

XI. OUR PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED BY THE PRESENCE OF ROYALTY

To explain the miller's sudden proposal it is only necessary to go back to that moment when Anne, Festus, and Mrs. Garland were talking together on the down. John Loveday had fallen behind so as not to interfere with a meeting in which he was decidedly superfluous; and his father, who guessed the trumpet-major's secret, watched his face as he stood. John's face was sad, and his eyes followed Mrs. Garland's encouraging manner to Festus in a way which plainly said that every parting of her lips was tribulation to him. The miller loved his son as much as any miller or private gentleman could do, and he was pained to see John's gloom at such a trivial circumstance. So what did he resolve but to help John there and then by precipitating a matter which, had he himself been the only person concerned, he would have delayed for another six months.

He had long liked the society of his impulsive, tractable neighbour, Mrs. Garland; had mentally taken her up and pondered her in connexion with the question whether it would not be for the happiness of both if she were to share his home, even though she was a little his superior in antecedents and knowledge. In fact he loved her; not tragically, but to a very creditable extent for his years; that is, next to his sons, Bob and John, though he knew very well of that ploughed-ground appearance near the

corners of her once handsome eyes, and that the little depression in her right cheek was not the lingering dimple it was poetically assumed to be, but a result of the abstraction of some worn-out nether millstones within the cheek by Rootle, the Budmouth man, who lived by such practices on the heads of the elderly. But what of that, when he had lost two to each one of hers, and exceeded her in age by some eight years! To do John a service, then, he quickened his designs, and put the question to her while they were standing under the eyes of the younger pair.

Mrs. Garland, though she had been interested in the miller for a long time, and had for a moment now and then thought on this question as far as, 'Suppose he should, 'If he were to,' and so on, had never thought much further; and she was really taken by surprise when the question came. She answered without affectation that she would think over the proposal; and thus they parted.

Her mother's infirmity of purpose set Anne thinking, and she was suddenly filled with a conviction that in such a case she ought to have some purpose herself. Mrs. Garland's complacency at the miller's offer had, in truth, amazed her. While her mother had held up her head, and recommended Festus, it had seemed a very pretty thing to rebel; but the pressure being removed an awful sense of her own responsibility took possession of her mind. As there was no longer anybody to be wise or ambitious for her, surely she should be wise and ambitious for herself, discountenance her mother's attachment, and encourage Festus in his addresses, for her own and her mother's good. There had been a time when

a Loveday thrilled her own heart; but that was long ago, before she had thought of position or differences. To wake into cold daylight like this, when and because her mother had gone into the land of romance, was dreadful and new to her, and like an increase of years without living them.

But it was easier to think that she ought to marry the yeoman than to take steps for doing it; and she went on living just as before, only with a little more thoughtfulness in her eyes.

Two days after the visit to the camp, when she was again in the garden, Soldier Loveday said to her, at a distance of five rows of beans and a parsley-bed--

'You have heard the news, Miss Garland?'

'No,' said Anne, without looking up from a book she was reading.

'The King is coming to-morrow.'

'The King?' She looked up then.

'Yes; to Gloucester Lodge; and he will pass this way. He can't arrive till long past the middle of the night, if what they say is true, that he is timed to change horses at Woodyates Inn--between Mid and South Wessex--at twelve o'clock,' continued Loveday, encouraged by her interest

to cut off the parsley-bed from the distance between them.

Miller Loveday came round the corner of the house.

'Have ye heard about the King coming, Miss Maily Anne?' he said.

Anne said that she had just heard of it; and the trumpet-major, who hardly welcomed his father at such a moment, explained what he knew of the matter.

'And you will go with your regiment to meet 'em, I suppose?' said old Loveday.

Young Loveday said that the men of the German Legion were to perform that duty. And turning half from his father, and half towards Anne, he added, in a tentative tone, that he thought he might get leave for the night, if anybody would like to be taken to the top of the Ridgeway over which the royal party must pass.

