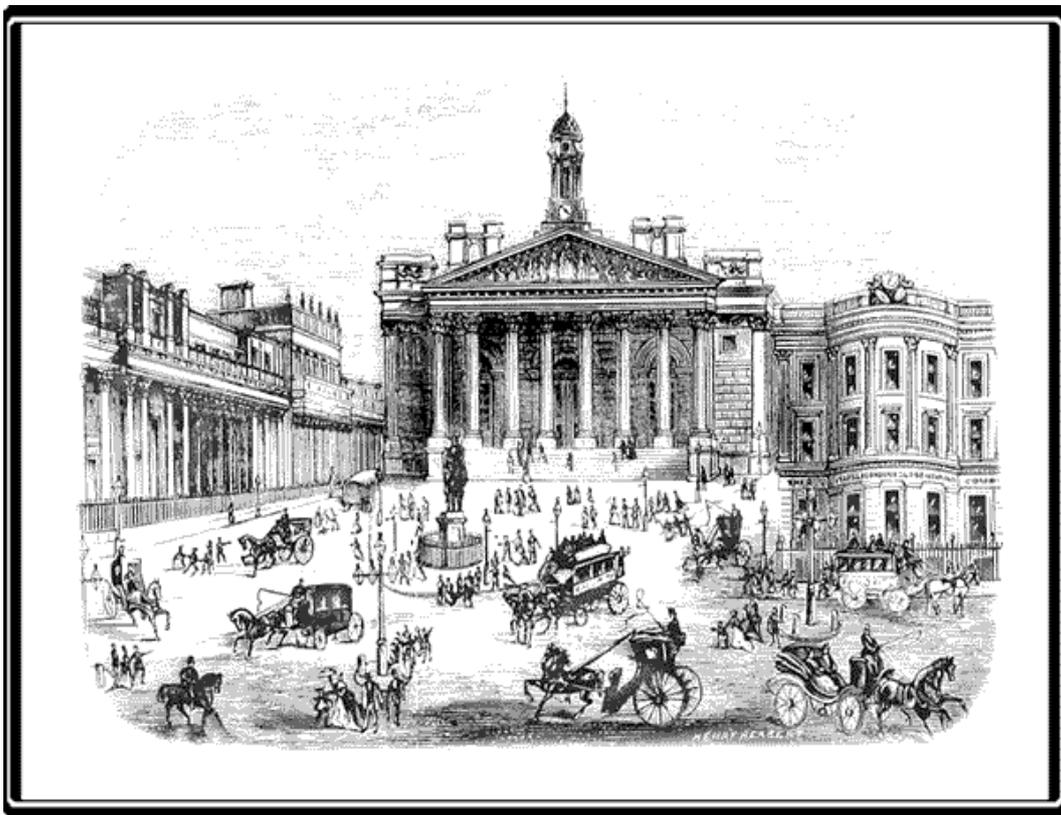


Anthony Trollope's
The Way We Live Now
Abridged



Emma Laybourn (Editor)

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Table of Contents

To return to the contents page at any time, click on the ↑ symbol at the start of each chapter.

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1 Three Editors](#)

[Chapter 2 The Carbury Family](#)

[Chapter 3 The Beargarden](#)

[Chapter 4 Madame Melmotte's Ball](#)

[Chapter 5 After the Ball](#)

[Chapter 6 Roger Carbury and Paul Montague](#)

[Chapter 7 Mentor](#)

[Chapter 8 Love-sick](#)

[Chapter 9 The Great Railway to Veracruz](#)

[Chapter 10 Mr. Fisker's Success](#)

[Chapter 11 Lady Carbury at Home](#)

[Chapter 12 Sir Felix in his Mother's House](#)

[Chapter 13 The Longstaffes](#)

[Chapter 14 Carbury Manor](#)

[Chapter 15 "You Should Remember that I am his Mother"](#)

[Chapter 16 The Bishop and the Priest](#)

[Chapter 17 Marie Melmotte Hears a Love Tale](#)

[Chapter 18 Ruby Ruggles Hears a Love Tale](#)

[Chapter 19 Hetta Carbury Hears a Love Tale](#)

[Chapter 20 Lady Pomona's Dinner Party](#)

[Chapter 21 Everybody Goes to Them](#)

[Chapter 22 Lord Nidderdale's Morality](#)

[Chapter 23 "Yes – I'm a Baronet"](#)

[Chapter 24 Miles Grendall's Triumph](#)

[Chapter 25 In Grosvenor Square](#)

[Chapter 26 Mrs. Hurtle](#)

[Chapter 27 Mrs. Hurtle Goes to the Play](#)

[Chapter 28 Dolly Longstaffe Goes into the City](#)

[Chapter 29 Miss Melmotte's Courage](#)

[Chapter 30 Mr. Melmotte's Promise](#)

[Chapter 31 Mr. Broune has Made up his Mind](#)

[Chapter 32 Lady Monogram](#)

[Chapter 33 John Crumb](#)

[Chapter 34 Ruby Ruggles Obeys her Grandfather](#)

[Chapter 35 Melmotte's Glory](#)

[Chapter 36 Mr Broune's Perils](#)

[Chapter 37 The Board-room](#)

[Chapter 38 Paul Montague's Troubles](#)

[Chapter 39 "I Do Love Him"](#)

[Chapter 40 "Unanimity is the Very Soul of These Things"](#)

[Chapter 41 All Prepared](#)

[Chapter 42 "Can You be Ready in Ten Minutes?"](#)

[Chapter 43 The City Road](#)

[Chapter 44 The Coming Election](#)

[Chapter 45 Mr. Melmotte is Pressed for Time](#)
[Chapter 46 Roger Carbury and his Two Friends](#)
[Chapter 47 Mrs. Hurtle at Lowestoft](#)
[Chapter 48 Ruby a Prisoner](#)
[Chapter 49 Sir Felix Makes Himself Ready](#)
[Chapter 50 The Journey to Liverpool](#)
[Chapter 51 Which Shall It Be?](#)
[Chapter 52 The Results of Love and Wine](#)
[Chapter 53 A Day in the City](#)
[Chapter 54 The India Office](#)
[Chapter 55 Clerical Charities](#)
[Chapter 56 Father Barham Visits London](#)
[Chapter 57 Lord Nidderdale Tries his Hand Again](#)
[Chapter 58 Mr. Squercum is Employed](#)
[Chapter 59 The Dinner](#)
[Chapter 60 Miss Longstaffe's Lover](#)
[Chapter 61 Lady Monogram Prepares for the Party](#)
[Chapter 62 The Party](#)
[Chapter 63 Mr. Melmotte on the Day of the Election](#)
[Chapter 64 The Election](#)
[Chapter 65 Miss Longstaffe Writes Home](#)
[Chapter 66 "So Shall Be my Enmity"](#)
[Chapter 67 Sir Felix Protects his Sister](#)
[Chapter 68 Miss Melmotte Declares her Purpose](#)
[Chapter 69 Melmotte in Parliament](#)
[Chapter 70 Sir Felix Meddles with Many Matters](#)
[Chapter 71 John Crumb Falls into Trouble](#)
[Chapter 72 "Ask Himself"](#)
[Chapter 73 Marie's Fortune](#)
[Chapter 74 Melmotte Makes a Friend](#)
[Chapter 75 In Bruton Street](#)
[Chapter 76 Hetta and her Lover](#)
[Chapter 77 Another Scene in Bruton Street](#)
[Chapter 78 Miss Longstaffe Again at Caversham](#)
[Chapter 79 The Brehgert Correspondence](#)
[Chapter 80 Ruby Prepares for Service](#)
[Chapter 81 Mr. Cohenlupe Leaves London](#)
[Chapter 82 Marie's Perseverance](#)
[Chapter 83 Melmotte Again at the House](#)
[Chapter 84 Paul Montague's Vindication](#)
[Chapter 85 Breakfast in Berkeley Square](#)
[Chapter 86 The Meeting in Bruton Street](#)
[Chapter 87 Down at Carbury](#)
[Chapter 88 The Inquest](#)
[Chapter 89 "The Wheel of Fortune"](#)
[Chapter 90 Hetta's Sorrow](#)
[Chapter 91 The Rivals](#)
[Chapter 92 Hamilton K. Fisker Again](#)
[Chapter 93 A True Lover](#)

[Chapter 94 John Crumb's Victory](#)

[Chapter 95 The Longstaffe Marriages](#)

[Chapter 96 Where "The Wild Asses Quench Their Thirst"](#)

[Chapter 97 Mrs. Hurtle's Fate](#)

[Chapter 98 Marie Melmotte's Fate](#)

[Chapter 99 Lady Carbury and Mr. Broune](#)

[Chapter 100 Down in Suffolk](#)

[Other books in this series](#)

Introduction

Anthony Trollope was born in London in 1815. His father was an unsuccessful lawyer, while his mother Frances was a prolific and popular author of novels and travel books. Anthony was bullied and unhappy at school; he did not go to university, but in 1834 became a clerk in the Post Office. In 1841, after being transferred to Ireland, he began to climb in his profession. He married in 1844 and then travelled widely in the course of his career.

At this period Trollope began to write novels about contemporary life, setting aside time for them in the mornings before going to work. His first novel appeared in 1847, and was followed by others with an Irish setting; but he did not become successful until *The Warden* was published in 1855. This was the first of six books set in the fictional county of Barsetshire and its cathedral town. In the 1860s Trollope began to write the set of political novels known as the Palliser series. He was fascinated by the workings of Parliament and in 1868, after resigning from the Post Office, stood as a Liberal candidate. However, he failed to be elected. He continued to write, at times bringing out two or three books a year. By the time of his death in 1882 he had produced forty-seven novels, as well as an autobiography and other non-fiction.

Trollope's novels generally dealt with the intertwined lives of a variety of people – from the aristocracy to the working poor – in both rural and city settings. His novels, combining drama and humour, are particularly admired for their strength of characterisation: Trollope manages to involve his readers in even the most villainous or dissolute characters.

The Way We Live Now, first published in serial form in 1874 -75, is a long and multi-stranded novel which is now regarded as one of the greatest of Trollope's works. Its chief theme is the pursuit of money; from the ambitious financier Melmotte, to the various parents trying to marry off their sons and daughters, money is often the driving force for their actions. Politics also figures in Melmotte's ambitions – though not through love of his country, but purely as a means of rising in society. Those in the book who wish to follow their hearts, like Melmotte's daughter Marie, face an uphill battle.

As with much of Trollope's work, the greatest strength of *The Way We Live Now* lies in his insight into character and motive. However, the book's chief weakness is its frequently long-winded style. Perhaps because of the manner of its first publication, in twenty monthly parts, it contains much in the way of repetition and reiteration. There can also have been little incentive for Trollope to condense his writing when he was effectively being paid by the inch. The result was what Henry James (talking of Victorian novels in general) called a "large loose baggy monster", around a thousand pages long.

This abridgement has removed much of the repetition and redundancy in the novel. Although Trollope writes straightforward prose, some sentences have been simplified further, or paraphrased to make the meaning clearer; and new paragraph breaks have been introduced. In all, the book has been shortened to about 60 per cent of its original length.

Readers studying the book for academic purposes should not rely on this version. The full text is readily available online at Project Gutenberg and elsewhere.



Chapter 1 Three Editors

Let me introduce Lady Carbury, as she sits at her writing-table in her house in Welbeck Street. Lady Carbury spent many hours at her desk, writing letters, and much else besides. She spoke of herself as a woman devoted to Literature, always spelling the word with a big L. The nature of her devotion may be learned by viewing the three letters she had written this morning.

Here is Letter No. 1:

Dear Friend,

You shall have the early copies of my two new volumes tomorrow, so that you may, if you wish, give a poor struggler like myself a lift in your next week's paper. Do give a poor struggler a lift. You and I have so much in common, and I hope that we are really friends! Aid from you would help me more than from any other quarter; and praise from you would gratify me more than any other praise.

I almost think you will like my "Criminal Queens." The sketch of Semiramis is spirited, though I had to twist it about a little to bring her in guilty. Cleopatra I have taken from Shakespeare. I have done the best I could with Joanna, though in our days she would simply have gone to Broadmoor. I hope you will not think that I have been too strong in my depiction of Henry VIII and his unfortunate Catherine Howard. I don't care a bit about Anne Boleyn; and I trust you go with me in my view of the Queen of Scots. Guilty! guilty always! Adultery, murder, treason, and all the rest of it. Marie Antoinette I have accused lovingly. I trust the British public will not be angry because I do not whitewash Caroline.

But I must not take up your time. Dear man, as you are great, be merciful on my book. Or rather, as you are a friend, be loving.

Yours gratefully and faithfully,
Matilda Carbury.

P.S. I have tried hard to be proper; but when girls read everything, why should not an old woman write anything?

This letter was addressed to Nicholas Broune, the editor of the *Morning Breakfast Table*, a newspaper of high character, considered to be the most important of the three daily papers. Mr. Broune was a powerful man – and fond of ladies.

Lady Carbury in her letter called herself an old woman, but she was satisfied that no one else regarded her as old. She was forty-three, but still beautiful. And she used her beauty calculatingly, to increase her influence, and assist her in earning her bread. She did not fall in love, she did not flirt, she did not commit herself; but she smiled and whispered, and looked into men's eyes as though there might be some mysterious bond between her and them. This was to induce a critic to be kind, or an editor to be lenient, so that she would be well paid for indifferent writing.

Among her literary friends, Mr. Broune was the one she most trusted; and Mr. Broune was fond of handsome women. It may be as well to describe a scene which had taken place between them a month previously. She had wanted him to take a series of articles for the *Morning Breakfast Table*, and to pay her for them at rate No. 1. However, she suspected that he doubted their merit, and knew that without special favour, she could not hope for payment above rate No. 2, or even No. 3. So she had looked into his eyes, and had left her soft hand for a moment in his.

A man in such circumstances is so often awkward! Mr. Broune, in a moment of enthusiasm, had put his arm round Lady Carbury's waist and kissed her. Lady Carbury was not angry, for no harm had been done, if only the dear susceptible old donkey could be made to understand that that wasn't the way to go on!

Without a flutter or a blush, she escaped from his arm, and then made an excellent little speech.

"Mr. Broune, how foolish, how mistaken! Surely you do not wish to put an end to the friendship between us!"

"End our friendship, Lady Carbury! Oh, no."

"Then why risk it by such an act? Think of my son and my daughter – both grown up. Think of the past troubles of my life – so much suffered and so little deserved. Think of my name, so often slandered but never disgraced! Say that you are sorry, and it shall be forgotten."

When a man has kissed a woman it goes against the grain with him to say the very next moment that he is sorry. Mr. Broune could not do this, and perhaps Lady Carbury did not quite expect it.

"You know that for worlds I would not offend you," he said. This sufficed. Lady Carbury again looked into his eyes, and he promised that the articles should be printed – with generous payment. Lady Carbury regarded this interview as quite successful. She would have preferred not to have been kissed; but what did it matter?

With Mr. Broune the affair was more serious.

"Confound all women," he said to himself as he left the house. He almost thought that Lady Carbury had intended him to kiss her again, and he was almost angry with himself for not doing so. He had seen her three or four times since, but had not repeated the offence.

We will now go on to the other letters, which were addressed to the editors of other newspapers. The second was written to Mr. Booker, of the *Literary Chronicle*. Mr. Booker was a hard-working professor of literature, now sixty, with a large family of daughters. He had five hundred a year for editing the *Literary Chronicle*, and kept his head above water; he held his own in literary circles. But he was driven by the stress of circumstances to take such good things as came in his way, and it must be confessed that literary scruple had long departed from his mind. Letter No. 2 was as follows;—

Dear Mr. Booker,

I have told my publishers Leadham and Loiter to send you an early copy of my "Criminal Queens." I have already settled with my friend Mr. Broune that I am to review your "New Tale of a Tub" in the *Breakfast Table*. Indeed, I am busy with it now, and am taking great pains with it. If there is anything you wish to have specially said about your view of the Protestantism of the time, let me know.

I should like you to say a word as to the accuracy of my historical details, which I know you can safely do. Don't put it off, as the sale does so much depend on early notices. I am only getting a royalty after the first four hundred are sold.

Yours sincerely,
Matilda Carbury.

There was nothing in this which shocked Mr. Booker. He laughed inwardly, as he thought of Lady Carbury dealing with his views of Protestantism – and as he thought also of the numerous historical errors into which that clever lady must fall in writing about matters of which he believed her to know nothing. But he was quite aware that a favourable notice in the *Breakfast Table* of his very thoughtful work, the “New Tale of a Tub,” would help him, and he would have no compunction about repaying her by praising her book in his newspaper. He would probably not say that the book was accurate, but he would declare that it was delightful reading, and would make its way into all drawing-rooms.

He was adept at this sort of work. He could almost do it without reading the book. And yet he was an honest man.

Then there was letter No. 3, to Mr. Ferdinand Alf. Mr. Alf managed the *Evening Pulpit*, which aimed not only to give its readers all the daily news, but to prophesy with wonderful omniscience what would be the sayings and doings of the next twelve hours. This it frequently did with an ignorance hardly surpassed by its arrogance. But the writing was clever. The facts, if not true, were well invented; the arguments, if not logical, were seductive. Mr. Alf knew what his audience liked to read. The *Evening Pulpit* was much given to politics, in the form of abusing whatever was being done by either side. A newspaper should never weary its readers by praising anything. Praise is dull – a fact that Mr. Alf had discovered.

Mr. Alf had discovered another fact. Censure from those who are always finding fault becomes so much a matter of course that it ceases to be objectionable. The caricaturist who draws only caricatures may take any liberties he likes with a man's face. It is his trade. But if an artist were to publish a series of portraits, in which two out of a dozen were hideous, he would certainly make enemies. Mr. Alf never made enemies, for in his newspaper he praised no one and nothing.

Mr. Alf was a remarkable man. No one knew whence he came. He was supposed to have been born a German Jew; yet he knew England as only an Englishman can know it. During the last year or two he had “come up” in society very thoroughly. He had been black-balled at three or four clubs, but had gained entrance to two or three others, and spoke of those which had rejected him as if they were imbecile, and moribund. He always implied that not to know Mr. Alf was to be altogether out in the dark. Those around him began to believe it – and Mr. Alf became an acknowledged something in the worlds of politics, letters, and fashion.

He was a good-looking man of about forty, with a pleasant smile belied by the sharp severity of his eyes. He also was intimate after his fashion with Lady Carbury, who was diligent in fostering useful friendships. Her letter to Mr. Alf was as follows;—

Dear Mr. Alf,

Do tell me who wrote the review on Fitzgerald Barker's last poem. I remember nothing done so well. I should think poor Barker will hardly hold his head up again. But it was fully deserved. I have no patience with the pretensions of would-be poets who contrive by toadying to get their volumes placed on every drawing-room table. I know no one to whom the world has been so good-natured in this way as to Fitzgerald Barker, but equally no one has extended the good nature to the length of reading his poetry.

Is it not singular how some authors continue to obtain reputations simply by puffing? To puff and to get one's self puffed have become branches of a new profession. Alas! I wish I could take lessons in it myself. Much as I hate the thing, I am struggling so hard to make a honest living, that I think, were the opportunity offered to me, I should pocket my honour, and descend among the low things, so that I might have the pride of feeling that I had succeeded by my own work in providing for my children.

But I have not yet commenced the descent; and therefore I am still bold enough to tell you that I shall look, not with concern but with a deep interest, for anything which may appear in the *Pulpit* about my "Criminal Queens." That my inaccuracy will be laid bare I do not doubt, but I think your reviewer will be able to say that the sketches are life-like and well considered.

I have not seen you for the last three weeks. I have a few friends every Tuesday evening; pray come next week or the week following. And pray believe that no amount of editorial severity shall make me receive you otherwise than with a smile.

Most sincerely yours,
Matilda Carbury.

Lady Carbury, having finished her third letter, threw herself back in her chair, and for a moment closed her eyes, as though about to rest. But she soon remembered that the activity of her life did not allow such rest. She seized her pen and began scribbling further notes.



Chapter 2 The Carbury Family

Dishonest as were Lady Carbury's letters to the editors, and the system by which she was trying to achieve success, nevertheless her statements about herself were largely true. She *had* been ill-treated. She *had* been slandered. She was devoted to her children – one of them especially – and was ready to work her nails off to advance their interests.

She was the widow of one Sir Patrick Carbury, who had done great things as a soldier in India, and had been made a baronet. He had married a young wife late in life and, having found out too late that he had made a mistake, had occasionally spoiled his darling and occasionally ill-used her.

As for Lady Carbury, when as a very lovely and penniless girl of eighteen she had consented to marry a wealthy man of forty-four, she had made up her mind to abandon all hope of romantic love. Sir Patrick was red-faced, stout, bald, short-tempered, generous in money, suspicious and intelligent. He knew how to govern men. He could read and understand a book. There was nothing mean about him. He had his attractive qualities. He was a man who might be loved; but he was hardly a man for love. The young Lady Carbury had understood her position and had determined to do her duty. She had never flirted. For fifteen years her marriage had been tolerable. A boy and a girl had been born, to whom both father and mother had been over-indulgent.

Lady Carbury was clever, educated, and beautiful. To do her duty correctly, to live in a big house and be respected, had been her ambition – and during the first fifteen years of her married life she was successful amidst great difficulties. But she had all her life been educated in deceit, and her married life had seemed to make the practice of deceit necessary. She would smile within five minutes of violent ill-usage. Her husband would strike her – and her first reaction would be to conceal the fact from all the world.

For fifteen years, though Sir Patrick had been imperious and often cruel, he had never been jealous. But in later years he drank too much, and she struggled hard first to prevent the evil, and then to hide its ill effects. But in doing this she schemed, and lied. Then, at last, when she was no longer quite a young woman, she attempted to form friendships for herself, and among her friends was one of the other sex. Lady Carbury was not faithless. But Sir Patrick became jealous, spoke words which even she could not endure – and she left him.

Her life at that time is of little importance to our story, except that the reader should know how she had been slandered. For a month or two hard words had been said against her by Sir Patrick and his friends. But gradually the truth was known, and after a year's separation they came together again. She remained the mistress of his house till he died. She brought him home to England when he had become a worn-out invalid. But scandal had followed her, and some people were never tired of reminding others that Lady Carbury had once run away from her husband, and had been taken back again by the kind-hearted old gentleman.

Sir Patrick left a moderate fortune, though by no means great wealth. To his son, Sir Felix Carbury, he had left £1,000 a year; and to his widow the same, to be divided between his son and daughter after her death. The young man was in the

army when his father died, and, needing no home of his own, often lived in his mother's house. Yet he now had an income equal to that with which his mother and sister had to keep a roof over their head.

Now Lady Carbury, when she was widowed at the age of forty, did not intend to pass her future life in grieving. She had endeavoured to do her duty, taking the good and the bad together. She had certainly encountered much that was bad. To be scolded, beaten, and sworn at by a choleric old man till she was at last driven out of her house by his violence; to be taken back as a favour with the assurance that her name would be tarnished for the rest of her life; to have her flight constantly thrown in her face; and then at last to become his nurse, was a high price to pay for the good things she had enjoyed. Now at length had come her reward, her freedom, her chance of happiness.

She thought much about herself, and resolved that she would have nothing to do with love. Nor would she marry again for convenience. But she would have friends – real friends, who could help her, and whom possibly she might help. She would make some career for herself, and live in London, and become somebody in some circle.

She had known from the first that economy was necessary – not for herself and her daughter, but on behalf of her son. Of her daughter's prudence she was convinced. She could trust Henrietta in everything. But her son, Sir Felix, was not very trustworthy. And yet Sir Felix was the darling of her heart.

At the time of the writing of the three letters, she was driven very hard for money. Sir Felix was then twenty-five, had sold out from his regiment, and, to tell the truth, had altogether wasted the property which his father had left him. The mother knew that she must maintain the young baronet. She did not know, however, the amount of his debts – nor, indeed, did he. He had gone a very long way into debt; his life had been in every way bad. He had become so heavy a burden on his mother and sister that their life had become full of unavoidable embarrassments.

But neither of them ever quarrelled with Sir Felix. Henrietta had been taught by her parents' conduct that every vice might be forgiven in a man, though every virtue was expected from a woman. It seemed natural to her that her interests should be subservient to her brother's; and when she found that her little comforts were curtailed because he, having eaten up all that was his own, was now eating up all that was his mother's, she never complained. Henrietta had been taught to think that men always did eat up everything.

The mother's feeling was more open to blame. Even on his road to ruin she had hardly said a word to stop him. She had spoiled him as a boy, and she spoiled him as a man. She was almost proud of his vices and extravagances. She had so indulged him that he was never ashamed of his selfishness or conscious of the injustice which he did to others.

Because of this, Lady Carbury's dabbling in literature had become hard work by which money might be earned. When she wrote to the editors of her struggles, she was speaking the truth. Other women made good earnings from literature. Why should she not add a thousand a year to her income, so that Felix might again live like a gentleman and marry an heiress? Who was so handsome as her son? Who could make himself more agreeable? If only enough money might be earned to tide her over the present evil day, all might be well.

However, Lady Carbury was convinced that she would achieve success not by producing good books, but by persuading people to say that her books were

good. She worked hard and wrote quickly; and was a clever woman. She wrote with a glib, sprightly style, and had acquired the knack of spreading all she knew very thin, so that it might cover a vast surface. She had no ambition to write a good book, but was painfully anxious to write a book that the critics should say was good. The woman was false from head to foot, yet there was much of good in her.

Whether Sir Felix, her son, had become what he was by bad training, or whether he had been born bad, who shall say? Surely any lack of training could not have produced a heart so utterly incapable of feeling. He could not even feel his own misfortunes unless they touched his outward comforts. He lacked the imagination to think of future misery even a month ahead, or a week – or a single night. He liked to be kindly treated, to be praised and petted and well fed; in this he had the instincts of a horse, not even the higher sympathies of a dog.

He had never loved anyone enough to deny himself a moment's gratification. His heart was a stone. But he was beautiful to look at, ready-witted, and intelligent. His hair was nearly black, soft and silky. His eyes were long and brown, made beautiful by the perfect arch of the eyebrow. But perhaps the glory of the face was in the fine moulding of the nose and mouth. He had a well-formed moustache, but no beard; his chin was perfect.

He was as excellent in figure as in face. It was admitted by men and asserted by women that no man had ever been more handsome than Felix Carbury, and it was admitted also that he never showed consciousness of his beauty. He gave himself airs on many scores; his money, his title, and his intellect. But he was clever enough to dress simply and avoid the appearance of vanity. As yet, his associates had hardly found out how devoid he was of affection.

In one matter he had marred his name, and by a moment's weakness had injured his character among his friends. He had started a quarrel with a brother officer; and when he should have acted with manly conduct, he had first threatened and had then shown the white feather. That was now a year since, but men still remembered that Felix Carbury had cowered.

It was now his business to marry an heiress. He was quite prepared for it. But he lacked the art of making love. He had the manners of a gentleman, could talk well, and felt no repugnance at declaring a passion he did not feel. But he knew so little of love, that when he talked of it he showed that he thought it was nonsense. Due to this fault he had already failed with one young lady, who had refused him because "he did not really care." And so that young lady escaped the pit-fall.

Now there was another young lady whom Sir Felix was urged to pursue. Her wealth was known to be very great. It was, indeed, generally supposed to be endless, since the young lady's father had such great concerns in business that ten or twenty thousand pounds was but a trifle to him. Such a man may be ruined at any time; but there was no doubt that to anyone marrying his daughter during his present outrageous prosperity he could give a very large fortune indeed. Lady Carbury was very anxious that Sir Felix should pursue this magnate's daughter.

And now there must be a few words said about Henrietta Carbury. Of course she was of infinitely less importance than her brother, so a few words should suffice. She was very lovely, like her brother; though less dark and with less regular features. But her face had a sweetness of expression altogether lacking in her brother. And her face was a true index of her character. Again, who shall say why the brother and sister had become so opposite to each other? She, at

any rate, had not been spoiled by a title, and by the temptations of money and society.

At present she was twenty-one, and had not seen much of London society. Her mother did not go to balls, and the need for economy had not allowed for gloves and costly dresses. Sir Felix went out of course, but Hetta Carbury spent most of her time at home. Occasionally the world saw her, and declared that she was a charming girl. The world was so far right.

But for Henrietta Carbury romance had already commenced in earnest. There was another branch of the Carburys, the head branch, which was represented by one Roger Carbury, of Carbury Hall: a gentleman of which, at this moment, it need only be said that he was passionately in love with his cousin Henrietta. He was, however, nearly forty years old, and there was one Paul Montague whom Henrietta had seen.



Chapter 3 The Beargarden

Lady Carbury's house in Welbeck Street was modest; but she had made it pretty and pleasant, and was proud to feel that she had comfortable belongings around her when her literary friends came to see her on Tuesday evenings. The door to the back drawing-room was permanently closed; it was here that she carried on her great work of writing. Here she was rarely disturbed by her daughter, although her son would break in upon her privacy without remorse.

Soon after she had completed her letter to Mr. Alf, Felix entered the room with a cigar in his mouth and threw himself upon the sofa.

"My dear boy," she said, "pray leave your tobacco behind when you come in here."

"Some women swear they like smoke, mother," he said, throwing the half-smoked cigar into the fire-place. "I wonder whether you can let me have twenty pounds?"

"My dear Felix! What is it for?"

"Well, a fellow can't live without some money in his pocket. I do with as little as most fellows. I even get my hair cut on credit."

"What is to be the end of it, Felix?"

"I never could see the end of anything, mother. I never could pass a dish that I liked in favour of those to follow. What's the use?"

"Have you been at the Melmottes' today?" It was now five o'clock on a winter afternoon, and Lady Carbury thought her son might have been paying his court to Marie Melmotte the great heiress.

"I have just come away."

"And what do you think of her?"

"To tell the truth, mother, I have thought very little about her. She is not pretty, she is not plain; she is not clever, she is not stupid; she is neither saint nor sinner."

"The more likely to make a good wife."

"Perhaps. Good enough, at any rate."

"What does the mother say?"

"The mother is a caution. Dolly Longestaffe says that somebody says that she was a Bohemian Jewess; but I think she's too fat for that."

"What does it matter, Felix? Is she civil to you?"

"Yes, civil enough."

"And the father?"

"Well, he does not turn me out. Of course there are half-a-dozen after her, and I think the old fellow is bewildered among them all. He's thinking more of getting dukes to dine with him than of his daughter's lovers. Any fellow might pick her up who happened to hit her fancy."

"And why not you?"

"I am doing my best, mother. Can you let me have the money?"

"Oh, Felix, I think you hardly know how poor we are. You have still got your hunters!"

“I have got two horses, if you mean that; and I haven’t paid a shilling for their keep since the season began. Look here, mother; this is a risky game, but I am playing it by your advice. If I can marry Miss Melmotte, I suppose all will be right. But I don’t think the way to get her is to let all the world know that I haven’t got a copper. If I gave up my hunting there would be lots of fellows to tell them in Grosvenor Square.”

The poor woman was unable to argue against this. The money was handed over, and the youth went away with a light heart, hardly listening to his mother’s entreaties that the affair with Marie Melmotte might be brought to a speedy conclusion.

Felix, when he left his mother, went down to the only club to which he now belonged. Clubs require money; and the young baronet, forced to restrict himself to one, chose the worst. It was called the Beargarden, and had been lately opened with the express view of combining parsimony with profligacy.

This club did not open till three o’clock in the afternoon. There were no morning papers taken, no library, no morning-room. Dining-rooms, billiard-rooms, and card-rooms would suffice for the Beargarden. Everything was luxurious, and the club was said to prosper. Herr Vossner, the purveyor, carried on affairs so that there was no trouble about anything, smoothing any little difficulties in the settling of accounts.

Perhaps no young man about town enjoyed the Beargarden more thoroughly than Sir Felix Carbury. The club was close to other clubs, in a small street off St. James’s Street, and outwardly sober. Why pay for marble pillars and cornices, when you can neither eat such things, nor drink them, nor gamble with them? But the Beargarden had the best wines – or thought that it had – and the easiest chairs, and two perfect billiard-tables. Hither Sir Felix went with his mother’s cheque for £20 in his pocket.

He found his friend, Adolphus “Dolly” Longestaffe, standing on the steps with a cigar in his mouth, and gazing vacantly at the brick house opposite.

“Going to dine here, Dolly?” said Sir Felix.

“I suppose I shall, because it’s such a lot of trouble to go anywhere else. I’m engaged somewhere, I know; but I’m not up to getting home and dressing.”

“Going to hunt tomorrow?”

“Well, yes; but I don’t suppose I shall. I was going to hunt every day last week, but my fellow never would get me up in time. Why can’t fellows hunt at two or three, so that a fellow needn’t get up in the middle of the night? I can’t get myself to Euston Square by nine. That fellow of mine says he comes in and wakes me, but I never remember it.”

“How many horses have you got at Leighton, Dolly?”

“There were five, but I think that fellow down there sold one; but maybe he bought another. I know he did something.”

“Who rides them?”

“He does, I suppose. Somebody told me that Grasslough was riding two of them last week. I think he tipped that fellow of mine; I call that a low thing to do. I’d ask him, only I know he’d say that I had lent them. Perhaps I did when I was tight, you know.”

“You and Grasslough were never pals.”

“I don’t like him. He gives himself airs, and he isn’t hard up. Why doesn’t he have his own horses? I’ll tell you what, Carbury, I’ve made up my mind, by

Jove. I never will lend a horse again to anybody. If fellows want horses let them buy them.”

“But some fellows haven’t got any money, Dolly.”

“Then they ought to go on tick. I don’t think I’ve paid for any of mine I’ve bought this season. There was somebody here yesterday – followed me here to say he wanted to be paid for something! It was horses, I think, because of the fellow’s trousers.”

“What did you say?”

“Oh, I didn’t say anything. I offered him a cigar, and went upstairs. I suppose he left when he was tired of waiting.”

“I’ll tell you what, Dolly;” said Sir Felix, “I wish you’d let me ride two of yours for a couple of days – that is, if you don’t want them yourself. You know how awfully done up I am. I shall pull through, but it’s an awful squeeze in the meantime.”

“Well, you may have them for two days. I don’t know whether that fellow of mine will believe you. He wouldn’t believe Grasslough, but Grasslough took them anyway.”

“You could write a line to your groom.”

“Oh, my dear fellow, that is such a bore; I don’t think I could do that. My fellow will believe you, because you and I have been pals. I think I’ll have a little drop of curaçao before dinner. Come and try it.”

It was then nearly seven o’clock. Nine hours afterwards the same two men, with two others – including Lord Grasslough – were just rising from a card-table in one of the upstairs rooms of the club. For while no man could get a breakfast at the Beargarden, suppers at three o’clock in the morning were quite within the rule.

At four in the morning Dolly Longestaffe was certainly in a condition to lend his horses and to remember nothing about it. He was quite affectionate with Lord Grasslough and his other companions. He was by no means helplessly drunk, and was, perhaps, hardly more silly than when he was sober; but he was willing to play at any game whether he understood it or not, and for any stakes. When Sir Felix got up and said he would play no more, Dolly also got up. Lord Grasslough, with a dark scowl, said that it was not the thing for men to stop when so much money had been lost; at which Dolly as willingly sat down again.

“I’m going to hunt tomorrow,” said Sir Felix – meaning that day – “and I shall play no more. A man must go to bed at some time.”

“When a man has won as much as you have, he should stay,” said Lord Grasslough.

“Stay how long?” said Sir Felix angrily. “That’s nonsense. There’s an end of this for me tonight.”

“Oh, if you choose,” said his lordship.

“I do choose. Good night, Dolly; we’ll settle next time we meet. I’ve got it all entered.”

Sir Felix had sat down to the card-table with his mother’s £20, and now he had – he didn’t know how much. He knew that Dolly Longestaffe owed him over £800, and he had received more than that in ready money and cheques from Lord Grasslough and the other player. As Sir Felix walked up St. James’s Street, looking for a cab, he presumed himself to be worth over £700.

Now that he was in the possession of wealth, he never for a moment thought of paying his bills. Even the large sum which he now so unexpectedly possessed

would not have gone far in that; but he could now look bright, and buy presents. It is hard to make love without something in your purse.

He found no cab, but there was something so joyous in possessing all this money that it made walking in the night air pleasant. Suddenly he remembered the low wail with which his mother had spoken of her poverty. Now he could give her back the £20. But it occurred to him that it would be foolish to do so. How soon might he want it again? Moreover, he could not repay the money without explaining to her how he had got it. As he let himself into the house he resolved that he would not say anything about it.

That morning he was at the station at nine, and went hunting down in Buckinghamshire, riding two of Dolly Longestaffe's horses – for the use of which he paid Dolly's "fellow" thirty shillings.



Chapter 4

Madame Melmotte's Ball

Two nights after that, a great ball was given in Grosvenor Square. It was a ball on a scale so magnificent that it had been talked about for a fortnight. Some people declared that February was the wrong time for such a ball; others said that the huge amount of money spent would certainly make it a success.

And much more than money had been expended. Almost incredible efforts had been made to obtain the co-operation of great people. The Duchess of Stevenage had come up from Castle Albury to attend it with her daughters, though it had never been her Grace's habit to be in London in winter. But then her brother, Lord Alfred Grendall, was known to be in great difficulties, which – people said – had been considerably modified by financial help. And one of the young Grendalls, Lord Alfred's second son, had been appointed to some mercantile position in the City, at Abchurch Lane, for which he received a salary which his friends thought he was hardly qualified to earn.

Where the Duchess of Stevenage went, all the world would go. And it became known the day before the party that a royal prince was to be there. How this had been achieved nobody quite understood; but there were rumours that a certain lady's jewels had been rescued from the pawnbroker's. The Prime Minister had declined to accept; but one Cabinet Minister and two or three under-secretaries had agreed to come, because it was felt that the giver of the ball might before long enter politics: and it is always wise to have great wealth on one's own side.

There had been much anxiety about the ball. But it was now beyond the chance of failure.

The giver of the ball was Augustus Melmotte, the father of the girl whom Sir Felix Carbury desired to marry, and the husband of the lady who was said to have been a Bohemian Jewess. Two years ago, when he arrived in London from Paris, he was known as Monsieur Melmotte. But he declared that he had been born in England. He admitted that his wife was a foreigner; indeed, she spoke very little English. Melmotte spoke it fluently, but with an accent. So did Miss Melmotte: some said she had been born in New York, but Madame Melmotte declared that the great event had taken place in Paris.

It was at any rate an established fact that Mr. Melmotte had made his wealth in France. He no doubt had had enormous dealings in other countries, even if the stories were exaggerated. It was said that he had made a railway across Russia, that he provisioned the Southern army in the American civil war, that he had supplied Austria with arms, and had at one time bought up all the iron in England. He could make or mar any company by buying or selling stock, and could make money dear or cheap as he pleased.

However, it was also said that he was regarded in Paris as the most gigantic swindler that had ever lived; that he had made that city too hot to hold him; that he had tried to establish himself in Vienna, but had been warned away by the police; and that he had at length found that Britain alone would allow him to enjoy, without persecution, the fruits of his industry. His private house was in Grosvenor Square and his house of business in Abchurch Lane.

There was only one child in the family, one heiress for all this wealth. Melmotte himself was a large man, with bushy whiskers and thick hair, heavy eyebrows, and a powerful-looking mouth and chin. His appearance was strong, but on the whole unpleasant and untrustworthy. He looked as though he were a bully. His wife was fat and fair, with a Jewish nose. She was very ready to spend money and give away presents to any who would accept them. She was still Madame Melmotte, not Mrs. Melmotte. However, the daughter, once Mademoiselle, was now Miss Melmotte on all occasions.

Felix Carbury had accurately described Marie Melmotte to his mother. She was not beautiful, nor clever, nor a saint. But then neither was she plain, stupid, or a sinner. She was a little thing, hardly over twenty years of age, and seemed to be overwhelmed by the sense of her own position.

It was well known that Miss Melmotte had already had one lover who had been nearly accepted. The affair, however, had gone off, with no blame to the lady. As royal marriages are governed by the interests of State, so in this case money had the same weight. The young Lord Nidderdale, the eldest son of the Marquis of Auld Reekie, had offered to marry the girl and make her Marchioness in exchange for half a million pounds. Melmotte had not objected to the sum – so it was said – but had proposed to tie it up. Nidderdale had desired to have it free in his own grasp. Although Melmotte had been anxious to secure the title for his daughter, he had lost his temper, and had asked his lordship's lawyer whether it was likely that he would entrust so much money to such a man.

“You are willing to trust your only child to him,” said the lawyer. Melmotte scowled, and marched out of the room. So that affair was over. I doubt whether Lord Nidderdale had ever said a word of love to Marie Melmotte – or whether the poor girl had expected it. Her destiny had no doubt been explained to her.

Others had tried, each treating the girl as an encumbrance he was to undertake at a very great price. But as affairs prospered with the Melmottes, as princes and duchesses were obtained with lesser cost, a title for Marie became less necessary, and Melmotte reduced his offers.

The girl herself, too, began to have an opinion. It was said that she had absolutely rejected Lord Grasslough, who indeed was penniless, ugly, vicious, ill-tempered, and without any power of recommending himself to a girl. She had gained experience, and she was now tempted to contemplate her own happiness. People were beginning to say that Sir Felix Carbury might be the happy man.

There was considerable doubt whether Marie was the daughter of Madame Melmotte. Some even said that Marie was not Mr. Melmotte's daughter. However, of the Melmotte money there could be no doubt. There was the house. There was the furniture. There were the carriages, the horses, the servants with the livery coats and powdered heads. There were the gems and presents, and the daily dinner parties. The tradesmen were quite free of doubt, and in the City Mr. Melmotte's name was worth any money – though his character was perhaps worth little.

The large house in Grosvenor Square was all ablaze by ten o'clock. The broad veranda had been turned into a conservatory, covered with boards contrived to look like trellis-work, heated with hot air and filled with exotic plants at some fabulous price. A covered way had been made from the road to the door; once inside the house, the hall was a paradise. The staircase was fairyland. The lobbies were grottoes rich with ferns. Walls had been knocked away and arches

constructed; floors had been carpeted. The ball took up the ground floor and first floor, and the house seemed to be endless.

"It's costing sixty thousand pounds," said the Marchioness of Auld Reekie to her old friend the Countess of Mid-Lothian.

"And money was never worse spent," said the Countess.

"By all accounts it was as badly come by," said the Marchioness. Then the two old noblewomen made graciously flattering speeches to the Jewess, who was standing in fairyland to receive her guests, almost fainting under the greatness of the occasion.

The three saloons had been prepared for dancing, and here Marie was stationed. The Duchess of Stevenage had undertaken to see that somebody should set the dancing going, and she had commissioned her nephew Miles Grendall, the young gentleman who now worked in the City, to make himself useful.

There had sprung up an intimacy between the Grendall family and the Melmottes, as each could give much and each receive much. Lord Alfred Grendall had not a shilling; but his brother was a duke and his sister was a duchess, and poor Alfred, who had tumbled into an unfortunate marriage, and had three sons and three daughters, had lived now for a very long time entirely on the unwilling contributions of his noble relatives. But Melmotte could support the whole family in affluence without feeling the burden. There had once been an idea that Miles should attempt to win the heiress, but it had soon been abandoned, since Miles had no title or position.

The ball was opened by a quadrille in which Lord Buntingford, the eldest son of the Duchess, stood up with Marie. This had been part of a bargain, although Lord Buntingford had objected mildly.

But his mother had said, "Of course they are vulgar. And I dare say he hasn't been very honest. When men make so much money, I don't know how they can have been honest. But what are we to do about Alfred's children? And his bills? Do dance with the girl once." Lord Buntingford did as his mother asked him.

The ball went very well. There were three or four card-tables in one of the rooms, and at one of them sat Lord Alfred Grendall and Mr. Melmotte, with two or three other players. Playing whist was Lord Alfred's only accomplishment, and almost the only occupation of his life. He played it daily at his club for ten months of the year, and during the other two he frequented some watering-place at which whist prevailed. He did not gamble, never playing for more than the club stakes, but he never made any money.

Melmotte was very anxious to get into Lord Alfred's club, The Peripatetics. It was pleasant to see the grace with which he lost his money, and the sweet intimacy with which he called his lordship Alfred. Though Melmotte was by far the bigger man, Lord Alfred would have liked to kick him. Lord Alfred, in spite of his habitual idleness and uselessness, had still a dash of vigour, and sometimes thought that he would kick Melmotte and have done with it. But there were his poor boys, and those bills in Melmotte's safe. And Melmotte paid his bets with such absolute good humour!

"Come and have a glass of champagne, Alfred," Melmotte said. Lord Alfred liked champagne, and followed his host; but he almost made up his mind that on some future day he would kick the man.

Late in the evening Marie Melmotte was waltzing with Felix Carbury, and Henrietta Carbury was standing by, talking to a Mr. Paul Montague. Lady

Carbury was also there. She did not care for balls, nor for the Melmottes; but Felix had suggested that they had better accept the invitation. Lady Carbury was very gracious to Madame Melmotte for two minutes, and then slid into a chair expecting nothing but misery for the evening. However, she was a woman who could do her duty and endure without complaint.

"It is the first great ball I ever was at in London," said Hetta Carbury to Paul Montague.

"And how do you like it?"

"Not at all. I know nobody here. I don't understand how it is that at these parties people do know each other, or whether they all go dancing about without knowing."

"If you wish to dance why won't you dance with me?"

"I have danced with you twice already."

"Is there any law against dancing three times?"

"But I don't especially want to dance," said Henrietta. "I think I'll go and console poor mamma, who has got nobody to speak to her." Just at this moment, however, an unexpected friend had come to Lady Carbury's relief.

Sir Felix and Marie Melmotte had been spinning round and round throughout a long waltz, thoroughly enjoying the excitement of the music and the movement. To give Felix Carbury what little praise might be his due, he did not lack physical activity. He would dance, and ride, and shoot eagerly, with an animation that made him happy for the moment.

And Marie Melmotte had been thoroughly happy. She loved dancing, although she had been warned that there were some men she should not dance with. She had been prepared to take Lord Nidderdale at her father's bidding, but she had never had any pleasure in his society. She certainly had never cared to dance with him. But she did like dancing with Sir Felix Carbury.

Not only was the man handsome, but he had an expressive play of face which belied his real disposition. He could seem to be hearty and true till the moment came to expose his heart – or to try to expose it. Then he failed. But in the approaches to intimacy with a girl he could be very successful; and Marie was slow to discover his deficiencies. To her he had seemed like a god. If she might be allowed to be wooed by Sir Felix Carbury, and to give herself to him, she thought that she would be contented.

"How well you dance," said Sir Felix.

"Do I?" She spoke with a slightly foreign accent, which gave a little prettiness to her speech. "I was never told so. But nobody ever told me anything about myself."

"I should like to tell you everything about yourself, from the beginning to the end."

"Ah – but you don't know."

"I think I could make some good guesses. I'll tell you what you would like best in all the world."

"What is that?"

"Somebody that liked you best in all the world."

"Ah, yes; if one knew who?"

"How can you know, Miss Melmotte, but by believing?"

"That is not the way to know. If a girl told me that she liked me better than any other girl, I should not know it, just because she said so. I should have to find it out."

“And if a gentleman told you so?”

“I shouldn’t believe him, and I should not care to find out. But I should like to have some girl for a friend whom I could love, oh, ten times better than myself.”

“So should I.”

“Have you no particular friend?”

“I mean a girl whom I could love – oh, ten times better than myself.”

“Now you are laughing at me, Sir Felix,” said Miss Melmotte.

“I wonder whether that will come to anything?” said Paul Montague to Miss Carbury. They had come back into the drawing-room, and had been watching this. “It would be a magnificent chance for him.”

“To marry the daughter of vulgar people, just because she will have money?” said Hetta. “He can’t care for her really.”

“But he needs money so dreadfully! It seems to me that there is no other solution for Felix than to marry an heiress.”

“What a dreadful thing to say!”

“But isn’t it true? He has beggared himself. And he will beggar you and your mother.”

“I don’t care about myself.”

“Others do, though.” Paul spoke through his teeth, as if he were angry.

“I did not think you would have spoken so harshly of Felix.”

“I don’t speak harshly of him, Miss Carbury. I haven’t said that it was his own fault. He seems to be one of those who have been born to spend money; and as this girl will have plenty of money to spend, I think it would be a good thing if he were to marry her.”

Lady Carbury had been seated for nearly half an hour in uncomplaining solitude, when she was delighted by the appearance of Mr. Ferdinand Alf.

“You here?” she said.

“Why not? Melmotte and I are brother adventurers.”

“I should have thought you would find little here to amuse you.”

“I have found you; and, in addition, duchesses and their daughters without number. They expect Prince George! It’s quite a success. Don’t you think it very nice, Lady Carbury?”

“I don’t know whether you are joking or not.”

“I never joke. I say it is very nice. These people are spending thousands upon thousands to gratify you and me and others, and all they want in return is a little attention.”

“Ah; the attention of the *Evening Pulpit*. Do you mean to give them that?”

“Well; it is not in our line exactly to give a catalogue of names and ladies’ dresses. Perhaps it may be better for our host that he should be kept out of the newspapers.”

“Are you going to be very severe upon poor me, Mr. Alf?” said the lady after a pause.

“We are never severe upon anybody, Lady Carbury. Here’s the Prince. What will they do with him now they’ve caught him? Oh, they’re going to make him dance with the heiress. Poor heiress!”

“Poor Prince!” said Lady Carbury.

“Not at all. She’s a nice enough little girl. But how is she, poor thing, to talk to royal blood?”

Poor thing indeed! The Prince was brought into the room where Marie was with Felix Carbury, and she was informed by Miles Grendall that she was to stand up and dance with royalty.

The band were playing a gallop, but that was stopped at once, to the great confusion of the dancers. In two minutes Miles Grendall had made up a set. He stood up with his aunt, the Duchess, opposite Marie and the Prince. Two daughters of the Duchess were present: Sir Felix Carbury, being good-looking and having a name, was made to dance with one of them, and Lord Grasslough with the other. There were four other couples, all made up of titled people, as it was intended that this special dance should be chronicled, if not in the *Evening Pulpit*, in some less serious journal. A paid reporter was ready to rush off with the list as soon as the dance began.

The Prince himself did not quite understand why he was there; he probably knew nothing about the lady's diamonds which had been rescued. Poor Marie looked as though she would have fled had flight been possible. But the trouble passed quickly. The Prince said a word or two, and did not seem to expect a reply. He made a few words go a long way, and was well trained in the work of easing the burden of his own greatness for those who were for the moment inflicted with it. When the dance was over he was allowed to escape after the ceremony of a single glass of champagne drunk with the hostess.

The presence of his royal guest was kept secret from the host himself till the Prince was gone. Melmotte would have desired to pour out that glass of wine with his own hands, and would probably have been troublesome and disagreeable. Miles Grendall had understood all this and had managed the affair very well.

"Bless my soul – his Royal Highness come and gone!" exclaimed Melmotte.

"You and my father were so absorbed at your whist that it was impossible to get you away," said Miles.

Melmotte was not a fool, and understood that it had been thought better that he should not speak to the Prince, but also that it might be better that it should be so. He could not have everything at once. Miles Grendall was very useful to him, and he would not quarrel with him just yet.

That night before they went to sleep Melmotte required from his weary wife an account of the ball, and of Marie's conduct.

"Marie," Madame Melmotte said, "behaved well, but certainly preferred 'Sir Carbury' to any other of the young men."

Hitherto Mr. Melmotte had heard very little of "Sir Carbury," except that he was a baronet. Though he was a man of sharp intelligence, he did not yet understand the bearing and sequence of English titles. He knew that he must get for his daughter either an eldest son, or one in possession of a title. Sir Felix was only a baronet; but his son would in course of time also become Sir Felix. Melmotte was not disposed to give any positive orders as to his daughter's conduct to the young baronet.

He did not, however, imagine that the young baronet had addressed his girl in the way Felix had when they parted.

"You know who it is," he whispered, "likes you better than anyone else in the world."

"Nobody does; don't, Sir Felix."

"I do," he said as he held her hand for a minute. He looked into her face and she thought it very sweet. He had studied the words, and, repeating them as a lesson, he did it fairly well. He did it well enough at any rate to send the poor girl

to bed with a sweet conviction that at last a man had spoken to her whom she could love.



Chapter 5 After the Ball

“It’s weary work,” said Sir Felix in the carriage with his mother and sister. “I think I’ll run down to the club before I go home.” He put his head out, and stopped the driver.

“It is two o’clock in the morning, Felix,” said his mother.

“I’m afraid it is, but you see I’m hungry. I had no supper. Good night.”

He jumped out of the carriage, called a cab, and had himself driven to the Beargarden. He told himself that the men there would think it mean of him if he did not give them their revenge. He had won again on the previous night. Dolly Longestaffe and Lord Grasslough owed him money, and he was determined that they should not think that he had been carried home by his mother and sister. So he argued with himself; but in truth he could not keep away from the card-table.

Neither mother nor daughter said a word till they reached home. Then the mother spoke of the trouble that was nearest to her heart.

“Do you think he gambles?”

“He has got no money, mamma.”

“I fear that might not stop him. If he gambles everything is lost.”

“I suppose they all play, more or less.”

“I am wearied out of all heart by his lack of consideration to me. It is not that I expect obedience from a grown-up son. But my word is nothing to him. He has no respect for me. He would as soon do what is wrong before me as before the merest stranger.”

“He has been so long his own master, mamma.”

“His own master! And yet I must provide for him as though he were a child. Hetta, you spent the whole evening talking to Paul Montague.”

“No, mamma; that is unjust. I knew nobody else. I could not tell him not to speak to me. I danced with him twice.”

Her mother shook her head.

“If you did not want me to speak to Paul,” said Hetta, “you should not have taken me there.”

“I don’t wish to prevent your speaking to him. You know what I want.” As Henrietta kissed her good night, Lady Carbury began to sob. “I think I am the unhappiest woman in all London.”

“Is it my fault, mamma?”

“You could save me from much if you wished. I work like a horse, and I never spend a shilling on myself. Nobody has suffered as I have. But Felix never thinks of me for a moment.”

“I think of you, mamma.”

“If you did you would accept your cousin’s offer. What right have you to refuse him? I believe it is because of that young man.”

“No, mamma; it is not because of that young man. I like my cousin Roger very much; – but that is all. Good night, mamma.”

At eight o’clock the next morning four young men had just risen from a card-table at the Beargarden. The party consisted of Dolly Longestaffe, Lord Grasslough, Miles Grendall, and Felix Carbury; they had amused themselves

during the last six hours with various innocent games. They had commenced with whist, and had finished with blind hookey. But all night Felix had won. Miles Grendall hated him, and agreed with Lord Grasslough that it would be proper to relieve Sir Felix of his previous winnings. The two men had shown their intention, causing a certain hostility. Felix had felt that Grendall and Grasslough were his enemies, and had thrown himself on Dolly for sympathy. Dolly, however, was very tipsy.

At eight o'clock in the morning there came a sort of settling-up, though no money passed hands. Grasslough was the chief loser, and the paper I.O.U.s which had been passed over to Carbury, when counted up, amounted to nearly £2,000. His lordship contested the amount bitterly, but in vain. Grendall had lost over £400 to Carbury, an amount that he could never hope to raise. However, he gave his I.O.U. to his opponent with an easy air. Dolly Longestaffe was too tipsy to make up his own account. That was to be left for some future occasion.

"I suppose you'll be here tomorrow, – that is, tonight," said Miles.

"Certainly," answered Felix. "Only I think these things should be squared before we play any more."

"What do you mean by that?" said Grasslough angrily. "Do you mean to hint anything?"

"I never hint anything, my Grassy," said Felix. "I believe when people play cards, it's intended to be ready money, that's all. But I'll give you your revenge tonight."

"All right," said Miles.

"I was speaking to Lord Grasslough," said Felix. "He is an old friend. You have been rather rough tonight, Mr. Grendall."

"Rough – what the devil do you mean by that?"

"And I think it will be as well that our account should be settled before we begin again."

"I'm used to settling once a week," said Grendall.

There was nothing more said; but the young men did not part on good terms. Felix, as he went home, calculated that if he were fully paid, he might begin the campaign again with all luxuries as before. He would have over £3,000!



Chapter 6

Roger Carbury and Paul Montague

Roger Carbury, of Carbury Hall, a small property in Suffolk, was the head of the Carbury family. The Carburys had been in Suffolk a great many years – certainly since the War of the Roses – and had always held up their heads. But they had never held them very high. They had, however, been true to their acres and their acres true to them through the civil wars, Reformation, Commonwealth, and Revolution; and the head Carbury had always lived at Carbury Hall.

Back in 1800 the squire of Carbury had been an important man, if not in his county, at any rate in his part of the county. The income of the estate had enabled him to live, to drink port wine, to ride a stout hunter, and to keep an old lumbering coach for his wife's use. He had an old butler, a cook, and a couple of maidservants; while the housekeeper was Mrs. Carbury herself, who marked her own linen, made her own preserves, and cured her own hams.

Since that time the Carbury property had considerably increased in value; but the income was no longer comfortably adequate for the wants of an English gentleman's household. Land is a costly luxury, and the Carburys never had anything but land. No eldest son had gone into a profession so as to add to the Carbury wealth. No great heiress had been married. There had been no ruin; yet the present Squire of Carbury was a poor man.

His estate was supposed to bring him £2,000 a year. Had he been content to let the Manor House and live abroad, he would have had enough to live luxuriously. But he lived on his own land among his own people, as all the Carburys before him had done, and was poor because he was surrounded by rich neighbours. The Longestaffes of Caversham – of whom Dolly Longestaffe was the eldest son – had the name of great wealth, although the founder of the family had been a Lord Mayor of London and a chandler as lately as Queen Anne's reign. The Hepworths had married money. The Primeros had been Spanish traders fifty years ago, and had bought their property from a great duke.

The estates of those three gentlemen, with the domain of the Bishop of Elmham, lay all around the Carbury property, and in regard to wealth altogether overshadowed our squire. He did not mind the Bishop's superior riches. But the grandeur of the Longestaffes and the wealth of the Primeros did oppress him, though he never breathed a word of such oppression. He felt that a man's standing in the world should not depend upon his wealth. The Primeros were undoubtedly beneath him in the social scale, although the young Primeros had three horses apiece, and killed legions of pheasants. Hepworth was a very good fellow, who gave himself no airs; but he could not be higher than Carbury, though he had £7,000 a year.

But the Longestaffes were altogether oppressive. Their footmen, even in the country, had powdered hair. They owned a house in town, and lived like magnates. The lady was Lady Pomona Longestaffe. The daughters, who were handsome, had been destined to marry peers. The only son, Dolly, had, or had had, a fortune of his own. To make the matter worse, rich as they were, they were never able to pay anybody anything that they owed. They lived with all the trappings of wealth. The house at Caversham Park was for six or seven months of

the year full of servants, and all the tradesmen in the little towns around knew that the Longestaffes were great people. Though occasionally much distressed for money, they would always fulfil the Longestaffe orders with submissive punctuality, and assume they would be paid in the end.

Carbury of Carbury had never owed a shilling that he could not pay. His orders to the tradesmen of Beccles were not extensive, and he took care to see that he was not overcharged. The Beccles tradesmen, consequently, did not care much for Carbury of Carbury; though perhaps one or two of the elders among them had some ancient reverence for the family.

Roger Carbury himself was alone in the world. His nearest Carbury relatives were Sir Felix and Henrietta, but they were no more than second cousins. He had sisters, but they had long since married and gone away with their husbands, one to India, and another to the United States.

At present Roger was almost forty, and still unmarried. He was a robust, good-looking man, with a firmly set square face, and finely cut features. His hair was red and curling, though he was now partly bald. He wore no beard. His eyes were small, but bright, and very cheery when his humour was good. He had the appearance of great strength and perfect health. A more manly man was never seen. And he was one with whom you would instinctively wish to be on good terms, because he looked as if he would be very stout in holding his own against opponents, but also as if he would be very pleasant to his friends.

When Sir Patrick and Lady Carbury had come home from India, Roger Carbury had hurried to see the invalid, and had offered him all kindness. Would Sir Patrick and his wife and children like to go down to the old place in the country? Sir Patrick did not care a straw for the old place in the country, and told his cousin so. But when the violent old man was dead, Roger paid a second visit to the widow and her daughter. Sir Felix had just joined his regiment and did not care to visit his cousin in Suffolk; but Lady Carbury and Henrietta had spent a month there, and everything had been done to make them happy.

Henrietta was indeed very happy there. As for the widow, Carbury Hall had not quite suited her tastes. She had already begun to sigh for a literary career, and "Dear cousin Roger," as she called him, could not assist her. She was a woman who did not care much for country charms. She found the Primeros odious; the Hepworths stupid; the Longestaffes – she had tried to make up a little friendship with Lady Pomona – insufferably supercilious. She had declared to Henrietta that Carbury Hall was very dull.

But then something happened which altogether changed her opinions. Roger Carbury followed them up to London, and made a most matter-of-fact offer to the mother for the daughter's hand. He was at that time thirty-six, and Henrietta was not yet twenty. He was very cool in his love-making, and Henrietta told her mother that she had not in the least expected it. But he was very persistent.

Lady Carbury was eager on his side. Though Carbury Manor did not suit her, it would do admirably for Henrietta. And as for age, to her thinking (she being over forty) a man of thirty-six was young enough for any girl.

But Henrietta had an opinion of her own. She liked her cousin, but did not love him. She was amazed, and even annoyed by the offer. She had praised him so loudly and innocently to her mother that now she found it difficult to give an adequate reason for her refusal. Yes; her cousin was charming, but not in that way. She refused the offer very plainly, but when Roger suggested that she should

take a few months to think about it, she could say only that she was afraid that thinking about it would not do any good.

Their first visit to Carbury had been made in September. In the following February she went there again – against her wishes; and she had been cold and constrained in her cousin's presence. The offer was renewed, but Henrietta again refused it, saying she did not love her cousin in that way.

But Roger declared that he would not abandon his suit. He truly loved the girl, and love with him was a serious thing. All this happened a full year before the beginning of our story.

But something else happened also. During that second visit to Carbury there came to the hall a young man of whom Roger Carbury had said much to his cousins – one Paul Montague. The squire, Roger, had anticipated no evil in his guests meeting Paul Montague at his house. But great harm had come of it. Paul Montague had fallen in love with Henrietta, causing much unhappiness.

Lady Carbury and Henrietta had been nearly a month at Carbury, and Paul Montague had been there barely a week, when Roger Carbury spoke to him.

“I've got to tell you something, Paul.”

“Anything serious?”

“Very serious to me. Nothing in my own life can approach it in importance.” He had unconsciously assumed that look, which his friend understood, of his resolve to fight if fighting be necessary. Montague knew him well, and became half aware that he had done something wrong, he knew not what.

“I have offered my hand in marriage to my cousin Henrietta,” said Roger gravely. “She has refused me twice. But I still have hopes of success. Perhaps I have no right to hope, but I do. Everything in life to me depends upon it. I think I may count upon your sympathy.”

“Why did you not tell me before?” said Paul Montague hoarsely.

Then there had come a sudden and rapid interchange, each of them declaring himself to be in the right and ill-used by the other, each of them equally hot, equally generous, and equally unreasonable. Montague baldly asserted that he also loved Henrietta Carbury. No; he had not said a word to her. He had intended to consult Roger in a day or two – perhaps that very day, had Roger not spoken to him.

“You have neither of you a shilling in the world,” said Roger; “and now you know what my feelings are you must abandon it.”

Then Montague declared that he had a right to speak to Miss Carbury. He did not suppose that she cared a straw about him. But he had a right to his chance, which was all the world to him. He was not a pauper, and he might earn an income as well as other men. If the young lady had accepted Roger, Paul would at once have left. But as it was not so, he would not abandon his hope.

The scene lasted for above an hour. When it was ended, Paul Montague packed up his clothes and was driven to the railway station by Roger, without seeing either of the ladies. There had been very hot words between the men, but the parting on the railway platform was not quarrelsome.

“God bless you, old fellow,” said Roger, pressing Paul's hands. Paul's eyes were full of tears, and he replied only by returning the pressure.

Paul Montague's parents had long been dead. The father had been a barrister in London, who left a moderate sum of about £6,000 to this son, when he was twenty-one. He was then at Oxford, and was intended to be a lawyer. An uncle of

his had married Roger's sister, and had taken her out to California; there he grew wool, wheat, and fruit; but whether he prospered or not was not clear to his English relatives.

An affectionate friendship had grown up between Paul Montague and Roger, despite the fact that they were not related. Roger had had charge of the boy's education, and had sent him to Oxford. But Paul had got into a "row" at Balliol, and then another row, and was sent down. Indeed he had a talent for rows – though, as Roger Carbury always declared, there was nothing really wrong about any of them.

At twenty-one, Paul took himself and his money out to California, and joined his uncle. He had perhaps an idea that rows are popular in California. At the end of three years he found that he did not like farming there, and nor did he like his uncle.

So he returned to England, but was unable to get any of his £6,000 out of the Californian farm. Indeed his uncle had assured him he would be sent an income amounting to ten per cent of his capital with the regularity of clockwork. But the clock must have been a very bad one. At the end of the first quarter there came the proper amount; then half the amount; then there was a long interval without anything; then some low payments now and again; and then a year with nothing.

Paul paid a second visit to California, having borrowed money from Roger for his journey. He had now again returned, with a little cash, and with a deed executed in his favour by one Hamilton K. Fisker, who had gone into partnership with his uncle, and who had added a vast flour-mill to his uncle's concerns. The deed stated that he was to get twelve per cent on his capital, and had his name put up as one of the firm – now Fisker, Montague, and Montague.

Paul hated Fisker horribly, did not love his uncle much, and would willingly have got back his £6,000 had he been able. But he was not able. However, he had succeeded in getting enough of his income to pay what he owed Roger, and to live for a few months. He was considering what to do next, consulting with Roger on the subject, when suddenly Roger had perceived that the young man was becoming attached to the girl whom he loved – with the result which has been told.

Nothing was said to Lady Carbury or her daughter of the cause of Paul's sudden disappearance. They probably guessed the truth, but neither spoke a word to the other on the subject. Before they left the Manor, the squire again pleaded his cause with Henrietta – in vain. Henrietta was colder than ever; but she used one unfortunate phrase. She said that she was too young to think of marrying yet. She had meant to imply that the difference in their ages was too great, but had not known how to say it. But that was not now her strongest reason for feeling sure that she could not marry Roger Carbury.

A week after the departure of the Carburys from the Manor House, Paul Montague returned, as a still dear friend. He had promised that he would not see Henrietta again for three months, but he would promise nothing further.

"If she won't take you, there is no reason why I shouldn't try." That had been his argument. Roger would not concede the justice of this. It seemed to him that Paul was bound to retire altogether, partly because he had no income, partly because of Roger's previous claim – and partly no doubt in gratitude, but of this last reason Roger never said a word. If Paul did not see this himself, he was not the man Roger had taken him to be.

Paul did see it himself, and had many scruples. But why should his friend be a dog in the manger? He would yield at once if Roger could succeed in his suit. But if Roger could not prevail, why should he not try? What Roger said about lack of money was mere nonsense. Paul declared to himself that he certainly would not give up Henrietta on that score.

He came up to London at various times in search of employment which had been half promised him, and, after the three months were up, constantly saw Lady Carbury and her daughter. But from time to time he had given renewed promises to Roger Carbury that he would not declare his passion. In the meantime the two men were fast friends; so much so that Montague spent most of his time as Roger's guest – with the understanding that Roger would blaze up into hostile wrath should Paul ever call himself Henrietta Carbury's favoured lover, but that everything was to be smooth between them if Henrietta could be persuaded to become the mistress of Carbury Hall.

So things went on until the night at which Montague met Henrietta at Madame Melmotte's ball. The reader should be informed that there had already been a love affair in the young life of Paul Montague. There had been, and indeed there still was, a widow, one Mrs. Hurtle, whom he had been desperately anxious to marry before his second journey to California; but the marriage had been prevented by the interference of Roger Carbury.



Chapter 7

Mentor

Lady Carbury's desire for a union between Roger and her daughter was greatly increased by her anxiety about her son. If her daughter could only be settled in the world, Lady Carbury thought, she could devote herself to her son's interests. She had no very clear idea of what that devotion would be. But she knew that she had paid so much money for him, and would have to pay so much more, that she might be unable to keep a home for her daughter.

In these troubles she constantly appealed to Roger Carbury for advice – which, however, she never followed. He recommended her to give up her house in town, and find a home for her daughter and Felix elsewhere. If Felix would not follow her, then let him bear the brunt of his own misdoings. When he had no more money he would seek her out. Lady Carbury thought Roger was always severe when he spoke of the baronet.

But, in truth, she did not ask for advice in order that she might follow it. She had plans with which she knew that Roger would not sympathise. She still thought that Sir Felix might bloom and burst out into grandeur, wealth, and fashion, as the husband of a great heiress. When he got money from her – when, with brazen-faced indifference to her remonstrances, he started off to his club at two in the morning – when he almost boasted of the hopelessness of his debts, a sickness of heart would come upon her, and she would weep hysterically, and lie the whole night without sleeping.

But if he could marry Miss Melmotte, then she would be proud of him. With such a view Roger Carbury could have no sympathy. He thought that a gentleman was disgraced by owing money to a tradesman. And Lady Carbury's heart was high with other hopes: the "Criminal Queens" might be a great literary success. Mr. Broune had promised. Mr. Booker had said that he would see what could be done. She had gathered from Mr. Alf's cautious words that the book would be reviewed in the *Evening Pulpit*.

No; she would not leave London. But she would continue to ask Roger's advice. Men like to have their advice asked. And, if possible, she would arrange the marriage. Her mind would fly away into regions of bliss. If only Henrietta could be engaged to her cousin, Felix marry the richest bride in Europe, and she be the author of the cleverest book of the year, what a Paradise of triumph might be open to her after all her troubles! Thinking this, for an hour she would be happy, in spite of everything.

A few days after the ball Roger Carbury was in town, and was with her in the back drawing-room. He had come because of the condition of the baronet's affairs and the necessity – so Roger thought – of taking steps to curtail the young man's expenses. It was horrible to him that a penniless man should have horses to hunt with! He was quite prepared to speak his mind to Felix himself, if he could get hold of him.

"Where is he now, Lady Carbury?"

"I think he's out with the Baron." This meant that he was hunting some forty miles from London.

"How does he manage it? Whose horses does he ride? Who pays for them?"

“Don’t be angry with me, Roger. What can I do?”

“I think you should refuse to have anything to do with him while he continues in such courses. Is he to be allowed to ruin you and Hetta? It can’t go on.”

“You wouldn’t have me throw him over.”

“I think *he* is throwing *you* over. And it is so thoroughly dishonest – so ungentlemanlike! I don’t understand how it goes on. I suppose you don’t supply him with money.”

“He has had a little.”

Roger frowned. “I can understand that you should provide him with bed and food, but not that you should pander to his vices by giving him money.” Lady Carbury winced. “His kind of life needs a large income. I could not afford it myself.”

“You are so different,” she said.

“I am older, of course. But he is old enough to understand it. Has he any money beyond what you give him?”

Then Lady Carbury revealed her suspicions. “I think he has been playing.”

“That is the way to lose money, not to get it,” said Roger.

“I suppose somebody wins, sometimes.”

“They who win are the sharpers. They who lose are the dupes. I would rather he were a fool than a knave.”

“O Roger, you are so severe!”

“How would he pay, if he were to lose?”

“I don’t even know that he does play; but I think that during the last week he has had money. He comes home at all hours and sleeps late. Yesterday I went into his room and there were notes and gold lying on his table – ever so much.”

“Why did you not take them?”

“What; rob my own boy?”

“When you tell me that you need money to pay your bills, and that he has taken yours! Why does he not repay you what he has borrowed?”

“Ah, indeed, he ought to. And there were papers there; I.O.U.s, signed by other men. And I think he has bought another horse.”

“Oh dear!”

“If you could only induce him to stop gambling! If he has won money, it would be a great comfort if he would let me have some of it – for, to tell the truth, I hardly know where to turn.”

Then Roger repeated his advice. If Lady Carbury felt bound to offer a home to her ruined son in spite of all his folly, that home should be far away from London. If he chose to remain in London, let him do so on his own resources.

“If he is a man he would sooner break stones than live on you,” said Roger. He would see his cousin tomorrow and speak to him. He would come at twelve, when Felix generally breakfasted. Then he assured Lady Carbury that if her son did not give her the money she needed, he, Roger, would lend her a hundred pounds.

After that his voice changed, as he asked, “Can I see Henrietta tomorrow?”

“Certainly; why not?”

