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The laboured resistance which Lady Constantine's judgment had offered to her rebellious affection ere she learnt that she was a widow, now passed into a bashfulness that rendered her almost as unstable of mood as before. But she was one of that mettle--fervid, cordial, and spontaneous--who had not the heart to spoil a passion; and her affairs having gone to rack and ruin by no fault of her own she was left to a painfully narrowed existence which lent even something of rationality to her attachment. Thus it was that her tender and unambitious soul found comfort in her reverses.

As for St. Cleeve, the tardiness of his awakening was the natural result of inexperience combined with devotion to a hobby. But, like a spring bud hard in bursting, the delay was compensated by after speed. At once breathlessly recognizing in this fellow-watcher of the skies a woman who loved him, in addition to the patroness and friend, he truly translated the nearly forgotten kiss she had given him in her moment of despair.

Lady Constantine, in being eight or nine years his senior, was an object even better calculated to nourish a youth's first passion than a girl of his own age, superiority of experience and ripeness of emotion exercising the same peculiar fascination over him as over other young men in their first ventures in this kind.

The alchemy which thus transmuted an abstracted astronomer into an eager lover--and, must it be said, spoilt a promising young physicist to produce a common-place innamorato--may be almost described as working its change in one short night. Next morning he was so fascinated with the novel sensation that he wanted to rush off at once to Lady Constantine, and say, 'I love you true!' in the intensest tones of his mental condition, to register his assertion in her heart before any of those accidents which 'creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of kings,' should occur to hinder him. But his embarrassment at standing in a new position towards her would not allow him to present himself at her door in any such hurry. He waited on, as helplessly as a girl, for a chance of encountering her.

But though she had tacitly agreed to see him on any reasonable occasion, Lady Constantine did not put herself in his way. She even kept herself out of his way. Now that for the first time he had learnt to feel a strong impatience for their meeting, her shyness for the first time led her to delay it. But given two people living in one parish, who long from the depths of their hearts to be in each other's company, what resolves of modesty, policy, pride, or apprehension will keep them for any length of time apart?

One afternoon he was watching the sun from his tower, half echoing the Greek astronomer's wish that he might be set close to that luminary for the wonder of beholding it in all its glory, under the slight penalty of

being consumed the next instant. He glanced over the high-road between the field and the park (which sublunary features now too often distracted his attention from his telescope), and saw her passing along that way.

She was seated in the donkey-carriage that had now taken the place of her landau, the white animal looking no larger than a cat at that distance. The buttoned boy, who represented both coachman and footman, walked alongside the animal's head at a solemn pace; the dog stalked at the distance of a yard behind the vehicle, without indulging in a single gambol; and the whole turn-out resembled in dignity a dwarfed state procession.

Here was an opportunity but for two obstructions: the boy, who might be curious; and the dog, who might bark and attract the attention of any labourers or servants near. Yet the risk was to be run, and, knowing that she would soon turn up a certain shady lane at right angles to the road she had followed, he ran hastily down the staircase, crossed the barley (which now covered the field) by the path not more than a foot wide that he had trodden for himself, and got into the lane at the other end. By slowly walking along in the direction of the turnpike-road he soon had the satisfaction of seeing her coming. To his surprise he also had the satisfaction of perceiving that neither boy nor dog was in her company.

They both blushed as they approached, she from sex, he from inexperience. One thing she seemed to see in a moment, that in the interval of her

absence St. Cleeve had become a man; and as he greeted her with this new and maturer light in his eyes she could not hide her embarrassment, or meet their fire.

'I have just sent my page across to the column with your book on Cometary Nuclei,' she said softly; 'that you might not have to come to the house for it. I did not know I should meet you here.'

'Didn't you wish me to come to the house for it?'

'I did not, frankly. You know why, do you not?'

'Yes, I know. Well, my longing is at rest. I have met you again. But are you unwell, that you drive out in this chair?'

'No; I walked out this morning, and am a little tired.'

