

CHAPTER IV

One morning Miss Carew sat on the bank of a great pool in the park, throwing pebbles two by two into the water, and intently watching the intersection of the circles they made on its calm surface. Alice was seated on a camp-stool a little way off, sketching the castle, which appeared on an eminence to the southeast. The woodland rose round them like the sides of an amphitheatre; but the trees did not extend to the water's edge, where there was an ample margin of bright greensward and a narrow belt of gravel, from which Lydia was picking her pebbles.

Presently, hearing a footstep, she looked back, and saw Cashel Byron standing behind Alice, apparently much interested in her drawing. He was dressed as she had last seen him, except that he wore primrose gloves and an Egyptian red scarf. Alice turned, and surveyed him with haughty surprise; but he made nothing of her looks; and she, after glancing at Lydia to reassure herself that she was not alone, bade him good-morning, and resumed her work.

"Queer place," he remarked, after a pause, alluding to the castle. "Chinese looking, isn't it?"

"It is considered a very fine building," said Alice.

"Oh, hang what it is considered!" said Cashel. "What IS it? That is the point to look to."

"It is a matter of taste," said Alice, very coldly.

"Mr. Cashel Byron."

Cashel started and hastened to the bank. "How d'ye do, Miss Carew," he said. "I didn't see you until you called me." She looked at him; and he, convicted of a foolish falsehood, quailed. "There is a splendid view of the castle from here," he continued, to change the subject. "Miss Goff and I have just been talking about it."

"Yes. Do you admire it?"

"Very much indeed. It is a beautiful place. Every one must acknowledge that."

"It is considered kind to praise my house to me, and to ridicule it to other people. You do not say, 'Hang what it is considered,' now."

Cashel, with an unaccustomed sense of getting the worst of an encounter, almost lost heart to reply. Then he brightened, and said, "I can tell you how that is. As far as being a place to sketch, or for another person to look at, it is Chinese enough. But somehow your living in it makes a difference. That is what I meant; upon my soul it is."

Lydia smiled; but he, looking down at her, did not see the smile because of her coronet of red hair, which seemed to flame in the sunlight. The obstruction was unsatisfactory to him; he wanted to see her face. He hesitated, and then sat down on the ground beside her cautiously, as if getting into a very hot bath.

"I hope you won't mind my sitting here," he said, timidly. "It seems rude to talk down at you from a height."

She shook her head and threw two more stones into the pool. He could think of nothing further to say, and as she did not speak, but gravely watched the circles in the water, he began to stare at them too; and they sat in silence for some minutes, steadfastly regarding the waves, she as if there were matter for infinite thought in them, and he as though the spectacle wholly confounded him. At last she said,

"Have you ever realized what a vibration is?"

"No," said Cashel, after a blank look at her.

"I am glad to hear you make that admission. Science has reduced everything nowadays to vibration. Light, sound, sensation--all the mysteries of nature are either vibrations or interference of vibrations. There," she said, throwing another pair of pebbles in, and pointing to the two sets of widening rings as they overlapped one another; "the twinkling of a star, and the pulsation in a chord of music, are THAT. But I cannot picture the thing in my own mind. I wonder whether the hundreds of writers of text-books on physics, who talk so glibly of vibrations, realize them any better than I do."

"Not a bit of it. Not one of them. Not half so well," said Cashel, cheerfully, replying to as much of her speech as he understood.

"Perhaps the subject does not interest you," she said, turning to him.

"On the contrary; I like it of all things," said he, boldly.

"I can hardly say so much for my own interest in it. I am told that you are a student, Mr. Cashel Byron. What are your favorite studies?--or rather, since that is generally a hard question to answer, what are your pursuits?"

Alice listened.

Cashel looked doggedly at Lydia, and his color slowly deepened. "I am a professor," he said.

"A professor of what? I know I should ask of where; but that would only elicit the name of a college, which would convey no real information to me."

"I am a professor of science," said Cashel, in a low voice, looking down at his left fist, which he was balancing in the air before him, and stealthily hitting his bent knee as if it were another person's face.

"Physical or moral science?" persisted Lydia.

"Physical science," said Cashel. "But there's more moral science in it than people think."

