

## CHAPTER XXX

Into Philip's guilty thoughts, as he wended his homeward way, we will not inquire, and indeed, for all the warm glow that the thousand pound cheque in his pocket diffused through his system, they were not to be envied. Perhaps no scoundrel presents at heart such a miserable object to himself and all who know him, as the scoundrel who attempts to deceive himself and, whilst reaping its profits, tries to shoulder the responsibility of his iniquity on to the backs of others!

Unfortunately, in this prosaic world of bargains, one cannot receive cheques for one thousand pounds without, in some shape or form, giving a *\_quid pro quo\_*. Now Philip's *\_quid\_* was to rid his house and the neighbourhood of Arthur Heigham, his guest and his daughter's lover. It was not a task he liked, but the unearned cheque in his breeches-pocket continually reminded him of the obligation it entailed.

When Arthur came to smoke his pipe with his host that evening, the latter looked so gloomy and depressed, that he wondered to himself if he was going to be treated to a repetition of the shadow scene, little guessing that there was something much more personally unpleasant before him.

"Heigham," Philip said, suddenly, and looking studiously in the other direction, "I want to speak to you. I have been thinking over our conversation of about a week ago on the subject of your engagement to

Angela, and have now come to a final determination. I may say at once that I approve of you in every way" (here his hearer's heart bounded with delight), "but, under all the circumstances, I don't think that I should be right in sanctioning an immediate engagement. You are not sufficiently sure of each other for that. I may seem old-fashioned, but I am a great believer in the virtue of constancy, and I'm anxious, in your own interests, to put yours and Angela's to the test. The terms that I can offer you are these. You must leave here to-morrow, and must give me your word of honour as a gentleman--which I know will be the most effectual guarantee that I can take from you--that you will not for the space of a year either attempt to see Angela again, or to hold any written communication with her, or anybody in any way connected with her. The year ended, you can return, and, should you both still be of the same mind, you can then marry her as soon as you like. If you decline to accede to these terms--which I believe to be to your mutual ultimate advantage--I must refuse my consent to the engagement altogether."

A silence followed this speech. The match that Arthur had lit before Philip began, burnt itself out between his fingers without his appearing to suffer any particular inconvenience, and now his pipe fell with a crash into the grate, and broke into fragments--a fit symbol of the blow dealt to his hopes. For some moments he was so completely overwhelmed at the idea of losing Angela for a whole long year, losing her as completely as though she were dead, that he could not answer. At length he found his voice, and said, hoarsely:

"Yours are hard terms."

"I cannot argue the point with you, Heigham; such as they are, they are my terms, founded on what I consider I owe to my daughter. Do you accept them?"

"I cannot answer you off-hand. My happiness and Angela's are too vitally concerned to allow me to do so. I must consult her first."

"Very good, I have no objection; but you must let me have your answer by ten to-morrow."

Had Arthur only known his own strength and Philip's weakness--the strength that honesty and honour ever have in the face of dishonour and dishonesty--had he known the hesitating feebleness of Philip's avarice-tossed mind, how easy it would have been for him to tear his bald arguments to shreds, and, by the bare exhibition of unshaken purpose, to confound and disallow his determinations--had he then and there refused to agree to his ultimatum, so divided was Philip in his mind and so shaken by superstitious fears, that he would have accepted it as an omen, and have yielded to a decision of character that had no real existence in himself. But he did not know; indeed, how could he know? and he was, besides, too thorough a gentleman to allow himself to suspect foul play. And so, too sad for talk, and oppressed by the dread sense of coming separation from her whom he loved more dearly

than his life, he sought his room, there to think and pace, to pace and think, until the stars had set.

When, wearied out at length, he threw himself into bed, it was only to exchange bad for worse; for on such occasions sleep is worse than wakefulness, it is so full of dreams, big with coming pain. Shortly after dawn he got up again, and went into the garden and listened to the birds singing their matin hymn. But he was in no mood for the songs of birds, however sweet, and it was a positive relief to him when old Jakes emerged, his cross face set in the gladness of the morning, like a sullen cloud in the blue sky, and began to do something to his favourite bed of cabbages. Not that Arthur was fond of old Jakes; on the contrary, ever since the coffin-stand conversation, which betrayed, he considered, a malevolent mind, he detested him personally; but still he set a fancy value on him because he was connected with the daily life of his betrothed.