“I should like her to know that I am coming. Paul Montague was in town the other day. He was here, I suppose?”

“Yes; he called. And he was at the Melmottes’ ball. Felix got a card for him. Has he gone down to Carbury?”

“No, not to Carbury. I think he had some business about his partners at Liverpool. He is another young man without anything to do. Not that Paul is at all like Sir Felix.”

“Don’t be too hard upon poor Felix,” said Lady Carbury. Roger, as he took his leave, thought that it would be impossible to be too hard upon Sir Felix.

The next morning Lady Carbury was in her son’s bedroom before he was up, and with incredible weakness told him that his cousin Roger was coming to lecture him.

“What the Devil’s the use of it?” said Felix from beneath the bedclothes.

“If you speak to me in that way, Felix, I must leave the room.”

“But what is the use of his coming to me? I know what he’s going to say. Nothing was ever got by preaching to people who ain’t good.”

“Why shouldn’t you be good?”

“I shall do very well, mother, if that fellow will leave me alone. If you’ll go now I’ll get up.” She had intended to ask him for some money, but her courage failed her. To ask for his money would be to recognise and even approve his gambling.

It was not yet eleven; but Felix resolved to get out of the house before that horrible bore should come with his sermon. He ate his breakfast at half-past eleven, planning how he would go out towards Marylebone Road, by which route Roger would not come. He left the house at ten to twelve, cunningly dodging round the first corner – and as he turned it, met his cousin. Roger had come early and strolled about, thinking of Henrietta. Felix felt that he had been caught unfairly.

“I was going to your mother’s house to see you,” said Roger.

“Were you? I am so sorry. I have an engagement with a fellow.”

“You can come back for ten minutes,” said Roger, taking him by the arm. “I go down to Carbury this afternoon. Your friend can wait. Come along.”

His firmness was too much for Felix, who lacked the courage to shake his cousin off. But he fortified himself with the remembrance of the money in his pocket. He remembered too certain sweet words which had passed between him and Marie Melmotte since the ball, and resolved that he would not be “sat upon” by Roger Carbury. The time was coming when he might defy Roger Carbury. Nevertheless, he dreaded the coming words.

“Your mother tells me,” said Roger, “that you still keep hunters.”

“I have one that I kept when the others went.”

“Only one horse?”

“Well – to be exact, I have a hack as well.”

“And another up here in town?”

“No; I’ve just been looking at one.”

“Who pays for all these horses?”

“I shall not ask *you* to pay for them.”

“No, you would be afraid to do that. But you have no scruple in asking your mother. You have squandered every shilling of your own, and now you are ruining her.”

“That isn’t true. I have my own money.”

“Where did you get it?”

“This is all very well, Roger; but I don’t know that you have any right to ask me these questions. I have money. If I buy a horse I can pay for it. Of course I owe a lot of money, but other people owe me money too. I’m all right.”

“Then why do you beg her last shilling from your mother, and not pay it back to her?”

“She can have the twenty pounds, if you mean that.”

“I mean that, and a good deal more. I suppose you have been gambling.”

“I won’t answer your questions. If you have nothing else to say, I’ll go.”

“I have something else to say, and I mean to say it.” Felix had walked towards the door, but Roger was before him, and leaned his back against it.

“I am not going to be kept here against my will,” said Felix.

“Listen to me. Do you wish to be looked upon as a blackguard by all the world? That is what it will be. You have spent every shilling of your own – and because your mother is affectionate and weak, you are now bringing her and your sister to beggary.”

“There is the £20. Give it her,” said Felix, counting the notes out. “When I asked for it, I did not think she would make such a row about such a trifle. Now, have you done?”

“Not quite. Do you intend that your mother should keep you for the rest of your life?”

“I hope to be able to keep *her* before long. The truth is, Roger, you know nothing about it. If you’ll leave me to myself, I shall do very well.”

“I don’t know any young man who ever did worse, or one who had less idea of what is right and wrong.”

“Very well. I differ from you. People can’t all think alike, you know. Now, if you please, I’ll go.”

Roger felt that he hadn’t said half of what he had to say. But of what use could it be to talk to a young man who was altogether callous? If his mother were not foolishly weak, she would divide herself from her son for a while, and leave him to suffer penury. That would tame him and make him humble. While he had money in his pocket it would be impossible to touch him.

“You will ruin your sister, and break your mother’s heart,” said Roger, firing a last harmless shot.

When Lady Carbury came into the room after her son had left, she seemed to think that a great success had been achieved because the £20 had been recovered.

“I knew he would give it back,” she said.

“Why did he not bring it to you of his own accord?”

“I suppose he did not like to talk about it. Has he said that he got it by – playing?”

“No; but you may take it for granted that he did get it by gambling – and also that he will lose all he has got. He talked in the wildest way, saying that he would soon have a home for you.”

“Dear boy! It is quite possible. You have heard of Miss Melmotte.”

“I have heard of the great French swindler who is buying his way into society.”

“Everybody visits them now, Roger.”

“More shame for everybody. But what of him?”

“Some people think that Felix will marry his only child. Felix is handsome, isn’t he? They say she’ll have half a million.”

“That’s his game, is it?”

“Don’t you think he is right?”

“No; I think he’s wrong. But we shall hardly agree about that. Can I see Henrietta for a few minutes?”



Chapter Eight Love-Sick

On the subject of fortune-hunting by marriage, it was impossible that Roger and Lady Carbury should ever understand each other. To Lady Carbury the prospect of a union between her son and Miss Melmotte was one of joy and triumph. Even if her father were disgraced, the wealth would certainly carry the day.

But in fact Mr. Melmotte was not in jail, but was entertaining duchesses in Grosvenor Square. People said that he had a reputation throughout Europe as a gigantic swindler, who had carried out schemes for the ruin of those who had trusted him, and had swallowed up the property of all who had come in contact with him. They said that he was fed with the blood of widows and children; – but what was all this to Lady Carbury? If the duchesses condoned it, why should she be prudish? People also said that Melmotte would fall; he couldn't keep his head up for long. But he might keep his head up long enough to give Marie her fortune. And then Felix was so exactly the young man who should marry a fortune! To Lady Carbury there was no other way of looking at the matter.

And to Roger Carbury also there was no second way of looking at it. He had the old-fashioned idea that the touching of pitch will defile one. He was a gentleman; and would have felt himself disgraced to enter Melmotte's house. Not all the duchesses or money in the city could alter his notions. But he knew that it would be useless to explain this to Lady Carbury. He trusted, however, that Henrietta Carbury might be taught to appreciate the difference between honour and dishonour. Henrietta Carbury had, he thought, a higher turn of mind than her mother.

He found Henrietta alone in the drawing-room. "Have you seen Felix?" she said.

"Yes. I caught him in the street."

"We are so unhappy about him."

"I think, you know, that your mother indulges him foolishly."

"Poor mamma! She worships the ground he treads on."

"Even a mother should not throw her worship away like that. Your brother will ruin you both if this goes on."

"What can mamma do?"

"Leave London, and refuse to pay a shilling on his behalf."

"What would Felix do in the country?"

"If he did nothing, how much better would that be than what he does in town? You would not like him to become a professional gambler."

"Oh, Mr. Carbury; you do not mean that he does that!"

"It seems cruel to say it, but I have to speak the truth. I have no influence over your mother; but you may have some. She asks my advice without having the slightest idea of listening to it. I don't blame her for that; but I am anxious for the sake of the family – and especially for you. Felix may drag you into the mud. For his sake you have already been to the house of that man Melmotte."

"I do not think that I shall be injured by anything of that kind," said Henrietta, drawing herself up.

“Pardon me if I seem to interfere, or if I am rough. I feel an injury is done to you if you are made to go to the house of such a man. Why does your mother seek his society? Not because she likes him; but simply because there is a rich daughter.”

“Everybody goes there, Mr. Carbury.”

“Yes, that is the excuse which everybody makes. Is that sufficient reason? Have you no feeling that you ought to choose your friends for your own reasons? Are the Melmottes people with whom you would wish to be connected?”

“I don’t know.”

“I know very well. They are absolutely disgraceful. A social connection with a crossing-sweeper would be less objectionable.” He spoke with a degree of energy of which he was himself unaware. He knit his brows, and his eyes flashed. Of course she thought of his offer to herself. Not that the Melmotte connection could ever really affect him, because she would not marry him – but he might think that he would be so affected. She resented this.

In truth, he was too simple-minded for any such complex idea. “Felix,” he continued, “has already descended so far that I cannot pretend to be anxious about him. But I should be sorry to think that you should often be seen at Mr. Melmotte’s.”

“I think, Mr. Carbury, that mamma will not take me where I ought not to be taken.”

“I wish you to have some opinion of your own as to what is proper for you.”

“I hope I have. I am sorry you should think that I have not.”

“I am old-fashioned, Hetta.”

“And I daresay we belong to a newer and worse sort of world. You have always been very kind, but I doubt whether you can change us now. If mamma chooses to go to the Melmottes I shall go with her. If that is contamination, I suppose I must be contaminated. I don’t see why I’m to consider myself better than anyone else.”

“I have always thought that you were better than anyone else,” said Roger.

“That was before I went to the Melmottes. I am sure you have altered your opinion now. I am afraid, Mr. Carbury, you must go your way, and we must go ours.”

He looked into her face as she spoke, and gradually began to perceive the working of her mind. Could she really have thought that he was concerned with his own possible future interests when he warned her about her new acquaintances?

“For myself,” he said, making a vain effort to take her hand, “I have only one wish in the world; and that is to travel the same road with you. You must know that I am sincere. When I spoke of the Melmottes, did you believe that I was thinking of myself?”

“Oh no; how should I?”

“I was speaking to you as a cousin. No contact with legions of Melmottes could make you other than the woman on whom my heart has settled. I love you so well that I have already taken you for better or for worse. I cannot change. My nature is too stubborn. Have you a word to comfort me?” She turned away her head, but did not answer. “Do you understand how much I am in need of comfort?”

“You can do very well without comfort from me.”

"I shall live, no doubt; but I am not doing very well. I am becoming sour and moody, and ill at ease with my friends. Please believe me, at any rate, when I say I love you."

"I suppose you mean something."

"I mean a great deal, dear. I mean all that a man can mean. That is it. You hardly understand that I am serious to the extent of ecstatic joy on the one side, and utter indifference to the world on the other. I shall never give it up till I learn that you are to be married to someone else."

"What can I say, Mr. Carbury?"

"That you will love me."

"But if I don't?"

"Say that you will try."

"No; I will not say that. Love should come without a struggle. I don't know how one person is to try to love another in that way. I like you very much; but being married is such a terrible thing."

"It would not be terrible to me, dear."

"Yes; when you found that I was too young for your tastes."

"I shall persevere, you know. If you promise your hand to another man, will you let me know at once?"

"I suppose so," she said.

"There is no one yet?"

"No. But, Mr. Carbury, you have no right to question me. I don't think it generous. I allow you to say things that nobody else could say because you are a cousin and because mamma trusts you. But no one except mamma has a right to ask me whether I care for anyone."

"If I have offended you it is because I love you so dearly."

"I am not offended, but I don't like to be questioned by a gentleman."

"Perhaps when you reflect how much of my happiness depends upon it you will forgive me. Good-bye now." She put out her hand to him and allowed it to remain in his for a moment. "When I walk about the old shrubberies at Carbury, I am always asking myself what chance there is of your walking there as the mistress."

"There is no chance," she said.

"I am, of course, prepared to hear you say so. Well; good-bye, and may God bless you."

The man had no poetry about him. All the embellishments of love were nothing to him. There are men and women to whom even the delays and disappointments of love are charming. It is sweet to such persons to be melancholy, sweet to pine in a romantic fashion. But there was nothing of this with Roger Carbury. Having fixed his heart upon Henrietta, he longed for her with an amazing longing. He had spoken the simple truth when he declared that life was indifferent to him without her. No man in England was less likely to blow out his brains. But he felt numbed in all the joints of his mind by this sorrow. There was only one thing for him: to persevere till he got her, or till he finally lost her. And should the latter be his fate, as he began to fear it would be, then he would live like a crippled man.

He felt almost sure that the girl loved Paul. That she had never confessed such love he was quite sure. Paul and Henrietta had both assured him on this point, and he believed them. But he knew that Paul Montague was attached to her.

Sorrowfully looking forward through future years, he thought that Henrietta would become Paul's wife.

Were it so, what should he do? Forget all personal happiness, and look solely to their prosperity, and their joys? Be a beneficent fairy godfather to them, in the agony of his own disappointment? Or should he let Paul Montague know of his deep resentment of Paul's ingratitude? What father had been kinder to a son, or brother to a brother, than he had been to Paul? His home had been the young man's home, and his purse the young man's purse. What right did Paul have to rob him of all that he had in the world?

He was conscious that there was something wrong in his argument; that Paul when he began to love the girl knew nothing of Roger's love – that the girl would probably have refused him even without Paul. He knew all this. But still the injustice was so great, that to forgive it would be weak, womanly, and foolish. Roger Carbury did not quite believe in forgiving injuries. If you pardon all the evil done to you, you encourage others to do you evil.

He returned that afternoon to Suffolk, and as he thought about it during the journey, he resolved that he would never forgive Paul Montague if Paul became his cousin's husband.



Chapter 9

The Great Railway to Vera Cruz

“You have been a guest in his house. Then, I guess, the thing’s about as good as done.”

These words were spoken with a fine nasal twang by a brilliantly-dressed American gentleman in the great railway hotel at Liverpool. They were addressed to a young Englishman sitting opposite him. Between them there was a table covered with maps and printed sheets. The American was smoking a very large cigar, which he kept constantly turning in his mouth. He was Mr. Hamilton K. Fisker, of the firm of Fisker, Montague, and Montague, and the Englishman was Paul, the junior member of that firm.

“But I didn’t even speak to him,” said Paul.

“That doesn’t matter. It justifies you in introducing me. We don’t want to borrow money off him.”

“I thought you did.”

“If he’ll go in for the thing he’d be one of us, and there would be no borrowing. He’ll join us if he’s as clever as they say, because he’ll see his way to making a couple of million dollars. If he’d take the trouble to go over to San Francisco, he’d make double that. The moneyed men would go in with him at once, because they know that he understands the game. By George! there’s no limit to what he might do with us. We’re a bigger people than you; we go after bigger things, and don’t shilly-shally on the brink as you do. But Melmotte pretty nigh beats us. Anyway he couldn’t have a bigger or a safer thing than this. He’d see it immediately if I could talk to him for half an hour.”

“Mr. Fisker,” said Paul mysteriously, “as we are partners, I think I ought to let you know that many people speak very badly of Mr. Melmotte’s honesty.”

Mr. Fisker smiled gently, turned his cigar round in his mouth, and closed one eye. “There is always a lack of charity,” he said, “when a man is successful.”

The scheme in question was the grand proposal for a South Central Pacific and Mexican railway, which was to run from Salt Lake City, branching off from the San Francisco and Chicago line, and pass down through New Mexico and Arizona, into the Mexican Republic, coming out on the gulf at the port of Vera Cruz. Mr. Fisker admitted that it was a great undertaking – something over 2,000 miles – and its probable cost could not be calculated; but he seemed to think that these questions were beside the point and childish. Melmotte would ask no such questions.

But we must go back a little. Paul Montague had received a telegram from Hamilton K. Fisker, sent from a New York liner, asking him to meet Fisker at Liverpool. He had felt bound to comply. Personally he disliked Fisker, although in California he had never been able to resist the man’s good humour, audacity, and cleverness. He had found himself agreeing with any project which Mr. Fisker might have in hand. It was altogether against the grain with him, and yet with his consent, that the flour-mill had been opened at Fiskerville. He trembled for his money and never wished to see Fisker again; but still, when Fisker came to England, he obeyed the order and went to Liverpool.

If the flour-mill had frightened him, what must the present project have done! Fisker explained that he had come with two aims: firstly, to ask Paul's consent to the proposed change in their business, and secondly to obtain the co-operation of English capitalists. The proposed change in the business meant selling the property at Fiskerville.

"That wouldn't pay for a mile of the railway," said Paul.

Mr. Fisker laughed. The object was not to make a railway to Vera Cruz, but to float a company. He seemed to be indifferent whether the railway should ever be constructed or not. It was clearly his idea that fortunes were to be made out of the concern before a spadeful of earth had been moved. If brilliantly printed programmes might avail anything, with gorgeous maps, and beautiful little pictures of trains running into tunnels beneath snowy mountains and coming out on the margin of sunlit lakes, Mr. Fisker had certainly done much.

But Paul, when he saw these pretty things, could not help thinking whence had come the money to pay for them. It seemed that a great deal had been done without any consent. His fears were not allayed by finding that on all these beautiful papers he was described as one of the general managers of the company. Each document was signed Fisker, Montague, and Montague; and in one it was stated that a member of the firm had gone to London to attend to British interests in the matter. This gave Paul a certain feeling of importance, not altogether unpleasant; but he also had the less pleasant conviction that his money was being spent without his consent, and that he should be cautious lest such consent should be extracted from him unawares.

"What has become of the mill?" he asked.

"We have put an agent into it. But, my word! when there is such a thing as this on hand, that trumpery mill is not worth speaking of."

"You haven't sold it?"

"Well; no. We've arranged a price for a sale."

"You haven't taken the money for it?"

"Well; yes; we have. We've raised money on it, you know. You see you weren't there, and so the two resident partners acted for the firm. But Mr. Montague, you'd better go with us. You had indeed."

"And my own income?"

"That's a flea-bite. When we've got a little ahead with this it won't matter, sir, whether you spend twenty thousand or forty thousand dollars a year. We've got the concession from the United States Government through the territories, and we're in correspondence with the President of Mexico."

"Where's the money to come from?"

"Where do you suppose the money comes from in these undertakings? If we can float the shares, the money'll come in quick enough. We hold three million dollars of the stock ourselves. As we sell we shall pay for them. But of course we shall only sell at a premium. If we can run them up even to 110, there would be three hundred thousand dollars. But we'll do better than that. I must try and see Melmotte at once. You had better write a letter now."

"I don't know the man."

"Never mind. I'll write it, and you can sign it." Whereupon Mr. Fisker wrote the following letter:

Dear Sir,

I have the pleasure of informing you that my partner, Mr. Fisker, of Fisker, Montague, and Montague, of San Francisco, is now in London with the view of allowing British capitalists to assist in carrying out perhaps the greatest work of the age: namely, the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway, which is to give direct communication between San Francisco and the Gulf of Mexico. He is very anxious to see you upon his arrival, as he is aware that your co-operation would be desirable. We feel assured that with your matured judgment in such matters you would see at once the magnificence of the enterprise. If you will name a day and an hour, Mr. Fisker will call upon you.

I have to thank you and Madame Melmotte for a very pleasant evening spent at your house last week.

Mr. Fisker proposes returning to New York. I shall remain here, superintending the British interests which may be involved.

I have the honour to be, Dear Sir,
Most faithfully yours.

“But I have never said that I would superintend the interests,” said Montague.

“You can say so now. It binds you to nothing. You Englishmen are so full of scruples!”

Paul Montague copied the letter and signed it, with doubt – almost with dismay. But he told himself that he could do no good by refusing. If this wretched American had got the upper hand of Paul’s uncle so as to do what he liked with the funds of the partnership, Paul could not stop it.

On the following morning they went up to London together, and Mr. Fisker presented himself in Abchurch Lane. This was not a grand site for the offices of a merchant prince. A small corner house had a brass plate on a door, bearing the words “Melmotte & Co.” Who the Co. was, no one knew. Mr. Melmotte had never burdened himself with a business partner. Here Fisker found three or four clerks seated at desks, and was asked to walk up narrow, crooked stairs. He waited in a small dark apartment till Miles Grendall announced that Mr. Melmotte would see him.

It has been already said that Mr. Melmotte was a big man with an expression of mental power on a harsh, vulgar face. He was certainly a man to repel you by his presence; yet he was magnificent in his expenditure, powerful in his doings, successful in his business, and the world around him therefore was not repelled.

Fisker, on the other hand, was a shining little man – perhaps forty years of age, with a well-twisted moustache and greasy brown hair. He was insignificant in appearance, but gorgeously dressed, with a silk waistcoat. One would at first say that Fisker was not much of a man; but after a little conversation one would own that there was something in him. He had no shyness, no scruples, and no fears. His mind was not capacious, but he knew how to use it.

The millionaire looked at him for a moment or two, just condescending to touch with his fingers the hand which Fisker offered.

“I don’t seem to remember,” he said, “the gentleman who has done me the honour of writing to me about you.”

“I dare say not, Mr. Melmotte. When I’m at home in San Francisco, I meet a great many gents whom I don’t remember afterwards. My partner told me that he went to your house with his friend, Sir Felix Carbury.”

“I know a young man called Sir Felix Carbury.”

“That’s it. I have only just arrived, and as my chief object in coming to London is to see you, I met my partner, Mr. Montague, in Liverpool, took a note from him and came on straight.”

“And what can I do for you, Mr. Fisker?”

Then Mr. Fisker began his account of the Great South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway, and exhibited considerable skill by telling it all in comparatively few words. And yet he was gorgeous and florid. In two minutes he had displayed his programme, his maps, and his pictures. As Mr. Melmotte read the documents, Fisker from time to time put in a word – not about the benefits of the railway, but solely about the appetite for such stock as theirs, which might certainly be produced in the speculating world by a proper manipulation of the affairs.

“You seem to think you couldn’t get it taken up in your own country,” said Melmotte.

“There’s not a doubt about getting it taken up there. Our folk, sir, are quick enough at the game; but you don’t want me to teach you, Mr. Melmotte, that nothing encourages this kind of thing like competition. When they hear at St. Louis and Chicago that the thing is alive in London, they’ll be alive there. And when they know that the stock is running like wildfire in America, they’ll make it run here too.”

“How far have you got?”

“We’ve got a concession for making the line from the United States Congress. We’re to have the land for nothing, of course, and a grant of one thousand acres round every station, the stations to be twenty-five miles apart.”

“And the land is to be made over to you – when?”

“When we have made the line up to the station.” Fisker understood perfectly that Mr. Melmotte did not ask the question in reference to any value such land might have, but to the attractiveness of such a prospectus to speculators.

“And what do you want me to do, Mr. Fisker?”

“I want to have your name there,” he said. And he placed his finger on a spot where it was indicated that there was to be a chairman of an English Board of Directors, but with a blank space for the name.

“Who are to be your directors here, Mr. Fisker?”

“We should ask you to choose them, sir. Mr. Paul Montague should be one, and perhaps his friend Sir Felix Carbury might be another. But we would leave it all to you – as also the amount of stock you would like to take yourself. If you gave yourself to it, heart and soul, Mr. Melmotte, it would be the finest thing that there has been for a long time. There would be such a mass of stock!”

“You have to back that with a certain amount of paid-up capital?”

“We take care, sir, in the West not to cripple commerce too closely by old-fashioned bandages. Look at what we’ve done already, sir, by having our limbs pretty free. Look at our line, sir, right across the continent, from San Francisco to New York. Look at—”

“Never mind that, Mr. Fisker. People wanted to go from New York to San Francisco, and I don’t know that they want to go to Vera Cruz. But I will look at it, and you shall hear from me.”

The interview was over, and Mr. Fisker was contented. If Mr. Melmotte did not intend at least to think of it he would not have given ten minutes to the subject. After all, what was wanted from Mr. Melmotte was his name, for the use

of which Mr. Fisker proposed that he should receive from the speculative public two or three hundred thousand pounds.

A fortnight later, the company was fully launched in England, with a body of London directors, of whom Mr. Melmotte was the chairman. Among the directors were Lord Alfred Grendall, Sir Felix Carbury, Samuel Cohenlupe, Esq., Member of Parliament for Staines, Lord Nidderdale, who was also in Parliament, and Mr. Paul Montague. It may be thought that the board of directors was not strong, and that little help could be given to any commercial enterprise by Lord Alfred or Sir Felix; but it was felt that Mr. Melmotte was himself so great a tower of strength that the company's fortune was made.



Chapter 10

Mr. Fisker's Success

Mr. Fisker was fully satisfied with his progress, but he never quite succeeded in reconciling Paul Montague to the transaction. Mr. Melmotte was indeed so great in the commercial world of London that Paul could no longer refuse to believe in the scheme. Melmotte had made close inquiries of San Francisco and Salt Lake City by telegraph. He was chairman of the British branch of the Company, and had shares allocated to him – he said – to the extent of two million dollars. But still Paul felt doubt, and was conscious that Melmotte, though a tower of strength, was thought by many to have been built upon the sands.

Paul had now given his full consent to the work, against the advice of his old friend Roger Carbury, and had come to live in London, to attend to the affairs of the great railway. There was an office behind the Exchange, with two or three clerks and a secretary – the latter being Miles Grendall. Paul, who was keenly aware that he was not only a director but also one of the firm responsible for the whole affair, was very anxious to be really at work, and would arrive most inopportunately at the Company's offices. Fisker did his best to put a stop to this folly.

“My dear fellow,” he said, “what's the use of flurrying yourself? Once a thing of this kind has been set agoing, there is nothing else to do. If you go there on Thursdays that's quite as much as you need do. A man such as Melmotte would not put up with any real interference.”

Paul tried to assert himself, declaring that as one of the managers he meant to take a part in the management, his own fortune being at stake; but Fisker put him down.

“Fortune! what fortune had either of us? a few beggarly thousand dollars not worth talking of. And now where are you? Look here, sir; there's more to be made here than could be made by years of hard work in regular trade.”

Paul Montague allowed himself to be carried away by Fisker's arguments.

“How could I have helped myself?” he wrote to Roger Carbury. “The money had been raised and spent before this man came here at all. I couldn't have gone to law with him without going over to California, and then I should have got no redress.” He disliked Fisker, and yet Fisker had one great merit: he quite acknowledged Paul's right to a share in the current dash of prosperity. As to the real facts of the firm's money affairs, he would tell Paul nothing. But he was well provided with money himself, and took care that Paul should be too. He paid him all the arrears of his income, and allocated him a large number of shares in the railway – with an understanding that he was not to sell them till they had reached ten per cent above par, and that in any sale he was to touch no other money than the accruing profit.

What Melmotte was to be allowed to do with his shares, Paul never heard. It seemed Melmotte was to be powerful over everything. All this made the young man unhappy, restless, and extravagant. He was living in London and had money at command, but he never could rid himself of the fear that the whole affair might tumble to pieces beneath his feet and that he might be stigmatised as a swindler.

Yet more of Paul's life was given up to enjoyments than to his cares and sorrows. Although he felt himself distracted by doubts, his associates found him to be a very pleasant fellow, fond of amusement and good living. Under the auspices of Sir Felix Carbury he had become a member of the Beargarden. The waiting list for that club was three years, but Paul Montague had suddenly become credited with commercial wealth and influence, and was elected at the Beargarden without any delay.

And – let it be said with regret, for Paul Montague was at heart honest and well-conditioned – he took to living a good deal at the Beargarden. A man must dine somewhere, and he reasoned that a man dines cheaper at his club than elsewhere. But Paul's dinners at the Beargarden were not cheap. He saw a good deal of his brother directors, Sir Felix Carbury and Lord Nidderdale, entertained Lord Alfred at the club, and had twice dined with his great chairman amidst the magnificence of Grosvenor Square.

Mr. Fisker suggested to him that he ought to enter himself for the great Marie Melmotte plate. Lord Nidderdale had again declared his intention of running, owing to pressure put upon him by certain tradesmen, and with this intention had become one of the directors of the Mexican Railway Company. However, Sir Felix was the favourite for the race among fashionable circles.

By the middle of April Fisker was still in London. He was made an honorary member of the Beargarden, and spent a good deal of money. But champagne and ginger-beer are all the same when you stand to win or lose thousands. The feeling that they need not worry about small expenses led both Fisker and Montague in the champagne direction; and the result was damaging. Montague found that he could not wake up on these London mornings with thoughts as satisfactory as those which had attended him at Carbury Manor.

On the 19th of April, Fisker was to leave London for New York, and on the 18th a farewell dinner was to be given to him at the club. Mr. Melmotte was asked to meet him; Lord Alfred Grendall was also to be a guest, and Mr. Cohenlupe, who went about a good deal with Melmotte. Nidderdale, Carbury, Montague, and Miles Grendall, as members of the club, gave the dinner.

No expense was spared. Herr Vossner provided the food and wines. There were two toasts drunk, to the healths of Mr. Melmotte and Mr. Fisker, and speeches were made by them. Mr. Melmotte perhaps proved the genuineness of his English birth by the awkwardness he showed. He stood with his hands on the table, and with his face turned to his plate blurted out his assurance that the floating of this railway company would be one of the greatest commercial operations ever conducted on either side of the Atlantic. It was a great thing – a very great thing; it was one of the greatest things ever. He didn't believe a greater thing had ever come out. He was happy to give his humble assistance to the furtherance of so great a thing – and so on. He was not eloquent; but the gentlemen who heard him remembered that he might make them all rich men, and they cheered.

When Melmotte sat down Fisker made his speech, and it was fluent, fast, and florid. But the listeners had more faith in one ponderous word from Mr. Melmotte than in all the American's oratory.

All those present by now understood that their fortunes were to be made, not by the construction of the railway, but by the floating of the railway shares. Even Montague did not beguile himself into an idea that he was really employed in the making and working of a railway. They were in the business of manufacturing

shares to be sold. That was to be their work, and they all knew it. But the eight of them talked of humanity at large and of the coming harmony of nations.

After the first cigar, Melmotte withdrew, and Lord Alfred went with him. Lord Alfred would have liked to remain to enjoy the tobacco and soda and brandy, but he thought it well to cling to his benefactor Melmotte. Mr. Samuel Cohenlupe also went. The young men were left alone, and it was soon proposed that they should adjourn to the cardroom. Mr. Fisker went with them, and they were joined by Lord Grasslough, and were very quickly playing loo.

During the recent gambling at the Beargarden, on the whole Sir Felix Carbury had kept his luck. This luck had been so continual that Miles Grendall had suggested to his friend Lord Grasslough that there must be foul play. Lord Grasslough, though he had not many good gifts, was at least not suspicious, and rejected the idea.

“We’ll keep an eye on him,” Miles Grendall had said.

“You may do as you like, but I’m not going to watch anyone,” Grasslough had replied.

Miles had watched in vain, and it may as well be said at once that Sir Felix, with all his faults, was not a cheat. Both of them now owed Sir Felix a considerable sum of money, as did Dolly Longestaffe. Very little ready money had passed hands, compared to the sums which had been written down on paper.

When I.O.U.’s have for some time passed freely in such a company, the sudden introduction of a stranger is very disagreeable, particularly when that stranger intends to start for San Francisco the next morning. Should the stranger win, then there may arise complications which have no comfortable solution. In such a state of things Herr Vossner must be called in to loan them cash at ruinous rates.

On this occasion things did not arrange themselves comfortably. From the start Fisker won, and quite a pile of little papers fell into his possession, many of which were passed to him from the hands of Sir Felix – bearing, however, a “G” for Grasslough, or an “N” for Nidderdale, or a wonderful hieroglyphic which was known at the Beargarden to mean D.L. for Dolly Longestaffe, who was not present. And then there were plentiful M.G.s of Miles Grendall.

Paul Montague up to now had never given an I.O.U. On this night he won, though not heavily. Sir Felix lost continually. But Mr. Fisker won nearly all that was lost. He was to start for Liverpool by train at 8.30 a.m., and at 6 a.m. he counted up his bits of paper and found himself the winner of about £600. “I think that most of them came from you, Sir Felix,” he said, handing the bundle across the table.

“I dare say they did, but they are all good against these other fellows.”

Fisker, with perfect good humour, extracted one from the mass which indicated that Dolly Longestaffe owed £50.

“That’s Longestaffe,” said Felix, “and I’ll change that of course.” Out of his pocket-book he extracted other minute documents bearing “M.G.”, and so made up the sum.

“You seem to have £150 from Grasslough, £145 from Nidderdale, and £322 10s. from Grendall,” said Sir Felix, and he got up as though he had paid his score. Fisker, with smiling good humour, arranged the little bits of paper before him and looked round upon the company.

“This won’t do, you know,” said Nidderdale. “Mr. Fisker must have his money before he leaves. You’ve got it, Carbury.”

“Of course he has,” said Grasslough.

“As it happens I have not,” said Sir Felix; “but what if I had?”

“Mr. Fisker starts for New York immediately,” said Lord Nidderdale. “I suppose we can muster £600 among us. Ring the bell for Vossner. I think Carbury ought to pay the money as he lost it, and we didn’t expect to have our I.O.U.’s brought up in this way.”

“Lord Nidderdale,” said Sir Felix, “I have already said that I have not got the money about me. Why should I have it more than you, especially as I knew I had I.O.U.’s more than sufficient to meet anything I could lose when I sat down?”

“Mr. Fisker must have his money at any rate,” said Lord Nidderdale, ringing the bell again.

“It doesn’t matter one straw, my lord,” said the American. “Let it be sent to me to Frisco, in a bill, my lord.” And he got up to take his hat, greatly to the delight of Miles Grendall. But the two young lords would not agree to this.

“If you must go I’ll meet you at the train with the money,” said Nidderdale. Fisker begged that no such trouble should be taken. Of course he would wait ten minutes if they wished. But the affair was of no consequence. Wasn’t the post running every day?

Then Herr Vossner came from his bed, in a dressing-gown, and there was a conference in a corner between him, the two lords, and Mr. Grendall. In a very few minutes Herr Vossner wrote a cheque for the amount due from Nidderdale and Grasslough, but he was afraid that he had not money at his bank sufficient for the greatest sum. It was known that Herr Vossner would not advance money to Mr. Grendall unless others would guarantee it.

“I suppose I’d better send you a bill over to America,” said Miles Grendall.

“Just so. Montague will tell you the address.” Then, shaking hands all round, he took his leave.

No one there had liked Fisker. His manners were not as their manners; his waistcoat not as their waistcoats. He spat upon the carpet. He said “my lord” too often. But he had behaved well about the money, and they felt that they were behaving badly. Sir Felix was the immediate offender, as he should have understood that he was not entitled to pay a stranger with their I.O.U.s. But there was no use now in going back to that. Something must be done.

“Vossner must get the money,” said Nidderdale.

“I don’t think it’s my fault,” said Miles. “Of course no one expected to be called upon in this way.”

“Why shouldn’t you be called upon?” said Carbury. “You acknowledge that you owe the money.”

“I think Carbury ought to have paid it,” said Grasslough.

“Grassy, my boy,” said the baronet, “your attempts at thinking are never worth much. Why was I to suppose that a stranger would be playing among us? I don’t walk about with six hundred pounds in my pocket – nor do you!”

“It’s no good jawing,” said Nidderdale; “let’s get the money.” Montague offered to undertake the debt himself, saying that there were money transactions between him and his partner. But this could not be allowed. He had only lately come among them, and was the last man in the company who ought to be made responsible for the debts of Miles Grendall. He, the impecunious one, sat silent, stroking his moustache.

There was a second conference between Herr Vossner and the two lords in another room, which ended in the preparation of a document by which Miles

Grendall undertook to pay Herr Vossner £450 at the end of three months; and in return for this the German produced £322 10s. in notes and gold. Then a cup of tea was swallowed; after which Nidderdale and Montague set off to meet Fisker at the railway station.

“It’ll only be a trifle over £100 each,” said Nidderdale, in the cab.

“Won’t Mr. Grendall pay it?”

“Oh, dear no. How the devil should he?”

“Then he shouldn’t play.”

“That’d be hard on him, poor fellow. If you went to his uncle the duke, I suppose you could get it. Or he might win, you know, some day, and then he’d make it square. Poor Miles!”

They found Fisker on the platform. “We’ve brought you the tin,” said Nidderdale.

“Upon my word, my lord, I’m sorry you have taken so much trouble about such a trifle.”

“A man should always have his money when he wins.”

“We don’t think anything about such little matters at Frisco, my lord.”

“You’re fine fellows at Frisco, I dare say. Here we pay up, when we can.” Fresh adieus were made, and then Fisker was taken off.

“He’s not a bad fellow, but he’s not a bit like an Englishman,” said Lord Nidderdale, as he walked out of the station.



Chapter 11

Lady Carbury at Home

During the last six weeks Lady Carbury had lived a life of mixed depression and elevation. Her “Criminal Queens” had come out, and had been widely reviewed. However, many hard words had been said of her. In spite of the dear friendship between herself and Mr. Alf, one of Mr. Alf’s most sharp-nailed subordinates had been set upon her book, and had pulled it to pieces with rabid malignity. Error after error was laid bare without mercy. The writer pointed out basic historical facts which had been misquoted, misdated, or misrepresented. He checked off the blunders with an assurance intended to show that he himself had an exact knowledge of all these details.

This learned man was called Jones. The world knew him not, but his learning was at the command of Mr. Alf. Mr. Alf always had a Mr. Jones or two ready to do his work for him. He had his Jones for science, for poetry, for politics, as well as for history, and one special Jones entirely devoted to the Elizabethan drama.

There is the review intended to sell a book, which comes out immediately after the book’s appearance; there is the review which gives reputation, which comes a little later; the review which snuffs a book out quietly; the review which is suddenly to make an author, and the review which is to crush him. Of all reviews, the crushing review is the most readable and the most popular. When the rumour goes abroad that some notable man has been crushed – been positively driven over by an entire Juggernaut of criticism – then a real success has been achieved; but even the crushing of a Lady Carbury is effective, and will cause those who buy the paper to be satisfied with their bargain. Whenever the circulation of a newspaper begins to slacken, the proprietors should, as a matter of course, add a little power to the crushing department.

Lady Carbury had been crushed by the *Evening Pulpit* in Mr. Jones’s very best manner. But the poor authoress, though reduced to little more than literary pulp for an hour or two, was not destroyed. On the following morning she went to her publishers, and met the senior partner, Mr. Leadham.

“I’ve got it all in black and white,” she said, “and can prove him to be wrong. It was in 1522 that the man first came to Paris, and he couldn’t have been her lover before that. I got it all out of the ‘Biographie Universelle.’ I’ll write to Mr. Alf myself – a letter to be published, you know.”

“Pray don’t do anything of the kind, Lady Carbury.”

“I can prove that I’m right.”

“And they can prove that you’re wrong.”

“I’ve got all the facts and figures.”

Mr. Leadham did not care a straw for facts or figures; but he knew very well that the *Evening Pulpit* would get the better of any mere author in such an argument. “Never fight the newspapers, Lady Carbury.”

“And Mr. Alf is my particular friend! It does seem so hard,” said Lady Carbury, wiping tears from her cheeks.

“It won’t do us the least harm, Lady Carbury. A book of that sort couldn’t hope to go on very long, you know. The *Breakfast Table* gave it an excellent lift, just at the right time. I rather like the notice in the *Pulpit*, myself.”

“Like it!” said Lady Carbury.

“Anything is better than indifference, Lady Carbury. A great many people remember simply that the book has been noticed. It’s a very good advertisement.”

“But to be told that I have got to learn the ABC of history!”

“That’s a mere form of speech, Lady Carbury.”

“You think the book has done pretty well?”

“Pretty well; just about what we hoped, you know.”

“There’ll be something coming to me, Mr. Leadham?”

Mr. Leadham sent for a ledger, and ran up a few figures, and then scratched his head. There would be something, but Lady Carbury was not to imagine that it could be very much. A first book did not often make a great deal.

Nevertheless, Lady Carbury, when she left the publisher’s shop, did carry a cheque. She was smartly dressed, and had smiled on Mr. Leadham. Mr. Leadham was no more than man, and had written a small cheque.

Mr. Alf certainly had behaved badly to her; but both Mr. Broune of the *Breakfast Table*, and Mr. Booker of the *Literary Chronicle*, had been true. Lady Carbury had, as she promised, “done” Mr. Booker’s “New Tale of a Tub” in the *Breakfast Table*. That is, she had been allowed, as a reward for looking into Mr. Broune’s eyes, and laying her soft hand on Mr. Broune’s sleeve, to bedaub Mr. Booker’s very thoughtful book in a very thoughtless fashion, and to be paid for it.

Her review had been very distasteful to poor Mr. Booker. It grieved his intelligence that such rubbish should be thrown upon him; but he knew that even the rubbish was valuable, and that he must pay for it in the usual manner. So Mr. Booker himself reviewed “Criminal Queens” in the *Literary Chronicle*, knowing that what he wrote would also be rubbish. “Remarkable vivacity.” “Power of delineating character.” “Excellent choice of subject.” “The literary world would be sure to hear of Lady Carbury again.” The writing of the review, together with the reading of the book, took him perhaps an hour. He had done this kind of thing so often that he knew what he was about. When the work was done he threw down his pen and uttered a deep sigh, feeling it hard that he had to descend so low in literature. “If I didn’t, somebody else would,” he said to himself.

But the review in the *Morning Breakfast Table* was the making of Lady Carbury’s book, as far as it ever was made. Two whole columns had been devoted to the work, assuring the world that no more delightful mixture of amusement and instruction had ever been concocted than *Criminal Queens*. It was the very book that had been wanted for years. At that last meeting Lady Carbury had been very soft and very handsome; Mr. Broune had given the order, and it had been obeyed.

Therefore, despite the crushing, there had also been some elation; and overall Lady Carbury was disposed to think that her literary career might yet be a success. The small cheque might lead to something better. People at any rate were talking about her, and her Tuesday evenings at home were generally full.

But her literary life and successes were only adjuncts to her real inner life, of which the absorbing interest was her son. About him too she was partly depressed, and partly elated. There was very much to frighten her. Any moderate reform in the young man’s expenses had been abandoned. Though he never told her anything, she became aware that during the last month of the hunting season he hunted nearly every day. She knew he had a horse in town. She only saw him

at noon, and was aware that he was always at his club throughout the night, gambling, which she hated. But she knew that he had ready money, and that two or three tradesmen had ceased to trouble her in Welbeck Street. For the present, therefore, she consoled herself by reflecting that his gambling was successful.

But her elation sprung from a higher source. From all that she could hear, she thought it likely that Felix would carry off the great prize of Marie Melmotte; and then what a blessed son would he have been! She would be able to forget all his vices, his debts, his gambling, and his cruel treatment of herself! The bliss seemed too great to be possible. She understood that £10,000 a year to start with would be the least of it; and that the ultimate wealth might make Sir Felix Carbury the richest commoner in England. She desired it for him rather than for herself. Then her mind ran away to baronies and earldoms, and she was lost in the coming glories of the boy whose faults had nearly ruined her.

She had another ground for elation: her son had become a Director of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway Company. She was aware that there was some reason for such a choice that was hidden from the world. A ruined baronet of five-and-twenty, whose life had been loaded with vice and folly – of what use could he be? But Lady Carbury was not shocked. She was now able to speak up for her boy, and sent the news by post to Roger Carbury. Her son on the same Board with Mr. Melmotte! What a sign of coming triumphs!

Fisker had departed on the 19th of April, leaving Sir Felix at the Club. All that day his mother was unable to see him. She found him asleep in his room at noon and again at two; and when she sought him again he had flown. But the next day she caught him.

“I hope,” she said, “you’ll stay at home on Tuesday evening.” Hitherto she had never succeeded in inducing him to attend her evening parties.

“Mother, it is such an awful bore.”

“Madame Melmotte and her daughter will be here.”

“One looks such a fool carrying on that kind of thing in one’s own house. Everybody sees that it has been contrived.”

Then Lady Carbury spoke her mind. “Felix, I think you must be a fool. I have given up expecting that you would do anything to please me. I sacrifice everything for you and I do not even hope for a return. But when I am working night and day to rescue you from ruin, I think you might at any rate help a little – not for me, but for yourself.”

“I don’t know what you mean by working day and night. I don’t want you to work day and night.”

“There is hardly a young man in London that is not thinking of this girl, and you have chances that none of them have. I am told they are going out of town at Whitsuntide, and that she’s to meet Lord Nidderdale down in the country.”

“She can’t endure Nidderdale. She says so herself.”

“She will do as she is told – unless she can be made to be in love with someone like yourself. Why not offer for her on Tuesday?”

“If I’m to do it I must do it in my own way. I’m not going to be driven.”

“Of course if you will not take the trouble to see her when she comes to your own house, you cannot expect her to think that you love her.”

“Love her! what a bother there is about loving! Well; I’ll look in. What time do the animals come to feed?”

“There will be no feeding. Felix, you are so heartless that I sometimes think I will let you go your own way and never speak to you again. You should be here not later than ten.”

“If I can get my dinner by that time, I will come.”

When the Tuesday came, the young man did contrive to get his dinner eaten, and his glass of brandy sipped, so as to present himself in his mother’s drawing-room not long after half-past ten. Madame Melmotte and her daughter were already there, and many others. Mr. Alf was discussing Lady Carbury’s book with Mr. Booker. He had been graciously received, as though he had not authorised the crushing. Lady Carbury had given him her hand, and had simply thrown one appealing glance into his eyes – as though asking how he had found it in his heart to be so cruel to one so unprotected as herself.

“I cannot stand this kind of thing,” said Mr. Alf to Mr. Booker. “There’s a regular system of touting got abroad, and I mean to trample it down.”

“If you’re strong enough,” said Mr. Booker.

“Well, I think I am. I’m not afraid to lead the way. I’ve the greatest possible regard for our friend here; but her book is a thoroughly rotten book, an unblushing compilation from half-a-dozen other works, with misunderstood facts and muddled dates. Then she writes to me and asks me to do the best I can for her. I have done the best I could.”

Mr. Alf knew very well what Mr. Booker had done, and Mr. Booker was aware of this.

“What you say is right,” said Mr. Booker; “only you want a different kind of world to live in.”

“Just so; and therefore we must make it different. I wonder how our friend Broune felt when he saw that his critic had declared that the *Criminal Queens* was the greatest historical work of modern days.”

“I didn’t see the notice. There isn’t much in the book, certainly. I should have said that violent censure or violent praise would be equally thrown away upon it. One doesn’t want to break a butterfly on the wheel; especially a friendly butterfly.”

“The friendship should be kept separate,” said Mr. Alf.

“I’ll never forget what you’ve done for me – never!” said Lady Carbury, holding Mr. Broune’s hand.

“Nothing more than my duty,” said he, smiling.

“I hope you’ll learn to know that a woman can really be grateful.” She let go his hand and moved away to some other guest. At that moment she did feel that she would willingly make Mr. Broune some return of friendship. Of any flirtation, she was absolutely innocent. She had forgotten that little absurd episode in their lives.

But it was otherwise with Mr. Broune. He could not make up his mind whether the lady was in love with him – and if she were, whether he ought to indulge her; and if so, in what manner. She was certainly very beautiful, her figure was distinguished, her income certain, and her rank considerable. Nevertheless, Mr. Broune knew that he was not a marrying man. He had made up his mind that marriage would not suit his business, and Lady Carbury would not turn him from his resolution.

“I am so glad that you have come tonight, Mr. Alf,” Lady Carbury said to the high-minded editor of the *Evening Pulpit*.

“Am I not always glad to come, Lady Carbury?”

“You are very good. But I feared that you might perhaps have felt that I should be unwilling to welcome you after – well, after the compliments of last Thursday.”

“Lady Carbury, I don’t write all these things myself.”

“No indeed. What a bitter creature you would be if you did.”

“To tell the truth, I never write any of them. Of course we endeavour to get critics whose judgments we can trust, and if, as in this case, our critic’s judgment is unfortunately hostile to a friend’s book, I can only lament the accident, and trust that my friend may have spirit enough to divide me as an individual from Mr. Alf the editor.”

“It is because you have so trusted me that I am obliged to you,” said Lady Carbury with her sweetest smile. She did not believe a word that Mr. Alf said. She thought, and thought rightly, that Mr. Alf’s critic had taken direct orders from his editor as to his treatment of the “Criminal Queens.” But she intended to write another book, and thought she might perhaps conquer even Mr. Alf by her courage.

It was Lady Carbury’s duty to say pretty things to everybody. And she did her duty. But in the midst of it all she was thinking of her son and Marie Melmotte, and she did at last venture to separate the girl from her mother.

Marie was not unwilling to be talked to by Sir Felix. He had never bullied her, had never seemed to scorn her; and then he was so beautiful! She, poor girl, bewildered by suitors, utterly confused by the life to which she was introduced, troubled by fitful admonitions from her father, who would leave her unnoticed for a week at a time; with no trust in her pseudo-mother – for poor Marie had in truth been born before her father had married, and had never known her own mother’s fate – she had concluded that it would be well for her to be taken away somewhere by somebody.

She had already led a varied life. She could just remember the dirty street in the German portion of New York where she had lived for her first four years, and could remember too the poor woman who had been her mother. She could remember being at sea, and her sickness, but could not quite remember whether that woman had been with her. Then she had run about the streets of Hamburg, sometimes very hungry, sometimes in rags – and she had a dim memory that her father had fallen into some trouble, and was away for a time.

Then her father had married her present mother in Frankfurt. She could remember that distinctly, and also the fact that she was told that from henceforth she was to be a Jewess. But soon they went to Paris, where they were all Christians. They had lived in various apartments in the French capital, sometimes with a carriage, sometimes not. She had realised that her father was being much talked about. He had always been capricious and indifferent rather than cruel, but at this period he was cruel both to her and to his wife. And Madame Melmotte would weep at times and declare that they were all ruined.

Then, at a moment, they burst out into sudden splendour at Paris. There was a hotel, with carriages and horses, and a crowd of dark, greasy men, who were entertained sumptuously in their rooms; but few women. At this time Marie was hardly nineteen. Suddenly again she was told that she was to be taken to London; and she had been brought to Grosvenor Square, and at once thrown into the matrimonial market.

No part of her life had been more disagreeable, more frightful, than the first months in which she had been trafficked for by the Nidderdales and Grassloughs.

She had been too frightened to object, but still had wished to have some hand in her own future destiny. Luckily for her, the first attempts at trafficking with the Nidderdales and Grassloughs had come to nothing; and she was picking up a little courage, and was beginning to feel that it might be possible to prevent an alliance which she did not like. She was also beginning to think that there might be one which would suit her own tastes.

Felix Carbury was leaning against a wall, and she was seated on a chair close to him.

“I love you better than anyone in the world,” he said.

“Oh, Sir Felix, pray do not talk like that.”

“You knew that before. Now I want you to say whether you will be my wife.”

“How can I answer that myself? Papa settles everything.”

“May I go to papa?”

“You may if you like,” she replied in a very low whisper. It was thus that the greatest heiress of the day gave herself away to a man without a penny.



Chapter 12

Sir Felix in his Mother's House

When all her friends were gone Lady Carbury looked about for her son – expecting him to have gone to the Beargarden, but still with some faint hope that he might have remained to tell her of his fortune. She had watched the whispering, and without hearing the words she had almost known the very moment in which he was asking – and had seen the girl's timid face, eyes turned to the ground, and the nervous twitching of her hands as she replied.

As a woman who had herself been wooed, she had greatly disapproved of her son's manner. Yet if the girl would put up with love-making so slight as that, and if the great Melmotte would accept in return for his money a title as modest as her son's, how glorious should Felix be to her!

"I heard him leave the house before the Melmottes went," said Henrietta.

"He might have stayed tonight. Do you think he asked her? I feel sure he did – and that she accepted him."

"If so I hope he will be good to her. I hope he loves her."

"Why shouldn't he love her as well as anyone else? There is nothing disagreeable about her."

"No. I do not know that she is especially attractive."

"Who is? It seems to me you are quite indifferent about Felix."

"Do not say that, mamma."

"You don't understand all that he might be with this girl's fortune, and what he must be unless he gets money by marriage. He is eating us both up."

"I would not let him do that, mamma."

"It's all very well to say that, but I have some heart. I love him. I could not see him starve. Think what he might be with £20,000 a year!"

"If he is to marry for that only, I cannot think that they will be happy."

"You had better go to bed, Henrietta. You never say a word to comfort me in all my troubles."

Henrietta went to bed, and Lady Carbury sat up the whole night waiting for her son. She went up to her room, took off her finery, and wrapped herself in a white dressing-gown. As she sat before her mirror, she acknowledged that age was coming on her. She could hide the unwelcome approach by art; but there it was, stealing on her with grey hairs around her temples, with little wrinkles round her eyes, and a look of weariness round the mouth which could only be removed by that self-assertion which practice had always made possible in company, though it now frequently deserted her when she was alone.

But she was not unhappy because she was growing old. Her happiness, like that of most of us, was ever in the future – never reached but always coming. She had never really determined what might make her happy – having some hazy aspiration after social distinction and literary fame, mixed with anxiety about money. But at present her great fears and hopes were centred on her son. She went down into the dining-room, where she would hear the key in the door, and waited for him with a volume of French memoirs in her hand.

Unfortunate woman! she might as well have gone to bed, for it was past eight when Felix's cab brought him to the door. The night had been very wretched

to her. She had slept, and the fire had sunk nearly to nothing. While she was awake the time seemed everlasting. It was so terrible to her that he should be gambling at these hours! Why should he desire to gamble if this girl's fortune was ready to fall into his hands? Fool, to risk his health, his character, his beauty, and the little money which he needed for his great project!

But at last he came. She waited patiently till he had thrown aside his hat and coat, and then she appeared at the dining-room door. She had rehearsed her part. She would not say a harsh word, and now she endeavoured to meet him with a smile.

"Mother," he said, "you up at this hour!" His face was flushed, and she thought that he was unsteady. She had never seen him tipsy; it would be doubly terrible to her if that were so.

"I could not go to bed till I had seen you," she said.

"Why not? I'll go to bed now. There'll be plenty of time by-and-by."

"Is anything the matter, Felix?"

"Matter – what should be the matter? There's been a row among the fellows at the club; that's all. I had to tell Grasslough my mind, and he didn't like it. You must let me go to bed now, for I am about used up."

"What did Marie Melmotte say to you?"

"Nothing particular." He stood with his hand on the door.

"And what did you say to her?"

"Nothing particular. Good heavens, mother, do you think a man is in a condition to talk about such stuff at eight o'clock in the morning, when he has been up all night?"

"If you knew all that I suffer on your behalf you would speak a word to me," she said, imploring him, holding him by the arm, and looking into his purple face and bloodshot eyes. She could smell the drink in his breath.

"I must go to the old fellow, of course."

"She told you to go to her father?"

"As far as I remember, that was about it. Of course, he will settle it as he likes. I should say that it's ten to one against me." Pulling himself away with some roughness, he made his way up to his own bedroom, occasionally stumbling against the stairs.

Then the heiress had accepted her son! If so, surely the thing might be done. But to beat a hard-hearted parent in an argument about marriage, a girl must be really in earnest, and her earnestness will depend on that of her lover.

However, there was no reason for supposing that Mr. Melmotte would object. He had shown some partiality for her son, in making him a director of the great American Company. Felix had also been kindly received in Grosvenor Square. And then he was a real baronet. If Mr. Melmotte had failed to catch a lord, why should he not content himself with a baronet?

Lady Carbury thought that her son wanted nothing but money to make him acceptable to Mr. Melmotte; not a real fortune – the man's own enormous wealth made this unnecessary – but Melmotte would not like outward signs of poverty. There should be means enough for sleekness and luxury. Felix must have a horse to ride, and rings and coats to wear, and above all the means of giving presents. He must not be seen to be poor. Fortunately, Chance had befriended him lately and had given him some ready money. But if he went on gambling Chance would certainly take it all away again. For all that the poor mother knew, Chance might have done so already.

He must abandon the habit of play – at any rate while his prospects depended on the good opinions of Mr. Melmotte. Such a one as Mr. Melmotte would not like gambling at a club, however much he might approve of it in the City. Why should not Felix learn to do his gambling on the Exchange, or among the brokers? Lady Carbury would at any rate urge him to be diligent in his position as director of the Great Mexican Railway. But what hope could there be for him if he should take to drink? Would not all hopes be over if Mr. Melmotte should ever learn that his daughter's lover tumbled upstairs to bed between eight and nine o'clock in the morning?

She watched for Felix's appearance at breakfast on the following day, and began at once on the subject.

"Do you know, Felix, I think I shall go down to your cousin Roger for Whitsuntide."

"To Carbury Manor!" said he. "I thought you found it so dull that you didn't mean to go there any more."

"I never said so, Felix. And now I have a great object."

"Hetta mightn't like it."

"I don't see why not."

"Has Roger asked you?"

"No; but I'm sure he'd be pleased to have us if I proposed that we should all go."

"Not me, mother!"

"Yes; you especially."

"What on earth should I do at Carbury Manor?" demanded Felix.

"Madame Melmotte told me last night that they were all going down to Caversham to stay three or four days with the Longestaffes. She spoke of Lady Pomona as quite her particular friend."

"Oh! that explains it all."

"Explains what, Felix?" said Lady Carbury, who had heard of Dolly Longestaffe, and feared that he might also have some matrimonial purpose in reference to Miss Melmotte's visit.

"They say at the club that Melmotte has taken up old Longestaffe's affairs, and means to put them straight. There's an old property in Sussex as well as Caversham, and they say that Melmotte is to buy that for himself. There's some bother because Dolly won't join his father in selling it. So the Melmottes are going to Caversham!"

"Of course we ought to be at Carbury Manor while they are there. What can be more natural? Everybody goes out of town at Whitsuntide."

"All very natural if you can manage it, mother."

"And you'll come?"

"If Marie Melmotte goes, I'll be there at any rate for one day and night," said Felix.

His mother thought that, for him, the promise had been graciously made.



Chapter 13

The Longestaffes

Mr. Adolphus Longestaffe senior, the squire of Caversham, and of Pickering Park in Sussex, was closeted one morning for an hour with Mr. Melmotte in Abchurch Lane. He had discussed all his private affairs, and was about to leave the room with a very dissatisfied air. Mr. Longestaffe had believed that if he could get Mr. Melmotte just to look at his affairs everything would be made right for him. But Mr. Melmotte had explained that property could not be created by the waving of any wand. He could help Mr. Longestaffe to realise property, or could find out the real market value of the property in question; but he could create nothing.

“You have only a life interest, Mr. Longestaffe.”

“That is customary with family estates in this country, Mr. Melmotte.”

“Just so. And therefore you can dispose of nothing else. Your son, of course, could join you, and then you could sell either one estate or the other.”

“There is no question of selling Caversham, sir. Lady Pomona and I reside there.”

“Your son will not join you in selling the other place?”

“He never does anything that I wish. I suppose you would not take Pickering Park on a lease?”

“I think not, Mr. Longestaffe. My wife would not like the uncertainty.”

Mr. Longestaffe left with a feeling of outraged aristocratic pride. His own lawyer would almost have done as much for him, and he need not have invited his own lawyer as a guest to Caversham – and certainly not his lawyer’s wife and daughter. He had indeed succeeded in borrowing a few thousand pounds from the great man at a rate of interest which the great man’s head clerk was to arrange, on the security of the lease of a house in town. There had been an ease in this which had gratified him. But he was already beginning to think that he might pay too dearly for that gratification.

At present, Mr. Melmotte was odious to him for another reason. He had condescended to ask Mr. Melmotte to make him a director of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway, and he, Adolphus Longestaffe of Caversham, had had his request refused!

“You have made Lord Alfred Grendall one!” he had complained. “I’m sure I could do anything that he does.”

Mr. Melmotte, knitting his brows, had replied that the number of directors required was complete. Since he had had two duchesses at his house Mr. Melmotte was beginning to feel that he was entitled to bully any mere commoner, especially a commoner who could ask him for a seat at his board.

Mr. Longestaffe was a tall, heavy man, about fifty, with hair and whiskers carefully dyed, whose clothes were made with great care, though they always seemed too tight, and who thought very much of his personal appearance. He was especially proud of his aristocratic bearing. He had an idea that people could perceive at a single glance that he was a gentleman and a man of fashion. He thought himself to be immensely superior to all those who earned their bread. There were no doubt gentlemen of different degrees, but the greatest English

gentleman was he who had land, an old family place, family portraits, and family debts, and a family absence of any useful employment. He was beginning even to look down upon peers, since so many men of much less consequence than himself had been made lords; and, having stood for Parliament unsuccessfully three or four times, he was of the opinion that a seat in the House was rather a mark of bad breeding.

He was a silly man; yet he had a certain nobility of feeling. He could leave his tradesmen's bills unpaid, but he could not question the items in their accounts. He could be tyrannical to his servants, but he could not inquire about the consumption of his wines in the servants' hall. He had no pity for his tenants if they poached game, but he hesitated much as to raising their rent. He had his theory of life and endeavoured to live up to it; but the attempt had hardly brought satisfaction to himself or to his family.

It was now the great desire of his heart to sell the smaller of his two properties and free the other from debt. The arrangement would, he believed, serve his whole family, and also his son, who was blessed with a third property of his own which he had already managed to burden with debt. But the father feared that his son would decline.

Now he walked sadly from Mr. Melmotte's office and went to his lawyer's chambers. Even for those few thousand pounds he was forced to tell his lawyers that the title-deeds of his house in town must be given up. Mr. Longestaffe felt that the world was very hard on him.

"What on earth are we to do with the Melmottes?" said Sophia, the eldest Miss Longestaffe, to her mother.

"I do think it's a shame of papa," said Georgiana, the second daughter. "I certainly shan't trouble myself to entertain them."

"Of course you will leave them all on my hands," said Lady Pomona wearily.

"But what's the use of having them?" urged Sophia. "I can understand going to a crush at their house in town when everybody else goes. One doesn't speak to them, and need not know them afterwards. I'm sure I shouldn't remember the girl if I were to see her."

"It would be a fine thing if Adolphus would marry her," said Lady Pomona.

"Dolly will never marry anybody," said Georgiana. "The idea of his taking the trouble of asking a girl to have him! Besides, he won't come down to Caversham. If that is to be the game, mamma, it is quite hopeless."

"Why should Dolly marry such a creature as that?" asked Sophia.

"Because everybody wants money," said Lady Pomona. "I'm sure I don't know why there is never any money for anything. *I don't spend it.*"

"I don't think that we do anything out of the way," said Sophia. "I haven't the slightest idea what papa's income is; but if we're to live at all, I don't know how we are to make a change."

"It's been like this ever since I can remember," said Georgiana, "and I don't mean to worry about it any more. I suppose it's just the same with other people, only one doesn't know it. I suppose we shall only have these Melmottes for two days."

"My dear, they're coming for a week!"

"Then papa must take them about the country, that's all. I never did hear of anything so absurd. What good can they do papa?"

"He is wonderfully rich," said Lady Pomona.

“But I don’t suppose he’ll give papa his money,” continued Georgiana. “If papa hasn’t got money to live at home, why doesn’t he go abroad for a year? The Sydney Beauchamps did that, and the girls had quite a nice time in Florence. Clara Beauchamp met young Lord Liffey there. I shouldn’t at all mind that kind of thing, but I think it quite horrible to have these sort of people brought down upon us at Caversham. No one knows who they are.” So spoke Georgiana, who among the Longestaffes was supposed to have the strongest head, and certainly the sharpest tongue.

This conversation took place in the drawing-room of the Longestaffes’ London town-house in Bruton Street. It was by no means a charming house, being gloomy and inconvenient, with large drawing-rooms, bad bedrooms, and very little accommodation for servants. But three or four generations of Longestaffes had lived there. When Lady Pomona had once suggested a change to Eaton Square, Mr. Longestaffe had snubbed her. If Bruton Street wasn’t good enough for her and the girls, then they might remain at Caversham.

The threat of remaining at Caversham was often made, for Mr. Longestaffe, proud as he was of his town-house, was very anxious to save the expense of the annual migration to London. The girls’ dresses and horses, the carriages and dull London dinner-parties, and the one ball which it was always necessary to give, made him dread the season and its cost.

But he had never yet been able to keep his family in the country during the entire year. The girls were willing to be taken about Germany and Italy for twelve months, but had shown that they would mutiny against any attempt by their father to keep them at Caversham during the London season.

Georgiana had just finished her protest against the Melmottes, when her brother strolled into the room. Dolly did not often show himself in Bruton Street. He had rooms of his own, and could seldom even be induced to dine with his family. His mother wrote him notes asking, would he come and dine; would he take them to the theatre; would he go to this ball or that party? These Dolly barely read, and never answered. Consequently his mother worshipped him; and even his sisters, who were superior to him in intellect, treated him with deference. He was free to do as he liked, while they felt themselves to be slaves, bound down by the dull Longestaffe regime.

“My dear Adolphus,” said the mother, “this is so nice of you.”

“I think it is rather nice,” said Dolly, submitting himself to be kissed.

“Oh Dolly, whoever would have thought of seeing you?” said Sophia.

“Give him some tea,” said his mother.

“I’d sooner have soda and brandy,” said Dolly.

“My darling boy!”

“I didn’t ask for it. I only said I’d sooner have it than tea. Where’s the governor?”

They looked at him with wondering eyes. There must be something going on when Dolly asked to see his father.

“Papa went out after lunch,” said Sophia gravely.

“I’ll wait for him,” said Dolly, taking out his watch.

“Do stay and dine with us,” said Lady Pomona.

“No, I’ve got to go and dine with some fellow.”

“Adolphus,” began Lady Pomona very seriously, “I’ve got a plan and I want you to help me. We’re all going to Caversham for Whitsuntide, and we particularly want you to come.”

“By George! no; I couldn’t do that.”

“You haven’t heard half. Madame Melmotte and her daughter are coming.”

“The d___ they are!” ejaculated Dolly.

“Dolly!” said Sophia, “remember where you are.”

“I won’t go to Caversham to meet old mother Melmotte.”

“My dear boy,” continued the mother, “do you know that Miss Melmotte will have twenty thousand a year the day she marries; and that her husband will probably some day be the richest man in Europe?”

“Half the fellows in London are after her,” said Dolly.

“She isn’t going to stay in the same house with half the fellows in London,” suggested Georgiana. “If you’ve a mind to try it you’ll have a chance which nobody else can have.”

“But I haven’t any mind to try it. Good gracious me – it isn’t at all in my way, mother.”

“I knew he wouldn’t,” said Georgiana.

“It would put everything so straight,” said Lady Pomona.

“There’s the governor. I heard his voice. Now for a row.”

Mr. Longestaffe entered the room.

“My dear,” said Lady Pomona, “here’s Adolphus come to see us.”

“I’ve got a letter, sir,” said Dolly, “ever so long, from those lawyer fellows. They want me to come and see you about selling something; so I’ve come. It’s an awful bore, because I don’t understand anything about it.”

“You’d better come with me into the study,” said the father. “We needn’t disturb your mother and sisters about business.”

The squire led the way out of the room, and Dolly followed, making a woeful grimace at his sisters. The three ladies sat over their tea for about half-an-hour, waiting for whatever signs of good or evil might be collected from the squire’s manner when he should return to them. Dolly they did not expect to see again – probably for a month. He and the squire never met without quarrelling.

At the end of the half hour Mr. Longestaffe returned to the drawing-room, and at once pronounced the doom of the family.

“My dear,” he said, “we shall not come back to London this year.” He struggled hard to maintain a grand dignified tranquillity, but his voice quivered with emotion.

“Papa!” screamed Sophia.

“My dear, you don’t mean it,” said Lady Pomona.

“Of course papa doesn’t mean it,” said Georgiana, rising to her feet.

“Certainly I mean it,” said Mr. Longestaffe. “We go to Caversham in about ten days, and we shall not return to London this year.”

“Our ball is fixed,” said Lady Pomona.

“Then it must be unfix’d.” So saying, the master of the house left the drawing-room.

The three ladies expressed their opinions very strongly, the daughters more loudly than their mother.

“He can’t really mean it,” said Sophia.

“He does,” said Lady Pomona, with tears in her eyes.

“Why did he bring us up to London at all,” said Georgiana, “if he means to take us away before the season has begun?”

“I wonder what Adolphus said to him. Your papa is always hard upon Adolphus.”

“Dolly can take care of himself,” said Georgiana. “He does not care for us.”

“Not a bit,” said Sophia.

“I’ll tell you what you must do, mamma. You must give up going to Caversham, unless he promises to bring us back. I won’t stir, unless he has me carried out of the house.”

“My dear, I couldn’t say that to him.”

“Then I will. To be buried down in that place for a whole year with no one near but the rusty old bishop and Mr. Carbury – I won’t stand it. If you go there I shall stay in town with the Primeros. Mrs. Primero would have me, I know. It wouldn’t be nice, of course. I don’t like the Primeros. They are vulgar; but not half so vulgar, mamma, as your friend Madame Melmotte.”

“She is not a friend of mine.”

“But you’re going to have her down at Caversham. I can’t think what made you dream of going to Caversham just now.”

“Everybody is going out of town at Whitsuntide, my dear.”

“No, mamma; everybody is not. The Primeros aren’t. What does he expect is to become of us? If he wants to save money why doesn’t he shut Caversham up altogether and go abroad? Caversham costs a great deal more than is spent in London, and it’s the dullest house in all England.”

The family party in Bruton Street that evening was not very gay. The two girls were quite silent, and would not speak to their father. When he addressed them they answered simply by monosyllables.

Lady Pomona was ill, and sat in a corner of a sofa, wiping her eyes. She had been told the purport of the conversation between Dolly and his father. Dolly had refused to consent to the sale of Pickering unless half the proceeds were to be given to him at once. When it had been explained to him that the sale was to free the Caversham property from debt – and Caversham would eventually be his – he replied that he also had an estate of his own which would be the better for money.

The result seemed to be that Pickering could not be sold. In consequence, Mr. Longestaffe had determined that there should be no more London expenses that year.

The girls, when they got up to go to bed, bent over him and kissed his head with very little show of affection.

“You had better remember that anything you have to do in town must be done this week,” he said. They heard the words, but marched out in stately silence.



Chapter 14 Carbury Manor

“I don’t think it quite nice, mamma; that’s all. Of course if you have made up your mind to go, I must go with you.”

“What on earth can be more natural than going to your cousin’s house?”

“You know what I mean, mamma.”

“It’s done now, my dear.”

This little conversation arose when Lady Carbury announced her intention of visiting Carbury Manor for the Whitsun week. It was very grievous to Henrietta that she should be taken to the house of a man who was in love with her. But she had no escape. She could not remain in town by herself. Lady Carbury had already posted the following letter to Roger:

My dear Roger,

We know how kind you are, and if what I am going to propose doesn’t suit you, say so at once. I have been working very hard, and feel it would do me good to get into the country for a day or two. Would you take us for a part of Whitsun week? We would come down on the 20th May and stay over the Sunday if you would keep us. Felix says he would run down though he would not trouble you for so long a time as we talk of staying.

I’m sure you must have been glad to hear of his being made a Director of that Great American Railway Board. It will enable him to prove that he can make himself useful. I think it was a great confidence to place in one so young.

Of course you will say so at once if my little proposal interferes with your plans, but you have been so very very kind to us that I have no scruple in making it.

Henrietta joins with me in kind love.

Your affectionate cousin,

Matilda Carbury.

There was much in this letter that disturbed and even annoyed Roger Carbury. In the first place he felt that Henrietta should not be brought to his house. Much as he loved her, he hardly wished to have her at Carbury unless she came with a resolution to be its future mistress. He thought that Henrietta was being brought to his house with the object of furthering his suit. He had not heard that the great heiress was coming into his neighbourhood, and therefore knew nothing of Lady Carbury’s scheme in that direction.

He was, too, disgusted by the ill-founded pride which the mother expressed at her son’s position as a director. Roger Carbury did not believe in the Railway, or in Fisker, or Melmotte. Paul Montague had acted against his advice in yielding to Fisker’s seductions. The whole thing was to his mind fraudulent and ruinous. What sort of company was directed by such men as Lord Alfred Grendall and Sir Felix Carbury? He did not know which to despise most, Sir Felix for belonging to such a Board, or the Board for having such a director. And did not everybody know that Mr. Melmotte was a gigantic swindler?

There was another trouble. He had asked Paul Montague to come to Carbury the same week, and Paul had accepted. Roger clung to his old affection for the man. He could not bear the idea of a permanent quarrel, though he knew that there must be a quarrel if Paul interfered with his dearest hopes. He had asked him down to Carbury intending that Henrietta's name should not be mentioned between them; and now it was proposed that Henrietta should be at the Manor House at the very same time! He decided that he must tell Paul not to come.

He wrote two letters at once. That to Lady Carbury was very short. He would be delighted to see her and Henrietta, and also Felix. He did not say a word about the Board.

To Montague his letter was longer.

"It is always best to be open and true," he wrote. "Since you were kind enough to say that you would come to me, Lady Carbury has proposed to visit me just at the same time with her daughter. I need hardly say that I could not make you both welcome here together. It is not pleasant to me to have to ask you to postpone your visit, but I think you will not accuse me of a lack of hospitality towards you." Paul wrote back to say that he was sure that there was no lack of hospitality, and that he would remain in town.