"Yes," said Lydia, seriously. "Though I have no real knowledge of physics, I can appreciate the truth of that. Perhaps all the science that is not at bottom physical science is only pretentious nescience. I have read much of physics, and have often been tempted to learn something of them--to make the experiments with my own hands--to furnish a laboratory--to wield the scalpel even. For, to master science thoroughly, I believe one must take one's gloves off. Is that your opinion?"

Cashel looked hard at her. "You never spoke a truer word," he said. "But you can become a very respectable amateur by working with the gloves."

"I never should. The many who believe they are the wiser for reading accounts of experiments deceive themselves. It is as impossible to learn science from theory as to gain wisdom from proverbs. Ah, it is so easy to follow a line of argument, and so difficult to grasp the facts that underlie it! Our popular lecturers on physics present us with chains of deductions so highly polished that it is a luxury to let them slip from end to end through our fingers. But they leave nothing behind but a vague memory of the sensation they afforded. Excuse me for talking figuratively. I perceive that you affect the opposite--a reaction on your part, I suppose, against tall talk and fine writing. Pray, should I ever carry out my intention of setting to work in earnest at science, will you give me some lessons?"

"Well," said Cashel, with a covert grin, "I would rather you came to me than to another professor; but I don't think it would suit you. I should like to try my hand on your friend there. She's stronger and straighter than nine out of ten men."

"You set a high value on physical qualifications then. So do I."

"Only from a practical point of view, mind you," said Cashel, earnestly. "It isn't right to be always looking at men and women as you would at horses. If you want to back them in a race or in a fight, that's one thing; but if you want a friend or a sweetheart, that's another."

"Quite so," said Lydia, smiling. "You do not wish to commit yourself to any warmer feeling towards Miss Goff than a critical appreciation of her form and condition."

"Just that," said Cashel, satisfied. "YOU understand me, Miss Carew. There are some people that you might talk to all day, and they'd be no wiser at the end of it than they were at the beginning. You're not one of that sort."

"I wonder do we ever succeed really in communicating our thoughts to one another. A thought must take a new shape to fit itself into a strange mind. You, Mr. Professor, must have acquired special experience of the incommunicability of ideas in the course of your lectures and lessons."

Cashel looked uneasily at the water, and said in a lower voice, "Of course you may call me just whatever you like; but--if it's all the same to you--I wish you wouldn't call me professor."

"I have lived so much in countries where professors expect to be addressed by their titles on all occasions, that I may claim to be excused for having offended on that point. Thank you for telling me. But I am to blame for discussing science with you. Lord Worthington told us that you had come down here expressly to escape from it--to recruit yourself after an excess of work."

"It doesn't matter," said Cashel.

"I have not done harm enough to be greatly concerned; but I will not offend again. To change the subject, let us look at Miss Goff's sketch."

Miss Carew had hardly uttered this suggestion, when Cashel, in a business-like manner, and without the slightest air of gallantry, expertly lifted her and placed her on her feet. This unexpected attention gave her a shock, followed by a thrill that was not disagreeable. She turned to him with a faint mantling on her cheeks. He was looking with contracted brows at the sky, as though occupied with some calculation.

"Thank you," she said; "but pray do not do that again. It is a little humiliating to be lifted like a child. You are very strong."

"There is not much strength needed to lift such a feather-weight as you. Seven stone two, I should judge you to be, about. But there's a great art in doing these things properly. I have often had to carry off a man of fourteen stone, resting him all the time as if he was in bed."

"Ah," said Lydia; "I see you have had some hospital practice. I have often admired the skill with which trained nurses handle their patients."

Cashel made no reply, but, with a sinister grin, followed her to where Alice sat.

"It is very foolish of me, I know," said Alice, presently; "but I never can draw when any one is looking at me."

"You fancy that everybody is thinking about how you're doing it," said Cashel, encouragingly. "That's always the way with amateurs. But the truth is that not a soul except yourself is a bit concerned about it. EX-cuse me," he added, taking up the drawing, and proceeding to examine it leisurely.

"Please give me my sketch, Mr. Byron," she said, her cheeks red with anger. Puzzled, he turned to Lydia for an explanation, while Alice seized the sketch and packed it in her portfolio.

"It is getting rather warm," said Lydia. "Shall we return to the castle?"