And then at last out came Angela, having spied him from behind the curtains of her window, clothed in the same white gown in which he had first beheld her, and which he consequently considered the prettiest of frocks. Never did she look more lovely than when she came walking towards him that morning, with her light, proud step, which was so full of grace and womanly dignity. Never had he thought her more sweet and heart-compelling, than when, having first made sure that Jakes had retreated to feed his pigs, she shyly lifted her bright face to be greeted with his kiss. But she was quick of sympathy, and had learned

to read him like an open page, and before his lips had fairly fallen on her own she knew that things had gone amiss.

"Oh, what is it, Arthur?" she said, with a little pant of fear.

"Be brave, dear, and I will tell you." And in somewhat choky tones, he recounted word for word what had passed between her father and himself.

She listened in perfect silence, and bore the blow as a brave woman should. When he had finished, she said, with a little tremor in her voice:

"You will not forget me in a year, will you, Arthur?"

He kissed her by way of answer, and then they agreed to go together to Philip, and try to turn him from his purpose.

Breakfast was not a cheerful meal that day, and Pigott, noticing the prevailing depression, remarked, with sarcasm, that they might, for all appearance to the contrary, have been married for twenty years; but even this spirited sally did not provoke a laugh. Ten o'clock, the hour that was to decide their fate, came all too soon, and it was with very anxious hearts that they took their way to the study. Philip, who was seated in residence, appeared to view Angela's arrival with some uneasiness.

"Of course, Angela," he said, "I am always glad to see you, but I hardly expected----"

"I beg your pardon for intruding, father," she answered; "but, as this is very important to me, I thought that I had better come too, and hear what is settled."

As it was evident that she meant to stay, Philip did not attempt to gainsay her.

"Oh, very well, very well--I suppose you have heard the terms upon which I am prepared to consent to your engagement."

"Yes, Arthur has told me; and it is to implore you to modify them that we have come. Father, they are cruel terms--to be dead to each other for a whole long year."

"I cannot help it, Angela. I am sorry to inflict pain upon either of you; but I have arrived at them entirely in your own interests, and after a great deal of anxious thought. Believe me, a year's probation will be very good for both of you; it is not probable that, where my only child is concerned, I should wish to do anything except what is for her happiness!"

Arthur looked rebellion at Angela. Philip saw it, and added:

"Of course you can defy me--it is, I believe, rather the fashion for girls, nowadays, to do so--but, if you do, you must both clearly understand, first, that you cannot marry without my consent till the first of May next, or very nearly a year hence, when Angela comes of age, and that I shall equally forbid all intercourse in the interval; and secondly, that when you do so, it will be against my wish, and that I shall cut her name out of my will, for this property is only entailed in the male line. It now only remains for me to ask you if you agree to my conditions."

Angela answered him, speaking very slowly and clearly:

"I accept them on my own behalf, not because I understand them, or think them right, or because of your threats, but because, though you do not care for me, I am your daughter, and should obey you--and believe that you wish to do what is best for me. That is why I accept, although it will make my life wretched for a year."

"Do you hear what she says?" said Philip, turning to Arthur. "Do you also agree?"

He answered boldly, and with some temper (how would he have answered could he have seen the thousand pound cheque that was reposing upon the table in Philip's rusty pocket-book, and known for what purpose it came there?).

"If it had not been Angela's wish, I would never have agreed. I think your terms preposterous, and I only hope that you have some satisfactory reason for them; for you have not shown us any. But since she takes this view of the matter, and because, so far as I can see, you have completely cornered us, I suppose I must. You are her father, and cannot in nature wish to thwart her happiness; and if you have any plan of causing her to forget me--I don't want to be conceited, but I believe that it will fail." Here Angela smiled somewhat sadly. "So, unless one of us dies before the year is up, I shall come back to be married on the 9th of June next year."

"Really, my dear Heigham, your way of talking is so aggressive, that some fathers might be tempted to ask you not to come back at all; but perhaps it is, under the circumstances, excusable."

"You would probably think so, if you were in my place," blurted out Arthur.

"You give me, then, your word of honour as a gentleman that you will attempt, either in person or by letter, no communication with Angela or with anybody about this place for one year from to-day?"

"On the condition that, at the end of the year, I may return and marry her as soon as I like."

"Certainly; your marriage can take place on the 9th of June next, if you like, and care to bring a license and a proper settlement--say, of half your income--with you," answered Philip, with a half smile.

"I take you at your word," said Arthur, eagerly, "that is, if Angela agrees." Angela made no signs of disagreement. "Then, on those terms, I give you my promise."

