

CHAPTER V. Mr Gideon Forsyth and the Gigantic Box

It has been mentioned that at Bournemouth Julia sometimes made acquaintances; it is true she had but a glimpse of them before the doors of John Street closed again upon its captives, but the glimpse was sometimes exhilarating, and the consequent regret was tempered with hope. Among those whom she had thus met a year before was a young barrister of the name of Gideon Forsyth.

About three o'clock of the eventful day when the magistrate tampered with the labels, a somewhat moody and distempered ramble had carried Mr Forsyth to the corner of John Street; and about the same moment Miss Hazeltine was called to the door of No. 16 by a thundering double knock.

Mr Gideon Forsyth was a happy enough young man; he would have been happier if he had had more money and less uncle. One hundred and twenty pounds a year was all his store; but his uncle, Mr Edward Hugh Bloomfield, supplemented this with a handsome allowance and a great deal of advice, couched in language that would probably have been judged intemperate on board a pirate ship. Mr Bloomfield was indeed a figure quite peculiar to the days of Mr Gladstone; what we may call (for the lack of an accepted expression) a Squirradical. Having acquired years without experience, he carried into the Radical side of politics those noisy, after-dinner-table passions, which we are more accustomed to connect with Toryism in its severe and senile aspects. To the opinions

of Mr Bradlaugh, in fact, he added the temper and the sympathies of that extinct animal, the Squire; he admired pugilism, he carried a formidable oaken staff, he was a reverent churchman, and it was hard to know which would have more volcanically stirred his choler--a person who should have defended the established church, or one who should have neglected to attend its celebrations. He had besides some levelling catchwords, justly dreaded in the family circle; and when he could not go so far as to declare a step un-English, he might still (and with hardly less effect) denounce it as unpractical. It was under the ban of this lesser excommunication that Gideon had fallen. His views on the study of law had been pronounced unpractical; and it had been intimated to him, in a vociferous interview punctuated with the oaken staff, that he must either take a new start and get a brief or two, or prepare to live on his own money.

No wonder if Gideon was moody. He had not the slightest wish to modify his present habits; but he would not stand on that, since the recall of Mr Bloomfield's allowance would revolutionize them still more radically. He had not the least desire to acquaint himself with law; he had looked into it already, and it seemed not to repay attention; but upon this also he was ready to give way. In fact, he would go as far as he could to meet the views of his uncle, the Squirradical. But there was one part of the programme that appeared independent of his will. How to get a brief? there was the question. And there was another and a worse. Suppose he got one, should he prove the better man?

Suddenly he found his way barred by a crowd. A garishly illuminated van was backed against the kerb; from its open stern, half resting on the street, half supported by some glistening athletes, the end of the largest packing-case in the county of Middlesex might have been seen protruding; while, on the steps of the house, the burly person of the driver and the slim figure of a young girl stood as upon a stage, disputing.

'It is not for us,' the girl was saying. 'I beg you to take it away; it couldn't get into the house, even if you managed to get it out of the van.'

'I shall leave it on the pavement, then, and M. Finsbury can arrange with the Vestry as he likes,' said the vanman.

'But I am not M. Finsbury,' expostulated the girl.

'It doesn't matter who you are,' said the vanman.

'You must allow me to help you, Miss Hazeltine,' said Gideon, putting out his hand.

Julia gave a little cry of pleasure. 'O, Mr Forsyth,' she cried, 'I am so glad to see you; we must get this horrid thing, which can only have come here by mistake, into the house. The man says we'll have to take off the door, or knock two of our windows into one, or be fined by

the Vestry or Custom House or something for leaving our parcels on the pavement.'

The men by this time had successfully removed the box from the van, had plumped it down on the pavement, and now stood leaning against it, or gazing at the door of No. 16, in visible physical distress and mental embarrassment. The windows of the whole street had filled, as if by magic, with interested and entertained spectators.

With as thoughtful and scientific an expression as he could assume, Gideon measured the doorway with his cane, while Julia entered his observations in a drawing-book. He then measured the box, and, upon comparing his data, found that there was just enough space for it to enter. Next, throwing off his coat and waistcoat, he assisted the men to take the door from its hinges. And lastly, all bystanders being pressed into the service, the packing-case mounted the steps upon some fifteen pairs of wavering legs--scraped, loudly grinding, through the doorway--and was deposited at length, with a formidable convulsion, in the far end of the lobby, which it almost blocked. The artisans of this victory smiled upon each other as the dust subsided. It was true they had smashed a bust of Apollo and ploughed the wall into deep ruts; but, at least, they were no longer one of the public spectacles of London.

'Well, sir,' said the vanman, 'I never see such a job.'

Gideon eloquently expressed his concurrence in this sentiment by

pressing a couple of sovereigns in the man's hand.

'Make it three, sir, and I'll stand Sam to everybody here!' cried the latter, and, this having been done, the whole body of volunteer porters swarmed into the van, which drove off in the direction of the nearest reliable public-house. Gideon closed the door on their departure, and turned to Julia; their eyes met; the most uncontrollable mirth seized upon them both, and they made the house ring with their laughter. Then curiosity awoke in Julia's mind, and she went and examined the box, and more especially the label.

