now is better than any sermon; it is an admirable moral exercise."

To Lady Rawlins also the Colonel's visits proved excellent moral exercises tinged with chastenings. Whenever he went away he left behind him some aphorism or reflection filled with a wholesome bitter. But still she sought his society and, in secret, adored him.

In addition to the club and Lady Rawlins there were the tables at Monte Carlo, with their motley company, which to a man of the world could not

fail to be amusing. Besides, the Colonel had one weakness--sometimes he did a little gambling, and when he played he liked to play fairly high. Morris accompanied him once to the "Salles de jeu," and--that was enough. What passed there exactly, could never be got out of him, even by Mary, whose sense of humour was more than satisfied with the little comedies in progress about her, no single point of which did she ever miss.

Only, funny as she might be in her general feebleness, and badly as she might have behaved in some distant past, for Lady Rawlins she felt sorry. Her kind heart told Mary that this unhappy person also possessed a heart, although she was now stout and on the wrong side of middle age. She was aware, too, that the Colonel knew as much, and his scientific pin-pricks and searings of that guileless and unprotected organ struck her as little short of cruel. None the less so, indeed, because the victim at the stake imagined that they were inflicted in kindness by the hand of a still tender and devoted friend.

"I hope that I shan't quarrel with my father-in-law," reflected Mary to herself, after one of the best of these exhibitions; "he's got an uncommonly long memory, and likes to come even. However, I never shall, because he's afraid of me and knows that I see through him."

Mary was right. A very sincere respect for her martial powers when roused ensured perfect peace between her and the Colonel. With his son, however, it was otherwise. Even in this age of the Triumph of the

Offspring parents do exist who take advantage of their sons' strict observance of the Fifth Commandment. It is easy to turn a man into a moral bolster and sit upon him if you know that an exaggerated sense of filial duty will prevent him from stuffing himself with pins. So it came about that Morris was sometimes sat upon, especially when the Colonel was suffering from a bad evening at the tables; well out of sight and hearing of Mary, be it understood, who on such occasions was apt to develop a quite formidable temper.

It is over this question of the tables that one of these domestic differences arose which in its results brought about the return of the Monks to Monksland. Upon a certain afternoon the Colonel asked his son to accompany him to Monte Carlo. Morris refused, rather curtly, perhaps.

"Very well," replied the Colonel in his grandest manner. "I am sure I do not wish for an unwilling companion, and doubtless your attention is claimed by affairs more important than the according of your company to a father."

"No," replied Morris, with his accustomed truthfulness; "I am going out sea-fishing, that is all."

"Quite so. Allow me then to wish good luck to your fishing. Does Mary accompany you?"

"No, I think not; she says the boat makes her sick, and she can't bear

eels."

"So much the better, as I can ask for the pleasure of her society this afternoon."

"Yes, you can ask," said Morris, suddenly turning angry.

"Do you imply, Morris, that the request will be refused?"

"Certainly, father; if I have anything to do with it."

"And might I inquire why?"

"Because I won't have Mary taken to that place to mix with the people who frequent it."

"I see. This is exclusiveness with a vengeance. Perhaps you consider that those unholy doors should be shut to me also."

"I have no right to express an opinion as to where my father should or should not go; but if you ask me, I think that, under all the circumstances, you would do best to keep away."

"The circumstances! What circumstances?"

"Those of our poverty, which leaves us no money to risk in gambling."

Then the Colonel lost all control of his temper, as sometimes happened to him, and became exceedingly violent and unpleasant. What he said does not matter; let it suffice that the remarks were of a character which even headstrong men are accustomed to reserve for the benefit of their women-folk and other intimate relations.

Attracted by the noise, which was considerable, Mary came in to find her uncle marching up and down the room vituperating Morris, who, with quite a new expression upon his face--a quiet, dogged kind of expression--was leaning upon the mantel-piece and watching him.

"Uncle," began Mary, "would you mind being a little quieter? My father is asleep upstairs, and I am afraid that you will wake him."

"I am sorry, my dear, very sorry, but there are some insults that no man with self-respect can submit to, even from a son."

"Insults! insults!" Mary repeated, opening her blue eyes; then, looking at him with a pained air: "Morris, why do you insult your father?"

"Insult?" he replied. "Then I will tell you how. My father wanted to take you to play with him at Monte Carlo this afternoon and I said that you shouldn't go. That's the insult."

"You observe, my dear," broke in the Colonel, "that already he treats

you as one having authority."

"Yes," said Mary, "and why shouldn't he? Now that my father is so weak who am I to obey if not Morris?"

"Oh, well, well," said the Colonel, diplomatically beginning to cool, for he could control his temper when he liked. "Everyone to their taste; but some matters are so delicate that I prefer not to discuss them," and he looked round for his hat.

By this time, however, the cyclonic condition of things had affected Mary also, and she determined that he should not escape so easily.

"Before you go," she went on in her slow voice, "I should like to say, uncle, that I quite agree with Morris. I don't think those tables are quite the place to take young ladies to, especially if the gentleman with them is much engaged in play."

"Indeed, indeed; then you are both of a mind, which is quite as it should be. Of course, too, upon such matters of conduct and etiquette we must all bow to the taste and the experience of the young--even those of us who have mixed with the world for forty years. Might I ask, my dear Mary, if you have any further word of advice for me before I go?"

"Yes, uncle," replied Mary quite calmly. "I advise you not to lose so much of--of your money, or to sit up so late at night, which, you



know, never agrees with you. Also, I wish you wouldn't abuse Morris for nothing, because he doesn't deserve it, and I don't like it; and if we are all to live together after I am married, it will be so much more comfortable if we can come to an understanding first."

Then muttering something beneath his breath about ladies in general and this young lady in particular, the Colonel departed with speed.

