

## CHAPTER XXIX—EVENTS OF TUESDAY: THE TOILS CLOSING

This day began with a surprise. I found a letter on my breakfast-table addressed to Edward Ducie, Esquire; and at first I was startled beyond measure. ‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all!’ When I had opened it, it proved to be only a note from the lawyer, enclosing a card for the Assembly Ball on Thursday evening. Shortly after, as I was composing my mind with a segar at one of the windows of the sitting-room, and Rowley, having finished the light share of work that fell to him, sat not far off tootling with great spirit and a marked preference for the upper octave, Ronald was suddenly shown in. I got him a segar, drew in a chair to the side of the fire, and installed him there—I was going to say, at his ease, but no expression could be farther from the truth. He was plainly on pins and needles, did not know whether to take or to refuse the segar, and, after he had taken it, did not know whether to light or to return it. I saw he had something to say; I did not think it was his own something; and I was ready to offer a large bet it was really something of Major Chevenix’s.

‘Well, and so here you are!’ I observed, with pointless cordiality, for I was bound I should do nothing to help him out. If he were, indeed, here running errands for my rival, he might have a fair field, but certainly no favour.

‘The fact is,’ he began, ‘I would rather see you alone.’

'Why, certainly,' I replied. 'Rowley, you can step into the bedroom. My dear fellow,' I continued, 'this sounds serious. Nothing wrong, I trust.'

'Well, I'll be quite honest,' said he. 'I am a good deal bothered.'

'And I bet I know why!' I exclaimed. 'And I bet I can put you to rights, too!'

'What do you mean!' he asked.

'You must be hard up,' said I, 'and all I can say is, you've come to the right place. If you have the least use for a hundred pounds, or any such trifling sum as that, please mention it. It's here, quite at your service.'

'I am sure it is most kind of you,' said Ronald, 'and the truth is, though I can't think how you guessed it, that I really am a little behind board. But I haven't come to talk about that.'

'No, I dare say!' cried I. 'Not worth talking about! But remember, Ronald, you and I are on different sides of the business. Remember that you did me one of those services that make men friends for ever. And since I have had the fortune to come into a fair share of money, just oblige me, and consider so much of it as your own.'

'No,' he said, 'I couldn't take it; I couldn't, really. Besides, the fact is, I've come on a very different matter. It's about my sister, St. Ives,' and he shook his head menacingly at me.

'You're quite sure?' I persisted. 'It's here, at your service—up to five hundred pounds, if you like. Well, all right; only remember where it is, when you do want it.'

'Oh, please let me alone!' cried Ronald: 'I've come to say something unpleasant; and how on earth can I do it, if you don't give a fellow a chance? It's about my sister, as I said. You can see for yourself that it can't be allowed to go on. It's compromising; it don't lead to anything; and you're not the kind of man (you must feel it yourself) that I can allow my female relatives to have anything to do with. I hate saying this, St. Ives; it looks like hitting a man when he's down, you know; and I told the Major I very much disliked it from the first. However, it had to be said; and now it has been, and, between gentlemen, it shouldn't be necessary to refer to it again.'

'It's compromising; it doesn't lead to anything; not the kind of man,' I repeated thoughtfully. 'Yes, I believe I understand, and shall make haste to put myself en règle.' I stood up, and laid my segar down. 'Mr. Gilchrist,' said I, with a bow, 'in answer to your very natural observations, I beg to offer myself as a suitor for your sister's hand. I am a man of title, of which we think lightly in France, but of ancient

lineage, which is everywhere prized. I can display thirty-two quarterings without a blot. My expectations are certainly above the average: I believe my uncle's income averages about thirty thousand pounds, though I admit I was not careful to inform myself. Put it anywhere between fifteen and fifty thousand; it is certainly not less.'

'All this is very easy to say,' said Ronald, with a pitying smile.

'Unfortunately, these things are in the air.'

'Pardon me,—in Buckinghamshire,' said I, smiling.