Suffolk is not an especially picturesque county, nor can it be said that the scenery round Carbury was grand or beautiful; but the house and its grounds had a charm of their own. Carbury Manor House was surrounded by a moat, which was rather a trouble to Roger, as it was felt necessary either to keep it clean with moving water, or else to fill it up and abolish it altogether. That plan of abolishing it had been discussed about ten years previously; but it was decided that it would alter the character of the house, and create a waste of mud around it which it would take years to beautify. The squire, therefore, had given up that idea, and instead had made his moat prettier than ever.

The high road from Bungay to Beccles ran very close to the house; a short, private road led from it to the old bridge over the moat. Between the bridge and the front door there was a sweep of ground just sufficient for the turning of a carriage. At the back of the house there were large gardens screened from the road by a wall ten feet high, and ancient yews and cypresses. The gardens were partly inside the moat, but chiefly beyond them, and were joined by two bridges – a foot bridge and one with a carriage way.

The house itself had been built in the time of Charles II, when Tudor architecture was giving way to a less picturesque, though perhaps more useful form. But Carbury Manor House had the reputation of being a Tudor building. The windows were long, with strong mullions, and small, old-fashioned panes. There was one high bow window in the library, which looked out on to the gravel sweep by the front door. All the other chief rooms faced the garden. The house was built of a buff stone that was very pretty. It was only two storeys high, except at the end where the kitchens were. The rooms were low, and mostly long and narrow, with large fire-places.

Its owner was very proud of it. The houses of the gentry around him were superior in comfort, but none of them had that thoroughly established look of Carbury Manor. Bundlesham, where the Primeros lived, looked as if it had been built within the last twenty years, and savoured of trade; so at least thought Roger Carbury, though he never said it aloud. Caversham was a very large mansion, built in the early part of George III's reign, and had nothing to recommend it but its size. The Bishop's palace was an excellent gentleman's residence, but modern,

with no distinctive features. Carbury Manor House, in its owner's eyes, was pre-eminently beautiful.

It often troubled him to think what would become of the place when he was gone. He was at present in excellent health, and the farmers of the neighbourhood still spoke of him as the young squire. When in his happiest moods he could be almost a boy; but a great care had grown within him. If he should not succeed with Henrietta, he felt that no marriage would be possible to him. In that case he must look for an heir.

Now Sir Felix was the next heir, though Roger could leave his property as he pleased. In one respect the natural succession to it by Sir Felix would be fortunate: the baronetcy and the family property would then go together. No doubt to Sir Felix himself such an arrangement would seem to be the most proper thing in the world.

But Roger had very strong objections. It was not only that he thought ill of the baronet, but he thought ill of the baronetcy itself. Sir Patrick, to his thinking, should not have accepted the title, knowing that he would leave no property adequate for its support. A baronet, thought Roger Carbury, should be rich enough to grace his rank.

With these old-fashioned notions Roger certainly would not leave his property to support the baronetcy. But Sir Felix was the natural heir, and Roger felt it was his duty to see that his land went from Carbury to Carbury, unimpaired in extent or value. There was no reason why he should himself die for twenty or thirty years – but if he were to die, Sir Felix would undoubtedly dissipate the acres, and then there would be an end of Carbury.

But in such case he, Roger Carbury, would at any rate have done his duty. Better that the estate should be dissipated by a Carbury than held together by a stranger. So thinking, he had already made his will, leaving the entire property to the man whom of all others he most despised, should he himself die childless.

In the afternoon on which Lady Carbury was expected, he wandered about the place thinking of all this. How infinitely better it would be to have an heir of his own – how wonderfully beautiful would the world be to him if his cousin would consent to be his wife! He thought much of her welfare too. He did not like Lady Carbury, accurately judging her as affectionate but worldly. She believed that good could come out of evil, and that falsehood might sometimes be better than truth. It was lamentable to him that the girl he loved should be subjected to this teaching. Would not the touch of pitch at last defile her?

In his heart of hearts he believed that she loved Paul Montague; and of Paul himself he was beginning to fear evil. Only a sham would pretend to sit on a Board of Directors with Lord Alfred Grendall and Sir Felix Carbury, under the control of Melmotte. What a life it would be for Henrietta were she to marry a man striving to become rich without labour – a city adventurer, of all men the vilest and most dishonest! He strove to think well of Paul Montague, but he feared for his future.

Then he went into the house and wandered through the rooms which the two ladies were to occupy. In the smaller room of the two the hangings were all white, and the room was sweet with May flowers; and he brought a white rose from the hot-house, and placed it in a glass on the dressing table. Surely she would know who had put it there.

Then he stood at the open window, gazing vacantly down upon the lawn for half an hour, till he heard the wheels of the arriving carriage. During that half hour he resolved that he would try again.



Chapter 15

“You Should Remember that I am his Mother”

“This is so kind of you,” said Lady Carbury, grasping her cousin’s hand as she got out of the carriage. “I did so long to get into the country, and I do so love Carbury.”

“Where should a Carbury go to escape from London smoke, but to the old house? I am afraid Henrietta will find it dull.”

“Oh no,” said Hetta, smiling. “I am never dull in the country.”

“The bishop and Mrs. Yeld are coming to dine tomorrow, and the Hepworths.”

“I shall be so glad to meet the bishop once more,” said Lady Carbury.

“He is a dear, good fellow, and his wife is just as good. And there is another gentleman coming whom you have never seen: a Father John Barham, who has come to Beccles as priest. He has got a little cottage about a mile from here. I used to know his family.”

“He is a gentleman then?”

“Certainly. He took his degree at Oxford, and then became a convert. He has not got a shilling in the world beyond his priest’s pay, which is not much more than a labourer’s. He told me the other day that he was forced to buy second-hand clothes.”

“How shocking!” said Lady Carbury.

“He didn’t seem to be at all shocked at telling it. We have got to be quite friends.”

“Will the bishop like to meet him?”

“Why not? I’ve told the bishop all about him, and he wishes to know him. He won’t hurt the bishop. But you and Hetta will find it very dull.”

“I shan’t find it dull, Mr. Carbury,” said Henrietta.

“It was to escape from the eternal parties that we came down here,” said Lady Carbury. She had nevertheless been anxious to hear what guests were expected at the Manor House. Sir Felix had promised to come down from Saturday until Monday, and Lady Carbury had hoped that some visiting might be arranged between the Manor House and Caversham.

“I have asked the Longestaffes for Monday,” said Roger. “But they won’t come, I dare say.”

“Why not?”

“They never do. They probably have a house full of guests, and they know that my accommodation is limited. I’ve no doubt they’ll ask us on Tuesday or Wednesday, and if you like we will go.”

“I know they are to have guests,” said Lady Carbury.

“What guests?”

“The Melmottes.” Lady Carbury felt that her voice and self-possession were failing her.

“The Melmottes coming to Caversham!” said Roger, looking at Henrietta, who blushed with shame as she remembered that she had been brought here solely in order that her brother might have an opportunity of seeing Marie Melmotte.

“Why not?” said Lady Carbury. “I fancy, Roger, that Mr. Longestaffe needs a little pecuniary help.”

“And he condescends to get it in this way! I should have thought that Mr. Longestaffe might have kept such a man as Mr. Melmotte out of his wife’s drawing-room.”

Henrietta became redder than ever. Even Lady Carbury flushed, as she remembered that Roger knew she had taken her daughter to Madame Melmotte’s ball. He thought of this himself as soon as the words were spoken, and tried to make some half apology. “I don’t approve of them in London, you know; but I think they are very much worse in the country.”

Then the ladies were shown into their rooms, and Roger again went out into the garden. He began to feel that he understood it all. Lady Carbury had come to his house not for love of him, but to be near the Melmottes! He and his house had been simply used in order to further a vile project of marrying two vile people to each other!

As he was thinking all this, Lady Carbury came out to him in the garden. She had changed her travelling dress, and made herself pretty. And now she dressed her face in her sweetest smiles. She wished to explain to her stern cousin the good that might come by an alliance with the heiress.

“I can understand, Roger,” she said, taking his arm, “that you should not like those Melmottes.”

“I don’t dislike them. How should I dislike people that I never saw? I dislike those who seek their society simply because they have the reputation of being rich.”

“Meaning me.”

“No; not meaning you. I don’t dislike you, as you know very well, though I do dislike the fact that you should run after these people.”

“Do you suppose, my friend, that I run after them for my own pleasure? You know my son’s condition. What is he to do? His only chance is to marry a girl with money. He is good-looking; you can’t deny that.”

“Certainly.”

“He was very young when he came into possession of his own small fortune. He might have done better; but how many young men placed in such temptations do well? He has nothing left. Is it not imperative that he should marry a girl with money?”

“I call that stealing a girl’s money, Lady Carbury.”

“Oh, Roger, how hard you are! The girl will not marry Felix unless she loves him.”

“But does he love her?”

“Why should he not? Of course she hopes to be married, and why should she not have Felix if she likes him best? Cannot you sympathize with my anxiety that he shall not be a disgrace to the family?”

“We had better not talk about the family, Lady Carbury. The family will not be benefited by a marriage with the daughter of Mr. Melmotte. I look upon him as dirt in the gutter. All his money, if he has it, can make no difference. Who knows anything of this man? Who can be sure that she is his daughter?”

“He would give her a fortune when she married.”

“Yes; it all comes to that. Men say openly that he is an adventurer and a swindler. No one pretends to think that he is a gentleman. His money is amassed not by honest trade, but by unknown tricks. He is one whom we would not admit

into our kitchens, much less to our dining-tables, on his own merits. But because he has learned the art of making money, we not only put up with him, but settle upon his carcass like birds of prey."

"Do you mean that Felix should not marry the girl, even if they love each other?"

He shook his head in disgust, feeling sure that any idea of love on the young man's part was a sham – and that his mother knew it. "It is no affair of mine. When I am told that the girl is at Caversham, and that Felix is coming here in order to be near his prey, I can only say what I think. Your son is welcome to my house, little as I approve his mode of life; but I could have wished that he had chosen some other place for the work that he has on hand."

"If you wish, Roger, we will return to London. I shall find it hard to explain to Hetta; but we will go."

"No; I certainly do not wish that."

"But you have said such hard things! You speak of Felix as though he were all bad." She looked at him hoping to get some retraction, but he had nothing to say. Had he found fault with herself, or with Henrietta, she would have put up with it, for the sake of benefits to come. But for her son she was prepared to fight. "I am grieved, Roger, that we should have troubled you with our visit, but I think that we had better go. You are very harsh, and it crushes me."

"I have not meant to be harsh."

"You say that Felix is brought here to be near – his prey. What can be more harsh than that? You should remember that I am his mother."

Roger began to be ashamed of himself, and to think that he had spoken unkind words. "If I have hurt you, I regret it."

"Of course you have hurt me. I think I will go in now. How very hard the world is! I came here thinking to find peace and sunshine, and there has come a storm at once."

"You asked me about the Melmottes, and I was obliged to speak." They walked in silence to the door, where he stopped. "If I have been over hot with you, let me beg your pardon." She smiled and bowed; but her smile was not one of forgiveness. "Pray do not speak of going, Lady Carbury."

"I think I will go to my room now. My head aches so that I can hardly stand."

It was about six in the afternoon, and according to his daily custom Roger should have gone to see his men as they finished their work; but he stood still for a few moments and then went slowly across the lawn to the bridge, sitting on the parapet. Would she really leave his house in anger and take her daughter – the one human being in the world that he loved? He was a man who thought much of the duties of hospitality, especially when his guests were Carburys. But if there were one person among all others to whom the house should be a refuge from care, that one was his cousin Hetta. And now he had been told that he had been so rough to his guest that she and her daughter must return to London!

He could not acquit himself. He had said very hard words. He could not have expressed his meaning without hard words. And Lady Carbury had acted well the part of an outraged mother. His heart was so soft that though he knew the woman to be false and the son to be worthless, he utterly condemned himself.

When he had sat half-an-hour upon the bridge he turned towards the house to dress for dinner – and to prepare himself for an apology. At the door, standing as though waiting for him, was his cousin Hetta. She had on her bosom the rose he

had placed in her room, and as he approached her he thought that there was in her eyes more graciousness towards him than he had ever seen there before.

“Mr. Carbury,” she said, “mamma is so unhappy!”

“I fear that I have offended her.”

“It is not that, but that you should be so – so angry about Felix.”

“I am more vexed with myself than I can tell you. She talked of going back to London. I should be wretched indeed if you and she were to leave my house in anger.”

“I do not think she will do that,” said Hetta.

“And you?”

“I am not angry. I should never dare to be angry with you. I only wish that Felix would be better. They say that young men do get better as they grow older. He is something in the city now, a director they call him, and mamma thinks that the work will be of service to him.”

Roger could express no hope or approval. “Dear Hetta, I only wish he were like you.”

“Girls are so different, you know.”

It was not till late in the evening, after dinner, that he made his apology to Lady Carbury; but he did make it, and it was accepted.

“I think I was rough to you, talking about Felix,” he said, “and I beg your pardon.”

“You were energetic, that was all.”

“A gentleman should never be rough to a lady, nor to his guests. I hope you will forgive me.”

She answered by putting out her hand and smiling; and so the quarrel was over.

Lady Carbury understood the full extent of her triumph, and used it thoroughly. Felix might now come down to Carbury, and go to Caversham to do his wooing, and the master of Carbury could make no objection. And Felix would not now be snubbed. Roger would understand that he was constrained to courtesy.

He did understand it, and though he was soft and gracious towards his two guests, he felt that he had been cheated out of his right to disapprove of all connection with the Melmottes. During the evening there came a bundle of notes from Caversham. That addressed to Roger was a letter from Lady Pomona; who was sorry to say that the Longestaffes were prevented from having the pleasure of dining at Carbury Hall by the fact that they had a house full of guests. Lady Pomona hoped that Mr. Carbury and his relatives would do the Longestaffes the pleasure of dining at Caversham either on the Monday or Tuesday following, as might best suit. There were cards of invitation for Lady Carbury and her daughter, and for Sir Felix.

Roger, as he read his own note, handed the others over to Lady Carbury, and asked her what she wished to have done.

“I should like to go,” she said.

“I certainly shall not go,” he replied; “but there will be no difficulty whatever in sending you over. You must answer at once, because their servant is waiting.”

“Monday will be best,” she said; “I suppose I had better say that I, and Hetta, and Felix will accept their invitation.”

“I can make no suggestion,” said Roger, thinking how delightful it would be if Henrietta could remain with him instead. Poor Hetta herself could say nothing.

She certainly did not wish to meet the Melmottes, but nor did she wish to dine alone with her cousin Roger.

“That will be best,” said Lady Carbury. “It is very good of you to send us.”

“Of course you will do here just as you please,” he replied; but still with that tone of voice which Lady Carbury feared. Soon the Caversham servant was on his way with the reply.



Chapter 16

The Bishop and the Priest

After that day of storm, the next morning was very calm. Roger went out about the farm immediately after breakfast, having told the ladies that they could have the waggonette when they pleased. Lady Carbury assured him that she was never dull when left alone with books.

Before starting he went into the garden and plucked a rose which he brought to Henrietta. He only smiled as he gave it her, and then went on his way. He had resolved to say nothing to her of his suit till Monday. If he could prevail with her then, he would ask her to remain with him when her mother and brother went to dine at Caversham.

She looked up into his face as she took the rose and thanked him in a whisper. She fully appreciated the truth, honour, and honesty of his character, and could have loved him so dearly as her cousin if he would have contented himself with such cousinly love! She was beginning, within her heart, to take his side against her mother and brother, and to feel that he was the safest guide that she could have. But how could she be guided by a lover whom she did not love?

“I am afraid, my dear, we shall have a bad time of it here,” said Lady Carbury.

“Why so, mamma?”

“It will be so dull. Your cousin is the best friend in all the world, but in his present mood he is not a comfortable host. What nonsense he did talk about the Melmottes!”

“I don’t suppose, mamma, that Mr. and Mrs. Melmotte can be nice people.”

“Why shouldn’t they be as nice as anybody else? Pray, Henrietta, don’t let us have any of that nonsense from you. I beg that you will not copy Roger with his superhuman virtue.”

“Mamma, I think that is unkind.”

“And I shall think it very unkind if you abuse people who are able and willing to set poor Felix on his legs. A word from you might undo all that we are doing.”

“What word?”

“Any word! If you have any influence with your brother you should use it in inducing him to hurry this on. I am sure the girl is willing enough. She did refer him to Mr. Melmotte.”

“Then why does he not go?”

“I suppose he is delicate about the money side of it. If Roger could only let it be understood that Felix is the heir to this place, and that some day he will be Sir Felix Carbury of Carbury, I don’t think there would be any difficulty with old Melmotte.”

“You should not think of such a thing, mamma.”

“Am I not to think of my own son? Is he not to be dearer to me than anyone? And it is so. If Roger were to die tomorrow he would be Sir Felix Carbury of Carbury.”

“But, mamma, Roger will live and have a family. Why should he not?”

“You say he is so old that you will not look at him.”

“I never said so. I did not mean that he was too old to get married. Men a great deal older get married every day.”

“If you don’t accept him he will never marry. He is so stubborn and old-fashioned that nothing will change him. If you would take him I would be quite contented. But if you mean to be obstinate I wish that the Melmottes should understand that the property and title will go together. Why should not Felix have that advantage?”

“Who is to say it?”

“Ah; that’s the thing. Roger is so prejudiced that one cannot get him to speak rationally.”

“Oh, mamma; you wouldn’t suggest it to him! You would not dare, mamma.”

“I would dare anything for my children. But you need not look like that, Henrietta. I am not going to say anything to him of the kind. He is not quick enough to understand how much it might help us without in any way hurting himself.”

Henrietta was silent; but she thought that her cousin was too honest to take part in any such scheme. She was beginning to understand the tortuous manœuvres in which her mother’s mind had learned to work, and to dislike them. But she felt it to be her duty to abstain from rebukes.

In the afternoon Lady Carbury, alone, had herself driven into Beccles to telegraph to her son. “*You are to dine at Caversham on Monday. Come on Saturday if you can. She is there.*”

Lady Carbury had many doubts as to the wording of this message. The female in the office might understand who the “She” was, and might also understand the project, and speak of it publicly. But it was essential that Felix should know how great was the opportunity given him. He had promised to come on Saturday and return on Monday – and, unless warned, would probably stick to his plan and throw over the Longestaffes’ dinner-party. But if he were told to come simply for the Monday, he would throw over the chance of wooing her on the Sunday. Lady Carbury desired to get him down for as long as possible.

On her return, she shut herself up in her bedroom, and worked for an hour or two on an article for the *Breakfast Table*. Nobody should ever accuse her of idleness. Afterwards, as she walked by herself round the garden, she revolved in her mind the scheme of a new book. Whatever might happen she would persevere.

Henrietta passed the whole day alone. She did not see her cousin from breakfast till dinner. But she was thinking of him every minute – how good he was, how honest, how thoroughly entitled to demand at least kindness from her! Could it be true that he would never marry unless she would take his hand? She thought of him with more tenderness than she had ever felt before, yet she would not tell herself she loved him. It might, perhaps, be her duty to give herself to him without loving him, because he was so good; but she was sure that she did not love him.

In the evening the bishop came, and Mrs. Yeld his wife, and the Hepworths, and Father John Barham, the priest. Mr. Hepworth sat facing Roger at the table, the bishop and the priest were opposite each other, and the ladies graced the four corners. Roger turned such matters over much in his mind. In the drawing-room he had been especially courteous to the young priest, introducing him to the others. Henrietta, watching him, told herself that he was a very mirror of courtesy in his own house. She had never watched him as she now watched him, since her

mother had said that he would die wifeless and childless because she would not be his wife.

The bishop was a tall man of sixty, healthy and handsome, with hair just becoming grey, clear eyes, a kindly mouth, and a double chin. He was a man of fortune; and, as he had no children on whom to spend his money, he was able to live as a nobleman in the country – where he was very popular. Among the poor he was idolized, and by such clergy as were not enthusiastic about their theology, he was regarded as a model bishop. By those of the very high and the very low church, he was looked upon as a time-server.

An unselfish man, he loved his neighbour and forgave all trespasses, thanked God for his daily bread from his heart, and prayed sincerely to be delivered from temptation. But I doubt whether he was competent to teach a creed which he could neither understand nor define. Whether he had any inward misgivings, who shall say? He never spoke of his faith.

He was diligent in preaching – moral sermons that were short, pithy, and useful. His house was open to his fellow-clergymen; he laboured at schools, and was zealous in improving the comforts of the poor; but he was never known to declare that the human soul must live or die for ever according to its faith. Perhaps there was no bishop in England more loved or more useful in his diocese than the Bishop of Elmham.

A man more antagonistic to the bishop than Father John Barham, the new Roman Catholic priest at Beccles, it would be impossible to conceive; and yet they were both eminently good men. Father John was thin, meagre and wasted in appearance. His thick brown hair was cut short in accordance with the usage of his Church; but he so constantly ruffled it with his hands that it seemed to be wild and uncombed. In discussions he would constantly push back his hair, and then sit with his hand fixed on the top of his head. He had a high forehead, enormous blue eyes, a long nose, hollow cheeks, a handsome large mouth, and a strong square chin.

He was utterly without income, except that which came to him from the ministry of his church, and which was not enough for food and clothing; but he was indifferent to such matters. The younger son of an English country gentleman, he had been sent to Oxford to be ordained, and on the eve of his ordination had declared himself a Roman Catholic. His family had resented this bitterly, but had not quarrelled with him till he converted a sister. When banished from the house he had still striven to convert the other sisters by his letters, and was now an alien from his father's heart. But it was part of the plan of his life that he should suffer for his faith. If he had not suffered persecution and poverty, his own conversion would not have seemed to him as satisfactory as it was.

He held that a man should believe and obey – that he should abandon his own reason, and allow himself to be guided by authority. Faith being all in all, moral conduct could be nothing to a man, except as a testimony of faith. The dogmas of his Church were to Father Barham a real religion; and he had but one duty before him: to bring over the world to his faith. It might be that with the toil of his whole life he should convert but one person, or only half convert one; or do no more than disturb the thoughts of one so that future conversion might be possible. But even that would be work done. If he could not sow the seed, he would at any rate plough the ground.

When he came to Beccles, Roger Carbury had learned that he was a gentleman by birth and education, and also very poor, and had consequently taken

him in hand. The young priest had accepted his neighbour's hospitality, laughingly saying that he was much in want of a dinner. He had accepted presents from the garden and the poultry yard, declaring that he was too poor to refuse anything. This frankness had charmed Roger, and the charm had not been seriously disturbed when Father Barham, one winter evening at Carbury, had tried his hand at converting his host.

"I have the greatest respect for your religion," Roger had said; "but it would not suit me." The priest repeated his attempt two or three times, and Roger had begun to feel it to be disagreeable. But the man's earnestness commanded respect. And Roger was quite sure that though he might be bored, he could not be injured by such preaching. It occurred to him that he had known the Bishop of Elmham intimately for a dozen years, and had never heard from the bishop's mouth – except when in the pulpit – a single word of religious teaching; whereas this man, who was a stranger, was always talking to him about his faith. Roger felt that the bishop's manner was the pleasanter of the two.

Lady Carbury at dinner was all smiles. No one would think that her heart was sore with many troubles. She sat between the bishop and her cousin, and was skilful enough to talk to each without neglecting the other. She was too wise to talk to the bishop of her soul; so she was full of the charms of Carbury and its neighbourhood.

"Yes, indeed," said the bishop, "Suffolk is a very nice county; and Norfolk too."

"I like a county which has something left of county feeling," said Lady Carbury. "Staffordshire and Warwickshire, Cheshire and Lancashire have become great towns, and have lost local distinctions."

"We still keep our name and reputation," said the bishop; "Silly Suffolk!"

"That was never deserved."

"I think we are a sleepy people. We've got no industry and no beautiful scenery. No rivers great for fishing, like Scotland – no hunting grounds, like the shires."

"Partridges!" pleaded Lady Carbury, with pretty energy.

"Yes; we have partridges, fine churches, and herring. We shall do very well if too much is not expected of us."

"For myself I like the country better than the town."

"So do I," said Roger; "and I like Suffolk. The people are hearty, and not so radical as elsewhere. The poor people touch their hats, and the rich people think of the poor. There is something left among us of old English habits."

"That is so nice," said Lady Carbury.

"Something left of old English ignorance," said the bishop. "All the same I dare say we're improving, like the rest of the world. What beautiful flowers you have here, Mr. Carbury! At any rate, we can grow flowers in Suffolk."

Mrs. Yeld, the bishop's wife, was sitting next to the priest, and was in truth somewhat afraid of him. She had an idea that Roman Catholics were wrong, and ought to be suppressed. Mr. Barham was, no doubt, a gentleman of good family, which did make a difference.

Mr. Barham always made his approaches very gradually. He started with quiet humility, and advanced to talkative enthusiasm. When Mrs. Yeld said a few civil words, he replied with a shame-faced modesty that she approved of. She spoke of the poor of Beccles: there was too much beer drunk, no doubt, and the

young women would have finery. Where did they get the money for those wonderful Sunday bonnets?

Mr. Barham agreed meekly to everything. No doubt he already had a plan for inducing Mrs. Yeld to have mass said regularly in her husband's palace, but he did not attempt it on this occasion. It was not till he made some apparently chance allusion to the superior church-attending qualities of "our people," that Mrs. Yeld drew herself up and changed the conversation, observing that there had been a great deal of rain lately.

When the ladies were gone the bishop began to talk to the priest, and asked about the morality of Beccles. It was Mr. Barham's opinion that "his people" were more moral than other people, though very much poorer.

"But the Irish always drink," said Mr. Hepworth.

"Not so much as the English, I think," said the priest. "And we are not all Irish. Most of my flock are English."

"It is astonishing how little we know of our neighbours," said the bishop. "Of course I am aware that there are a certain number of Catholics round about us. But I could not name any Catholic families."

"I think, here in Suffolk, they must be chiefly the poor," said Mr. Hepworth.

"They were chiefly the poor who first put their faith in our Saviour," said the priest.

"I think the analogy is hardly correct," said the bishop, with a curious smile. "We are speaking of those who are still attached to an old creed. Our Saviour was the teacher of a new religion. That the poor in the simplicity of their hearts should be the first to acknowledge the truth of a new religion is natural. But that the poor should keep to an old faith abandoned by the rich is not so easy to understand."

"The poor have ever been the salt of the earth, my lord," said the priest.

"That begs the question," said the bishop, turning to Roger Carbury, and beginning to talk about a breed of pigs which had lately been imported into the palace sties.

Father Barham continued his argument with Mr. Hepworth. It was a mistake to suppose that the Catholics in the county were all poor. The wealthier families of his faith – whom he named – would some day restore England to her pristine condition.

"Your priest is a very zealous man," said the bishop afterwards to Roger Carbury, "and no doubt an excellent gentleman; but he is perhaps a little indiscreet."

"I like him because he is doing the best he can, without any reference to his own worldly welfare."

"That is all very grand, and I am perfectly willing to respect him. But I do not know that I should care to talk very freely in his company."

"I am sure he would repeat nothing."

"Perhaps not; but he would always be thinking that he was going to get the better of me."

Mrs. Yeld said to her husband as they went home, "Of course I don't mean to oppose you, my dear; but I don't know that I want to meet Mr. Barham again."

"I don't know that I do, either," said the bishop; "but if he comes in my way I hope I shall treat him civilly."



Chapter 17

Marie Melmotte hears a Love Tale

On the following morning there came a telegram from Felix: he would be at Beccles that afternoon by a certain train. Roger sent a carriage to the station for him, but Felix did not arrive. There was another train by which he might come so as to be just in time for dinner; and Roger, with knitted brows, sent the carriage again.

Now carriages and carriage-horses were not numerous at Carbury. Roger kept a waggonette and a pair of horses which were used about the farm. He himself would walk home from the train, leaving the luggage to be brought by some cheap conveyance. He sent the carriage a second time with deep displeasure. He felt Felix was not entitled to any special consideration. Nevertheless the dinner was put off, and the waggonette was sent – but it again came back empty. That evening was spent by Roger, Lady Carbury, and Henrietta in gloom.

About four in the morning the house was roused by the baronet's arrival. Failing to leave town by either of the afternoon trains, he had contrived to catch the evening mail coach, and had been deposited at some distant town from which he had posted to Carbury. Roger came down in his dressing-gown to let him in, and Lady Carbury also came downstairs. Sir Felix evidently thought that he had been a very fine fellow in going through so much trouble.

“Oh, Felix,” said the mother, “you have so terrified us!”

“I can tell you I was terrified myself when I found that I had to come fifteen miles across country with a pair of old jades who could hardly trot.”

“But why didn't you come by the train?”

“I couldn't get out of the city,” lied the baronet.

“I suppose you were at the Board?” To this Felix made no answer. Roger knew that there had been no Board, because Mr. Melmotte was in the country. It was sheer impudence. The young man had knocked him and his household up at four in the morning, and had uttered no word of apology.

“Miserable cub!” Roger muttered between his teeth. Then he spoke aloud, “You had better not keep your mother standing here. I will show you your room.”

“All right, old fellow,” said Sir Felix. “I'm awfully sorry to disturb you all in this way. I think I'll just take a drop of brandy and soda before I go to bed.”

This was another blow to Roger.

“I doubt whether we have soda-water in the house. I can give you some brandy if you will come with me.” He pronounced the word “brandy” in a tone which implied that it was a wicked beverage. He was forced to go upstairs and fetch a key in order that he might wait upon this cub – this cur! The cub drank his brandy-and-water, not in the least disturbed by his host's ill-humour. As he went to bed he said he would probably not show himself till lunch the following day, and requested that breakfast be sent to him in bed.

“He is born to be hung,” said Roger to himself as he went to his room.

The following morning being Sunday, they all went to church, except Felix. Lady Carbury always went to church in the country, never in London. It was one of those habits, like early dinners and long walks, which suited country life. And she fancied that were she not to do so, the bishop would be sure to know it. She

liked the bishop. As to the religious purpose for which people go to church, it never occurred to Lady Carbury to think of it. On their return they found Sir Felix smoking a cigar on the gravel path, in front of the open drawing-room window.

"Felix," said Roger, "take your cigar a little farther. You are filling the house with tobacco."

"Oh, heavens – what a prejudice!" said the baronet.

"Maybe, but still do as I ask you." Sir Felix chucked the cigar out of his mouth on to the gravel walk, whereupon Roger walked up and kicked it away.

After lunch Lady Carbury urged her son to go over at once to Caversham.

"How the deuce am I to get there?"

"Your cousin will lend you a horse."

"He's as cross as a bear with a sore head. He's a deal older than I am, and a cousin and all that, but I'm not going to put up with insolence. If it were anywhere else I should just go into the yard and ask for a horse and saddle as a matter of course. I don't want anything grand."

"He is vexed because he sent twice to the station for you yesterday."

"I hate the kind of fellow who is always thinking of little grievances. Such a man expects you to go like clockwork, and if you don't, he insults you. I shall ask him for a horse, and if he does not like it, he may lump it."

About half an hour after this he found his cousin. "Can I have a horse to ride over to Caversham this afternoon?" he said.

"Our horses never go out on Sunday," said Roger. Then he added, after a pause, "You can have it." Sir Felix would be gone on Tuesday, and need never come to Carbury House again! So he declared to himself as Felix rode out of the yard; but he soon remembered how probable it was that Felix himself would be the owner of Carbury. And if ever Henrietta should be the mistress of Carbury, he could hardly forbid her to receive her brother.

He stood for a while on the bridge watching his cousin canter off down the road. The young man was offensive in every possible way. Who does not know that only ladies are allowed to canter their friends' horses upon roads? A gentleman trots his friend's horse. Roger Carbury had only one saddle horse – a favourite old hunter, whose legs were not so good as they once were. And now this dear old friend was being galloped along the hard road by that odious cub!

"Soda and brandy!" Roger exclaimed to himself. "He'll die some day of delirium tremens!"

Before the Longestaffes left London for Caversham, a treaty had been made between Mr. Longestaffe and Georgiana, his strong-minded daughter. The daughter undertook that the guests should be treated with courtesy, exactly as though old Melmotte had been a gentleman and Madame Melmotte a lady. In return for this the Longestaffe family were to be allowed to return to town.

But here again the father carried another clause. The stay in London was to be only for six weeks. On the 10th of July the Longestaffes were to remove to the country for the rest of the year. When a foreign tour was proposed, the father became absolutely violent in his refusal.

"Where in God's name do you expect the money to come from?" He told Georgiana that a time was coming when she might think herself lucky to have a roof over her head. This she took as poetic licence, since he had made the same threat before. However, both parties to the treaty were prepared to carry it out honestly.

The faint idea that Dolly should marry Marie Melmotte had been abandoned. Dolly, with all his vapid folly, had a will of his own, and he certainly would not marry her. Therefore the Longestaffes had no special objection to entertaining Sir Felix at Caversham. He had been talked of in London as the favourite in regard to Marie Melmotte. Georgiana Longestaffe had a grudge of her own against Lord Nidderdale, and was on that account somewhat well inclined towards Sir Felix's prospects.

Soon after the Melmottes' arrival she managed to say a word to Marie. "There is a friend of yours going to dine here on Monday, Miss Melmotte. I think you know Sir Felix Carbury."

Marie, still abashed by the grandeur and fashionable haughtiness of her new acquaintances, said, "Oh yes, we know Sir Felix Carbury."

"He is coming down to his cousin's. I suppose it is for your bright eyes, as Carbury Manor would hardly be what he would like."

"I don't think he is coming because of me," said Marie, blushing. She had once told him that he might go to her father, which she felt had been tantamount to accepting his offer as far as she was able. Since then she had seen him, indeed, but he had not said a word to press his suit, nor, as far as she knew, had he said a word to Mr. Melmotte. But she had been very rigorous in declining the attentions of other suitors. She had made up her mind that she was in love with Felix Carbury, and she had resolved on constancy. Yet she had begun to tremble, fearing his faithlessness.

Sir Felix, on the Sunday afternoon, found all the ladies out on the lawn, and he also found Mr. Melmotte there. At the last moment Lord Alfred Grendall had been asked, since he could talk to Melmotte, and he had come, with all his expenses paid by the great Director. When Sir Felix arrived, Lord Alfred was earning his keep by talking to Mr. Melmotte in a summer-house, with a cool drink and a box of cigars.

Sophia was walking apart with a certain Mr. Whitstable, a young squire in the neighbourhood, who had been asked to Caversham because as Sophia was now reputed to be twenty-eight – in fact she was thirty-one – Mr. Whitstable was considered good enough. Sophia was handsome, but with a big, cold, unalluring handsomeness, and had not succeeded in London. Georgiana had been more admired, and boasted among her friends of the offers which she had rejected. She held her head up, and had not as yet come down among the rural Whitstables.

For a few minutes Sir Felix sat on a garden chair making conversation to Lady Pomona and Madame Melmotte. "Beautiful garden," he said; "for myself I don't much care for gardens; but if one is to live in the country, this is the sort of thing that one would like."

"Delicious," said Madame Melmotte, repressing a yawn, and drawing her shawl round her throat. It was the end of May, and very warm; but she did not like sitting out in the garden.

"It isn't a pretty place; but the house is comfortable, and we make the best of it," said Lady Pomona.

"Plenty of glass, I see," said Sir Felix. "I like that kind of thing. Carbury is a very poor place."

This was offensive – as though the Carbury property could be compared to the Longestaffe mansion.

"For a small place," said Lady Pomona, "I think Carbury is one of the nicest in the county. Of course it is not extensive."

“No, by Jove,” said Sir Felix. “It’s like a prison with that moat round it.” Then he jumped up and joined Marie Melmotte and Georgiana. Georgiana, glad to be released from her duty, soon left them together.

Sir Felix had his work to do, and was willing to do it. The prize was so great, and the comfort of wealth was so sure, that even he was tempted to exert himself. It was this feeling which had induced him to travel across dirty roads in an old cab. For the girl herself he cared not the least. It was not in his power really to care for anybody. He did not dislike her much. He regarded her simply as the means by which Mr. Melmotte’s wealth might be conveyed to his uses.

Miss Melmotte was not his idea of a beauty. Such prettiness as she had came from the brightness of her youth, and from a modest, shy demeanour joined to a hope for the enjoyment of something in the world which should be her own. There was arising within her bosom an idea that she, too, could say something, and have thoughts of her own, if only she had some friend near her whom she need not fear. Though still shy, she was always resolving to abandon her shyness, and thought a perfectly open confidence should exist between two lovers. When alone – and she was much alone – she would build castles in the air, which were bright with art and love, rather than with gems and gold. She fancied to herself brilliant conversations in which she bore a bright part, though in real life she had hardly talked to anyone. Sir Felix Carbury had made her an offer; and she loved him. And now she was with him alone! Now surely had come the time in which one of her castles in the air might be found to be built of real materials.

“You know why I have come down here?” he said.

“To see your cousin.”

“No, indeed. I’m not particularly fond of my cousin, who is a cross old bachelor.”

“How disagreeable!”

“Yes; I didn’t come to see him, I can tell you. But when I heard that you were going to be here, I determined to come at once. I wonder whether you are glad to see me?”

“I don’t know,” said Marie, who could not immediately find those brilliant words which her imagination supplied in solitude.

“Do you remember what you said to me that evening at my mother’s?”

“Did I say anything? I don’t remember anything particular.”

“Do you not? Then I fear you can’t think very much of me.” He paused. “I thought you told me that you would love me.”

“Did I?”

“Did you not?”

“I don’t know what I said. Perhaps if I said that, I didn’t mean it.”

“Am I to believe that?”

“Perhaps you didn’t mean it yourself.”

“By George, I did. I was quite in earnest. There never was a fellow more in earnest than I was. I’ve come down here on purpose to say it again.”

“To say what?”

“To ask whether you’ll accept me?”

“I don’t know whether you love me well enough.” She longed to be told that he loved her. He had no objection to telling her so, but felt it to be a bore. All that kind of thing was trash and twaddle. He wanted her to accept him; and he wished that she could have gone to her father for his consent. There was something in the big eyes and heavy jaws of Mr. Melmotte which he almost feared.

“Do you really love me well enough?” she whispered.

“Of course I do. I’m bad at making pretty speeches, and all that, but you know I love you.”

“Do you?”

“By George, yes. I always liked you from the first moment I saw you. I did indeed.”

It was a poor declaration of love, but it sufficed. “Then I will love you,” she said, “with all my heart.”

“There’s a darling!”

“I may call you Felix now;— mayn’t I?”

“Rather.”

“Oh, Felix, I hope you will love me. You know a great many men have asked me to love them.”

“I suppose so.”

“But I have never cared for any of them in the least.”

“You do care for me?”

“Oh yes.” She looked up into his beautiful face, and he saw that her eyes were swimming with tears. He thought that she was very common to look at. Even Sophia Longestaffe looked better. The brightness which another man might have read in Marie’s mingled smiles and tears was thrown away altogether upon him.

They were walking in some shrubbery apart from the house; so, as in duty bound, he put his arm around her waist and kissed her.

“Oh, Felix,” she said, giving her face up to him; “no one ever did it before.” He did not believe her, nor did it matter to him. “Say that you will be good to me, Felix. I will be so good to you.”

“Of course I will be good to you.”

“Men are not always good to their wives. Papa is often very cross to mamma.”

“I suppose he can be cross?”

“Yes, he can. I don’t know what he’ll say when we tell him about this.”

“But I suppose he intends that you shall be married?”

“He wanted me to marry Lord Nidderdale and Lord Grasslough, but I hated them both. I think he wants me to marry Lord Nidderdale again. But I never will!”

“I hope not, Marie.”

“I would not do it if they were to kill me. I hate him – and I do so love you.” Then she leaned upon his arm and looked up again into his beautiful face. “You will speak to papa; won’t you?”

“Will that be the best way?”

“I suppose so. How else?”

“I don’t know whether Madame Melmotte—”

“Oh dear no. Nothing would induce her. She is more afraid of him than I am. I thought the gentleman always did it.”

“Of course I’ll do it,” said Sir Felix. “I’m not afraid of him. He and I are very good friends. He made me a Director of one of his companies.”

“Did he? Perhaps he’ll like you for a son-in-law. Oh, Felix, say that you love me.” Then she put her face up towards his again.

“Of course I love you,” he said, not thinking it worth his while to kiss her. “It’s no good speaking to him here. I suppose I had better go and see him in the city.”

“He is in a good humour now,” said Marie.

“But I couldn’t get him alone. It wouldn’t be the thing to do in another person’s house. Will you tell Madame Melmotte?”

“Yes, I shall tell mamma; but she won’t say anything to him. Mamma does not care much about me. But I’ll tell you all that another time. I never yet had anybody to tell anything to, but I shall never be tired of telling you.”

Then he left her as soon as he could, and escaped to the other ladies. Mr. Melmotte was still sitting in the summer-house with Lord Alfred. As Sir Felix passed the great man he told himself that it was much better to postpone the interview till they were in London. Mr. Melmotte did not look as though he were in a good humour.

Sir Felix said a few words to Lady Pomona and Madame Melmotte. Yes; he hoped to have the pleasure of seeing them on the following day. His cousin was not coming. He believed that his cousin Roger never did go anywhere. Then he got on his horse, and rode away.



Chapter 18

Ruby Ruggles Hears a Love Tale

Miss Ruby Ruggles, the granddaughter of old Daniel Ruggles, of Sheep's Acre, near Bungay, received the following letter from the rural postman that Sunday morning:

"A friend will be near Sheepstone Birches between four and five on Sunday afternoon." There was not another word in the letter, but Miss Ruby Ruggles knew from whom it came.

Daniel Ruggles was a farmer, who had the reputation of wealth, but also the reputation of being a curmudgeon and a miser. His wife was dead; he had quarrelled with his only son, and had banished him from his home; his daughters were married and had moved away; and the only member of his family who lived with him was his granddaughter Ruby.

This granddaughter was twenty-three, and had been engaged to a prosperous young man at Bungay in the corn-meal and bran line, to whom old Ruggles had promised to give £500 on their marriage. But Ruby had taken it into her foolish young head that she did not like meal and bran, and now she had received the above very dangerous letter. She knew well that it came from Sir Felix Carbury – the most beautiful gentleman she had ever set her eyes upon.

Poor Ruby Ruggles! Living down at Sheep's Acre, she had heard both too much and too little of the great world. There were, she thought, many glorious things which she would never see if she were to become the wife of John Crumb, the meal and bran dealer. Therefore she was full of a wild joy – half joy, half fear – when she got her letter. At four o'clock on that Sunday she was at Sheepstone Birches.

Mr. Ruggles's land at Sheep's Acre Farm belonged to the bishopric of Elmham; but he also held an outlying meadow which belonged to the Carbury estate. Sheepstone Birches, at which Felix made his appointment, belonged to Roger. Once Felix had ridden over with Roger to call on the old man, and had then first seen Ruby; and had heard from Roger that she was to marry John Crumb. Since then Roger had heard, with sorrow, that the marriage was either postponed or abandoned – but he had not spoken to Felix on the subject. Sir Felix, however, had probably heard more of Ruby Ruggles than he had.

There is, perhaps, no condition of mind more difficult for the educated city-dweller to imagine than that of such a girl as Ruby Ruggles. The rural labourer and his wife live a life that seems open to the eye. With the men of the Ruggles class one can generally find out what they want, and how their minds work. But the Ruggles woman – especially the Ruggles young woman – has higher aspirations and a brighter imagination, and is infinitely more cunning than the man. Her education has been much better than his: she can read, whereas he can only spell words from a book. She can write a letter after her fashion, whereas he can barely form words on paper. Her tongue is more glib, and her intellect sharper.

But her ignorance about real life is much greater than his. He learns from the markets, the streets and the fields of the condition of his countrymen. The woman builds castles in the air, and wonders, and longs. To the farmer's daughter

the young squire is an Apollo, whom to look at is a pleasure – by whom to be looked at is a delight. The danger for the most part is soon over: the girl marries one of her own kind, and the matter is at rest.

A mind more absolutely ignorant than that of Ruby Ruggles about the world beyond Suffolk it would be impossible to find. But her thoughts were as wide as they were vague, and as active as they were mistaken. Why should she, with all her prettiness and cleverness, marry that dusty John Crumb, before she had seen any of the beauties of the world? John Crumb was not bad-looking. He was a sturdy, honest fellow, slow of speech but sure of his points, fond of his beer but not often drunk, and the very soul of industry at his work. But he was always dusty. The meal had got within his hair, and skin, and clothes, so that he looked more like a stout ghost than a healthy young man. Nevertheless it was said that he could thrash any man in Bungay, and carry two hundred weight of flour upon his back. And Ruby also knew that he worshipped the very ground on which she trod.

But, alas, she thought there might be something better than such worship; and when Felix Carbury came in her way, with his beautiful face, she was lost in a feeling which she mistook for love; and when he sneaked over to her a second and a third time, she thought more of his listless praise than ever she had thought of John Crumb's honest promises.

But though she was an utter fool, and miserably ignorant, she did understand that there was a degradation which she needed to avoid. She thought, as moths seem to think, that she might fly into the flame and not burn her wings. She was pretty, with long glossy ringlets, large round dark eyes, and a clear complexion. She was strong, healthy, and tall – and had a will of her own which gave infinite trouble to old Daniel Ruggles, her grandfather.

Felix Carbury took himself two miles out of his way in order that he might return by Sheepstone Birches. The road leading to it was a quiet country lane, almost sure to be deserted on Sundays. He approached the gate, and stood awhile looking into the wood. When he saw the girl's bonnet, he dismounted, fastened his horse to a rail, and sauntered on till he stood looking down upon Ruby Ruggles as she sat beneath the tree.

"I like your impudence," she said, "in calling yourself a friend."

"Ain't I a friend, Ruby?"

"A pretty sort of friend! You said you was to be back at Carbury in a fortnight; and that is ever so long ago now."

"But I wrote to you, Ruby."

"What's letters? And grandfather is almost sure to see 'em. I beg you won't write any more."

"Did he see them?"

"No thanks to you if he didn't. I don't know why you are come here, Sir Felix, – nor why I should come and meet you. It's all just folly like."

"Because I love you; that's why I come, Ruby. And you have come because you love me; eh, Ruby? Is not that about it?" Then he threw himself on the ground beside her, and got his arm round her waist.

There is no need to tell here all that they said to each other. The happiness of Ruby Ruggles for that half hour was complete. She had her London lover beside her; and though in every word he spoke there was a tone of contempt, still he talked of love, and made her promises, and told her she was pretty. He probably did not enjoy it much; he cared very little about her, and carried on the liaison simply because it was the proper sort of thing for a young man to do. He

had begun to think that the odour of patchouli was unpleasant, and that the flies were troublesome, and the ground hard, before the half hour was over.

She felt that she could sit there for ever and listen to him. But what was to come next? She had not dared to ask him to marry her; and he had not dared to ask her to be his mistress. There was an animal courage about her, and a strength, and a fire in her eye, of which he had learned to be wary.

Before the half hour was over he wished himself away; but when he did go, he promised to see her again on the Tuesday morning. Her grandfather would be at Harlestone market, and she would meet him at noon at the bottom of the farm's kitchen garden. As he made the promise he resolved that he would not keep it. He would write to her, and bid her come to him in London, and would send her money for the journey.

"I suppose I am to be his wedded wife," thought Ruby, as she crept away. "I'll never be nothing unless I'm that." Then she allowed her mind to lose itself in thinking of the difference between John Crumb and Sir Felix Carbury.



Chapter 19

Hetta Carbury Hears a Love Tale

"I have half a mind to go back tomorrow morning," Felix said to his mother that evening after dinner. Roger was walking round the garden by himself, and Henrietta was in her room.

"Tomorrow morning, Felix! You are engaged to dine with the Longestaffes!"

"You could make an excuse."

"It would be most uncourteous. The Longestaffes are the leading people in this part of the country. And remember why you came here – to see Marie Melmotte more at your ease than you can in their London house."

"That's all settled," said Sir Felix, in the most indifferent tone that he could assume.

"Settled!"

"As far as the girl is concerned. I can't very well go to the old fellow for his consent down here."

"Do you mean to say, Felix, that Marie Melmotte has accepted you?"

"I told you that before."

"My dear Felix. Oh, my boy!" In her joy the mother took her unwilling son in her arms. Here was the first step taken not only to success, but to such magnificent splendour that she would be envied by all mothers in England! "I am so happy. Is she really fond of you? I don't wonder that any girl should be fond of you."

"I think she means to stick to it."

"If she is firm, of course her father will give way at last. Fathers always do. Why should he oppose it? You are a man of rank, with a title. I suppose he wants a gentleman for his girl. I don't see why he should not be perfectly satisfied. With all his enormous wealth a thousand a year or so can't make any difference. And then he made you one of his Directors. Oh Felix – it is almost too good to be true."

"I ain't sure that I care very much about being married, you know."

"Oh, Felix, pray don't say that. Why shouldn't you like being married? She is a very nice girl, and we shall be so fond of her! You will be able to do just what you please once the money is settled. Of course you can hunt as often as you like, and you can have a house in any part of London you please. There would be plenty of money for everything. I don't know how to tell you how dearly I love you, and how well I think you have done it all."

Then she caressed him, almost beside herself in an agony of mingled anxiety and joy. If her beautiful boy, who had lately been her disgrace and her trouble, should shine forth to the world as a baronet with £20,000 a year, how glorious would it be! She must have known – she did know – how poor, how selfish a creature he was. But the prospect of his splendour obliterated her sorrow at his character. It raised her into a very heaven of beautiful dreams.

"But, Felix," she continued, "you really must stay, and go to the Longestaffes' tomorrow. It will only be one day. If you were to start back to

London at once, it would be an affront to her, and the very thing to set Melmotte against you. You should try to please him; indeed you should.”

“Oh, bother!” said Sir Felix. Nevertheless he was persuaded to remain, and endure the nuisance of spending another day at the Manor House.

Lady Carbury, almost lost in delight, did not know who to tell. If her cousin were not so pig-headed, so ignorant of the ways of the world, he would have rejoiced with her for the sake of the family. But she did not dare to tell him. Even Henrietta would not be enthusiastic. She must be silent for now.

That evening Roger Carbury hardly spoke to his cousin Hetta till quite late, when Father Barham came in for supper. He had been over at Bungay among his people, and walked back via Carbury.

“What did you think of our bishop?” Roger asked him, rather imprudently.

“Not much of him as a bishop. I don’t doubt that he makes a very nice lord. He has no strong opinion of his own, so he can hardly be competent to guide his clergy.”

Roger turned round and took up his book. He was already becoming tired of his pet priest. He himself always abstained from insulting his new friend’s religion in the man’s hearing; but his new friend did not return the compliment. Perhaps also Roger felt that he might lose any argument, as in such combats success is won by practised skill rather than by truth. Henrietta was also reading, and Felix was smoking elsewhere. But Lady Carbury was quite willing to allow the priest to put her right.

“I suppose our bishops are sincere in their beliefs,” she said with her sweetest smile.

“I’m sure I hope so.”

“They are so much respected everywhere as good and pious men!”

“Indeed. But they may be excellent men without being excellent bishops. I find no fault with them, but much with the system by which they are controlled. English people like to play at having a Church, though they have not sufficient faith to submit to a Church’s control.”

“Do you think men should be controlled by clergymen, Mr. Barham?”

“In matters of faith I do; and so, I suppose, do you; at least you declare it to be your duty to submit yourself to your spiritual pastors.”

“That, I thought, was for children,” said Lady Carbury.

“I quite agree that the matter, as viewed by your Church, is childish altogether. As a rule, adults in your Church want no religion.”

“I am afraid that is true of a great many.”

“I marvel that, when a man thinks of it, he should not be driven by fear to a safer faith – unless, indeed, he enjoys the security of absolute infidelity.”

“That is worse than anything,” said Lady Carbury with a sigh and a shudder.

“I don’t know that it is worse than a belief which is no belief,” said the priest with energy; “than a creed which a man never questions, and does not even know what it contains.”

“That is very bad,” said Lady Carbury.

“We’re getting too deep, I think,” said Roger, putting down his book.

“I think it is so pleasant to have a little serious conversation on Sunday evening,” said Lady Carbury. The priest smiled. He knew that Lady Carbury had been talking nonsense. But she might be all the easier converted because she understood nothing.

“I don’t like hearing my Church ill-spoken of,” said Roger.

“You wouldn’t like me if I thought ill of it and spoke well of it,” said the priest.

“And, therefore, the less said the sooner mended,” said Roger, rising from his chair. Upon this Father Barham departed to Beccles. It might be that he had sowed some seed; or, at any rate, ploughed some ground.

Roger had fixed on the following morning for repeating his suit to Henrietta. Though the words had been almost on his tongue that Sunday afternoon, he had repressed them. He was almost painfully conscious of an increase of tenderness in his cousin’s manner towards him. When he greeted her, she looked softly into his face. She cherished the flowers which he gave her. He saw that if he expressed the slightest wish in any matter about the house she would attend to it. There had been a word said about punctuality, and she had become as punctual as the hand of the clock.

But because she was tender and observant, he did not allow himself to believe that she was growing to love him. He thought that he understood her. She could see how great was his disgust at her brother’s doings; how fretted he was by her mother’s conduct. Her grace, and sweetness, and sense, made her sympathise with him; she was kind to him. Thus he read it, and with exact accuracy.

“Hetta,” he said after breakfast, “come out into the garden awhile.”

She put on her hat and tripped out with him, knowing well that she had been summoned to hear the old story. She had been sure that the old story would be repeated again before she left Carbury; and she had hardly decided what answer she would give.

She knew well that she loved the other man. That other man had never asked for her love, but she thought that he desired it. In spite of this there had grown up in her bosom a feeling of tenderness towards Roger so strong that it almost tempted her to think that he ought to have what he wanted. He was so good, so noble, so generous, so devoted, that it almost seemed she could not be justified in refusing him. Should such a gentleman be doomed to pine for ever because a girl could not love him – a man born to be loved, if nobility and tenderness and truth were lovely!

“Hetta,” he said, “put your arm here.” She gave him her arm. “I was a little annoyed last night by that priest. I want to be civil to him, and he is always turning against me.”

“He doesn’t do any harm, I suppose?”

“He does harm if he teaches us to think lightly of those things which we have been brought up to revere.” So, thought Henrietta, it isn’t about love this time; it’s only about the Church. “He ought not to say such things before my guests. I didn’t like your hearing it.”

“I don’t think he’ll do me any harm. I suppose they all do it. It’s their business. I liked him; only I didn’t like his saying stupid things about the bishop.”

“And I like him.” Then there was a pause. “I suppose your brother does not talk to you much about his affairs. I mean about the Melmottes.”

“No. Felix hardly ever speaks to me about anything.”

“I wonder whether she has accepted him.”

“I think she very nearly did accept him in London.”

“I can’t quite sympathise with your mother in all her feelings about this marriage. But I quite recognise her unselfish devotion to his interests.”

“Mamma thinks more of him than of anything,” said Hetta, not intending to accuse her mother of indifference to herself.

"I know; and though I happen to think that her other child would better repay her devotion," – he smiled at Hetta – "I know how good a mother she is to Felix. You know, the other day we almost had a quarrel. And then Felix arriving late put me out. I am getting old and cross, or I should not mind such things."

"I think you are so good – and so kind." She leaned upon his arm.

"I have been angry with myself," he said, "and so I am making you my father confessor. Confession is good for the soul sometimes, and I think you would understand me better than your mother."

"I do; but don't think there is any fault to confess."

"I am going to put a penance on myself all the same. I can't congratulate your brother on his wooing over at Caversham, but I will express some civil wish to him about things in general."

"Will that be a penance?"

"If you could look into my mind you'd find that it would. I'm full of fretful anger against him for half-a-dozen little things. But it is their triviality which makes the penance necessary. Had he burned the house down, I should have had a right to be angry. But I was angry because he wanted a horse on Sunday; and therefore I must do penance."

There was nothing of love in all this. Hetta thought that if he would only continue treating her as a friend, how happy could she be!

But his tone altered. "And now," said he, "I must speak about myself." Immediately the weight of her hand upon his arm was lessened. He pressed her arm to his. "No," he said; "do not make any change while I speak to you. Whatever comes of it we shall at any rate be cousins and friends."

"Always friends!" she said.

"Yes; always friends. And now listen. I will not tell you again that I love you. You know it. It is not only that I love you, but that I cannot as it were escape from my love. I am thinking of it always, often despising myself because I think of it so much. For a man should not allow his love to dominate his intellect."

"Oh, no!"

"I do. I calculate my chances almost as a man might calculate his chances of heaven. I should like you to know me just as I am, the weak and the strong together. I would not win you by a lie. I think of you more than I ought to do. I am quite sure that you are the only possible mistress of this house while I live here. If I am ever to live as other men do, it must be as your husband."

"Pray, do not say that."

"Yes; I think I have a right to say it. I will not ask you to be my wife if you do not love me. You should not be pressed to sacrifice yourself because I am your friend and cousin. But I think it is quite possible you might come to love me, – unless your heart be absolutely given away elsewhere."

"What am I to say?"

"We each of us know of what the other is thinking. If Paul Montague has robbed me of my love—?"

"Mr. Montague has never said a word."

"We have been like brothers together; or indeed like father and son. I think he should place his hopes elsewhere."

"What am I to say? He has not told me. I think it almost cruel that a girl should be asked in that way."

"Hetta, I should not wish to be cruel to you. I have no right to ask you about Paul Montague – no right to expect an answer. But it is all the world to me. I think

you might learn to love even me, if you loved no one else.” The tone of his voice was manly, and at the same time full of entreaty. His eyes were bright with love and anxiety. She believed in him altogether. She knew that he was a staff on which a woman might safely lean, trusting to it for comfort and protection.

In that moment she all but yielded to him. Had he seized her in his arms and kissed her then, I think she would have yielded. She did all but love him. She would have been ready to swear that any woman who refused him was a fool. She almost hated herself because she was unkind to one who so thoroughly deserved kindness. As it was she made him no answer, but continued to walk beside him trembling.

“I wish you to know exactly the state of my mind, to make all transparent. When you know, dear, that a man’s heart is so set upon a woman, it is for you to make his life bright or dark, for you to open or to shut the gates of his earthly Paradise. I do not think you will keep him in darkness for the sake of a girlish scruple.”

“Oh, Roger!”

“If ever there should come a time in which you can say it, then say it boldly. I at least shall never change. Of course if you love another man and give yourself to him, it will be all over. Tell me that boldly also. I have said it all now. God bless you, my own heart’s darling. I hope – I may be strong enough to think more of your happiness than of my own.”

Then he parted from her abruptly, crossing one of the bridges, and leaving her to find her way into the house alone.



Chapter 20

Lady Pomona's Dinner Party

That evening, Lady Carbury went to dine at Caversham with her son and daughter, and Roger was left alone. He was used to solitude. For most of the year he would eat and drink and live without companionship; there was to him nothing particularly sad in it. But on this occasion he could not prevent himself from dwelling on the loneliness of life.

His cousins cared nothing for him. Lady Carbury had come to his house simply because it might be useful to her; Sir Felix did not pretend to treat him with even ordinary courtesy; and Hetta herself was soft and gracious to him through pity rather than love. On this day he had almost brought himself to think that she might give all that he wanted without asking. And yet, when he told her of the greatness of his enduring love, she was simply silent. When the carriage took them away, he sat on the parapet of the bridge in front of the house listening to the sound of the horses' feet, and telling himself that there was nothing left for him in life.

If ever one man had been good to another, he had been good to Paul Montague, and now Paul Montague was robbing him of everything he valued in the world. His thoughts were not logical, nor exact. The more he considered it, the more strongly he condemned his friend. He had never mentioned to anyone the services he had given to Montague. But he felt that Montague had owed it to him not to fall in love with the girl he loved; he should have retired as soon as he learned the truth. Roger could not bring himself to forgive his friend, even though Hetta had assured him that Montague had never spoken to her of love. He was sore all over. Without Paul, Hetta might now have been mistress of Carbury.

He sat there till the servant came to tell him that his dinner was on the table. Then he crept in and ate, so that the man might not see his sorrow; and, after dinner, he sat with a book in his hand seeming to read. But he read not a word, for his mind was fixed on Hetta.

"What a poor creature a man is," he said to himself, "who is not sufficiently his own master to get over a feeling like this."

At Caversham there was a very grand dinner party. There were the Earl and Countess of Loddon and Lady Jane Pewet, and the bishop and his wife, and the Hepworths. These, with the Carburys and the parson's family, and the people staying in the house, made twenty-four at the dinner table. There were three powdered footmen, unique to that part of the country; and a very heavy and imposing butler. The grand saloon was thrown open, and sofas and chairs on which nobody ever sat were uncovered. This kind of thing was done at Caversham only once a year; but when it was done, nothing was spared which could add to its magnificence.

Lady Pomona and her two tall daughters stood up to receive the Countess of Loddon and Lady Jane Pewet. Madame Melmotte and Marie stood behind as though ashamed of themselves. The grand room was soon fairly full; but nobody had a word to say. Lord Loddon potted about, making a feeble attempt, while Lord Alfred stood stock-still stroking his grey moustache. Augustus Melmotte put his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and was impassive. The bishop

saw at a glance the hopelessness of the occasion, and did not try to make conversation. Lady Pomona and her two daughters were grand and handsome, but dumb and weary after four days of civilly entertaining Madame Melmotte.

When dinner was announced Felix was allowed to take in Marie Melmotte. The great Augustus went in with Lady Carbury, much to her satisfaction. She also had been dumb in the drawing-room; but now it would be her duty to talk.

“I hope you like Suffolk,” she said.

“Pretty well, I thank you. Very nice place for a little fresh air.”

“Yes; that’s just it, Mr. Melmotte. When the summer comes one does long to see the flowers.”

“We have better flowers in our balconies than any I see down here,” said Mr. Melmotte.

“No doubt; because you can command the floral tribute of the world. Money can turn a London street into a bower of roses, and give you grottoes in Grosvenor Square.”

“It’s a very nice place, is London.”

“If you have got plenty of money, Mr. Melmotte.”

“And if you have not, it’s the best place I know to get it. Do you live in London, ma’am?”

“Oh, yes, I live in London. I have had the honour of being entertained by you there.” This she said with her sweetest smile.

“Oh, indeed. So many do come, that I don’t always remember.”

“How should you – with all the world flocking round you? I am Lady Carbury, the mother of Sir Felix Carbury, whom I think you will remember.”

“Yes; I know Sir Felix. He’s sitting there, next to my daughter.”

“Happy fellow!”

“I don’t know about that. Young men don’t get their happiness in that way now. They’ve got other things to think of.”

“He thinks so much of his business.”

“Oh! I didn’t know,” said Mr. Melmotte.

“He sits at the same Board with you, I think, Mr. Melmotte.”

“Oh; that’s his business!” said Mr. Melmotte, with a grim smile.

Lady Carbury was clever and well-informed about many things, but she did not know much about the city, and was profoundly ignorant as to the duties of Directors. “I trust that he is diligent there,” she said; “and that he is aware of the great privilege which he enjoys in having your counsel and guidance.”

“He don’t trouble me much, ma’am, and I don’t trouble him much.”

Lady Carbury said no more about her son’s position in the city. She tried to talk of other things; but she found Mr. Melmotte to be heavy on her hands. After a while she had to abandon him in despair, and give herself up to the Caversham parson, who sat on her other side.

Opposite her sat Sir Felix and his love. “I have told mamma,” Marie had whispered, as she walked in to dinner with him. She was now full of the idea that she might tell everything to her lover.

“Did she say anything?” he asked. Marie had to take her place and arrange her dress before she could reply.

“She said a great deal. She thinks that papa will think you are not rich enough. Hush! Talk about something else, or people will hear.”

Felix changed the subject very willingly. “Have you been riding?” he asked.

“No; I don’t think there are horses here for visitors. How did you get home? Did you have any adventures?”

“None at all,” said Felix, remembering Ruby Ruggles. “I just rode home quietly. I go to London tomorrow.”

“And we go on Wednesday. Mind you come and see us before long,” she whispered.

“Of course I shall. I suppose I’d better go to your father in the city. Does he go every day?”

“Oh yes. He’s always back about seven. Sometimes he’s good-natured enough when he comes back, but sometimes he’s very cross. He’s best just after dinner. But it’s so hard to get to him then. Lord Alfred is almost always there; and then other people come, and they play cards. I think the city will be best.”

“You’ll stick to it?” he asked.

“Oh, yes; indeed I will. Nothing will ever turn me. I think papa knows that.”

Felix looked at her as she said this, and thought that he saw more in her face than he had ever read there before. Perhaps she would consent to run away with him; and, if so, being the only child, she would certainly – almost certainly – be forgiven. But if he were to elope with her, and then find that she were not forgiven, where would he be then? Considering the trouble and the expense of it, he thought that he could not afford to run away with her.

After dinner he hardly spoke to her. Indeed, nobody talked to anybody, and the minutes went very heavily till at last the carriages were there to take them all home.

“They arranged that you should sit next to her,” said Lady Carbury to her son, in the carriage. “They would not have done that unless they had thought that it would please Mr. Melmotte. Oh, Felix! if you can bring it about.”

“I shall if I can, mother; you needn’t make a fuss about it.”

“No, I won’t. You cannot wonder that I should be anxious. You behaved beautifully to her at dinner; I was so happy to see you together. God bless you, Felix! I shall be the happiest and proudest mother in England if this comes about.”



Chapter 21

Everybody Goes to Them

When the Melmottes left Caversham the house was very desolate. The Longestaffe ladies would have been comforted if the date of their return to London had been fixed. But days passed, and dreadful fears began to fill the minds of Lady Pomona and Sophia Longestaffe. Georgiana was also impatient, but she asserted boldly that treachery was impossible. Their father would not dare to propose it.

Three or four times daily, hints were given and questions were asked, but without avail. Mr. Longestaffe would not consent to fix a day till he had received some particular letter. Poor Lady Pomona was urged by her daughters to compel him to name a day; but Lady Pomona was less bold than Georgiana, and less anxious to go to London.

On the Sunday, before church, there was a great discussion in Lady Pomona's room. The Bishop of Elmham was going to preach at Caversham church, and the three ladies were dressed in their best London bonnets. It was supposed that the expected letter had arrived. Mr. Longestaffe had certainly received a message from his lawyer. He had been unusually silent at breakfast, and – so Sophia asserted – more disagreeable than ever.

The question had now arisen in reference to their bonnets. “You might as well wear them,” said Lady Pomona, “for I am sure you will not be in London again this year.”

“You don't mean it, mamma,” said Sophia.

“I do, my dear. He looked like it when he put those papers into his pocket. I know what his face means.”

“It is not possible,” said Sophia. “He promised, and he got us to have those horrid people because he promised.”

“Well, my dear, if your father says that we can't go back to London, we must take his word for it. I suppose that he would take us back if he could.”

“Mamma!” shouted Georgiana, outraged by her treachery.

“My dear, what can we do?” said Lady Pomona.

“Do! Make him understand that we are not going to be sat upon like that. I'll do something! If he treats me like that I'll run off with the first man that will take me.”

“Don't talk like that, Georgiana, unless you wish to kill me.”

“I'll break his heart for him. He does not care about us – not the least; but he cares about the family name. I'll tell him that I'm not going to be a slave. I'll marry a London tradesman before I'll stay here.”

“Oh, Georgey, don't say such horrid things,” pleaded her sister.

“It's all very well for you, Sophy. You've got George Whitstable, and your fish is fried. Dolly does just what he pleases, and spends money as fast as he likes. Of course it makes no difference to *you*, mamma, where you are.”

“You are very unjust,” wailed Lady Pomona.

“I ain't unjust. It doesn't matter to you. And Sophy is settled. But I'm to be sacrificed! How am I to see anybody down here in this horrid hole? Papa promised and he must keep his word.”

A loud voice called from the hall. "Are you coming to church, or are you going to keep the carriage waiting all day?"

Of course they were going to church, because of the bishop and the bonnets. They trooped downstairs, Georgiana stalking along. She passed her father at the front door without condescending to look at him. Not a word was spoken on the way to church, or on the way home.

During the sermon the ladies sat without the slightest sign either of weariness or of attention. It was nothing to them what the bishop was speaking about. It was the same kind of endurance which enabled Georgiana to go on from year to year waiting for a suitable husband. She could put up with any amount of tedium if only the chance of obtaining ultimate relief were not denied to her. But to be kept at Caversham all summer would be as bad as hearing a bishop preach for ever!

After the service they came back to lunch, which was eaten in silence. Then Mr. Longestaffe settled into the dining-room arm-chair, evidently intending to sleep in comfort. But this was denied to him. The two daughters remained; and Lady Pomona, though she made one attempt to leave the room, returned when she found that her daughters would not follow her. Georgiana had told her sister that she meant to "have it out" with her father. When the last tray had been taken out, she began.

"Papa, don't you think you could settle now when we are to go back to town? There is Lady Monogram's party on Wednesday. We promised to be there."

"You had better write to Lady Monogram and say you can't go."

"But why not, papa? We could go up on Wednesday morning."

"You can't do anything of the kind."

"But, my dear, we should all like to have a day fixed," said Lady Pomona. There was a pause. Even Georgiana would have accepted some distant, undefined time, as a compromise.

"You can't have a day fixed," said Mr. Longestaffe.

"How long shall we be kept here?" said Sophia, in a low constrained voice.

"I do not know what you mean by being kept here. This is your home."

"But we are to go back?" demanded Sophia. Georgiana waited in silence, biding her time.

"You'll not return to London this season," said Mr. Longestaffe, turning abruptly to his newspaper. "That is settled."

Was there ever treachery like this! Georgiana's indignation approached almost to virtue as she thought of her father's falseness. She would not have left town at all but for that promise. She would not have contaminated herself with the Melmottes but for that promise. And now the promise was to be absolutely broken!

"Then, papa," she said, with affected calmness, "you have simply and premeditatedly broken your word to us."

"How dare you speak to me in that way, you wicked child!"

"I am not a child, papa, as you know very well. I am my own mistress, by law."

"Then go and be your own mistress. You dare to tell me, your father, that I have premeditated a falsehood! If you tell me that again, you shall eat your meals in your own room."

“Did you not promise that we should go back if we would come here and entertain these people?”

“I will not argue with an insolent child. If I have anything to say about it, I will say it to your mother. Now go away, and if you choose to be sullen, go and be sullen where I shan’t see you.”

Georgiana looked round on her mother and sister and then marched majestically out of the room. She still meditated revenge, but she was partly cowed, and did not dare to go on with her reproaches. She stalked off into another room, and stood panting with anger.

“And you mean to put up with it, mamma?” she said when Lady Pomona followed.

“What can we do, my dear?”

“I will do something. I’m not going to be cheated and swindled and have my life thrown away. I have always behaved well to him. I have never run up bills without saying anything about them.” This was a cut at her elder sister. “I have never got myself talked about. If there is anything to be done I always do it. I have written his letters for him till I have been sick. And now he tells me that I am to eat my meals up in my bedroom because I remind him that he distinctly promised to take us back to London! Did he not promise, mamma?”

“I understood so, my dear.”

“You know he promised, mamma. If I do anything now he must bear the blame. I am not going to keep myself straight for the sake of the family, and then be treated in that way.”

“You keep straight for your own sake, I suppose,” said her sister.

“It is more than you’ve been able to do,” said Georgiana, alluding to an ancient flirtation, when Sophia had made a foolish and futile attempt to run away with an impoverished officer of dragoons. Ten years had passed since that, and the affair was never mentioned except in moments of great bitterness.

“I’ve kept myself as straight as you have,” said Sophia. “It’s easy enough when nobody cares for a person.”

“My dears, if you quarrel what am I to do?” said their mother.

“It is I that have to suffer,” continued Georgiana. “Does he expect me to find anybody here? Poor George Whitstable is not much; but there is nobody else at all.”

“You may have him if you like,” said Sophia, with a toss of her head.

“Thank you, but I haven’t come to that quite yet. I shall write papa a letter. If he won’t take me up to town himself, he must send me up to the Primeros. What makes me most angry is that we condescended to be civil to the Melmottes. To have them here was terrible!”

During that afternoon nothing more was said. Georgiana had been as hard to her sister as to her father, and Sophia in her quiet way resented the affront. She was almost reconciled to staying in the country, because it inflicted a fitting punishment on Georgiana, and the presence of Mr. Whitstable only ten miles away did of course make a difference to herself. Lady Pomona complained of a headache, and Mr. Longestaffe went to sleep. The next morning he found the following letter on his dressing-table:

My dear Papa,

I don’t think you ought to be surprised that our going up to town is so important to us. If we are not to be in London at this time of the year we can never

see anybody, and of course you know what that must mean for me. It does not signify for Sophia, but it is very, very hard upon me. It isn't for pleasure that I want to go up. But if I'm to be buried down here at Caversham, I might just as well be dead at once. If you choose to give up both houses for a year, or two years, and take us all abroad, I should not grumble in the least. There are very nice people to be met abroad, and there would be no expense for horses, and we could dress very cheap. I'm sure I don't want to run up bills. But if you would only think what Caversham must be to me, without anyone worth thinking about within twenty miles, you would hardly ask me to stay here.