Anne, knowing by this time of the budding hope in the gallant dragoon's mind, and not wishing to encourage it, said, 'I don't want to go.'

The miller looked disappointed as well as John.

'Your mother might like to?'

'Yes, I am going indoors, and I'll ask her if you wish me to,' said she.

She went indoors and rather coldly told her mother of the proposal. Mrs. Garland, though she had determined not to answer the miller's question on matrimony just yet, was quite ready for this jaunt, and in spite of Anne she sailed off at once to the garden to hear more about it. When she re-entered, she said--

'Anne, I have not seen the King or the King's horses for these many years; and I am going.'

'Ah, it is well to be you, mother,' said Anne, in an elderly tone.

'Then you won't come with us?' said Mrs. Garland, rather rebuffed.

'I have very different things to think of,' said her daughter with virtuous emphasis, 'than going to see sights at that time of night.'

Mrs. Garland was sorry, but resolved to adhere to the arrangement. The night came on; and it having gone abroad that the King would pass by the road, many of the villagers went out to see the procession. When the two Lovedays and Mrs. Garland were gone, Anne bolted the door for security, and sat down to think again on her grave responsibilities in the choice of a husband, now that her natural guardian could no longer be trusted.

A knock came to the door.

Anne's instinct was at once to be silent, that the comer might think the family had retired.

The knocking person, however, was not to be easily persuaded. He had in fact seen rays of light over the top of the shutter, and, unable to get an answer, went on to the door of the mill, which was still going, the miller sometimes grinding all night when busy. The grinder accompanied the stranger to Mrs. Garland's door.

'The daughter is certainly at home, sir,' said the grinder. 'I'll go round to t'other side, and see if she's there, Master Derriman.'

'I want to take her out to see the King,' said Festus.

Anne had started at the sound of the voice. No opportunity could have been better for carrying out her new convictions on the disposal of her hand. But in her mortal dislike of Festus, Anne forgot her principles, and her idea of keeping herself above the Lovedays. Tossing on her hat and blowing out the candle, she slipped out at the back door, and hastily followed in the direction that her mother and the rest had taken. She overtook them as they were beginning to climb the hill.

'What! you have altered your mind after all?' said the widow. 'How came you to do that, my dear?'

'I thought I might as well come,' said Anne.

'To be sure you did,' said the miller heartily. 'A good deal better than biding at home there.'

John said nothing, though she could almost see through the gloom how glad he was that she had altered her mind. When they reached the ridge over which the highway stretched they found many of their neighbours who had got there before them idling on the grass border between the roadway and the hedge, enjoying a sort of midnight picnic, which it was easy to do, the air being still and dry. Some carriages were also standing near, though most people of the district who possessed four wheels, or even two, had driven into the town to await the King there. From this height could be seen in the distance the position of the watering-place, an additional number of lanterns, lamps, and candles having been lighted to-night by the loyal burghers to grace the royal entry, if it should occur before dawn.

Mrs. Garland touched Anne's elbow several times as they walked, and the young woman at last understood that this was meant as a hint to her to take the trumpet-major's arm, which its owner was rather suggesting than offering to her. Anne wondered what infatuation was possessing her mother, declined to take the arm, and contrived to get in front with the miller, who mostly kept in the van to guide the others' footsteps. The trumpet-major was left with Mrs. Garland, and Anne's encouraging pursuit of them induced him to say a few words to the former.

'By your leave, ma'am, I'll speak to you on something that concerns my mind very much indeed?'

'Certainly.'

'It is my wish to be allowed to pay my addresses to your daughter.'

'I thought you meant that,' said Mrs. Garland simply.

'And you'll not object?'

'I shall leave it to her. I don't think she will agree, even if I do.'

The soldier sighed, and seemed helpless. 'Well, I can but ask her,' he said.