'Well, what I mean is, my dear St. Ives, that you can't prove them,' he continued. 'They might just as well not be: do you follow me? You can't bring us any third party to back you.'

'Oh, come!' cried I, springing up and hurrying to the table. 'You must excuse me!' I wrote Romaine's address. 'There is my reference, Mr. Gilchrist. Until you have written to him, and received his negative answer, I have a right to be treated, and I shall see that you treat me, as a gentleman.' He was brought up with a round turn at that.

'I beg your pardon, St. Ives,' said he. 'Believe me, I had no wish to be offensive. But there's the difficulty of this affair; I can't make any of my points without offence! You must excuse me, it's not my fault. But, at any rate, you must see for yourself this proposal of marriage is—is merely impossible, my dear fellow. It's nonsense! Our countries

are at war; you are a prisoner.'

'My ancestor of the time of the Ligue,' I replied, 'married a Huguenot lady out of the Saintonge, riding two hundred miles through an enemy's country to bring off his bride; and it was a happy marriage.'

'Well!' he began; and then looked down into the fire, and became silent.

'Well?' I asked.

'Well, there's this business of—Goguelat,' said he, still looking at the coals in the grate.

'What!' I exclaimed, starting in my chair. 'What's that you say?'

'This business about Goguelat,' he repeated.

'Ronald,' said I, 'this is not your doing. These are not your own words. I know where they came from: a coward put them in your mouth.'

'St. Ives!' he cried, 'why do you make it so hard for me? and where's the use of insulting other people? The plain English is, that I can't hear of any proposal of marriage from a man under a charge like that. You must see it for yourself, man! It's the most absurd thing I ever heard of! And you go on forcing me to argue with you, too!'

'Because I have had an affair of honour which terminated unhappily, you—a young soldier, or next-door to it—refuse my offer? Do I understand you aright?' said I.

'My dear fellow!' he wailed, 'of course you can twist my words, if you like. You say it was an affair of honour. Well, I can't, of course, tell you that—I can't—I mean, you must see that that's just the point! Was it? I don't know.'

'I have the honour to inform you,' said I.

'Well, other people say the reverse, you see!'

'They lie, Ronald, and I will prove it in time.'

'The short and the long of it is, that any man who is so unfortunate as to have such things said about him is not the man to be my brother-in-law!' he cried.

'Do you know who will be my first witness at the court? Arthur Chevenix!' said I.

'I don't care!' he cried, rising from his chair and beginning to pace outrageously about the room. 'What do you mean, St. Ives? What is this about? It's like a dream, I declare! You made an offer, and I have refused it. I don't like it, I don't want it; and whatever I did, or

didn't, wouldn't matter—my aunt wouldn't bear of it anyway! Can't you take your answer, man?'

'You must remember, Ronald, that we are playing with edged tools,' said I. 'An offer of marriage is a delicate subject to handle. You have refused, and you have justified your refusal by several statements: first, that I was an impostor; second, that our countries were at war; and third— No, I will speak,' said I; 'you can answer when I have done,—and third, that I had dishonourably killed—or was said to have done so—the man Goguelat. Now, my dear fellow, these are very awkward grounds

to be taking. From any one else's lips I need scarce tell you how I should resent them; but my hands are tied. I have so much gratitude to you, without talking of the love I bear your sister, that you insult me, when you do so, under the cover of a complete impunity. I must feel the pain—and I do feel it acutely—I can do nothing to protect myself.' He had been anxious enough to interrupt me in the beginning; but now, and after I had ceased, he stood a long while silent.

'St. Ives,' he said at last, 'I think I had better go away. This has been very irritating. I never at all meant to say anything of the kind, and I apologise to you. I have all the esteem for you that one gentleman should have for another. I only meant to tell you—to show you what had influenced my mind; and that, in short, the thing was impossible. One thing you may be quite sure of: I shall do nothing against you. Will you shake hands before I go away?' he blurted out.

'Yes,' said I, 'I agree with you—the interview has been irritating. Let bygones be bygones. Good-bye, Ronald.'

