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Half an hour before this time Swithin St. Cleeve had been sitting in his cabin at the base of the column, working out some figures from observations taken on preceding nights, with a view to a theory that he had in his head on the motions of certain so-called fixed stars.

The evening being a little chilly a small fire was burning in the stove, and this and the shaded lamp before him lent a remarkably cosy air to the chamber. He was awakened from his reveries by a scratching at the window-

pane like that of the point of an ivy leaf, which he knew to be really caused by the tip of his sweetheart-wife's forefinger. He rose and opened the door to admit her, not without astonishment as to how she had been able to get away from her friends.

'Dearest Viv, why, what's the matter?' he said, perceiving that her face, as the lamplight fell on it, was sad, and even stormy.

'I thought I would run across to see you. I have heard something so--so--to your discredit, and I know it can't be true! I know you are constancy itself; but your constancy produces strange effects in people's eyes!'

'Good heavens! Nobody has found us out--'

'No, no--it is not that. You know, Swithin, that I am always sincere, and willing to own if I am to blame in anything. Now will you prove to me that you are the same by owning some fault to me?'

'Yes, dear, indeed; directly I can think of one worth owning.'

'I wonder one does not rush upon your tongue in a moment!'

'I confess that I am sufficiently a Pharisee not to experience that spontaneity.'

'Swithin, don't speak so affectedly, when you know so well what I mean! Is it nothing to you that, after all our vows for life, you have thought it right to--flirt with a village girl?'

'O Viviette!' interrupted Swithin, taking her hand, which was hot and trembling. 'You who are full of noble and generous feelings, and regard me with devoted tenderness that has never been surpassed by woman,--how can you be so greatly at fault? I flirt, Viviette? By thinking that you injure yourself in my eyes. Why, I am so far from doing so that I continually pull myself up for watching you too jealously, as to-day, when I have been dreading the effect upon you of other company in my absence, and thinking that you rather shut the gates against me when you have big-wigs to entertain.'

'Do you, Swithin?' she cried. It was evident that the honest tone of his words was having a great effect in clearing away the clouds. She added with an uncertain smile, 'But how can I believe that, after what was seen to-day? My brother, not knowing in the least that I had an iota of interest in you, told me that he witnessed the signs of an attachment between you and Tabitha Lark in church, this morning.'

'Ah!' cried Swithin, with a burst of laughter. 'Now I know what you mean, and what has caused this misunderstanding! How good of you, Viviette, to come at once and have it out with me, instead of brooding over it with dark imaginings, and thinking bitter things of me, as many women would have done!' He succinctly told the whole story of his little adventure with Tabitha that morning; and the sky was clear on both sides. 'When shall I be able to claim you,' he added, 'and put an end to all such painful accidents as these?'

She partially sighed. Her perception of what the outside world was made of, latterly somewhat obscured by solitude and her lover's company, had been revived to-day by her entertainment of the Bishop, clergymen, and, more particularly, clergymen's wives; and it did not diminish her sense of the difficulties in Swithin's path to see anew how little was thought of the greatest gifts, mental and spiritual, if they were not backed up by substantial temporalities. However, the pair made the best of their future that circumstances permitted, and the interview was at length drawing to a close when there came, without the slightest forewarning, a smart rat-tat-tat upon the little door.

'O I am lost!' said Viviette, seizing his arm. 'Why was I so incautious?'

'It is nobody of consequence,' whispered Swithin assuringly. 'Somebody from my grandmother, probably, to know when I am coming home.'

They were unperceived so far, for the only window which gave light to the hut was screened by a curtain. At that moment they heard the sound of their visitors' voices, and, with a consternation as great as her own, Swithin discerned the tones of Mr. Torkingham and the Bishop of Melchester.

'Where shall I get? What shall I do?' said the poor lady, clasping her hands.

Swithin looked around the cabin, and a very little look was required to take in all its resources. At one end, as previously explained, were a table, stove, chair, cupboard, and so on; while the other was completely occupied by a diminutive Arabian bedstead, hung with curtains of pink-and-white chintz. On the inside of the bed there was a narrow channel, about a foot wide, between it and the wall of the hut. Into this cramped retreat Viviette slid herself, and stood trembling behind the curtains.

By this time the knock had been repeated more loudly, the light through the window-blind unhappily revealing the presence of some inmate. Swithin

threw open the door, and Mr. Torkingham introduced his visitors.

The Bishop shook hands with the young man, told him he had known his father, and at Swithin's invitation, weak as it was, entered the cabin, the vicar and Louis Glanville remaining on the threshold, not to inconveniently crowd the limited space within.

Bishop Helmsdale looked benignantly around the apartment, and said, 'Quite a settlement in the backwoods--quite: far enough from the world to afford the votary of science the seclusion he needs, and not so far as to limit his resources. A hermit might apparently live here in as much solitude as in a primeval forest.'

'His lordship has been good enough to express an interest in your studies,' said Mr. Torkingham to St. Cleeve. 'And we have come to ask you to let us see the observatory.'

'With great pleasure,' stammered Swithin.

'Where is the observatory?' inquired the Bishop, peering round again.

'The staircase is just outside this door,' Swithin answered. 'I am at your lordship's service, and will show you up at once.'

'And this is your little bed, for use when you work late,' said the Bishop.

'Yes; I am afraid it is rather untidy,' Swithin apologized.

'And here are your books,' the Bishop continued, turning to the table and the shaded lamp. 'You take an observation at the top, I presume, and come down here to record your observations.'

The young man explained his precise processes as well as his state of mind would let him, and while he was doing so Mr. Torkingham and Louis waited patiently without, looking sometimes into the night, and sometimes through the door at the interlocutors, and listening to their scientific converse. When all had been exhibited here below, Swithin lit his lantern, and, inviting his visitors to follow, led the way up the column, experiencing no small sense of relief as soon as he heard the footsteps of all three tramping on the stairs behind him. He knew very well that, once they were inside the spiral, Viviette was out of danger, her knowledge of the locality enabling her to find her way with perfect safety through the plantation, and into the park home.

At the top he uncovered his equatorial, and, for the first time at ease, explained to them its beauties, and revealed by its help the glories of those stars that were eligible for inspection. The Bishop spoke as intelligently as could be expected on a topic not peculiarly his own; but, somehow, he seemed rather more abstracted in manner now than when he had arrived. Swithin thought that perhaps the long clamber up the

stairs, coming after a hard day's work, had taken his spontaneity out of him, and Mr. Torkingham was afraid that his lordship was getting bored. But this did not appear to be the case; for though he said little he stayed on some time longer, examining the construction of the dome after relinquishing the telescope; while occasionally Swithin caught the eyes of the Bishop fixed hard on him.

'Perhaps he sees some likeness of my father in me,' the young man thought; and the party making ready to leave at this time he conducted them to the bottom of the tower.

Swithin was not prepared for what followed their descent. All were standing at the foot of the staircase. The astronomer, lantern in hand, offered to show them the way out of the plantation, to which Mr. Torkingham replied that he knew the way very well, and would not trouble his young friend. He strode forward with the words, and Louis followed him, after waiting a moment and finding that the Bishop would not take the precedence. The latter and Swithin were thus left together for one moment, whereupon the Bishop turned.

'Mr. St. Cleeve,' he said in a strange voice, 'I should like to speak to you privately, before I leave, to-morrow morning. Can you meet me--let me see--in the churchyard, at half-past ten o'clock?'

'O yes, my lord, certainly,' said Swithin. And before he had recovered from his surprise the Bishop had joined the others in the shades of the

plantation.

Swithin immediately opened the door of the hut, and scanned the nook behind the bed. As he had expected his bird had flown.