'This is the strangest thing that ever happened,' she said, with another burst of laughter. 'It is certainly Morris's handwriting, and I had a letter from him only this morning, telling me to expect a barrel. Is there a barrel coming too, do you think, Mr Forsyth?'

'"Statuary with Care, Fragile,"' read Gideon aloud from the painted warning on the box. 'Then you were told nothing about this?'

'No,' responded Julia. 'O, Mr Forsyth, don't you think we might take a peep at it?'

'Yes, indeed,' cried Gideon. 'Just let me have a hammer.'

'Come down, and I'll show you where it is,' cried Julia. 'The shelf is too high for me to reach'; and, opening the door of the kitchen stair,

she bade Gideon follow her. They found both the hammer and a chisel; but Gideon was surprised to see no sign of a servant. He also discovered that Miss Hazeltine had a very pretty little foot and ankle; and the discovery embarrassed him so much that he was glad to fall at once upon the packing-case.

He worked hard and earnestly, and dealt his blows with the precision of a blacksmith; Julia the while standing silently by his side, and regarding rather the workman than the work. He was a handsome fellow; she told herself she had never seen such beautiful arms. And suddenly, as though he had overheard these thoughts, Gideon turned and smiled to her. She, too, smiled and coloured; and the double change became her so prettily that Gideon forgot to turn away his eyes, and, swinging the hammer with a will, discharged a smashing blow on his own knuckles. With admirable presence of mind he crushed down an oath and substituted the harmless comment, 'Butter fingers!' But the pain was sharp, his nerve was shaken, and after an abortive trial he found he must desist from further operations.

In a moment Julia was off to the pantry; in a moment she was back again with a basin of water and a sponge, and had begun to bathe his wounded hand.

'I am dreadfully sorry!' said Gideon apologetically. 'If I had had any manners I should have opened the box first and smashed my hand afterward. It feels much better,' he added. 'I assure you it does.'

'And now I think you are well enough to direct operations,' said she.

'Tell me what to do, and I'll be your workman.'

'A very pretty workman,' said Gideon, rather forgetting himself.

She turned and looked at him, with a suspicion of a frown; and the indiscreet young man was glad to direct her attention to the packing-case. The bulk of the work had been accomplished; and presently Julia had burst through the last barrier and disclosed a zone of straw. in a moment they were kneeling side by side, engaged like haymakers; the next they were rewarded with a glimpse of something white and polished; and the next again laid bare an unmistakable marble leg.

'He is surely a very athletic person,' said Julia.

'I never saw anything like it,' responded Gideon. 'His muscles stand out like penny rolls.'

Another leg was soon disclosed, and then what seemed to be a third. This resolved itself, however, into a knotted club resting upon a pedestal.

'It is a Hercules,' cried Gideon; 'I might have guessed that from his calf. I'm supposed to be rather partial to statuary, but when it comes to Hercules, the police should interfere. I should say,' he added, glancing with disaffection at the swollen leg, 'that this was about the biggest and the worst in Europe. What in heaven's name can have induced

him to come here?'

'I suppose nobody else would have a gift of him,' said Julia. 'And for that matter, I think we could have done without the monster very well.'

'O, don't say that,' returned Gideon. 'This has been one of the most amusing experiences of my life.'

'I don't think you'll forget it very soon,' said Julia. 'Your hand will remind you.'

'Well, I suppose I must be going,' said Gideon reluctantly. 'No,' pleaded Julia. 'Why should you? Stay and have tea with me.'

'If I thought you really wished me to stay,' said Gideon, looking at his hat, 'of course I should only be too delighted.'

'What a silly person you must take me for!' returned the girl. 'Why, of course I do; and, besides, I want some cakes for tea, and I've nobody to send. Here is the latchkey.'

Gideon put on his hat with alacrity, and casting one look at Miss Hazeltine, and another at the legs of Hercules, threw open the door and departed on his errand.

He returned with a large bag of the choicest and most tempting of cakes

and tartlets, and found Julia in the act of spreading a small tea-table in the lobby.

'The rooms are all in such a state,' she cried, 'that I thought we should be more cosy and comfortable in our own lobby, and under our own vine and statuary.'

'Ever so much better,' cried Gideon delightedly.

'O what adorable cream tarts!' said Julia, opening the bag, 'and the dearest little cherry tartlets, with all the cherries spilled out into the cream!'

'Yes,' said Gideon, concealing his dismay, 'I knew they would mix beautifully; the woman behind the counter told me so.'

'Now,' said Julia, as they began their little festival, 'I am going to show you Morris's letter; read it aloud, please; perhaps there's something I have missed.'