'Good-bye, St. Ives!' he returned. 'I'm heartily sorry.'

And with that he was gone.

The windows of my own sitting-room looked towards the north; but the entrance passage drew its light from the direction of the square. Hence I was able to observe Ronald's departure, his very disheartened gait, and the fact that he was joined, about half-way, by no less a man than Major Chevenix. At this, I could scarce keep from smiling; so unpalatable an interview must be before the pair of them, and I could hear their voices, clashing like crossed swords, in that eternal antiphony of 'I told you,' and 'I told you not.' Without doubt, they had gained very little by their visit; but then I had gained less than nothing, and had been bitterly dispirited into the bargain. Ronald had stuck to his guns and refused me to the last. It was no news; but, on the other hand, it could not be contorted into good news. I was now certain that during my temporary absence in France, all irons would be put into the fire, and the world turned upside down, to make Flora disown the obtrusive Frenchman and accept Chevenix. Without doubt she would resist these instances: but the thought of them did not please me, and I felt she should be warned and prepared for the battle.



It was no use to try and see her now, but I promised myself early that evening to return to Swanston. In the meantime I had to make all my preparations, and look the coming journey in the face. Here in Edinburgh I was within four miles of the sea, yet the business of approaching random fishermen with my hat in the one hand and a knife in the other, appeared so desperate, that I saw nothing for it but to retrace my steps over the northern counties, and knock a second time at the doors of Birchell Fenn. To do this, money would be necessary; and after leaving my paper in the hands of Flora I had still a balance of about fifteen hundred pounds. Or rather I may say I had them and I had them not; for after my luncheon with Mr. Robbie I had placed the amount, all but thirty pounds of change, in a bank in George Street, on a deposit receipt in the name of Mr. Rowley. This I had designed to be my gift to him, in case I must suddenly depart. But now, thinking better of the arrangement, I despatched my little man, cockade and all, to lift the fifteen hundred.

He was not long gone, and returned with a flushed face, and the deposit receipt still in his hand.

‘No go, Mr. Anne,’ says he.

‘How’s that?’ I inquired,

‘Well, sir, I found the place all right, and no mistake,’ said he. ‘But I tell you what gave me a blue fright! There was a customer standing by the door, and I reckonised him! Who do you think it was, Mr. Anne? W’y,

that same Red-Breast—him I had breakfast with near Aylesbury.’

‘You are sure you are not mistaken?’ I asked.

‘Certain sure,’ he replied. ‘Not Mr. Lavender, I don’t mean, sir; I mean the other party. “Wot’s he doing here?” says I. It don’t look right.”’

‘Not by any means,’ I agreed.

I walked to and fro in the apartment reflecting. This particular Bow Street runner might be here by accident; but it was to imagine a singular play of coincidence that he, who had met Rowley and spoken with him in the ‘Green Dragon,’ hard by Aylesbury, should be now in Scotland, where he could have no legitimate business, and by the doors of the bank where Rowley kept his account.

‘Rowley,’ said I, ‘he didn’t see you, did he?’

‘Never a fear,’ quoth Rowley. ‘W’y Mr. Anne, sir, if he ’ad, you wouldn’t have seen me any more! I ain’t a hass, sir!’

‘Well, my boy, you can put that receipt in your pocket. You’ll have no more use for it till you’re quite clear of me. Don’t lose it, though; it’s your share of the Christmas-box: fifteen hundred pounds all for yourself.’

'Begging your pardon, Mr. Anne, sir, but wot for!' said Rowley.

'To set up a public-house upon,' said I.

'If you'll excuse me, sir, I ain't got any call to set up a public-house, sir,' he replied stoutly. 'And I tell you wot, sir, it seems to me I'm reether young for the billet. I'm your body servant, Mr. Anne, or else I'm nothink.'

