

CHAPTER XII

When the autumn set in, Alice was in Scotland learning to shoot; and Lydia was at Wiltstoken, preparing her father's letters and memoirs for publication. She did not write at the castle, all the rooms in which were either domed, vaulted, gilded, galleried, three-sided, six-sided, anything except four-sided, or in some way suggestive of the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments," and out of keeping with the associations of her father's life. In her search for a congruous room to work in, the idea of causing a pavilion to be erected in the elm vista occurred to her. But she had no mind to be disturbed just then by the presence of a troop of stone-masons, slaters, and carpenters, nor any time to lose in waiting for the end of their operations. So she had the Warren Lodge cleansed and lime washed, and the kitchen transformed into a comfortable library, where, as she sat facing the door at her writing-table, in the centre of the room, she could see the elm vista through one window and through another a tract of wood and meadow land intersected by the high-road and by a canal, beyond which the prospect ended in a distant green slope used as a sheep run. The other apartments were used by a couple of maid-servants, who kept the place well swept and dusted, prepared Miss Carew's lunch, answered her bell, and went on her errands to the castle; and, failing any of these employments, sat outside in the sun, reading novels. When Lydia had worked in this retreat daily for two months her mind became so full of the old life with her father that the interruptions of the servants often recalled her to the present with a shock. On the twelfth of August she was bewildered for a moment when Phoebe, one of the maids, entered and said,

"If you please, miss, Bashville is wishful to know can he speak to you a moment?"

Permission being given, Bashville entered. Since his wrestle with Cashel he had never quite recovered his former imperturbability. His manner and speech were as smooth and respectful as before, but his countenance was no longer steadfast; he was on bad terms with the butler because he had been reproved by him for blushing. On this occasion he came to beg leave to absent himself during the afternoon. He seldom asked favors of this kind, and was of course never refused.

"The road is quite thronged to-day," she observed, as he thanked her. "Do you know why?"

"No, madam," said Bashville, and blushed.

"People begin to shoot on the twelfth," she said; "but I suppose it cannot have anything to do with that. Is there a race, or a fair, or any such thing in the neighborhood?"

"Not that I am aware of, madam."

Lydia dipped her pen in the ink and thought no more of the subject. Bashville returned to the castle, attired himself like a country gentleman of sporting tastes, and went out to enjoy his holiday.

The forenoon passed away peacefully. There was no sound in the Warren Lodge except the scratching of Lydia's pen, the ticking of her favorite skeleton clock, an occasional clatter of crockery from the kitchen, and the voices of the birds and maids without. The hour for lunch approached, and Lydia became a little restless. She interrupted her work to look at the clock, and brushed a speck of dust from its dial with the feather of her quill. Then she looked absently through the window along the elm vista, where she had once seen, as she had thought, a sylvan god. This time she saw a less romantic object--a policeman. She looked again, incredulously, there he was still, a black-bearded, helmeted man, making a dark blot in the green perspective, and surveying the landscape cautiously. Lydia rang the bell, and bade Phoebe ask the man what he wanted.

The girl soon returned out of breath, with the news that there were a dozen more constables hiding in the road, and that the one she had spoken to had given no account of himself, but had asked her how many gates there were to the park; whether they were always locked, and whether she had seen many people about. She felt sure that a murder had been committed somewhere. Lydia shrugged her shoulders, and ordered luncheon,

during which Phoebe gazed eagerly through the window, and left her mistress to wait on herself.

"Phoebe," said Lydia, when the dishes were removed; "you may go to the gate lodge, and ask them there what the policemen want. But do not go any further. Stay. Has Ellen gone to the castle with the things?"

Phoebe reluctantly admitted that Ellen had.

"Well, you need not wait for her to return; but come back as quickly as you can, in case I should want anybody."

"Directly, miss," said Phoebe, vanishing.

Lydia, left alone, resumed her work leisurely, occasionally pausing to gaze at the distant woodland, and note with transient curiosity a flock of sheep on the slope, or a flight of birds above the tree-tops. Something more startling occurred presently. A man, apparently half-naked, and carrying a black object under his arm, darted through a remote glade with the swiftness of a stag, and disappeared. Lydia concluded that he had been disturbed while bathing in the canal, and had taken flight with his wardrobe under his arm. She laughed at the idea, turned to her manuscript again, and wrote on. Suddenly there was a rustle and a swift footstep without. Then the latch was violently jerked up, and Cashel Byron rushed in as far as the threshold, where he stood, stupefied at the presence of Lydia, and the change in the appearance of the room.