'I have been looking for you night and day. Why do you turn your face aside? You used not to be so.' Her hand rested on the side of the chair, and he took it. 'Do you know that since we last met, I have been thinking of you--daring to think of you--as I never thought of you before?'

'Yes, I know it.'

'How did you know?'

'I saw it in your face when you came up.'

'Well, I suppose I ought not to think of you so. And yet, had I not learned to, I should never fully have felt how gentle and sweet you are. Only think of my loss if I had lived and died without seeing more in you than in astronomy! But I shall never leave off doing so now. When you talk I shall love your understanding; when you are silent I shall love your face. But how shall I know that you care to be so much to me?'

Her manner was disturbed as she recognized the impending self-surrender, which she knew not how to resist, and was not altogether at ease in welcoming.

'O, Lady Constantine,' he continued, bending over her, 'give me some proof more than mere seeming and inference, which are all I have at present, that you don't think this I tell you of presumption in me! I have been unable to do anything since I last saw you for pondering uncertainly on this. Some proof, or little sign, that we are one in heart!'

A blush settled again on her face; and half in effort, half in spontaneity, she put her finger on her cheek. He almost devotionally kissed the spot.

'Does that suffice?' she asked, scarcely giving her words voice.

'Yes; I am convinced.'

'Then that must be the end. Let me drive on; the boy will be back again soon.' She spoke hastily, and looked askance to hide the heat of her cheek.

'No; the tower door is open, and he will go to the top, and waste his time in looking through the telescope.'

'Then you should rush back, for he will do some damage.'

'No; he may do what he likes, tinker and spoil the instrument, destroy my papers,--anything, so that he will stay there and leave us alone.'

She glanced up with a species of pained pleasure.

'You never used to feel like that!' she said, and there was keen self-reproach in her voice. 'You were once so devoted to your science that the thought of an intruder into your temple would have driven you wild. Now you don't care; and who is to blame? Ah, not you, not you!'

The animal ambled on with her, and he, leaning on the side of the little vehicle, kept her company.

'Well, don't let us think of that,' he said. 'I offer myself and all my

energies, frankly and entirely, to you, my dear, dear lady, whose I shall be always! But my words in telling you this will only injure my meaning instead of emphasize it. In expressing, even to myself, my thoughts of you, I find that I fall into phrases which, as a critic, I should hitherto have heartily despised for their commonness. What's the use of saying, for instance, as I have just said, that I give myself entirely to you, and shall be yours always,--that you have my devotion, my highest homage? Those words have been used so frequently in a flippant manner that honest use of them is not distinguishable from the unreal.' He turned to her, and added, smiling, 'Your eyes are to be my stars for the future.'

'Yes, I know it,--I know it, and all you would say! I dreaded even while I hoped for this, my dear young friend,' she replied, her eyes being full of tears. 'I am injuring you; who knows that I am not ruining your future,--I who ought to know better? Nothing can come of this, nothing must,--and I am only wasting your time. Why have I drawn you off from a grand celestial study to study poor lonely me? Say you will never despise me, when you get older, for this episode in our lives. But you will,--I know you will! All men do, when they have been attracted in their unsuspecting youth, as I have attracted you. I ought to have kept my resolve.'

'What was that?'

'To bear anything rather than draw you from your high purpose; to be like

the noble citizen of old Greece, who, attending a sacrifice, let himself be burnt to the bone by a coal that jumped into his sleeve rather than disturb the sacred ceremony.'

'But can I not study and love both?'

'I hope so,--I earnestly hope so. But you'll be the first if you do, and I am the responsible one if you do not.'

'You speak as if I were quite a child, and you immensely older. Why, how old do you think I am? I am twenty.'

'You seem younger. Well, that's so much the better. Twenty sounds strong and firm. How old do you think I am?'

'I have never thought of considering.' He innocently turned to scrutinize her face. She winced a little. But the instinct was premature. Time had taken no liberties with her features as yet; nor had trouble very roughly handled her.