The spot on which they had finally chosen to wait for the King was by a field gate, whence the white road could be seen for a long distance northwards by day, and some little distance now. They lingered and lingered, but no King came to break the silence of that beautiful summer night. As half-hour after half-hour glided by, and nobody came, Anne began to get weary; she knew why her mother did not propose to go back, and regretted the reason. She would have proposed it herself, but that Mrs. Garland seemed so cheerful, and as wide awake as at noonday, so that it was almost a cruelty to disturb her.

The trumpet-major at last made up his mind, and tried to draw Anne into a private conversation. The feeling which a week ago had been a vague and piquant aspiration, was to-day altogether too lively for the reasoning of this warm-hearted soldier to regulate. So he persevered in his intention to catch her alone, and at last, in spite of her manoeuvres to the contrary, he succeeded. The miller and Mrs. Garland had walked about fifty yards further on, and Anne and himself were left standing by the gate.

But the gallant musician's soul was so much disturbed by tender vibrations and by the sense of his presumption that he could not begin; and it may be questioned if he would ever have broached the subject at all, had not a distant church clock opportunely assisted him by striking the hour of three. The trumpet-major heaved a breath of relief.

'That clock strikes in G sharp,' he said.

'Indeed--G sharp?' said Anne civilly.

'Yes. 'Tis a fine-toned bell. I used to notice that note when I was a boy.'

'Did you--the very same?'

'Yes; and since then I had a wager about that bell with the bandmaster of

the North Wessex Militia. He said the note was G; I said it wasn't. When we found it G sharp we didn't know how to settle it.'

'It is not a deep note for a clock.'

'O no! The finest tenor bell about here is the bell of Peter's, Casterbridge--in E flat. Tum-m-m-m--that's the note--tum-m-m-m.' The trumpet-major sounded from far down his throat what he considered to be E flat, with a parenthetic sense of luxury unquenchable even by his present distraction.

'Shall we go on to where my mother is?' said Anne, less impressed by the beauty of the note than the trumpet-major himself was.

'In one minute,' he said tremulously. 'Talking of music--I fear you don't think the rank of a trumpet-major much to compare with your own?'

'I do. I think a trumpet-major a very respectable man.'

'I am glad to hear you say that. It is given out by the King's command that trumpet-majors are to be considered respectable.'

'Indeed! Then I am, by chance, more loyal than I thought for.'

'I get a good deal a year extra to the trumpeters, because of my position.'

'That's very nice.'

'And I am not supposed ever to drink with the trumpeters who serve beneath me.'

'Naturally.'

'And, by the orders of the War Office, I am to exert over them (that's the government word) exert over them full authority; and if any one behaves towards me with the least impropriety, or neglects my orders, he is to be confined and reported.'

'It is really a dignified post,' she said, with, however, a reserve of enthusiasm which was not altogether encouraging.

'And of course some day I shall,' stammered the dragoon--'shall be in rather a better position than I am at present.'

'I am glad to hear it, Mr. Loveday.'

'And in short, Mistress Anne,' continued John Loveday bravely and desperately, 'may I pay court to you in the hope that--no, no, don't go away!--you haven't heard yet--that you may make me the happiest of men; not yet, but when peace is proclaimed and all is smooth and easy again? I can't put it any better, though there's more to be explained.'

'This is most awkward,' said Anne, evidently with pain. 'I cannot possibly agree; believe me, Mr. Loveday, I cannot.'

'But there's more than this. You would be surprised to see what snug rooms the married trumpet- and sergeant-majors have in quarters.'

'Barracks are not all; consider camp and war.'

'That brings me to my strong point!' exclaimed the soldier hopefully. 'My father is better off than most non-commissioned officers' fathers; and there's always a home for you at his house in any emergency. I can tell you privately that he has enough to keep us both, and if you wouldn't hear of barracks, well, peace once established, I'd live at home as a miller and farmer--next door to your own mother.'

'My mother would be sure to object,' expostulated Anne.

'No; she leaves it all to you.'

'What! you have asked her?' said Anne, with surprise.

'Yes. I thought it would not be honourable to act otherwise.'