He was himself remarkably changed. He was dressed in a pea-jacket, which evidently did not belong to him, for it hardly reached his middle, and the sleeves were so short that his forearms were half bare, showing that he wore nothing beneath this borrowed garment. Below it he had on white knee-breeches, with green stains of bruised grass on them. The breeches were made with a broad ilap in front, under which, and passing round his waist, was a scarf of crimson silk. From his knees to his socks, the edges of which had fallen over his laced boots, his legs were visible, naked, and muscular. On his face was a mask of sweat, dust, and blood, partly rubbed away in places by a sponge, the borders of its passage marked by black streaks. Underneath his left eye was a mound of bluish flesh nearly as large as a walnut. The jaw below it, and the opposite cheek, were severely bruised, and his lip was cut through at one corner. He had no hat; his close-cropped hair was disordered, and his ears were as though they had been rubbed with coarse sand-paper.

Lydia looked at him for some seconds, and he at her, speechless. Then she tried to speak, failed, and sunk into her chair.

"I didn't know there was any one here," he said, in a hoarse, panting whisper. "The police are after me. I have fought for an hour, and run over a mile, and I'm dead beat--I can go no farther. Let me hide in the back room, and tell them you haven't seen any one, will you?"

"What have you done?" she said, conquering her weakness with an effort, and standing up.

"Nothing," he replied, groaning occasionally as he recovered breath. "Business, that's all."

"Why are the police pursuing you? Why are you in such a dreadful condition?"

Cashel seemed alarmed at this. There was a mirror in the lid of a paper-case on the table. He took it up and looked at himself anxiously, but was at once relieved by what he saw. "I'm all right," he said. "I'm not marked. That mouse"--he pointed gayly to the lump under his eye--"will run away to-morrow. I am pretty tidy, considering. But it's bellows to mend with me at present. Whoosh! My heart is as big as a bullock's after that run."

"You ask me to shelter you," said Lydia, sternly. "What have you done? Have you committed murder?"

"No!" exclaimed Cashel, trying to open his eyes widely in his astonishment, but only succeeding with one, as the other was gradually closing. "I tell you I have been fighting; and it's illegal. You don't want to see me in prison, do you? Confound him," he added, reverting to her question with sudden wrath; "a steam-hammer wouldn't kill him. You might as well hit a sack of nails. And all my money, my time, my training, and my day's trouble gone for nothing! It's enough to make a man cry."

"Go," said Lydia, with uncontrollable disgust. "And do not let me see which way you go. How dare you come to me?"

The sponge-marks on Cashel's face grew whiter, and he began, to pant heavily again. "Very well," he said. "I'll go. There isn't a boy in your stables that would give me up like that."

As he spoke, he opened the door; but he involuntarily shut it again immediately. Lydia looked through the window, and saw a crowd of men, police and others, hurrying along the elm vista. Cashel cast a glance round, half piteous, half desperate, like a hunted animal. Lydia could not resist it. "Quick!" she cried, opening one of the inner doors. "Go in there, and keep quiet--if you can." And, as he sulkily hesitated a moment, she stamped vehemently. He slunk in submissively. She shut the door and resumed her place at the writing-table, her heart beating with a kind of excitement she had not felt since, in her early childhood, she had kept guilty secrets from her nurse.

There was a tramping without, and a sound of voices. Then two peremptory raps at the door.

"Come in," said Lydia, more composedly than she was aware of. The permission was not waited for. Before she ceased speaking a policeman opened the door and looked quickly round the room. He seemed rather taken aback by what he saw, and finally touched his helmet to signify respect for Lydia. He was about to speak, when Phoebe, flushed with running, pushed past him, put her hand on the door, and pertly asked what he wanted.

"Come away from the door, Phoebe," said Lydia. "Wait here with me until I give you leave to go," she added, as the girl moved towards the inner door. "Now," she said, turning courteously to the policeman, "what is the matter?"