Mary sat down in an armchair, and fanned herself with a pocket-handkerchief.

"Thinking of the right thing to say always makes me hot," she remarked.

"Well, if by the right thing you mean the strong thing, you certainly discovered it," replied Morris, looking at her with affectionate admiration.

"I know; but it had to be done, dear. He's losing a lot of money, which is mere waste"--here Morris groaned, but asked no questions--"besides," and her voice became earnest, "I will not have him talking to you like that. The fact that one man is the father of another man doesn't give him the right to abuse him like a pickpocket. Also, if you are so good that you put up with it, I have myself to consider--that is, if we are all to live as a happy family. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," said Morris. "I daresay you are right, but I hate rows."

"So do I, and that is why I have accepted one or two challenges to single combat quite at the beginning of things. You mark my words, he will be like a lamb at breakfast to-morrow."

"You shouldn't speak disrespectfully of my father; at any rate, to me," suggested the old-fashioned Morris, rather mildly.

"No, dear, and when I have learnt to respect him I promise you that I won't. There, don't be vexed with me; but my uncle Richard makes me cross, and then I scratch. As he said the other day, all women are like cats, you know. When they are young they play, when they get old they use their claws--I quote uncle Richard--and although I am not old yet, I can't help showing the claws. Dad is ill, that is the fact of it, Morris, and it gets upon my nerves."

"I thought he was better, love."

"Yes, he is better; he may live for years; I hope and believe that he will, but it is terribly uncertain. And now, look here, Morris, why don't you go home?"

"Do you want to get rid of me, love?" he asked, looking up.

"No, I don't. You know that, I am sure. But what is the use of your stopping here? There is nothing for you to do, and I feel that you are

wasting your time and that you hate it. Tell the truth. Don't you long to be back at Monksland, working at that aerophone?"

"I should be glad to get on with my experiments, but I don't like leaving you," he answered.

"But you had better leave me for a while. It is not comfortable for you idling here, particularly when your father is in this uncertain temper. If all be well, in another couple of months or so we shall come together for good, and be able to make our own arrangements, according to circumstances. Till then, if I were you, I should go home, especially as I find that I can get on with my uncle much better when you are not here."

"Then what is to happen after we marry, and I can't be sent away."

"Who knows? But if we are not comfortable at Monk's Abbey, we can always set up for ourselves--with Dad at Seaview, for instance. He's peaceable enough; besides, he must be looked after; and, to be frank, my uncle hectors him, poor dear."

"I will think it over," said Morris. "And now come for a walk on the beach, and we will forget all these worries."

Next morning the Colonel appeared at breakfast in a perfectly angelic frame of mind, having to all appearance utterly forgotten the

"contretemps" of the previous afternoon. Perhaps this was policy, or perhaps the fact of his having won several hundred pounds the night before mollified his mood. At least it had become genial, and he proved a most excellent companion.

"Look here, old fellow," he said to Morris, throwing him a letter across the table; "if you have nothing to do for a week or so, I wish you would save an aged parent a journey and settle up this job with Simpkins."

Morris read the letter. It had to do with the complete reerection of a set of buildings on the Abbey farm, and the putting up of a certain drainage mill. Over this question differences had arisen between the agent Simpkins and the rural authorities, who alleged that the said mill would interfere with an established right of way. Indeed, things had come to such a point that if a lawsuit was to be avoided the presence of a principal was necessary.

"Simpkins is a quarrelsome ass," explained the Colonel, "and somebody will have to smooth those fellows down. Will you go? because if you won't I must, and I don't want to break into the first pleasant holiday I have had for five years--thanks to your kindness, my dear John."

"Certainly I will go, if necessary," answered Morris. "But I thought you told me a few months ago that it was quite impossible to execute those alterations, on account of the expense."

"Yes, yes; but I have consulted with your uncle here, and the matter has been arranged. Hasn't it, John?"

Mr. Porson was seated at the end of the table, and Morris, looking at him, noticed with a shock how old he had suddenly become. His plump, cheerful face had fallen in; the cheeks were quite hollow now; his jaws seemed to protrude, and the skin upon his bald head to be drawn quite tight like the parchment on a drum.

"Of course, of course, Colonel," he answered, lifting his chin from his breast, upon which it was resting, "arranged, quite satisfactorily arranged." Then he looked about rather vacantly, for his mind, it was clear, was far away, and added, "Do you want: I mean, were you talking about the new drainage mill for the salt marshes?" Mary interrupted and explained.

"Yes, yes; how stupid of me! I am afraid I am getting a little deaf, and this air makes me so sleepy in the morning. Now, just tell me again, what is it?"

Mary explained further.

"Morris to go and see about it. Well, why shouldn't he? It doesn't take long to get home nowadays. Not but that we shall be sorry to lose you, my dear boy; or, at least, one of us will be sorry," and he tried to wink in his old jovial fashion, and chuckled feebly.

Mary saw and sighed; while the Colonel shook his head portentously. Nobody could play the part of Job's comforter to greater perfection.

The end of it was that, after a certain space of hesitation, Morris agreed to go. This "menage" at Beaulieu oppressed him, and he hated the place. Besides, Mary, seeing that he was worried, almost insisted on his departure.

"If I want you back I will send for you," she said. "Go to your work, dear; you will be happier."

So he kissed her fondly and went--as he was fated to go.

"Good-bye, my dear son," said Mr. Porson--sometimes he called him his son, now. "I hope that I shall see you again soon, and if I don't, you will be kind to my daughter Mary, won't you? You understand, everybody else is dead--my wife is dead, my boy is dead, and soon I shall be dead. So naturally I think a good deal about her. You will be kind to her, won't you? Good-bye, my son, and don't trouble about money; there's plenty."