'That's very good of you,' said Anne, her face warming with a generous sense of his straightforwardness. 'But my mother is so entirely ignorant

of a soldier's life, and the life of a soldier's wife--she is so simple in all such matters, that I cannot listen to you any more readily for what she may say.'

'Then it is all over for me,' said the poor trumpet-major, wiping his face and putting away his handkerchief with an air of finality.

Anne was silent. Any woman who has ever tried will know without explanation what an unpalatable task it is to dismiss, even when she does not love him, a man who has all the natural and moral qualities she would desire, and only fails in the social. Would-be lovers are not so numerous, even with the best women, that the sacrifice of one can be felt as other than a good thing wasted, in a world where there are few good things.

'You are not angry, Miss Garland?' said he, finding that she did not speak.

'O no. Don't let us say anything more about this now.' And she moved on.

When she drew near to the miller and her mother she perceived that they were engaged in a conversation of that peculiar kind which is all the more full and communicative from the fact of definitive words being few. In short, here the game was succeeding which with herself had failed. It was pretty clear from the symptoms, marks, tokens, telegraphs, and

general byplay between widower and widow, that Miller Loveday must have again said to Mrs. Garland some such thing as he had said before, with what result this time she did not know.

As the situation was delicate, Anne halted awhile apart from them. The trumpet-major, quite ignorant of how his cause was entered into by the white-coated man in the distance (for his father had not yet told him of his designs upon Mrs. Garland), did not advance, but stood still by the gate, as though he were attending a princess, waiting till he should be called up. Thus they lingered, and the day began to break. Mrs. Garland and the miller took no heed of the time, and what it was bringing to earth and sky, so occupied were they with themselves; but Anne in her place and the trumpet-major in his, each in private thought of no bright kind, watched the gradual glory of the east through all its tones and changes. The world of birds and insects got lively, the blue and the yellow and the gold of Loveday's uniform again became distinct; the sun bored its way upward, the fields, the trees, and the distant landscape kindled to flame, and the trumpet-major, backed by a lilac shadow as tall as a steeple, blazed in the rays like a very god of war.

It was half-past three o'clock. A short time after, a rattle of horses and wheels reached their ears from the quarter in which they gazed, and there appeared upon the white line of road a moving mass, which presently ascended the hill and drew near.

Then there arose a huzza from the few knots of watchers gathered there,

and they cried, 'Long live King Jarge!' The cortege passed abreast. It consisted of three travelling-carriages, escorted by a detachment of the German Legion. Anne was told to look in the first carriage--a post-chariot drawn by four horses--for the King and Queen, and was rewarded by seeing a profile reminding her of the current coin of the realm; but as the party had been travelling all night, and the spectators here gathered were few, none of the royal family looked out of the carriage windows. It was said that the two elder princesses were in the same carriage, but they remained invisible. The next vehicle, a coach and four, contained more princesses, and the third some of their attendants.

'Thank God, I have seen my King!' said Mrs. Garland, when they had all gone by.

Nobody else expressed any thankfulness, for most of them had expected a more pompous procession than the bucolic tastes of the King cared to indulge in; and one old man said grimly that that sight of dusty old leather coaches was not worth waiting for. Anne looked hither and thither in the bright rays of the day, each of her eyes having a little sun in it, which gave her glance a peculiar golden fire, and kindled the brown curls grouped over her forehead to a yellow brilliancy, and made single hairs, blown astray by the night, look like lacquered wires. She was wondering if Festus were anywhere near, but she could not see him.

Before they left the ridge they turned their attention towards the Royal

watering-place, which was visible at this place only as a portion of the sea-shore, from which the night-mist was rolling slowly back. The sea beyond was still wrapped in summer fog, the ships in the roads showing through it as black spiders suspended in the air. While they looked and walked a white jet of smoke burst from a spot which the miller knew to be the battery in front of the King's residence, and then the report of guns reached their ears. This announcement was answered by a salute from the Castle of the adjoining Isle, and the ships in the neighbouring anchorage. All the bells in the town began ringing. The King and his family had arrived.