'Well, Rowley,' I said, 'I'll tell you what it's for. It's for the good service you have done me, of which I don't care—and don't dare—to speak. It's for your loyalty and cheerfulness, my dear boy. I had meant it for you; but to tell you the truth, it's past mending now—it has to be yours. Since that man is waiting by the bank, the money can't be touched until I'm gone.'

'Until you're gone, sir?' re-echoed Rowley. 'You don't go anywheres without me, I can tell you that, Mr. Anne, sir!'

'Yes, my boy,' said I, 'we are going to part very soon now; probably to-morrow. And it's for my sake, Rowley! Depend upon it, if there was any reason at all for that Bow Street man being at the bank, he was not there to look out for you. How they could have found out about the account so early is more than I can fathom; some strange coincidence must have played me false! But there the fact is; and Rowley, I'll not only have to say farewell to you presently, I'll have to ask you to stay

indoors until I can say it. Remember, my boy, it's only so that you can serve me now.'

'W'y, sir, you say the word, and of course I'll do it!' he cried.

"Nothink by 'alves," is my motto! I'm your man, through thick and thin, live or die, I am!'

In the meantime there was nothing to be done till towards sunset. My only chance now was to come again as quickly as possible to speech of Flora, who was my only practicable banker; and not before evening was it worth while to think of that. I might compose myself as well as I was able over the Caledonian Mercury, with its ill news of the campaign of France and belated documents about the retreat from Russia; and, as I sat there by the fire, I was sometimes all awake with anger and mortification at what I was reading, and sometimes again I would be three parts asleep as I dozed over the barren items of home intelligence. 'Lately arrived'—this is what I suddenly stumbled on—'at Dumbreck's Hotel, the Viscount of Saint-Yves.'

'Rowley,' said I.

'If you please, Mr. Anne, sir,' answered the obsequious, lowering his pipe.

'Come and look at this, my boy,' said I, holding out the paper.

'My crikey!' said he. 'That's 'im, sir, sure enough!'

'Sure enough, Rowley,' said I. 'He's on the trail. He has fairly caught up with us. He and this Bow Street man have come together, I would swear. And now here is the whole field, quarry, hounds and hunters, all together in this city of Edinburgh.'

'And wot are you goin' to do now, sir? Tell you wot, let me take it in 'and, please! Gimme a minute, and I'll disguise myself, and go out to this Dum--- to this hotel, leastways, sir—and see wot he's up to. You put your trust in me, Mr. Anne: I'm fly, don't you make no mistake about it. I'm all a-growing and a-blowing, I am.'

'Not one foot of you,' said I. 'You are a prisoner, Rowley, and make up your mind to that. So am I, or next door to it. I showed it you for a caution; if you go on the streets, it spells death to me, Rowley.'

'If you please, sir,' says Rowley.

'Come to think of it,' I continued, 'you must take a cold, or something. No good of awakening Mrs. McRankine's suspicions.'

'A cold?' he cried, recovering immediately from his depression. 'I can do it, Mr. Anne.'

And he proceeded to sneeze and cough and blow his nose, till I could not

restrain myself from smiling.

'Oh, I tell you, I know a lot of them dodges,' he observed proudly.

'Well, they come in very handy,' said I.

'I'd better go at once and show it to the old gal, 'adn't I?' he asked.

I told him, by all means; and he was gone upon the instant, gleeful as though to a game of football.

I took up the paper and read carelessly on, my thoughts engaged with my immediate danger, till I struck on the next paragraph:—

'In connection with the recent horrid murder in the Castle, we are desired to make public the following intelligence. The soldier, Champdivers, is supposed to be in the neighbourhood of this city. He is about the middle height or rather under, of a pleasing appearance and highly genteel address. When last heard of he wore a fashionable suit of pearl-grey, and boots with fawn-coloured tops. He is accompanied by a servant about sixteen years of age, speaks English without any accent, and passed under the alias of Ramornie. A reward is offered for his apprehension.'

In a moment I was in the next room, stripping from me the pearl-coloured suit!