You certainly did say that if we came down here with those Melmottes we should be taken back to town, and you cannot be surprised that we should be disappointed. It makes me feel that life is so hard that I can't bear it. I see other girls having such chances when I have none, that sometimes I think I don't know what will happen to me.

I suppose that it is useless for me to ask you to take us back this summer – though it was promised; but I hope you'll give me money to go up to the Primeros. It would only be me and my maid. Julia Primero asked me to stay with them earlier on, and I know they've a room. They all ride, and I should want a horse; but there would be nothing else, as they have plenty of carriages, and Julia's groom would do for both of us. Pray answer this at once, papa.

Your affectionate daughter,
Georgiana Longestaffe.

Mr. Longestaffe read this. Though he had rebuked his mutinous daughter severely, he was somewhat afraid of her; and he dreaded the weariness of continued domestic strife. He thought that his daughter liked a row. He himself hated them. He had not any very lively interest in life. To stand about the public rooms of his clubs, and hear other men talk politics or scandal, was what he liked better than anything else in the world. But he was quite willing to give this up for the good of his family

By living with a certain useless pomp, by powdering his footmen's heads and bewigging his coachmen, by aping the ways of grander men, he had run into debt. His own ambition had been a peerage, and he had thought that this was the way to get it. A separate property had come to his son Adolphus from his wife's mother – some £2,000 or £3,000 a year – and the knowledge of this had reconciled him to increasing the burdens on the family estates. He had been sure that Adolphus, when of age, would consent to sell the Sussex property to pay the debts. But Dolly was now in debt himself, and though careless in most respects he was always on his guard in dealings with his father. He would not consent to the sale of the Sussex property unless he got half the proceeds. The father found his troubles very hard upon him.

Melmotte had done something for him – but he had been hard and tyrannical. Melmotte, while at Caversham, had looked into his affairs, and had told him very plainly that he was not entitled to keep a house in town. Mr. Longestaffe had said something about his daughters – especially about Georgiana – and Mr. Melmotte had made a suggestion.

Mr. Longestaffe, when he read his daughter's appeal, did feel for her, in spite of his anger. But he regarded the Primeros as upstarts. Mr. Primero was not a gentleman. He owed no man anything. He paid his tradesmen punctually. He had spent many thousands in county elections, and was now a Member of Parliament

– a radical, according to Mr. Longestaffe’s views. And now there was a rumour that Mr. Primero was to have a peerage. That would be more than Mr. Longestaffe could endure. It was quite impossible that his daughter should stay in London with the Primeros.

But another suggestion had been made. On the morning after Georgiana’s letter, Lady Pomona handed her a note, saying,

“Your papa has given it me. Of course you must judge for yourself.”

The note read:

My dear Mr. Longestaffe,

As you seem determined not to return to London this season, perhaps one of your young ladies would like to come to us. Mrs. Melmotte would be delighted to have Miss Georgiana for June and July. If so, she need only give Mrs. Melmotte a day’s notice.

Yours truly,

Augustus Melmotte.

Georgiana, as soon as her eye had glanced over this paper, looked in vain for the date. It had, she felt sure, been left in her father’s hands to be used as he might think fit. She breathed very hard. Both her father and mother knew what she thought of the Melmottes. There was an insolence in the very suggestion.

“Why shouldn’t I go to the Primeros?” she asked.

“Your father will not hear of it. He dislikes them.”

“And I dislike the Melmottes. I dislike the Primeros of course, but they are not so bad as the Melmottes.”

“You must judge for yourself, Georgiana.”

“It is that – or staying here?”

“I think so, my dear.”

“It will be awfully disagreeable, – absolutely disgusting!”

“She seemed to be very quiet.”

“Pooh, mamma! She was quiet here because she was afraid of us. She’ll be frightfully vulgar! She must have been the very sweeping of the gutters. She could not even open her mouth, she was so ashamed of herself. They make me shudder.”

“Everybody goes to them,” said Lady Pomona. “The Duchess of Stevenage has been there over and over again.”

“But everybody doesn’t go and live with them. Oh, mamma!”

“But you are so anxious to be in London, my dear.”

“Of course I am. What other chance have I? And I am so tired of it! Papa does not have to work half as hard as I do. I suppose I must do it. I know it will make me ill. Horrid, horrid people! And papa has always been so proud of being with the right set.”

“Things are changed, Georgiana.”

“Indeed they are when papa wants me to go and stay with people like that. But I’ll go. I don’t believe that any decent man would propose to a girl in such a house, and you and papa must not be surprised if I take some horrid creature from the Stock Exchange. Papa has altered his ideas; and so I had better alter mine.”

Georgiana did not speak to her father that night, but Lady Pomona informed him that Mr. Melmotte’s invitation was to be accepted. Georgiana would go to London on the Friday following.

On the Friday morning there was a little conversation between the two sisters, just before Georgiana's departure. She had tried to hold up her head, but had failed. She was cowed even in front of her sister.

"Sophy, I do so envy you staying here."

"But it was you who were so determined to be in London."

"Yes; I've got to get myself settled somehow, and that can't be done down here. But I believe the man to be a swindler and a thief; and I believe her to be anything low that you can think of. As to their pretensions to be gentlefolk, it is monstrous."

"Then don't go, Georgey."

"I must go. It's the only chance that is left. You are going to marry Whitstable, and you'll do very well. Whitstable has no debt, and he isn't a bad sort of fellow. He hasn't much to say for himself, but he is a gentleman."

"That he certainly is."

"As for me, I shall give over caring about gentlemen now. The first man that comes to me with four or five thousand a year, I'll take him, though he'd come out of Newgate or Bedlam. And I shall always say it has been papa's doing."

And so Georgiana Longestaffe went up to London and stayed with the Melmottes.



Chapter 22

Lord Nidderdale's Morality

It was said in the city at this time that the Great South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway was the very best thing out. Mexico has not a reputation for commercial security, or stability. But the Panama railway had paid twenty-five per cent; and in the great line across the continent to San Francisco, enormous fortunes had been made. It was believed that the Great South Central might be just as successful, and this belief was no doubt founded on Mr. Melmotte's support for the enterprise.

Paul Montague, however, could not learn how the thing was progressing. At the regular half-hour meetings of the Board, two or three papers were read by Miles Grendall; Melmotte would speak a few slow words, indicative of triumph, and then everybody would agree to everything, somebody would sign something, and the "Board" for that day would be over.

To Paul Montague this was very unsatisfactory. More than once he tried to halt the proceedings, "simply as wishing to understand;" but the silent scorn of his chairman and the opposition of his colleagues were barriers which he was not strong enough to overcome. Lord Alfred Grendall would declare that he "did not think that was at all necessary." Lord Nidderdale would nudge him and bid him hold his tongue. Mr. Cohenlupe would make a little speech in fluent but broken English, assuring the Committee that everything was being done in the approved city fashion. Sir Felix, after the first two meetings, was never there. And thus Paul Montague, with a sorely burdened conscience, was carried along.

I do not know whether the burden was made lighter to him, or heavier, by the fact that the immediate financial result was certainly very comfortable. The Company had only existed six weeks, and it had already been suggested to him twice that he should sell fifty shares at £112 10s. He did not even know how many shares he possessed, but on both occasions he consented, and on the following day received a cheque for £625 – representing the profit above the original price of £100 a share. When he asked Miles Grendall how the shares had been allocated, he was told it would be arranged in accordance with the capital invested and must depend on the final disposition of the Californian property.

"But from what we see, old fellow," said Miles, "I don't think you have anything to fear. You seem to be about the best in of them all. Melmotte wouldn't advise you to sell out gradually, if he didn't see it as a certain income as far as you are concerned."

Paul Montague understood nothing of all this, and felt that he was standing on ground which might be blown from under his feet at any moment. The uncertainty, and what he feared might be the dishonesty, of the whole thing, made him often very miserable. But there were times in which he also felt the delight of his wealth. Though he was snubbed at the Board when he wanted explanations, outside the Board-room the Directors were attentive. Melmotte had asked him to dine two or three times. Mr. Cohenlupe had begged him to go down to his little place at Rickmansworth. Lord Alfred was gracious, and Nidderdale and Carbury were evidently anxious to make him one of their set at the Beargarden.

Certainly the money was very pleasant to him. The time would soon arrive before which he had promised not to make an offer to Henrietta Carbury; and when it did, it would be delightful to him to know that he possessed enough property to give a wife a comfortable home. In all his aspirations and fears, he was true to Hetta Carbury, and made her the centre of his hopes. Nevertheless, had Hetta known everything, she might have tried to dismiss him from her heart.

The other Directors, however, had a grievance against Melmotte. Neither Sir Felix Carbury nor Lord Nidderdale had been invited to sell shares, and consequently neither of them had received any money. Montague had told Felix, whom he hoped some day would be his brother-in-law, exactly what shares he had sold, and for how much. The original price of the shares being £100 each, and £12 10s. a share having been paid to Montague, it was supposed that the original capital was re-invested in other shares. But they agreed that the matter was very complicated, and Montague wrote to Hamilton K. Fisker at San Francisco asking for an explanation. As yet he had received no answer.

But it was not the wealth flowing into Montague's hands which embittered Nidderdale and Carbury. They understood that he had really brought money into the concern, and was therefore entitled to take money out of it. Nor did it occur to them to grudge Melmotte his pickings, and of Cohenlupe's doings they heard nothing. Cohenlupe was too deep for their inquiry. But they knew that Lord Alfred had sold shares, and had received the profit; and they knew how utterly impossible it was that Lord Alfred should have produced capital. If Lord Alfred Grendall was entitled to plunder, why were not they? And if their day for plunder had not yet come, why had Lord Alfred's?

"You haven't sold any shares, have you?" Sir Felix asked Lord Nidderdale at the club.

"Not a share."

"Nor got any profits?"

"Not a shilling. I suppose something will turn up some day."

"In the meantime, you know, Grendall is making a fortune out of it."

"If he's doing so well, I think Miles ought to pay up something of what he owes. I think we ought to tell him that we shall expect him to have the money ready when that bill of Vossner's comes round."

"Yes, by George."

"Not that it will be the least good," said Nidderdale.

"Fellows used to pay their gambling debts," said Sir Felix, who still held a considerable assortment of I.O.U.'s. "Otherwise a fellow went smash, and disappeared and was never heard of any more. It was just the same if he was found cheating. I believe a fellow might cheat now and nobody'd say anything!"

"I shouldn't," said Lord Nidderdale. "What's the use of being beastly ill-natured? Live and let live – that's my motto."

"But you agree that we ought to do something about these shares?" said Sir Felix.

"Oh, certainly. It's no good our going to old Grendall," said Lord Nidderdale. "We should go to our master, Augustus Melmotte."

This meeting occurred on the day after Felix Carbury's return from Suffolk, when it was the great duty of his life to get Melmotte's consent to his marriage with Marie. In his heart of hearts he was afraid of Melmotte.

"You go to the Board oftener than I do, and perhaps you could do it best," said Sir Felix.

“But you’re always at his house. He’d be civil to me, perhaps, because I’m a lord: but for the same reason, he’d think I was a bigger fool.”

“I don’t see that at all,” said Sir Felix.

“I ain’t afraid of him,” continued Lord Nidderdale. “He’s a wretched old reprobate, but I’ll have a go at him. On the whole I think he rather likes me, because I’ve always been square with him. If it depended on him, you know, I should have the girl tomorrow.”

“Would you?”

“But she don’t want me, and I ain’t quite sure that I want her. Where the devil would a fellow find himself if the money wasn’t there?”

Lord Nidderdale then sauntered away, leaving the baronet deep in thought. Where would he, Sir Felix Carbury, be, if he were to marry the girl, and then find that the money was not there?

On the following Friday, which was the Board day, Nidderdale went to the great man’s offices in Abchurch Lane, and contrived to walk with the great man to the meeting. Melmotte was always very gracious to Lord Nidderdale, but had never spoken to him about business.

“I just wanted to ask you something,” said Nidderdale. “Don’t you think that Carbury and I ought to have some shares to sell?”

“No, I don’t.”

“But why shouldn’t we as well as the others?”

“Have you and Sir Felix put any money into it?”

“Well, I don’t suppose we have. How much has Lord Alfred put into it?”

“I have taken shares for Lord Alfred,” said Melmotte, with heavy emphasis. “If it suits me to advance money to Lord Alfred Grendall, I suppose I may do so without your consent, or Sir Felix Carbury’s.”

“Oh, certainly. I don’t want to ask what you do with your money.”

“I’m sure you don’t, and, therefore, we won’t say anything more about it. Wait awhile, Lord Nidderdale, and you’ll find it will come all right. If you’ve got a few thousand pounds loose, and put them into the concern, why, of course you can sell; and, if the shares are up, you can sell at a profit. It’s presumed that, at some early day, you’ll qualify for your directorship by doing so, and till that is done, the shares are allocated to you, but cannot be transferred to you.”

“That’s it, is it,” said Lord Nidderdale, pretending to understand.

“If things go on as we hope between you and Marie, you can have pretty nearly any number of shares that you please; that is, if your father consents to a proper settlement.”

“I hope it’ll all go smooth, I’m sure,” said Nidderdale. “Thank you; I’m ever so much obliged to you, and I’ll explain it all to Carbury.”



Chapter 23

“Yes – I’m a Baronet”

Lady Carbury was eager that her son should go at once to Marie’s father. “My dear Felix,” she said, standing over his bedside just before noon, “pray don’t put it off.”

“I need to get him in a good humour,” pleaded Sir Felix.

“But the young lady will feel that she is ill-used.”

“There’s no fear of that; she’s all right. What am I to say to him about money? That’s the question. Nidderdale asked for a certain sum down, to be paid before the ceremony, and it only went off because Nidderdale wanted the money to do what he liked with.”

“You wouldn’t mind having it settled?”

“No; I’d consent to that if the money was paid down, and the income insured to me – say £7,000 or £8,000 a year. It wouldn’t be worth while for less.”

“But you have nothing left of your own.”

“I’ve got a throat that I can cut, and brains that I can blow out,” said the son, using an argument which he thought might be effective with his mother; though no man lived less likely to cut his own throat.

“Oh, Felix! how brutal.”

“It may be brutal; but you know, mother, business is business. You want me to marry this girl because of her money.”

“You want to marry her yourself.”

“I want her money; and if I were to marry her, and if the money wasn’t there, it would be like cutting my throat. There’d be no going back.”

“Of course he’d pay the money first.”

“Of course he ought; but it would be rather awkward to refuse to go into church because the money hadn’t been paid over. He’s so clever, that he’d contrive that a man shouldn’t know whether the money had been paid or not. If you’ll go, mother, I might think of getting up.”

Lady Carbury saw the danger, and turned over the affair in her own mind. But she could also see the house in Grosvenor Square, the wealth and celebrity of the man, and weigh that against the absolute pennilessness of her son. Felix’s condition was hopeless. Lord Nidderdale’s embarrassments were only temporary. There were the family estates, and a golden future for him; but there was nothing coming to Felix. All he would ever have, he had now; position, a title, and a handsome face. Even the ruins of such wealth as that displayed in Grosvenor Square would be better than his present condition. And though it was possible that old Melmotte should be ruined some day, there could be no doubt about his riches now.

She visited her son again the next morning, which was Sunday, and again tried to persuade him to the marriage. “I think you should be content to run a little risk,” she said.

Sir Felix had been unlucky at cards on Saturday night, and was sulky.

“I wish you’d leave me alone,” he said, “to manage my own business.”

“Is it not my business too?”

“No; you haven’t got to marry her, and to put up with these people. I shall make up my mind what to do, and I don’t want anybody to meddle.”

“You ungrateful boy! Are you always to be a burden on me and your sister? You have no shame. Your cousin Roger is right. I will quit London altogether, and leave you to your own wretchedness.”

“That’s what Roger says, is it?”

“He is the best friend I have.”

“He’s an ill-tempered, close-fisted, interfering cad, and if he meddles with my affairs again, I shall tell him what I think of him. Upon my word, mother, I think you might let me have my room to myself.” It was impossible for Lady Carbury, in his present mood, to explain that it was the only way she could ever find him. If she waited till he came down to breakfast, he escaped in five minutes, and did not return till some ungodly hour in the morning.

Again and again there came upon her moments in which she thought that Roger Carbury was right about Felix. She almost hated herself for the weakness of her love – but she acknowledged it. If he should fall, she must fall with him. In spite of his cruelty, his callous hardness, his insolence and ruinous indifference to the future, she must cling to him to the last. All that she had done and borne – was it not for his sake?

Sir Felix had been in Grosvenor Square, and had seen Madame Melmotte and Marie; but not a word had been said about the engagement. Madame Melmotte had told him that Miss Longestaffe was coming, which was a great bore. Upon this Marie had declared that she intended to like the young lady very much.

“Pooh!” said Madame Melmotte. “You never like no person at all.” At this Marie had looked over to her lover and smiled. “Ah, yes; that is all very well, while it lasts; but you care for no friend.” From which Felix had judged that Madame Melmotte knew of his offer, and did not absolutely disapprove.

On Saturday he had received a note at his club from Marie. “Come on Sunday at half-past two. You will find papa after lunch.” But he did not tell his mother of his intention.

At about three on Sunday he knocked at the door in Grosvenor Square and asked for the ladies. He intended to ask for Mr. Melmotte; but his courage failed him, and he was shown up into the drawing-room, where he found Madame Melmotte, Marie, Georgiana Longestaffe, and Lord Nidderdale.

Marie looked anxiously into his face, thinking that he had already been with her father. He slid into a chair close to Madame Melmotte, and tried to seem at his ease. Lord Nidderdale continued his flirtation with Miss Longestaffe – a flirtation which she carried on in a half whisper, wholly indifferent to her hostess.

“We know what brings you here,” said Georgiana.

“I came to see you.”

“I’m sure, Lord Nidderdale, you didn’t expect to find me here.”

“Lord bless you, I knew all about it, and came on purpose. That fellow there is the happy man. I shall go on coming here, because you’re here. I don’t think you’ll like it here a bit, you know.”

“I don’t suppose I shall, Lord Nidderdale.”

After a while Marie contrived to be alone with her lover near one of the windows. “Papa is downstairs in the book-room,” she said. “Go down, and ask the man to show you into the book-room.”

“Shall I come up again?”

“No; but leave a note for me under cover to Madame Didon.” Sir Felix knew that Madame Didon was Madame Melmotte’s maid. “Or post it under cover to her. Go at once, now.”

It seemed to Sir Felix that the very nature of the girl was altered. But he went, shaking hands with Madame Melmotte, and bowing to Miss Longestaffe.

In a few moments he found himself with Mr. Melmotte. The great financier was waked from slumber, which he seemed to have been enjoying with a cigar in his mouth.

“How do you do, Sir Felix?” he said. “I suppose you want the ladies.”

“I’ve just been in the drawing-room, but I thought I’d look in on you as I came down.”

It immediately occurred to Melmotte that the baronet had come about his share of the plunder out of the railway, and he resolved to be stern, and perhaps rude, in resenting any such interference. Experience had told him that young men might easily be cowed by a savage assumption of superiority. And he understood the game, which Sir Felix did not. He liked young associates because they were more timid and less greedy than their elders. Lord Nidderdale’s suggestions had soon been put at rest, and Mr. Melmotte anticipated no greater difficulty with Sir Felix. Lord Alfred he had been obliged to buy.

“I’m very glad to see you, and all that,” said Melmotte, raising his eyebrows in a disagreeable way; “but this is hardly a day for business.”

Sir Felix wished himself at the Beargarden. “I didn’t mean to intrude, Mr. Melmotte,” he said.

“I dare say not. I only thought I’d tell you. You might have been going to speak about that railway.”

“Oh dear no.”

“Your mother was saying to me down in the country that she hoped you attended to the business. I told her that there was nothing to attend to.”

“My mother doesn’t understand anything about it,” said Sir Felix.

“Women never do. Well; what can I do for you?”

“Mr. Melmotte, I’m come – I’m come to – in short, Mr. Melmotte, I want to propose myself as a suitor for your daughter’s hand.”

“The d_____ you do!”

“Well, yes; and we hope you’ll give us your consent.”

“She knows you’re coming then?”

“Yes.”

“And my wife – does she know?”

“I’ve never spoken to her about it. Perhaps Miss Melmotte has.”

“And how long have you and she had an understanding?”

“I’ve been attached to her ever since I saw her,” said Sir Felix. “I have indeed. You know how that kind of thing goes on.”

“I’m blessed if I do. I know how it *ought* to go on. I know that the young man should speak to the father before he speaks to the girl. He’s a fool if he don’t, if he wants to get the father’s money. So she has given you a promise?”

“I don’t know about a promise.”

“Do you consider that she’s engaged to you?”

“Not if she’s disposed to get out of it,” said Sir Felix, hoping that he might thus ingratiate himself with the father. “Of course, I should be awfully disappointed.”

“She has consented to your coming to me?”

“Well, yes, sort of. Of course she knows that it all depends on you.”

“Not at all. She’s of age. If she chooses to marry you, she can marry you. If that’s all you want, her consent is enough. You’re a baronet, I believe?”

“Oh, yes, I’m a baronet.”

“And therefore you haven’t to wait for your father to die, and I dare say you are indifferent about money.”

This was a view of things which Sir Felix felt that he was bound to dispel. “Not exactly,” he said. “I suppose you will give your daughter a fortune, of course.”

“Then I wonder you didn’t come to me before you went to her. If my daughter marries to please me, I shall give her money. If she marries to please herself, without considering me, I shan’t give her a farthing.”

“I had hoped that you might consent, Mr. Melmotte.”

“It is possible. You’re a man of fashion and have a title – and no doubt a property. If you’ll show me that you’ve an income fit to maintain her, I’ll think about it at any rate. What is your property, Sir Felix?”

Sir Felix thought that when a man can hardly count his millions he ought not to ask questions about trifling sums of money. But the question had been asked, and must be answered. For a moment it occurred to Sir Felix that he might conveniently tell the truth. It would be nasty for the moment, but there would be nothing to come after. He could not be dragged down lower into the mire by cross-examinings. There might be an end of his hopes, but at the same time an end of his misery.

But he lacked the necessary courage. “It isn’t a large property, you know,” he said.

“Not like the Marquis of Westminster’s, I suppose,” said the horrid, big, rich scoundrel.

“No; not quite,” said Sir Felix, with a sickly laugh.

“But you can support a baronet’s title? Where’s your family seat?”

“Carbury Manor, down in Suffolk, near the Longestaffes.”

“That doesn’t belong to you,” said Melmotte sharply.

“No; not yet. But I’m the heir.”

Now Melmotte was puzzled. He did not understand the complex English system under which titles and property descend. He wanted to comprehend the ways of the country which he had adopted; and was clever at hiding his ignorance. He knew that Sir Felix was a baronet, and therefore presumed him to be the head of the family. He knew that Carbury Manor belonged to Roger Carbury. And now the baronet declared that he was heir to the man who was simply an Esquire.

“Oh, the heir are you? But how did he get it before you? You’re the head of the family?”

“Yes, I am the head of the family, of course,” said Sir Felix, lying. “But the place won’t be mine till he dies. It would take a long time to explain it all.”

“He’s a young man, isn’t he? If he were to marry and have children, how would it be then?”

“I don’t quite know. I have always understood that I am the heir. It’s not very likely that he will marry.”

“And in the meantime what is your own property?”

“My father left me money in the funds and in railway stock – and then I am my mother’s heir.”

“You wish to marry my daughter. Would you inform me the amount and nature of the income on which you intend to support her?”

Sir Felix felt that the bloated swindler was taking a most ungenerous advantage of him. Was he not a baronet and a gentleman, and a very handsome fellow, who had been in a crack regiment? If this surfeited sponge of speculation, this crammed commercial cormorant, wanted more than that for his daughter, why could he not say so without asking disgusting questions which it was quite impossible for a gentleman to answer? Was it not plain that any gentleman proposing to marry the daughter of such a man as Melmotte, must do so because he needed money in return for his rank? Sir Felix stood silent, wishing that he was well out of the house.

“You don’t seem to be very clear about your own circumstances, Sir Felix. Perhaps you will get your lawyer to write to me.”

“Perhaps that will be best,” said the lover.

“Either that, or give it up.” At this moment Lord Alfred entered the room. “You’re very late today, Alfred. Good morning, Sir Felix. Ring the bell, Alfred, and we’ll have a little soda and brandy.”

Sir Felix succeeded in getting Melmotte to shake hands with him before he went.

“Do you know anything about that young fellow?” Melmotte asked as soon as the door was closed.

“He’s a baronet without a shilling; was in the army and had to leave it,” said Lord Alfred.

“I supposed so. But he’s heir to a place down in Suffolk; eh?”

“No. It’s the same name, and that’s about all. That young fellow has nothing to do with it whatever.”

“Hasn’t he now?” Mr. Melmotte, thinking it over, almost admired the young man’s impudence.



Chapter 24 Miles Grendall's Triumph

Sir Felix felt that he had been checkmated – and was at the same time full of wrath at Melmotte's insolence. As far as he could see, the game was over. No doubt he might marry Marie Melmotte. She was in love with him, which was natural; and was a fool, which was perhaps also natural. But Melmotte would not forgive his daughter for marrying without his consent. He was – so Sir Felix declared to himself – the greatest brute ever created. Sir Felix had found himself quite unable to stand up against Melmotte, and now he cursed the man as he was carried down to the Beargarden in a cab.

But what should he do? Should he abandon Marie Melmotte altogether, and drop the whole family, including the Great Mexican Railway? An idea occurred to him. Nidderdale had explained to him the result of his application for shares.

“You see we haven't bought any and therefore can't sell any. There seems to be something in that. I shall explain it all to my governor, and get him to let me have a thousand or two.”

Sir Felix thought this over, and made a mental calculation. £12 10s. per £100! £125 for a thousand! and paid in ready money. As far as Sir Felix could understand, as soon as one operation had been completed the thousand pounds would be available for another.

There was just one objection. He had not got a thousand pounds. But luck had been good to him, and he had more than half that amount lying at a bank in the city. And he had very much more than the remainder in I.O.U.'s from Dolly Longestaffe and Miles Grendall. In fact, if every man paid up, he could take up his shares tomorrow. Would that not refute Melmotte's charge of not having any fortune? He would try to get the money out of Dolly Longestaffe; and though it would be impossible to get cash from Miles Grendall, he might use his claim against Miles, who was Secretary to the Board, and could perhaps contrive that the money required for the shares should not be all ready money.

As he sat in his club, he thought over this great stroke till he gave up his idea of abandoning his suit. So he wrote a note to Marie Melmotte:

Dear M.,

Your father cut up very rough about money. Perhaps you had better see him yourself; or would your mother?

Yours always,

F.

This, as directed, he addressed to Madame Didon, and posted at the club.

On Sundays there was generally a house dinner, so called, at eight o'clock. Five or six men would sit down, and gamble afterwards. On this occasion Dolly Longestaffe sauntered in at about seven, and Felix said, “You couldn't cash your I.O.U.'s for me tomorrow; could you?”

“Tomorrow! oh, lord!”

“I'll tell you why, because you're a friend. I'm after that daughter of Melmotte's.”

“I’m told you’re to have her.”

“I don’t know about that. I mean to try. I’ve gone in for that Board in the city.”

“I don’t know anything about Boards, my boy.”

“Well, it would take a week to explain it all, but it’s absolutely essential for me to take up a lot of shares in the city tomorrow; or perhaps Wednesday. Old Melmotte will think that I’m utterly hard up if I don’t pay for them. Can’t you understand, now, how important it may be?”

“It’s always important to have a lot of money. I know that.”

“You know how much you owe me, don’t you?”

“Not in the least.”

“It’s about eleven hundred pounds!”

“I shouldn’t wonder.”

“And Miles Grendall owes me two thousand. Grasslough and Nidderdale always pay me with Miles’s I.O.U.’s. They ain’t really worth anything. I don’t see what’s the use of playing when this rubbish is shoved about the table. But you’ll try and get me the money, won’t you, Dolly?”

“Melmotte has been at me twice,” said Dolly Longestaffe. “He wants me to agree to sell something. He’s an old thief, and he means to rob me. You may tell him that if he’ll let me have the money in the way I’ve proposed, you are to have a thousand pounds out of it. I don’t know any other way.”

“You could write that in a business letter.”

“I couldn’t, Carbury. I never write letters. You tell him that if the sale comes off, I’ll make it straight.”

Miles Grendall also dined there, and in the smoking-room after dinner, Sir Felix tried to do a little business with him, believing that he must have some influence with Melmotte.

“I’m going to take up my shares in that company,” said Sir Felix.

“Nidderdale saw Melmotte and he has explained it. I think I shall go in for a couple of thousand on Wednesday.”

“Oh; ah.”

“It will be the proper thing to do, won’t it?”

“Very good thing to do!” Miles Grendall smoked harder.

“Is it always ready money?”

“Always ready money,” said Miles, shaking his head.

“I suppose they allow some time to their own Directors, if a deposit, say 50 per cent, is made for the shares?”

“They’ll give you half the number, which would come to the same thing.”

Sir Felix turned this over in his mind, but could not see the truth of it. “You know I should want to sell again – for the rise.”

“Oh; you’ll want to sell again.”

“I want to begin with ten shares; that’s £1,000. I have got the money, but I don’t want to draw out so much. Couldn’t you manage for me that I should get them on paying 50 per cent down?”

“Melmotte does all that himself.”

“You could explain, you know, that you are a little short in your own payments to me.” Sir Felix thought this was a delicate way of introducing his claim upon the Secretary.

“That’s private,” said Miles, frowning.

“Of course it’s private; but if you would pay me the money I could buy the shares.”

“I don’t think we could mix the two things together, Carbury.”

“Then when the deuce will you pay what you owe me?” demanded Sir Felix.

Miles Grendall smoked on in silence.

“Do you know how much you owe me?” continued the baronet, determined to persist. There was a little crowd of other men in the room, and he asked these questions in a whisper, but he was plainly angry.

“Of course I know,” said Miles. “I’m not going to talk about it here, in a public room.”

“I am going to talk about it,” said Sir Felix, raising his voice.

“Will any fellow come upstairs and play a game of billiards?” said Miles Grendall, rising from his chair. Then he walked out slowly. For a moment Sir Felix considered exposing the transaction to the whole room; but he was afraid, thinking that Miles Grendall was a more popular man than himself.

The gamblers were assembled in the card-room at eleven. Dolly Longestaffe was there, and with him the two lords, and Sir Felix, and Miles Grendall, and, I regret to say, Paul Montague. Sir Felix had doubted whether he should join the party. What was the use of playing with a man who seemed to feel no obligation to pay? But then where should he find another gaming table?

They began with whist, but soon switched to loo at Grendall’s repeated suggestions.

“Let’s stick to whist,” said Grasslough.

“I hate loo,” said Sir Felix.

“I like whist best,” said Nidderdale, “but I’ll play anything anybody likes.” Miles Grendall had his way, and loo was the game.

At about two o’clock Grendall was the only winner. His opponents did not grudge him his unusual luck; and they were able to pay him with his own paper, which was so valueless that they parted with it without a pang. The only man without any of his I.O.U.s was Montague, and since the sums won were quite small he paid with cash.

But to Sir Felix it was frightful to see ready money going over to Miles Grendall.

“Montague,” he said, “just change these.” And he handed a lot of Miles’s paper across the table, so that he would receive so much real money, and Miles would get back more of his own worthless paper. Paul Montague was about to do as he was asked, when Miles interfered.

“When I win from you, Carbury,” he said, “I’ll take my I.O.U.’s, as long as you have any. But I won’t have them handed about the table to be changed.”

“Pay them yourself, then,” said Sir Felix, laying a handful down on the table.

“Don’t let’s have a row,” said Lord Nidderdale.

“Carbury is always making a row,” said Grasslough.

“Of course he is,” said Miles Grendall.

“I don’t make more row than anybody else; but I do say that as we have such a lot of these things, Grendall shouldn’t take money and walk off with it.”

“Who is walking off?” said Miles.

“And why should you be entitled to Montague’s money?” asked Grasslough.

The matter was debated; and it was decided that Miles's paper should not be negotiated at the table in this way. But Mr. Grendall pledged his honour that when they broke up the party he would give any money that he might have won towards the paying of his I.O.U.'s.

The decision made Sir Felix very cross. He knew that by six or seven in the morning they would need an accountant to work that out; and he felt sure that Miles would simply walk off with the money.

For a considerable time he did not speak, and became very moderate in his play, losing a minimum, and watching the board. He was sitting next to Grendall, and he thought that he observed that his neighbour moved his chair farther and farther away from him. This went on for an hour, during which Grendall still won – and won heavily from Paul Montague.

"I never saw a fellow have such a run of luck," said Grasslough. "You've had two trumps dealt to you every hand almost since we began!"

"You've always won when I've played," said Dolly. "I've been looted every time."

"You oughtn't to begrudge me one run of luck, when I've lost so much," said Miles, who by now had destroyed his own papers to the amount of £1,000, and had also received an amount of ready money which was a godsend to him.

"What's the good of talking about it?" said Nidderdale. "Let's go on, or go to bed." The idea of going to bed was absurd. So they went on.

Sir Felix, however, hardly spoke, and watched Miles Grendall. At last he felt certain that he saw a card go into the man's sleeve. He was tempted to rush at once upon him, and catch the card on his person. But Grendall was a big man; and what if there should be no card there? And the men around him would be most unwilling to believe such an accusation. Grasslough was Grendall's friend, and Nidderdale and Dolly Longestaffe would rather be cheated than suspect one of their own set of cheating them.

So Felix let that opportunity pass by, again watched, and again saw the card abstracted. Thrice he saw it, till it was amazing to him that others did not. He watched more closely, and was certain that in each round the man had an ace at least once. At last he pleaded a headache, got up, and went away, leaving the others playing. He had lost nearly a thousand pounds, but it had been all in paper.

"There's something the matter with that fellow," said Grasslough.

"There's always something the matter with him," said Miles. "He is so awfully greedy about his money."

"The less said about that, Grendall, the better," said Nidderdale. "We have all put up with a good deal, you know." Miles was cowed, and dealt without manoeuvring a card on that hand.



Chapter 25 In Grosvenor Square

Marie Melmotte was hardly satisfied with the note which she received from Didon on Monday morning. With French volubility, Didon declared that she would be turned out of the house if Monsieur knew what she was doing. Marie retorted that Monsieur could not possibly know anything about it. In that house nobody ever told anything to Monsieur. He was regarded as the general enemy, against whom the whole household was always making ambushes.

It is not a pleasant condition for a master of a house; but the master knew how he was placed, and never trusted anyone. Of course his daughter might run away. But who would run away with her without money? And there could be no money except from him. He knew his own strength. His daughter was valuable to him because she might make him the father-in-law of a Marquis or an Earl; but the higher he rose, the less need had he of his daughter's aid. Lord Alfred had suggested that by certain uses of his money, Melmotte might be made a baronet.

"But if they should say that I'm not an Englishman?" asked Melmotte. Lord Alfred had explained that it was not necessary that he should have been born in England. No questions would be asked. Let him first get into Parliament, and then spend a little money on the Conservative side, and entertain lavishly, and the baronetcy would follow.

Marie was dissatisfied with her letter, because there was no word of love in it. An impassioned correspondence would be delightful to her. She loved the young man, and was living in a new, marvellous world. As days went on she ceased to be a child, and her courage grew. She became conscious of an identity of her own, partly because her increasing familiarity with grand people meant she was no longer in awe of them. She was no longer afraid of saying No to the Nidderdales. She was drifting away even from the sense of obligation to her father.

Had her mind been as independent when Lord Nidderdale first came to her, she might indeed have loved him; for, as a man, he was infinitely better than Sir Felix. But at that time she had been childish, and he, finding her to be a child, had hardly spoken to her. And she had resented it. But she was a child no longer. She was in love with Sir Felix, and had told her love. Whatever difficulties there might be, she intended to be true. If necessary, she would run away. Sir Felix was her idol, and she abandoned herself to its worship.

But she desired that her idol should be of flesh and blood, not wood. She was at first half-inclined to be angry; but as she sat with his letter in her hand, she remembered that he did not know Didon well, and that he might be afraid to trust his raptures to the maid's custody. She could write to him at his club.

Dearest, Dearest Felix,

I have just got your note – such a scrap! Of course papa would talk about money because he never thinks of anything else. I don't know anything about money, and I don't care in the least how much you have got. Papa has got plenty, and I think he would give us some if we were married. I have told mamma, but she is always afraid of everything. Papa is very cross to her sometimes; more so

than to me. I will try to tell him, though I can't always get at him. I hardly see him. But I don't mean to be afraid, and I will tell him that on my word and honour I will never marry anyone except you. I don't think he will beat me, but if he does, I'll bear it, for your sake. He does beat mamma sometimes.

You can write to me quite safely through Didon. I think if you would give her something, it would help, as she is very fond of money. Do write and tell me that you love me. I love you better than anything in the world, and I will never, never give you up. I suppose you can come and call, unless papa tells the servants not to let you in. I'll find out from Didon. Now I am going downstairs to breakfast with mamma and that Miss Longestaffe. She is a stuck-up thing. Didn't you think so at Caversham?

Good-bye. You are my own, own, own darling Felix,
And I am your own, own affectionate ladylove,
Marie.

Sir Felix when he read this turned up his nose and shook his head. He thought if there were much more of that kind of thing, he could not go on with it, despite the money.

"What an infernal little ass!" he said to himself as he crumpled the letter up.

Marie, having entrusted her letter to Didon, together with a little present of gloves and shoes, went down to breakfast. Her mother was there, and Miss Longestaffe soon followed, having resolved to endure Madame Melmotte. She had to go out in the carriage with her every day, and could only go to parties if Madame Melmotte accompanied her. She met Mr. Melmotte only infrequently, at dinner.

But Miss Longestaffe already perceived that her old acquaintances were changed in their manner to her. She had written to her dear friend Lady Monogram, whom she had known intimately as Miss Triplex, telling her she had been forced to consent to return to London as Madame Melmotte's guest. She hoped her friend would not throw her off on that account. She had been very affectionate, with a poor attempt at fun, and rather humble. Georgiana Longestaffe had never been humble before; but the Monograms were in such an excellent set!

But it was of no use. She had been humble in vain, for Lady Monogram had not even answered her note.

"She never really cared for anybody but herself," Georgiana said wretchedly.

Then, too, Lord Nidderdale's manner to her had changed. She was not a fool, and could read these signs. She could see it in the faces of people – especially the men – as they greeted her in the park. She already understood that others understood that she had degraded herself.

"What's all this about?" Lord Grasslough had said to her, seeing her come into a room behind Madame Melmotte. She had tried to laugh, and had then turned away her face.

"Impudent scoundrel!" she said to herself, knowing that a fortnight ago he would not have dared to address her in such a tone.

A day or two afterwards a memorable event occurred. Dolly Longestaffe called on his sister! His mind must have been much stirred to move him to such uncommon action. He came at a very early hour, not much after noon, and declared to the servant that he did not wish to see any of the family, only his sister. He was shown into a room where Georgiana joined him.

“What’s all this about? Why are you staying with these people?”

“Ask papa.”

“I don’t suppose he sent you here?”

“That’s just what he did do.”

“You needn’t have come, I suppose, unless you liked it. Is it because they aren’t coming up to London?”

“Exactly that, Dolly.”

“Don’t you feel ashamed of yourself? I feel ashamed for you.”

“Everybody comes here.”

“No; everybody does not stay here. I thought you used to think so much of yourself.”

“I think as much of myself as ever I did,” said Georgiana, hardly able to restrain her tears.

“I can tell you nobody else will think much of you if you remain here. I could hardly believe it when Nidderdale told me.”

“What did he say, Dolly?”

“He didn’t say much, but I could see what he thought. And of course everybody thinks the same. I don’t understand how you can like these people!”

“I don’t – I hate them.”

“Then why do you stay here?”

“Oh, Dolly, it is impossible to make you understand. A man is so different. You can go just where you please. And your fortune is made for you. What is to become of me?”

“You mean about marrying?”

“I mean altogether,” said the poor girl.

“I don’t see how the Melmottes are to help you. The long and the short of it is, you oughtn’t to be here. It’s not often I interfere, but I shall write to the governor, and tell him. He should have known better.”

“Don’t write to papa, Dolly!”

“Yes, I shall. Good-bye.”

As soon as he had left he hurried down to some club, and actually did write to his father.

My Dear Father,

I have seen Georgiana at Mr. Melmotte’s house. She ought not to be there. Everybody says he’s a swindler. For the sake of the family I hope you will get her home again. I think Bruton Street is the proper place for the girls at this time of the year.

Your affectionate son,
Adolphus Longestaffe.

This letter fell upon old Mr. Longestaffe at Caversham like a thunderbolt. It was extraordinary to him that his son should have written a letter. The Melmottes must be very bad indeed for him to expend such energies. But he was angry at being told that he ought to have taken his family back to town. This came from his son, who had refused to help him in his difficulties!



Chapter 26

Mrs. Hurtle

Paul Montague at this time lived in comfortable lodgings in Sackville Street, and the world appeared to go well with him. But he had many troubles. His troubles about Fisker, Montague, and Montague are already known to the reader. He was also troubled about his love, though when he thought about the success of the great railway he hoped that he might be blessed by Henrietta's acceptance. He was troubled too about the gambling, which he disliked, and yet returned to.

But there was another trouble which culminated just at this time. One morning he got a cab in Piccadilly and travelled to a certain address in Islington. Here he knocked at a decent, modest door, and asked for Mrs. Hurtle.

He was shown into the drawing-room, and stood by the table until Mrs. Hurtle entered the room. Mrs. Hurtle was a widow whom he had once promised to marry.

"Paul," she said, with a quick, sharp voice, but a voice which could be very pleasant when she pleased, "Paul, say that that letter of yours means nothing. Say that, and I will forgive everything."

"I cannot say that."

"You cannot say it! What do you mean? Will you dare to tell me that your promises mean nothing?"

"Things are changed," said Paul hoarsely. He had come here at her bidding because he had felt that to stay away would be cowardly, but the meeting was inexpressibly painful to him. He did think that he had sufficient excuse for breaking his troth to this woman, but he hardly knew how to justify it to her. He had heard things about her past life which, had he heard them before, would have saved him from this difficulty. But he had loved her – did love her in a way, in spite of her offences.

"How are they changed? I am two years older, if you mean that." As she said this she looked round at the mirror, as though to see whether she was become haggard with age. She was very lovely, though not in the current fashion. She was a dark brunette with large round blue eyes, that could be soft, but could also be very severe. Her silken hair, almost black, hung in a thousand curls around her head and neck. Her cheeks and lips were full, and she blushed easily. Her bust was beautifully shaped; but she dressed as though she were oblivious of her own charms.

Her dress, when Montague had seen her, was always black, always new, always nice, well-fitting, and above all simple. She was certainly a beautiful woman, and she knew it. Of her age she had never spoken to Montague. She was in truth over thirty. But she was one of those whom years hardly seem to touch.

"You are as beautiful as ever you were," he said.

"Psha! I care nothing for my beauty unless it can bind me to your love. Sit down and tell me what it means." She seated herself opposite him.

"I told you in my letter."

"You told me nothing in your letter, except that it was – off. Why? Do you not love me?" Then she threw herself upon her knees, and leaned upon his, looking up in his face. "Paul," she said, "I have come again across the Atlantic to

see you, after so many months – and will you not give me one kiss? Even though you should leave me for ever, give me one kiss.”

Of course he kissed her, with a long, warm embrace. While she knelt there at his feet what could he do but embrace her?

“Now tell me everything,” she said, seating herself on a footstool at his feet.

She did not look like a woman whom a man might scorn unpunished. Paul felt, even while she was caressing him, that she might well turn and rend him before he left her. He had known something of her temper before, though he had also known the truth and warmth of her love.

He had travelled with her from San Francisco to England, and she had been very good to him in illness, distress and poverty – for he had been almost penniless in New York. When they landed at Liverpool they were engaged to marry. He had given her the whole history of his life. This was when Hamilton K. Fisker was unknown to him. But she had told him little or nothing of her own life, except that she was a widow, travelling to Paris on business. When he left her at the London railway station, he was full of a lover’s ardour.

But when he remembered that he must tell his friend Roger of his engagement, and remembered also how little he knew of Mrs. Hurtle, he became embarrassed. She had spoken hardly a word of her own family, although she had said that her husband had been a great miscreant, and her release from him had been the one blessing she had known before she had met Paul Montague. After she had left him, he reflected how bald was the story which he must tell Roger Carbury, and became dismayed. Such had been the woman’s cleverness and charm, that he had passed weeks in her daily company without feeling that anything had been missing.

He had told Roger, and his friend had declared to him that it was impossible that he should marry a woman whom he had met on a train without knowing anything about her. Roger did all he could to persuade him to forget his love – and partially succeeded. Paul saw his mistake. Yet, though he was half false to his widow, he was half true to her. He had pledged his word, and said that ought to bind him.

Then he returned to California, and learned through Hamilton K. Fisker that in San Francisco Mrs. Hurtle was regarded as a mystery. Some people did not believe that there ever had been a Mr. Hurtle. Others said that there certainly had been, and that he still existed. The fact, however, best known was, that she had shot a man through the head in Oregon. She had not been tried for it, as the world of Oregon had considered that the circumstances justified the deed. Everybody thought that she was very clever and very beautiful, but also very dangerous.

“She always had money,” Hamilton Fisker said, “but no one knew where it came from. I don’t think, you know, that I should like to go in for a life partnership.”

Montague had seen her in New York on his second journey to San Francisco, and had then renewed his promises in spite of his cousin’s caution. He told her that he was going to see what he could make of his broken fortunes – for this was before the great railway – and she had promised to follow him. Since then they had not met till this day. Letters from her had reached him in England, and he had answered these by trying to explain that their engagement must be at an end. And now she had followed him to London!

“Tell me everything,” she said, looking up into his face.

“When did you arrive here?”

“On Tuesday I reached Liverpool. There I found that you were in London, and so I came here. I can understand that you should have been estranged from me. Our meeting in New York was so short and wretched. I did not tell you because you then were poor yourself, but at that moment I was penniless. I could not get across to San Francisco as I said I would, and when I did you had quarrelled with your uncle and left. And now I am here. I at any rate have been faithful. And now,” she said, “tell me about yourself?”

His position was very embarrassing. He ought to have gently pushed her away, have sprung to his legs, and have declared that, however faulty might have been his conduct, he did not intend to become her husband. But he was either too much or too little of a man to do that. He did vow to himself that she should never be his wife. But he did not know how to say this with properly apologetic courtesy.

“I am engaged here about this railway,” he said. “You have heard of it, I suppose?”

“Heard of it! San Francisco is full of it. Hamilton Fisker is the great man of the day there, and, when I left, your uncle was buying a villa for seventy-four thousand dollars. And yet they say that the best of it has been transferred to you Londoners.”

“It’s doing very well, I believe,” said Paul, with some shame, as he thought how little he knew about it.

“You are the manager here in England?”

“No; I am a member of the firm; but the real manager here is our chairman, Mr. Melmotte.”

“Ah – I have heard of him. A great man. You know him, of course?”

“Yes; I see him once a week.”

“I would sooner see that man than any of your dukes or lords. They tell me that he holds the world of commerce in his right hand. What power; what grandeur!”

“Grand enough,” said Paul, “if it all came honestly.”

“Such a man rises above honesty,” said Mrs. Hurtle, “as a great general rises above humanity when he sacrifices an army to conquer a nation. Such greatness is incompatible with small scruples. Commerce is not noble unless it rises to great heights. Do they say here that he is not honest?”

“As he is my partner perhaps I had better say nothing against him.”

“Of course such a man will be abused. People have said that Napoleon was a coward, and Washington a traitor. I would like to see Melmotte – to kiss his hand; but I would not condescend to speak a word of reverence to any of your Emperors.”

“I fear you will find that your idol has feet of clay.”

“Ah – you mean that he covets worldly wealth. All men and women break that commandment, but they do so stealthily, pretending to despise what they really love. Here is a man who boldly says that wealth is power, and that power is good, and that the more wealth a man has the greater and the nobler he can be.”

Montague had formed his own opinions about Melmotte. He believed the Grand Director to be as vile a scoundrel as ever lived. Mrs. Hurtle’s enthusiasm was very pretty, and it was shocking to see it lavished on such a subject.

“Personally, I do not like him,” said Paul.

“But you are prospering in this business?”

“I suppose so. It is hard to tell. I fell into it altogether against my will. I had no alternative.”

“It seems to me to have been a golden chance.”

“As far as immediate results go it has been golden.”

“That at any rate is well, Paul. And now – tell me what all this means. Why should our engagement be over? You used to love me, did you not?”

She waited, and he had to answer. “You know I did,” he said.

“I thought so. You are sure of my love to you. Is it not so? Come, speak like a man. Do you doubt me?”

He did not doubt her, and was forced to say so. “No, indeed.”

“Oh, with what half-mouthed words you speak – like a girl from a nursery! Out with it if you have anything to say against me! I have never lied to you. I have taken nothing from you – if not your heart. I have given you all that I have to give.” Then she leaped to her feet and stood a little apart from him. “If you hate me, say so.”

“Winifrid,” he said.

“Winifrid! Yes, now for the first time, though I have called you Paul from the moment you entered the room. Well, speak out. Is there another woman that you love?”

At this moment Paul Montague proved that at any rate he was no coward. “There is another,” he said.

She stood silent, looking into his face, thinking how she would begin her attack. She fixed her eyes upon him, squeezing her hands together.

“Oh,” she whispered; “that is the reason why I am told that it is – off.”

“That was not the reason.”

“What better reason than that? Unless, indeed, as you have learned to love another so also you have learned to hate me.”

“Listen to me, Winifrid.”

“No, sir; no Winifrid now! How did you dare to kiss me, knowing that you were about to tell me I was to be cast aside? And so you love some other woman! I am too old to please you, too rough, too little like the dolls of your own country! Let me hear your other reasons, so that I may tell you that they are lies.”

The reasons were very difficult to tell. Paul knew little about Winifrid Hurtle, and nothing at all about the late Mr. Hurtle.

“We know too little of each other,” he said.

“What more do you want to know? Ask anything and I will tell you. Did I ever refuse to answer you? Is it about my money? You knew when you gave me your word that I had next to none. Now I have ample means of my own. You knew that I was a widow. What more? If you wish to hear of the wretch that was my husband, I will deluge you with stories. I should have thought that a man who loved would not have cared to hear much of that.”

He knew that his position was indefensible. It would have been better for him not to have alluded to any other reasons, but to have stuck to his assertion that he loved another woman. He would have been called false, and a fiend, and might have had to endure whatever punishment an angry lady could inflict upon him. But his position would have been plain. Now he was all at sea.

“I wish to hear nothing,” he said.

“Then why tell me that we know so little of each other? That is a poor excuse to make to a woman – after you have been false to her. Why did you not say that when we were in New York? Is that not mean?”

"I do not think that I am mean."

"No; a man will lie to a woman, and justify it always. Who is this lady?"

He knew that he could not mention Hetta Carbury's name. He had never asked her for her love, and had received no assurance that he was loved. "I cannot name her."

"And I, who have come from California to see you, am to return satisfied because you tell me that you have changed your affections? You can shake hands with me, and go away without a pang?"

"I did not say so."

"Did you say you would be my husband? Answer me, sir."

"I did say so."

"Do you now refuse to keep your promise?"

"I cannot marry you."

"Then, sir, are you not a liar?"

It would have taken him long to explain that a man may break a promise and yet not tell a lie. He had made up his mind to break his engagement before he had seen Hetta Carbury, because of the rumours he had heard of Mrs. Hurtle's past life, and his uncertainty about her husband.

"Oh, Paul," she said, changing into softness, "I am pleading for my life! Have you given a promise to this lady also?"

"No," said he.

"But she loves you?"

"She has never said so."

"You have told her of your love?"

"Never."

"There is nothing, then, between you? And you would put her against me,—some woman who has nothing to suffer, who, for all you know, cares nothing for you. Is that so?"

"I suppose it is," said Paul.

"Then you may still be mine. Oh, Paul, come back to me. Will any woman love you as I do — live for you as I do? I have come here without a single friend. I have told the woman here that I am engaged to marry you."

"You have told your landlady?"

"Certainly. Were you not engaged to me? Am I to have you visit, and to risk her insults, and perhaps be told to take myself off? I am here because you promised to make me your wife, and I am not ashamed of the fact. If she had doubted me, I could have shown her your letters. Now go and tell her that what I said is false — if you dare."

Paul felt he could hardly leave the room in order to denounce a lady whom he had certainly ill-used. He needed to think; and he took up his hat to go.

"Do you mean to tell her?"

"No," he said; "not today."

"And you will come back to me?"

"Yes."

"I have no friend here but you, Paul. Remember that. Remember your promises. Remember all our love — and be good to me." Then she let him go.



Chapter 27

Mrs. Hurtle Goes to the Play

On the next day, Paul Montague received this letter from Mrs. Hurtle:

My dear Paul,

I think that perhaps we hardly understood each other yesterday, and I am sure that you do not understand how absolutely my whole life is now at stake. I need only refer you to our journey from San Francisco to London to make you conscious that I really love you. To a woman such love is all important. She cannot throw it from her as a man may. Nor can she bear the loss as a man bears it. Her thoughts have dwelt on it with more constancy than his; and her devotion has separated her from other things. My devotion to you has separated me from everything.

If you say that you will discard me because you have seen some one fairer, I shall not throw myself at your feet. I wish, however, that you should hear me. You say that there is someone you love better than me, but that you have not committed yourself to her. But I think that you must remember the past now that you have seen me again. I think that you must know that you did love me, and that you could love me again. You sin against me to my utter destruction if you leave me. I have given up every friend I have to follow you. As regards the other lady, there can be no fault; for she knows nothing of your passion.

You hinted that there were other reasons – that we know too little of each other. You meant that you knew too little of me. Yet have you not merely been made discontented by stories told you at San Francisco? Find out the truth before you treat me the way you propose to. I think you are too good a man to cast aside a woman like a soiled glove, because ill-natured words have been spoken of her by people who know nothing of her life.

My late husband, Caradoc Hurtle, was Attorney-General in Kansas when I married him, bringing to him a fortune left to me by my mother. There his life was infamously bad. He spent my money, and then left me and took himself to Texas – where he drank himself to death. I did not follow him, and in his absence I was divorced from him in accordance with the laws of Kansas State. I then went to San Francisco about property of my mother's, which my husband had fraudulently sold, having forged my name. There I met you, and that is all that there is to be told. Maybe you do not believe me; but if so, are you not bound to go where you can verify your doubts?

I try to write dispassionately, but I am in truth overcome by passion. I also have heard in California rumours about myself. When I received your letter, I resolved to follow you to England as soon as I could. I have been forced to fight a battle for my property, and I have won it; for I was determined that I would not plead to you as a pauper. When a man and woman have agreed to be husband and wife there should be no delicacy in talking about money. I have made my way through my difficulties, and from what I have heard at San Francisco, I suppose you have done the same.

And now about myself. I have come here all alone. Since I last saw you in New York I have not had a good time. I have had a great struggle and have been

thrown on my own resources. Very cruel things have been said of me – some of them with reference to you. I have no friends here ready to receive me. I needed to see you and hear my fate – and I appeal to you to release me from the misery of my solitude. You know that I am not usually melancholy. Let us be cheerful together, as we once were, if only for a day.

Come and take me out, and let us dine together, and go to one of your theatres. If you wish I will promise not to allude to that revelation you made to me. Perhaps a woman's vanity makes me think that if you would only see me again, and talk to me as you used to talk, you would think of me as you used to think.

You will find me at home, for I have nowhere else to go. Send me a line.
Yours with all my heart,
Winifred Hurtle.

This letter took her much time to write, though she was very careful to make it seem that it had flown easily from her pen. She copied it rapidly from the first draft, with one or two premeditated erasures, so that it should look to have been done hurriedly. She had suppressed her anger – and yet she was as angry as a lioness who had lost her cub. Invited as she had invited him, surely he must come to her!

As she read it over she thought that it had a tone of natural feminine eagerness. She put her letter in an envelope, addressed it, and then threw herself back in her chair to think.

He should marry her – or the name of Winifrid Hurtle would become known to the world! She had no plan of revenge yet formed – she told herself she would not even think of revenge, till she was quite sure that revenge would be necessary. But she did think of it all the time.

Could it be possible that she, with all her cleverness and good looks, should be thrown over by a man who – well as she loved him – she regarded as greatly inferior to herself? He had promised to marry her; and he should marry her, or the world should hear the story of his perjury!

Paul Montague felt that he was surrounded by difficulties as soon as he read the letter. It did not seem that there was any escape open to him. There was not a single word in the letter that he could contradict. He had loved her and had promised to marry her – and had determined to break his word because, as Roger said, she was an adventuress, about whom he knew almost nothing. “Any scrape is better than that scrape,” Roger had said, and Paul had believed him; and had believed doubly once he had met Hetta Carbury.

But what should he do now? It was impossible, after what had passed between them, that he should leave Mrs. Hurtle immediately. It was clear that she would not consent to be so left. Her present proposal held some comfort. To take her out to dinner and the theatre would be easy and perhaps pleasant. He remembered some delightful evenings which he had so passed with her, when they were first together at New York. She could both talk and listen, and he had been very happy to sit next to her. The reminiscence partly reconciled him to doing this perilous duty.

But when the evening was over, how would he part with her? What should he say to her then? He must arrange some future meeting. He knew that he was in great peril, and he did not know how to escape it. He could not ask Roger Carbury for advice; for was not Roger his rival? He had no other friend in whom he could

confide. He thought for a moment of writing a stern and true letter to Mrs. Hurtle, telling her that he felt himself bound to stay away. But then he remembered her solitude in London, and he convinced himself that he ought to see her. So he wrote to her thus:

Dear Winifred,

I will come for you tomorrow at half-past five. We will dine together at the Thespian; and then I will have a box at the Haymarket Theatre. The Thespian is a good sort of place, and lots of ladies dine there. You can dine in your bonnet.

Yours affectionately,
P. M.

Some half-formed idea ran through his brain that P. M. was a safer signature than Paul Montague. Then came a long train of thoughts as to the perils of the whole proceeding. She had told her landlady that she was engaged to him, and he had not contradicted it. And now he was agreeing to go out with her. However, the note was sent, and he ordered the dinner and the box. At the hour fixed he was again at her lodgings.

The woman who owned the lodging-house showed him into Mrs. Hurtle's sitting-room, welcoming him with a congratulatory smile. Paul Montague felt no satisfaction at this – only a sense of danger which every hour became stronger. He was almost tempted to tell the woman the truth; but he could not do it.

Mrs. Hurtle came out of her bedroom, with her hat on. It was now June, and the weather was warm, and she wore a light, gauzy black dress coming close up round her throat. It was very pretty, and she was even prettier. Her hat was black also, small and simple. There are times at which a man going to a theatre with a lady wishes her to look bright and gorgeous; but there are also times when he would prefer that his companion should be very quiet in her dress, but still pretty; in other words, that she should dress for him only. All this Mrs. Hurtle had understood; and Paul, who understood nothing of it, was gratified.

“You told me to have a hat, and here I am – hat and all.” She gave him her hand, and laughed pleasantly as they entered a cab.

Neither during the drive, nor at the dinner, nor at the theatre, did she say a word about the engagement. It was as it had been in former days. She whispered pleasant words, touching his arm now and again, seeming more inclined to listen than to speak. Now and again she referred, in the lightest fashion, to little things that had happened between them, to some joke, some hour of tedium, some moment of delight. There was a scent which he had once approved, and now she bore it on her handkerchief. There was a ring which he had once given her, and she wore it on the finger with which she touched his sleeve. She had a way of shaking her head that was very pretty, which she did now.

There are a thousand little silly softnesses which are endearing between acknowledged lovers; and Mrs. Hurtle was a perfect master of the art of these. Not an unpleasant word was spoken; Paul was flattered; and though the sword was hanging over his head, still he enjoyed it.

There are men who do not like women, even though they may have wives and legions of daughters. But others have their strongest affinities and sympathies with women, and Paul Montague was of the latter sort. At this time he was thoroughly in love with Hetta Carbury, and was not in love with Mrs. Hurtle; yet he delighted in her presence.

“The acting isn’t very good,” he said towards the end of the play.

“What does it matter? The acting is not first-rate, but I have listened and laughed and cried, because I have been happy.”

“It has been very jolly,” he admitted.

“And one has so little that is really jolly, as you call it. I wonder whether any girl ever did sit and cry like that because her lover talked to another woman. What I find fault with is that the writers and actors are so ignorant of people as we see them every day. It’s all right that she should cry, but she shouldn’t cry there.” She spoke knowing that her words would confuse him. “A woman hides such tears. She may be found crying because she is unable to hide them; but she does not let the other woman see them. Does she?”

“I suppose not.”

“I am quite ready if you like. Are you going to see me home?”

“Certainly.”

“You need not. I’m not afraid of a London cab by myself.”

But of course he accompanied her to Islington. He owed her that. She talked during the journey of what a wonderful place London was – so immense, but so dirty! New York was, she thought, pleasanter. But Paris was the gem of towns. She did not like Frenchmen, and she liked Englishmen; but she fancied that she could never like English women. “I like good conduct, but I hate what your women call propriety. I suppose what we have been doing tonight is very improper; but I am quite sure that it has not been in the least wicked.”

“I don’t think it has,” said Paul Montague very tamely.

At last the cab reached the lodging-house door.

“Yes, this is it,” she said. “Even about the houses there is an air of stiff-necked propriety which frightens me.” She was getting out as she spoke. “Come in for one moment,” she said. The lodging-house woman was standing with the door in her hand. It was near midnight, but, when people are engaged, hours do not matter. The woman of the house – who was a nice, respectable widow, with five children, named Mrs. Pipkin – smiled again as he followed Mrs. Hurtle into her sitting-room. She flung her hat on to the sofa.

“Shut the door for one moment,” she said; and he shut it. Then she threw herself into his arms, not kissing him but looking up into his face.

“Oh Paul,” she exclaimed, “my darling! Oh Paul, my love! I will not bear to be separated from you. No, no; there is nothing I cannot do for love of you – but to lose you.” Then she pushed him from her and clasped her hands together. “But Paul, I mean to keep my pledge to you tonight. It was to be an island in our troubles, a little holiday in our hard school-time, and I will not destroy it. You will see me again soon – will you not?” He nodded assent, then took her in his arms and kissed her, and left her without a word.



Chapter 28

Dolly Longestaffe goes into the City

It has been told how the gambling at the Beargarden went on one Sunday night. On the Monday Sir Felix did not go to the club. He was sure that Miles Grendall had cheated at cards; and he did not quite know what to do. Reprobate as he was himself, this type of villainy was new to him and seemed very terrible. He was quite sure of his facts, and yet he feared that Nidderdale and Grasslough and Longestaffe would not believe him. He might have told Montague, but Montague had hardly any authority at the club.

On the Tuesday again he did not go to the club. He felt severely the loss of his usual excitement, but he did not dare to sit down and play with the man who had cheated him without saying anything about it. On the Wednesday afternoon life was becoming unbearable to him and he sauntered into the building at about five in the afternoon. He found Dolly Longestaffe drinking sherry and bitters.

“Where the blessed angels have you been?” said Dolly, who had just called on his sister and written a sharp letter to his father, and at that moment felt himself to be almost a man of business.

“I’ve had fish to fry,” said Felix, who had passed the last two days in unendurable idleness. Then he mentioned the money which Dolly owed him, not complaining, but explaining with an air of importance that if a commercial arrangement could be made, it might be very useful to him. “I’m particularly anxious to take up those shares,” he said.

“Of course you ought to have your money.”

“I know that you’re all right, old fellow. You’re not like Miles Grendall.”

“Well; no. Poor Miles has got nothing to bless himself with.”

“That’s no excuse,” said Sir Felix, shaking his head.

“A chap can’t pay if he hasn’t got it, Carbury. He ought to pay of course. Here, I’ve just had a letter from our lawyer.” And Dolly pulled a letter out of his pocket. “My governor wants to sell Pickering to Melmotte. He can’t sell without me, and I’ve asked for half the plunder. I know what’s what. It isn’t much of a place, and they are talking of £50,000, over and above the debt upon it. £25,000 would pay off what I owe on my own property, and make me very square. From what this fellow says I suppose they’re going to give in to my terms.”

“By George, that’ll be a grand thing for you, Dolly.”

“Oh yes. Of course I want it. But I don’t like selling the place. I’m not much of a fellow, I know. I’m awfully lazy; but I’ve a sort of feeling that I don’t like the family property going to pieces.”

“You never lived at Pickering.”

“No; and it doesn’t bring in much income. Old Melmotte knows all about it, and if you like I’ll go with you to the city tomorrow and make it straight about what I owe you. He’ll advance me £1,000, and then you can get the shares. Are you going to dine here?”

Sir Felix said that he would dine at the club, but declared, in a mysterious manner, that he could not stay and play whist afterwards. They agreed to meet at two the next day. They dined together, Miles Grendall dining alone at the table

next to them. Though Dolly and Grendall spoke to each other frequently, Felix and Grendall did not address each other at all.

“Is there anything up between you and Miles?” said Dolly, when they had adjourned to the smoking-room.

“I can’t bear him.”

“There never was any love between you two, I know. But you’ve played with him.”

“Played with him! I should think I have.” Sir Felix paused a moment. “I’ll tell you all about it in the cab tomorrow.” Then he left, declaring that he would go up to Grosvenor Square and see Marie Melmotte.

He did go up to the Square, but when he came to the house he did not go in. What was the good? He could do nothing without old Melmotte’s consent, and the best way to get that was by showing that he had enough money to buy shares in the railway.

On his return home, he found this note from Marie.

Dearest Felix,

Why don’t we see you? Papa is never in the drawing-room. Miss Longestaffe is here of course, and people always come in the evening. We are just going out to dine at the Duchess of Stevenage’s. Mamma told me that Lord Nidderdale is to be there, but you need not be a bit afraid. I don’t like Lord Nidderdale, and I will never take anyone but the man I love. You know who that is. Miss Longestaffe is so angry because she can’t go with us. She is coming with us afterwards to a musical party at Lady Gamut’s, but she says she hates music. She is such a stuck-up thing! I wonder why papa has her here. We don’t go anywhere tomorrow evening, so pray come.

Why haven’t you written me something and sent it to Didon? She won’t betray us. In any case, I mean to be true. If papa were to beat me I would stick to you. He wants me to take Lord Nidderdale again. But I won’t. I’ll take no one but my own darling.

Yours for ever and ever,

Marie.

Now that the young lady had begun to have an interest in life, she was determined to make the most of it. All this was delightful to her, but to Sir Felix it was simply “a bother.” He was quite willing to marry the girl tomorrow, if the money was properly arranged; but he was not willing to go through much work in the way of love-making. In such business he preferred Ruby Ruggles as a companion.

On the following day Felix was with Dolly at the appointed time, and was only kept waiting an hour while Dolly ate his breakfast and struggled into his coat and boots. On their way to the city Felix told his dreadful story about Miles Grendall.

“By George!” said Dolly. “And you think you saw him do it?”

“I’m sure I saw him do it three times. I believe he always had an ace somewhere about him. What had I better do?”

“By George; I don’t know.”

“What would you do?”

“Nothing at all. I wouldn’t believe my own eyes.”

“You wouldn’t go on playing with him?”

“Yes, I would. It’d be such a bore breaking up.”

“But Dolly – think of it!”

“I wish you hadn’t told me. If I’d known that you were going to tell me such a story I wouldn’t have come with you.”

“That’s nonsense, Dolly.”

“Maybe. I can’t bear these kind of things. I feel all in a twitter.”

“You mean to go on playing just the same?”

“Of course I do. If he won anything very heavy I should begin to think about it, I suppose. Oh; this is Abchurch Lane, is it? Now for the man of money.”

Melmotte received them much more graciously than Sir Felix had expected. Of course nothing was said about Marie. Both Dolly and Sir Felix were astonished by the quick way in which the great financier understood their wishes and the readiness with which he complied with them. No disagreeable questions were asked about the nature of the debt between the young men.

Dolly was called upon to sign a couple of documents, and Sir Felix to sign one – and then they were assured that the thing was done. Mr. Adolphus Longestaffe had paid Sir Felix Carbury a thousand pounds, and Sir Felix Carbury’s commission had been accepted by Mr. Melmotte for the purchase of railway stock to that amount. Sir Felix attempted to explain that he wanted to make money immediately by reselling the shares, and to go on continually making money by buying at a low price and selling at a high price. This, as far as he could understand, was what Paul Montague was allowed to do, as a Director with a little money. Mr. Melmotte was cordiality itself, but he did not go into particulars.

“You will wish to sell again, of course; of course. I’ll watch the market for you.” When the young men left the room all they knew, or thought that they knew, was, that Dolly Longestaffe had authorised Melmotte to pay a thousand pounds on his behalf to Sir Felix, and that Sir Felix had instructed the same great man to buy shares with the amount.

“But why didn’t he give you the scrip?” said Dolly.

“I suppose it’s all right with him,” said Sir Felix.

“Oh yes; it’s all right. Thousands of pounds to him are like half-crowns to us fellows. All the same, he’s the biggest rogue out, you know.” Sir Felix already began to be unhappy about his thousand pounds.



Chapter 29

Miss Melmotte's Courage

Lady Carbury asked frequent questions about her son's suit for Marie's hand, until Sir Felix began to think that he was persecuted.

"I have spoken to her father," he said crossly.

"And what did he say?"

"Say – what should he say? He wanted to know what income I had got. He's an old screw."

"She has accepted you?"

"Of course she has. I told you that."

"Then, Felix, if I were you I'd run off with her. I would indeed. It's done every day, and nobody thinks any harm of it when you marry the girl. From all I can hear she's just the sort of girl that would go with you."

The son sat silent. He did believe that Marie would go off with him if he asked. Her own father had hinted that such a thing was feasible, but at the same time had very clearly stated that in such case the lady would have no money.

But then, might not that be only a threat? Rich fathers generally forgive their daughters, and a rich father with only one child would surely forgive her when she returned graced with a title. Sir Felix thought of all this as he sat silent.

His mother read his thoughts. "Of course, Felix, there must be some risk."

"Imagine if I were to be thrown over at last!" he exclaimed. "I couldn't bear it. I think I should kill her."

"Oh no, Felix; you wouldn't do that. But when I say *some* risk, I mean *very little*. He has nobody else to give his money to, and it would be much nicer to have his daughter, Lady Carbury, with him, than to be left all alone in the world."

"I couldn't live with him, you know. I couldn't do it."

"You needn't live with him, Felix. Of course she would visit her parents. Once the money was settled you need see little of them. Pray do not allow trifles to interfere. If this should not succeed, what are you to do? We shall all starve unless something be done. If I were you, Felix, I would take her away at once."

"I shouldn't know where to take her," said Sir Felix, almost stunned by the magnitude of the proposition. "Maybe better not to marry, till the money was settled."

"Oh, no; no! Everybody would be against you. If you take her off in a spirited way and then marry her, everybody will be with you. The father will be sure to come round, if people speak up in your favour. I could get Mr. Alf and Mr. Broune to help. I'd try it, Felix."

Sir Felix gave no assent. But the prospect was so grand that it excited even him. He had enough money to carry out the scheme, and if he delayed now, he might never have the chance again. He thought that he would ask somebody where he ought to take her. Miles Grendall would know, but he could not ask Miles. He and Nidderdale were good friends; but Nidderdale wanted the girl for himself. Dolly would be altogether useless. He thought that, perhaps, Herr Vossner would help him. Herr Vossner would help any fellow out of difficulty, for a payment.

On Thursday evening he went to Grosvenor Square, as desired by Marie, but unfortunately found Melmotte in the drawing-room. Lord Nidderdale was there also, with his father, the Marquis of Auld Reekie, a fierce-looking, gouty old man, with watery eyes, and very stiff grey hair. There were also present Madame Melmotte, Miss Longestaffe, and Marie. Felix shook hands with the ladies, bowed to Melmotte, who seemed to take no notice of him, and nodded to Lord Nidderdale.

A moment later the old Marquis said, "Suppose we go downstairs."

"Certainly, my lord," said Melmotte. "I'll show your lordship the way." The Marquis poked at his son with his stick until Nidderdale followed Melmotte; and the gouty old Marquis toddled after them.