"I think we had better," said Alice, trembling with resentment as she walked away quickly, leaving Lydia alone with Cashel, who presently exclaimed,

"What in thunder have I done?"

"You have made an inconsiderate remark with unmistakable sincerity."

"I only tried to cheer her up. She must have mistaken what I said."

"I think not. Do you believe that young ladies like to be told that there is no occasion for them to be ridiculously self-conscious?"

"I say that! I'll take my oath I never said anything of the sort."

"You worded it differently. But you assured her that she need not object to have her drawing overlooked, as it is of no importance to any one."

"Well, if she takes offence at that she must be a born fool. Some people can't bear to be told anything. But they soon get all that thin-skinned nonsense knocked out of them."

"Have you any sisters, Mr. Cashel Byron?"

"No. Why?"

"Or a mother?"

"I have a mother; but I haven't seen her for years; and I don't much care if I never see her. It was through her that I came to be what I am."

"Are you then dissatisfied with your profession?"

"No--I don't mean that. I am always saying stupid things."

"Yes. That comes of your ignorance of a sex accustomed to have its silliness respected. You will find it hard to keep on good terms with my friend without some further study of womanly ways."

"As to her, I won't give in that I'm wrong unless I AM wrong. The truth's the truth."

"Not even to please Miss Goff?"

"Not even to please you. You'd only think the worse of me afterwards."

"Quite true, and quite right," said Lydia, cordially. "Good-bye, Mr. Cashel Byron. I must rejoin Miss Goff."

"I suppose you will take her part if she keeps a down on me for what I said to her."

"What is 'a down'? A grudge?"

"Yes. Something of that sort."

"Colonial, is it not?" pursued Lydia, with the air of a philologist.

"Yes; I believe I picked it up in the colonies." Then he added, sullenly, "I suppose I shouldn't use slang in speaking to you. I beg your pardon."

"I do not object to it. On the contrary, it interests me. For example, I have just learned from it that you have been in Australia."

"So I have. But are you out with me because I annoyed Miss Goff?"

"By no means. Nevertheless, I sympathize with her annoyance at the manner, if not the matter, of your rebuke."

"I can't, for the life of me, see what there was in what I said to raise such a fuss about. I wish you would give me a nudge whenever you see me making a fool of myself. I will shut up at once and ask no questions."

"So that it will be understood that my nudge means 'Shut up, Mr. Cashel Byron; you are making a fool of yourself'?"

"Just so. YOU understand me. I told you that before, didn't I?"

"I am afraid," said Lydia, her face bright with laughter, "that I cannot take charge of your manners until we are a little better acquainted."

He seemed disappointed. Then his face clouded; and he began, "If you regard it as a liberty--"

"Of course I regard it as a liberty," she said, neatly interrupting him. "Is not my own conduct a sufficient charge upon my attention? Why should I voluntarily assume that of a strong man and learned professor as well?"

"By Jingo!" exclaimed Cashel, with sudden excitement, "I don't care what you say to me. You have a way of giving things a turn that makes it a pleasure to be shut up by you; and if I were a gentleman, as I ought to be, instead of a poor devil of a professional pug, I would--" He recollected himself, and turned quite pale. There was a pause.

"Let me remind you," said Lydia, composedly, though she too had changed color at the beginning of his outburst, "that we are both wanted elsewhere at present; I by Miss Goff, and you by your servant, who has been hovering about us and looking at you anxiously for some minutes."

Cashel turned fiercely, and saw Mellish standing a little way off, sulkily watching him. Lydia took the opportunity, and left the place. As she retreated she could hear that they were at high words together; but she could not distinguish what they were saying. Fortunately so; for their language was villainous.

She found Alice in the library, seated bolt upright in a chair that would have tempted a good-humored person to recline. Lydia sat down in silence. Alice, presently looking at her, discovered that she was in a fit of noiseless laughter. The effect, in contrast to her habitual self-possession, was so strange that Alice almost

forgot to be offended.

"I am glad to see that it is not hard to amuse you," she said.

Lydia waited to recover herself thoroughly, and then replied, "I have not laughed so three times in my life. Now, Alice, put aside your resentment of our neighbor's impudence for the moment, and tell me what you think of him."