I confess I was now a good deal agitated. It is difficult to watch the toils closing slowly and surely about you, and to retain your composure; and I was glad that Rowley was not present to spy on my confusion. I was flushed, my breath came thick; I cannot remember a time when I was more put out.

And yet I must wait and do nothing, and partake of my meals, and entertain the ever-garrulous Rowley, as though I were entirely my own man. And if I did not require to entertain Mrs. McRankine also, that was but another drop of bitterness in my cup! For what ailed my landlady, that she should hold herself so severely aloof, that she should refuse conversation, that her eyes should be reddened, that I should so continually hear the voice of her private supplications sounding through the house? I was much deceived, or she had read the insidious paragraph and recognised the comminated pearl-grey suit. I remember now a certain air with which she had laid the paper on my table, and a certain sniff, between sympathy and defiance, with which she had announced it: 'There's your Mercury for ye!'

In this direction, at least, I saw no pressing danger; her tragic countenance betokened agitation; it was plain she was wrestling with her conscience, and the battle still hung dubious. The question of what to do troubled me extremely. I could not venture to touch such an intricate and mysterious piece of machinery as my landlady's spiritual nature: it might go off at a word, and in any direction, like a badly-made firework.

And while I praised myself extremely for my wisdom in the past, that I had made so much a friend of her, I was all abroad as to my conduct in the present. There seemed an equal danger in pressing and in neglecting the accustomed marks of familiarity. The one extreme looked like impudence, and might annoy, the other was a practical confession of guilt. Altogether, it was a good hour for me when the dusk began to fall in earnest on the streets of Edinburgh, and the voice of an early watchman bade me set forth.

I reached the neighbourhood of the cottage before seven; and as I breasted the steep ascent which leads to the garden wall, I was struck with surprise to hear a dog. Dogs I had heard before, but only from the hamlet on the hillside above. Now, this dog was in the garden itself, where it roared aloud in paroxysms of fury, and I could hear it leaping and straining on the chain. I waited some while, until the brute's fit of passion had roared itself out. Then, with the utmost precaution, I drew near again; and finally approached the garden wall. So soon as I had clapped my head above the level, however, the barking broke forth again with redoubled energy. Almost at the same time, the door of the cottage opened, and Ronald and the Major appeared upon the threshold with a lantern. As they so stood, they were almost immediately below me, strongly illuminated, and within easy earshot. The Major pacified the dog, who took instead to low, uneasy growling intermingled with occasional yelps.



'Good thing I brought Towzer!' said Chevenix.

'Damn him, I wonder where he is!' said Ronald; and he moved the lantern up and down, and turned the night into a shifting puzzle-work of gleam and shadow. 'I think I'll make a sally.'

'I don't think you will,' replied Chevenix. 'When I agreed to come out here and do sentry-go, it was on one condition, Master Ronald: don't you forget that! Military discipline, my boy! Our beat is this path close about the house. Down, Towzer! good boy, good boy—gently, then!' he went on, caressing his confounded monster.

'To think! The beggar may be hearing us this minute!' cried Ronald.

'Nothing more probable,' said the Major. 'You there, St. Ives?' he added, in a distinct but guarded voice. 'I only want to tell you, you had better go home. Mr. Gilchrist and I take watch and watch.'

The game was up. 'Beaucoup de plaisir!' I replied, in the same tones.

'Il fait un peu froid pour veiller; gardez-vous des engelures!'

I suppose it was done in a moment of ungovernable rage; but in spite of the excellent advice he had given to Ronald the moment before, Chevenix slipped the chain, and the dog sprang, straight as an arrow, up the bank. I stepped back, picked up a stone of about twelve pounds weight, and stood ready. With a bound the beast landed on the cope-stone of the

wall; and, almost in the same instant, my missile caught him fair in the face. He gave a stifled cry, went tumbling back where he had come from, and I could hear the twelve-pounder accompany him in his fall. Chevenix, at the same moment, broke out in a roaring voice: 'The hell-hound! If he's killed my dog!' and I judged, upon all grounds, it was as well to be off.