Madame Melmotte was beside herself with anxiety. "You should not have been shown in," she said. "You have to go."

"I am very sorry," said Sir Felix, quite aghast.

"I think that I had better retire," said Miss Longestaffe, stalking out of the room.

"Oh, she is so bad," said Madame Melmotte. "Sir Felix, you had better go too."

"No," said Marie, running to him, and taking hold of his arm. "Why should he go? I want papa to know."

"He will kill you," said Madame Melmotte. "My God, yes."

"Then he shall," said Marie, clinging to her lover. "I will never marry Lord Nidderdale. Felix, you love me – do you not?"

"Certainly," said Sir Felix, slipping his arm round her waist.

"Mamma," said Marie, "I will never have any other man but him; never, never, never. Felix, tell her that you love me."

"You know that, don't you, ma'am?" Sir Felix was a little troubled as to what he should say or do.

"Oh, love! It is a beastliness," said Madame Melmotte. "Sir Felix, you had better go."

"Don't go," said Marie. "No, mamma. I will walk down into papa's room, and say that I will never marry that man, and that this is my lover. Felix, will you come?"

Sir Felix did not quite like the proposition. There had been a savage ferocity in that Marquis's eye, and a sternness about Melmotte, which made him cautious. "I don't think I have a right to do that," he said, "because it is Mr. Melmotte's own house."

"I wouldn't mind," said Marie. "I told papa today that I wouldn't marry Lord Nidderdale."

"Was he angry?"

"He laughed at me. He thinks that everybody must do exactly what he tells them. He may kill me, but I will not do it. Felix, if you will be true to me, nothing shall separate us. I will not be ashamed to tell everybody that I love you."

Madame Melmotte had thrown herself into a chair, sighing. Sir Felix stood with his arm round Marie's waist, listening – when a heavy step was heard ascending the stairs.

"C'est lui," screamed Madame Melmotte, bustling up and hurrying out of the room by a side door. The two lovers were alone for one moment, during which Marie lifted up her face, and Sir Felix kissed her lips.

"Now be brave," she said, escaping from his arm, "and I'll be brave."

Mr. Melmotte looked round the room as he entered. "Where are the others?" he asked.

"They have gone away."

"Sir Felix, I must tell you that my daughter is engaged to marry Lord Nidderdale."

"Sir Felix, I am not engaged to marry Lord Nidderdale," said Marie. "It's no good, papa. I won't do it, if you chop me to pieces."

"She will marry Lord Nidderdale," continued Mr. Melmotte, addressing Sir Felix. "As that is arranged, you will perhaps think it better to leave us. I shall be happy to see you in the city at any time."

"Papa, he is my lover," said Marie.

"Pooh!"

"It is not pooh. I will never have any other. I hate Lord Nidderdale; and as for that dreadful old man, I could not bear to look at him. Sir Felix is as good a gentleman as he is. If you loved me, papa, you would not want to make me unhappy all my life."

Her father walked up to her rapidly with his hand raised, and she clung closer to her lover's arm. Sir Felix wished himself out in the square.

"Jade!" said Melmotte, "go to your room."

"Of course, if you tell me, papa."

"I do tell you. How dare you take hold of him in that disgraceful way!"

"It is not more disgraceful to love him than that other man. Oh, papa, don't. You hurt me. I am going." He took her by the arm and dragged her to the door, and then thrust her out.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Melmotte," said Sir Felix, "to have had a hand in causing this disturbance."

"Go away, and don't come back any more; that's all. Just understand this. I won't give my daughter a single shilling if she marries against my consent. By God, Sir Felix, she shall not have one shilling. But look you – if you'll give this up, I shall be proud to co-operate with you in anything you may wish to have done in the city."

Sir Felix went downstairs and was ushered out into the square. But as he went through the hall a woman managed to shove a note into his hand.

It was dated that morning, and ran as follows:

There is something you ought to know. When we were in France papa thought it wise to settle a lot of money on me. I don't know how much, but I suppose it was enough to live on if other things went wrong. He never talked to me about it, but I know it was done, and it can't be undone without my leave. He says he won't give me anything if I marry without his leave. But I am sure he cannot take it away.

M.

Sir Felix felt that he had become engaged to a very enterprising young lady. She braved her father on behalf of her lover, and now she coolly proposed to rob him. But Sir Felix saw no reason why he should not take advantage of the money made over to the girl's name.

He could understand that a man in Melmotte's position should want to secure some of his fortune against accidents, by settling it on his daughter. Whether having so settled it, he could take it back without the daughter's assent,

Sir Felix did not know. Marie had no doubt been regarded as a passive instrument when the thing was done, but she was now aware of the benefit which she might derive from it. Her proposition amounted to this: "Marry me without my father's consent, and together we can rob my father of the money which, for his own purposes, he has settled upon me."

He had looked upon her as a poor weak thing; but now she began to loom before his eyes as something bigger than that. She had a will of her own. She had not been afraid of her brutal father when he, Sir Felix, had trembled. She had offered to be beaten, and killed, and chopped to pieces on behalf of her lover. There could be no doubt she would run away if she were asked.

It seemed to him that things which had been troublesome or difficult were now coming easily within his reach. He had won two or three thousand pounds at cards. He had been set to marry this heiress, and the girl was willing and anxious to jump into his arms. If such a man as Miles Grendall could cheat at cards and be brought to no punishment, it seemed to him that much more than that might be done without detection.

But nothing had opened his eyes to the ways of the world so widely as the sweet little lover-like proposition made by Miss Melmotte for robbing her father. It certainly recommended the girl to him. She had been able to throw off altogether those scruples of honesty which are apt to prevent great enterprises.

What should he do next? This sum of money of which Marie wrote was probably large. It would not have been worth her father's while to make a provision of less than £50,000 – probably very much more. But this was certain: if he and Marie were to marry, there could then be no hope of more money beyond that. In that case, £50,000 would not be very much. And Melmotte would probably have means of making the possession of the money very uncomfortable. These were deep waters into which Sir Felix was preparing to plunge; and he was uneasy.



Chapter 30

Mr. Melmotte's Promise

On the following Saturday there appeared in Mr. Alf's paper, the *Evening Pulpit*, a very remarkable article on the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway. This article attracted a great deal of attention, but the most remarkable thing about it was that it expressed no opinion about the railway at all. The Editor would at any future time be able to refer to his article with equal pride whether the railway should become reality, or whether it should collapse amidst a horde of swindlers. The article was mysterious, amusing, well-informed, and above all ironical. Whether the writer thought the railway would be a failure or an unequalled success, no one could tell.

It was generally said that Mr. Alf had written this article himself. Some thought that the *Evening Pulpit* had wanted to go as far as it could in denouncing Mr. Melmotte without incurring the danger of being sued for libel. But other readers did not agree; and the article served to enhance the value of shares in the great railway enterprise.

Lady Carbury was sure that the article was intended to write up the railway, and took great joy in it. She had a somewhat confused notion that if she could only induce her son to open his eyes, very great things might be achieved, so that wealth might become his handmaid and luxury his habit. He was the beloved of Marie Melmotte. He was a Director of this great company. He was the handsomest young man in London. And he was a baronet. Should she take Mr. Alf into her confidence? If he and Melmotte could be brought together, what might they not do? Alf could write up Melmotte, and Melmotte could shower shares upon Alf. And if Melmotte would visit her and be smiled upon and flattered, would not the great man become putty under her hands? And if meanwhile, Felix ran away with Marie, could not forgiveness be made easy?

Her creative mind ranged still farther. Mr. Broune might help, and even Mr. Booker. To such a one as Melmotte, the support of the Press would be everything. Who would not buy shares in a railway which Mr. Broune and Mr. Alf both praised to the heavens? Her thoughts were rather hazy, but she worked hard to make them clear to herself.

On the Sunday afternoon Mr. Booker called and talked to her about the article. She prudently did not say much to Mr. Booker about her own connection with Melmotte, but she listened with all her ears.

"You think him honest, don't you?" she asked. Mr. Booker smiled and hesitated. "Of course, I mean as honest as men can be in such very large transactions."

"Perhaps that is the best way of putting it," said Mr. Booker.

"If a thing can be made a great boon to humanity, simply by creating a belief in it, does not a man become a benefactor to his race by creating that belief?"

"At the expense of truth?" suggested Mr. Booker.

"One cannot measure such men by the ordinary rule."

"You would do evil to produce good?" asked Mr. Booker.

“I do not call it doing evil. You have to destroy a thousand living creatures every time you drink a glass of water, but you do not think of that when you are thirsty. You tell me this man may perhaps ruin hundreds, but then again he may create a new world in which millions will be rich and happy.”

“You are an excellent casuist, Lady Carbury.”

“I am an enthusiastic lover of beneficent audacity,” said Lady Carbury, picking her words carefully. “If I held your distinguished place, Mr. Booker, I should have no hesitation in lending the whole weight of my periodical to the assistance of so great a man and so great an object as this.”

“I should be dismissed tomorrow,” said Mr. Booker, laughing as he took his departure. Lady Carbury felt that she had only thrown out a word that could not do any harm. On the Tuesday evening – her regular Tuesday – all her three editors came to her drawing-room; but there came also a greater man. She had taken the bull by the horns, and had written a very pretty note to Mr. Melmotte himself, asking him to honour her poor house with his presence.

The great man came, and Lady Carbury took him gracefully under her wing. She said a word about their dear friends at Caversham, expressed her sorrow that her son’s engagements did not allow him to be there, and then boldly brought up the article in the *Pulpit*. Her friend, Mr. Alf, the editor, had thoroughly appreciated the greatness of Mr. Melmotte’s character, and the magnificence of his undertakings. Mr. Melmotte bowed and muttered something inaudible.

“Now I must introduce you to Mr. Alf,” said the lady. When she did, Mr. Alf explained that he had already been entertained as one of Mr. Melmotte’s guests.

“There were a great many there I never saw,” said Mr. Melmotte. “If you had come into the whist-room you would have found me.”

“Ah – if I had but known!” said Mr. Alf. His irony was altogether thrown away upon Melmotte.

Lady Carbury, finding that no immediate good results could be expected from this introduction, tried another.

“Mr. Melmotte,” she whispered to him, “I do so want to make you known to Mr. Broune, who manages the *Breakfast Table*. There is hardly a more influential man in London.” The two men were introduced to each other, and Lady Carbury retreated; but not out of hearing.

“Getting very hot,” said Mr. Melmotte.

“Very hot indeed,” said Mr. Broune.

“It was over 70 in the city today. I call that very hot for June.”

“Very hot indeed,” said Mr. Broune. Then the conversation was over, and Mr. Broune sidled away. Lady Carbury told herself that Rome was not built in a day. She would have been better satisfied certainly if she could have laid a few more bricks. Perseverance, however, was needed.

But Mr. Melmotte himself had a word to say before he left the house.

“It was very good of you to ask me, Lady Carbury; very good. And I came because I had something particular to say. Your son has proposed to my daughter.” Lady Carbury looked up into his face with all her eyes, and clasped her hands together. “My daughter, ma’am, is engaged to another man. I won’t give her a shilling if she marries anyone else; that’s all. You reminded me down at Caversham that your son is a Director at our Board.”

“I did.”

“I have a great respect for your son, ma’am. I don’t want to hurt him in any way. If he’ll tell my daughter that he withdraws from his offer, I’ll see that he does uncommon well in the city. I’ll be the making of him. Good night, ma’am.” Then Mr. Melmotte departed without another word.

Here was a promise by the great man that he would be the “making of Felix,” if Felix would only obey him! There was much to be considered in this. She did not doubt that Felix might be “made” by Mr. Melmotte’s city influences. But the wife without the money would be terrible! That would be absolute ruin! The young people would have nothing before them but beggary and the workhouse. As she thought of this she trembled. Her beautiful boy – so glorious, so fit for all the graces of the grand world!

But the girl was an only child. The future honours of the house of Melmotte could settle on no other head. No doubt the father would prefer a lord for a son-in-law; but would he not make the best of the marriage if it took place? His daughter would return to him with a title, though a lower one than his ambition desired.

She looked round the room, longing for a friend whom she might consult. Her most natural friend was Roger Carbury. But even if he had been there she could not have consulted him about the Melmottes. Dear Roger was old fashioned, and knew nothing of people as they are now. He lived in a world which had been good in its way; but which had now passed on.

Then her eye settled on Mr. Broune. She was afraid of Mr. Alf, who was proving difficult to manage. But Mr. Broune was softer. He had been very courteous to her lately – so much so that she had almost feared that he was going to be a goose again. That would be a bore; but still she might make use of his susceptibility. When her guests began to leave, she spoke to him, saying she wanted his advice. Would he stay behind for a few minutes?

He did, and she asked her daughter to leave them.

“I’m afraid you didn’t make much of Mr. Melmotte,” she said, smiling. He had seated himself close to her arm-chair. In reply, he shook his head and laughed.

“I was sorry for it,” said Lady Carbury, “for he certainly is a wonderful man.”

“I suppose he is, but he is one of those men whose powers do not lie in conversation. Though, indeed, if he said little, I said less.”

“It didn’t come off,” Lady Carbury suggested with her sweetest smile. “But now I want to tell you something. I think I am justified in regarding you as a real friend.”

“Certainly,” he said, putting out his hand for hers.

She gave it to him for a moment, and then took it back again. “Stupid old goose!” she thought; and then said, “You know my boy, Felix? He is engaged to marry that man’s daughter.”

“Engaged to marry Miss Melmotte? I thought she was to marry Lord Nidderdale.”

“She is desperately in love with Felix, as is he with her. Melmotte naturally wants her to marry the lord. He came here to tell me that if his daughter married Felix she should not have a penny.”

“Do you mean that he volunteered that, as a threat?”

“Just so. It was more candid than civil. In these days young people are not often stopped from marrying simply by a father’s fantasy. But he also told me that if Felix would desist, he would enable him to make a fortune in the city.”

“That’s bosh,” said Broune with decision.

“Do you think so?”

“Yes, I do. He must have meant to deceive you.”

“You know my son is one of the Directors of that great American Railway, so is connected to him.”

“Sir Felix’s name was put there merely because he has a title, and because Melmotte thought Felix would not interfere. It may be that he will be able to sell a few shares at a profit; but, if I understand the matter rightly, he has no capital to go into such a business.”

“No.”

“Dear Lady Carbury, I would place no dependence at all on such a promise as that.”

“You think he should marry the girl then, in spite of the father?”

Mr. Broune hesitated before he replied. But Lady Carbury wanted someone to support her in her view of an elopement.

“Felix is all but prepared to take her off. She is quite ready to go. She is devoted to him. Do you think he would be wrong?”

“That is very hard to answer,” said Mr. Broune.

“People do it every day. Lionel Goldsheiner ran away the other day with Lady Julia Start, and everybody visits them.”

“Oh yes, people do run away, and it all comes right. You know it is said that Lady Julia’s mother arranged the elopement herself, as the safest way of securing the young man and his fortune. Nevertheless it is one of those things a man hardly ventures to advise. If you ask me whether I think that Melmotte would forgive her, and make her an allowance afterwards – I think he would.”

“I am so glad to hear you say that.”

“And I feel certain that you should not depend on that promise of assistance in the City.”

“I quite agree with you. I am so much obliged to you,” said Lady Carbury, who was now determined that Felix should run off with the girl. “You have been so very kind.” She gave him her hand, as though to bid him farewell.

“And now,” he said, “I also have something to say to you.”



Chapter 31

Mr. Broune has made up his Mind

“And now I have something to say to you.” Mr. Broune as he spoke stood up, then sat down again, with a perturbed air.

“The susceptible old goose is going to do something highly ridiculous and disagreeable,” she thought.

“Lady Carbury,” said Mr. Broune, standing up a second time, “we are neither of us so young as we used to be.”

“No, indeed; and that is why we can afford the luxury of being friends. Nothing but age enables men and women to know each other intimately.”

This speech was a great impediment to Mr. Broune’s progress. It was evidently intended to imply that he had reached a time of life at which love would be absurd. And yet he was nearer fifty than sixty, was young for his age, could walk his four or five miles pleasantly, and work through four or five hours of the night with the easy steadiness of sound health. Mr. Broune could see no reason why he should not be in love.

“I hope we know each other intimately at any rate,” he said somewhat lamely.

“Oh, yes; that is why I have come to you for advice.”

“When I said that we were neither of us so young as we once were, I uttered a stupid platitude.”

“I did not think so,” said Lady Carbury, smiling.

“I intended something further.” Mr. Broune had got himself into a difficulty and hardly knew how to get out of it. “I was going on to say that I hoped we were not too old to – love.”

Foolish old darling! What did he mean by making such an ass of himself? This was more troublesome even than the kiss. Lady Carbury even now had no inkling that the editor of the *Breakfast Table* intended to make her an offer of marriage. That Mr. Broune, blessed with power, a large income, and influence – that he should desire to share her fortunes and misfortunes, her struggles and her poverty, was not within the scope of her imagination. She thought so badly of men and women generally, that she was unable to conceive the possibility of such a sacrifice.

“Mr. Broune,” she said, “I did not think that you would take advantage of the confidence I have placed in you to annoy me in this way.”

“To annoy you, Lady Carbury! I have determined to ask you to be my wife. That I should be – annoyed by your refusal, is a matter of course. That I ought to expect such annoyance is perhaps too true. But you can extricate yourself from the dilemma easily.”

The word “wife” came upon her like a thunder-clap. It at once changed all her feelings towards him. She did not dream of loving him. Had it been on the cards for her to love any man, it would have been some handsome spendthrift. This man was a friend, to be used because he knew the world. And now he showed that he knew as little of the world as any other man.

But mixed with these feelings was a tenderness which brought back some memory of her distant youth, and almost made her weep. That such a man should

offer to take half her burdens! What an idiot! But what a God! She had looked upon him as all intellect, and now she found that he not only had a human heart in his bosom, but a heart that she could touch. How wonderfully sweet! How infinitely small!

It was necessary that she should answer him. It did not occur to her that she could love him; but it did occur to her that he might lift her out of her difficulties. What a benefit it would be to her to have such a father for Felix! How easy would be a literary career to the wife of the editor of the *Morning Breakfast Table*! Would not the world come to her drawing-room if she were the wife of Mr. Broune?

It all passed through her brain at once during that minute of silence which she allowed herself. But other feelings were present also. Perhaps the truest aspiration of her heart had been the love of freedom which the tyranny of her late husband had engendered. Once, she had fled from that tyranny and had been almost crushed by the censure that followed. Then her husband's protection and his tyranny had been restored to her.

After that the freedom had come; accompanied by many hopes still unfulfilled, and embittered by many sorrows; but the memory of the tyranny was very clear. The minute was over, and she must speak.

"Mr. Broune," she said, "you have quite taken away my breath. I never expected anything of this kind."

"Lady Carbury," he said, "I have lived a long time without marrying. I have worked so hard all my life that when I was young I had no time to think of love. And my mind has been so fully employed that I have hardly realised the want which nevertheless I have felt. Then I met you. As I said, perhaps with little gallantry, you also are not as young as you once were. But you keep the beauty and energy of your youth, and the freshness of a young heart. And I have come to love you. I speak with absolute frankness, risking your anger. But if you can confide your happiness with me, I am prepared to entrust mine to your keeping."

Poor Mr. Broune! Though a gifted editor, he showed little capacity for reading a woman's character when he talked of the freshness of Lady Carbury's young mind! And he must have surely been much blinded by love, in convincing himself that he could trust his happiness to such keeping.

"You do me infinite honour."

"Well?"

"How am I to answer you at a moment? I expected nothing of this. It has come upon me like a dream; I can hardly yet believe it. How am I to know my own feelings so suddenly? Marriage as I have found it, Mr. Broune, has not been happy. I have suffered much. I have been hurt in every nerve – tortured till I could hardly endure it. At last I got my liberty, and to that I have looked for happiness."

"Has it made you happy?"

"It has made me less wretched. And there is so much to be considered! I have a son and a daughter, Mr. Broune."

"Your daughter I can love as my own. I think I prove my devotion to you when I say that I am willing for your sake to encounter the troubles which your son may face."

"Mr. Broune, I shall always love him better than anything in the world." This was calculated to damp the lover's ardour, but he probably reflected that if he were successful, time might change her feelings. "Mr. Broune," she said, "you had better leave me. It is very late."

“When may I hope for an answer?”

“I will write to you – tomorrow; say the day after tomorrow.” He kissed her hand and left without another word.

As he was about to let himself out, the front door was opened from the other side, and Sir Felix entered. The young man looked at Mr. Broune with impudence and surprise.

“Halloo, old fellow,” he said, “you’ve been keeping up late, haven’t you?” He was nearly drunk, and Mr. Broune passed him without a word.

Lady Carbury was still standing in the drawing-room, struck with amazement at the proposal and wondering what she should do, when she heard her son stumbling up the stairs.

“Felix,” she said, “why do you make so much noise as you come in?”

“Noish! I’m not making any noish. Your people’s only just gone. I shaw that editor fellow at the door. He’sh great ass, that fellow. All right, mother.” And so he stumbled up to bed, and his mother followed him to see that the candle was placed squarely on the table, beyond the reach of the bed curtains.

Mr. Broune as he walked to his newspaper office experienced many pangs of doubt. Would it have been better if he had not spoken? That last apparition at his lady love’s door certainly did not reassure him. What curse can be greater than that inflicted by a drunken son? Why should a man unnecessarily afflict himself with so terrible a misfortune?

Then thousands of other thoughts crowded upon him. He must have a new house, and new ways; must fit himself to new pleasures. And what was he to gain by it? Lady Carbury was a handsome woman, and, he thought, a clever woman. Because she had flattered him, he had liked her conversation. He had been around long enough to know better – and he almost felt that he ought to have known better. He warmed himself a little with the remembrance of her beauty, and told himself that his new home would be pleasanter than the old one. He tried to make the best of it; but he was repressed by the memory of that drunken young baronet.

Whether for good or for evil, the step had been taken. It did not occur to him that the lady would refuse him. Of course she would accept him; and of course he would stick to his guns. He tried to feel complacent; but underneath there was a substratum of melancholy.

Lady Carbury went to her own chamber, and there sat thinking through most of the night. During these hours she perhaps became a better woman, more oblivious of herself, than she had been for many a year. It could not be good for this man that he should marry her. Although in the moments of her triumph she would buoy herself up with assurances that her Felix would become wealthy and brilliant, still in her heart of hearts she knew how great was the peril of catastrophe. He might go utterly to the dogs and take her with him – married or single. He was the one thing in the world that overpowered her. In all other matters she could scheme, and pretend, and overcome her feelings, telling herself that passions were simply weapons to be used. But her love for her son mastered her – and she knew it. As it was so, could it be fit that she should marry another man?

And then her liberty! A repetition of marriage vows did not recommend itself to her. As to loving the man, and liking his caresses, she imagined no romance of that kind. If Felix should go to the dogs, then Mr. Broune would not want her. Should Felix go to the stars instead of the dogs, then he – and she – would not need Mr. Broune.

She thought very little of her daughter in all this. There was a comfortable home for Hetta, if Hetta would only condescend to marry her cousin Roger. Hetta's life was so much at her own disposal that her mother did not feel herself bound to be guided in this great matter by her wishes. But she must tell Hetta if she decided to marry the man, and the sooner the better.

On that night she did not make up her mind. Even as she declared to herself that she would not marry him, the picture of a comfortable home, and the power of the editor of the *Morning Breakfast Table* brought doubts to her mind. The next morning she met Hetta at breakfast, and with assumed nonchalance asked, "Do you like Mr. Broune, Hetta?"

"Yes; pretty well. I don't care very much about him. What makes you ask, mamma?"

"Because among my acquaintances in London there is no one so truly kind to me as he is."

"I think he has that air of selfishness which is so common with people in London – as though what he said were out of surface politeness."

"Why should not London people be as kind as other people, Hetta? I think Mr. Broune is as obliging a man as anyone I know. But the only person you seem to think well of is Mr. Montague."

"Mamma, that is unfair and unkind. I never mention Mr. Montague's name if I can help it, and I should not have spoken of Mr. Broune, unless you had asked me."



Chapter 32

Lady Monogram

Georgiana Longestaffe had now been staying with the Melmottes for a fortnight, and her prospects in regard to the London season had not much improved. Her father had, apparently, taken no notice of Dolly's interference. Twice a week she received a cold, dull letter from her mother; and she had answered with descriptions of fashionable doings, and bits of scandal, as if there was nothing painful in the nature of her stay in London. Of the Melmottes she hardly spoke. She had not been taken to those houses where she wished to be seen; but she did not announce her disappointment. She had chosen to come here rather than remaining at Caversham, and she would not declare her own failure.

In truth, her "season" was very unpleasant. Her way of life was altogether different to anything she had known. The house in Bruton Street had never been very bright, but at least it had been full of books and little toys and those thousand trifling household gods which are accumulated over years. In Grosvenor Square there were no toys, no books, nothing but gold and grandeur, powder and pride. The Longestaffe life had not been an easy or intellectual life; but the Melmotte life was hardly endurable.

She had, however, come prepared to suffer much. If she could have ridden in the park, and visited proper houses, she would have borne the rest. But it was not so. She had her horse, but could hardly get any proper companion. She had been in the habit of riding with one of the Primero girls, accompanied by their father or a brother; and when out, she would be surrounded by a cloud of young men. Even though they had been walking round and round the same bit of ground with the same companions and conversation, still it had satisfied her. Now even Penelope Primero snubbed her.

But the evenings were still worse. She could only go where Madame Melmotte went, and Madame Melmotte preferred to receive people at home rather than going out. And the people she received were antipathetic to Miss Longestaffe. She did not know who they were, or whence they came. They were no more akin to her than the shopkeepers of Caversham. She would sit through long evenings almost speechless, trying to fathom the depth of their vulgarity. Occasionally she was taken out to very grand houses, to the garden parties of royalty, and some of the most elaborate fêtes of the season, held on behalf of travelling potentates.

Miss Longestaffe was fully aware of the struggle that was made for invitations. The Emperor of China was to be in London; and it was thought proper that some private person should give a dinner, so that the Emperor might see how an English merchant lives. Mr. Melmotte was chosen on condition that he would spend £10,000 on the banquet; and in return his family would be admitted to a grand entertainment for the Emperor at Windsor Park. Of these good things Georgiana would receive her share. But she went to them as a Melmotte and not as a Longestaffe.

She had told her parents very plainly that she needed to be in London at this time of year to look for a husband. She wanted to be settled in life, and had meant, when she first started on her career, to have a lord; but lords are scarce. She was

herself not very highly born, not very gifted, not very lovely, not very pleasant, and she had no fortune. She had long made up her mind that she could do without a lord, but that she must get a commoner of the proper sort. He must be a man with a place in the country and sufficient means to come yearly to London. He must be a gentleman, and, probably, in parliament. And above all, he must be in the right set; she would not take some country Whitstable as her sister was about to do.

But now the men of the right sort never came near her. The one object for which she had subjected herself to all this ignominy seemed to have vanished in the distance. When by chance she exchanged a few words with the Nidderdales and Grassloughs, they spoke to her with a lack of respect. Even Miles Grendall tried to patronise her. All this nearly broke her heart.

And from time to time little rumours reached her ears which made her aware that, despite Mr. Melmotte's social successes, a general opinion that he was a gigantic swindler was rather gaining ground than otherwise.

"Your host is a wonderful fellow, by George!" said Lord Nidderdale. "No one seems to know which way he'll turn up at last."

There was a vacancy for a member of parliament at Westminster, and Melmotte was to come forward as a candidate.

"If he can manage that I think he'll pull through," she heard one man say. "If money'll do it, it will be done." She understood it all. Mr. Melmotte was admitted into society, because of some enormous power which was supposed to lie in his hands; but even those who admitted him regarded him as a scoundrel. This was the man whose house her father had sent her to, in order to search for a husband!

In her agony she wrote to her old friend Julia Triplex, now the wife of Sir Damask Monogram. She had been really intimate with Julia Triplex, and had been sympathetic when she made a brilliant marriage. Julia had been without fortune, but very pretty. Sir Damask, though the grandson of a butcher, was a man of great wealth. He kept a yacht, a deer forest, and a moor for pheasants. He shot pigeons at Hurlingham, drove four-in-hand in the park, had a box at every race-course, and was a good-natured fellow.

Julia Triplex made the most of her position as Lady Monogram. She dispensed champagne and smiles, and made everybody, including herself, believe that she was in love with her husband. She had been fairly true in friendship while Georgiana behaved herself. But she thought that Georgiana in going to the Melmottes had not behaved herself, and therefore she had determined to drop her.

"Heartless, false creature," Georgiana said to herself as she wrote the following letter in humiliating agony.

Dear Lady Monogram,

I think you hardly understand my position. Of course you have cut me. Haven't you? And of course I feel it very much. You did not use to be ill-natured, and I do not think that I have done anything that should make an old friend treat me in this way. Of course it is because I am staying here. You may be sure that it is not my own choice. Papa arranged it all. If there is anything against these people, I suppose papa does not know it. Of course they are not nice, nor like anything that I have been used to. But when papa told me that the house in Bruton Street was to be shut up and that I was to come here, of course I did as I was bid. I don't think an old friend like you, whom I have always liked more than anybody

else, ought to cut me for it. It's not about the parties, but about yourself that I mind. I don't ask you to come here, but if you will see me I can have the carriage and will go to you.

Yours, as ever,
Georgiana Longestaffe.

It was a troublesome letter to write. Lady Monogram was her junior, and in the early days of their friendship Georgiana had sometimes domineered over her. The great Monogram marriage had exalted Julia very high, just as Georgiana's own aspirations were beginning to descend. And now she was absolutely begging and praying that she might not be cut!

On the following day a reply was brought by a footman.

Dear Georgiana,

Of course I shall be delighted to see you. I don't know what you mean by cutting. I never cut anybody. We happen to have got into different sets, but that is not my fault. Sir Damask won't let me call on the Melmottes. I can't help that. I did go to their ball, but everybody knows that's different. I shall be at home all tomorrow till three; but if you wish to see me alone you had better come before lunch.

Yours affectionately,
J. Monogram.

Georgiana reached her friend's house a little after noon. The two ladies kissed each other, and then Miss Longestaffe at once began.

"Julia, I did think that you would at least have asked me to your second ball."

"Of course you would have been asked if you had been up in Bruton Street."

"What difference does a house make?"

"The people in a house make a great deal of difference, my dear. I don't want to quarrel with you; but I can't know the Melmottes. I asked Damask and he wouldn't have it. He won't let me know them; and I'm very sorry, my dear, but I can't go against my husband."

"Everybody goes to their house," pleaded Georgiana. "The Duchess of Stevenage has dined there. And people are giving their eyes to be asked to the dinner party which he is to give to the Emperor in July."

"To hear you talk, Georgiana, one would think that you didn't understand anything," said Lady Monogram. "People are going to see the Emperor, not to see the Melmottes. I dare say we might have gone, only I suppose we shan't now because of this row."

"I don't know what you mean by a row, Julia."

"Well, it is a row, and I hate rows. Going there to see the Emperor of China doesn't mean acquaintance. I should meet Madame Melmotte in the park afterwards and not think of bowing to her."

"I should call that rude."

"Then we differ. But really you ought to understand these things. I don't find any fault with you for staying with the Melmottes, though I was very sorry to hear it; but I don't think you should complain of people because they won't have the Melmottes crammed down their throats."

“Nobody has wanted it,” said Georgiana, with a sob. At this moment the door was opened, and Sir Damask came in. “I’m talking to your wife about the Melmottes,” she continued, determined to take the bull by the horns. “I’m staying there, and I think it – unkind that Julia – hasn’t been to see me.”

“How’d you do, Miss Longestaffe? She doesn’t know them.” And Sir Damask, folding his hands together, looked as though he had solved the whole difficulty.

“She knows *me*, Sir Damask.”

“Oh yes. We’re delighted to see *you*, Miss Longestaffe. Wish we could have had you at Ascot. But–” He looked as though he had again explained everything. “Stay and have lunch, Miss Longestaffe.”

“No, thank you. I’m sorry that I have not been able to make you understand me, Julia. I could not allow our very long friendship to be dropped without a word.”

“Don’t say dropped,” exclaimed the baronet.

“I do say dropped, Sir Damask. I thought your wife and I would understand each other; but we haven’t. Wherever she might have gone, I should have seen her; but she feels differently. Good-bye.”

“It’s the most absurd thing I ever knew,” said his wife as soon as Georgiana had left. “She couldn’t bear to remain down in the country for one season. So she condescends to stay with these abominations and pretends to feel surprised that her old friends don’t run after her. I feel for her. But she must expect to be dropped. You remember the woman, don’t you?”

“What woman?”

“Madame Melmotte. The blowsy fat woman at the top of the stairs at the ball; a regular horror? If Georgiana Longestaffe thinks I’m going to make acquaintance with Madame Melmotte she is very much mistaken. And if she thinks that that is the way to get married, she is mistaken again.”

Perhaps nothing is so effective in preventing men from marrying, as the tone in which married women speak of these struggles of their unmarried friends.



Chapter 33

John Crumb

Sir Felix Carbury agreed to meet Ruby Ruggles a second time at the bottom of the kitchen-garden of Sheep's Acre farm. He made this appointment without any intention of keeping it. But Ruby was there, and hung about among the cabbages till her grandfather returned from Harlestone market. She thought that a fine London gentleman like her lover might well be late. But he did not come, and she was obliged at last to go into the house.

After that for three weeks she heard nothing of him, but she was always thinking of him; and though she could not altogether avoid her country lover, she was in his company as little as possible.

One afternoon her grandfather told her that her country lover was coming to see her.

"John Crumb be a coming over by-and-by," said the old man. "See and have a bit o' supper ready for him."

"John Crumb? He's welcome to stay away, for me."

"That be dommed." The old man thrust his hat on to his head and seated himself in a wooden arm-chair by the kitchen-fire. Whenever he was angry he put on his hat, as Ruby knew. "Why not welcome? Look ye here, Ruby, I'm going to have an end o' this. John Crumb is to marry you next month, and the banns is to be said."

"The parson may say what he pleases, grandfather. I can't stop him. But no parson can marry me without I'm willing."

"And why should you no be willing, you contrairy young jade, you?"

"You've been a' drinking, grandfather."

He turned round sharp, and threw his old hat at her. She picked it up, and returned it to him with cool indifference.

"Look ye here, Ruby," he said, "if you go from here as John Crumb's wife you'll go with five hun'erd pound, and we'll have a dinner, and a dance, and all Bungay."

"Who cares for all Bungay – beery chaps as knows nothing but swilling and smoking? There never was a chap for beer like John Crumb."

"Never saw him the worse o' liquor in all my life." And the old farmer rattled his fist upon the table.

"It just makes him stoopider."

"Didn't ye say as how ye'd have him? Didn't ye promise?"

"If I did, I ain't the first girl as has gone back of her word."

"You means you won't have him?"

"That's about it, grandfather."

"Then you'll have to have somebody to fend for ye, for you won't have me."

"There ain't no difficulty about that, grandfather."

"Very well. John Crumb's a coming here tonight, and you may settle it along wi' him. I know of your doings."

"What doings! There ain't no doings."

“If you can make it up wi’ him, well and good. There’s five hun’erd pound, and if you don’t like to take it – leave it. But you’ll leave Sheep’s Acre too.”

“Bother Sheep’s Acre. Who wants to stop at Sheep’s Acre? It’s the stoopidest place in all England.”

“Stoopid, is it? Then find another. If Sheep’s Acre ain’t good enough for you, you’d best find another home.”

Miss Ruggles prepared supper for John Crumb; she knew that she owed that service to her grandfather. But she determined that she would make John Crumb understand that she would never be his wife. As she went about the kitchen, cutting slices of ham, and trussing the fowl that was to be boiled for John Crumb, she made mental comparisons between him and Sir Felix Carbury. She could see the mealy, floury head of the one, his hair stiff with dust, and the sweet glossy well-combed locks of the other, so bright, so seductive, that she was always longing to twine her fingers among them.

And she remembered the heavy, flat, honest face of the meal-man, with his slowly-moving mouth, and his broad white nose, and his great staring eyes; and then she remembered the white teeth, the perfect eyebrows, and the rich complexion of her London lover. Surely even one year of Paradise with him would be well purchased at the price of a life with the other!

“It’s no good going against love,” she said to herself. “He shall have his supper, and be told all about it, and then go home. He cares more for his supper than he do for me.” And with this resolution she popped the fowl into the pot. Her grandfather wanted her to leave Sheep’s Acre. Very well. She had a little money of her own, and would take herself off to London. She knew what people would say, but she cared nothing for old women’s tales. She knew how to take care of herself.

At seven o’clock John Crumb knocked at the door of Sheep’s Acre farmhouse. He was accompanied by his friend Joe Mixet, the baker of Bungay, who was to be his best man at his wedding. John Crumb had many fine attributes. He was not afraid of work, nor of any man, and he was honest. After his fashion he had chivalrous ideas: he was willing to thrash any man that ill-used a woman.

But Ruby had told the truth in saying that he was slow of speech, and what the world calls stupid in regard to expressing himself. Joe Mixet, who was dapper of person and glib of tongue, had often declared that anyone taking John Crumb for a fool would lose his money. Joe Mixet was probably right; but there had been a lack of worldly wisdom in the way in which Crumb had allowed his proposed marriage with Ruby Ruggles to become a source of gossip. He was proud of Ruby’s beauty, and of his status as her lover; and he did not hide it. Now, when he came to settle the wedding day – having heard that there was a difficulty with Ruby – he brought his friend Mixet with him as though to be present at his triumph.

The old man roused himself to entertain his guests.

“Joe Mixet; is that thou? Come in, man. Well, John, how is it wi’ you? Ruby’s a stewing o’ something for us to eat.”

“Where be she, Muster Ruggles?” asked John Crumb. Ruby was at work in the back kitchen, where she could be heard among the pots and plates. She now came out, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Grandfather said as how you was a coming out for your supper, so I’ve been a seeing to it. You’ll excuse the apron, Mr. Mixet.”

“You couldn’t look nicer, miss. My mother says as it’s housifery as recommends a girl to the young men. What do you say, John?”

“I loiks to see her loik o’ that,” said John rubbing his hands down the back of his trousers.

“Bother!” said Ruby, turning round sharp, and going back to the other kitchen. John Crumb turned round also, and grinned at his friend and the old man.

“You’ve got it all afore you,” said the farmer.

“There ain’t nothing wanting in John’s house,” said Joe Mixet. “A young woman going to John knows what she’ll have to eat when she gets up, and what she’ll lie down upon when she goes to bed.” This he declared in a loud voice for Ruby’s benefit.

“That she do,” said John, grinning again. “There’s a hun’erd and fifty poond o’ things in my house forbye what mother left behind her.”

After this there was no more conversation till Ruby reappeared with the boiled fowl. She was followed by the servant-girl with a dish of broiled ham and an enormous pyramid of cabbage. Then the old man got up slowly and from a little private door drew a jug of ale and a bottle of gin. Everything being thus prepared, the three men sat round the table.

Ruby cut up the fowl standing, and dispensed the other good things, not even placing a chair for herself at the table – and no one invited her to do so.

“Spirits or ale, Mr. Crumb?” she said. He gave her a look of love that might have softened the heart of an Amazon; but instead of speaking he bobbed his head at the beer jug. She filled his tumbler to the brim. She would be as kind to him as she knew how – short of love.

There was a good deal of eating done; but very little was said. John Crumb finished a second dish of ham, and a second instalment of cabbage, and Ruby replenished his glass. When the eating was done, she retired into the back kitchen, and there had a bit of the fowl, standing up, and then went to work cleaning the dishes. The men lit their pipes and smoked in silence.

So matters went on for half an hour; during which Ruby escaped by the back door, went round into the house, got into her own room, and resolved to go to bed. But she was afraid her grandfather would bring John Crumb upstairs to speak to her; and her door had no bolt. It would be terrible to be invaded by John Crumb after his fifth or sixth glass of beer. And he would be sure to bring Joe Mixet with him. So she paused and listened.

When they had smoked for half an hour the old man called for his granddaughter, in vain.

“Where the mischief is the jade gone?” he said, slowly making his way into the empty back kitchen. “She’ll make the place hot for her, if she goes on this way.”

Then he returned to the two young men. “She’s playing off her games somewheres,” he said. “Take a glass of sperrits and water, Mr. Crumb, and I’ll look for her.”

“I’ll just take a drop of ale,” said John Crumb, apparently quite unmoved by his sweetheart’s absence.

It was sad work for the old man. He went down into the garden, hobbling among the cabbages, not daring to call very loud; but still anxious, and sore at heart about Ruby’s ingratitude. She was not even his own child – yet he had offered her £500!

“Domm her,” he said aloud as he made his way back to the house. After much searching he found Ruby, cuffed her and led her to the kitchen.

“We’re a disturbing you too late, miss,” said Mr. Mixet.

“It ain’t that at all, Mr. Mixet. If grandfather chooses to have a few friends, I ain’t nothing against it. If you and Mr. Crumb’ve come out to Sheep’s Acre farm for a bit of supper—”

“Which we ain’t,” said John Crumb very loudly; “nor yet for beer.”

“We’ve come for the smiles of beauty,” said Joe Mixet.

Ruby tossed her head. “Mr. Mixet, stow that! There ain’t no beauty here as I knows of, and if there was it isn’t nothing to you.”

“I’m just sick of all this,” said Mr. Ruggles, who was sitting bent in his chair. “I won’t put up with it no more.”

“Who wants you to put up with it?” said Ruby. “Who brought ’em tonight? I don’t know what business Mr. Mixet has interfering along o’ me.”

“John Crumb, have you anything to say?” asked the old man.

Then John Crumb slowly arose from his chair, and stood up at his full height. “I hove,” said he, swinging his head to one side.

“Then say it.”

“I will.” He stretched out his left hand to his glass, and drained it of beer. Then he slowly put down his pipe.

“Now speak your mind, like a man,” said Mixet.

“I intends it,” said John. But he still stood dumb. Ruby was standing with both her hands upon the table and her eyes on the wall over the fire-place.

“You’ve asked Miss Ruby to be your wife a dozen times, haven’t you, John?” suggested Mixet.

“I hove.”

“And she has promised to have you?”

“She hove.”

“Everything is ready in your own house?”

“They is.”

“And you will expect Miss Ruby to come to the scratch?”

“I sholl.”

“That’s about it, I think,” said Joe Mixet, turning to the grandfather.

“There’s been a talk of five hundred pounds, Mr. Ruggles.” Mr. Ruggles made a slight nod. “Five hundred pounds is very comfortable; and added to what John has, will make things snug. But John Crumb isn’t after Miss Ruby along of her fortune.”

“Nohow’s,” said the lover, shaking his head.

“Not he. John has a heart in his buzzom.”

“I has,” said John, raising his hand a little above his stomach.

“And feelings as a man. It’s true love as has brought John Crumb to Sheep’s Acre farm this night. He’s a proposed to this young lady, and she’s haccepted him, and now it’s about time as they was married. That’s what John Crumb has to say.”

“That’s what I has to say,” repeated John Crumb, “and I means it.”

“And now, miss,” continued Mixet, “you can’t have anything to say against it, can you? Your grandfather is willing, and John Crumb is willing, and his house is ready. All we want is for you to name the day.”

“Say tomorrow, Ruby, and I’ll not be agon it,” said John Crumb, slapping his thigh.

“I won’t say tomorrow, Mr. Crumb, nor the day after tomorrow, nor yet no day at all. I’m not going to have you. I’ve told you as much before.”

“That was only in fun, loike.”

“Then now I tell you in earnest.”

“You don’t mean – never?”

“I do mean never, Mr. Crumb.”

“Didn’t you say as you would, Ruby?” John was almost in tears.

“Young women is allowed to change their minds,” said Ruby.

“Brute!” exclaimed old Ruggles. “Pig! Jade! I’ll tell’ee what, John. She’ll go out into the streets. I won’t keep her here no longer – nasty, ungrateful, lying slut.”

“She ain’t that,” said John. “She’s no slut. I won’t hear her called so. But, oh, she has put me so abouts, that I’ll have to go home and hang myself.”

“Dash it, Miss Ruby, you can’t do that,” said the baker.

“If you’ll keep yourself to yourself, I’ll be obliged, Mr. Mixet,” said Ruby.

Mr. Mixet, not trusting himself to words, put on his hat and walked out into the yard, declaring that his friend would find him there whenever he was ready to return to Bungay.

As soon as Mixet was gone John made a slow motion towards his sweetheart, putting out his right hand as a feeler.

“You’d better be aff after him,” she said.

“And when’ll I come back again?”

“Never. It ain’t no use. What’s the good of more words, Mr. Crumb?”

“Domm her; domm her,” said old Ruggles. “She’ll have to be out on the roads this night.”

“She shall have the best bed in my house if she’ll come for it,” said John, “and the old woman to look arter her; and I won’t come nigh her till she sends for me.”

“I can find a place for myself, thank ye, Mr. Crumb. And now if you please, I’ll go upstairs to my own room.”

“You don’t go up to any room here, you jade you.” The old man as he said this got up from his chair, and would have struck her with his stick had he not been stopped by John Crumb.

“Don’t hit the girl, Mr. Ruggles.”

“Domm her, John; she breaks my heart.” While John held her grandfather, Ruby escaped to her bedroom.

“Ain’t it more nor a man ought to have to bear?” appealed the old man. “She ought to have a whipping at the cart-tail. She’s been and seen some young buck.”

Then John Crumb turned red all over, through the flour, and sparks of anger flashed from his eyes. “You ain’t a meaning it, master?”

“I’m told the squoire’s cousin been about – him as they call the baronite.”

“Been along wi’ Ruby?” The old man nodded. “I’ll baronite him – I wull,” said John, seizing his hat and stalking off after his friend.



Chapter 34

Ruby Ruggles Obeys her Grandfather

The next day there was great surprise at Sheep's Acre farm. Ruby Ruggles had gone away. The old farmer learnt of this from the servant girl at about noon. Ruby had left at seven in the morning; but Ruggles had not asked for her when he had his breakfast. There had been a bad scene up in the bedroom overnight, after John Crumb had left the farm. The old man in his anger had tried to expel the girl; but she had hung on to the bed-post and would not go; and the maid came up crying and screaming murder.

"You'll be out tomorrow as sure as my name's Dannel Ruggles," said the farmer, panting for breath. He had been drinking gin, and he struck her, and pulled her by the hair, and knocked her about: and in the morning she took him at his word, packed a box and went. At the first cottage, she had got a boy to carry her box into Beccles, and she had walked.

For an hour or two Ruggles sat quietly, telling himself that he was well rid of her, and that he would trouble himself no more about her. But by degrees there came upon him a feeling half of compassion and half of fear. She had been like a child to him, and what would people say if he allowed her to depart like this? Then he remembered his violence the night before, which the servant girl had heard. He could not drop his responsibility for Ruby. So he sent a message to John Crumb, to tell him that Ruby Ruggles had gone off with a box to Beccles. John Crumb went open-mouthed with the news to Joe Mixet, and all Bungay soon knew that Ruby Ruggles had run away.

After sending his message the old man sat thinking, and at last made up his mind to go to his landlord. Roger Carbury would tell him what he ought to do. His conscience and his heart and his terrors were all at work together, and he could not eat his dinner. So he drove himself off to Carbury Hall.

He found the squire seated on the terrace with Father Barham, the priest. The old man was not long in telling his story. He made the most of Ruby's bad behaviour, and of course as little as possible of his own violence. But he did explain that there had been threats used, and that Ruby had taken herself off.

"I thought it was settled they were to marry," said Roger. "Didn't she like him, Daniel?"

"She liked him well enough till she'd seed somebody else." Old Daniel paused, and shook his head. Roger took him aside; and at last the secret was told. The farmer thought there was something between the girl and Sir Felix, who had been seen near the farm; and on the same occasion Ruby had been observed away from the house with her best clothes on.

"He's been so little here, Daniel," said the squire.

"Girls like Ruby don't want no time to be wooed by one such as that," said the farmer.

"I suppose she's gone to London."

"Don't know, squire; maybe it's Lowestoffe."

They returned to the priest. "If she was one of our people," said Father Barham, "we should have her back quick enough."

“I don’t see how you would have more chance of catching her than we have,” said Carbury.

“She’d catch herself. Wherever she might be she’d go to the priest, and he wouldn’t leave her till he’d seen her back with her friends.”

“With a flea in her ear,” suggested the farmer.

“Your people never go to a clergyman in their distress. It’s the last thing they’d think of. But with us the poor know where to look for sympathy.”

“She ain’t that poor, neither,” said the grandfather. “And I don’t think as our Ruby’d go to any clergyman. It never was her way.”

“It never is the way with a Protestant,” said the priest.

“We’ll say no more about that now,” said Roger, who was growing annoyed. “I suppose we shall hear something of her at the railway station. Not many people leave Beccles, so she may be remembered.” He ordered the carriage so that they could go to the station together.

But before they started John Crumb rode up. “Ye ain’t a’ found her, Mr. Ruggles?” he asked, wiping the sweat from his brow.

“Not yet.”

“If she was to come to harm, Mr. Carbury, I’d never forgive myself,” said Crumb.

“As far as I can understand it is no doing of yours, my friend,” said the squire.

“It is and it ain’t. I was over there last night a bothering of her. She’d a’ come round maybe, if she’d a’ been left alone. But – oh!”

“What is it, Mr. Crumb?”

“He’s a cousin o’ yours, squire; and I’ve never known nothing but good o’ you and yourn. But if your baronite has done this! Oh, Mr. Carbury! If I was to wring his neck, you wouldn’t say as I was wrong; would ye?”

Roger could hardly answer the question. On general grounds the wringing of Sir Felix’s neck seemed a good idea. The world would be better with Sir Felix out of it. But still the young man was his cousin and a Carbury, and he was bound to defend him.

“They says as how he was groping about Sheep’s Acre when he was last here, a skulking behind hedges. They’ve gals enough of their own, them fellows. Why can’t they let a fellow alone? If I learn as he did it, I’ll do him a mischief, Master Roger; I wull.” Poor John Crumb! In his anger he could talk freely enough.

They all went to the Beccles Station, where Ruby was distinctly remembered. She had taken a second-class ticket on the train for London, and had gone off without any appearance of secrecy. She had been wearing a hat and cloak, and had some luggage; but nothing more could be learned.

Then they went to the post office to send a message by telegraph to the station in London, and waited for a reply. One of the porters in London remembered seeing such a girl, but the man who had carried her box to a cab had gone away for the day.

“I’ll be arter her at once,” said John Crumb. But there was no train till night, and Roger Carbury doubted whether his going would do any good. Crumb evidently felt that the first step towards finding Ruby would be the breaking of every bone in Sir Felix Carbury’s body.

Now it was not clear to the squire that his cousin had anything to do with this affair. The old man had quarrelled with his granddaughter not because she

had misbehaved with Sir Felix, but because she had refused to marry John Crumb. When John Crumb had gone over to the farm to arrange it all, there had been no fear about Felix Carbury. Nor could Ruby have communicated with Felix since the quarrel at the farm.

Even if the old man were right in supposing that Ruby and the baronet had met, the baronet had not abducted her. John Crumb was thirsting for blood, and Roger, little as he loved his cousin, did not wish all Suffolk to know that Sir Felix Carbury had been thrashed by John Crumb of Bungay.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said he, putting his hand kindly on the old man’s shoulder. “I’ll go up myself by the first train tomorrow. I can trace her better than Mr. Crumb can do, and you will both trust me.”

“But you’ll let us know the truth,” said John Crumb. Roger Carbury made an indiscreet promise of this. So the matter was settled, and the grandfather and lover returned together to Bungay.



Chapter 35

Melmotte's Glory

Augustus Melmotte was becoming greater and mightier every day. He was learning to despise mere lords, and to feel that he might almost domineer over a duke. He had not intended to play so high a game, but the game had become high of its own accord. A man cannot always keep his doings within the limits which he has planned. They will often fall short of his aspirations; they will sometimes soar higher than he had imagined. So it had been with Mr. Melmotte. He had contemplated great things; but the things which he was achieving were beyond his contemplation.

The reader will not have thought much of Fisker on his arrival in England. Fisker was, perhaps, not worthy of much thought. He had never read a book. He had never said a prayer. He cared nothing for humanity. He had sprung out of some Californian gully, and had tumbled up in the world on the strength of his own audacity. But, such as he was, he had given the necessary impetus for rolling Augustus Melmotte onward into almost unprecedented commercial greatness, thanks to the Mexican Railway. The great company had its own office, where the Board was held; but everything was really managed in Mr. Melmotte's offices at Abchurch Lane.

The enterprise had swung itself across from California to London, as a compass needle turns to the pole, till Mr. Fisker almost regretted the deed which he had done. And Melmotte was not only the head, but the body of it all. The shares seemed to be all in Melmotte's pocket, so that he could distribute them as he would; and it seemed when sold, they came back to Melmotte's pocket. Men were content to buy shares simply on Melmotte's word.

Sir Felix had brought his winnings at cards to the great man, who had swept the money into his till, and had told Sir Felix that the shares were his. Sir Felix was supremely happy. He could now do as Paul Montague was doing: get a perennial income, buying and selling. It was only after a day or two's reflection that he found that he had nothing yet to sell.

Sir Felix was just one among hundreds. In the meantime the bills in Grosvenor Square were no doubt paid – and these bills must have been stupendous. The very servants were as tall, gorgeous, and numerous as the servants of royalty.

And now there appeared a paragraph in the *Morning Breakfast Table*, and another in the *Evening Pulpit*, telling the world that Mr. Melmotte had bought Pickering Park, the magnificent Sussex property of Adolphus Longestaffe. The purchase-money was to be divided between father and son. The thing was done with the greatest ease, for the magnificence of Mr. Melmotte affected even the Longestaffe lawyers. Were I to buy some humble cottage, the money would be wanted to the last farthing before we should be able to enter our new home. But Melmotte's mere breath was taken for money. Pickering was his, and within a week a builder, with masons and carpenters, was at work upon the house.

But there was still much for Mr. Melmotte to do in London. The parliamentary seat for Westminster had fallen vacant, and it was considered vital to the country that Mr. Melmotte should go into Parliament. What constituency

could be so fit as Westminster? When each party began to seek the most suitable candidate, each put its hand upon Melmotte. And that great man was forced to descend from the heights on which his mind dwelt, and to decide whether he would enter Parliament as a Conservative or a Liberal. The next day every hoarding in London declared to the world that Melmotte was the Conservative candidate for Westminster. Some unfortunate Liberal was to run against him; but the odds were ten to one on Melmotte.

This no doubt was a great matter; but the dinner to be given to the Emperor of China was much greater. It was now the middle of June, and the dinner was to be given on the 8th of July. The idea was to show the Emperor by this banquet what an English merchant-citizen of London could do. Of course some men said that Melmotte was not a citizen of London, and not even an Englishman. But no one could deny that he was both able and willing to spend the necessary money. On the 20th of June the tradesmen were at work, knocking down walls, and generally transmuting the house in Grosvenor Square so that two hundred guests might be able to sit down to dinner in the dining-room of a British merchant.

But who were the two hundred guests to be? The Emperor of China could not sit at the table without English royalty. The list also included the Prime Minister, his cabinet and their wives. The Opposition desired their share of seats. As a Conservative candidate, Melmotte was advised that he must have Conservative members, with their wives; he owed it to his party.

But the great difficulty lay with the city merchants. It was essential that the Emperor should meet this great merchant's brother-merchants at the dinner. Yet the Lord Mayor had set his face against it, and what was to be done? Meetings were held; a committee was appointed; fifteen merchant guests were selected, with their fifteen wives – and the Lord Mayor was made a baronet.

The Emperor with his suite was twenty people. Royalty had twenty tickets, each ticket for guest and wife. The existing Cabinet was fourteen; but only eleven were coming. Five ambassadors were to be asked. There were the fifteen city merchants. Ten great peers, with their peeresses, were selected. There were to be three wise men, two poets, three independent members of the House of Commons, two Royal Academicians, three editors of papers – Mr. Alf, Mr. Broune and Mr. Booker; an African traveller who had just come home, and a novelist; but all these latter gentlemen were expected to come alone. Three tickets were kept for last-minute presentation – and ten were left for Melmotte and his own family and friends.

But the dinner was not all. Eight hundred additional tickets were to be issued for Madame Melmotte's evening entertainment, and the fight for these was fiercer than for seats at the dinner. The value of the privilege was so great that Madame Melmotte thought that she was doing more than friendship called for when she informed her guest, Miss Longestaffe, that unfortunately there would be no seat for her at the dinner; but that instead she should receive an evening ticket for herself and a joint ticket for a gentleman and his wife. Georgiana was at first indignant, but she accepted the compromise. What she did with her tickets shall be told later.

From all this it will be understood that Mr. Melmotte needed no manoeuvres now to catch a duchess. Duchesses were willing enough to come. Lord Alfred, when he was called by his Christian name, felt no aristocratic twinges, but was only too anxious to make himself necessary to the great man. The world worshipped Mr. Melmotte.

In the meantime Mr. Melmotte was much troubled about his private affairs. He had promised his daughter to Lord Nidderdale, and as he rose in the world had lowered the price which he offered for this marriage. Fifteen thousand a year was to be settled on Marie and her first son, and twenty thousand pounds were to be paid to Nidderdale six months after the marriage. This delay, Melmotte said, was so that he could purchase and furnish for them a house in town. It was also said in the papers that the young people were to have Pickering Park; and that Nidderdale was doing very well for himself. The money was not perhaps so great as had been at first asked; but at that time, Melmotte had not been the strong, impregnable tower of commerce, as all men now regarded him. Nidderdale and his father were content with the bargain.

But, in the midst of all this, Marie, who had at one time consented to accept the young lord, told both the young lord and her father, very roundly, that she had changed her mind. Her father scowled and told her that her mind was of no concern. She would marry Lord Nidderdale in August.

“It is no use, father, for I will never have him,” said Marie.

“Is it about that other scamp?” he asked angrily.

“If you mean Sir Felix Carbury, it is about him.”

“You’ll both starve, my lady; that’s all.” And Melmotte took hold of her and shook her. “By —,” he said, “if you run rusty after all I’ve done for you, I’ll make you suffer. You little fool; that man’s a beggar. He hasn’t the price of a petticoat. He wants money, not you, you little fool!”

But she was quite settled in her purpose when Nidderdale spoke to her. The young nobleman, having settled everything with the father, expected no great difficulty in resettling everything with the girl. He was not very skilful at making love, but he was thoroughly good-humoured, anxious to please, and averse to give pain.

“Well, Miss Melmotte,” he said; “parents are stern beings: are they not? You know well enough that you and I can’t marry without leave from them.”

“Nor with it,” said Marie, nodding.

“I don’t know about that. There was some hitch somewhere. But it’s all right now. The old fellows are agreed. Can’t we make a match of it, Miss Melmotte?”

“No, Lord Nidderdale; I don’t think we can.”

“Do you mean that?”

“I do mean it. I knew nothing before. I have seen more of things since then.”

“And you’ve seen somebody you like better than me?”

“I say nothing about that, Lord Nidderdale. I don’t think you ought to blame me, my lord.”

“Oh dear, no.”

“It was you that withdrew first. Wasn’t it now?”

“It was my father, I think.”

“I don’t think any father has a right to make anybody marry anyone.”

“I agree with you there,” said Lord Nidderdale. “But I don’t know why you shouldn’t just marry me – because you – like me.”

“I like you ever so, Lord Nidderdale; only marrying a person is different.”

“There’s something in that to be sure.”

“And I don’t mind telling you,” said Marie solemnly, “because you are good-natured and won’t get me into a scrape, that I do like somebody else – oh, so much.”

“I supposed that was it. It’s a deuced pity. We should have been awfully jolly. You couldn’t think of it again?”

“I tell you, my lord, I’m – in love.”

“Oh, ah; yes. It’s an awful bore. I shall come to the party all the same if you send me a ticket.” And so Nidderdale went away. This happened more than a week since Marie had seen Sir Felix. As soon as Lord Nidderdale was gone she wrote again to Sir Felix begging that she might hear from him, and entrusted her letter to Didon.



Chapter 36

Mr. Broune's Perils

Lady Carbury had allowed herself two days for answering Mr. Broune's proposal. It was made on Tuesday night and she had promised to send a reply on Thursday. But early on the Wednesday morning she had made up her mind; and by noon her letter was written.

She had spoken to Hetta about him, and had seen that Hetta disliked him. She was not usually much guided by Hetta's opinion. There was an excellent match ready for Hetta if she would only accept it; and she was not therefore inclined to consult Hetta's comfort on this occasion. But nevertheless, what her daughter said had its effect.

She had encountered the troubles of one marriage, and they had been very bad. Hetta had said that Mr. Broune liked his own way. Had not she herself found that all men liked their own way? And she liked her own way. She liked the comfort of a home to herself. Personally she did not want the companionship of a husband. And what scenes would there be between Felix and the man!

Added to all this, something within her, almost amounting to conscience, told her that it was not right to burden any one with the inevitable troubles of such a son as Felix. What would she do were her husband to command her to separate herself from her son? In that case she would certainly separate herself from her husband.

Having considered these things deeply, she wrote as follows to Mr. Broune:

Dearest Friend,

I need not tell you that I have thought much of your generous offer. How could I refuse such a prospect without much thought? I regard your career as noble; and in that career no one is your superior. I am proud that you should have asked me to be your wife. But, my friend, my life has been wounded. I have not strength left me to make my heart whole enough to be worthy of your acceptance. I have been so cut and lopped by my sufferings that I am best alone. I would put the whole sorrowful history before you to read, were it not that the poor tale would be too long for your patience. You would then understand that I am no longer fit to enter in upon a new home. I should bring showers instead of sunshine, melancholy instead of mirth.

I will, however, be bold enough to assure you that could I marry any man it would be you. But I shall never marry again.

Your most affectionate friend,
Matilda Carbury.

She sent this letter to Mr. Broune's rooms in Pall Mall East, and then sat for a while alone, full of regrets. She had thrown away a firm footing. Even at this moment she was in debt – and did not know how to pay her debts without mortgaging her life income. She longed for some staff to lean on. She was afraid of the future. When she was trying to write, her head would sometimes seem to be full of the unpaid baker, and her son's horses, and his dissipation. Mr. Broune

would have made her secure – but that was all over. Yet if she had accepted him she would now be feeling equal regret.

Mr. Broune's feelings were more decided than Lady Carbury's. From the moment he had made his proposal he had repented it. He was indeed what Lady Carbury had called him: a susceptible old goose. Had she allowed him to kiss her without objection, there would have been no offer of marriage. He had believed that her little manœuvres had indicated love on her part, and he had felt himself obliged to return it. She was beautiful in his eyes, she was bright, and she wore her clothes like a lady. When she had repudiated the kiss, he had felt himself bound to obtain the right to kiss her.

The offer had no sooner been made than he met her son reeling in, drunk, at the front door. When he woke the next day, he no longer felt that the world was all right with him. Who does not know that sudden thoughtfulness at waking; the lowness of heart, the blankness of hope at the remembrance of some folly? On this Wednesday Mr. Broune found himself uncomfortable. He had taken a very great step and he feared that he had not taken it wisely. As he lit a cigarette he thought that Lady Carbury would not like him to smoke in her bedroom. Then he remembered other things. "I'll be d_____ if he shall live in my house," he said to himself.

There was no way out of it. It did not occur to the man that his offer could be refused. During that day he went about in a melancholy fashion, saying snappish things at the club, and dining by himself with about fifteen newspapers around him. After dinner he went early to the office of the newspaper in Trafalgar Square where he did his nightly work – and immediately saw Lady Carbury's letter on the table before him.

He knew her writing well, and was aware that here was the confirmation of his fate a day earlier than promised. She had accepted him with unseemly haste. He pushed the letter away, and tried to read for some ten minutes, but he found that his mind did not follow what he was reading. He struggled again, but he could do nothing while the letter lay there.

"It shall be a part of the bargain that I shall never have to see Felix," he said to himself, as he opened it. The second line told him that the danger was over.

At once he stood up, leaving the letter on the table. Then, after all, the woman wasn't in love with him! But she had shown her love by a thousand signs. There was no doubt, however, that she now had her triumph. A woman always has a triumph when she rejects a man. Would she publish it? Mr. Broune would not like to have it known among his brother editors that he had offered to marry Lady Carbury and that she had refused him. He had escaped; but the sweetness of his present safety was not in proportion to the bitterness of his late fears.

He could not understand why Lady Carbury should have refused him! He reflected upon it for full ten minutes, before he read the entire letter.

"'Cut and lopped!' I suppose she has been," he said to himself. He had heard much of Sir Patrick. "I shouldn't have cut or lopped her." When he had read the whole letter there crept upon him gradually a feeling of admiration for her so great that, for a while, he almost thought that he would renew his offer. "'Showers instead of sunshine; melancholy instead of mirth,'" he repeated to himself. "I should have done the best for her, taking the showers and the melancholy."

He went to his work in a mixed frame of mind, but certainly without that dragging weight which had oppressed him when he entered the room. Gradually,

he realised that he had escaped, and rejected the idea of repeating his offer. Before he left he wrote her a line:

Be it so. It need not break our friendship.

N. B.

This he sent by a special messenger, who returned with a note to his lodgings.

No; certainly not. No word of this will ever pass my mouth.

M. C.

Mr. Broune thought that he was very well out of the danger, and resolved that Lady Carbury should never lack anything that his friendship could do for her.



Chapter 37

The Board-Room

On Friday 21st June, the Board of the Railway sat, as it did every Friday. All the members were there, as it had been understood that the chairman was to make a special statement. Even Sir Felix had come, being very anxious to buy and sell, and not as yet having had an opportunity of realising his golden hopes, although he had paid Mr. Melmotte a thousand pounds.

The Board always met at three, and had generally been dissolved at a quarter past. Lord Alfred and Mr. Cohenlupe sat next to Mr. Melmotte. Paul Montague usually sat immediately below, with Miles Grendall opposite him; but on this occasion Lord Nidderdale and Carbury took these places.

Montague was out of favour, having insisted on giving vent to certain doubts at the last meeting but one, and making himself very disagreeable to the great chairman. What nuisance can be so great to a man busied with immense affairs, as to have to explain small details to men incapable of understanding them?

But Montague had stood to his guns. He felt very strongly, he said, that the directors needed to know more than they did know. Lord Alfred had declared that he did not agree.

“If anybody don’t understand, it’s his own fault,” said Mr. Cohenlupe. But Paul would not give way, and it was understood that Mr. Melmotte would therefore make a statement.

The “Boards” always began with the reading of a record of the last meeting. This was done by Miles Grendall; and the record was supposed to have been written by him. But Montague had discovered that the statement was written by a satellite of Melmotte’s from Abchurch Lane, who was not at the meeting. When he asked Miles about this, Miles had given a somewhat evasive reply.

“A cussed deal of trouble and all that, you know! He’s used to it.”

So Montague had spoken on the subject both to Nidderdale and Felix Carbury.

“He couldn’t do it,” Nidderdale had said. “I don’t think I’d bully him if I were you. He only gets £500 a year.” With Felix Carbury, Montague had as little success. Sir Felix hated Miles Grendall, had detected him cheating at cards, had resolved to expose him – and had then been afraid to do so. He had not mentioned the affair again, and had gradually fallen back into the habit of playing at the club, since they were now playing whist instead of loo.

The “Board” now commenced as usual: Miles read the short record out of the book, stumbling over every other word, so that if there had been anything to understand no one could have understood it.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Melmotte, in his usual hurried way, “shall I sign the record?”

Paul Montague rose to object; but Melmotte had made his scrawl, and was already deep in conversation with Mr. Cohenlupe.

Melmotte, however, had watched him. He perceived that Montague had made a little struggle and had been cowed; and he knew how hard it is for one man to persevere against five or six. Nidderdale was filliping bits of paper across

the table at Carbury. The other men were unconcerned, so Melmotte went on talking to Cohenlupe.

Then Paul put both his hands upon the table, intending to rise and ask some perplexing question. Melmotte saw this also and was upon his legs first.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Melmotte, “it may perhaps be as well if I take this occasion of saying a few words to you about the affairs of the company.” Then, instead of going on with his statement, he sat down again, and began to turn over some voluminous papers very slowly, whispering a word or two every now and then to Mr. Cohenlupe. Nidderdale and Carbury filliped their paper pellets backwards and forwards. Montague sat ready to listen, feeling that he was bound to be silent. It seemed that Melmotte had much to say to Cohenlupe, and Cohenlupe much to say to Melmotte. Cohenlupe had never before shown such powers of conversation.

Nidderdale didn’t quite understand it. He had been there twenty minutes, and suddenly remembered that the Beargarden would now be open.

“I suppose that’s about all,” he said, looking at Melmotte.

“Well, perhaps as your lordship is in a hurry, and as my lord here is engaged elsewhere,” – turning round to Lord Alfred, who had not uttered a syllable – “we had better adjourn this meeting for another week.”

“I cannot allow that,” said Paul Montague.

“I have been discussing certain circumstances with our Chairman,” said Cohenlupe, “and I must say that it is not expedient just at present to go into matters too freely.”

“My lords and gentlemen,” said Melmotte. “I hope that you trust me.”

Lord Alfred, bowing, muttered something about absolute confidence.

“Hear, hear,” said Mr. Cohenlupe.

“All right,” said Lord Nidderdale.

“I trust,” said the Chairman, “that my young friend, Sir Felix, doubts neither my discretion nor my ability.”

“Oh dear, no, not at all,” said the baronet, much flattered, and quite prepared to support the Chairman on any matter whatever.

“My Lords and Gentlemen,” continued Melmotte, “I am delighted to receive this expression of your confidence. If I know anything in the world I know something of commercial matters. I am able to tell you that we are prospering. I do not know that greater prosperity has ever been achieved in a shorter time by a commercial company. I think our friend here, Mr. Montague, should be as aware of that as any gentleman.”

“What do you mean by that, Mr. Melmotte?” asked Paul.

“Your firm in San Francisco, sir, know very well how the affairs of the Company are being transacted here. No doubt you are in correspondence with Mr. Fisker. Ask him. The telegraph wires are open to you, sir. But, my Lords and Gentlemen, in affairs of this nature great discretion is necessary. On behalf of our shareholders, I think it expedient that any general statement should be postponed for a short time, and I flatter myself that in that opinion I shall carry the majority of this Board with me. I now move that this meeting be adjourned to this day week.”

“I second that motion,” said Lord Alfred.

“I understood that we were to have a statement,” said Montague.

“You’ve had a statement,” said Mr. Cohenlupe.

“I will put my motion to the vote,” said the Chairman.

“I shall move an amendment,” said Paul, determined not to be silenced.

“There is nobody to second it,” said Mr. Cohenlupe.

“How do you know? I shall ask Lord Nidderdale to second it.”

“Oh, gracious me! Don’t ask me. I’ve got to go away. I have indeed.”

“At any rate I claim the right of saying a few words,” continued Paul. “As we sit here as directors and will be held responsible as such by the public, we ought to know what is being done. We ought to know where the shares really are. I for one do not even know what scrip has been issued.”

“You’ve bought and sold enough to know something about it,” said Melmotte.

Paul Montague became very red in the face. “I began,” he said, “by putting what was to me a large sum of money into the affair.”

“That’s more than I know,” said Melmotte. “Whatever shares you have, were issued at San Francisco, and not here.”

“I have taken nothing that I haven’t paid for,” said Montague. “Nor have I yet had allotted to me anything like the number of shares which my capital would represent. But I did not intend to speak of my own concerns.”

“It looks very like it,” said Cohenlupe.

“So far from it that I am prepared to risk the loss of everything I have in the world. I am determined to know what is being done with the shares, or to tell the world at large that I, one of the directors, do not in truth know anything about it. I intend to do what is right.”

“The gentleman had better resign his seat at this Board,” said Melmotte. “There will be no difficulty about that.”

“Bound up as I am with Fisker and Montague in California I fear that there will be difficulty.”

“Not in the least,” continued the Chairman. “You need only give your resignation and the thing is done. I had intended, gentlemen, to propose an addition to our number. When I name to you a gentleman, personally known to many of you, and esteemed as a man of business, probity, and fortune – I mean Mr. Longestaffe of Caversham—”

“Young Dolly, or old?” asked Lord Nidderdale.

“I mean Mr. Adolphus Longestaffe, senior. I am sure that you will all be glad to welcome him among you. I had thought to strengthen our number by this addition. But if Mr. Montague is determined to leave us, it will be my pleasing duty to move that Adolphus Longestaffe Esquire should take his place. If on reconsideration Mr. Montague shall determine to remain with us – and I sincerely hope that he will – then I shall move that Mr. Longestaffe be added to our number as an additional director.” Mr. Melmotte immediately left the chair, so as to show that the business of the Board was closed for that day.