"I ask your pardon, mum," said the constable, agreeably. "Did you happen to see any one pass hereabouts lately?"

"Do you mean a man only partly dressed, and carrying a black coat?" said Lydia.

"That's him, miss," said the policeman, greatly interested. "Which way did he go?"

"I will show you where I saw him," said Lydia, quietly rising and going with the man to the door, outside which she found a crowd of rustics, and five policemen, having in custody two men, one of whom was Mellish (without a coat), and the other a hook-nosed man, whose like Lydia had seen often on race-courses. She pointed out the glade across which she had seen Cashel run, and felt as if the guilt of the deception she was practising was wrenching some fibre in her heart from its natural order. But she spoke with apparent self-possession, and no shade of suspicion fell on the minds of the police.

Several peasants now came forward, each professing to know exactly whither Cashel had been making when he crossed the glade. While they were disputing, many persons resembling the hook-nosed captive in general appearance sneaked into the crowd and regarded the police with furtive hostility. Soon after, a second detachment of police came up, with another prisoner and another crowd, among whom was Bashville.

"Better go in, mum," said the policeman who had spoken to Lydia first. "We must keep together, being so

few, and he ain't fit for you to look at."

But Lydia had looked already, and had guessed that the last prisoner was Paradise, although his countenance was damaged beyond recognition. His costume was like that of Cashel, except that he was girt with a blue handkerchief with white spots, and his shoulders were wrapped in a blanket, through one of the folds of which his naked ribs could be seen, tinged with every hue that a bad bruise can assume. A shocking spectacle appeared where his face had formerly been. A crease and a hole in the midst of a cluster of lumps of raw flesh indicated the presence of an eye and a mouth; the rest of his features were indiscernible. He could still see a little, for he moved his puffed and lacerated hand to arrange his blanket, and demanded hoarsely, and with greatly impeded articulation, whether the lady would stand a dram to a poor fighting man wot had done his best for his backers. On this some one produced a flask, and Mellish volunteered, provided he were released for a moment, to get the contents down Paradise's throat. As soon as the brandy had passed his swollen lips he made a few preliminary sounds, and then shouted,

"He sent for the coppers because he couldn't stand another round. I am ready to go on."

The policemen bade him hold his tongue, closed round him, and hid him from Lydia, who, without showing the mingled pity and loathing with which his condition inspired her, told them to bring him to the castle, and have him attended to there. She added that the whole party could obtain refreshment at the same time. The sergeant, who was very tired and thirsty, wavered in his resolution to continue the pursuit. Lydia, as usual, treated the matter as settled.

"Bashville," she said, "will you please show them the way, and see that they are satisfied."

"Some thief has stole my coat," said Mellish, sullenly, to Bashville. "If you'll lend me one, governor, and these blessed policemen will be so kind as not to tear it off my back, I'll send it down to you in a day or two. I'm a respectable man, and have been her ladyship's tenant here."

"Your pal wants it worse than you," said the sergeant. "If there was an old coachman's cape or anything to put over him, I would see it returned safe. I don't want to bring him round the country in a blanket, like a wild Injin."

"I have a cloak inside," said Bashville. "I'll get it for you." And before Lydia could devise a pretext for stopping him, he went out, and she heard him reentering the lodge by the back door. It seemed to her that a silence fell on the crowd, as if her deceit were already discovered. Then Mellish, who had been waiting for an opportunity to protest against the last remark of the policeman, said, angrily,

"Who are you calling my pal? I hope I may be struck dead for a liar if ever I set my eyes on him in my life before."

Lydia looked at him as a martyr might look at a wretch to whom she was to be chained. He was doing as she had done--lying. Then Bashville, having passed through the other rooms, came into the library by the inner door, with an old livery cloak on his arm.

"Put that on him," he said, "and come along to the castle with me. You can see the roads for five miles round from the south tower, and recognize every man on them, through the big telescope. By your leave, madam, I think Phoebe had better come with us to help."

"Certainly," said Lydia, looking steadfastly at him.

"I'll get clothes at the castle for the man that wants them," he added, trying to return her gaze, but failing with a blush. "Now boys. Come along."