'I will tell you,' she replied, speaking almost with physical pain, yet as if determination should carry her through. 'I am eight-and-twenty--nearly--I mean a little more, a few months more. Am I not a fearful deal older than you?'

'At first it seems a great deal,' he answered, musing. 'But it doesn't

seem much when one gets used to it.'

'Nonsense!' she exclaimed. 'It is a good deal.'

'Very well, then, sweetest Lady Constantine, let it be,' he said gently.

'You should not let it be! A polite man would have flatly contradicted me. . . . O I am ashamed of this!' she added a moment after, with a subdued, sad look upon the ground. 'I am speaking by the card of the outer world, which I have left behind utterly; no such lip service is known in your sphere. I care nothing for those things, really; but that which is called the Eve in us will out sometimes. Well, we will forget that now, as we must, at no very distant date, forget all the rest of this.'

He walked beside her thoughtfully awhile, with his eyes also bent on the road. 'Why must we forget it all?' he inquired.

'It is only an interlude.'

'An interlude! It is no interlude to me. O how can you talk so lightly of this, Lady Constantine? And yet, if I were to go away from here, I might, perhaps, soon reduce it to an interlude! Yes,' he resumed impulsively, 'I will go away. Love dies, and it is just as well to strangle it in its birth; it can only die once! I'll go.'

'No, no!' she said, looking up apprehensively. 'I misled you. It is no interlude to me,--it is tragical. I only meant that from a worldly point of view it is an interlude, which we should try to forget. But the world is not all. You will not go away?'

But he continued drearily, 'Yes, yes, I see it all; you have enlightened me. It will be hurting your prospects even more than mine, if I stay. Now Sir Blount is dead, you are free again,--may marry where you will, but for this fancy of ours. I'll leave Welland before harm comes of my staying.'

'Don't decide to do a thing so rash!' she begged, seizing his hand, and looking miserable at the effect of her words. 'I shall have nobody left in the world to care for! And now I have given you the great telescope, and lent you the column, it would be ungrateful to go away! I was wrong; believe me that I did not mean that it was a mere interlude to me. O if you only knew how very, very far it is from that! It is my doubt of the result to you that makes me speak so slightly.'

They were now approaching cross-roads, and casually looking up they beheld, thirty or forty yards beyond the crossing, Mr. Torkingham, who was leaning over a gate, his back being towards them. As yet he had not recognized their approach.

The master-passion had already supplanted St. Cleeve's natural ingenuousness by subtlety.

'Would it be well for us to meet Mr. Torkingham just now?' he began.

'Certainly not,' she said hastily, and pulling the rein she instantly drove down the right-hand road. 'I cannot meet anybody!' she murmured. 'Would it not be better that you leave me now?--not for my pleasure, but that there may arise no distressing tales about us before we know--how to act in this--this'--(she smiled faintly at him) 'heartaching extremity!'

They were passing under a huge oak-tree, whose limbs, irregular with shoulders, knuckles, and elbows, stretched horizontally over the lane in a manner recalling Absalom's death. A slight rustling was perceptible amid the leafage as they drew out from beneath it, and turning up his eyes Swithin saw that very buttoned page whose advent they had dreaded, looking down with interest at them from a perch not much higher than a yard above their heads. He had a bunch of oak-apples in one hand, plainly the object of his climb, and was furtively watching Lady Constantine with the hope that she might not see him. But that she had already done, though she did not reveal it, and, fearing that the latter words of their conversation had been overheard, they spoke not till they had passed the next turning.

She stretched out her hand to his. 'This must not go on,' she said imploringly. 'My anxiety as to what may be said of such methods of meeting makes me too unhappy. See what has happened!' She could not help smiling. 'Out of the frying-pan into the fire! After meanly

turning to avoid the parson we have rushed into a worse publicity. It is too humiliating to have to avoid people, and lowers both you and me. The only remedy is not to meet.'

'Very well,' said Swithin, with a sigh. 'So it shall be.'

And with smiles that might more truly have been tears they parted there and then.