Paul went up to him and took him by the sleeve, signifying that he wished to speak before they parted.

“Certainly,” said the great man, bowing. “Carbury,” he said, looking round on the young baronet with his blandest smile, “if you are not in a hurry, wait a moment for me. I have a word to say before you go. Now, Mr. Montague, what can I do for you?”

Paul began to express again the opinion which he had already expressed at the table. But Melmotte stopped him with less courtesy than before.

“The thing is, Mr. Montague – you think you know more of this matter than I do.”

“Not at all, Mr. Melmotte.”

“And I think that I know more of it than you do. Either of us may be right. But as I don’t intend to give way to you, perhaps the less we speak together about it the better. As long as you are hostile to me, I can’t help you; and so good afternoon.”

Then, without giving Montague the possibility of a reply, he escaped into an inner room and shut the door behind him. After a few moments, he put out his head and beckoned to Sir Felix Carbury. Paul Montague slowly made his way out into the courtyard.

Sir Felix had come intending to suggest to the Chairman that having paid his thousand pounds he should like to have a few shares to go on with. He was very nearly penniless, and had negotiated, or lost at cards, all the I.O.U.’s which were of any value. He still had a pocket-book full of those issued by Miles Grendall; but it was now understood at the Beargarden that no one was to be called upon to take them except Miles himself.

Beyond this, Felix had lately been forced to issue an I.O.U. or two himself. His case certainly was hard. He had paid a thousand pounds down in hard cash, in the belief that he would thus put himself in the way of making a continual income. He understood that as a director he would be always entitled to buy shares at par, and be able to sell them at the market price – giving him from ten to twenty per cent profit. He would have nothing to do but to buy and sell. He was told that Lord Alfred was allowed to do it to a small extent; and that Melmotte was doing it to an enormous extent. But before he could do it he must get something – he hardly knew what – out of Melmotte’s hands. Melmotte certainly did not seem to shun him, and therefore there could be no danger about the shares.

“I am delighted to see you here,” said Melmotte, shaking him cordially by the hand. “There’s nothing like attending to business. You should be here every Friday.”

“I will,” said the baronet.

“And let me see you sometimes at my place in Abchurch Lane. I can put you more in the way of understanding things there than I can here. This is all a mere formal sort of thing. You can see that.”

“Oh yes, I see that.”

“We are obliged to have this kind of thing for men like that fellow Montague. By-the-bye, is he a friend of yours?”

“Not particularly.”

“If he makes himself disagreeable, he’ll have to go. But never mind him at present. Did your mother tell you what I said to her?”

“No, Mr. Melmotte,” said Sir Felix, staring.

“I was talking to her about you, and I thought that perhaps she might have told you. This is all nonsense, you know, about you and Marie.”

Sir Felix looked into the man’s face. It was not savage. But there had suddenly come into it a heavy look of determined purpose.

“You understand that; don’t you?” continued Melmotte. “It’s all d_____ nonsense. You haven’t got a brass farthing. You’re just living on your mother, and she’s not well off. How can you suppose that I shall give my girl to you?”

Felix did not dare to contradict him. Yet when the man told him that he had not a brass farthing he thought of his thousand pounds which were now in the man’s pocket.

“You’re a baronet, and that’s about all,” said Melmotte. “The Carbury property, which is a very small thing, belongs to a distant cousin who may leave it however he pleases; and who isn’t much older than you are yourself.”

“Oh, come, Mr. Melmotte; he’s a great deal older than me.”

“It wouldn’t matter if he were as old as Adam. The thing is out of the question, and you must drop it. She is going to marry Lord Nidderdale. She was engaged to him before you ever saw her. What do you expect to get by it?”

Sir Felix had not the courage to say that he expected to get the girl he loved. But he was obliged to say something. “I suppose it’s the old story,” he said.

“Just so; the old story. You want my money. Come; out with it. Is not that it? When we understand each other I’ll put you in the way of making money. You give me your written promise that you’ll drop this affair with Marie, and you shan’t want for money.”

“A written promise!”

“Yes. And then I’ll put you in the way of doing so well with these shares that you shall be able to marry any other girl you please – or to live without marrying, which you’ll find to be better.”

Felix considered this. Marriage had not specially recommended itself to him. A few horses, Ruby Ruggles or any other beauty, and life at the Beargarden were much more to his taste. And he was quite aware that he might find himself possessed of the wife without the money. Marie might be mistaken about the amount settled on her – or she might be lying. If he were sure of making money, the loss of Marie would not break his heart.

But then also Melmotte might be lying. “By-the-bye, Mr. Melmotte,” said he, “could you let me have those shares?”

“What shares?” And the heavy brow became still heavier.

“I gave you a thousand pounds, and I was to have ten shares.”

“You must come about that on the proper day, to the proper place.”

“When is the proper day?”

“It is the twentieth of each month.” Sir Felix looked very blank at hearing this, since it was now the twenty-first. “Do you need a little money?”

“Well, I do,” said Sir Felix. “A lot of fellows owe me money, but it’s so hard to get it.”

“That tells of gambling,” said Mr. Melmotte. “You think I’d give my girl to a gambler?”

“Nidderdale’s in it quite as thick as I am.”

“Nidderdale has a settled property which he cannot destroy. But don’t be such a fool as to argue with me. You won’t get anything by it. If you’ll write that letter here now—”

“What; to Marie?”

“No, not to Marie at all; but to me. It need never be shown to her. If you’ll do that I’ll stick to you and make a man of you. And if you want a couple of hundred pounds I’ll give you a cheque for it before you leave the room. But if my daughter were to marry you, she’d never have a single shilling.”

“And couldn’t you manage that I should have the shares before the twentieth of next month?”

“I’ll see about it. Perhaps I could let you have a few of my own. At any rate I won’t see you short of money.”

The terms were enticing and the letter was of course written. Melmotte himself dictated the words, which were not romantic:

Dear Sir,

In consideration of the offers made by you, and on a clear understanding that such a marriage would be disagreeable to you and to the lady's mother, I hereby declare and promise that I will not renew my suit to the young lady, which I hereby altogether renounce.

I am, Dear Sir,
Your obedient Servant,
Felix Carbury.

The letter was dated 21st July, and bore the printed address of the offices of the Railway.

"You'll give me that cheque for £200, Mr. Melmotte?" The financier hesitated for a moment, but did give the baronet the cheque as promised. "And you'll see about letting me have those shares?"

"You can come to me in Abchurch Lane, you know." Sir Felix said that he would.

As he went westward towards the Beargarden, the baronet was not happy. Ignorant as he was about the duties of a gentleman, indifferent as he was to the feelings of others, still he felt ashamed. He knew that he was treating the girl very badly. He tried to console himself by reflecting that his writing such a letter would not prevent his running away with the girl, should he, on consideration, find it worth his while to do so.

That night he was again playing at the Beargarden, and he lost a great part of Mr. Melmotte's money. In fact he lost much more than the £200; but he paid in I.O.U.s.



Chapter 38

Paul Montague's Troubles

Paul Montague had other troubles on his mind. It was now more than a fortnight since he had taken Mrs. Hurtle to the play. He had seen her twice since, once on the following day, when she had not mentioned their engagement, and again, three or four days afterwards, when the meeting was by no means so pleasant. She had wept and stormed. She had dared him to be false to her. Did he deny that he had promised to marry her? Were his visits not a repetition of that promise? And then she became soft, and pleaded.

But for the storm, he might have given way. Her tears and pleadings touched him. He had loved her and had won her love. And she was lovely. It was impossible to drive her away from him. She would look up in his face and he could not help embracing her. Then there had come a passionate flood of tears and she was in his arms. How he had escaped he hardly knew, but he did know that he had promised to be with her again in two days.

On the day he wrote her a letter excusing himself. He had been summoned, he said, to Liverpool on business connected with the great American railway, and must postpone seeing her till his return. This was true. He had been corresponding with a Mr. Ramsbottom at Liverpool since having become a partner in the house of Fisker, Montague, and Montague. Mr. Ramsbottom, whom he consulted and trusted, had suggested that he should come to him at Liverpool. He went, and his conduct at the Board was the result of the advice which he had received.

In Liverpool he heard tidings of Mrs. Hurtle, though hardly trustworthy information. The lady, after landing from an American steamer, had inquired for Paul, in a manner that Mr. Ramsbottom thought indicated danger. He had spoken about her with a fellow-traveller, who had said that Mrs. Hurtle was "a queer card." "On board ship we reckoned she was about the handsomest woman we had ever seen, but we all said that there was a bit of the wild cat in her breeding." Then Mr. Ramsbottom had asked whether the lady was a widow.

"There was a man on board from Kansas," said the fellow-traveller, "who knew a man named Hurtle, who was separated from his wife and is still alive. There was a queer story about the man and his wife having fought a duel with pistols."

This information about Mrs. Hurtle could only be given to Paul face to face, which is why Mr. Ramsbottom had invited him to Liverpool.

"It is as well that you should know," his friend said to him. Paul had thanked him, not daring to speak of his own difficulties with the lady.

In all this there had been increased dismay, but also some comfort. Sometimes Paul had doubted whether he should break off his engagement. When she assured him that she had given up everything in life for him, and threw her arms round him – then he would almost yield. But when what the traveller had called the wild cat showed itself – and when, having escaped from her, he thought of Hetta Carbury – he was fully determined that he would not marry Mrs. Hurtle.

That he was tangled in a mass of troubles he was well aware; but if it were true that Mr. Hurtle was alive, that fact might help him. She certainly had declared

him to be dead. And if it were true also that she had fought a duel with one husband, that also ought to justify him in breaking from his engagement.

He must make up his mind what to do. If he meant to reject the lady finally on the score of her being a wild cat, he must tell her so. He felt very strongly that he must not flinch from the wild cat's claws. That he would have to undergo some mauling and clawing, he understood. He must tell her to her face that he was not satisfied with her past life, and that therefore he would not marry her.

But before he saw her it would be as well to get some real evidence. He returned from Liverpool to London on the morning on which the Board was held, and thought even more of all this than he did of his attack on Mr. Melmotte. The husband's name had been Caradoc Carson Hurtle. If he had been seen in the State of Kansas within the last two years, that certainly would be evidence. As to the duel, he felt that it might be very hard to prove that. But there was a rumour also that she had shot a gentleman in Oregon. Could he get at the truth of that story?

However, this detective's work was very distasteful to him. After having had the woman in his arms how could he make such inquiries? And it would be almost necessary that he should take her in his arms again while he was making them, unless he told her outright that he would not marry her because of what he had heard. In so doing he might incur the fate of the gentleman in Oregon.

At any rate he would declare the ground on which he considered himself free, and would bear the consequences. This was the resolve in his mind when he rose up to attack Mr. Melmotte at the Board.

When the Board was over, he went down to the Beargarden, where he often dined. This evening he sat with Nidderdale, at the young lord's instigation.

"What made you so savage at old Melmotte today?" said Nidderdale.

"I didn't mean to be savage, but I think that as Directors we ought to know something about it."

"I suppose we ought. I don't know. I can't make out why the mischief they made me a Director."

"Because you're a lord," said Paul bluntly.

"But what good can I do them? Nobody thinks that I know anything about business. Of course I'm in Parliament, but I don't often go there unless they want me to vote. I can't understand it. The Governor said that I was to do it, and so I've done it."

"They say, you know – there's something between you and Melmotte's daughter."

"But what has that to do with a railway? And why should Carbury be there? And why on earth should old Grendall be a Director? If you were to pick out the two most hopeless men in London in regard to money, they would be old Grendall and young Carbury. I've been thinking a good deal about it, and I can't make it out."

"I have been thinking about it too," said Paul.

"I suppose old Melmotte is all right?"

This was a question which Paul found it difficult to answer. How could he whisper suspicions to the man who was a competitor for Marie Melmotte's hand?

"You can speak out to me, you know," said Nidderdale.

"I've got nothing to speak. People say that he is the richest man alive. I don't see why it shouldn't be true. Nobody knows very much about him."

It occurred to Nidderdale that he would “come a cropper” were he to marry Melmotte’s daughter for her money, and then find that she had got none. After dinner he invited Montague to go up to the card-room.

“Carbury, and Grasslough, and Dolly Longestaffe are there,” he said.

But Paul declined. He left the club, and slowly sauntered northwards through the streets till he found himself in Welbeck Street; he hardly knew why. He had certainly intended to call on Lady Carbury. But his mind was full of Mrs. Hurtle.

And, indeed, he was still under some promise made to Roger Carbury, that for a certain period, still unexpired, he would not ask Hetta to be his wife. It had been a foolish promise, made and then repented; but still it existed, and Paul knew that Roger trusted that it would be kept.

Nevertheless Paul made his way up to Welbeck Street and almost unconsciously knocked at the door. No; Lady Carbury was not at home. She was out somewhere with Mr. Roger Carbury. Up to that moment Paul had not heard that Roger was in town; but the reader may remember that he had come in search of Ruby Ruggles. Miss Carbury was at home, the servant said. Would Mr. Montague go up and see her? Without considering, Mr. Montague said that he would.

“Mamma is out with Roger,” said Hetta, trying to save herself from confusion. “She made him take her to some soirée of learned people.”

“I am so glad to see you. What an age it is since we met. What has brought Roger up to town?”

“I don’t know. Some mystery, I think. Whenever there is a mystery I am always afraid that there is something wrong about Felix.”

“I saw Felix today, at the Railway Board.”

“Roger says the Railway Board is all a sham.” Paul could not help blushing as he heard this. “And there is something going on about that horrid man’s daughter.”

“She is to marry Lord Nidderdale, I think.”

“Is she? They are talking of her marrying Felix, for her money of course. And I believe Mr. Melmotte is determined to quarrel with them. It’s all horrid from beginning to end.”

“But today they seemed to be the greatest friends. Mr. Melmotte asked your brother into an inner room with him, as if they were friends.”

“Roger greatly dislikes Mr. Melmotte. And it is always safe to trust Roger. Don’t you think so, Mr. Montague?” Paul did think so; but he found the subject difficult. “Of course I will never go against mamma,” continued Hetta, “but I always feel that my Cousin Roger is a rock of strength, so that if one did whatever he said one would never go wrong.”

“No one has more reason to praise him than I have.”

“I think everybody who knows him has reason to praise him.”

“Is he the only man you can trust? But I should not contradict you. Roger Carbury has been the best friend that any man ever had.”

“I didn’t say he was the only person. But of all my friends—”

“Am I among the number, Miss Carbury?”

“Yes; why not? Of course you are a friend – because you are his friend.”

“Look here, Hetta,” he said. “It is no good going on like this. I love Roger Carbury. He is all that you say, and more. He is a gentleman every inch. He never

lies. He never takes what is not his own. I believe he does love his neighbour as himself.”

“Oh, Mr. Montague! I am so glad to hear you speak of him like that.”

“I love him as well as a man can love a man. If you say that you love him as well as a woman can love a man, I will leave England at once, and never return.”

“There’s mamma,” said Henrietta; for at that moment there was a knock at the door.



Chapter 39 “I Do Love Him”

Lady Carbury had returned from the soiree with Roger. They came up to the drawing-room and found Paul and Henrietta together. Roger had supposed that Montague was still at Liverpool, and could hardly avoid feeling that a meeting between the two had been planned in the mother's absence. Roger was not a man liable to suspicion, but the circumstances were suspicious.

Lady Carbury was the first to speak. “This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Montague.” The moment she saw Paul she thought that the meeting between Hetta and him had been pre-arranged.

“Yes,” he said lamely, “I had nothing to do, and thought I would come and see you.” Lady Carbury disbelieved him, but Roger felt assured that his coming truly had been an accident.

“I thought you were at Liverpool,” said Roger.

“I came back today, for that Board in the city. I will tell you all about it later. What has brought you to London?”

“A little business,” said Roger.

There was an awkward silence. Lady Carbury was angry, and Henrietta, knowing the way in which her mother's thoughts would run, forced herself to speak.

“Have you had a pleasant evening, mamma?”

“Have *you* had a pleasant evening, my dear?” said Lady Carbury, forgetting herself in her desire to punish her daughter.

“Indeed, no,” said Hetta, attempting to laugh, “I have been trying to work at Dante, but I was just going to bed when Mr. Montague came in. What did you think of the soiree, Roger?”

“I was out of my element; but I think your mother liked it.”

“I was very glad indeed to meet Dr. Palmoil. It seems that if we can only open the interior of Africa a little further, we can feed the human race. Isn't that a grand idea, Roger?”

“I doubt whether Dr. Palmoil will be able to put his descendants back into Eden.”

“Roger, for a religious man, you do say the strangest things! I have quite decided that if I am ever able, I will visit the interior of Africa. It is the garden of the world.”

This scrap of enthusiasm so carried them through their difficulties that the two men were able to take their leave with fair comfort. As soon as the door was closed behind them Lady Carbury attacked her daughter.

“What brought him here?”

“He brought himself, mamma.”

“Don't answer me in that way, Hetta. Of course he brought himself. That is insolent.”

“Insolent, mamma! How can you say such hard words? I meant that he came of his own accord.”

“How long was he here?”

“Two minutes before you came in. Why do you cross-question me like this? I could not help his coming. I did not desire that he might be shown up.”

“You did not know that he was to come?”

“Mamma, if I am to be suspected, all is over between us.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“If you can think that I would deceive you, you will think so always. If you will not trust me, how am I to live with you? I knew nothing of his coming.”

“Tell me this, Hetta; are you engaged to marry him?”

“No; I am not.”

“Has he asked you to marry him?”

Hetta paused a moment, considering, before she answered. “I do not think he ever has.”

“You do not think?”

“I was going on to explain. He never has asked me. But he has said that which makes me know that he wishes me to be his wife.”

“What has he said? When did he say it?”

Again Hetta paused. But again she answered with straightforward simplicity. “Just before you came in, he said – I don’t know what he said; but it meant that.”

“You told me he had been here but a minute.”

“It was very little more. It was almost no time, and yet he said it.”

“He had come prepared to say it.”

“How could he, expecting to find you?”

“Psha! He expected nothing of the kind.”

“I think you do him wrong, mamma. I am sure you are doing me wrong. I think his coming was an accident, and that what he said was also – an accident.”

“An accident!”

“It was not intended, mamma, though I have known it ever so long; and so have you.”

“And what did you say?”

“Nothing. You came.”

“I am sorry that my coming should have been so inopportune. But I must ask one other question, Hetta. What do you intend to say?”

Hetta was again silent, and now for longer. She put her hand up and pushed back her hair as she thought whether her mother had a right to continue this cross-examination. She had told her mother everything as it had happened. She had kept back no word spoken. But she was not sure that her mother, being so unsympathetic, had a right to know her thoughts.

“How do you intend to answer him?” demanded Lady Carbury.

“I do not know that he will ask again.”

“That is prevaricating.”

“No, mamma; I do not prevaricate. It is unfair to say that. I do love him. There. You should know that I should never give him encouragement without telling you. I do love him, and I shall never love anyone else.”

“He is a ruined man. Your cousin says that this Company in which he is involved will go to pieces.”

Hetta was too clever to allow this argument to pass. “If so,” said she, “Mr. Melmotte will be a ruined man too, and yet you want Felix to marry Marie Melmotte.”

“It makes me ill to hear you talk – as if you understood these things. And you think you will marry this man because he is to make a fortune out of the Railway!” Lady Carbury spoke with extreme scorn.

“I have not thought of his fortune. I have not thought of marrying him, mamma. I think you are very cruel to me. You say things so hard, that I cannot bear them.”

“Why will you not marry your cousin?”

“I am not good enough for him.”

“Nonsense!”

“Very well; but that is what I think. He is so much above me, that, though I do love him, I cannot think of him in that way. I have no secret from you now. Good night, mamma,” she said, coming up to her mother and kissing her. “Do be kind to me; and pray, do believe me.”

Lady Carbury allowed herself to be kissed, and her daughter left the room.

There was a great deal said that night between Roger Carbury and Paul Montague; but not a word about Paul’s presence in Welbeck Street. Paul asked about the cause of Carbury’s journey to London.

“I could not speak of it before Hetta,” said Roger. “You remember Ruby Ruggles? She was to have married John Crumb, but she has gone off, leaving him most unhappy. John Crumb is almost too good for her.”

“Ruby is very pretty. Has she gone with anyone?”

“No; she went alone. But the horror of it is this. They think that Felix has – well, made love to her, and that she has been taken to London by him.”

“That would be very bad.”

“He certainly knew her. Though he lied when I first spoke to him, I got him to admit that he and she had been friends down in Suffolk. And we know what that means. But I do not think that she came to London at his request.”

“He knows nothing about her coming to town?”

“No. I found him the day after she left, and I think that he knew nothing about it then. Since that he has avoided me. To make matters worse, old Ruggles has now quarrelled with Crumb, and is no longer anxious to get back his granddaughter.”

After that Paul told all his own story – the double story, about both Melmotte and Mrs. Hurtle. As regarded the Railway, Roger could only tell him to follow the advice of his Liverpool friend. “I never believed in it, you know. From what I hear Mr. Ramsbottom’s character is good; do exactly what he tells you.”

But the Railway business was not the heaviest of Paul’s troubles. He had now, for the first time, to tell his friend that Mrs. Hurtle had come to London, and that he had been with her three or four times. It was very hard to speak of his engagement with Mrs. Hurtle without alluding to his love for Henrietta Carbury.

Roger knew of both loves; he had urged his friend to abandon the widow, and equally urged him to give up the other passion. Were he to marry the widow, all danger on the other side would be at an end. And yet he had to discuss Mrs. Hurtle as though there were no such person as Henrietta. Paul told it all – the rumoured duel, the rumoured murder, and the rumour of the existing husband.

“It may be necessary that you should go out to Kansas,” said Roger.

“But even if the rumours are untrue I will not marry her,” said Paul. Roger shrugged, but said nothing. “I know I have been a fool,” continued Paul. “I know I have been wrong. But if there be a fair cause for my broken word, I will use it.”

“Get out of it honestly if you can; but get out of it. I advised you to do this before. I believe this woman has deceived you. If I were you, nothing should induce me to marry her. I’ll go and see her if you like.”

But Paul would not allow this. They sat long into the night, and it was at last resolved that Paul should go next day to Islington, tell Mrs. Hurtle all the stories he had heard, and declare his resolution not to marry her. They both felt how improbable it was that he should get to the end of such a story before the wild cat would show its claws. But Paul declared that, claws or no claws, he would never make Mrs. Hurtle his wife.

“I wish it were over, old fellow,” said Roger.

“So do I,” said Paul.

He went to bed like a man condemned to die on the next morning, and when he awoke the wretched reality at once overwhelmed him. He put his hand up to his brow, and almost made himself believe that his head was aching. This was Saturday. Would it not be well to put off his execution till Monday? Were there not still matters to consider? Should he not rush down to Liverpool, and ask a few more questions of Mr. Ramsbottom? Why should he go forth to execution today?

At last he jumped out of bed and into his bath-tub, and dressed quickly. He worked himself up into a fit of fortitude, and resolved that the thing should be done before the fit was over. He ate his breakfast, and then, although it was still early, he threw himself into a Hansom cab, and ordered the man to drive him to Islington.

How quick that cab went! Before Paul had been able to arrange the words with which he would begin the interview, the cab was in Islington and dashed noisily up to the house. Paul paid the cabman, pushed open the iron gate and walked very quickly past the little garden up to the door. He rang rather furiously, and asked for Mrs. Hurtle.

“Mrs. Hurtle is out for the day,” said the girl who opened the door.

“Leastways, she went out yesterday and won’t be back till tonight.”

Providence had sent him a reprieve! But he almost forgot the reprieve, as he looked at the girl and saw that she was Ruby Ruggles.

“Oh laws, Mr. Montague, is that you?” Ruby recognised Paul as quickly as he did her; and thought at once that he had come in search of her. She knew that Roger Carbury was in town looking for her. She had learned this from Sir Felix – for she had seen the baronet more than once since her arrival. Now she felt that she was caught. In her terror she did not remember that the visitor had asked for Mrs. Hurtle.

“Yes. I was sorry to hear, Miss Ruggles, that you had left your home.”

“I’m all right, Mr. Montague. Mrs. Pipkin is my aunt, or, leastways, my mother’s brother’s widow, though grandfather never would speak to her. She’s quite respectable, and has five children, and lets lodgings. There’s a lady here now, and has gone away with her just for one night down to Southend. They’ll be back this evening, and I’ve the children to mind, with the servant girl. I’m quite respectable here, Mr. Montague, and nobody need be a bit afraid about me.”

“Mrs. Hurtle has gone down to Southend?”

“Yes, Mr. Montague; she wasn’t quite well, and wanted a breath of air, she said. And aunt didn’t like she should go alone, so they’ve gone, and the baby with them. Do you know Mrs. Hurtle, sir?”

“Yes; she’s a friend of mine.”

“Oh, I didn’t know. Should I say, sir, as you was here?”

"I'm afraid they are very unhappy about you down at Bungay, Miss Ruggles," said Paul.

"Then they've got to be unhappy; that's all. Grandfather is that provoking a young woman can't live with him. He lugged me all about the room by my hair, Mr. Montague. How is a young woman to put up with that? And I did everything for him, his linen, and his victuals, and even cleaned his boots of a Sunday. You won't see me again at Sheep's Acre."

"But I thought there was somebody else to give you a home."

"Oh, yes, there's John Crumb."

"You were to have married him, I thought."

"Ladies is to change their minds if they like, Mr. Montague. Grandfather made me say I'd have him, but I never cared *that* for him."

"I'm afraid, Miss Ruggles, you won't find a better man up here in London."

"I didn't come here to look for a man, Mr. Montague. They has to look for me, if they want me. But I am looked after; and that by one as John Crumb ain't fit to touch."

That told the whole story. Paul was quite sure that Roger's fear about Felix was well founded.

"But there's Betsy a crying upstairs," said Ruby.

"I will tell the Squire that I saw you, Miss Ruggles."

"You can tell if you please, Mr. Montague, of course. I'm a coming, my darling."

Paul made his way into Mrs. Hurtle's sitting-room and wrote a note for her. He had come, he said, immediately on his return from Liverpool, and was sorry to find that she was away for the day. When should he call again? If she would make an appointment he would attend to it.

This would give him another day. Mrs. Hurtle would not return till late in the evening, and as the following day was Sunday there would be no postal delivery. He left the note on the table, and called to Ruby to tell her that he was going.

"Mr. Montague," she said in a confidential whisper, tripping down the stairs, "I don't see why you need be saying anything about me, you know."

"Your grandfather is very anxious about you."

"Not a bit of it, Mr. Montague. Grandfather knows very well where I am. He doesn't want me back, and I ain't a going. Why should the Squire bother himself about me?"

"He's afraid, Miss Ruggles, that you are trusting yourself to a young man who is not trustworthy."

"I can mind myself very well, Mr. Montague."

"Have you seen Sir Felix Carbury since you've been in town?" Ruby flushed up to her forehead. "You may be sure that he means you no good."

"I don't see why I shouldn't have my friend, Mr. Montague, as well as you. Howsomever, if you'll not tell, I'll be ever so much obliged."

"But I must tell Mr. Carbury."

"Then I ain't obliged to you one bit," said Ruby, shutting the door.

Paul as he walked away could not help thinking of the justice of Ruby's reproach. What business had he to advise her in love – he, who had engaged himself to marry Mrs. Hurtle, and who the evening before had declared his love to Hetta Carbury?

In regard to Mrs. Hurtle he had got a reprieve, he thought, for two days; but it did not make him comfortable. He thought of Hetta Carbury, and the words he had spoken to her. If he had heard the declaration which she had made to her mother, he would have been able for the hour to forget Mrs. Hurtle.



Chapter 40 “Unanimity is the very Soul of these Things”

That evening Montague was surprised to receive at the Beargarden this note from Mr. Melmotte.

Dear Sir,

If convenient would you call on me in Grosvenor Square tomorrow, Sunday, at half past eleven. I want to have a few words with you in private about the Company. My messenger will wait for an answer if you are at the club.

Yours truly,

Augustus Melmotte.

Paul immediately wrote to say that he would call at Grosvenor Square at the hour appointed. But this was not the only letter he received that evening. On his return to his lodgings he found a brief note, which Mrs. Hurtle had sent him after her return from Southend.

“I am so sorry to have been away. I will expect you all tomorrow. W. H.” His reprieve was thus curtailed to less than a day.

On the Sunday morning he walked up to Grosvenor Square, pondering what the great man could have to say to him. In the Board-room, Paul had understood that war was declared, and that his antagonist was a master of financial tactics. He was prepared to lose his money, if in doing so he might save his character and reputation. He intended to ask Mr. Ramsbottom to draw up for him a fitting statement. But it now appeared that Mr. Melmotte would make some proposition, when there was no Mr. Ramsbottom at his elbow to help him.

He had been in Melmotte’s house on the night of the ball, but remembered only the crush and the crowd, and that he had danced with Hetta Carbury. When he was shown into the hall he was astonished to find that it was stripped, and full of planks, ladders and mortar. The preparations for the great dinner had already commenced.

He was taken up to a small room on the second floor, where the servant told him that Mr. Melmotte would come to him. He waited a quarter of an hour looking out into the yard. There was not a book in the room with which he could amuse himself. He was beginning to wonder whether he should leave, when Melmotte, in a magnificent dressing-gown and slippers, bustled in.

“My dear sir, I am so sorry. You are a punctual man I see. A man of business should be punctual. But they ain’t always. Brehgert has just been with me, about the Moldavian loan, and he came a quarter of an hour late.”

Montague assured him that the delay was of no consequence.

“And I am so sorry to ask you into such a place as this. The house is so knocked about! We move into a furnished house in Bruton Street tomorrow – Longstaffe is letting me his house for a month till this dinner is over. By-the-bye, Montague, if you’d like to come to the dinner, I’ve got a ticket for you. You know how they’re run after.”

Montague did not in the least want to attend the dinner. But he was very anxious to know why Mr. Melmotte should offer it. He excused himself, saying that he was not fond of big dinners.

“Ah, indeed,” said Melmotte. “Ever so many people would give anything for a ticket. You’d be astonished at the persons who have asked, archbishops and people of title.”

But Paul would not take the bribe.

“You’re the only man in London then,” said Melmotte, somewhat offended. “At any rate you’ll come in the evening, and I’ll have one of Madame Melmotte’s tickets sent to you.” Paul, not knowing how to escape, said that he would come in the evening.

“I am particularly anxious,” continued Melmotte, “to be civil to those who are connected with our great Railway, and of course, in this country, your name stands next to my own.” Then he paused.

“Have you anything special to say about the Railway?” asked Paul.

“Well, yes. It is so hard to get things said at the Board. Of course there are some there who do not understand matters.”

“I doubt if there is anyone there who does understand this matter,” said Paul.

Melmotte pretended to laugh. “Well, well; I would not go quite so far as that. My friend Cohenlupe has had great experience in these affairs, and Lord Alfred sees farther into them than perhaps you give him credit for.”

“He may easily do that.”

“Perhaps you don’t know him quite as well as I do.” The scowl began to appear on Mr. Melmotte’s brow. “What I wanted to say was this. We didn’t quite agree at the last meeting.”

“No; we did not.”

“I was very sorry for it. Unanimity is everything in such an undertaking as this. With unanimity we can do – everything.” Mr. Melmotte in his enthusiasm lifted both his hands over his head. “Without unanimity we can do – nothing.” The two hands fell.

“But suppose the directors are not unanimous.”

“They should make themselves unanimous. God bless my soul! You don’t want to see the thing fall to pieces!”

“Not if it can be carried on honestly.”

“Honestly! Who says that anything is dishonest?” The brow became very heavy. “Look here, Mr. Montague. If you and I quarrel in that Board-room, there is no knowing the evil we may do to every shareholder in the Company. I find the responsibility so great that I say the thing must be stopped. Damme, Mr. Montague, it must be stopped. We mustn’t ruin widows and children by letting those shares run down for a mere fancy. I’ve known a fine property blasted, Mr. Montague, annihilated, sir; so that widows and children past counting were sent out to starve in the streets, just because one director sat in another director’s chair, by G__! What is it you want, Mr. Montague?”

“I only want justice.”

“But you should know what justice is before you demand it at the expense of other people. Look here, Mr. Montague. I suppose you are like the rest of us. You want to make money out of it.”

“I want interest for my capital; that is all. But I am not thinking of myself.”

“You are getting very good interest.” Here Melmotte pulled out a little book. “You had about £6,000 embarked in the business when Fisker joined your firm. You still have that, and you’ve drawn nearly a thousand pounds since Fisker came over. That’s not bad interest on your money.”

“There was back interest due to me.”

“If so, it’s due still. I’ve nothing to do with that. Look here, Mr. Montague. I am most anxious that you should remain with us. I was about to propose, but for that little rumpus the other day, that you should go out to California and across to Mexico, to get necessary information for the Company. Were I of your age, unmarried, and without impediment, it is just the thing I should like. Of course you’d go at the Company’s expense. Your seat at the Board would be kept for you. It would be a delightful trip; but if you don’t like it, you can of course remain at the Board, and be of the greatest use to me. Indeed, after a bit I could devolve nearly the whole management on you; and I must do something of the kind, as I really haven’t the time for it. But do be unanimous. Unanimity is the very soul of these things, Mr. Montague.”

“But if I can’t be unanimous?”

“Well; if you can’t, and if you won’t take my advice about going out; which, pray, think about, for you would be most useful – then I can only suggest that you should take your £6,000 and leave us. I, myself, should be greatly distressed; but if you are determined I will see that you have your money before the end of the year.”

Paul Montague told the great man that he would consider the matter, and see him in Abchurch Lane before the next Board day.

“And now, good-bye,” said Mr. Melmotte. “I’m afraid that I’m keeping Sir Gregory Gribe, the Bank Director, waiting downstairs.”



Chapter 41 All Prepared

Meanwhile Miss Melmotte was not contented with her lover's prowess, though she did not doubt his sincerity. She had not only assured him of her undying affection, and had offered to be chopped in pieces on his behalf, but had also written telling him she had a large sum of her father's money within her power, and was willing to give herself and her fortune to her lover. She felt that her lover was a little slow in acknowledging the favours conferred upon him. But, nevertheless, she believed that he was true to her.

Through Didon, Marie had written various letters to Sir Felix, and had received two or three very short notes in reply. But now, in June, she was told that a day was fixed for her marriage with Lord Nidderdale, in the middle of August.

"You may buy what wedding clothes you like, mamma," she said; "but if you were to sew me up in the things by force, I wouldn't have Lord Nidderdale."

Madame Melmotte groaned and scolded, and wished that she were dead; she told Marie that she was a pig, an ass, a toad, and a dog. She ended, as always, by swearing that Melmotte must manage the matter himself.

"Nobody shall manage this matter for me," said Marie. "I know what I'm about now, and I won't marry anybody just to suit papa."

On Sunday morning, while her father was doing business with Paul Montague in Grosvenor Square, Marie was walking in the square's gardens. Didon was there, at some distance; and Sir Felix Carbury was alongside her. Marie had learned that her neighbours did not frequent the square during church time on Sunday morning.

Her lover's letter to her father had of course been shown to her, and she taxed him with it immediately. Sir Felix was ready with a lie.

"It was the only thing to do, Marie; it was indeed. I just copied what he put down. He'd have sent you away where I couldn't have got near you if I hadn't written it."

"And you have accepted nothing for it?"

"Not at all. As it is, he owes me money. I gave him a thousand pounds to buy shares, and I haven't got anything from him yet." Sir Felix, no doubt, forgot the cheque for £200.

"Nobody ever does who gives papa money," said the observant daughter.

"Don't they? Dear me! What do you think we'd best do now?"

Marie looked at him almost with scorn. Surely it was for him to propose and for her to yield.

"I wonder whether you're sure about that money which you say is settled," said Felix.

"I'm quite sure. Mamma told me in Paris that it was done so that there might be something if things went wrong. And papa told me that he should want me to sign something from time to time; and I said I would. But of course I won't if I have a husband of my own."

Felix pondered the matter. If he were to run off with Marie, after having written that letter, the father would certainly not forgive him. This assurance of Marie's as to the settled money was too doubtful. The game to be played was too

full of danger. And if he were true to Melmotte, Melmotte would probably supply him with ready money.

But then here was the girl at his elbow, and he no more dared to tell her to her face that he meant to give her up, than he dared to tell Melmotte that he intended to stick to his engagement. Some half promise was the only escape for the present.

“It’s d___ difficult to know what to do,” he said.

“But you do love me?”

“Of course I do. If I didn’t love you why should I be walking round this stupid place? They talk of your marrying Nidderdale in August.”

“That’s all nonsense. They can’t make me. He don’t care a bit for me, and never did. I don’t think you care much, Felix.”

“Yes, I do. A fellow can’t go on saying so over and over again in a beastly place like this. If we were anywhere jolly together, then I could say it often enough.”

“I wish we were, Felix. I wonder whether we ever shall be.”

“Upon my word I hardly see my way as yet.”

“You’re not giving it up!”

“Oh no; certainly not. But the bother is a fellow doesn’t know what to do.”

“You’ve heard of young Mr. Goldsheiner, haven’t you?” suggested Marie. “He married Lady Julia Start last winter in Switzerland, and now they’ve got a house close to Albert Gate.”

“How jolly! He is awfully rich, isn’t he?”

“Not half so rich as papa. They did all they could to prevent her going, but she met him down at Folkestone. Didon says that nothing was easier.”

“Oh; ah. Didon knows all about it.”

“For £50, Didon would arrange it all.”

“And would you come to Folkestone?”

“I think that would be stupid, because Lady Julia did that. I wouldn’t mind going to New York. And then, perhaps, we might – get married, you know, on board ship. That’s what Didon thinks.”

“And would Didon go too?”

“She could go as my aunt. I should go as a French girl. And you could call yourself Smith, and be an American. We wouldn’t go together, but we’d get on board just at the last moment. If they wouldn’t marry us on board, they would at New York. The *Adriatic* – that’s a White Star boat – goes from Liverpool on Thursday week at noon. There’s an early train we could get. You had better go and sleep at Liverpool, and take no notice of us till we meet on board. We could be back in a month – and then papa would be obliged to make the best of it.”

Sir Felix felt that the young lady had it all at her fingers’ ends. But Thursday week was very near, and the whole thing was taking uncomfortably defined proportions. Where was he to get funds to do this? And the idea of starting to New York with Melmotte’s daughter, immediately after he had written to Melmotte renouncing the girl, frightened him. Now was the time come when he might make himself, or utterly mar himself.

“It’s deuced important,” he said with a groan. “If you’re wrong about the money, and he shouldn’t come round, where would we be then?”

“Nothing venture, nothing have,” said the heiress.

“That’s all very well; but one might venture everything and get nothing after all.”

“You’d get me,” said Marie with a pout.

“Yes – and I’m awfully fond of you, of course. But–”

“Very well; if that’s your love,” she said, turning away.

Sir Felix gave a great sigh. “I’ll venture it.”

“Oh, Felix, how grand it will be!”

“There’s a great deal to do, you know. I don’t know whether it can be Thursday week.”

“I shall be afraid of Didon if it’s delayed long.”

“There’s the money to get, and all that.”

“I can get some money. Mamma has money in the house.”

“How much?” asked the baronet eagerly.

“A hundred pounds; perhaps two hundred.”

“That would help, certainly. I must go to your father for money. Won’t that be a sell? To get it from him, to take you away!”

It was decided that they were to go to New York, on Thursday week if possible. Didon was to pack up the clothes. Didon would be paid £50; and as one of the men must know about it, and help smuggle the trunks out, he was to have £10. Sir Felix really had no need to think about anything.

“And now,” said Marie, “there’s Didon. You leave through that gate, and we’ll get out on the other side.” Marie Melmotte was certainly a clever girl.



Chapter 42

“Can You be Ready in Ten Minutes?”

After leaving Melmotte on Sunday morning Paul Montague went to Roger Carbury's hotel and found his friend just returning from church. He had made up his mind not to visit Mrs. Hurtle till seven o'clock that evening. But it was necessary that Roger should hear the news about Ruby Ruggles.

“It's not so bad as you thought,” said he, “as she is living with her aunt.”

“I never heard of such an aunt.”

“She says her grandfather knows where she is, and that he doesn't want her back.”

“Does she see Felix Carbury?”

“I think she does,” said Paul.

“Then it doesn't matter whether the woman's her aunt or not. I'll go and see her and try to get her back to Bungay.”

“Why not send for John Crumb?”

Roger hesitated for a moment, and then answered, “He'd give Felix a thrashing. My cousin deserves it; but I should not like it. And he could not force her back with him. I don't suppose the girl is all bad – if she could see the truth.”

“I don't think she's bad at all.”

“I'll go and see her,” said Roger. “Perhaps I shall see your widow at the same time.” Paul sighed, but said nothing. “I'll walk up to Welbeck Street now,” said Roger, taking his hat.

Paul dined in solitude at the Beargarden, and then went to Islington in a cab. As he went he thought of Melmotte's proposal. If he could do it with a clear conscience, if he could really make himself believe in the railway, such an expedition would be welcome to him. He had already said more than he had intended to say to Hetta Carbury; and she had expressed no anger. He had almost been betrayed into breaking a promise. Were he to start now on this journey, the period of the promise would have ended before his return. And he would escape from Mrs. Hurtle, and would be able to make inquiries about her. However, Mrs. Hurtle might offer to go with him – which would not suit him at all.

But how could he go without a belief in the railway? And how could he have such belief? Mr. Ramsbottom did not believe in it; nor did Roger Carbury. Would it not be best to take the Chairman's offer as to his own money? If he could get his £6,000 back and have done with the railway, he would think himself a lucky man. But he did not know how far he could with honesty lay aside his responsibility; and he doubted whether he could trust Melmotte's guarantee for the amount. At any rate, it was clear to him that Melmotte was very anxious to secure his absence from the meetings of the Board.

Now he was again at Mrs. Pipkin's door, and again it was opened by Ruby Ruggles. “The ladies have come back from Southend, Miss Ruggles?”

“Oh yes, sir, and Mrs. Hurtle is expecting you.” Then she whispered, “You didn't tell him as you'd seen me, Mr. Montague?”

“Indeed I did, Miss Ruggles.”

“Then you might have left it alone, that's all,” said Ruby as she opened the door of Mrs. Hurtle's room.

Mrs. Hurtle received him with her sweetest smile – and her smile could be very sweet. Like most witches she could be terrible, and like most witches she could charm.

“Only fancy,” she said, “that you should have come the only day I have been away from the house. I was so sorry. But I wasn’t well, and I fancied that the house was stuffy, and Mrs. Pipkin proposed to carry me off to Southend. She declared that Southend was Paradise.”

“A cockney Paradise.”

“Oh, what a place it is! How very English – a little yellow river, and you call it the sea!”

“I suppose we do have the sea here in England. It’s generally supposed we’re an island.”

“Of course; but things are so small. But upon my word I enjoyed Southend. We ate shrimps, and Mrs. Pipkin was so humble. Of course I paid. She has got all those children, and nothing but what she can earn from these lodgings. We got back yesterday evening, and then I found that you had been here, at last.”

“You knew that I had to go to Liverpool.”

“I’m not going to scold. Did you get your business done at Liverpool?”

“Yes; of course it’s about this railway.”

“Everybody talks of it as being the greatest thing ever invented. I wish I was a man so that I might be involved with a great thing like that. What is it that you do in it, Paul?”

“They want me to go out to Mexico about it,” said he slowly.

“Shall you go?”

“I think not.”

“Why not? Do go. Oh, Paul, I would go with you. It is just the thing for you to do. The railway will make Mexico a new country, and you would be the man who had done it. Why should you throw away such a chance as that? Think what it would be to be the regenerator of Mexico!”

“Think what it would be to find one’s self there without the means of doing anything, and to feel that one had been sent there merely to be out of the way.”

“I would make the means of doing something.”

“Means are money. How can I make that?”

“There must be money where there is all this buying and selling of shares. Where does Fisker get his money? Where does Melmotte get his money? Why should not you get it as well as the others?”

“If I wanted to rob I might do it.”

“Why should it be robbery? I do not want you to live in a palace. But I want you to have ambition. Go to Mexico, and chance it. I will go every yard with you.”

He felt that he was taking no steps towards the statement which he had resolved to make. Indeed every word about this Mexican project carried him farther away from it. He was tacitly admitting that if he went, she might travel with him. The very offer on her part implied that they were still engaged, and yet he shrunk from the cruelty of telling her that he would not have her as a companion for such a journey or for any other purpose. The thing must be said; but this conversation made it infinitely more difficult.

“You are not in a hurry?” she said.

“Oh no.”

“You’re going to spend the evening with me like a good man? I’ll ask them to let us have tea.” She rang the bell and Ruby brought tea. “That young lady tells me that you are an old friend of hers.”

“I’ve met her down in the country, and was astonished to find her here yesterday.”

“There’s some lover, isn’t there; some would-be husband whom she does not like?”

“And some won’t-be husband, I fear, whom she does like.”

“Of course. The natural liking of a young woman for a man in a station above her, because he is softer and cleaner and speaks better, is one of the evils of the inequality of mankind. If all men wore coats of the same fabric, and all worked equally, that evil would come to an end.”

“If men were equal tomorrow and all wore the same coats, they would wear different coats the next day.”

“But there would be no more purple and fine linen,” said she. “It isn’t to be done in a day, of course, nor yet in a century. I remember, you never take sugar; give me that.”

“Thanks,” he said, changing his cup. “How well you remember!”

“Do you think I shall ever forget your preferences? Do you recollect telling me about that blue scarf of mine, that I should never wear blue?”

She waited for an answer, so that he was obliged to speak.

“Of course I do. Black is your colour; black and grey; or white, and perhaps yellow when you choose to be gorgeous; crimson possibly. But not blue or green.”

“I never thought much of it before, but I have taken your word for gospel. It is very good to have an eye for such things, as you have, Paul. You should throw your lot in with a new people. This railway to Mexico gives you the chance. I would have you a hero, Paul.”

He got up from his chair and walked about the room in an agony of despair. To be told that he was expected to be a hero at the very moment when he felt more of a coward than ever before, was not to be endured! And yet how could he immediately rush away from these flattering speculations to his own unpleasant, tragic matter!

Nevertheless, through it all, he was sure – nearly sure – that she was playing her game, in direct opposition to the game which she knew that he wanted to play. Would it not be better to go away and write another letter? In a letter he could say what he had to say.

“What makes you so uneasy?” she asked in her most caressing way. “Do you not like me to say that I would have you be a hero?”

“Winifrid,” he said, “I came here with a purpose, and I had better carry it out.”

“What purpose?” She leaned forward, looking at him intently. But there seemed to be only love in her eyes; the wild cat, if there, was hidden from sight. Paul stood with his hands on the back of a chair, propping himself up and trying to find fitting words. “Stop, my dear,” she said. “Must the purpose be told tonight?”

“Why not tonight?”

“Paul, I am not well; and I am a coward. You do not know the delight of having a few words of pleasant talk to an old friend after the desolation of the last weeks. Oh, Paul, if it was your purpose to tell me of your love, to assure me that

you are still my dear, dear friend, to speak with hope of future days, then do so. But if you had come to speak cruel daggers, then drop your purpose for tonight, and let me have one hour of comfort.”

Of course he was conquered for that night. “I will not harass you, if you are ill,” he said.

“I am ill. That is why I went to Southend. The air is heavy; what Mrs. Pipkin calls muggy. I was thinking if I were to go away somewhere for a week, it would do me good. Where had I better go?” Paul suggested Brighton. “That is full of people; is it not?”

“Not at this time of the year.”

“But it is a big place. I want some little, pretty place. You could take me – not very far, you know. Is there no other place, except Southend?”

“There is Cromer in Norfolk, perhaps ten hours away.”

“Is Cromer by the sea?”

“Yes; what we call the sea. It is a hundred miles to Holland. A ditch of that kind wouldn’t do perhaps.”

“Ah, now you are laughing at me. Is Cromer pretty?”

“Well, yes; I think it is. I was there once, but I don’t remember much. Then there’s Lowestoft. It is not so far as Cromer, and there is a railway all the distance, and sea enough for anything.”

“You will be a better guide than Mrs. Pipkin. You would not have taken me to Southend when I expressed a wish for the ocean, would you? Let it be Lowestoft. Is there an hotel?”

“A small place.”

“Very small?”

“They have about a hundred beds; but in the States it would be very small.”

“Paul,” said she, delighted to have brought him back to this humour, “if I were to throw the tea things at you, it would serve you right. This is because I did not lose myself in awe at the sight of the Southend ocean. It shall be Lowestoft.” Then she rose up and took his arm. “You will take me, will you not? It is desolate for a woman to travel to such a place all alone. I will not ask you to stay. And I can return by myself. You will do that for old acquaintance sake?”

For a moment he made no answer, and his face was troubled. He was trying to think; he was aware of his danger, and could see no way through it.

“I will take you down. When will you go?” He had some idea that the railway carriage would be a good place for the declaration of his purpose, or perhaps the sands at Lowestoft.

“When will you take me? You have Boards to attend, and Mexico to regenerate. I am a poor woman with nothing on hand. Can you be ready in ten minutes? – because I could.”

Paul shook his head and laughed, before suggesting Saturday, the 29th. He must attend the next Board, and had promised to see Melmotte before the Board day. Should she meet him at the railway station? Of course he undertook to come and fetch her.

Then, as he took his leave, she put her cheek up for him to kiss. There are moments when a man finds it utterly impossible to be prudent, let the danger be what it may. Of course he took her in his arms, and kissed her lips as well as her cheeks.



Chapter 43

The City Road

What Ruby had said about her connection with Mrs. Pipkin was true. Ruby's father had married a Pipkin whose brother had died, leaving a widow at Islington. The old man at Sheep's Acre farm had resented this marriage, and had never spoken to his daughter-in-law.

When Ruby ran away from Suffolk she did the best she could in going to her aunt's house. Mrs. Pipkin was a poor woman, and could not offer a permanent home to Ruby; but she was good-natured, and came to terms with her. Ruby was to stay for a month, and to work in the house for her bread. But she made it a part of her bargain that she should be allowed to go out occasionally.

Mrs. Pipkin immediately asked about a lover. "I'm all right," said Ruby. If the lover was what he ought to be, should he not come and see her? This was Mrs. Pipkin's suggestion, so that scandal might be avoided.

"Maybe, by-and-by," said Ruby. Then she told the story of John Crumb: how she hated John Crumb, and would not marry him. She gave her own account of that night on which John Crumb and Mr. Mixet ate their supper at the farm, and how her grandfather had treated her.

Mrs. Pipkin was a respectable woman in her way, and she gave Ruby very good advice. Of course if she was "dead-set" against John Crumb, that was one thing! But a young woman should look to a decent house over her head, and food. "What's all the love in the world, Ruby, if a man can't do for you?"

Ruby declared that she knew somebody who could do very well for her. She knew what she was about. Mrs. Pipkin had an idea that young women in these days had more liberty than was allowed when she was young. The world was changing very fast. And therefore when Ruby went to the theatre, probably in company with her lover, and did not get home till past midnight, Mrs. Pipkin said very little.

Ruby had never told her lover's name to Mrs. Pipkin. She had been managing her own affairs; but now that Mr. Montague had found her, the Squire would be after her, and then John Crumb would come, accompanied of course by Mr. Mixet – and after that, as she said to herself, "the fat would be in the fire."

"Who do you think was at our place yesterday?" said Ruby one evening to her lover. They were sitting together at a music-hall. Sir Felix was dressed, as he called it, "incognito," with a blue silk cravat, and a green coat. He had an idea that if his West End friends saw him in this attire they would not know him. He was smoking, and had before him a glass of hot brandy and water, shared by Ruby. Poor Ruby! She was half-ashamed, half-frightened, and yet felt that it was a grand thing to have got rid of restraints, and be with her young man. Why not? The Miss Longestaffes were allowed to walk about with their young men. Why was she to be given up to a great mass of stupid dust like John Crumb, without seeing anything of the world?

Yet as she sat sipping brandy and water at the music-hall in the City Road, she was not altogether comfortable. She saw things which she did not like to see, and she heard things which she did not like to hear. And her lover, though he was beautiful – oh, so beautiful! – was not all that a lover should be. She was still a

little afraid of him, and did not dare to ask him for the promise which she expected him to make. Her mind was set upon marriage, but the word had hardly passed between them. To have his arm round her waist was heaven to her! But how was this to go on? Even Mrs. Pipkin made disagreeable allusions, and she could not live always with Mrs. Pipkin. She was glad therefore to tell her lover that something was going to happen. "Who do you suppose was at our place yesterday?"

Sir Felix changed colour, thinking of Marie Melmotte; perhaps Didon had been there. He had had an interview with Didon, and nothing was lacking for the New York journey but the money. Didon had urged him to recover his funds from Melmotte. Therefore his mind was in Grosvenor Square.

"Who was it, Ruby?"

"A friend of the Squire's, a Mr. Montague."

"Paul Montague!"

"Do you know him, Felix?"

"Rather. He's a member of our club. He's a prig of a fellow."

"He's got a lady friend where I live."

"The devil he has!" Sir Felix of course knew of Roger Carbury's suit to his sister, and her supposed preference for Paul Montague. "Who is she, Ruby?"

"She's a Mrs. Hurtle. Such a stunning woman! Aunt says she's an American. She's got lots of money."

"Is Montague going to marry her?"

"Oh yes. It's all arranged. Mr. Montague comes quite regular to see her; not so regular as he ought, though. When gentlemen are fixed to be married, they never are regular afterwards. I wonder whether it'll be the same with you?"

"Wasn't John Crumb regular, Ruby?"

"Bother John Crumb! Oh, he'd been regular as clockwork if I let him – only the slowest clock out. But Mr. Montague has told the Squire as he saw me, and the Squire's coming. What am I to tell him, Felix?"

"Tell him to mind his own business. He can't do anything to you."

"No; I ain't done nothing wrong. But he can talk, and I ain't one of those as don't mind about their characters. Shall I tell him as I'm with you?"

"Gracious goodness, no! What would you say that for?"

"But aunt will be letting on about my being out late o'nights. He'll be asking who I'm with."

"Your aunt does not know?"

"No; I've told nobody. But it won't do to go on like that always, will it?"

"It's very jolly, I think."

"It ain't jolly for me. Of course, Felix, I like to be with you. But I'm pretty nigh ashamed of myself. Yes, I am." And now Ruby burst into tears. "Because I wouldn't have John Crumb, I didn't mean to be a bad girl. Nor yet I won't. But what'll I do, if everybody turns again me? Aunt said last night that—"

"Bother what she says!"

"She knows there's somebody. She ain't a fool. She says that whoever it is ought to speak out. And she's right. A girl has to mind herself, though she's ever so fond of a young man."

Sir Felix took a long drink of brandy and water. Then he called the waiter for another, intending to avoid making any reply to Ruby. He was going to New York very shortly, and he had not troubled himself to think how it might be with Ruby when he was gone. He had not even considered whether he would tell her

that he was going. It was not his fault that she had come up to London. He liked the intrigue better perhaps than the girl herself. But he told himself that he wasn't going to give himself any trouble; and the idea of John Crumb coming to London in his wrath had never occurred to him.

"Let's go and have a dance," he said.

Ruby was very fond of dancing. It was delightful to be spinning round the room with her lover's arm tight round her waist. She loved the music, and the motion. She could spin along and dance a whole room down, and feel that the world could hold nothing better. So she went and danced, resolving to have some answer to her question before she left her lover that night.

"Now I must go," she said at last. "What am I to say to the Squire?"

"Say nothing."

"And what am I to say to aunt?"

"Just say what you have said all along."

"I've said nothing all along. I must say something. A girl has got herself to mind. What have you got to say to me, Felix?"

He was silent for about a minute. "If you bother me I shall cut it, you know."

"Cut it!"

"Yes. Can't you wait till I am ready to say something?"

"Waiting will be the ruin o' me, if I wait much longer. Where am I to go, if Mrs. Pipkin won't have me no more?"

"I'll find a place for you."

"You find a place! No; that won't do. I've told you all that before. I'd sooner go into service, or—"

"Go back to John Crumb."

"John Crumb has more respect for me nor you. He'd make me his wife tomorrow, and be only too happy."

"I didn't tell you to come away from him," said Sir Felix.

"Yes, you did. You told me as I was to come up to London when I saw you at Sheepstone Beeches; didn't you? And you told me you loved me; didn't you? And that if I wanted anything you'd get it done for me; didn't you?"

"So I will. What do you want? I can give you a couple of sovereigns, if that's what it is."

"No it isn't. I won't have your money. I'd sooner work my fingers off. I want you to say whether you mean to marry me. There!"

An additional lie would have been nothing to Felix. He was going to New York, out of the way of any trouble; and he thought that lies of that kind to young women never mattered. Young women didn't believe them, but liked to be able to believe afterwards that they had been deceived. It wasn't the lie that stuck in his throat, but the fact that he was a baronet. He felt it was "confounded impudence" by Ruby Ruggles to ask to be his wife.

"Marry, Ruby! No, I don't ever mean to marry. It's the greatest bore out."

She stopped in the street and looked at him. This was a state of things of which she had never dreamed. What business had such a man to go after any young woman?

"And what do you mean that I'm to do, Sir Felix?" she said.

"Just go easy, and not make yourself a bother."

“Not make myself a bother! Oh, but I will. I’m to be carrying on with you, and nothing to come of it; but for you to tell me that you don’t mean to marry! Never?”

“Don’t you see lots of old bachelors about, Ruby?”

“Of course I does. There’s the Squire. If he came asking a girl to keep him company, he’d marry her – because he’s a gentleman.” Ruby began to cry. “You mustn’t come no further now, and I’ll never see you again – never! I think you’re the falsest young man, and the basest, that I ever heard tell of. You go your way, and I’ll go mine.”

In her passion she was as good as her word, and escaped from him, running all the way to her aunt’s door. There was in her mind an anger against him, which she did not herself understand, that he would take no risk on her behalf. He would not even make a lover’s easy promise to make the evening pleasant. Ruby let herself into her aunt’s house, and cried herself to sleep.

On the next day Roger called. Ruby had begged Mrs. Pipkin to tell any gentleman callers that she was out; but Mrs. Pipkin, having heard something of Roger Carbury, decided that the Squire should see the young lady.

When therefore Ruby was called into the little back parlour and found Roger there, she thought that she had been caught in a trap. She had been very cross all morning. Though in her rage she had been able on the previous evening to dismiss Felix, now she almost regretted it. Could it be that she would never see him again – that she would dance no more in that gilded bright saloon? Maybe she had pressed him too hard. A baronet would not like to be brought to book. But to have said that he would never marry! She was very unhappy.

Roger was very kind to her, taking her by the hand, and telling her how glad he was to find her comfortably settled with her aunt.

“We were all alarmed, of course, when you went away without telling anybody where you were going.”

“Grandfather’d been that cruel to me that I couldn’t tell him.”

“He wanted you to keep your word.”

“To pull me about by my hair wasn’t the way to make a girl keep her word; was it, Mr. Carbury? I’ve been good to grandfather, and he shouldn’t have treated me like that.”

The Squire had no answer to this. That old Ruggles should be a violent brute under the influence of gin did not surprise him. And the girl had not done amiss in coming to her aunt. But Roger had already heard from Mrs. Pipkin about Ruby’s late hours, and a lover, and knew who that lover was. He also knew that John Crumb was a gallant, loving fellow who might forgive everything if Ruby would only go back to him; but would certainly persevere, after his slow fashion, and “see the matter out” if she did not go back.

“I’m glad that you should be here,” said Roger; “but you don’t mean to stay here always?”

“I don’t know,” said Ruby.

“You must think of your future life. You don’t want to be always your aunt’s maid.”

“Oh dear, no.”

“It would be very odd if you did, when you may be the wife of such a man as Mr. Crumb.”

“Oh, Mr. Crumb! Everybody is going on about Mr. Crumb. I don’t like him and I never will like him.”

“Now look here, Ruby; I have come to speak to you very seriously. Nobody can make you marry Mr. Crumb. But I fear you have given him up for somebody else, who certainly won’t marry you, and who can only mean to ruin you.”

“Nobody won’t ruin me,” said Ruby. “I mean to look to myself.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so, but being out at night with Sir Felix Carbury is not looking to yourself. That means going to the devil head foremost.”

“I ain’t a going to the devil,” said Ruby, sobbing and blushing.

“But you will, if you put yourself into the hands of that bad young man. He has no idea of marrying you, and if he did, he could not support you. He is ruined himself, and would ruin any young woman who trusted him. Though he is my cousin, I never came across so vile a young man as he is. He would ruin you and cast you away without a pang of remorse. He has no heart.” Ruby was sobbing with her apron to her eyes. “And it is for that vile man that you have left a man who is as much above him in character, as the sun is above the earth. You think little of John Crumb because he does not wear a fine coat.”

“I don’t care about any man’s coat,” said Ruby; “but John hasn’t ever a word to say.”

“Words! What do words matter? He loves you. He wants to make you happy and respectable, not to disgrace you. He thinks more of you than of himself, and would give you all that he has. What would that other man give you? If you were once married to John Crumb, would anyone then pull you by the hair? Would there be any disgrace?”

“There ain’t no disgrace, Mr. Carbury.”

“No disgrace in going about at midnight with Felix Carbury? You know that it is disgraceful. If you are fit to be an honest man’s wife, go back and beg that man’s pardon.”

“John Crumb’s pardon! No!”

“Ruby, if you knew how highly I respect him, and how lowly I think of the other; how I look on the one as a noble fellow, and regard the other as dust beneath my feet, you would perhaps change your mind.”

Her mind was being changed. His words had their effect, though the poor girl struggled against it. She had never expected to hear anyone call John Crumb noble. She respected no one more highly than Squire Carbury. Amidst all her misery she still told herself that it was but a dusty, dumb nobility.

“Mr. Crumb won’t put up with this, you know,” continued Roger.

“He can’t do nothing to me, sir.”

“That’s true enough. Unless it be to take you in his arms, he wants to do nothing to you. Do you think he’d injure you? You don’t know what a man’s love really means, Ruby. But he could do something to somebody else. How do you think it would be with Felix Carbury, if they two met?”

“John’s mortal strong.”

“One is a brave man, and the other a coward. You know it as well as I do; and you’re throwing yourself away, and throwing over the man who loves you – for such a fellow as that! Go back to him, Ruby, and beg his pardon.”

“I never will; never.”

“I’ve spoken to Mrs. Pipkin, and while you’re here she will see that you don’t keep such late hours any longer. I’m going now. But I’ll come again. If you want money to go home, I will let you have it. Take my advice: do not see Sir Felix Carbury any more.”

Then he took his leave. If he had failed to impress her with admiration for John Crumb, he had certainly succeeded in lessening her admiration for Sir Felix.



Chapter 44 The Coming Election

The very greatness of Mr. Melmotte's popularity created bitter opposition against him at Westminster. As the great man was praised, so also was he abused. From the moment he declared his purpose of standing for Westminster, an attempt was made to drive him down the throats of the electors by assertions of his commercial greatness. His wealth was so immense, it was said, that he had no need for any personal profit. He would open up new worlds, and enable young nations to prosper. He was the head of the railway which was to regenerate Mexico. He was to enter into terms with the Emperor of China for farming the tea-fields of that vast country. He was already in treaty with Russia for a railway from Moscow to Khiva. He had a fleet – or soon would have a fleet – of emigrant ships, ready to carry every discontented Irishman from Ireland to all quarters of the globe.

Some of these things were only speculation; but they all found their way into the public press, and were used as strong arguments why Melmotte should become member of Parliament for Westminster.

The opposing Liberals were driven to make enquiries about his history. Messages were sent to Paris and Frankfurt, Vienna and New York. It was not difficult to collect stories – true or false. Nevertheless there was at first some difficulty in finding a Liberal candidate to run against him. Many were asked, but they were either afraid of Melmotte's purse or his influence. Lord Buntingford was asked, but he was nephew to Lord Alfred Grendall, and abstained. An overture was made to Sir Damask Monogram, who certainly could afford the contest. But Sir Damask preferred his yacht and his four-in-hand.

At last a candidate was selected, whose nomination created very great surprise. The press had of course taken up the matter. The *Morning Breakfast Table* supported Mr. Melmotte – perhaps under Lady Carbury's influence, but more probably because Mr. Broune saw the way the wind was blowing, and supported the commercial hero of the day. There was a strong belief in Melmotte. Dukes and duchesses fêted him. Royalty was to dine at his table. Melmotte himself was to sit at the right hand of the Brother of the Sun and the Uncle of the Moon, with British royalty arranged opposite. How could the Editor of the *Morning Breakfast Table* do other than support him?

But the *Evening Pulpit* took the other side. Now this was remarkable, because the *Evening Pulpit* had never supported the Liberal interest. It pronounced itself to be independent. So the newspaper's vigour on this occasion was all the more alarming; and the short articles which appeared almost daily about Mr. Melmotte were read by everybody.

Now newspaper proprietors are well aware that censure is far more attractive than praise – but also more dangerous. No proprietor was ever brought before the courts for over-praising. Censure, on the other hand, be it ever so truthful, brings the danger of ruin from a libel suit. A very long purse, or very high courage, is needed for the exposure of such conduct as the *Evening Pulpit* attributed to Mr. Melmotte.

The paper took up this line suddenly. After the second article Mr. Alf sent back to Mr. Miles Grendall, who was acting as Mr. Melmotte's secretary, the ticket of invitation for the dinner, with a note stating Mr. Alf could not dine at Mr. Melmotte's table in the presence of the Emperor of China. This conduct astonished the world considerably; but the world was more astonished when it was declared that Mr. Ferdinand Alf himself was going to stand for Westminster as a Liberal.

Some said that Mr. Alf intended to retire from his position at the newspaper, and go into Parliament. Mr. Broune whispered to Lady Carbury that the man was a fool, and was carried away by pride.

Lady Carbury shook her head. She did not want to give up Mr. Alf if she could help it. He had never said a civil word of her in his paper; but still she felt that it was well to be on good terms with so great a power. She felt much more awe for Mr. Alf than for Mr. Broune. Her awe for *him* had been much diminished since he had made her an offer of marriage. Of course in the election she supported Mr. Melmotte, still thinking that he might be the making of Felix.

"I suppose Mr. Alf is very rich," she said to Mr. Broune.

"I dare say he has put by something. But this election will cost him £10,000; and if he goes on as he is doing now, he had better allow another £10,000 for libel actions."

"Do you believe that about the Austrian Insurance Company?" This was a matter in which Mr. Melmotte was supposed to have retired from Paris not with clean hands.

"I don't believe the *Evening Pulpit* can prove it – and it will cost them three or four thousand pounds to try. That's a game which nobody wins but the lawyers. I wonder at Alf. He has been so clever until now!"

Mr. Alf had a powerful committee. The Whig Marquises and the Whig Barons came forward, and with them the Liberal professional men and tradesmen. There would be a good fight. And it was found that Mr. Alf was a good speaker. He addressed meetings of the constituency almost daily, and in his speeches he never spared Melmotte. No one, he said, had a greater reverence for mercantile grandeur than himself. But let them make sure that the grandeur was honest. How great would be the disgrace to Westminster if it should find that it had been taken in by a false spirit of speculation and gambling!

This was regarded as very open speaking. And it had its effect. Some men began to say that Melmotte had not been known long enough to deserve confidence, and the Lord Mayor was beginning to think that it might be wise to escape the dinner by some excuse.

Melmotte's committee was also very grand, and included Dukes and Earls. But his public speaking did not inspire much confidence. He had very little to say when he attempted to explain his political principles. After a while he confined himself to remarks on the personal attacks made on him by the other side, and even in doing that he repeated himself. Let them prove it. He defied them to prove it. The men of Westminster were too high-minded to pay any attention to such charges as these till they were proved. Let them prove it.

He did not say much himself about libel – but assurances were made on his behalf by Lord Alfred Grendall and his son, that as soon as the election was over various people would be indicted for libel: the *Evening Pulpit* and Mr. Alf would of course be the first victims.

The dinner was fixed for Monday, July the 8th. The election was to be held on Tuesday the 9th. This accident was distressing to some of the Melmottites, for there was much to be done both about the dinner and about the election. The two Grendalls, father and son, found themselves to be so driven that the world seemed to be turned topsy-turvey.

“If this goes on much longer I shall cut it,” said the elder to his son.

“Think of me, governor,” said the son. “I have to be in the city four or five times a week.”

“You’ve a regular salary.”

“The thing is – will it last? There are a good many who say that Melmotte will burst up.”

“I don’t believe it,” said Lord Alfred. “They don’t know what they’re talking about. There are too many in the same boat to let him burst up. It would be the bursting up of half London. But I shall tell him after this that he must make it easier.”

“You shall come to us for three days – after it’s over,” said Lady Monogram to Miss Georgiana Longestaffe; to which Miss Longestaffe agreed, though not as if a favour had been conferred upon her.

The reason why Lady Monogram had changed her mind about inviting her old friend was as follows. Miss Longestaffe had the disposal of two evening tickets for Madame Melmotte’s grand reception; and so greatly had the Melmottes risen in society’s appreciation, that Lady Monogram had found that she was bound to go. So she had made a bargain with Miss Longestaffe. She was to have her two tickets, and would receive Miss Longestaffe for three days as a guest. It had also been conceded that on one of these nights Lady Monogram should take Miss Longestaffe out with her. There was perhaps something slightly painful at the start of the negotiation; but such feelings soon fade away, and Lady Monogram was a woman of the world.



Chapter 45

Mr. Melmotte is Pressed for Time

At this time, a fortnight before the election, Mr. Longestaffe came up to town and saw Mr. Melmotte very frequently. He could not go into his own house, as he had let that for a month to the great financier, but he lived at the Carlton. He was delighted to find that his new friend was an honest Conservative, and proposed him as a member at the club. However, according to the rules it was decided that the club could only admit Mr. Melmotte once he occupied a seat in the House of Commons.

Mr. Melmotte, who was becoming somewhat arrogant, was heard to declare that the club might do without him. If not elected at once, he should withdraw his name. So great was his prestige at this moment that there were some, Mr. Longestaffe included, who tried to persuade the committee that Mr. Melmotte was not like other men. Rules should not control the club in a matter of such importance as this. But the club for the time lost the honour of entertaining Mr. Melmotte.

It may be remembered that Mr. Longestaffe had been anxious to become one of the directors of the Mexican Railway, and that he was snubbed when he expressed his wish to Mr. Melmotte. Like other great men, Mr. Melmotte liked to choose his own time for bestowing favours. The time had now come, and he had let Mr. Longestaffe know that there would be a place for him at the Board.

The alliance between Mr. Melmotte and Mr. Longestaffe had become very close. And Mr. Melmotte had bought Mr. Longestaffe's estate at Pickering on terms very favourable to the Longestaffes. Mr. Melmotte suggested to Mr. Longestaffe that he had better qualify for his seat at the Board by taking shares in the Company to the amount of two or three thousand pounds, and Mr. Longestaffe had of course consented. No ready cash was needed. The shares could be paid for out of Mr. Longestaffe's half of the purchase money for Pickering Park, and could remain for the present in Mr. Melmotte's hands. To this also Mr. Longestaffe had consented, not quite understanding why the scrip should not be made over to him at once.

It was a part of the charm of all dealings with this great man that no ready money seemed ever to be necessary for anything. Great transactions were apparently completed without the signing even of a cheque. Mr. Longestaffe was afraid even to give a hint to Mr. Melmotte about ready money. Pickering had been purchased and the title-deeds made over to Mr. Melmotte; but the £80,000 had not been paid, though of course Mr. Melmotte's note assenting to the terms was security sufficient for any reasonable man. The property had been mortgaged, but there was still a sum of £50,000 to come, of which Dolly was to have one half and the other was to be used in paying off Mr. Longestaffe's debts. It would have been very pleasant to have had this at once – but Mr. Longestaffe felt the absurdity of pressing such a man as Mr. Melmotte.

But Dolly wanted his money. Dolly, idle and foolish as he was, liked to have what belonged to him. £5,000 would pay off all his tradesmen's debts and leave him comfortably possessed of money in hand, while the other £20,000 would make his own property free. Dolly was growing impatient. He had actually

gone down to Caversham to arrange the terms with his father, and had been almost triumphant, thinking that the money would come the next day, or at any rate during the next week.

Now Dolly came to his father to enquire what was being done. He had not as yet been blessed with a single ten-pound note as the result of the sale.

“Are you going to see Melmotte, sir?” he asked somewhat abruptly.

“Yes, tomorrow; and he is to introduce me to the Board.”

“You’re going in for that, are you, sir? Do they pay anything?”

