

A week had passed away. It had been a time of cloudy mental weather to Swithin and Viviette, but the only noteworthy fact about it was that what had been planned to happen therein had actually taken place. Swithin had gone from Welland, and would shortly go from England.

She became aware of it by a note that he posted to her on his way through Warborne. There was much evidence of haste in the note, and something of reserve. The latter she could not understand, but it might have been obvious enough if she had considered.

On the morning of his departure he had sat on the edge of his bed, the sunlight streaming through the early mist, the house-martens scratching the back of the ceiling over his head as they scrambled out from the roof for their day's gnat-chasing, the thrushes cracking snails on the garden stones outside with the noisiness of little smiths at work on little anvils. The sun, in sending its rods of yellow fire into his room, sent, as he suddenly thought, mental illumination with it. For the first time, as he sat there, it had crossed his mind that Viviette might have reasons for this separation which he knew not of. There might be family reasons--mysterious blood necessities which are said to rule members of old musty-mansioned families, and are unknown to other classes of society--and they may have been just now brought before her by her brother Louis on the condition that they were religiously concealed.

The idea that some family skeleton, like those he had read of in memoirs, had been unearthed by Louis, and held before her terrified understanding as a matter which rendered Swithin's departure, and the neutralization of the marriage, no less indispensable to them than it was an advantage to himself, seemed a very plausible one to Swithin just now. Viviette might have taken Louis into her confidence at last, for the sake of his brotherly advice. Swithin knew that of her own heart she would never wish to get rid of him; but coerced by Louis, might she not have grown to entertain views of its expediency? Events made such a supposition on St. Cleve's part as natural as it was inaccurate, and, conjoined with his own excitement at the thought of seeing a new heaven overhead, influenced him to write but the briefest and most hurried final note to her, in which he fully obeyed her sensitive request that he would omit all reference to his plans. These at the last moment had been modified to fall in with the winter expedition formerly mentioned, to observe the Transit of Venus at a remote southern station.

The business being done, and himself fairly plunged into the preliminaries of an important scientific pilgrimage, Swithin acquired that lightness of heart which most young men feel in forsaking old love for new adventure, no matter how charming may be the girl they leave behind them. Moreover, in the present case, the man was endowed with that schoolboy temperament which does not see, or at least consider with much curiosity, the effect of a given scheme upon others than himself. The bearing upon Lady Constantine of what was an undoubted predicament

for any woman, was forgotten in his feeling that she had done a very handsome and noble thing for him, and that he was therefore bound in honour to make the most of it.

His going had resulted in anything but lightness of heart for her. Her sad fancy could, indeed, indulge in dreams of her yellow-haired laddie without that formerly besetting fear that those dreams would prompt her to actions likely to distract and weight him. She was wretched on her own account, relieved on his. She no longer stood in the way of his advancement, and that was enough. For herself she could live in retirement, visit the wood, the old camp, the column, and, like OEnone, think of the life they had led there--

'Mournful OEnone, wandering forlorn
Of Paris, once her playmate on the hills,'

leaving it entirely to his goodness whether he would come and claim her in the future, or desert her for ever.

She was diverted for a time from these sad performances by a letter which reached her from Bishop Helmsdale. To see his handwriting again on an envelope, after thinking so anxiously of making a father-confessor of him, started her out of her equanimity. She speedily regained it, however, when she read his note.

'THE PALACE, MELCHESTER,

July 30, 18--.

'MY DEAR LADY CONSTANTINE,--I am shocked and grieved that, in the strange dispensation of things here below, my offer of marriage should have reached you almost simultaneously with the intelligence that your widowhood had been of several months less duration than you and I, and the world, had supposed. I can quite understand that, viewed from any side, the news must have shaken and disturbed you; and your unequivocal refusal to entertain any thought of a new alliance at such a moment was, of course, intelligible, natural, and praiseworthy. At present I will say no more beyond expressing a hope that you will accept my assurances that I was quite ignorant of the news at the hour of writing, and a sincere desire that in due time, and as soon as you have recovered your equanimity, I may be allowed to renew my proposal.--I am, my dear Lady Constantine, yours ever sincerely,

C. MELCHESTER.'

She laid the letter aside, and thought no more about it, beyond a momentary meditation on the errors into which people fall in reasoning from actions to motives. Louis, who was now again with her, became in due course acquainted with the contents of the letter, and was satisfied with the promising position in which matters seemingly stood all round.

