

CHAPTER XX

Arthur did not do much fishing that morning; indeed, he never so much as got his line into the water--he simply sat there lost in dreams, and hoping in a vague way that Angela would come back again. But she did not come back, though it would be difficult to say what prevented her; for, had he but known it, she was for the space of a full hour sitting within a hundred yards of him, and occasionally peeping out to watch his mode of fishing with some curiosity. It was, she reflected, exceedingly unlike that practised by Jakes. She, too, was wishing that he would detect her, and come to talk to her; but, amongst other new sensations, she was now the victim of a most unaccountable shyness, and could not make up her mind to reveal her whereabouts.

At last Arthur awoke from his long reverie, and remembered with a sudden pang that he had had nothing to eat since the previous evening, and that he was consequently exceedingly hungry. He also discovered, on consulting his watch, that it was twelve o'clock, and, moreover, that he was quite stiff from sitting so long in the same position. So, sighing to think that such a vulgar necessity as that of obtaining food should force him to depart, he put up his unused fishing-rod and started for Isleworth, where he arrived just as the bell was ringing for lunch.

George received him with cold civility, and asked him what sport he had, to which he was forced to reply--none.

"Did you see anybody there?"

"Yes, I met Miss Caresfoot."

"Ah! trust a girl to trail out a man. What is she like? I remember her a raw-boned girl of fourteen with fine eyes."

"I think that she is the handsomest woman I ever saw," Arthur replied, coldly.

"Ah!" said George, with a rude little laugh, "youth is always enthusiastic, especially when the object is of the dairymaid cut."

There was something so intensely insolent in his host's way of talking that Arthur longed to throw a dish at him, but he restrained his feelings, and dropped the subject.

"Let me see, you are only just home from India, are you?" asked George, presently.

"I got back at the beginning of last month."

"And what were you doing there?"

"Travelling about and shooting."

"Did you get much sport?"

"No, I was rather unfortunate, but I and another fellow killed two tigers, and went after a rogue elephant; but he nearly killed us. I got some very good ibix-shooting in Cashmere, however."

"What do you intend to do with yourself now? Your education has been extravagantly expensive, especially the Cambridge part of it. Are you going to turn it to any account?"

"Yes. I am going to travel for another year, and then read for the Bar. There is no particular object in being called too young, and I wish to see something more of the world first."

"Ah! I see, idleness called by a fine name."

"Really I cannot agree with you," said Arthur, who was rapidly losing his temper.

"Of course you can't, but every man has a right to choose his own road to the dogs. Come," he added, with a smile of malice, as he noticed Arthur's rising colour, "no need to get angry; you see I stand *in loco parentis*, and feel bound to express my opinion."

"I must congratulate you on the success with which you assume the

character," answered Arthur, now thoroughly put-out; "but, as everything I have done or mean to do is so distasteful to you, I think it is a pity that you did not give me the benefit of your advice a little sooner."

George's only answer was a laugh, and presently the two parted, detesting each other more cordially than ever.

At half-past three, when George was still away, for he had gone out with his bailiff immediately after lunch, Philip and his daughter were shown into the drawing-room, where we may be sure Arthur was awaiting them.

"Mr. Caresfoot is not back yet," said Arthur, "but I do not suppose that he will be long."

"Oh! he will be here soon," said Philip, "because I told him we were coming to call. What sort of sport did you have? What, none! I am very sorry. You must come and try again--ah! I forgot you are going away. by the way, Mr. Heigham, why should you go just yet? If you are fond of fishing, and have nothing better to do, come and put up at the Abbey House for a while; we are plain people, but there is plenty of room, and you shall have a hearty welcome. Would you care to come?"

It would have been amusing to any outsider to watch Angela's face as she heard this astounding proposition, for nobody had been invited

inside her father's doors within her recollection. It assumed first of all a look of blank amazement, which was presently changed into one of absolute horror.

"Would he come, indeed?" reflected Arthur. "Would he step into Paradise? would he accept the humble offer of free quarters in the Garden of Eden?" Rapture beamed so visibly from every feature of his face that Philip saw it and smiled. Just as he was about to accept with enthusiasm, he caught sight of Angela's look of distress. It chilled him like the sudden shock of cold water; she did not wish him to come, he thought, she did not care for him. Obligated, however, to give an answer, he said,

"I shall be delighted if"--and here he bowed towards her--"Miss Caresfoot does not object."