"Very good. Then that is settled, and I will send for a dog-cart to take you to the four o'clock train. I fear you will hardly be ready for the 12.25. I shall, however, hope," he added, "to have the pleasure of presenting this young lady to you for good and all on this day next year. Good-bye for the present. I shall see you before you go."

It is painful to have to record that when Arthur got outside the door, and out of Angela's hearing, he cursed Philip, in his grief and anger, for the space of some minutes.

To linger over those last hours could only be distressing to the sympathetic reader of this history, more especially if he, or she, has ever had the misfortune to pass through such a time in their own proper persons. The day of any one's departure is always wretched, but much more is it wretched, when the person departing is a lover, whose face will not be seen and of whom no postman will bear tidings for a whole long year.

Some comfort, however, these two took in looking forward to that joyous day when the year of probation should have been gathered to its predecessors, and in making the most minute arrangements for their wedding: how Angela was to warn Mr. Fraser that his services would be required; where they should go to for their honeymoon, and even of what flowers the wedding bouquet, which Arthur was to bring down from town with him, should be composed.

And thus the hours passed away, all too quickly, and each of them strove to be merry, in order to keep up the spirits of the other. But it is not in human nature to feel cheerful with a lump of ice upon the heart! Dinner was even more dismal than breakfast, and Pigott, who had been informed of the impending misfortune, and who was distrustful of Philip's motives, though she did not like to add to the general gloom by saying so, made, after the manner of half-educated people, a painful and infectious exhibition of her grief.

"Poor Aleck," said Angela, when the time drew near, bending down over the dog to hide a tear, as she had once before bent down to hide a blush; "poor Aleck, I shall miss you almost as much as your master."

"You will not miss him, Angela, because I am going to make you a present of him if you will keep him."

"That is very good of you, dear. I shall be glad to have him for your

sake."

"Well, keep him, love, he is a good dog; he will quite have transferred his allegiance by the time I come back. I hope you won't have done the same, Angela."

"Oh, Arthur, why will you so often make me angry by saying such things? The sun will forget to shine before I forget you."

"Hush, love, I did not mean it," and he took her in his arms. And so they sat there together under the oak where first they had met, hand in hand and heart to heart, and it was at this moment that the self-reliant strength, and more beautiful serenity of Angela's character as compared with her lover's came into visible play. For whilst, as the moment of separation drew nigh, he could scarcely contain his grief, she on the other hand grew more and more calm, strengthening his weakness with her quiet power; and bidding him seek consolation in his trouble at the hands of Him who for His own purposes decreed it.

"Dearest," she said, in answer to his complainings, "there are so many things in the world that we cannot understand, and yet they must be right and lead to a good end. What may happen to us before this year is out, of course we cannot say, but I feel that all love is immortal, and that there is a perfect life awaiting us, if not in this world, then in the next. Remember, dear, that these few years are, after all, but as a breath to the general air, or as that dew-drop to the waters

of the lake, when compared with the future that awaits us there, and that until we attain that future we cannot really know each other, or the true meaning and purpose of our love. So look forward to it without fear, dear heart, and if it should chance that I should pass out of your life, or that other ties should spring up round you that shall forbid the outward expression of our love----" Here Arthur started and was about to interrupt, but she stopped him. "Do not start, Arthur. Who can read the future? Stranger things have happened, and if, I say, such a thing should come about in our case, then remember, I implore you, that in that future lies the answer to the puzzles of the world, and turn your eyes to it, as to the horizon beyond which you will find me waiting for you, and not only me, but all that you have ever loved. Only, dear, try to be a good man and love me always."

He looked at her in wonder.

"Angela," he said, "what has made you so different from other women? With all whom I have known, love is an affair of passion or amusement, of the world and the day, but yours gazes towards Heaven, and looks to find its real utterance in the stillness of Eternity! To be loved by you, my dear, would be worth a century of sorrows."

At last the moment came, as all moments good and bad must come. To Pigott, who was crying, he gave a hug and a five-pound note, to Aleck, a pat on the head, to Philip, who could not look him in the face, a

shake of the hand, and to Angela, who bravely smiled into his eyes--a long last kiss.

But, when the cruel wheels began to crunch upon the gravel, the great tears welling to her eyes blotted him from sight. Blindly she made her way up to her room, and throwing herself upon the bed let her unrestrained sorrow loose, feeling that she was indeed desolate and alone.