"I have not thought about him at all, I assure you," said Alice, disdainfully.

"Then think about him for a moment to oblige me, and let me know the result."

"Really, you have had much more opportunity of judging than I. *I* have hardly spoken to him."

Lydia rose patiently and went to the bookcase. "You have a cousin at one of the universities, have you not?" she said, seeking along the shelf for a volume.

"Yes," replied Alice, speaking very sweetly to atone for her want of amiability on the previous subject.

"Then perhaps you know something of university slang?"

"I never allow him to talk slang to me," said Alice, quickly.

"You may dictate modes of expression to a single man, perhaps, but not to a whole university," said Lydia, with a quiet scorn that brought unexpected tears to Alice's eyes. "Do you know what a pug is?"

"A pug!" said Alice, vacantly. "No; I have heard of a bulldog--a proctor's bulldog, but never a pug."

"I must try my slang dictionary," said Lydia, taking down a book and opening it. "Here it is. 'Pug--a fighting man's idea of the contracted word to be produced from pugilist.' What an extraordinary definition! A fighting man's idea of a contraction! Why should a man have a special idea of a contraction when he is fighting; or why should he think of such a thing at all under such circumstances? Perhaps 'fighting man' is slang too. No; it is not given here. Either I mistook the word, or it has some signification unknown to the compiler of my dictionary."

"It seems quite plain to me," said Alice. "Pug means pugilist."

"But pugilism is boxing; it is not a profession. I suppose all men are more or less pugilists. I want a sense of the word in which it denotes a calling or occupation of some kind. I fancy it means a demonstrator of anatomy. However, it does not matter."

"Where did you meet with it?"

"Mr. Byron used it just now."

"Do you really like that man?" said Alice, returning to the subject more humbly than she had quitted it.

"So far, I do not dislike him. He puzzles me. If the roughness of his manner is an affectation I have never seen one so successful before."

"Perhaps he does not know any better. His coarseness did not strike me as being affected at all."

"I should agree with you but for one or two remarks that fell from him. They showed an insight into the real nature of scientific knowledge, and an instinctive sense of the truths underlying words, which I have never met with except in men of considerable culture and experience. I suspect that his manner is deliberately assumed in protest against the selfish vanity which is the common source of social polish. It is partly natural, no doubt. He seems too impatient to choose his words heedfully. Do you ever go to the theatre?"

"No," said Alice, taken aback by this apparent irrelevance. "My father disapproved of it. But I was there once. I saw the 'Lady of Lyons.'"

"There is a famous actress, Adelaide Gisborne--"

"It was she whom I saw as the Lady of Lyons. She did it beautifully."

"Did Mr. Byron remind you of her?"

Alice stared incredulously at Lydia. "I do not think there can be two people in the world less like one another," she said.

"Nor do I," said Lydia, meditatively. "But I think their dissimilarity owes its emphasis to some lurking likeness. Otherwise how could he have reminded me of her?" Lydia, as she spoke, sat down with a troubled expression, as if trying to unravel her thoughts. "And yet," she added, presently, "my theatrical associations are so complex that--" A long silence ensued, during which Alice, conscious of some unusual stir in her patroness, watched her furtively and wondered what would happen next.

"Alice."

"Yes."

"My mind is exercising itself in spite of me on small and impertinent matters--a sure symptom of failing mental health. My presence here is only one of several attempts that I have made to live idly since my father's death. They have all failed. Work has become necessary to me. I will go to London tomorrow."

Alice looked up in dismay; for this seemed equivalent to a dismissal. But her face expressed nothing but polite indifference.

"We shall have time to run through all the follies of the season before June, when I hope to return here and set to work at a book I have planned. I must collect the material for it in London. If I leave town before the season is over, and you are unwilling to come away with me, I can easily find some one who will take care of you as long as you please to stay. I wish it were June already!"

Alice preferred Lydia's womanly impatience to her fatalistic calm. It relieved her sense of inferiority, which familiarity had increased rather than diminished. Yet she was beginning to persuade herself, with some success, that the propriety of Lydia's manners was at least questionable. That morning Miss Carew had not scrupled to ask a man what his profession was; and this, at least, Alice congratulated herself on being too well-bred to do. She had quite lost her awe of the servants, and had begun to address them with an unconscious haughtiness and a conscious politeness that were making the word "upstart" common in the servants' hall. Bashville, the footman, had risked his popularity there by opining that Miss Goff was a fine young woman.