“I believe not.”

“Nidderdale and young Carbury belong to it, and Miles Grendall and old Alfred. I don’t think they’d go in for it, if there was no money going. I’d make them fork out something.”

“I think that perhaps, Adolphus, you hardly understand these things.”

“No, I don’t understand much about business, I know. What I want to understand is, when Melmotte is going to pay up this money.”

“I suppose he’ll arrange it with the banks,” said the father.

“I beg that he won’t arrange my money with the banks, sir. I want a cheque upon his bank which I can pay in to mine. You’d better tell him. If you don’t like, you know, I’ll get Squercum to do it.” Mr. Squercum was a lawyer whom Dolly had employed lately, much to the annoyance of his parent.

“I beg you’ll do nothing of the kind.”

“Then he’d better pay up, like anybody else,” said Dolly as he left the room. His father was quite sure that Squercum would have his finger in the pie unless the money were paid quickly. When Dolly had taken an idea into his head, no power on earth would turn him.

On that same day Melmotte received visits from two of his fellow directors. At the time he was very busy. He had speeches to write. Members of his Committee were always trying to see him. Orders as to the dinner and the preparation of the house had to be given. And then his gigantic commercial affairs required much labour on his part.

Still he saw each of these young men for a few minutes. “My dear young friend, what can I do for you?” he said to Sir Felix, not sitting down, so that Sir Felix also should remain standing.

“About that money, Mr. Melmotte?”

“What money, my dear fellow? A good many money matters pass through my hands.”

“The thousand pounds I gave you for shares. If you don’t mind, as the shares seem to be a bother, I’ll take the money back.”

“It was only the other day you had £200,” said Melmotte.

“Exactly; and you might as well let me have the £800.”

“I’ve ordered the shares; gave the order to my broker the other day.”

“Then I’d better take the shares,” said Sir Felix. “Could I get them, Mr. Melmotte?”

“My dear fellow, I really think you hardly calculate the value of my time when you come to me about such an affair as this.”

“I’d like to have the money or the shares,” said Sir Felix, who was not especially averse to quarrelling with Mr. Melmotte now that he had resolved upon taking that gentleman’s daughter to New York. Their quarrel would be so bitter when the departure should be discovered, that any present anger could hardly increase its bitterness. What Felix thought of now was simply his money.

“You’re a spendthrift,” said Melmotte, apparently relenting, “and I’m afraid a gambler. I can give you £200 more on account.”

Sir Felix could not resist the touch of ready money, and consented. As he pocketed the cheque he asked for the name of the brokers who were employed to buy the shares.

But here Melmotte demurred. “No, my friend. You are only entitled to shares for £600 now. I will see that the thing is put right.”

So Sir Felix departed with £200 only. Marie had said that she could get £200. Perhaps if he wrote to some of Miles’s relations he could obtain payment of part of that gentleman’s debt to him.

Sir Felix going down the stairs in Abchurch Lane met Paul Montague coming up. Carbury, on the spur of the moment, said, “What’s this I hear about a lady at Islington?”

“Who has told you anything about a lady at Islington?”

“A little bird. I’m told that I’m to congratulate you on your coming marriage.”

“Then you’ve been told an infernal falsehood,” said Montague, passing on. He paused and added, “I don’t know who can have told you, but if you hear it again, I’ll trouble you to contradict it.” As he was waiting in Melmotte’s outer room, he thought that of course the rumour had come through Ruby Ruggles.

Miles Grendall came out and said that the great man would see him; but was very busy. Paul assured him that he would be concise, and was shown in.

“I should not have troubled you,” said Paul to Melmotte, “only I understood that I was to see you before the Board met.”

“Exactly; of course – only you see I am a little busy. If this d___d dinner were over I shouldn’t mind. Let me see. Oh; I was proposing that you should go out to Peking?”

“To Mexico.”

“Yes, yes; to Mexico. I’ve so many things running in my head! Well; if you’ll say when you’re ready to start, we’ll draw up some instructions. You’ll see Fisker, of course. You and Fisker will manage it. The chief thing will be a cheque for the expenses; eh? We must get that passed at the next Board.”

“Mr. Melmotte, I have made up my mind that it would not be fit that I should go.”

“Oh, indeed!”

“No; even if I saw my way to do any good in America, my duties here would not be compatible with the trip.”

“I don’t see that at all. What duties have you got here? If you do stay, I hope you’ll be unanimous; that’s all; or perhaps you intend to get out. If that’s it, I’ll look to your money.”

“That, Mr. Melmotte, is what I should prefer.”

“Very well, very well. I’ll arrange it. Sorry to lose you, that’s all. Miles, isn’t Mr. Goldsheiner waiting to see me?”

“You’re a little too quick, Mr. Melmotte,” said Paul. “I cannot tell you as a fact that I shall withdraw from the Board till I receive the advice of a friend with whom I am consulting. I do not yet know what my duty may be.”

“I’ll tell you, sir, what cannot be your duty. You cannot make known any of the affairs of the Company which you have learned in that Board-room. You cannot divulge the circumstances of the Company to any gentleman who is a stranger to the Company.”

“Thank you, Mr. Melmotte. On matters such as that I think that I can see my own way. I have been in fault in coming in to the Board without understanding my duties.”

“Very much in fault, I should say,” replied Melmotte, whose arrogance was overcoming him.

“But in reference to what I may or may not say to any friend, I do not want advice from you.”

“Very well; very well. I can’t ask you to stay, because Goldsheiner is waiting to see me, about more important matters.” Montague had said what he had to say, and departed.

On the following day, before the meeting of the Board of Directors, old Mr. Longestaffe called in Abchurch Lane. He was received very civilly by Miles Grendall. Mr. Melmotte quite expected him, and would walk with him over to the offices of the railway, and introduce him to the Board.

Mr. Longestaffe, with some shyness, said he desired to have a few moments’ conversation with the chairman before the Board met. Fearing his son and Squercum, he had made up his mind to suggest that the little matter about Pickering Park should be settled.

Miles assured him that the opportunity should be given him, but that at the present moment the chief secretary of the Russian Legation was with Mr. Melmotte. The chief secretary must have been very tedious with his business, for Mr. Longestaffe was not summoned to walk off to the Board until five minutes after the Board should have met. He thought that he could explain his views in the street; but on the stairs they were joined by Mr. Cohenlupe, and in three minutes they were in the Board-room.

Mr. Longestaffe was presented, and took the chair opposite Miles Grendall. Montague was not there, but had sent a letter to the secretary explaining that for reasons known to the chairman he was absent.

“All right,” said Melmotte. “I know all about it. Mr. Montague’s retirement may be an advantage. He could not be made to understand that unanimity in such an enterprise is essential. I am confident that our new director will not sin in the same direction.” Mr. Melmotte bowed and smiled very sweetly on Mr. Longestaffe.

Mr. Longestaffe was astonished to find how soon the business was done, and how very little he had been called on to do. Miles Grendall had read something out of a book which he had been unable to follow. Then the chairman had read some figures. Mr. Cohenlupe had declared that their prosperity was unprecedented; and the Board was over. When Mr. Longestaffe told Miles that he still wished to speak to Mr. Melmotte, Miles explained to him that the chairman had been obliged to run off to a meeting about the interior of Africa, which was being held at the Cannon Street Hotel.



Chapter 46

Roger Carbury and his Two Friends

Roger Carbury, having found Ruby Ruggles and given the girl his advice, returned to Carbury. He felt that there was no more to be done. It was out of the question that he should bring Ruby with him. She would not have gone; and old Farmer Ruggles had sworn that his granddaughter should never again be received at Sheep's Acre Farm.

The squire on his return home sent for Crumb, and heard all the news. John Crumb had quarrelled with old Ruggles, who had called Ruby by every bad name possible. John had sworn that he would have punched the old man's head but for his age. He wouldn't believe any harm of Ruby. But as for the Baro-nite – the Baro-nite had better look to himself!

“Did ye find her, squire?”

“Yes, Mr. Crumb. She's living with her aunt, Mrs. Pipkin, at Islington. It was the proper thing for her to do.”

“I knew she'd do the thing as was right. I said that all along. But how about she and the Baro-nite?”

Roger did not wish to speak of the Baronet at present. “I suppose old Ruggles did ill-use her?”

“Oh, dreadful. Dragged her about awful. D'ye think she's see'd the Baro-nite since she's been in Lon'on, Muster Carbury?”

“I think she's a good girl, if you mean that.”

“I'm sure she be. I don't want none to tell me that, squire, tho' it's good to hear you say so. If e'er a man in Bungay said she warn't good – well, I was there, and ready.”

“I hope nobody has said so.”

“You can't stop them women, squire. But, Lord love 'ee, she shall come and be missus of my house tomorrow, and what'll it matter then what they say? What sort of a one is her aunt, squire?”

“She keeps lodgings; a very decent sort of a woman.”

“She won't let the Baro-nite come there?”

“Certainly not,” said Roger, who felt that he was hardly being sincere. He knew that Ruby had spent many hours with her fashionable lover.

“If I was to give Mrs. Pipkin a gown now – or a blue cloak – or a chest of drawers like, wouldn't that make her more o' my side, squire?”

“I think she'll try to do her duty without that.”

“Any ways I'll go up, squire, and see how things is lying.”

“I wouldn't go just yet, Mr. Crumb, if I were you. She hasn't forgotten the scene at the farm yet.”

“I said nothing as warn't kind.”

“If you had been unkind she could have forgiven it; but as you were good-natured and she was cross, she can't forgive that.”

John Crumb scratched his head, and felt that the depths of a woman's character required more gauging than he had yet managed.

“To tell you the truth, my friend, I think that a little hardship at Mrs. Pipkin's will do her good.”

“Don’t she have enough vittels?” asked John Crumb, with intense anxiety.

“I dare say she has enough to eat. But of course she has to work for her aunt. She has three or four children to look after.”

“That moight come in handy by-and-by,” said John Crumb, grinning.

“As you say. There is a good deal to do, and I should not be surprised if she were to think after a bit that your house in Bungay was more comfortable than Mrs. Pipkin’s kitchen. Let her think about that, and in a month’s time she’ll be more willing to settle matters than she is now.”

“But – the Baro-nite!”

“Mrs. Pipkin will allow none of that.”

“It makes me feel as though I had two hun’erd weight o’ meal on my stomach, lying awake o’ nights and thinking af him! If I thought that she’d let him – oh! I’d swing for it, Muster Carbury.”

Roger assured him again that he believed Ruby to be a good girl, and that Mrs. Pipkin would keep a close watch upon her niece. John Crumb made no promise not to travel to London; but the squire thought that his purpose of doing so was shaken. He was still resolved to send Mrs. Pipkin the price of a new blue cloak, and declared that he would get Mixet to write the letter.

That afternoon Roger Carbury rode over to Lowestoft, to a meeting on church matters at which his friend the bishop presided. After the meeting he dined at the inn with half a dozen clergymen and neighbouring gentlemen, and then walked down by himself on to the long strand.

It was now just the end of June, and the weather was delightful. Here and there a few townspeople were strolling about; and another few had come out from the lodging-houses and the hotel. Roger was fond of the sea-shore, and always came to loiter there for a while when any cause brought him into the town.

He was walking close to the margin of the tide, with his hands joined behind his back, and his face turned down towards the shore, when he came upon a couple who were standing looking together upon the waves. He was close to them before they saw each other. The man was his friend Paul Montague. Leaning on Paul’s arm a lady stood, dressed in black, with a dark straw hat; very simple in her attire, but yet a woman whom it would be impossible to pass without notice. The lady of course was Mrs. Hurtle.

Paul Montague had been a fool to suggest Lowestoft, but his folly had been natural. Here were the sea sands which he knew best. When Mrs. Hurtle had been taken from the hotel on to the beach, she had declared herself to be charmed; Paul had understood what sort of place she needed.

“I think the hotel is quite gorgeous,” she said, “and the people so civil!” Hotel people always are civil before the crowds come.

Of course it was impossible that Paul should return to London by the mail train an hour after his arrival. He would have reached London at four or five in the morning. The following day was Sunday, so of course he promised to stay till Monday. He had said nothing in the train of those stern things which he had resolved to say. He was not saying them when Roger Carbury came upon him; but was indulging in some poetical nonsense about the expanse of the ocean, and the endless ripples which connected shore with shore. Mrs. Hurtle, too, as she leaned with friendly weight upon his arm, indulged also in moonshine and romance. Though in the heart of each there was a devouring care, still they enjoyed the hour.

And Paul liked the companionship of Mrs. Hurtle, because her attire was becoming and her eyes were bright. He liked the warmth of her closeness, and the softness of her arm, and the perfume from her hair – though he would have given all that he possessed to have her removed from him by some impassable gulf.

He certainly had been foolish to bring her to Lowestoft, and now he felt his folly. As soon as he saw Roger Carbury he blushed, and then leaving Mrs. Hurtle's arm he came forward, and shook hands with his friend.

"It is Mrs. Hurtle," he said, "I must introduce you." Roger took off his hat and bowed, but with the coldest ceremony. Mrs. Hurtle was just as cold in her acknowledgment. She had heard much of Roger Carbury, and felt that he was no friend to her.

"I did not know that you were thinking of coming to Lowestoft," said Roger, unable to hide the severity he felt.

"Mrs. Hurtle wished to get to the sea, and as she knew no one else here in England, I brought her."

"Mr. Montague and I have travelled so many miles together before now," she said, "that a few more will not make much difference."

"Do you stay long?" asked Roger in the same severe voice.

"I go back probably on Monday," said Montague.

"As I shall be here a whole week, and shall not speak a word to anyone after he has left me, he has consented to bestow his company on me for two days. Will you join us at dinner, Mr. Carbury, this evening?"

"Thank you, madam; I have dined."

"Then, Mr. Montague, I will leave you with your friend. We dine you know in twenty minutes. I wish you could get your friend to join us." So saying, Mrs. Hurtle tripped back towards the hotel.

"Is this wise?" demanded Roger, as soon as the lady was out of hearing.

"Nobody knows the folly of it so thoroughly as I do."

"Then why do you do it? Do you mean to marry her?"

"No; certainly not."

"Is it honest then, or gentlemanly, that you should be with her in this way? Does she think that you intend to marry her?"

"I have told her that I would not. I have told her—" He stopped, unable to say that he had told her that he loved another woman.

"What does she mean then? Has she no regard for her own character?"

"I would explain it all to you, Carbury, if I could. But you would never have the patience to hear me."

"I am not naturally impatient."

"But this would drive you mad. I wrote to her assuring her that it must be all over. Then she sent for me. Was I not bound to go to her?"

"Yes; and to repeat what you had said in your letter."

"I went with that very purpose, and did repeat it."

"Then you should have left her."

"Ah; but you do not understand. She begged that I would not desert her in her loneliness. We have been so much together that I could not desert her."

"I certainly do not understand that, Paul. You have allowed yourself to be entrapped into a promise of marriage; and then, for reasons which we will not go into now, you resolved to break your promise, thinking that you were justified in doing so. But nothing can justify you in staying on such terms with the lady that she thinks your old promise holds good."

“She does not think so.”

“Then what are you both doing here? Though I don’t know why I should trouble myself about it. People live now in a way that I don’t comprehend. If this is your way of living, I have no right to complain.”

“For God’s sake, Carbury, do not speak in that way. It sounds as though you meant to throw me over.”

“I should have said that you had thrown me over. You come down here to this hotel, where we are both known, with this lady whom you are not going to marry; and I meet you, just by chance. What am I to say? I think that the lady will succeed in marrying you.”

“Never.”

“And that such a marriage will be your destruction. Doubtless she is good-looking.”

“Yes, and clever. And you must remember that the manners of her country are not as the manners of this country.”

“Then I trust I may not marry a lady of her country,” said Roger. “She is here with you in order to marry you. She is cunning and strong. You are foolish and weak. You should tell her your mind – and leave her.”

Paul thought of the gentleman in Oregon, and of certain difficulties in leaving.

“That’s what I should do,” said Roger. “You must go in now, I suppose, and eat your dinner.”

“May I come to the hall on the way home?”

“Certainly, if you please,” said Roger. Then he thought that his welcome had not been cordial. “I mean that I shall be delighted to see you,” he added, marching away.

Paul went into the hotel, and ate his dinner. In the meantime Roger Carbury walked far away along the strand. In all that he had said to Montague he had not been influenced by any reference to his own affairs. And yet he feared that this man was the chief barrier between himself and the girl that he loved.

As he had listened to John Crumb speaking of Ruby Ruggles, he had told himself that he and John Crumb were alike. Both panted for the companionship of a fellow-creature: and each was to be thwarted by the make-believe regard of unworthy youth and fatuous good looks! Crumb would probably be successful at last. Ruby, as soon as hardship told upon her, would return to the strong arm that could be trusted to provide for her. But what chance was there of success for *him*? Hetta Carbury, if once she loved, would never change her love.

It was possible, no doubt, that her heart was still vacillating. If she knew about Mrs. Hurtle, would not that open her eyes? Would she not then see where she could trust her happiness, and where she would certainly be shipwrecked?

“Never,” said Roger to himself, hitting at the stones on the beach with his stick. “Never.” Then he got his horse and rode back to Carbury Manor.



Chapter 47

Mrs. Hurtle at Lowestoft

When Paul went into the dining-room Mrs. Hurtle was already there, radiant with smiles. She made herself especially pleasant during dinner, but Paul felt sure that everything was not well with her. Though she talked and laughed, there was something forced in her manner. He knew that she was only waiting till the serving-man should have left the room to speak in a different strain.

And when the door was finally shut behind the retreating waiter, she asked, "Your friend was hardly civil, was he, Paul? I suppose he is on very intimate terms with you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then his want of courtesy was intended for me. He disapproves of me. I can understand that it should be so. But he should have been civil to his friend's friend. You have told me that Mr. Carbury was your ideal of an English gentleman."

"So he is."

"Then why didn't he behave as such?" Mrs. Hurtle again smiled. "Has he authority over you?"

"Of course not. What authority could he have?"

"I do not know. I should have said that he was your guardian, and that he intended to rebuke you for being in bad company. I dare say he did after I had gone."

This was so true that Montague did not know how to deny it. Nor was he sure that he should. Why not say it now as well as at any future moment? He had to make her understand that he could not marry her – chiefly indeed because his heart was elsewhere – but also because her history caused all his friends to warn him against such a marriage. So he plucked up courage for the battle.

"It was nearly that," he said.

There are many of my readers who will declare that Paul Montague was a poor creature, in his reluctance to face this woman with the truth. His folly in falling for her charms will be forgiven him; his unwise engagement, and his determination to break it, will be pardoned as natural. But readers will be very hard on him on the score of his cowardice – I think unjustly. Mastery often comes from hardness of heart rather than true courage. The man who succumbs to his wife, the mother who succumbs to her daughter, often does so because of an aversion to giving pain.

Paul feared the woman; but he also shrank from subjecting her to the blank misery of utter desertion. After what had passed between them he could hardly bring himself to tell her that he wanted her no further. But that was what he had to do.

"Mr. Carbury rebuked you for showing yourself on the sands at Lowestoft with me?"

"He knew of the letter which I wrote to you."

"You have discussed me between you?"

"Of course we have. Would you have had me be silent about you to the oldest and best friend I have in the world?"

“No. But I should not have supposed you would have asked his leave. I thought you were a man capable of managing your own actions. I had heard that in your country, girls sometimes hold themselves at the disposal of their friends, but I did not dream that such could be the case with a man who had gone out into the world.”

Paul Montague’s punishment was begun, and he did not like it. “Of course you can say bitter things,” he replied.

“Have I usually said bitter things to you? When I hung round your neck and swore that you should be my God upon earth, was that bitter? I am alone and I have to fight my own battles. Say but one word to me, Paul, and there will be an end to bitterness. And think what it is I am asking. Do you remember how urgent were once your own prayers to me; how you begged for one word of mine? I spoke it, because I loved you, and because I believed you.”

“I cannot say that word.”

“So after all, I am to be thrown off like an old glove? I have had many dealings with men and have found them to be false, cruel, unworthy, and selfish. But I have met nothing like *that*. No man has ever dared to treat me like that.”

“I wrote to you.”

“Wrote to me! And I was to take that as sufficient! No. While I live I will face injustice and expose it. You wrote to me! Heaven and earth – I can hardly control myself when I hear such impudence!” She clenched her fist upon the knife that lay on the table, and then dropped it again. “Could any mere letter break the bond by which we were bound together? The letter must be unwritten. It has already been contradicted by your conduct to me since I have been in this country.”

“I am sorry to hear you say that.”

“Am I not justified in saying it?”

“I hope not. When I first saw you I told you everything. If I have been wrong in attending to your wishes since, I regret it.”

“This comes from your seeing your master for two minutes on the beach. You are acting now under his orders. No doubt he came with the purpose. Had you told him you were to be here?”

“His coming was an accident.”

“It was very opportune. Well; what have you to say to me? Or perhaps you would prefer that I should argue the matter out with your – friend, Mr. Carbury.”

“What has to be said, I can say myself.”

“Say it then. Or are you so ashamed of it, that the words stick in your throat?”

“I am ashamed of it. I must say that which will be painful, and which would not have needed to be said, if I had been careful.”

“Don’t spare me,” she said. “I already know it all. I know the lies with which they crammed you at San Francisco. You have heard that up in Oregon I shot a man. That is no lie. I did. I brought him down dead at my feet.” Then she rose from her chair, and looked at him. “Do you suppose that the sight of that dying wretch does not haunt me? that I do not daily hear his drunken screech, and see him fall? But did they tell you also that it was only thus that I could save myself? Otherwise, why did they not try me for his murder? Why did the women flock around me and kiss the very hems of my garments? In this soft civilization of yours you know nothing of such necessity. A woman here is protected – except from lies.”

“It was not that only,” he whispered.

“No; they told you other things,” she continued, still standing over him.

“They told you of quarrels with my husband. I know the lies, and who made them, and why. Did I conceal my husband’s character from you? Did I not tell you that he was a drunkard and a scoundrel?”

“They told me that – you fought him.”

“Fought him! Yes; I was always fighting him. What are you to do but to fight cruelty, and fight falsehood, and fight fraud and treachery? You have not been foolish enough to believe that fable about a duel? I did stand once, armed, and guarded my bedroom door from him, and told him that he should only enter it over my body. He went away to the tavern and I did not see him for a week afterwards. That was the duel. And they have told you that he is not dead.”

“Yes; they have.”

“Who has seen him alive? And what would it matter to you? I was divorced from him according to the law of the State of Kansas, on the grounds of his cruelty and drunkenness. He made no appearance, and the Court granted it me. Am I disgraced by that?”

“I heard nothing of the divorce.”

“When we were talking in the old days you wanted to hear nothing of Caradoc Hurtle. Now you are more particular. I told you that he was dead, as I believed myself, and do believe. And I suppose they have told you that I failed in getting back my property?”

“I have asked no question about your property.”

“You are welcome to know. At last I have it again. And now, sir, what else is there? Is it because I protected myself from drunken violence that I am to be rejected? Am I to be cast aside because I saved my life from a reprobate husband, and escaped from him by lawful means; or because I have secured my own property? If I am not condemned for these things, then say why am I condemned.”

She had left him without a word to say. She had owned to shooting the man. Well; it certainly may be necessary that a woman should shoot a man in Oregon. As to the duel with her husband, she had half confessed it. She had confessed that perhaps Hurtle was not dead. But then, as she had asked, why was not a divorce as good as a death?

And yet, from this story, what man would wish to marry her? She had seen so much of drunkenness, had become so handy with pistols, and had done so much of a man’s work, that any ordinary man might well hesitate before he assumed to be her master.

“I do not condemn you,” he replied.

“Paul, do not lie. If you tell me that you will not be my husband, you condemn me.”

“I will not lie if I can help it. I did ask you to be my wife—”

“How often did you ask before I consented?”

“I now believe such a marriage would be miserable for both of us. Of course, I can hardly defend myself.”

“Hardly.”

“But I know that I shall now be acting for the best in declaring that I will not become your husband.”

“You will not?” She was still standing, and stretched out her right hand as though to grasp something.

He also rose. “I will not.”

“Oh, God! Why is it my lot to meet man after man as false and cruel as this! You tell me to my face that I am to bear it! Who is the jade that has done it? Has she money? or rank? Or are you afraid to marry a woman who can speak for herself, and act for herself? Perhaps you think that I am – old.” He was looking at her intently as she spoke, and it did seem to him that many years had been added to her face. It was full of lines round the mouth, and her eyes seemed to be deep in her head. “Speak, man. Is it that you want a younger wife?”

“You know it is not.”

“Know! How should one know anything from a liar? You are a coward. It is that man who has forced you to this. Between me and him you tremble, and are a thing to be pitied – another mean wretch. That men should be so vile, and think themselves masters of the world! You are a liar. Now go. Had I had a weapon in my hand I should have used it.”

Paul Montague felt that perhaps Mrs. Hurtle might have had some excuse. “I will say good-bye to you,” he said.

“Say no such thing. Tell me that you have triumphed and got rid of me. Show me your joy. Tell me that an Englishman has dared to ill-treat an American woman.” He was now standing in the doorway, and before he escaped she gave him a command. “I shall not stay here now,” she said. “I shall return on Monday. I must resolve what I will do. I shall seek a means of punishing you for your treachery. I expect you to come to me on Monday.”

“I do not see that it will serve any purpose.”

“It is for me, sir, to judge of that. If you are too much of a coward to come to me, I shall come to you. I shall not be too timid to show myself and tell my story.” He said he would visit her, but would not fix a day. On his return to town he would write to her.

When he was gone she went to the door and listened. Then she locked it, and stood with her hands clasped. After a few moments she ran forward, and falling on her knees, buried her face in her hands. She gave way to a flood of tears, and at last lay rolling upon the floor.

Should she never know rest? Was there to be no end to the storms and turmoils of her life? In almost all that she had said she had spoken the truth, though doubtless not all the truth. She had endured violence, and had been violent. She had been schemed against, and had schemed. But she had been honest about money, and she had been loving of heart. She had loved this young Englishman – and now this was to be the end of it! Oh, what a journey she would now have to make back to her own country, all alone!

But the strongest feeling which raged within her bosom was that of disappointed love. Violently as she had abused him, if he had taken her in his arms, she would not only have forgiven him but have blessed him for his kindness. She was in truth sick at heart of rough living. If she could only escape, if she could find some safe niche in the world, then she thought she could put away violence and be as gentle as a girl. When she first met this admiring Englishman, she had ventured to hope that a haven would at last be open to her. But the reek of the gunpowder from that first pistol shot still clung to her, and she told herself – not for the first time – that it would have been better for her to have shot herself.

On receiving his letter, though she had been angry, she declared to herself that his resolution was natural. In marrying her he must give up his old friends and haunts. She was aware that when her past life became known, she would be

avoided in English society. To have been allowed to forget the past and to live the life of an English lady would have been heaven to her. But she, whose name had become almost a proverb for violence out in the far West – how could she dare to hope that her lot should be so changed?

She had reminded Paul that he had asked her often before she had consented to be his wife; but she did not tell him that her hesitation had arisen from her sense of her own unfitness. Then gradually, as she came to believe in his love, as she lost herself in love for him, she told herself that she would be changed. She had, however, known that it could not be so.

But this man had relatives and property in the United States. Might not a prosperous life be opened for him in the far West? Then had arisen the offer of that journey to Mexico. With what joy would she have accompanied him as his wife! For that at any rate she would have been fit.

She was conscious – perhaps too conscious – of her own beauty. And she knew herself to be clever, and a good comrade. If they could be together in some other country, could she not make him happy? Yet what was she that a man should give up everything and go away to some half-barbarous country for her alone? She knew it all and was hardly angry with him. But treated as she had been, she must play her game with such weapons as she possessed. She should at least seem to be angry.

Sitting alone late into the night she made many plans, but the plan that seemed best to suit her frame of mind was the writing of a letter to Paul bidding him adieu, sending him her fondest love, and telling him that he was right. She did write this letter, believing that she would not have the strength to send it.

Dear Paul,

You are right and I am wrong. Our marriage would not have been fitting. I do not blame you. I attracted you; but you have learned truly that you should not give up your life for such attractions. If I have been violent with you, forgive me. You will acknowledge that I have suffered.

Always know that there is one woman who will love you better than anyone else. I think too that you will love me even when some other woman is by your side. God bless you, and make you happy. Write me the shortest word of adieu. Not to do so would make you think yourself heartless. But do not come to me.

For ever,
W. H.

Having read this note twice, she put it into her pocket-book. She told herself that she ought to send it; but told herself as plainly that she could not bring herself to do so.

Paul, when he escaped from her presence, roamed out on to the sea-shore, and then went to bed, having ordered a carriage to take him to Carbury Manor early in the morning.

At breakfast he presented himself to the squire, and told the whole story. Roger expressed his satisfaction. That evening Paul Montague returned to London by the mail train, being sure that he would thus avoid a meeting with Mrs. Hurtle in the railway-carriage.



Chapter 48

Ruby a Prisoner

Ruby had run away from her lover in great dudgeon after the dance at the Music Hall, and had declared that she never wanted to see him again. But in the morning she was miserable. What would life be to her now without her lover? When she escaped from her grandfather's house she had not intended to become maid-of-all-work at a London lodging-house. The daily toil she could endure, as long as she was supported by the prospect of some coming delight – like a dance with Felix at the Music Hall.

But when she had parted with her lover almost on an understanding that they were never to meet again, things were very different. And perhaps she had been wrong. A gentleman like Sir Felix did not like to be told about marriage. If she gave him another chance, perhaps he would speak. At any rate she could not live without another dance. And so she wrote him a letter.

Ruby was glib enough with her pen, though what she wrote will hardly bear repeating. She underscored all her loves to him, and her regret at vexing him. She did not want to hurry a gentleman. But she did want to have another dance at the Music Hall. Would he be there next Saturday?

Sir Felix sent her a very short reply to say that he would be at the Music Hall on Tuesday. As he planned to leave London on the Wednesday on his way to New York, he was proposing to devote his very last night to the companionship of Ruby Ruggles.

Mrs. Pipkin had never interfered with her niece's letters. But since Roger Carbury's visit she had watched the postman, and had also watched her niece. For nearly a week Ruby said not a word of going out at night. She took the children for an airing with exemplary care, and washed the cups and saucers diligently.

But Mrs. Pipkin was intent on obeying Mr. Carbury's requests. She decided to tell Ruby most solemnly, if she found her preparing to leave the house in the evening, that she should be kept out the whole night. On the Tuesday, when Ruby went up to her room to deck herself, she had been careless – she had left her lover's scrap of a note behind when she went out with the children, and Mrs. Pipkin knew all about it.

It was nine o'clock when Ruby went upstairs; and Mrs. Pipkin locked both the front door and the area gate. Mrs. Hurtle had come home on the previous day.

"You won't be wanting to go out tonight, will you, Mrs. Hurtle?" Mrs. Pipkin asked her. Mrs. Hurtle declared her intention of remaining at home all evening.

"If you should hear words between me and my niece, don't you mind, ma'am."

"I hope there's nothing wrong, Mrs. Pipkin?"

"She'll be wanting to go out, and it isn't right; is it, ma'am? She's a good girl; but they've got such a way nowadays of doing just as they pleases, that one doesn't know what's coming next."

Ruby came down in her silk frock, and made her usual speech. "I'm just going to step out, aunt, for a little time tonight. I've got the key, and I'll let myself in quiet."

“Indeed, Ruby, you won’t,” said Mrs. Pipkin. “If you go out tonight you’ll stay out. That’s all. You won’t come back here any more. I won’t have it. You’re going after that young man that they tell me is the greatest scamp in all England.”

“They tell lies then, Aunt Pipkin.”

“Very well. No girl is going out any more at nights out of my house; so that’s it. You’d better take your finery off again.”

Ruby could hardly believe it. She had expected some opposition; but she had never imagined that her aunt would threaten to keep her in the streets all night. Nor did she believe her aunt would be as hard as her threat.

“I’ve a right to go if I like,” she said.

“You haven’t a right to come back again.”

“Yes, I have. I’ve worked hard for you, for no wages. I’ve a right to go out – and go I shall.”

“You’ll be no better than you should be, if you do.”

“Am I to work my very nails off, and then I ain’t to go out, not once a week?”

“I won’t have you go and throw yourself into the gutter, Ruby – not while you’re with me.”

“Who’s throwing themselves into the gutter? I know what I’m about.”

“And I know what I’m about.”

“I shall just go then.” And Ruby walked off towards the door.

“You won’t get out that way, for the door’s locked; and the area gate. You’d better just take your things off, Ruby.”

Poor Ruby for the moment was struck dumb. Mrs. Pipkin had feared that she would try to climb over the area gate, for she was a little afraid of Ruby. But Ruby was crushed. Her lover would be there to meet her, and she would not turn up!

“Aunt Pipkin,” she said, “let me go just this once.”

“No, Ruby; it ain’t proper.”

“You don’t know what you’re doing, aunt. You’ll ruin me, you will. Dear Aunt Pipkin, do, do! I’ll never ask again.”

Mrs. Pipkin had not expected this, and was almost willing to yield. But Mr. Carbury had spoken so very plainly!

“It ain’t the thing, Ruby; and I won’t do it.”

“And I’m to be – a prisoner! I don’t believe as you’ve any right to lock me up.”

“I’ve a right to lock my own doors.”

“Then I shall go away tomorrow.”

“I can’t help that, my dear. The door will be open, if you choose to go.”

“Then why not open it tonight?” But Mrs. Pipkin was stern, and Ruby, in a flood of tears, took herself up to her garret.

Mrs. Pipkin knocked at Mrs. Hurtle’s door again. “She’s gone to bed,” she said.

“I’m glad to hear it.”

“She was put out a bit. Poor girl! She ain’t got a mother, poor dear! And she’s got it into her head that a great gentleman will marry her. But what’d a grand gentleman see in Ruby to marry her? She says she’ll leave tomorrow.”

“And where will she go?”

“Just nowhere. After this gentleman – and you know what that means! You’re going to be married yourself, Mrs. Hurtle.”

“We won’t mind about that now, Mrs. Pipkin.”

“But you know how these things are managed. No gentleman’ll marry her because she runs after him. Girls should let the gentlemen run after them. Or anyways the girls shouldn’t let on as they are running after the gentlemen. But then, maybe, I’m old-fashioned,” added Mrs. Pipkin. “But if you wouldn’t mind speaking to Ruby tomorrow, Mrs. Hurtle, she’d listen to you. I don’t want her to go out into the street, till she knows where she’s to go to.”

Mrs. Hurtle promised that she would speak to Ruby, though she could not help thinking of her unfitness for the task. She knew nothing of the country. She had not a single friend in it but Paul Montague; and she had run after him with as little discretion as Ruby Ruggles. Who was she to give advice?

She had not sent her letter to Paul, but still kept it in her pocket-book. At some moments she thought that she would send it; and at others she told herself that it might still be possible to shame him into a marriage. She had returned from Lowestoft on the Monday, and had made some trivial excuse to Mrs. Pipkin in her mildest voice. The place had been windy, and too cold; and she had not liked the hotel. Mrs. Pipkin was very glad to see her back again.



Chapter 49

Sir Felix Makes Himself Ready

Sir Felix was to start with Marie Melmotte for New York on the Thursday, and to go down to Liverpool on the Wednesday. There was no reason, he thought, why he should not enjoy himself to the last by seeing Ruby. The details of his journey had been settled between him and Marie, with help from Didon, in the garden of Grosvenor Square. Sir Felix had been astonished at the completeness of the preparations.

“Mind you go by the 5 p.m. train,” Marie said. “That will take you into Liverpool at 10.15. There’s an hotel at the railway-station. Didon has got our tickets under the names of Madame and Mademoiselle Racine. We are to share a cabin. You must get yours tomorrow. She has found out that there is plenty of room.”

“I’ll be all right.”

“Pray don’t miss that train. We leave at 7 a.m. I shan’t go to bed all night, so as to be sure to be in time. Robert will start a little earlier in the cab with my heavy box. What do you think is in it?”

“Clothes,” suggested Felix.

“My wedding dresses. Think of that! What a job to get them and nobody to know anything about it except Didon and the shop in Mount Street! And I shall have all my jewels. They’ll go in our cab, then Didon and I follow in another cab. Nobody is ever up before nine, and I don’t think we shall be interrupted.”

“Won’t your mother find out?”

“I don’t think she’d tell if she knew. Papa leads her such a life! Felix, I hope you won’t be like that.” She looked into his face, and thought that it would be impossible that he should be.

“I’m all right,” said Felix, feeling very uncomfortable. This great effort of his life was drawing very near. There had been a pleasurable excitement in talking about running away with the heiress, but now that the deed had to be done, he almost wished that he had not undertaken it. And then if they should be wrong about the girl’s fortune! He almost repented, but he had not the courage to withdraw.

“How about money though?” he said hoarsely. “I have only the two hundred pounds which your father paid me. I don’t see why he should keep my money.”

“Look here,” said Marie. “There is a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds. I had money of my own enough for the tickets.”

“Whose is this?” said Felix, taking it.

“It is papa’s cheque. Mamma gets ever so many of them to pay for things, but she gets so muddled that she doesn’t know what she pays and what she doesn’t.” Felix saw that the cheque was payable to House or Bearer, and was signed by Augustus Melmotte. “If you take it to the bank you’ll get the money,” said Marie. “Or shall I send Didon, and give you the money on board the ship?”

Felix thought this over very anxiously. He would much prefer to have the money in his own pocket. But if he presented the cheque himself, might he be arrested for stealing Melmotte’s money?

"I think Didon had better get the money," he said, "and bring it to me tomorrow afternoon, to the club." If the money did not come he would not go down to Liverpool. "You see," he said, "I'm so much in the City that they might know me at the bank. And then I'll come on board on Thursday morning without looking for you."

"Oh dear, yes. And don't know us till we are out at sea. Won't it be fun when we are walking about on the deck and not speaking to one another! And, Felix; Didon has found that there is to be an American clergyman on board. I wonder whether he'd marry us. Won't that be jolly? Then, when we get to New York, we'll telegraph and write to papa, and be penitent and good. Of course he'll make the best of it."

"But he's so savage."

"Just for the moment. But I don't think he minds afterwards. He's always for making the best of everything. Things go wrong so often that he can't go on thinking of them for ever. It'll be all right in a month. I wonder how Lord Nidderdale will look when he hears that we've gone off. Do you know, Felix, that though we were engaged, he never once kissed me!" Felix at this moment almost wished that *he* had never done so.

Then they parted with the understanding that they were not to see each other again till they met on the boat. But Felix was determined that he would not stir unless Didon brought him the £250; and he almost hoped that she would not. Either she would be stopped at the bank, or she would run off with the money. Then he would be able to withdraw. He would do nothing till after Monday afternoon.

Should he tell his mother that he was going? She had recommended him to run away with the girl, and must approve. She would understand the great expense of such a trip, and might perhaps give him some money. He determined that he would tell his mother, if Didon brought him the full amount for the cheque.

He walked into the Beargarden at four o'clock on the Monday, and found Didon standing in the hall. His heart sank. She made him a little curtsey, and handed him a fat envelope. He bade her wait a moment, and going into a side room counted the notes. The money was all there. Now he must certainly go to New York.

"It is all in order?" whispered Didon when he returned. Sir Felix nodded, and she departed.

Yes; he must go. How should he dispose of his time before he went? Gambling was too dangerous: even he felt that. He would dine that night at the club, and in the evening go to his mother. On the Tuesday he would book his place for New York, and would spend the evening with Ruby at the Music Hall. On the Wednesday, he would start for Liverpool, according to his instructions. He felt annoyed that he had been so fully instructed. But should the affair turn out well, all the fellows would give him credit for the audacity with which he had carried off the heiress to America.

At ten o'clock he found his mother and Hetta in Welbeck Street.

"What, Felix?" exclaimed Lady Carbury.

"Mother," he said, "would you mind coming into the other room?" Lady Carbury followed him. "I've got something to tell you," he said.

"Good news?" she asked, clasping her hands together.

"That's as may be. I'm going to take Marie off."

"Oh, Felix!"

“You said it was the right thing to do – so I’m going to do it. But one wants such a lot of money for this kind of thing.”

“When?”

“Immediately. I wouldn’t tell you till I had arranged everything. We’re going to New York.”

“To New York! But when will you be married?”

“There will be a clergyman on board. It’s all fixed. I wouldn’t go without telling you.”

“I will have your clothes got ready for you. When do you start?”

“Wednesday afternoon.”

“For New York! Oh, Felix, how will it be if he does not forgive her? You are going to risk it?”

“I am going to take your advice.” This was dreadful to the poor mother. “There is money settled on Marie; money which he can’t get back again.”

“How much?”

“She doesn’t know; but a great deal.”

“But the money can’t be her own, Felix.”

“Melmotte will find that it is. Marie knows what she’s about. She’s a great deal sharper than anyone would think. What can you do for me about money, mother?”

“I have none, Felix.”

“I thought you’d be sure to help me, as you wanted me so much to do it.”

“That’s not true, Felix. Oh, I am so sorry I ever said that! I have no money in the bank.”

“They would let you overdraw £50 or £60.”

“I will not starve myself and Hetta. You had ever so much money only lately. I will get some clothes for you, and pay for them if you cannot – but I have no money to give you.”

“That’s a blue look out,” said he, “just when £60 or £70 might make a fellow for life! You could borrow it from your friend Broune.”

“I will do no such thing, Felix. £50 or £60 would make very little difference in such a trip as this. You have some money?”

“Some; yes. But I’m so short that any little thing would help me.”

Before the evening was over she gave him a cheque for £30. Then he went back to his club, even though he understood the danger. He could not bear the idea of going to bed quietly at home at half-past ten. He was very soon up in the card-room. He found nobody there, and went to the smoking-room, where Dolly Longestaffe and Miles Grendall were sitting silently together.

“Here’s Carbury,” said Dolly, waking suddenly into life. “Now we can have a game at three-handed loo.”

“Thank ye; not for me,” said Sir Felix. “I don’t think I’ll play tonight, old fellow. I hate three fellows sticking down together.”

Miles sat silently smoking his pipe, conscious of the baronet’s dislike of playing with him.

“By-the-bye, Grendall.” And Sir Felix in his most friendly tone whispered into his enemy’s ear a request that some of the I.O.U.’s might be converted into cash.

“I must ask you to wait till next week,” said Miles.

“It’s always waiting till next week with you,” said Sir Felix, getting up and speaking so that everyone in the room should hear. “I wonder whether any fellow

would buy these for five shillings in the pound?" And he held up the scraps of paper. He had been drinking freely before he went up to Welbeck Street, and had just taken a glass of brandy.

"Don't let's have that kind of thing down here," said Dolly. "If there is to be a row about cards, let it be in the card-room."

"Come into the card-room, then," said Sir Felix. "Come up, now; and Dolly shall come and hear what you say."

But Miles objected. He was not going up into the card-room that night, as no one was going to play.

"How I do hate a row!" said Dolly.

"Carbury likes a row," said Miles.

"I should like my money," said Sir Felix, walking out of the room.

On the next day he went into the City, and changed his mother's cheque. A gentleman behind the desk begged him to remind Lady Carbury that she was overdrawing her account.

"Dear, dear," said Sir Felix, as he pocketed the notes. "I'm sure she was unaware of it." Then he paid for his passage from Liverpool to New York under the name of Walter Jones. This was on Tuesday. He dined again at the club, alone, and in the evening went to the Music Hall. There he remained from ten till nearly twelve, very angry at the non-appearance of Ruby Ruggles. As he smoked and drank in solitude, he decided that since she had broken her appointment everything would now be her fault. Whatever might happen to her, she could not blame him.

He went back to his club very cross, as brave as brandy could make him, and inclined to expose Miles Grendall if he had an opportunity. Up in the card-room he found all the usual men – except Miles. Nidderdale, Grasslough, Dolly, Paul Montague, and one or two others were there. Ready money was on the table; indeed the men at the Beargarden had become sick of I.O.U.'s, and they had been nearly all converted into money, excepting those of Miles Grendall. The committee had decided to take no more I.O.U.s.

At three o'clock in the morning, Sir Felix had lost over a hundred pounds in ready money. On the following night about one he had lost a further sum of two hundred pounds. The reader will remember that he should at that time have been in the hotel at Liverpool.

But Sir Felix, as he played on in the almost desperate hope of recovering the money which he needed, remembered how Fisker had played all night, and how he had left the club to catch the early train for Liverpool, and had gone on to New York without delay.



Chapter 50

The Journey to Liverpool

Marie Melmotte, as she had promised, sat up all night with Didon. To Marie the night was full of pleasurable excitement. She unpacked and repacked her treasures, including her wedding dress, and asked Didon if she thought the dress would be fit for getting married on board ship. Didon thought that the dress would not much signify. They had no breakfast, so that no suspicion should be raised by the use of cups and plates.

At six they started. Robert went first with the big boxes, and Marie and Didon with the smaller luggage followed in a second cab. No one interfered with them and nothing went wrong. The very civil man at Euston Square gave them their tickets, and even attempted to speak to them in French. They had agreed that not a word of English was to be spoken till the ship was out at sea. At the station they got some very bad tea, then took their seats – and they were off.

Marie gabbled to Didon about her hopes and her future life, and all the things she would do, and how she had hated Lord Nidderdale. Nidderdale was ugly, and Sir Felix was as beautiful as the morning.

“Bah!” exclaimed Didon in disgust. She had learned that Lord Nidderdale would be a marquis and would have a castle, whereas Sir Felix would never be more than Sir Felix, and would never have anything at all. She had preferred Lord Nidderdale, but her mistress liked to have a will of her own. Didon thought, however, that New York might offer her a new career, so she had yielded.

Marie bore her disgust with good humour. She was running away to a distant continent – and her lover would be with her! She cared nothing for marquises.

As they drew near to Liverpool Didon explained that they must still be very careful, and say nothing about New York till they were in a cab. Marie’s big box was directed simply “Madame Racine, Passenger to Liverpool;” so was a second box, nearly as big, which was Didon’s property. Didon declared that she would be anxious until the ship was moving. Marie was sure that all their dangers were over, if only Sir Felix was safe on board.

Poor Marie! Sir Felix was at this moment in Welbeck Street, striving to find temporary oblivion from his distressing situation and loss of money, and his headache, beneath the bedclothes.

When the train arrived at Liverpool a well-mannered porter offered to take their luggage. Didon handed out the packages, keeping the jewel-case in her own hands. She left the carriage first, and then Marie. But Marie had hardly put her foot on the platform, before a gentleman addressed her, touching his hat.

“You, I think, are Miss Melmotte.”

Marie was struck dumb. Didon immediately became voluble in French. No; the young lady was not Miss Melmotte; the young lady was Mademoiselle Racine, her niece. What was Melmotte? They knew nothing about Melmottes. Would the gentleman kindly allow them to pass on to their cab?

But the gentleman would not allow them to pass on to their cab. With him was another gentleman, and not far in the distance Didon espied a policeman, who seemed to be quite ready if he were wanted.

“You are Miss Melmotte,” said the gentleman, “and this is your servant, Elise Didon. You had better make up your minds to go back to London. I will accompany you.”

“Ah, Didon, nous sommes perdues!” exclaimed Marie. Didon, plucking up her courage, asserted that they had a right to come to Liverpool. They had done nothing against the law. Why were they to be stopped in this way?

“You had better trust yourself to me; you had indeed,” said the gentleman. “A cheque has been changed which you took from your father’s house. No doubt your father will pardon that when you are back with him. But in order to bring you back safely we can arrest you on the score of the cheque, if necessary. We shall not let you go on board. If you travel back to London with me, you shall be subjected to no inconvenience.”

There was no help to be found anywhere. Marie blamed the telegraph system; and she offered no further opposition. Bursting into tears, she sat down on one of the boxes.

But Didon became very clamorous on her own behalf. “What had she – Didon – done? Did anybody mean to take her up for stealing anybody’s money? If anybody did, that person had better look to himself. She knew the law. She would go where she pleased.” So saying she began to tug her box away.

The gentleman looked at his telegram. Elise Didon had been accused of nothing unlawful. He suggested that Didon had better return with her mistress; but Didon only clamoured the more. No; she would go to New York. Nobody should stop her. She started off to the nearest cab, and no one did stop her.

“But the box in her hand is mine,” said Marie, not forgetting her trinkets in her misery. Didon surrendered the jewel-case, and got into the cab without a word of farewell. Then she was driven away – and out of our story. She had a first-class cabin all to herself as far as New York, but what may have been her fate after that it matters not to us to enquire.

Poor Marie! If she had succeeded in getting on board the ship she would have passed an hour of miserable suspense, looking everywhere for her lover, and would then have been carried to New York without him. She had a lucky escape.

But she was truly miserable. She would have to encounter an enraged father; and when should she see her lover again? Poor, poor Felix! What would be his feelings when he should find himself on his way to New York without his love!

She would be true to him. But might it not be even better to throw herself out of the carriage and to be killed? Would not that be the best punishment for her father? But how would it be with poor Felix?

“After all I don’t know that he cares for me,” she said to herself.

The gentleman was very kind to her. As they got near town he ventured to advise her. “Put a good face on it,” he said, “and don’t be cast down. Your mother will be delighted to have you back again.”

“I don’t think that mamma cares. It’s papa. I’d do it again tomorrow if I had the chance. And it’s very mean saying that I stole the money. I always take what I want, and papa never says anything about it.”

“Two hundred and fifty pounds is a large sum, Miss Melmotte.”

“It is nothing in our house. It isn’t about the money. It’s because papa wants me to marry another man; and I won’t.”

The gentleman had telegraphed up to Grosvenor Square, and at Euston they were met by one of the Melmotte carriages. Marie was taken home in the carriage, and the box was to follow later in a cab, so that Grosvenor Square might not be

aware of what had happened. Grosvenor Square, of course, very soon knew all about it.

When she got home she was hurried at once to her mother's room – and there she found her father, alone.

“This is your game, is it?” said he, looking down at her.

“Well, papa; yes. You made me do it.”

“You fool! You were going to New York? As if I hadn't found out all about it. Who was going with you?”

“If you have found out all about it, you know, papa.”

“Of course I know; but *you* don't know all about it, you little idiot.”

“No doubt I'm a fool and an idiot. You always say so.”

“Where do you suppose Sir Felix Carbury is now?” She looked at him. “An hour ago he was in bed at his mother's house in Welbeck Street.”

“I don't believe it, papa.”

“Don't you? It's true. If you had gone to New York, you'd have gone alone.”

“I'm sure he didn't stay behind.”

“If you contradict me, I'll box your ears, you jade. He is in London at this moment. Where is Didon?”

“She's gone on board the ship.”

“And where is the money you took from your mother?” Marie was silent. “Who got the cheque changed?”

“Didon.”

“And has she got the money?”

“No, papa.”

“Did you give it to Sir Felix Carbury?”

“Yes, papa.”

“Then I'll be hanged if I don't prosecute him for stealing it.”

“Oh, papa, don't do that. He didn't steal it. I only gave it him to take care of for us. He'll give it you back again.”

“I shouldn't wonder if he lost it at cards, and therefore didn't go to Liverpool. Will you give me your word that you'll never try to marry him again if I don't prosecute him?”

“No, papa. What's the good of making a promise when I should only break it? Why can't you let me have the man I love? What's the good of all the money if people don't have what they like?”

“All the money! What do you know about the money? Look here,” and he took her by the arm and shook her. “I've been very good to you. You've had your share of everything; carriages and horses, bracelets and brooches, silks and gloves.”

“Let me go, papa; you hurt me. I don't care a straw about bracelets and brooches.”

“What do you care for?”

“Only for somebody to love me,” said Marie, looking down.

“You'll soon have nobody to love you, if you go on this way. You've had everything done for you, and if you don't do something for me in return, by G___, you shall have a hard time of it. I know more than you do, you fool.”

“You don't know what'll make me happy.”

“Do you think only of yourself? If you'll marry Lord Nidderdale you'll have a position in the world which nothing can take from you.”

“Then I won’t,” said Marie firmly. Upon this he shook her till she cried, and calling for Madame Melmotte told her not to let the girl out of her presence.

Sir Felix’s condition was worse than Marie’s. He had played at the Beargarden till four in the morning and had then left the club, intoxicated and almost penniless. During the last half hour at the club he had made himself very unpleasant, saying all manner of harsh things about Miles Grendall; declaring that he would not pay his debts, and that he cheated. There was a desperate row. At four o’clock Sir Felix wandered forth into the streets, with nothing more than the change of a ten pound note in his pocket. All his luggage was lying in the hall of the club, and there he left it.

There could hardly have been a more miserable wretch than Sir Felix wandering about the streets that night. He was not drunk enough to forget the condition of his affairs. He felt himself to be an object of ridicule to every wanderer, and of dangerous suspicion to every policeman. What had he better do?

He fumbled in his pocket for his ticket to New York. Should he still make the journey? Then he thought of his luggage, and could not remember where it was. At last he remembered that it was at the club, and tried to get back there, staggering down Bond Street. Then a policeman enquired into his purposes, and when he said that he lived in Welbeck Street, walked back with him to Oxford Street. He had not strength of will left to go back for his luggage and start for Liverpool.

Between six and seven he was knocking at the door in Welbeck Street. As he was supposed to be at Liverpool, the door had been locked. At last it was opened by Lady Carbury. He had fallen more than once, and was soiled with the gutter. A sorer sight cannot meet a mother’s eye than that of a son coming home drunk at six in the morning.

“Oh, Felix!” she exclaimed.

“It’s all up,” he said, stumbling in.

“What has happened, Felix?”

“Discovered, and be d___ to it! The old chap’sh stopped ush.” Drunk as he was, he was able to lie. At that moment the “old chap” was fast asleep in Grosvenor Square, altogether ignorant of the plot; and Marie, joyful with excitement, was getting into the cab. “Better sh go to bed.” So he stumbled upstairs. His wretched mother took off his clothes and his boots, and having left him already asleep, she went to her own room, a miserable woman.



Chapter 51 Which Shall It Be?

Paul Montague reached London from Suffolk early on the Monday morning, and the following day he wrote to Mrs. Hurtle. He almost wished that he had taken Melmotte's offer and gone to Mexico. In that case he would never have seen Hetta Carbury again; but, as things were, of what use was his love? The kind of life of which he dreamed seemed to be far beyond his reach. Perhaps he should go away, and write to Hetta and bid her marry Roger Carbury – the best man that ever lived.

But the journey to Mexico was no longer open to him. He had quarrelled with Melmotte. And as to Mrs. Hurtle, he had promised to go again to Islington. He knew that if he failed to keep his promise, she would come to him.

So he would go there; but first he would try what a letter would do – a plain unvarnished tale. This was his plain tale as he now told it.

My Dear Mrs. Hurtle,

I promised that I would come to you again in Islington, and so I will, if you still require it. But I think that such a meeting can be of no use to either of us. What is to be gained? I do not mean to justify my own conduct. It is not to be justified. When I met you on our journey from San Francisco, I was charmed with your genius, your beauty, and your character. But circumstances have made our lives and temperaments so different, that I am certain that, were we married, we should not make each other happy. Of course the fault was mine; but it is better to own that fault, and to take all the blame, and any evil consequences

(–to be shot, for instance, like the gentleman in Oregon–)

...than to be married knowing that such marriage will be a matter of sorrow and repentance. I cannot blame you for the step you have taken. But I can only adhere to my resolution.

The first day I saw you here in London you asked me whether I was attached to another woman. I could answer you only by the truth. But it was after I had resolved to break my engagement with you that I first knew this girl. It was not because I had come to love her that I broke it. I have no grounds whatever for hoping that my love will lead to any results.

I have now told you as exactly as I can the condition of my mind. If it were possible for me in any way to compensate the injury I have done you, or to suffer retribution, I would do so. I think that our further meeting can avail nothing. But if you wish me to come again, I will come for the last time – because I have promised.

Your most sincere friend,
Paul Montague.

Mrs. Hurtle, as she read this, was torn. All that Paul had written was in accordance with the words written by herself on a scrap of paper which she still kept in her pocket. Those words would be the most generous and the fittest answer she could give. And she longed to be generous. She had all a woman's natural desire to sacrifice herself. Had he been ruined, or blind, or crippled, she

would have stayed by him and have given him comfort. No sacrifice would have been too much for her if she was appreciated and loved in return.

But to sacrifice herself by going away was too much. What woman can endure such sacrifice as that? To give up not only her love, but her anger also! The idea of being tame was terrible to her. She had always protected herself by her own spirit. Now, at last, should she succumb and be trodden on like a worm?

She took out the scrap of paper and read it; the softness in it gratified her. But no, she could not send it. And so she sat down, and wrote rapidly as follows:

Paul Montague,—

I have suffered many injuries, but of all injuries this is the worst and most unmanly. Surely there never was such a coward, never so false a liar. Even poor Caradoc Hurtle never premeditated such wrong as this. What; you are to bind yourself to me by the most solemn promises that can join a man and a woman together, and then tell me – when they have affected my whole life – that they are to go for nothing, because they do not suit your view of things? I have no brother, no man near me; or you would not dare to do this.

You talk of compensation! Do you mean money? It is an insult. But as to retribution; yes. You shall suffer retribution. I desire you to come to me – according to your promise – and you will find me with a horsewhip in my hand. I will whip you till I have not a breath in my body. And then I will see whether you will dare to drag me into a court of law for the assault.

Yes; come. Now you know the welcome you shall find. But should you be afraid and break your promise, I will come to you. I will make London too hot to hold you; and if I do not find you I will go with my story to every friend you have.

I have now told you as exactly as I can the condition of my mind.

Winifred Hurtle.

Having written this she again read the short note, and again gave way to violent tears. But on that day she sent no letter. On the following morning she wrote a third, and sent that. This was the third letter:

Yes. Come.

W. H.

This letter reached Paul Montague at his lodgings. He started immediately for Islington, having no desire to delay the meeting. He had declared his purpose plainly, and she could arm herself if she pleased; but he had now told her that he was resolved to do her wrong. The worst of that was over.

The door was opened for him by Ruby, who looked unhappy. It was the second morning after the night of her imprisonment; and nothing had occurred to alleviate her woe. At this very moment her lover was in bed in Welbeck Street.

“Yes, sir; she’s at home,” said Ruby, with a baby in her arms and a little child hanging on to her dress. “Please, sir, is Sir Felix still in London?” Ruby had written to Sir Felix, but had not received any reply. Paul declared that he knew nothing about Sir Felix, and was shown into Mrs. Hurtle’s room.

“So you have come,” she said, without rising from her chair.

“Of course I came, when you desired it.”

“I don’t know why you should. My wishes do not seem to affect you much. Sit down. So you think it would be best that you and I should never see each other

again?" She was very calm; but it seemed to him that the quietness might at any moment change to violence. He thought that her eye seemed to foretell the spring of the wild-cat.

"I did think so. What more can I say?"

"Oh, clearly nothing." Her voice was very low. "Why should a gentleman trouble himself to say any more than that he has changed his mind? Why make a fuss about such little things as a woman's life, or a woman's heart?"

"What would you have me say?"

"Ah! Suppose you were to say, 'I am a gentleman, and a man of my word, and I repent of my intended perfidy,' do you not think you might get your release that way? Might it not be possible that I should reply that I scorned to be the wife of a man who did not want me?" As she asked this she gradually raised her voice, and half lifted herself in her seat.

"You might indeed."

"But I at least will be true. I should still take you, Paul; with a confidence that I should yet win you by my devotion. I have still some kindness towards you – none to that woman who is I suppose younger and gentler than I." There was nothing to be said in answer to this. "Now that you are going to leave me, Paul, is there any advice you can give me, as to what I shall do next? I have given up every friend in the world for you. I have no home but this room. I have all the world to choose from, but no reason whatever for a choice. I have my property. What shall I do with it, Paul? You might at any rate advise me. You are in some degree responsible, are you not, for my loneliness?"

"I am. But you know that I cannot answer your questions."

"As far as I can see, I had better remain here. I do good at any rate to Mrs. Pipkin. She went into hysterics yesterday when I spoke of leaving her." She paused for a minute. "You thought my letter very short; did you not?"

"It said, I suppose, all you had to say."

"No, indeed. I had much more to say. That was the third letter I wrote. Now you shall see the other two. There is one. You may read that first." Then she handed him the sheet of paper which contained the threat of the horsewhip.

"I am glad you did not send that," he said.

"I meant it."

"But you have changed your mind?"

"Is there anything in it that seems to you to be unreasonable?"

"I am thinking of you, not of myself. I do not think that under any provocation a woman should use a horsewhip."

"Upon my word, I don't know what to say about that. When a woman has no one to help her, is she to bear everything without turning upon those who ill-use her? Shall a woman be flayed alive because it is unfeminine to fight for her own skin? If she is treated as prey, shall she not fight as a beast of prey? Oh, no; it is so unfeminine! Paul, the charm of womanly weakness entered my mind in a soft moment, and then I wrote this other letter." She handed him the scrap which had been written at Lowestoft.

He could hardly finish it because of the tears which filled his eyes. Then he came across the room and threw himself on his knees at her feet, sobbing.

"I have not sent it, you know," she said.

"It hurts me more than the other."

"Nay, I would not hurt you – not at this moment. Sometimes I feel that I could tear you limb from limb, so great is my disappointment and my rage! Why

should I be such a victim? Why should life be an utter blank to me, while you have everything before you? There, you have seen them all. Which will you have?"

"I cannot now take that other as the expression of your mind."

"But it will be my feeling when you have left me – and was when you were with me at the sea-side. And it was so I felt when I got your first letter in San Francisco. Why should you kneel there? You do not love me." She put her hand upon his forehead, and pushed back his hair, and looked into his face. "I wonder whether that other woman loves you. I do not want an answer, Paul. I suppose you had better go." She took his hand and pressed it to her breast. "Tell me one thing. When you spoke of compensation, did you mean – money?"

"No; indeed no."

"I hope not. Well, go. You shall be troubled no more with Winifrid Hurtle." She took the sheet of paper which contained the threat of the horsewhip and tore it into scraps.

"Am I to keep the other?" he asked.

"No. Why? To prove my weakness? That also shall be destroyed." But she took it and restored it to her pocket-book.

"Good-bye, my friend," he said.

"No farewells. Go, and let there be no other word spoken." So he went.

As soon as the front door was closed behind him she rang the bell and begged Ruby to ask Mrs. Pipkin to come to her.

"Mrs. Pipkin," she said, as soon as the woman had entered the room; "everything is over between me and Mr. Montague." She was standing upright in the middle of the room, and as she spoke there was a smile on her face.

"Lord a' mercy," said Mrs. Pipkin, holding up both her hands.

"As I have told you that I was to be married to him, I think it right now to tell you that I'm not going to be married to him."

"Why not? and he such a nice young man, and quiet too."

"As to the why not, I don't know that I am prepared to speak about that. But I'm no longer engaged to him. That's all."

"Dearie me! and you going down to Lowestoft with him, and all." Mrs. Pipkin could not bear to think that she should hear no more of such an interesting story.

"We did go down to Lowestoft together, and we came back – not together. And there's an end of it."

"I'm sure it's not your fault, Mrs. Hurtle. When a marriage doesn't come off, it never is the lady's fault."

"If you please, Mrs. Pipkin, we won't say anything more about it."

"Are you going to leave, ma'am?" said Mrs. Pipkin, alarmed. Where should she get such another lodger as Mrs. Hurtle, who had never questioned an item in a bill since she had been in the house!

"We'll say nothing about that yet, Mrs. Pipkin."

Then Mrs. Pipkin gave her so many assurances of sympathy and help that it almost seemed that she would guarantee her lodger another lover, in place of the one who was now dismissed.



Chapter 52

The Results of Love and Wine

Five o'clock still found Sir Felix Carbury in bed on that fatal Thursday. When his mother crept up to his room, he feigned to be fast asleep. But he had only short snatches of uneasy slumber. He was sick and sore, and could find no comfort anywhere. To lie quiet, trying to soothe the agony of his head, and to remember that as long as he lay there he would be safe from attack by the outer world, was all he could do. A servant brought him tea. He asked for soda and brandy; but there was none to be had.

All was surely now over. He had allowed the heiress to run away without him. She would have started her long journey across the ocean before she could discover that he had failed to be there. He had lost all his money, and hers, and even his mother's. And he could vaguely remember starting some row at the club.

When would he summon courage to enter the club again? When could he show himself again anywhere? All the world would know that Marie Melmotte had attempted to run off with him, and that he had failed her. What lie could he invent to cover his disgrace? If ever a man ought to cut his own throat, surely the time had come for him now. But he simply gathered the bedclothes around him and tried to sleep.

Between five and six his mother again came to him, and when he appeared to sleep, stood with her hand upon his shoulder, thinking. She had bought clothes for him, and had been busy with Hetta for two days preparing for his long journey – having told some lie to her own daughter as to its cause.

When he came, drunk and degraded, back to the house, she had searched his pockets with less scruple than she had ever before felt. She had found his ticket for the vessel and the little money he had left. She could read the riddle plainly. He had stayed at his club till he was drunk, and had gambled away all his money.

What lie should she now tell her daughter? At breakfast she said, "Felix is back. Some plan about the Mexican railway has fallen through, I believe. He is very unhappy and not well. I will see to him." After that Hetta had said nothing all day.

And now, an hour before dinner, Lady Carbury stood by her son's bedside.

"Felix," she said, "speak to me. I know you are awake." He groaned, and turned away, burying himself further under the bedclothes. "You must get up for your dinner. It is near six o'clock."

"All right."

"What is the meaning of this, Felix? You must tell me. You had better trust your mother."

"I am so sick, mother."

"You will be better up. What were you doing last night? Where are your things?"

"At the club."

"Felix, you must tell me. What has been done?"

"It hasn't come off. I didn't get away."

"You said this morning when you came in, that Mr. Melmotte had discovered it."

“Did I? Then I suppose he has. Oh, mother, I wish I could die. I don’t see what’s the use of anything. I won’t get up to dinner. I’d rather stay here.”

“You must have something to eat, Felix.”

“Sam can bring it me. Do let him get me some brandy and water. I’m so faint and sick that I can’t talk. If he’ll get me some soda water and brandy, I’ll tell you all about it then.”

“Where is the money, Felix?”

“I paid it for the ticket,” said he.

Then his mother again left him. The boy went out and got him soda water and brandy, and meat was carried up to him, and then he did sleep for a while.

“Is he ill, mamma?” Hetta asked.

“Yes, my dear.”

“Had you not better send for a doctor?”

“No, my dear. He will be better tomorrow.”

“Mamma, I think you would be happier if you told me everything.”

“I can’t,” said Lady Carbury, bursting into tears. “Don’t ask. What’s the good of asking? It is all misery and wretchedness. There is nothing to tell – except that I am ruined. Don’t talk about it any more. Oh, God, how much better it would be to be childless!”

“Oh, mamma, do you mean me?” said Hetta, rushing to her mother’s side.

“Mamma, say that you do not mean me.”

“It concerns you as well. I wish I were childless.”

“Oh, mamma, do not be cruel to me! Am I not good to you? Do I not try to be a comfort to you?”

“Then marry your cousin, Roger Carbury, who is a good man, and can protect you. You can, at any rate, find a home for yourself, and a friend for us. You are not like Felix. You do not get drunk and gamble. But you are stiff-necked, and will not help me in my trouble.”

“Shall I marry him, mamma, without loving him?”

“Love! Have I been able to love? Why should you not love him? He is a gentleman, and a good, sweet-natured man, who would try to make you happy. Ask yourself whether you do not give as much pain as Felix. It never occurs to you to sacrifice a fantasy for the advantage of others.”

Hetta moved away, and when her mother went upstairs she turned it over in her mind. Could it be right to marry one man when she loved another? Could it be right to marry at all, for the sake of doing good to her family? She knew that Roger had a sweet nature, and also high honour and a noble courage. He was the very friend whose advice she could have asked – had he not wished to make her his wife.

Hetta felt that she could sacrifice much for her mother. Her time, her inclinations, her very heart’s treasure, she could give. She could doom herself to poverty, and loneliness, and heart-rending regrets for her mother’s sake. But she did not know how she could give herself into the arms of a man she did not love.

“I don’t know what there is to explain,” said Felix to his mother. She had asked him why he had not gone to Liverpool, whether he had been interrupted by Melmotte, or whether Marie had changed her mind. But he could not bring himself to tell the truth.

“It didn’t come off,” he said, “and of course I did take some champagne when I found how it was. A fellow gets cut up by that kind of thing. Oh, I heard it at the club – that the whole thing was off. I can’t explain any more. I got the

ticket. There it is. That shows I was in earnest. I spent the £30 in getting it. I suppose the change is there. I haven't another shilling in the world." Of course he said nothing of Marie's money, or of that which he had received from Melmotte. And as his mother knew nothing of these sums she could not contradict him; but she was sure there was a story to be told which would reach her ears sooner or later.

That evening Mr. Broune called in Welbeck Street. He often called now, coming in a cab, staying for a cup of tea, and going back in the same cab to the newspaper office. Since Lady Carbury had refused his offer, Mr. Broune had become almost sincerely attached to her. There was certainly more real friendship between them than had ever existed earlier. He spoke to her more freely about his affairs, and she would speak to him with some attempt at honesty. There was no love-making between them. But he talked of the things that worried him, and also of his editorial triumphs; how he had saved the country millions by telling some grand truth!

Lady Carbury delighted in all this and repaid him by little confidences of her own. She had almost made up her mind to give up Mr. Alf. Mr. Broune thought that Mr. Alf was making a fool of himself with the Westminster election and those attacks on Melmotte.

"London believes Mr. Melmotte to be sound," he said. "I don't pretend that he has never done anything that he ought not to. But he is a man of wealth, power, and genius, and Alf will get the worst of it."

On this evening Lady Carbury at once poured forth all her troubles about Felix. She told him everything.

He had already heard the story. "The young lady went down to Liverpool, and Sir Felix was not there."

"Did she go, then?"

"So I am told; and was met at the station by a police officer, who brought her back to London. She probably still thinks her lover was on board the ship. I pity her."

"How much worse it would have been, had she gone on board," said Lady Carbury.

"Yes; she would have had a sad journey to New York, and a sadder journey back. Has your son told you anything about money?"

"What money?"

"They say the girl entrusted him with a large sum which she had taken from her father. If that is so he certainly ought to lose no time in returning it. It might be done through some friend. I would do it. But to avoid unpleasantness, it should be sent back at once."

This was dreadful to Lady Carbury. She had no money to give back, nor, as she knew, had her son.

"What do you mean by a large sum?" she said, in tears.

"Two or three hundred pounds, perhaps."

"I have not a shilling in the world, Mr. Broune." Then it all came out – the whole story of her poverty, caused by her son's misconduct. She told him every detail of her money affairs from her husband's death up to the present.

"He is eating you up, Lady Carbury. You must put a stop to this."

"But how?"

"You must rid yourself of him. It is dreadful to say so, but it must be done. You must not see your daughter ruined. Find out what money he got from Miss

Melmotte and I will see that it is repaid. Then we will try to get him to go abroad. No; do not contradict me. We can talk of the money another time. I must be off now, but do as I bid you. Send me word of the sum down to the office. God bless you." And so he hurried off.

Early the following morning Mr. Broune received a letter from Lady Carbury, giving the story of the money as far as she had been able to extract it from Sir Felix. Sir Felix declared that Mr. Melmotte had owed him £600, and that he had received £250 out of this from Miss Melmotte. Lady Carbury added that her son had at last confessed that he had lost this money at play. Although this was true, she admitted that she could not safely believe anything told to her by her son.



Chapter 53

A Day in the City

Melmotte had got back his daughter, and was half inclined to let the matter rest there. He would probably have done so had it not become widely known that she had gone off to meet Sir Felix Carbury. Of course Lord Nidderdale would hear of it, and all the trouble that he had taken in that direction would be in vain. Stupid fool of a girl to throw away her chance in that way!

But his anger against Sir Felix was infinitely more bitter than his anger against his daughter. The man had given a written pledge not to marry Marie! Melmotte had of course learned all the details of the cheque for £250. Marie acknowledged that Sir Felix had received the money. If possible he would prosecute the baronet for theft.

Had Melmotte been prudent he would have allowed the money to go without further trouble. Although at this point ready money was very valuable to him, his concerns were of such magnitude that £250 could make little difference. But during the last few months there had grown in him an arrogance, a self-confidence inspired by the worship of other men, which clouded his intellect.

He remembered perfectly his various little transactions with Sir Felix. Indeed it was one of his gifts to remember accurately all money transactions. But Sir Felix's money had been handed to him for the purchase of shares, and did not justify Sir Felix in taking money from his daughter. He thought that an English magistrate would be on his side – especially as he was Augustus Melmotte, the man about to be chosen for Westminster, the man about to entertain the Emperor of China!