"I thank your ladyship," said the sergeant. "We have had a hard morning of it, and we can do no more at present than drink your health." He touched his helmet again, and Lydia bowed to him. "Keep close together, men," he shouted, as the crowd moved off with Bashville.

"Ah," sneered Mellish, "keep close together like the geese do. Things has come to a pretty pass when an Englishman is run in for stopping when he sees a crowd."

"All right," said the sergeant. "I have got that bundle of colored handkerchiefs you were selling; and I'll find the other man before you're a day older. It's a pity, seeing how you've behaved so well and haven't resisted us, that you won't drop a hint of where those ropes and stakes are hid. I might have a good word at the sessions for any one who would put me in the way of finding them."

"Ropes and stakes! Fiddlesticks and grandmothers! There weren't no ropes and stakes. It was only a turn-up--that is, if there was any fighting at all. *I* didn't see none; but I s'pose you did. But then you're clever, and I'm not."

By this time the last straggler of the party had disappeared from Lydia, who had watched their retreat from the door of the Warren Lodge. When she turned to go in she saw Cashel cautiously entering from the room in which he had lain concealed. His excitement had passed off; he looked cold and anxious, as if a reaction were setting in.

"Are they all gone?" he said. "That servant of yours is a good sort. He has promised to bring me some clothes. As for you, you're better than--What's the matter? Where are you going to?"

Lydia had put on her hat, and was swiftly wrapping herself in a shawl. Wreaths of rosy color were chasing each other through her cheeks; and her eyes and nostrils, usually so tranquil, were dilated.

"Won't you speak to me?" he said, irresolutely.

"Just this," she replied, with passion. "Let me never see you again. The very foundations of my life are loosened: I have told a lie. I have made my servant--an honorable man--an accomplice in a lie. We are worse than you; for even your wild-beast's handiwork is a less evil than the bringing of a falsehood into the world. This is what has come to me out of our acquaintance. I have given you a hiding-place. Keep it. I will never enter it again."

Cashel, appalled, shrank back with an expression such as a child wears when, in trying to steal sweet-meats from a high shelf, it pulls the whole cupboard down about its ears. He neither spoke nor stirred as she left the lodge.

Finding herself presently at the castle, she went to her boudoir, where she found her maid, the French lady, from whose indignant description of the proceedings below she gathered that the policemen were being regaled with bread and cheese, and beer; and that the attendance of a surgeon had been dispensed with, Paradise's wounds having been dressed skilfully by Mellish. Lydia bade her send Bashville to the Warren Lodge to see that there were no strangers loitering about it, and ordered that none of the female servants should return there until he came back. Then she sat down and tried not to think. But she could not help thinking; so she submitted and tried to think the late catastrophe out. An idea that she had disjoined the whole framework of things by creating a false belief filled her imagination. The one conviction that she had brought out of her reading, observing, reflecting, and living was that the concealment of a truth, with its resultant false beliefs, must produce mischief, even though the beginning of that mischief might be as inconceivable as the end. She made no distinction between the subtlest philosophical misconception and the vulgarest lie. The evil of Cashel's capture was measurable, the evil of a lie beyond all measure. She felt none the less assured of that evil because she could not foresee one bad consequence likely to ensue from what she had done. Her

misgivings pressed heavily upon her; for her father, a determined sceptic, had taught her his own views, and she was, therefore, destitute of the consolations which religion has for the wrongdoer. It was plainly her duty to send for the policeman and clear up the deception she had practised on him. But this she could not do. Her will, in spite of her reason, acted in the opposite direction. And in this paralysis of her moral power she saw the evil of the lie beginning. She had given it birth, and nature would not permit her to strangle the monster.

At last her maid returned and informed her that the canaille had gone away. When she was again alone, she rose and walked slowly to and fro through the room, forgetting the lapse of time in the restless activity of her mind, until she was again interrupted, this time by Bashville.

"Well?"

He was daunted by her tone; for he had never before heard her speak haughtily to a servant. He did not understand that he had changed subjectively, and was now her accomplice.

"He's given himself up."

"What do you mean?" she said, with sudden dismay.