Bashville was in his twenty-fourth year, and stood five feet ten in his stockings. At the sign of the Green Man in the village he was known as a fluent orator and keen political debater. In the stables he was deferred to as an authority on sporting affairs, and an expert wrestler in the Cornish fashion. The women servants regarded

him with undissembled admiration. They vied with one another in inventing expressions of delight when he recited before them, which, as he had a good memory and was fond of poetry, he often did. They were proud to go out walking with him. But his attentions never gave rise to jealousy; for it was an open secret in the servants' hall that he loved his mistress. He had never said anything to that effect, and no one dared allude to it in his presence, much less rally him on his weakness; but his passion was well known for all that, and it seemed by no means so hopeless to the younger members of the domestic staff as it did to the cook, the butler, and Bashville himself. Miss Carew, who knew the value of good servants, appreciated her footman's smartness, and paid him accordingly; but she had no suspicion that she was waited on by a versatile young student of poetry and public affairs, distinguished for his gallantry, his personal prowess, his eloquence, and his influence on local politics.

It was Bashville who now entered the library with a salver, which he proffered to Alice, saying, "The gentleman is waiting in the round drawing-room, miss."

Alice took the gentleman's card, and read, "Mr. Wallace Parker."

"Oh!" she said, with vexation, glancing at Bashville as if to divine his impression of the visitor. "My cousin--the one we were speaking of just now--has come to see me."

"How fortunate!" said Lydia. "He will tell me the meaning of pug. Ask him to lunch with us."

"You would not care for him," said Alice. "He is not much used to society. I suppose I had better go and see him."

Miss Carew did not reply, being plainly at a loss to understand how there could be any doubt about the matter. Alice went to the round drawing-room, where she found Mr. Parker examining a trophy of Indian armor, and presenting a back view of a short gentleman in a spruce blue frock-coat. A new hat and pair of gloves were also visible as he stood looking upward with his hands behind him. When he turned to greet Alice he displayed a face expressive of resolute self-esteem, with eyes whose watery brightness, together with the bareness of his temples, from which the hair was worn away, suggested late hours and either very studious or very dissipated habits. He advanced confidently, pressed Alice's hand warmly for several seconds, and placed a chair for her, without noticing the marked coldness with which she received his attentions.

"I was surprised, Alice," he said, when he had seated himself opposite to her, "to learn from Aunt Emily that you had come to live here without consulting me. I--"

"Consult you!" she said, contemptuously, interrupting him. "I never heard of such a thing! Why should I consult you as to my movements?"

"Well, I should not have used the word consult, particularly to such an independent little lady as sweet Alice Goff. Still, I think you might--merely as a matter of form, you know--have informed me of the step you were taking. The relations that exist between us give me a right to your confidence."

"What relations, pray?"

"What relations!" he repeated, with reproachful emphasis.

"Yes. What relations?"

He rose, and addressed her with tender solemnity. "Alice," he began; "I have proposed to you at least six times--"

"And have I accepted you once?"

"Hear me to the end, Alice. I know that you have never explicitly accepted me; but it has always been understood that my needy circumstances were the only obstacle to our happiness. We--don't interrupt me, Alice; you little know what's coming. That obstacle no longer exists. I have been made second master at Sunbury College, with three hundred and fifty pounds a year, a house, coals, and gas. In the course of time I shall undoubtedly succeed to the head mastership--a splendid position, worth eight hundred pounds a year. You are now free from the troubles that have pressed so hard upon you since your father's death; and you can quit at once--now--instantly, your dependent position here."

"Thank you: I am very comfortable here. I am staying on a visit with Miss Carew."

Silence ensued; and he sat down slowly. Then she added, "I am exceedingly glad that you have got something good at last. It must be a great relief to your poor mother."

"I fancied, Alice--though it may have been only fancy--I fancied that YOUR mother was colder than usual in her manner this morning. I hope that the luxuries of this palatial mansion are powerless to corrupt your heart. I cannot lead you to a castle and place crowds of liveried servants at your beck and call; but I can make you mistress of an honorable English home, independent of the bounty of strangers. You can never be more than a lady, Alice."