"If father," broke in Angela, with hesitation, "you could arrange that Mr. Heigham came to-morrow, not to-day, it would be more convenient. I must get a room ready."

"Ah! domestic details; I had overlooked them. I daresay you can manage that--eh, Heigham?"

"Oh! yes, easily, thank you."

As he said the words, the door was flung open, and "Lady Bellamy" was

announced with the energy that a footman always devotes to the enunciation of a title, and next second a splendid creature, magnificently dressed, sailed into the room.

"Ah! how do you do, Mr. Caresfoot?" she said, in that low, rich voice that he remembered so well. "It is some time since we met; indeed, it quite brings back old times to see you, when we were all young people together."

"At any rate, Lady Bellamy, you show no signs of age; indeed, if you will permit me to say so, you look more beautiful than ever."

"Ah! Mr. Caresfoot, you have not forgotten how to be gallant, but let me tell you that it entirely depends upon what light I am in. If you saw me in the midst of one of those newfangled electric illuminations, you would see that I do look old; but what can one expect at forty?"

Here her glance fell upon Angela's face for the first time, and she absolutely started; the great pupils of her eyes expanded, and a dark frown spread itself for a moment over her countenance. Next second it was gone. "Is it possible that that beautiful girl is your daughter? But, remembering her mother, I need not ask. Look at her, Mr. Caresfoot, and then look at me, and say whether or not I look old. And who is the young man? Her lover, I suppose--at any rate, he looks like it; but please introduce me."

"Angela," said Philip, crossing to the window where they were talking,

"let me introduce you to Lady Bellamy. Mr. Heigham--Lady Bellamy."

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Miss Caresfoot, though I think it is very generous of me to say so."

Angela looked puzzled.

"Indeed!" she said.

"What! do you not guess why it is generous? Then look at yourself in the glass, and you will see. I used to have some pretension to good looks, but I could never have stood beside you at the best of times, and now---- Your mother, even when I was at my best, always killed me if I was in the same room with her, and you are even handsomer than your mother."

Angela blushed very much at this unqualified praise, and, putting it and the exclamation her appearance had that morning wrung from Arthur together, she suddenly came to the conclusion--for, odd as it may seem, she had never before taken the matter into serious consideration --that she must be very good-looking, a conclusion that made her feel extremely happy, she could not quite tell why.

It was whilst she was thus blushing and looking her happiest and loveliest that George, returning from his walk, chanced to look in at the window and see her, and, gradually drawn by the attraction of her

beauty, his eyes fixed themselves intently upon her, and his coarse features grew instinct with a mixture of hungry wickedness and delighted astonishment. It was thus that Arthur and Lady Bellamy saw him. Philip, who was looking at a picture in the corner of the room, did not see him; nor, indeed, did Angela. The look was unmistakable, and once more the dark frown settled upon Lady Bellamy's brow, and the expanding pupils filled the heavy-lidded eyes. As for Arthur, it made him feel sick with unreasonable alarm.

Next minute George entered the room with a stupid smile upon his face, and looking as dazed as a bat that has suddenly been shown the sun. Angela's heaven-lit beauty had come upon his gross mind as a revelation; it fascinated him, he had lost his command over himself.

"Oh! here you are at last, George," said Lady Bellamy--it was always her habit to call him George. "We have all been like sheep without a shepherd, though I saw you keeping an eye on the flock through the window."

George started. He did not know that he had been observed.

"I did not know that you were all here, or I would have been back sooner," he said, and then began to shake hands.

When he came to Angela, he favoured her with a tender pressure of the fingers and an elaborate and high-flown speech of welcome, both of

which were inexpressibly disagreeable to her. But here Lady Bellamy intervened, and skilfully forced him into a conversation with her, in which Philip joined.

"What does Lady Bellamy remind you of?" Angela asked Arthur, as soon as the hum of talk made it improbable that they would be overheard.

"Of an Egyptian sorceress, I think. Look at the low, broad forehead, the curling hair, the full lips, and the inscrutable look of the face."

"To my mind she is an ideal of the Spirit of Power. I am very much afraid of her, and, as for him"--nodding towards George--"I dislike him even more than I was prepared to," and she gave a little shudder.