Lady Constantine went her mournful ways as she had planned to do, her chief resort being the familiar column, where she experienced the

unutterable melancholy of seeing two carpenters dismantle the dome of its felt covering, detach its ribs, and clear away the enclosure at the top till everything stood as it had stood before Swithin had been known to the place. The equatorial had already been packed in a box, to be in readiness if he should send for it from abroad. The cabin, too, was in course of demolition, such having been his directions, acquiesced in by her, before he started. Yet she could not bear the idea that these structures, so germane to the events of their romance, should be removed as if removed for ever. Going to the men she bade them store up the materials intact, that they might be re-erected if desired. She had the junctions of the timbers marked with figures, the boards numbered, and the different sets of screws tied up in independent papers for identification. She did not hear the remarks of the workmen when she had gone, to the effect that the young man would as soon think of buying a halter for himself as come back and spy at the moon from Rings-Hill Speer, after seeing the glories of other nations and the gold and jewels that were found there, or she might have been more unhappy than she was.

On returning from one of these walks to the column a curious circumstance occurred. It was evening, and she was coming as usual down through the sighing plantation, choosing her way between the ramparts of the camp towards the outlet giving upon the field, when suddenly in a dusky vista among the fir-trunks she saw, or thought she saw, a golden-haired, toddling child. The child moved a step or two, and vanished behind a tree. Lady Constantine, fearing it had lost its way, went quickly to the spot, searched, and called aloud. But no child could she perceive or

hear anywhere around. She returned to where she had stood when first beholding it, and looked in the same direction, but nothing reappeared. The only object at all resembling a little boy or girl was the upper tuft of a bunch of fern, which had prematurely yellowed to about the colour of a fair child's hair, and waved occasionally in the breeze. This, however, did not sufficiently explain the phenomenon, and she returned to make inquiries of the man whom she had left at work, removing the last traces of Swithin's cabin. But he had gone with her departure and the approach of night. Feeling an indescribable dread she retraced her steps, and hastened homeward doubting, yet half believing, what she had seemed to see, and wondering if her imagination had played her some trick.

The tranquil mournfulness of her night of solitude terminated in a most unexpected manner.

The morning after the above-mentioned incident Lady Constantine, after meditating a while, arose with a strange personal conviction that bore curiously on the aforesaid hallucination. She realized a condition of things that she had never anticipated, and for a moment the discovery of her state so overwhelmed her that she thought she must die outright. In her terror she said she had sown the wind to reap the whirlwind. Then the instinct of self-preservation flamed up in her like a fire. Her altruism in subjecting her self-love to benevolence, and letting Swithin go away from her, was demolished by the new necessity, as if it had been a gossamer web.

There was no resisting or evading the spontaneous plan of action which matured in her mind in five minutes. Where was Swithin? how could he be got at instantly?--that was her ruling thought. She searched about the room for his last short note, hoping, yet doubting, that its contents were more explicit on his intended movements than the few meagre syllables which alone she could call to mind. She could not find the letter in her room, and came downstairs to Louis as pale as a ghost.

He looked up at her, and with some concern said, 'What's the matter?'

'I am searching everywhere for a letter--a note from Mr. St. Cleeve--just a few words telling me when the Occidental sails, that I think he goes in.'

'Why do you want that unimportant document?'

'It is of the utmost importance that I should know whether he has actually sailed or not!' said she in agonized tones. 'Where can that letter be?'

Louis knew where that letter was, for having seen it on her desk he had, without reading it, torn it up and thrown it into the waste-paper basket, thinking the less that remained to remind her of the young philosopher the better.

'I destroyed it,' he said.

'O Louis! why did you?' she cried. 'I am going to follow him; I think it best to do so; and I want to know if he is gone--and now the date is lost!'

'Going to run after St. Cleeve? Absurd!'

'Yes, I am!' she said with vehement firmness. 'I must see him; I want to speak to him as soon as possible.'

'Good Lord, Viviette! Are you mad?'

'O what was the date of that ship! But it cannot be helped. I start at once for Southampton. I have made up my mind to do it. He was going to his uncle's solicitors in the North first; then he was coming back to Southampton. He cannot have sailed yet.'

'I believe he has sailed,' muttered Louis sullenly.

She did not wait to argue with him, but returned upstairs, where she rang to tell Green to be ready with the pony to drive her to Warborne station in a quarter of an hour.