"It is very good of you to lecture me, I am sure."

"You might be serious with me," he said, rising in ill-humor, and walking a little way down the room.

"I think the offer of a man's hand ought to be received with respect."

"Oh! I did not quite understand. I thought we agreed that you are not to make me that offer every time we meet."

"It was equally understood that the subject was only deferred until I should be in a position to resume it without binding you to a long engagement. That time has come now; and I expect a favorable answer at last. I am entitled to one, considering how patiently I have waited for it."

"For my part, Wallace, I must say I do not think it wise for you to think of marrying with only three hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"With a house: remember that; and coals and gas! You are becoming very prudent, now that you live with Miss Whatshername here. I fear you no longer love me, Alice."

"I never said I loved you at any time."

"Pshaw! You never said so, perhaps; but you always gave me to understand that--"

"I did nothing of the sort, Wallace; and I won't have you say so."

"In short," he retorted, bitterly, "you think you will pick up some swell here who will be a better bargain than I am."

"Wallace! How dare you?"

"You hurt my feelings, Alice, and I speak out. I know how to behave myself quite as well as those who have

the entree here; but when my entire happiness is at stake I do not stand on punctilio. Therefore, I insist on a straightforward answer to my fair, honorable proposal."

"Wallace," said Alice, with dignity; "I will not be forced into giving an answer against my will. I regard you as a cousin."

"I do not wish to be regarded as a cousin. Have I ever regarded you as a cousin?"

"And do you suppose, Wallace, that I should permit you to call me by my Christian name, and be as familiar as we have always been together, if you were not my cousin? If so, you must have a very strange opinion of me."

"I did not think that luxury could so corrupt--"

"You said that before," said Alice, pettishly. "Do not keep repeating the same thing over and over; you know it is one of your bad habits. Will you stay to lunch? Miss Carew told me to ask you."

"Indeed! Miss Carew is very kind. Please inform her that I am deeply honored, and that I feel quite disturbed at being unable to accept her patronage."

Alice poised her head disdainfully. "No doubt it amuses you to make yourself ridiculous," she said; "but I must say I do not see any occasion for it."

"I am sorry that my behavior is not sufficiently good for you. You never found any cause to complain of it when our surroundings were less aristocratic. I am quite ashamed of taking so much of your valuable time. GOOD-morning."

"Good-morning. But I do not see why you are in such a rage."

"I am not in a rage. I am only grieved to find that you are corrupted by luxury. I thought your principles were higher. Good-morning, Miss Goff. I shall not have the pleasure of seeing you again in this very choice mansion."

"Are you really going, Wallace?" said Alice, rising.

"Yes. Why should I stay?"

She rang the bell, greatly disconcerting him; for he had expected her to detain him and make advances for a reconciliation. Before they could exchange more words, Bashville entered.

"Good-bye," said Alice, politely.

"Good-bye," he replied, through his teeth. He walked loftily out, passing Bashville with marked scorn.

He had left the house, and was descending the terrace steps, when he was overtaken by the footman, who said, civilly,

"Beg your pardon, sir. You've forgotten this, I think." And he handed him a walking-stick.

Parker's first idea was that his stick had attracted the man's attention by the poor figure it made in the castle hall, and that Bashville was requesting him, with covert superciliousness, to remove his property. On second thoughts, his self-esteem rejected this suspicion as too humiliating; but he resolved to show Bashville that he

had a gentleman to deal with. So he took the stick, and instead of thanking Bashville, handed him five shillings.

Bashville smiled and shook his head. "Oh, no, sir," he said, "thank you all the same! Those are not my views."

"The more fool you," said Parker, pocketing the coins, and turning away.

Bashville's countenance changed. "Come, come, sir," he said, following Parker to the foot of the steps, "fair words deserve fair words. I am no more a fool than you are. A gentleman should know his place as well as a servant."

"Oh, go to the devil," muttered Parker, turning very red and hurrying away.

"If you weren't my mistress's guest," said Bashville, looking menacingly after him, "I'd send you to bed for a week for sending me to the devil."