"Byron, madam. I brought some clothes to the lodge for him, but when I got there he was gone. I went round to the gates in search of him, and found him in the hands of the police. They told me he'd just given himself up. He wouldn't give any account of himself; and he looked--well, sullen and beaten down like."

"What will they do with him?" she asked, turning quite pale.

"A man got six weeks' hard labor, last month, for the same offence. Most probably that's what he'll get. And very little for what's he's done, as you'd say if you saw him doing it, madam."

"Then," said Lydia, sternly, "it was to see this"--she shrank from naming it--"this fight, that you asked my permission to go out!"

"Yes, madam, it was," said Bashville, with some bitterness. "I recognized Lord Worthington and plenty more noblemen and gentlemen there."

Lydia was about to reply sharply; but she checked herself; and her usual tranquil manner came back as she said, "That is no reason why you should have been there."

Bashville's color began to waver, and his voice to need increased control. "It's in human nature to go to such a thing once," he said; "but once is enough, at least for me. You'll excuse my mentioning it, madam; but what with Lord Worthington and the rest of Byron's backers screaming oaths and abuse at the other man, and the opposite party doing the same to Byron--well, I may not be a gentleman; but I hope I can conduct myself like a man, even when I'm losing money."

"Then do not go to such an exhibition again, Bashville. I must not dictate to you what your amusements shall be; but I do not think you are likely to benefit yourself by copying Lord Worthington's tastes."

"I copy no lord's tastes," said Bashville, reddening. "You hid the man that was fighting, Miss Carew. Why do you look down on the man that was only a bystander?"

Lydia's color rose, too. Her first impulse was to treat this outburst as rebellion against her authority, and crush it. But her sense of justice withheld her.

"Would you have had me betray a fugitive who took refuge in my house, Bashville? YOU did not betray him."

"No," said Bashville, his expression subdued to one of rueful pride. "When I am beaten by a better man, I have courage enough to get out of his way and take no mean advantage of him."

Lydia, not understanding, looked inquiringly at him. He made a gesture as if throwing something from him, and continued recklessly,

"But one way I'm as good as he, and better. A footman is held more respectable than a prize-fighter. He's told you that he's in love with you; and if it is to be my last word, I'll tell you that the ribbon round your neck is more to me than your whole body and soul is to him or his like. When he took an unfair advantage of me, and pretended to be a gentleman, I told Mr. Lucian of him, and showed him up for what he was. But when I found him to-day hiding in the pantry at the Lodge, I took no advantage of him, though I knew well that if he'd been no more to you than any other man of his sort, you'd never have hid him. You know best why he gave himself up to the police after your seeing his day's work. But I will leave him to his luck. He is the best man: let the best man win. I am sorry," added Bashville, recovering his ordinary suave manner with an effort, "to inconvenience you by a short notice, but I should take it as a particular favor if I might go this evening."

"You had better," said Lydia, rising quite calmly, and keeping resolutely away from her the strange emotional result of being astonished, outraged, and loved at one unlooked-for stroke. "It is not advisable that you should stay after what you have just--"

"I knew that when I said it," interposed Bashville hastily and doggedly.

"In going away you will be taking precisely the course that would be adopted by any gentleman who had spoken to the same effect. I am not offended by your declaration: I recognize your right to make it. If you need my testimony to further your future arrangements, I shall be happy to say that I believe you to be a man of honor."

Bashville bowed, and said in a low voice, very nervously, that he had no intention of going into service again, but that he should always be proud of her good opinion.

"You are fitted for better things," she said. "If you embark in any enterprise requiring larger means than you possess, I will be your security. I thank you for your invariable courtesy to me in the discharge of your duties. Good-bye."

She bowed to him and left the room. Bashville, awestruck, returned her salutation as best he could, and stood motionless after she disappeared; his mind advancing on tiptoe to grasp what had just passed. His chief sensation was one of relief. He no longer dared to fancy himself in love with such a woman. Her sudden consideration for him as a suitor overwhelmed him with a sense of his unfitness for such a part. He saw himself as a very young, very humble, and very ignorant man, whose head had been turned by a pleasant place and a kind mistress. Wakened from his dream, he stole away to pack his trunk, and to consider how best to account to his fellow-servants for his departure.