"By the way, Mr. Heigham, you really must not be so rash as to accept my father's invitation."

"If you do not wish to see me, of course I will not," he answered, in a hurt and disappointed tone.

"Oh! it is not that, indeed; how could you think so, when only this morning we agreed to be friends?"

"Well, what is it, then?" he asked, blankly.

"Why, Mr. Heigham, the fact is that we--that is, my old nurse and I,

for my father is irregular in his meals, and always takes them by himself--live so very plainly, and I am ashamed to ask you to share our mode of life. For instance, we have nothing but bread and milk for breakfast;" and the golden head sunk in some confusion before his amused gaze.

"Oh! is that all?" he said, cheerily. "I am very fond of bread and milk."

"And then," went on Angela with her confession, "we never drink wine, and I know that gentlemen do."

"I am a teetotaller, so that does not matter."

"Really?"

"Yes--really."

"But then, you know, my father shuts himself up all day, so that you will have nobody but myself to talk to."

"Oh! never mind"--encouragingly. "I am sure that we shall get on."

"Well, if, in spite of all this and a great deal more--ah! a very great deal that I have not time to tell you--you still care to come, I will do my best to amuse you. At any rate, we can read together; that

will be something, if you don't find me too stupid. You must remember that I have only had a private education, and have never been to college like you. I shall be glad of the opportunity of rubbing up my classics a little; I have been neglecting them rather lately, and actually got into a mess over a passage in Aristophanes that I shall ask you to clear up."

This was enough for Arthur, whose knowledge of the classics was that of the ordinary University graduate; he turned the subject with remarkable promptitude.

"Tell me," he said, looking her straight in the face, "are you glad that I am coming?"

The grey eyes dropped a little before the boldness of his gaze, but she answered, unhesitatingly,

"Yes, for my own sake I am glad; but I fear that you will find it very dull."

"Come, Angela, we must be off; I want to be home by a quarter to six," said Philip just then.

She rose at once and shook hands with Arthur, murmuring, "Good-by till to-morrow morning," and then with Lady Bellamy.

George, meanwhile, with the most unwonted hospitality, was pressing her father to stay to dinner, and, when he declined, announcing his intention of coming over to see him on the morrow. At last he got away, but not before Lady Bellamy had bid him a seemingly cordial adieu.

"You and your charming daughter must come and see me at Rewtham House, when we get in. What, have you not heard that Sir John has bought it from poor Maria Lee's executors?"

Philip turned pale as death, and hurried from the room.

"It is good," reflected Lady Bellamy, as she watched the effect of her shaft, "to let him know that I never forget."

But, even when her father had gone, the path was still blocked to Angela.

"What!" said George, who was, when in an amiable mood, that worst of all cads, a jocose cad, "are you going to play truant, too, my pretty cousin? Then first you must pay the penalty, not a very heavy one, however." And he threw his long arm round her waist, and prepared to give her a cousinly embrace.

At first Angela, not being accustomed to little jokes of the sort, did not understand what his intentions were, but as soon as she did, being

an extremely powerful young woman, she soon put a stop to them, shaking George away from her so sharply by a little swing of her lithe body, that, stumbling over a footstool in his rapid backward passage, he in a trice measured his length upon the floor. Seeing what she had done, Angela turned and fled after her father.

As for Arthur, the scene was too much for his risible nerves, and he fairly roared with laughter, whilst even Lady Bellamy went as near to it as she ever did.

George rose white with wrath.

"Mr. Heigham," he said, "I see nothing to laugh at in an accident."

"Don't you?" replied Arthur. "I do; it is just the most ludicrous accident that I ever saw."

George turned away muttering something that it was perhaps as well his guest did not hear, and at once began to attack Lady Bellamy.

"My dear George," was her rejoinder, "let this little adventure teach you that it is not wise for middle-aged men to indulge in gallantries towards young ladies, and especially young ladies of thews and sinews. Good-night."

At the same moment the footman announced that the dog-cart which

Arthur had ordered was waiting for him.

"Good-by, Mr. Heigham, good-by," said George, with angry sarcasm.

"Within twenty-four hours you have killed my favourite dog, taken offence at my well-meant advice, and ridiculed my misfortune. If we should ever meet again, doubtless you will have further surprises in store for me;" and, without giving Arthur time to make any reply, he left the room.