Gideon took the letter, and spreading it out on his knee, read as follows:

DEAR JULIA, I write you from Browndean, where we are stopping over for a few days. Uncle was much shaken in that dreadful accident, of which,

I dare say, you have seen the account. Tomorrow I leave him here with John, and come up alone; but before that, you will have received a barrel CONTAINING SPECIMENS FOR A FRIEND. Do not open it on any account, but leave it in the lobby till I come.

Yours in haste,

M. FINSBURY.

P.S.--Be sure and leave the barrel in the lobby.

'No,' said Gideon, 'there seems to be nothing about the monument,' and he nodded, as he spoke, at the marble legs. 'Miss Hazeltine,' he continued, 'would you mind me asking a few questions?'

'Certainly not,' replied Julia; 'and if you can make me understand why Morris has sent a statue of Hercules instead of a barrel containing specimens for a friend, I shall be grateful till my dying day. And what are specimens for a friend?'

'I haven't a guess,' said Gideon. 'Specimens are usually bits of stone, but rather smaller than our friend the monument. Still, that is not the point. Are you quite alone in this big house?'

'Yes, I am at present,' returned Julia. 'I came up before them to prepare the house, and get another servant. But I couldn't get one I liked.'

'Then you are utterly alone,' said Gideon in amazement. 'Are you not afraid?'

'No,' responded Julia stoutly. 'I don't see why I should be more afraid than you would be; I am weaker, of course, but when I found I must sleep alone in the house I bought a revolver wonderfully cheap, and made the man show me how to use it.'

'And how do you use it?' demanded Gideon, much amused at her courage.

'Why,' said she, with a smile, 'you pull the little trigger thing on top, and then pointing it very low, for it springs up as you fire, you pull the underneath little trigger thing, and it goes off as well as if a man had done it.'

'And how often have you used it?' asked Gideon.

'O, I have not used it yet,' said the determined young lady; 'but I know how, and that makes me wonderfully courageous, especially when I barricade my door with a chest of drawers.'

'I'm awfully glad they are coming back soon,' said Gideon. 'This

business strikes me as excessively unsafe; if it goes on much longer, I could provide you with a maiden aunt of mine, or my landlady if you preferred.'

'Lend me an aunt!' cried Julia. 'O, what generosity! I begin to think it must have been you that sent the Hercules.'

'Believe me,' cried the young man, 'I admire you too much to send you such an infamous work of art..'

Julia was beginning to reply, when they were both startled by a knocking at the door.

'O, Mr Forsyth!'

'Don't be afraid, my dear girl,' said Gideon, laying his hand tenderly on her arm.

'I know it's the police,' she whispered. 'They are coming to complain about the statue.'

The knock was repeated. It was louder than before, and more impatient.

'It's Morris,' cried Julia, in a startled voice, and she ran to the door and opened it.

It was indeed Morris that stood before them; not the Morris of ordinary days, but a wild-looking fellow, pale and haggard, with bloodshot eyes, and a two-days' beard upon his chin.

'The barrel!' he cried. 'Where's the barrel that came this morning?' And he stared about the lobby, his eyes, as they fell upon the legs of Hercules, literally goggling in his head. 'What is that?' he screamed. 'What is that waxwork? Speak, you fool! What is that? And where's the barrel--the water-butt?'

'No barrel came, Morris,' responded Julia coldly. 'This is the only thing that has arrived.'

'This!' shrieked the miserable man. 'I never heard of it!'

'It came addressed in your hand,' replied Julia; 'we had nearly to pull the house down to get it in, that is all that I can tell you.'

Morris gazed at her in utter bewilderment. He passed his hand over his forehead; he leaned against the wall like a man about to faint. Then his tongue was loosed, and he overwhelmed the girl with torrents of abuse. Such fire, such directness, such a choice of ungentlemanly language, none had ever before suspected Morris to possess; and the girl trembled and shrank before his fury.

'You shall not speak to Miss Hazeltine in that way,' said Gideon

sternly. 'It is what I will not suffer.'

'I shall speak to the girl as I like,' returned Morris, with a fresh outburst of anger. 'I'll speak to the hussy as she deserves.'

'Not a word more, sir, not one word,' cried Gideon. 'Miss Hazeltine,' he continued, addressing the young girl, 'you cannot stay a moment longer in the same house with this unmanly fellow. Here is my arm; let me take you where you will be secure from insult.'

'Mr Forsyth,' returned Julia, 'you are right; I cannot stay here longer, and I am sure I trust myself to an honourable gentleman.'

Pale and resolute, Gideon offered her his arm, and the pair descended the steps, followed by Morris clamouring for the latchkey.

Julia had scarcely handed the key to Morris before an empty hansom drove smartly into John Street. It was hailed by both men, and as the cabman drew up his restive horse, Morris made a dash into the vehicle.

'Sixpence above fare,' he cried recklessly. 'Waterloo Station for your life. Sixpence for yourself!'

'Make it a shilling, gov'ner,' said the man, with a grin; 'the other parties were first.'

'A shilling then,' cried Morris, with the inward reflection that he would reconsider it at Waterloo. The man whipped up his horse, and the hansom vanished from John Street.