The next day was Friday, and he sent a note to Lord Nidderdale asking him to come to the Railway Board. He thought that it would be wise to make a clean breast of it with his hoped-for son-in-law. The young lord would of course know what Marie had done. But Nidderdale had already known that there was a difficulty in regard to Sir Felix Carbury, yet had not given up his suit. It might be possible to persuade him that his own chances might now be improved rather than injured.

Mr. Melmotte on that morning had many visitors, amongst them Mr. Longestaffe. His offices in Abchurch Lane had a front stairs and a back stairs; the front stairs being intended for everybody, whereas the back stairs were only for those who were favoured. Miles Grendall had the command of the stairs, and when Mr. Longestaffe reached Abchurch Lane, he fell at once into Miles's hands.

Miles ushered him through the front stairs passage and into the waiting-room, with much courtesy. Of course Mr. Longestaffe should see Mr. Melmotte as soon as possible. Would Mr. Longestaffe sit down for a few minutes? Mr. Melmotte was very much engaged. At this moment a deputation from the Canadian Government was with him; but Miles thought that they would not be long. Miles would do his very best to get an interview for Mr. Longestaffe.

We will leave Mr. Longestaffe in the front waiting-room, merely noting that he remained there for over two hours.

In the meantime both Mr. Broune and Lord Nidderdale came to the office, and were received without delay. Mr. Broune was the first.

“I’m commissioned to pay some money on behalf of Miss Melmotte,” said Mr. Broune – words which at once procured him admission to the sanctum. The Canadian Deputation must have taken its leave.

Lord Nidderdale, who had arrived almost at the same moment, was shown into a little private room.

“You’ll go in directly,” said Miles.

“I suppose all this about Miss Melmotte is true?” asked Nidderdale.

“She did go off yesterday morning,” said Miles, in a whisper.

“But Carbury wasn’t with her. He staggered out of the club yesterday morning at four o’clock, drunk. He’d lost a pot of money, and had been kicking up a row about you.”

“Brute!” exclaimed Miles, with honest indignation.

“I dare say. But I’m sure he couldn’t get himself down to Liverpool. And I saw all his things lying about the club hall late last night. By George! What a fiasco!” said the young lord. “I wonder what the old boy means to say to me about it.”

Then there was heard the clear tingle of a little silver bell, and Miles told Lord Nidderdale that his time had come.

Melmotte had been very gracious to Mr. Broune, on account of the support given by the *Breakfast Table* to his candidature. But Mr. Broune cut short his speech of thanks.

“I never talk about the *Breakfast Table*,” said he. “I have come about quite another matter. Sir Felix Carbury lately received a sum of money in trust from your daughter, and as Sir Felix’s friend, I have called to return it to you.” Mr. Broune did not like calling himself the friend of Sir Felix, but he did even that for the lady who had been good enough not to marry him.

“Oh, indeed,” said Mr. Melmotte, with a scowl. “D___ scoundrel!”

“We won’t discuss that, Mr. Melmotte. The sum was £250, I think.” And Mr. Broune put a cheque for that amount upon the table. “Good morning.”

They shook hands; then Mr. Broune departed and Melmotte tinkled his bell. As Nidderdale was shown in he put the cheque into his pocket, abandoning any idea of prosecuting Sir Felix.

“Well, my Lord, and how are you?” said he with his pleasantest smile.

Nidderdale declared himself to be as fresh as paint, and – to show a good face before his late intended father-in-law – sang the refrain of an old song:

“Cheer up, Sam;

Don’t let your spirits go down.

There’s many a girl that I know well,

Is waiting for you in the town.”

“Ha, ha,” laughed Melmotte, “very good. But you won’t let this stupid nonsense stand in your way with Marie.”

“Upon my word, sir, I don’t know about that. Miss Melmotte has given convincing proof of her partiality for another gentleman, and of her indifference to me.”

“A silly little romantic baggage! She’s been reading novels till she has learned to think she had to run off with somebody.”

“She doesn’t seem to have succeeded on this occasion, Mr. Melmotte.”

“No; of course we had her back again from Liverpool.”

“But they say that she got further than the gentleman.”

“He is a dishonest, drunken scoundrel. My girl knows that now. Of course, my Lord, I’m very sorry. You know that I’ve been square with you always. She’s my only child, and sooner or later she must have all that I possess. In a year or two I expect that I shall be able to double what I give her now, without touching my capital. Of course you understand that I desire to see her occupying high rank. Now, my Lord, I hope this shall make no difference to you. I do not try to hide anything. This has been a misfortune. Girls will be romantic. But after this she will not be very fond of Sir Felix Carbury.”

“I dare say not. Though, by Jove, girls will forgive anything.”

“She won’t forgive him. She shall hear the whole story. You’ll come and see her just the same as ever!”

“I don’t know about that, Mr. Melmotte.”

“The money will all be there, Lord Nidderdale.”

“The money’s all right, I’ve no doubt. But, by Jove, it’s a rather strong order when a girl has just run away with another man. Everybody knows it.”

“In three months everybody will have forgotten it.”

“To tell you the truth, sir, I think Miss Melmotte has got a will of her own stronger than you give her credit for. She has never given me the slightest encouragement.”

“You just come to the house, and ask her again tomorrow, or on Sunday morning.”

Lord Nidderdale thought for a few moments and then said that perhaps he would come on Sunday morning. After that Melmotte proposed that they should go and have lunch at a Conservative club, before the meeting of the Railway Board. Nidderdale had no objection to the lunch, but expressed a strong opinion that the Board was “rot.”

“That’s all very well for you, young man,” said the chairman, “but I must go there in order that you may enjoy a splendid fortune. Come this way, Nidderdale; there are people waiting for me there who think that a man can attend to business from morning to night without ever having to eat.” And they escaped by the back stairs.

At the club, Mr. Melmotte was warmly welcomed. He played the part of the big City man to perfection, talking loudly to a dozen men at once. He was glad to show the club that Lord Nidderdale had come there with him. The club of course knew that Melmotte’s daughter had tried to run away with Sir Felix Carbury; and Lord Nidderdale’s presence was an assurance that the misfortune had been wiped out.

A little before three Mr. Melmotte returned to Abchurch Lane, intending to regain his room by the back way; while Lord Nidderdale went westward, considering whether he should continue to be a suitor for Miss Melmotte’s hand.

“After all it’s only an affair of money,” he said to himself.

Mr. Longstaffe in the meantime had progressed from weariness to impatience, from impatience to ill-humour, and from ill-humour to indignation. Miles Grendall informed him that the Canadian Deputation would not take itself away. Mr. Longstaffe was accustomed to lunch punctually at two o’clock; and he would not be starved for any Melmotte in Europe. He attempted to see Grendall for the fourth time. But Miles Grendall also liked his lunch, and was therefore declared by one of the junior clerks to be on most important business with Mr. Melmotte.

“Then say that I can’t wait any longer,” said Mr. Longestaffe, stamping out angrily.

At the door he met Mr. Melmotte. “Ah, Mr. Longestaffe,” said the great financier, seizing him by the hand, “you are the very man I wanted to see.”

“I have been waiting two hours,” said the Squire of Caversham.

“Tut, tut; and they never told me!”

“I spoke to Mr. Grendall half a dozen times.”

“Yes, yes. I do remember. My dear sir, I have so many things on my brain, that I hardly know how to get along with them. You are coming to the Board now?”

“No,” said Mr. Longestaffe. “I can stay no longer in the City. My son is very anxious to have the payments made about Pickering.”

“Payments for Pickering!” said Melmotte, assuming an air of absent-minded doubt. “Haven’t they been made?”

“Certainly not,” said Mr. Longestaffe, “unless made this morning.”

“There was something about it, but I cannot just remember what. My second cashier, Mr. Smith, manages all my private affairs, and they go clean out of my head. Pickering! Wasn’t there some question of a mortgage?”

“Of course there was a mortgage; that made three payments necessary instead of two.”

“But there was some unavoidable delay about the papers; something occasioned by the mortgagee. I know there was. But you shan’t be inconvenienced, Mr. Longestaffe.”

“It’s my son, Mr. Melmotte. He’s got a lawyer of his own.”

“I never knew a young man that wasn’t in a hurry for his money,” said Melmotte, laughing. “Oh, yes; there were three payments to be made; one to you, one to your son, and one to the mortgagee. I will speak to Mr. Smith tomorrow – and tell your son that he really need not trouble his lawyer. You won’t come to the Board?”

Mr. Longestaffe declined. A painful rumour had reached him the day before, quietly communicated by a very old friend, a member of a private firm of bankers – that Pickering had been already mortgaged to its full value by its new owner. “If true,” said the banker, “It shows that Mr. Melmotte must be much pressed for money. It does not concern you at all if you have got your price. I suppose you have, or he wouldn’t have the title-deeds.”

Therefore, as Mr. Longestaffe left, he was low in spirits. But nevertheless he had been reassured by Melmotte’s manner.

Sir Felix Carbury of course did not attend the Board; nor did Paul Montague. Lord Nidderdale had had enough of the City for that day, and Mr. Longestaffe had been banished by hunger. The chairman was therefore supported only by Lord Alfred and Mr. Cohenlupe. But the work was got through as well as if those absentees had all attended, and then Mr. Melmotte and Mr. Cohenlupe retired together.

“I must get that money for Longestaffe,” said Melmotte to his friend.

“What, eighty thousand pounds!”

“It isn’t eighty thousand. I’ve renewed the mortgage, and that makes it only fifty. If I can manage half of the son’s money, I can put the father off.”

“You must raise what you can on the whole property.”

“I’ve done that already,” said Melmotte hoarsely.

“And where’s the money gone?”

“Brehgert has had £40,000. You can manage £25,000 for me by Monday?”
Mr. Cohenlupe said that he would try, but that it would be very difficult.



Chapter 54 The India Office

The Conservative party at this particular period was putting its shoulder to the wheel, as it now and then does, so that other parties may not suppose that it is moribund. A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull together – and the old days, before the Radical reforms, will come back again. Venerable patriarchs think of Lord Liverpool and other heroes, and dream of Conservative bishops and lord-lieutenants, and a Conservative ministry that shall remain in for a generation.

If this seat for Westminster could be won by Mr. Melmotte, it would show that the country was sound at heart, and that all the great changes of the last forty years – from the first reform in Parliament down to the Secret Ballot – had been managed by the cunning and treachery of a few ambitious men. Not that the Ballot was regarded by the party as an unmitigated evil, though it was the last triumph of Radical wickedness. The Ballot was on the whole popular with the party, and it might assist Melmotte at Westminster.

Anyone reading the Conservative papers of the time would have thought that England's welfare depended on Melmotte's election. The praise was as loud as the censure of him had been bitter. The chief crime laid to his charge was connected with the ruin of some great continental assurance company, which it was said he had left utterly stranded, with an enormous fortune of his own. Now the *Evening Pulpit*, in reporting this, had said that the company's headquarters were in Paris, whereas in fact they were in Vienna. Did not this blunder show that Mr. Melmotte was a merchant of high honour?

And then two different newspapers, both antagonistic to Melmotte, failed to agree about his wealth. One declared that in truth he had none. The other said that he had derived his wealth from those unfortunate shareholders on the Continent. Could anything be so false, so weak, so wicked – in fact, so “Liberal” as this contradiction? The natural deduction from this, said the Conservative newspapers, was that Mr. Melmotte had an immense fortune, and that he had never robbed any shareholder of a shilling.

Although it was not a Conservative paper, the *Breakfast Table* supported Melmotte because of his commercial position and understanding. Few men had so acute an insight into the great commercial questions of the age as Mr. Augustus Melmotte. No matter what his origin, it would be for the country's good that such a man should sit in the British Parliament. This was the opinion of the *Breakfast Table*.

There was one man who thoroughly believed that the thing most necessary for England's glory was the return of Mr. Melmotte for Westminster. This man was undoubtedly a very ignorant man. He knew nothing of any of the political questions which had vexed England for the last half century, or of the country's political history, or of the working of Parliament. Yet he was fully confident that England ought to demand that Mr. Melmotte should be returned for Westminster. This man was Mr. Melmotte himself.

At this point Mr. Melmotte certainly lost his head. He had enough boldness for the very dangerous game which he was playing; but, as crisis heaped itself upon crisis, he lacked prudence. He spoke of those who opposed him as little

malignant beings, and went about in his open carriage with a disdainful air. He scolded Earls and snubbed Dukes, and yet did it in a manner which showed how proud he was of connecting himself with their pre-eminence. The more arrogant he became the more vulgar he was.

The result was damaging. "Couldn't Lord Alfred say a word to him?" said the Honourable Beauchamp Beauclerk, who, himself in Parliament, had been moving heaven and earth on behalf of the great financial king.

"Alfred's more than half afraid of him," said Lionel Lupton, a young aristocrat, also in Parliament.

"Something really must be done, Mr. Beauclerk," said Mr. Jones, who led a very wealthy firm of builders in the borough. "He is making a great many personal enemies."

"He's the finest old turkey cock out," said Lionel Lupton.

It was decided that Mr. Beauclerk should speak a word to Lord Alfred.

"Alfred," said he at the club one afternoon, "I wonder whether you couldn't say something to Melmotte about his manner." Lord Alfred turned sharply round and looked into his companion's face. "They tell me he is giving offence. Couldn't he draw it a little milder?"

Lord Alfred made his reply almost in a whisper. "If you ask me, I don't think he could."

"You couldn't speak to him, then?"

"Not unless I did it with a horsewhip."

Lord Alfred had been much afflicted that morning. He had spent some hours with Melmotte, going about the borough in the open carriage, and standing just behind him at meetings – and had been nauseated with him. He found his position to be almost insupportable. When he was told to "just open the door," and "just give that message," he meditated revenge. Mr. Beauclerk whistled and withdrew.

The Emperor of China was now in England, and was to be entertained at the India Office on Saturday the 6th of July, and Melmotte's dinner was to take place on the following Monday. The London world was very keen to obtain admission to the India Office, begging for tickets allocated to the under secretaries, assistant secretaries, chief clerks, and head-messengers and their wives.

Now Mr. Melmotte with his family was, of course, supplied with tickets. He had already seen the Emperor at a breakfast in Windsor Park, and at a ball in royal halls. But he had not been presented to the Emperor. He had felt himself to be ill-used, and was offended. He spoke with bitterness of the Royal Family, because he had not been brought to the front rank – and now, at the India Office, was determined to have his due. But he was not on the list of those who would be presented to the Brother of the Sun.

At this period of his career he had taken to dining freely, which was imprudent, as he needed his best intelligence. Wine did not often make him tipsy; but it made him tower in his arrogance till he was almost sure to totter. He went with his wife and daughter and Lord Alfred to the event at the India Office, with some foolish idea that as the India Office was in Westminster, he had a right to demand an introduction because of his candidature. He did succeed in getting hold of an unfortunate under secretary of state, a studious and invaluable young peer, known as Earl De Griffin. He was a shy man, who worked hard night and day, and was second in command at the India Office.

"My Lord," said Melmotte loudly, "I desire to be presented to his Imperial Majesty." Lord De Griffin looked at him in despair, not knowing the great man.

“This is Mr. Melmotte,” said Lord Alfred.

“Oh,” said Lord De Griffin. “I am delighted; ah, yes,” and he made a weak and ineffectual attempt to escape.

Melmotte stood in his way, and repeated his demand.

“I’m afraid it’s all arranged,” said Lord De Griffin. “I don’t know anything about it myself. I’m very sorry.”

“I’m not going to stand this kind of thing,” said Melmotte. The old Marquis of Auld Reekie was close at hand, Lord Nidderdale’s father; and he poked his thumb into Lord Alfred’s ribs. “It is generally understood, I believe,” continued Melmotte, “that the Emperor is to dine at my house on Monday. He don’t dine there unless I’m made acquainted with him before he comes. I mean what I say. I ain’t going to entertain even an Emperor unless I’m good enough to be presented to him.”

“Here’s a row,” said the old Marquis.

“He has taken a little wine,” whispered Lord Alfred. “Melmotte,” he said, still whispering; “upon my word it isn’t the thing. They’re only Indian chaps and Eastern swells who are presented here.”

“Then they should have done it at Windsor,” said Melmotte. “By George, Alfred! I’m in earnest, and somebody had better look to it. If I’m not presented to his Imperial Majesty tonight, by G___, there shall be no dinner in Grosvenor Square on Monday.”

Lord De Griffin was frightened, and Lord Alfred felt that something ought to be done. It might have been wise to have allowed Melmotte to return home with the resolution that his dinner should be abandoned; he would probably have repented before the next morning. But Lord De Griffin went to the Secretary of State, Mr. Wilson, and explained the issue.

“Bring him up,” said Mr. Wilson. “He’s going to do something out in the East, isn’t he?”

Lord de Griffin returned to Melmotte, and whispered, “If you will come with me, it shall be managed. It isn’t just the thing, but as you wish it, it shall be done.”

“I do wish it,” said Melmotte aloud. He was one of those men for whom success always demanded some hoarse note of triumph from his own trumpet.

And so the thing was done. Melmotte, as he was taken up to the imperial footstool, was resolved upon making a little speech; but the awful, silent solemnity of the celestial one quelled even him, and he shuffled by without saying a word.

But he had gained his point, and afterwards became intolerable. Lord Alfred tried to escape after putting Madame Melmotte and her daughter into the carriage, but Melmotte insisted: “Come with me, Alfred; there are two or three things I must settle before I go to bed.”

“I’m about knocked up,” said the unfortunate man.

“Nonsense!” Melmotte put his hand on Lord Alfred’s shoulder, and the poor fellow was beaten. Walking about Mr. Longstaffe’s back room with a brandy and a cigar, Melmotte again sounded his own trumpet.

“I mean to let the fellows know what’s what,” he said. “They won’t find many people to spend ten thousand pounds in entertaining a guest of the country. I don’t know of any other man of business who could do it. But I intend to be respected. The Prince treated me very scurvily, Alfred, and I shall take an

opportunity of telling him so on Monday. I suppose a man may speak to his own guests.”

“You might turn the election against you if you said anything the Prince didn’t like,” said Lord Alfred.

“D ___ the election, sir. I stand before the electors of Westminster as a man of business, not as one of the Prince’s toadies. I can tell you that I think myself quite as great a man as any Prince. I’ll teach them a lesson before long. Didn’t I teach ’em a lesson tonight, eh? Didn’t I make ’em do as I chose?”

This went on through the whole of a cigar; and afterwards, as Lord Alfred slowly walked back to his lodgings, he thought deeply whether there might not be a means of escaping from his servitude.

“Beast! Brute! Pig!” he said to himself over and over again as he returned to Mount Street.



Chapter 55 Clerical Charities

Melmotte's success, wealth, and history were much discussed in Suffolk at this time. He had stayed at Caversham, and many in those parts knew that Miss Longestaffe was now living in his house in London. The purchase of the Pickering estate had been noticed in the Suffolk newspapers, as had rumours of his past frauds. Miss Melmotte's attempt at running away had also been reported in the papers.

Suffolk is very old-fashioned; and did not like the Melmotte fashion. Although Conservative, Suffolk did not believe in Melmotte as a Conservative Member of Parliament. Suffolk on this occasion was rather ashamed of the Longestaffes, and remembered that it was barely the other day since the original Longestaffe was in trade. This selling of Pickering to Melmotte was a mean thing.

Mr. Hepworth was with Roger one morning, and they were talking about the attempted elopement.

"I know nothing about it," said Roger, "Of course I knew when they were down here that Sir Felix hoped to marry her. But nothing could have been more unfortunate for either of them than such a marriage. Melmotte will probably be bankrupt before long, and my cousin not only has not a shilling, but could not keep one if he had it."

"You think Melmotte will turn out a failure."

"A failure! Of course he's a failure – a hollow vulgar fraud from beginning to end. What are we coming to when such as he is an honoured guest at our tables? These leaders of fashion who invite him know he is a swindler. But men reconcile themselves to swindling. Dishonesty is no longer odious to them."

Roger dined with the Bishop of Elmham that evening, and Melmotte was again discussed.

"He has given £200 to the Curates' Aid Society," said the Bishop. "I don't think a man could spend his money better."

"Clap-trap!" said Roger bitterly.

"The money is not clap-trap, my friend. I presume that the money is really paid."

"I don't feel at all sure of that."

"Such a gift shows him to be a useful member of society, and I am always for encouraging useful men."

"Even though their aims may be vile and pernicious?"

"There you beg ever so many questions, Mr. Carbury. Mr. Melmotte wishes to get into Parliament. I do not know why we should say that ambition is pernicious or vile." Roger frowned and shook his head. "Of course Mr. Melmotte is not the sort of gentleman whom you regard as fitting for a Conservative constituency. But the country is changing."

"It's going to the dogs, I think."

"I think that men on the whole live better lives than they did a hundred years ago," said the Bishop. "There is a wider spirit of justice and mercy, a more lively charity, and if less religious enthusiasm, less also of superstition. Men will hardly go to heaven, Mr. Carbury, simply by doing as their fathers did."

“I suppose men will go to heaven, my Lord, by doing as they would be done by.”

“There can be no safer lesson. But who comes up to that teaching? Do you not wish for, nay, almost demand, instant pardon for any trespass that you may commit, of temper, or manner, for instance? and are you always ready to forgive in that way yourself?”

“I do not put myself forward as an example.”

“I apologise; a clergyman is apt to forget that he is not in the pulpit. Of course I speak of men in general. Taking society as a whole, I think that it grows better from year to year, and not worse. I think, too, that they who grumble at the times, and declare that each age is worse than its forerunner, look only at the small things, and ignore the course of the world at large. And as for freedom, has it not grown almost every year? The world perhaps is managed more justly than you think, Mr. Carbury.”

“My Lord, I believe you’re a Radical at heart,” said Roger.

“Very likely, very likely.”

But to Roger everything seemed to be out of joint. He had that morning received a letter from Lady Carbury, reminding him of the promise of a loan, should a time come to her of great need. It had come very quickly. Roger Carbury did not in the least begrudge her the hundred pounds which he sent; but he did begrudge any money going to the iniquitous schemes of Sir Felix.

He was disheartened and disgusted by all the circumstances of the Carbury family. There was Paul Montague, bringing a woman such as Mrs. Hurtle down to Lowestoft, utterly unable, Roger thought, to free himself; and yet on Montague’s account, Hetta was cold and hard to him. He was sure that he could make her happy; or rather, his way of life could. What would be Hetta’s lot if her heart was given to Paul Montague?

When he got home, he found Father Barham sitting in his library. The wind had recently blown the roof off the priest’s cottage; and Roger Carbury, though his affection for him was waning, had offered him shelter while the damage was being repaired. Carbury Manor was very much more comfortable than the priest’s home, and Father Barham was in clover.

Father Barham was reading his favourite newspaper, *The Surplice*, when Roger entered the room.

“Have you seen this, Mr. Carbury?” he said. “Mr. Melmotte is a convert to our faith. He is a great man.”

“Melmotte a convert to Romanism! I don’t believe it.”

Then Father Barham read out: “Mr. Augustus Melmotte, the great financier, has presented a hundred guineas towards the erection of an altar for the new church of St. Fabricius, in Tothill Fields. An accompanying letter leaves little doubt that the new member for Westminster will be a member of the Catholic party in the House, during the next session.”

“That’s another dodge, is it?” said Carbury. “The other day, the great man gave £200 to the Protestant Curates’ Aid Society. I have just left the Bishop exulting over it.”

“I don’t believe that – or it may be a parting gift to his former Church.”

“Would you really be proud of Mr. Melmotte as a convert?”

“I would be proud of the lowest human being that has a soul,” said the priest; “but of course we are glad to welcome the wealthy and the great.”

“The great! oh dear!”

“A man is great who has made for himself such a position as Mr. Melmotte’s. And when such a one leaves your Church and joins our own, it is a sign to us that the Truth is prevailing.”

Roger Carbury, without another word, took his candle and went to bed.



Chapter 56

Father Barham Visits London

It was considered to be a great thing to catch the Roman Catholic vote in Westminster. To catch the Protestant and the Roman Catholic vote at the same time is difficult; but it was attempted now by Mr. Melmotte and his friends.

It was perhaps thought that the Protestants would not notice the £100 given for the altar to St. Fabricius; but Mr. Alf took care that Mr. Melmotte's religious opinions should be reported. No article at that time created so much interest as that which appeared in the *Evening Pulpit*, under the heading "For Priest or Parson?"

In this delightfully pungent article, Mr. Alf's writer declared that it was really important that the nation should know the nature of Mr. Melmotte's faith. That he was a highly religious man was most certain, from his two recent donations – doubtless part of a regular flow of Christian benevolence. The *Evening Pulpit* did not imagine that so great a man as Mr. Melmotte looked for any return in this world from his generosity. But still, as Protestants naturally wish to be represented in Parliament by a Protestant member, and Roman Catholics by a Catholic, perhaps Mr. Melmotte would not object to declare his creed.

This was biting; but Mr. Melmotte and his manager were not foolish enough to allow it to influence them. If the Protestants chose to believe that he was hyper-protestant, and the Catholics that he was tending towards papacy, so much the better for him.

It may be doubted whether the donation to the Curates' Aid Society had much effect. It may perhaps have induced a few religiously-minded men to go to the poll. But the donation to St. Fabricius certainly had results. It was made much of by the Roman Catholic party generally, till a report got itself spread abroad that Mr. Melmotte was going to join the Church of Rome.

These manœuvres require delicate handling, or evil may follow instead of good. On the second day after the question had been asked in the *Evening Pulpit*, an answer to it appeared: "For Priest and not for Parson." Therein, various assertions made by Roman Catholic journals were brought together, to show that Mr. Melmotte really had made up his mind on this important question. All the world knew, said Mr. Alf's writer, that with that keen sense of honesty which was the Great Financier's peculiar characteristic, he had doubted whether he could serve the nation best as a Liberal or as a Conservative. He had solved that doubt with wisdom. And now this other doubt had passed through the crucible, and a golden certainty had been produced. Westminster at last knew that Mr. Melmotte was a Roman Catholic.

Now it was clear that no real Roman Catholic could hope to be elected. This article vexed Mr. Melmotte, and he proposed to his friends that they send a letter to the *Breakfast Table* asserting that he kept to the Protestant faith of his ancestors. But, as it was suspected by many that Melmotte had been born a Jew, this assurance would perhaps have been too strong.

"Do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Beauchamp Beauclerk. "If anyone asks you, say you are a Protestant. But don't go writing letters."

Unfortunately the gift of an altar to St. Fabricius was such a godsend that priests around the country were determined to cling to the good man who had bestowed his money so well. Father Barham was ready to sacrifice anything in the good cause of returning the country to the Catholic faith – his time, his health, and his money when he had any.

In his resolution Father Barham was admirable. But he had no scruple whatsoever as to the nature of the arguments and facts he would use. With mingled ignorance and faith he had at once made up his mind that Melmotte was a great man, and that he might be made a great instrument on behalf of the Pope. He believed in the man's enormous wealth and power, and believed that he was at heart a Catholic. That he should profess the Protestant religion was not to Father Barham either improbable or distressing.

He had for some time been preparing for a trip to London in order to spend a week in retreat at the cells of St. Fabricius. And so he now travelled there. He had conceived the great idea of having a word with Mr. Melmotte himself; he wished to meet a man who was perhaps destined to be the means of restoring the true faith to his country.

On Saturday night – that night on which Mr. Melmotte had so successfully exercised his greatness at the India Office – Father Barham took up his quarters in the cloisters of St. Fabricius; he spent the Sunday at various church services; and on the Monday morning he sought Mr. Melmotte.

He went first to Abchurch Lane. But on this day, and the next, which would be the day of the election, Mr. Melmotte was not expected in the City, and the priest was told that he might be in Grosvenor Square. There he found Mr. Melmotte superintending the arrangements for the entertainment of the Emperor.

The house was in great confusion. Wreaths of flowers and green boughs were being hung up, last daubs of heavy gilding were being given to the wooden capitals of mock pillars, incense was being burned to kill the smell of the paint, tables were being fixed and chairs moved. The hall was in chaos, and poor Father Barham, who had heard a good deal of the Westminster election, but not a word about the Emperor, was at a loss to conceive why these operations were carried on. But through the chaos he made his way, and found himself in the presence of Mr. Melmotte in the banqueting hall.

Mr. Melmotte was with Lord Alfred and his son. He was standing in front of the chair which had been arranged for the Emperor, and he was very angry indeed. He had been given to understand, when the dinner was first planned, that he was to sit opposite his guest – which he thought meant immediately in front of the Emperor of Emperors. It was now explained to him that this could not be done. In front of the Emperor there must be a wide space, so that his Majesty could look down the hall; and the same for the royal princesses and princes who sat by him. In this way Mr. Melmotte's own seat became really quite obscure.

Lord Alfred was having a very bad time of it. "It's that fellow from *The Herald* office did it, not me," he said, almost in a passion. "I don't know how people ought to sit."

"I'm d___ if I'm going to be treated this way in my own house," were the first words which the priest heard. And as Father Barham walked towards him, Mr. Melmotte was trying, in vain, to move his own seat nearer to the Imperial Majesty. A bar had been put up that kept him from the centre of his own hall.

“Who the d___ are you?” he demanded of the priest, who was clothed in his usual very rusty brown black. A comely priest in glossy black might have been received with better grace.

Father Barham stood humbly with his hat off. Outward humility – at any rate at the start of an enterprise – was the rule of his life.

“I am the Reverend Mr. Barham,” he said, “the priest of Beccles in Suffolk. I believe I am speaking to Mr. Melmotte.”

“That’s my name, sir. And what may you want? Who let him in, Alfred? Can anybody who pleases walk into my hall?”

“I came on a mission which I hope may be pleaded as my excuse,” said the priest. Although he was bold, he found it difficult to explain his mission.

“Is it business?” asked Lord Alfred.

“Certainly,” said Father Barham with a smile.

“Then you had better call at the office in Abchurch Lane,” said his lordship.

“My business is not of that nature. I am a poor servant of the Cross, who is anxious to know from the lips of Mr. Melmotte himself that his heart is inclined to the true Faith.”

“Some lunatic,” said Melmotte. “See that there ain’t any knives about, Alfred.”

“Not mad, sir, only enthusiastic for the souls of others.”

“Just get a policeman, Alfred.”

“You will hardly need a policeman, Mr. Melmotte,” continued the priest. “If I might speak to you alone for a few minutes—”

“Certainly not. I am very busy. I wonder whether anybody knows him.”

“Mr. Carbury, of Carbury Hall, is my friend.”

“Carbury! D___ the Carburys! Did they send you here? A set of beggars! Why don’t you do something, Alfred, to get rid of him?”

“You’d better go,” said Lord Alfred. “Don’t make a rumpus, there’s a good fellow; just go.”

“There shall be no rumpus,” said the priest, growing angry. “I asked for you at the door, and was told to come in by your servants. Have I been uncivil that you should treat me in this fashion?”

“You’re in the way,” said Lord Alfred.

“It’s gross impertinence,” said Melmotte. “Go away.”

“Will you not tell me whether I shall pray for you as one whose steps are in the right path; or as one still in error and darkness?”

“What the mischief does he mean?” asked Melmotte.

“He wants to know whether you’re a papist,” said Lord Alfred.

“What the deuce is it to him?” almost screamed Melmotte – whereupon Father Barham bowed and took his leave.

“Remarkable,” said Melmotte.

“Mad as a hatter,” said Lord Alfred.

“But why did he come to me in his madness? I’ll tell you what it is. There isn’t a man in all England at this moment thought of so much as I am. I wonder whether the *Morning Pulpit* people sent him here to find out my real religion.”

“Mad as a hatter,” said Lord Alfred again; “just that and no more.”

“My dear fellow, the truth is they don’t know what to make of me; and I don’t intend that they shall. Now, can we have this bar down?”

And he succeeded in removing the bar which had been put up to prevent his intrusion on his own guests in his own house.

“That fellow’s coming here is a sign of the times,” he went on. “Before long they’ll want to know where I have my clothes and boots made!” Perhaps the most remarkable circumstance in Melmotte’s remarkable career was the fact that he almost came to believe in himself.

Father Barham went away disgusted; and yet not disheartened. The man had blasphemed and cursed, and had been outrageously uncivil to a minister of God. He was no gentleman. But, none the less, he might be a good Catholic – or good enough at any rate to be influential. To his eyes Melmotte was a much more hopeful prospect than Roger Carbury.

“He insulted me,” said Father Barham to a brother priest that evening at St. Fabricius. “But it is not by the hands of polished men, nor even of the courteous, that this work has to be done. He was preparing for some great festival, and was intent on that.”

“He entertains the Emperor of China today,” said the brother priest.

“The Emperor of China! Ah, that accounts for it. I do think that he is on our side, though he gave me little encouragement for saying so. Will they vote for him, here at Westminster?”

“Our people will. They think that he is rich and can help them.”

“There is no doubt of his wealth, I suppose,” said Father Barham.

“Some people doubt; but others say he is the richest man in the world.”

“He looked like it – and spoke like it,” said Father Barham. “Think what such a man might do! Though he was uncivil, I am glad that I saw him.” Father Barham, with singular simplicity, made himself believe before he returned to Beccles that Mr. Melmotte was certainly a Roman Catholic.



Chapter 57

Lord Nidderdale Tries his Hand Again

Lord Nidderdale had half consented to renew his suit to Marie Melmotte, and had agreed to call at Melmotte's house on Sunday. However, he did not go to Bruton Street. Though not much given to severe thinking, he did feel that on this occasion there was need for thought.

His father's property was not large. His father and his grandfather had both been extravagant, and he had added to their debts. In such families as his, it is generally understood that matters shall be put right by marrying an heiress. Rank squanders money; trade makes it; and then trade purchases rank. The arrangement is well understood, and was so approved of by the old marquis that he had felt himself justified in eating up the property, which his son's future marriage would renew as a matter of course.

Nidderdale himself had never dissented; but had claimed his right to "have his fling" before he married. His indulgent father had felt that it would be foolish to oppose so natural a desire; but there arose some difference as to the duration of the fling, and the father had at last informed his son that if the fling were carried on much longer it would mean war between himself and his heir.

Nidderdale, whose sense and temper were good, assured his father that he did not want that, and was ready for the heiress as soon as she should be put in his way. The alliance with Marie Melmotte had been arranged at Auld Reekie Castle during the last winter, and the reader knows the result.

But difficulties had arisen: the young lady preferred another gentleman, and disagreeable stories were afloat, not only about the way in which the money had been made, but even as to its very existence.

The Marquis, however, hated to be beaten. As far as he could learn, the money would be there. A considerable sum had in truth been already settled on Marie. Her father had armed himself with a power of attorney for drawing the income, but had signed over the property to his daughter, so that in the event of unforeseen accidents he might retire to obscure comfort. Marie had been quite correct in her story to Felix Carbury. And the Marquis's lawyer had found that if Marie married before she had restored this money to her father, her husband would have this amount as a certainty, with the immense remainder in prospect.

Therefore the Marquis was determined to persevere. Pickering was to be added. Mr. Melmotte had been asked to depone the title-deeds, and had promised to do so as soon as the day of the wedding was fixed.

But Nidderdale too had his doubts. That absurd elopement was perhaps his strongest objection. Sir Felix had not gone with her; but one doesn't wish to have one's intended wife even attempt to run off with anyone but oneself.

"She'll be sick of him by this time," his father said. "What does it matter, if the money's there?" The Marquis seemed to think that the escapade had simply been the girl's revenge against his son for having made his arrangements exclusively with Melmotte, instead of devoting himself to her. Nidderdale acknowledged that he had been remiss. She had more spirit than he had thought. By the Sunday evening he had resolved to try again. Previously, he had expected

that the plum would fall into his mouth. He would now stretch out his hand to pick it.

On the Monday he went to Bruton Street at lunch time. Melmotte and the two Grendalls had just come over from their work in Grosvenor Square, and the financier was full of the priest's visit. Madame Melmotte was there, and Miss Longestaffe. After they had sat down, Marie came in.

Nidderdale got up and shook hands with her, as though nothing had happened. Marie, putting a brave face upon it, with a struggle succeeded in saying an ordinary word or two. Her position was uncomfortable. When a girl has run away expecting her lover to go with her, and has then been brought back, her lover not having stirred, her state of mind must be peculiarly harassing. But Marie's courage was good, and she ate her lunch sitting next to Lord Nidderdale.

Melmotte was very gracious to the young lord. "Did you ever hear anything like that, Nidderdale?" he said, speaking of the priest's visit.

"Mad as a hatter," said Lord Alfred.

"I don't know. I shouldn't wonder if he had been sent by the Archbishop of Westminster."

"Mad as a hatter, nothing else," said Lord Alfred.

"You should have seen him, Nidderdale."

"I suppose you didn't ask him to the dinner, sir."

"D___ the dinner, I'm sick of it," said Melmotte, frowning. "We must go back, Alfred. Come, Miles. Ladies, I shall expect you to be ready at exactly a quarter to eight. His Imperial Majesty is to arrive at eight, and I must be there to receive him. You, Madame, will have to receive your guests in the drawing-room."

The ladies went upstairs, and Lord Nidderdale followed them. Miss Longestaffe departed to her dear friend Lady Monogram. There fell upon Madame Melmotte the duty of leaving the young people together; but she did not know how to get up and go out of the room. The troubles of these times were almost too much for her. She had no pleasure from her grandeur, and probably no belief in her husband's achievements. She liked Nidderdale, and wondered at Marie's preference for Sir Felix; so at last she plucked up her courage, rose from her chair, and made for the door.

"Mamma, where are you going?" said Marie, also rising. Madame Melmotte, putting her handkerchief up to her face, declared that she had a toothache.

"I must see if I can't do something for her," said Marie, hurrying to the door. But Lord Nidderdale was too quick for her, and stood with his back to it.

"Your mother has gone on purpose so that I may speak to you," he said. "Why should you grudge me the opportunity?"

Marie returned to her chair. She also had thought much of her own position since her return from Liverpool. Why had Sir Felix not been there? Why had he not tried to see her since her return? Why had he made no attempt to write to her? She had waited in the square, and left the gates open, but he had not come. Her father had told her that he had not gone to Liverpool – that he had never intended to go. Melmotte had been very savage about the money. But even if Felix had spent the money, why was he not man enough to come and say so? Marie could have forgiven that fault – could have forgiven even the gambling and drunkenness which had caused the failure, if he had had the courage to come and confess to her. What she could not forgive was indifference – or cowardice.

She had more than once almost doubted his love. Now, as far as she could see, he was ready to consent that the thing was over between them. No doubt she could write to him; but if he really loved her he would come to her. She would not fling herself at a man's head. Therefore she had done nothing, beyond leaving the garden gates open on the Sunday morning.

But what was she to do with herself? She also felt, she knew not why, that the present turmoil of her father's life might be brought to an end by some dreadful convulsion. No girl could be more anxious to be married and taken away from her home. If Sir Felix did not appear again, what should she do? She did not suppose that her journey to Liverpool would frighten all the men away. But she had thought that it would put an end to Lord Nidderdale's courtship; yet here he was now, standing with his back to the door, and cutting off her retreat.

"I don't know what you should have to say to me, Lord Nidderdale."

"Why shouldn't I have something to say to you?"

"Because – oh, you know why. Besides, I've told you ever so often that I liked somebody else better."

"Perhaps I don't believe you."

"Well; that is impudent! I've given you reason to believe it, at any rate."

"You can't be very fond of him now, I should think."

"That's all you know, my lord. Why shouldn't I be fond of him? Accidents will happen, you know."

"I don't want to make any allusion to anything unpleasant, Miss Melmotte."

"You may say just what you please. All the world knows about it. Of course I went to Liverpool, and papa had me brought back again."

"Why did not Sir Felix go?"

"I don't think, my lord, that that is any business of yours."

"But I think that it is, and I'll tell you why. You might as well let me say what I've got to say."

"It can't make any difference."

"You were engaged to me before you knew him, you know."

"You broke it off," said Marie.

"I know I did. Or, rather, your father and my father broke it off for us."

"If we had cared for each other they couldn't have broken it off. Nobody in the world could break me off as long as I felt that he really loved me. But you didn't care, not a bit. You did it just because your father told you. And so did I. But I know better than that now. And now you've come again; because your father has told you again. And you'd better go away."

"There's a great deal of truth in what you say."

"It's all true, my lord."

"It isn't true now. How was I to love you when I had seen so little of you? I do love you now."

"Then you needn't," she said, "for it isn't any good."

"I should be truer to you than that fellow who wouldn't take the trouble to go down to Liverpool."

"You don't know why he didn't go."

"Perhaps I do. But I did not come here to say anything about that."

"Why didn't he go, Lord Nidderdale?" She asked the question with an altered tone. "If you really know, you might as well tell me."

"No, Marie; that's just what I ought not to do. But *he* ought to tell you. Do you really believe that he means to come back to you?"

“I don’t know,” she said, sobbing. “I do love him; I do indeed. I would be cut in pieces for him. I know that you are more good-natured than he is. But he did like me. You never did, not a bit. No; go away. I don’t care what he is; I’ll be true to him. Go away, Lord Nidderdale. I don’t want you to come. No; I won’t say any kind word to you. I love Sir Felix Carbury better – than any person – in all the world. There! I don’t know whether you call that kind, but it’s true.”

“Say good-bye to me, Marie.”

“Oh, I don’t mind saying good-bye. Good-bye, my lord; and don’t come any more.”

“Yes, I shall. Good-bye, Marie. You’ll find the difference between me and him yet.” So he left, and as he sauntered away he thought that upon the whole he had prospered, considering the extreme difficulties in carrying on his suit.

“She’s quite a different sort of girl from what I thought,” he said to himself. “Upon my word, she’s awfully jolly.”

Marie, after this interview, walked about the room almost in dismay. It was borne in upon her that Sir Felix Carbury was not as nice as she had thought him. Of his beauty there was no doubt; but she could have trust in no other good quality. Why did he not come to her? Why did he not show some pluck? Why did he not tell her the truth? Lord Nidderdale was, she thought, not at all beautiful. He had a commonplace, rough face, with a turned-up nose, high cheek bones, sandy-coloured whiskers, and bright laughing eyes – not at all an Adonis. But if he had only made love at first as he had attempted to do it now, she thought that she would have allowed herself to be cut in pieces for him.



Chapter 58

Mr. Squercum is Employed

While these things were happening, horrid rumours were spreading from the City westwards to the House of Commons, which was sitting this Monday afternoon with a prospect of adjourning at seven o'clock because of the banquet for the Emperor. It is difficult to explain the exact nature of this rumour, as it was not thoroughly understood by those who spread it. But certainly the word 'forgery' was whispered by more than one pair of lips.

Many of Melmotte's staunchest supporters thought that he was wrong not to show himself that day in the City. What good could he do pottering about in the banqueting room? There were people to manage that kind of thing. In such a crisis as this, he should have been in the City. Men will whisper forgery behind a man's back who would not dare even to think it before his face.

Of this particular rumour our young friend Dolly Longestaffe was the parent. Unawed by his father, Dolly had gone to his attorney, Mr. Squercum, immediately after Mr. Longestaffe first took his seat at the Railway Board.

"I don't know why Mr. Melmotte is to be different from anybody else," he had said to his father. "When I buy a thing and don't pay for it, it is because I haven't got the tin, and I suppose it's the same with him. I don't see why he should have got hold of the place till the money was paid down."

"Of course it's all right," said the father. "You understand nothing at all."

"Of course I'm slow," said Dolly. "I don't comprehend these things. But Squercum does."

"You'll ruin me and yourself too, if you go to such a man as that. Why can't you trust Mr. Bideawhile? Slow and Bideawhile have been the family lawyers for a century." But Dolly made some disparaging remark, and went his way. The father knew that his boy would go to Squercum. All he could do was to press Mr. Melmotte for the money; but in vain, as the reader has already learned.

Squercum was a thorn in the side of all the Bideawhiles, who piqued themselves on the decorous and orderly transaction of their business. It was their rule that anything done quickly must be done badly. They were never in a hurry. Squercum was the very opposite to this. He had established himself, without a partner, at a little office in Fetter Lane, and had there made a name for getting things done in a new and marvellous fashion. It was said that he was fairly honest, though he did sharp things, no doubt, and had no hesitation in supporting the interests of sons against those of their fathers.

He was a mean-looking little man, about forty, who always wore an old dress coat, a dingy waistcoat, and light trousers of some different hue. He generally had on dirty shoes and gaiters. He had putty-formed features, a squat nose, a large mouth, and bright blue eyes. He was very quick and active, doing his law work himself, and trusting to his three or four juvenile clerks for little more than copying.

Squercum sat at a desk covered with papers in chaotic confusion, on a swivel chair. When clients came to him, he turned himself sharp round, sticking out his dirty shoes, and throwing himself back with his hands thrust into his

pockets. In this attitude he would listen to his client's story, and would himself speak as little as possible.

He now listened as Dolly told him of the delay in the payment for Pickering.

"Melmotte's at Pickering?" asked the attorney. Dolly informed him how tradesmen had already half knocked down the house. Squercum asked what authority Dolly had given for the surrender of the title-deeds. Dolly declared that he had given authority for the sale, but none for the surrender. Some time ago his father had put before him, for his signature, a letter prepared in Mr. Bideawhile's office, which Dolly said that he had refused even to read, and certainly had not signed. Squercum said that he'd look into it, and bowed Dolly out of his room.

"They've got him to sign something when he was drunk," said Squercum to himself, knowing something of his client's habits. "I expect his father did it, not that pompous old fool Bideawhile." He went to work, however, making himself detestably odious among the very respectable clerks in Mr. Bideawhile's office.

And now there came this rumour which accused Mr. Melmotte of forgery in his mode of acquiring the Pickering property. The nature of the forgery was described in various ways. But there were many who believed that some great fraud had been committed; and it was ascertained that the Pickering estate had already been mortgaged by Melmotte to its full value – a report which injured his credit.

As the day went on, other news was told about other properties. Houses in the East-end of London were said to have been bought and sold, without payment of the purchase money when buying, and with receipt of the purchase money when selling.

Squercum himself saw the letter in Mr. Bideawhile's office which gave the son's permission for the surrender of the title-deeds. That letter purported to have Dolly's signature. Squercum knew that his client was not always clear in the morning as to anything he had done on the preceding evening. But the signature, though it was scrawled as Dolly always scrawled it, was not like the scrawl of a drunken man.

The letter was said to have been sent to Mr. Bideawhile's office with other letters and papers, direct from old Mr. Longestaffe. Such was the statement made at first by the Bideawhiles, who had no doubt of the genuineness of the letter or of the accuracy of their statement.

Then Squercum saw his client again, and returned to the charge at Bideawhile's office, with the positive assurance that the signature was a forgery. Dolly had insisted that he had signed no letter when he was tight.

"Never did such a thing in my life, and nothing could make me," said Dolly. "I'm never tight except at the club, and the letter couldn't have been there. I never signed it. That's flat." Dolly was intent on going at once to his father, or Melmotte or Bideawhile's, and making "no end of a row," but Squercum stopped him.

"We'll just ferret this thing out quietly," he said.

Mr. Longestaffe, the father, had heard nothing of the matter till the Saturday after his last interview with Melmotte in the City. He had then called at Bideawhile's office, and was shown the letter. He declared at once that he had never sent the letter to Mr. Bideawhile. He had begged his son to sign it and his son had refused. He did not distinctly remember what he had done with the unsigned letter. He believed he had left it with the other papers; but it was possible that his son might have taken it away. He acknowledged that at the time he had been both angry and unhappy. He had more than once been in his own

study in Bruton Street since Mr. Melmotte had occupied the house, having left various papers there under his own lock and key. It had been agreed when he let the house that he should have access to his study. He thought it probable that he would have kept the unsigned letter locked up there, when he sent away the other papers.

On looking at Mr. Longestaffe's own letter to the lawyer, it was found that he had not even alluded to that which his son had been asked to sign; but that he had said that his son was still creating difficulties. Mr. Bideawhile was obliged to confess that there had been a lack of caution among his own people. This allusion to the creation of difficulties by Dolly, accompanied by Dolly's supposed letter doing away with all difficulties, should have attracted notice. Dolly's letter must have come in a separate envelope; but the envelope could not be found.

Such were the facts as far as they were known at Slow and Bideawhile's office. The Bideawhiles were still perfectly sure that Dolly had signed the letter, believing the young man to be quite incapable of knowing on any day what he had done on the day before.

Squercum was quite sure that his client had not signed it. And certainly Dolly's manner on this occasion was convincing.

"Yes," he said to Squercum; "I'm lack-a-daisical. But I know when I'm lack-a-daisical and when I'm not. Awake or asleep, drunk or sober, I never signed that letter." And Mr. Squercum believed him.

It would be hard to say how the rumour first got into the City on this Monday morning. Mr. Squercum's little matter alone might hardly have attracted any attention; but other facts were coming to light about Melmotte's affairs. A great many shares of the South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway had been thrown upon the market, all of which had passed through the hands of Mr. Cohenlupe. Then there was the mortgage of this Pickering property, for which the money certainly had not been paid; and there was the sale of half a street of houses near the Commercial Road, by which a large sum of money had come into Mr. Melmotte's hands.

It might, no doubt, all be right. There were many who thought that it would all be right, and expressed contempt for these rumours. But it was felt to be a pity that Mr. Melmotte was not in the City.

This was the day of the dinner. The Lord Mayor had made up his mind that he would not go, feeling that he needed to be more careful than other men. Others of the chosen few of the City who had been honoured with invitations resolved to absent themselves unless the Lord Mayor went. The affair was much discussed, and six City men defaulted. A seventh was taken ill and sent a note to Miles Grendall excusing himself.

But there was a reverse worse than this, and more injurious to Melmotte. The House of Commons had heard the tidings in an exaggerated form. It was whispered that Melmotte had been detected in forging the deed of conveyance of a large property, and that he had already been visited by policemen. The *Evening Pulpit* contained a mysterious paragraph:

"A rumour is prevalent that enormous frauds have been committed by a gentleman whose name we are unwilling to mention. If it be so it is remarkable that they should have come to light at the present moment."

No one wishes to dine with a swindler. The Emperor of China no doubt was going to dine with this man. The motions of Emperors are managed with such

ponderous care that it was held to be impossible now to save the country from the disgrace that would be felt if it turned out that he had been entertained by a forger.

The thing was far from certain; but many men were unhappy. How would the story be told hereafter if Melmotte should be arrested for forgery as soon as the Eastern Monarch had left his house? How would it be told in all the foreign newspapers, that this man had been selected as the great and honourable type of British Commerce?

There were those in the House who thought that disgrace might yet be avoided, and that the dinner should be "postponed." The leader of the Opposition had a few words on the subject with the Prime Minister.

"It is the merest rumour," said the Prime Minister.

"They say that the story is believed in the City."

"I should not feel myself justified in acting upon such a report. The Prince might not go. Where should we be if Mr. Melmotte tomorrow were able to prove the whole thing was a calumny, got up to influence the election at Westminster? The dinner must certainly go on."

"And you will go?"

"Assuredly," said the Prime Minister. "And I hope that you will too."

His political antagonist declared with a smile that he would not desert his honourable friend; but he could not answer for his followers. He admitted that many leaders of the Conservative party distrusted Melmotte, and would be unwilling to go, even to meet the Emperor of China.

"They should remember," said the Prime Minister, "that they are also to meet their own Prince, and that empty seats will be a dishonour to him."

"I can only answer for myself," said the leader of the Opposition.

The Prime Minister was much disturbed; but he could only choose the lesser of two evils. To have taken the Emperor to dine with a swindler would be very bad; but to stop the coming of the Emperor on a false rumour, would be worse.



Chapter 59 The Dinner

It sometimes happens that an unambitious man is driven into a position in which he must choose a side; and though he does not know which side to choose, he is aware that he will be disgraced if he should make the wrong choice. This was felt by many who were suddenly forced to make up their mind whether they would go to Melmotte's dinner, or stay away.

Some suspected that the story against Melmotte had been got up simply as an electioneering trick, so that Mr. Alf might win the borough on the next day. As a dodge for an election this might work, but any who were therefore deterred from supporting their Prince at the dinner would surely be marked men. And none of the wives cared a straw whether Melmotte was a swindler or not. Would the Emperor and the Princes and Princesses be there? This was the only question which concerned them. They did not care whether Melmotte was arrested at the dinner, so long as they could show their diamonds in the presence of royalty.

Yet what a fiasco would it be, if the host should be apprehended for common forgery! The great thing was to find out whether others were going. If half stayed away, how dreadful would be the position of those who were present! And what if at the last moment the Emperor should be kept away? The Prime Minister had decided that the Emperor and the Prince should remain in ignorance of the charges against Melmotte; but of that these doubters were unaware.

"Is your Grace going?" said Lionel Lupton to the Duchess of Stevenage, having gone into the park between six and seven to pick up some hints. The Duchess was Lord Alfred's sister, and of course she was going. She had been assured by Lord Alfred not a quarter of an hour before that everything was as straight as a die. Lord Alfred had not then even heard of the rumour. Ultimately both Lionel Lupton and Beauchamp Beauclerk attended the dinner. They had received special tickets as supporters of Mr. Melmotte at the election, and they thought themselves honour-bound to be there. But they, with their leader, and one other member of the party, were all who came as the political friends of the candidate for Westminster.

When Melmotte arrived at his own door with his wife and daughter he had heard nothing of the matter. That a man so vexed with affairs of money, so laden with cares and dangers, should be free from fear it is impossible to imagine. That such burdens should be borne at all is a wonder. Surely his whole life must have been a life of terrors! But of any special peril at that moment, he knew nothing. He placed his wife in the drawing-room and himself in the hall, and arranged his satellites around him – including the two Grendalls, young Nidderdale, and Mr. Cohenlupe – with a feeling of gratified glory.

Nidderdale had heard the rumour at the Houses of Parliament, but had determined that he would not as yet fly. Cohenlupe had also come up from the House, where no one had spoken to him. Though grievously frightened, he had not dared to be on the wing as yet. And, indeed, to what clime could such a bird as he fly in safety? He knew very much, and was not prepared to enjoy the feast.

In the hall Miles whispered to his father.

“You’ve heard about it; haven’t you?” Lord Alfred turned pale, but declared that he had heard nothing. “They’re saying all manner of things in the City; forgery and heaven knows what. The Lord Mayor is not coming.”

Lord Alfred made no reply. But he was unhappy.

The grand arrivals were punctual, and the very grand people all came. The Emperor, with impassive and awful dignity, was marshalled into the room on the ground floor, before being marshalled back into the banqueting hall. Melmotte, bowing to the ground, walked backwards before him, and was probably taken by the Emperor for some Court Master of Ceremonies. The Princes had all shaken hands with Melmotte, and the Princesses had bowed graciously. Nothing of the rumour had been whispered in royal palaces.

Besides royalty the company allowed to enter the room was very select: the Prime Minister, one archbishop, two duchesses, and an ex-governor of India. The remainder of the company were received in the drawing-room above. Everything was going well, and they who had decided to come were proud of their wisdom.

But when the company was seated at dinner the absences were unfortunately visible. A week ago, admission could not be had for love or money. Now it looked as though the room were but half-filled. There were six absences from the City; another six of Mr. Melmotte’s own political party were away. The archbishops and the bishop were there, but two or three peers were absent, and so were a poet, two painters, and a philosopher, as well as three independent members of the House of Commons. Nearly forty places were vacant when the dinner commenced.

Melmotte had insisted that Lord Alfred should sit next to him at the big table, having had the objectionable bar removed, and his own chair shoved nearer to the centre. He glanced repeatedly round the hall, and of course became aware that many were absent.

“How is it that there are so many places empty?” he asked.

“Don’t know,” said Lord Alfred, shaking his head, steadfastly refusing to look round upon the hall.

Melmotte looked round again. “Has there been some mistake about the numbers? There’s room for ever so many more.”

“Don’t know,” said Lord Alfred unhappily, wishing that he had never seen Mr. Melmotte.

“What the deuce do you mean?” whispered Melmotte. “You ought to know.”

“Can’t say anything about it,” said Lord Alfred, with his eyes fixed upon his plate.

“I’ll be d___ if I don’t find out,” said Melmotte. “Where’s the Lord Mayor?” In spite of royalty, he was now sitting with his face turned round upon the hall. “Have you seen the Lord Mayor?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“But he was to come. What’s the meaning of it, Alfred?”

“Don’t know anything about it.”

“And where’s Mr. Killebrew, and Sir David Boss? What’s up, Alfred? I must know.”

“I could not make them come.” Lord Alfred’s answers were surly. He was sure the failure would partly be attached to himself, and he felt that Melmotte, by his frequent questions, was drawing attention to him. “If you go on making a

row," he said, "I shall go away. Just sit quiet. You'll know all about it soon enough."

This was hardly the way to give Mr. Melmotte peace of mind. For a few minutes he did sit quiet. Then he got up and moved down the hall behind the guests.

In the meantime, various Royalties ate their dinner, without observing those empty Banquo's seats. As the Emperor spoke only Manchoo, and as there was no one present who could even interpret Manchoo into English – the imperial interpreter condescending only to interpret Manchoo into ordinary Chinese – his Imperial Majesty could not have much conversation with his neighbours. And his neighbours had not very much to say to each other. They probably found these duties irksome; and that solemn, silent Emperor must have had a weary time of it. He sat there for more than two hours, not eating nor drinking very much; but wondering at the changes which were coming when an Emperor of China was forced to sit and hear this buzz of voices and clatter of knives and forks. "And this," he must have said to himself, "is what they call royalty in the West!"

"Where's Sir Gregory Gripe?" said Melmotte, in a hoarse whisper, to a City friend – old Todd, of Todd, Brehgert, and Goldsheiner.

"Ain't he here?" said Todd, knowing very well that he wasn't.

"No – and the Lord Mayor's not come; nor Postlethwaite, nor Bunter. What's the meaning of it?"

Todd looked at his neighbours before he answered. "I'm here, that's all I can say, Mr. Melmotte; and I've had a very good dinner."

There was a weight upon Melmotte's mind. He knew from old Todd's manner, and Lord Alfred's, that there was something they could tell him if they would. But they would not open their mouths.

"It's very odd," he said, "that gentlemen should promise to come and then stay away. There were hundreds anxious to be present. I think it is very odd."

"It is odd," said Mr. Todd, turning his attention to his plate.

Passing back up the table, Melmotte found Beauchamp Beauclerk with a vacant seat next to him. There were many vacant seats in this part of the room, and Mr. Melmotte seated himself for a minute, thinking that he might get the truth from his ally in the election. Prudence should have kept him silent. Whatever the cause of these desertions, he could apply no remedy to it now. But he was bewildered and dismayed; and though he declared that nothing should cow him, yet he was cowed.

Personally, Mr. Beauclerk disliked the man greatly, thinking him a loud and vulgar upstart. But he had taken the business of Melmotte's election in hand, and considered himself bound to stand by Melmotte till that was over; and he was now the man's guest, and was constrained to courtesy. His wife was sitting by him, and he introduced her to Mr. Melmotte.

"You have a wonderful assemblage here, Mr. Melmotte," said the lady.

"Yes, ma'am, yes. His Majesty the Emperor has said that he has been much gratified. – Can you tell me, Mr. Beauclerk, why those other gentlemen are not here? It looks very odd; does it not?"

"Ah; you mean Killebrew."

"And Sir David Boss, and the whole lot. I insisted on their being invited, and I know the cards were sent; and, by George, I have their answers, saying they'd come."

"I suppose some of them are engaged," said Mr. Beauclerk.

“Engaged! What business has a man to accept one engagement and then take another? There’s something up. What is it, Mr. Beauclerk? You must have heard. If you know anything about it I think you ought to tell me.”

“I know nothing except that the ballot will be taken tomorrow. You and I have got nothing more to do except await the result.”

“Well; I suppose it’s all right,” said Melmotte, rising and going back to his seat. But he knew that things were not all right.

The Emperor sat solemn in his chair for another hour; and then, at some signal, he was withdrawn. The ladies had already left the room. According to the programme arranged for the evening, the royal guests were to return to the smaller room for a cup of coffee, and were then to be paraded upstairs before the multitude who would by that time have arrived, and to remain there long enough to justify the invited ones in saying that they had spent the evening with the Emperor and the Princes and the Princesses.

The plan was carried out perfectly. At half-past ten the Emperor was made to walk upstairs, and for half an hour sat awful and composed in an arm-chair. How one would wish to see inside his mind!

Melmotte went through to the hall, and found Miles Grendall.

“Miles,” he said, “there’s something wrong, and you know all about it. Why didn’t the people come? What is it? Is it about the election?”

“No, it’s not that,” said Miles.

“Then what is it?”

“They got hold of something today in the City – about Pickering.”

“And what were they saying about Pickering? Come; out with it. You don’t suppose that I care what lies they tell.”

“They say there’s been something – forged. Title-deeds, I think.”

“Forged title-deeds! All right, Miles; that will do.” And the Great Financier went upstairs into his own drawing-room.



Chapter 60

Miss Longstaffe's Lover

A few days before the dinner, Miss Longstaffe was seated in Lady Monogram's back drawing-room, discussing the terms on which the two tickets for the grand reception had been given to the Monograms; and the terms also on which Miss Longstaffe had been asked to spend two or three days with her dear friend Lady Monogram. Each lady wanted to get as much and to give as little as possible. In return for the two tickets, Lady Monogram was to chaperon Miss Longstaffe at the entertainment, to take Miss Longstaffe as a visitor for three days, and to have one party at her own house during that time, so that it might be seen that Miss Longstaffe had other friends in London besides the Melmottes.

Miss Longstaffe felt that she was hardly receiving a fair price. The Melmotte tickets had reached their height, and there was a rush for them. Lady Monogram already had them in her desk. But the seller was complaining that as she had parted with her goods too cheap, some make-weight should be added to the price.

"As for that, my dear," said Miss Longstaffe, who had endeavoured to resume something of her old manners, "I don't see what you mean at all. You meet Lady Julia Goldsheiner everywhere, and her father-in-law is Mr. Brehgert's junior partner."

"Lady Julia is Lady Julia, my dear, and young Mr. Goldsheiner hunts, and Damask says that he is one of the best shots at Hurlingham. I don't think Sir Damask would like me to ask Mr. Brehgert to dine here." Sir Damask had nothing to do with the matter; but Lady Monogram was very clever in the use which she made of her husband.

"May I speak to Sir Damask about it?" asked Miss Longstaffe.

"Well, my dear, I really don't think you ought to do that."

"But Julia, when you tell me that Sir Damask cannot receive Mr. Brehgert, it does sound odd. City people are just as good as West-end people."

"A great deal better, I dare say. I'm not arguing about that. But we ain't big enough to introduce new-comers. I don't suppose there's anybody in London understands it better than you do, Georgiana, and therefore it's absurd my pretending to teach you. I go pretty well everywhere, as you are aware; and I shouldn't know Mr. Brehgert if I were to see him."

"You'll meet him at the Melmottes', and you're glad enough to go there."

"Quite true, my dear. And there's the butcher round the corner in Bond Street, or the man who comes to do my hair. If they were suddenly to turn out wonderful men, and go everywhere, no doubt I should be glad to have them here. Mr. Brehgert at present to me is like the butcher round the corner." Lady Monogram had the tickets safe under lock and key, or I think she would hardly have said this.

"He is not a bit like a butcher," said Miss Longstaffe, blazing up in real wrath.

"I did not say that he was."

“Yes, you did; and it was the unkindest thing you could possibly say. It was monstrous. How would you like it if I said that Sir Damask was like a hair-dresser?”

“You can say so if you please. Sir Damask drives four in hand, rides as though he meant to break his neck, is one of the best shots going, and is supposed to understand a yacht as well as any other gentleman out. And I’m rather afraid that before he was married he used to box with all the prize-fighters. If that makes a man like a hair-dresser, well, there it is.”

“How proud you are of his vices.”

“He’s very good-natured, my dear, and as he does not interfere with me, I don’t interfere with him. I hope you’ll do as well. I dare say Mr. Brehgert is good-natured.”

“He’s an excellent man of business, and is making a very large fortune.”

“And has five or six grown-up children, who, no doubt, will be a comfort.”

“If I don’t mind them, why need you? You have none at all, and you find it lonely enough.”

“Not at all lonely. I have everything that I desire. How hard you are trying to be ill-natured, Georgiana.”

“Why did you say that he was a butcher?”

“I said nothing of the kind. What I did say was that I don’t care to risk my reputation on the appearance of new people at my table. If you like Mr. Brehgert to come here on Tuesday evening, when the rooms will be full, you can ask him; but as for having him to dinner, I won’t do it.”

So the matter was settled. Miss Longestaffe did ask Mr. Brehgert for the Tuesday evening, and the two ladies were again friends.

Perhaps Lady Monogram was aware of Mr. Brehgert’s resemblance to a butcher. He was a fat, greasy man, good-looking in a certain degree, about fifty, with hair dyed black, and beard and moustache dyed a dark purple colour. The charm of his face consisted in a pair of very bright black eyes, which were, however, set rather near together. He was stout, and had that look of command in his face which is common to master-butchers.

But Mr. Brehgert was considered to be a very good man of business, and was now regarded as being the leading member of the great financial firm of which he was the second partner. Old Mr. Todd’s day was nearly done, and Mr. Brehgert was now supposed to be the moving spirit of the firm. He was a widower, living in a luxurious villa at Fulham with a family varying from an eldest son of eighteen, who had just been placed at a desk in the office, to the youngest girl of twelve, who was at school at Brighton. He was a man who always asked for what he wanted; and having made up his mind that he wanted a second wife, had asked Miss Georgiana Longestaffe to fill that situation. He had met her at the Melmottes’, had entertained her, with Madame Melmotte and Marie, at his villa, had then proposed, and two days later had received an acceptance.

Poor Miss Longestaffe! Although she had told Lady Monogram of her engagement, she had not yet found courage to tell her family. The man was absolutely a Jew; there was no doubt of it. Goldsheiner was also a Jew, whom Lady Julia Start had married; and Georgiana had counted up ever so many instances of “decent people” who had married Jews or Jewesses. Lord Frederic Framlingham had married a Berrenhoffer; and Lord Frederic’s wife and Lady Julia Goldsheiner were seen everywhere. She was sure that progress in society

would soon make it a matter of indifference whether anybody was Jew or Christian.

For herself, she was above all personal prejudices of that kind. Jew, Turk, or infidel was nothing to her. Of course she would go to church. It was the proper thing to do. As to her husband, though she did not suppose that she could ever get him to church, she thought that she might induce him to go nowhere, so that she could pass him off as a Christian.

But she was afraid of her father and mother. Lady Pomona was distressingly old-fashioned, and had often spoken with horror even of the approach of a Jew. Unfortunately, Georgiana in her earlier days had echoed her mother's sentiments. And then her father – on the admission of Jews into parliament, he was certain that England's glory was sunk for ever. How could she tell her parents that she was engaged to marry a man who went to synagogue on a Saturday and carried out every other filthy abomination of the despised people?

That Mr. Brehgert was a fat, greasy man of fifty, conspicuous for hair-dye, was in itself distressing: but this minor distress was swallowed up in the greater. Miss Longestaffe had begun life with very high aspirations. At nineteen she had thought that all the world was before her. With her commanding figure, regular features, and bright complexion, she had regarded herself as one of the beauties of the day, and had considered herself entitled to demand wealth and a coronet. At twenty-three, any young peer, or peer's eldest son, with a house in town and in the country, might have sufficed. Twenty-five and six had been the years for baronets and squires; and even a leading fashionable lawyer or two had been marked by her as sufficient.

But now she was aware that she had always fixed her price a little too high. On three things she was still determined: that she would not be poor, she would not be banished from London, and she would not be an old maid. Yet how was this to be done? Lovers are as plentiful as blackberries for girls of nineteen, but as rare as hothouse fruits for girls of twenty-nine. Brehgert was rich, would live in London, and would be a husband. People did such odd things now and "lived them down"; she could see no reason why she should not do this and live it down. Courage was the one thing necessary; that and perseverance.

She had plucked up enough courage to declare her fate to her old friend Julia Monogram, remembering as she did so how in days long past the two had scattered their scorn upon some poor girl who had married a man with a Jewish name.

"Dear me," said Lady Monogram. "Todd, Brehgert, and Goldsheiner! Mr. Todd is – one of us, I suppose."

"Yes," said Georgiana boldly, "and Mr. Brehgert is a Jew. His name is Ezekiel Brehgert. You can say what you like about it."

"I don't say anything about it, my dear."

"And you can think anything you like. Things are changed since you and I were younger."

"Very much changed, it appears," said Lady Monogram.

But to tell her father and mother required a higher spirit, and that spirit had not yet come to Georgiana. On the morning before she left the Melmottes in Bruton Street, her lover had been with her. The Melmottes of course knew of the engagement and quite approved of it. Mr. Brehgert, therefore, had been allowed to come and go as he pleased. On that morning they were sitting alone in some back room, and Brehgert was pressing for an early wedding day.

“I don’t think we need talk of that yet, Mr. Brehgert,” she said.

“You might as well call me Ezekiel,” he remarked. Georgiana frowned. “Mrs. Brehgert” – he alluded of course to the mother of his children – “used to call me Ezzy.”

“Perhaps I shall do so some day,” said Miss Longestaffe, thinking it impossible that she should ever call him Ezzy.

“And ven shall it be? I should say as early in August as possible.”

“In August!” she almost screamed. It was already July.

“Vy not, my dear? Ve would have our little holiday at Vienna. I have business there, and know many friends.” Then he pressed her to fix some day in the next month. It would be expedient to be married from the Melmottes’ house, and the Melmottes would leave town in August.

There was truth in this. Unless married from the Melmottes’ house, she must go down to Caversham for the occasion – which would be intolerable. No; she must separate herself altogether from father and mother, and become one with the Melmottes and the Brehgerts – till she could live it down.

“I must ask mamma about it,” said Georgiana. Mr. Brehgert, with the customary good-humour of his people, was satisfied, and went away promising to meet his love at the great Melmotte reception. Then she sat silent, thinking how she should declare the matter to her family. Would it not be better for her to say at once that there must be a division among them, and acknowledge that she had gone out from among the Longestaffes altogether, and had become one with the Melmottes, Brehgerts, and Goldsheiners?



Chapter 61

Lady Monogram Prepares for the Party

When that little conversation took place between Lady Monogram and Miss Longestaffe, Mr. Melmotte was in all his glory, and tickets for the entertainment were very precious. High prices were being paid. Mr. Cohenlupe was asked out to dinner to meet two peers and a countess. Lord Alfred received various presents. A young lady gave a lock of her hair to Lord Nidderdale, although it was known that he was to marry Marie Melmotte.

But gradually the prices fell; and by eight or nine o'clock on the evening of the party the tickets were worth nothing. The rumour had spread through the whole town from Pimlico to Marylebone. Men coming home from clubs had told their wives. Ladies who had been in the park had heard it. Even the hairdressers had heard it, and ladies' maids and footmen and grooms. It had got into the air.

I doubt whether Sir Damask would have said a word about it to his wife, if he had calculated what the result might be. But he made no calculation.

"Have you heard what's up, Ju?" he said when he came home, rushing half-dressed into his wife's room.

"What is up?"

"They say Melmotte's been found out."

"Found out!" exclaimed Lady Monogram. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know exactly. There are a dozen stories told. It's something about that place he bought off old Longestaffe."

"Are the Longestaffes mixed up in it? I won't have her here a day longer if there is anything against them."

"Don't be an ass, Ju. There's nothing against them except that the poor old fellow hasn't got a shilling of his money."

"Then he's ruined – and there's an end of them."

"Perhaps he will get it now. Some say that Melmotte has forged a receipt, or maybe a letter, or maybe a whole set of title-deeds. They say Dolly Longestaffe has found it all out. There was always more about Dolly than fellows gave him credit for. At any rate, everybody says that Melmotte will be arrested before long."

"Not tonight, Damask!"

"Nobody seems to know. Lupton was saying that the policemen would wait till the Emperor and the Princes had gone away."

"Is Mr. Lupton going?"

"He hadn't made up his mind when I saw him. Nobody seems to be quite certain whether the Emperor will go. Somebody said that a Cabinet Council was to be called. It's rather an awkward thing, letting the Prince go to dine with a man who may be arrested before dinner-time. That's the worst part of it. Nobody knows."

Lady Monogram waved her maid away. She piqued herself upon having a French maid who could not speak a word of English, and was therefore quite careless in the woman's presence. But, of course, everything she said was repeated downstairs. Lady Monogram sat motionless for some time, while her husband finished dressing for dinner.

"Damask," she said, "we can't go."

“After you’ve made such a fuss about it!”

“It is a pity, having that girl here in the house. You know she’s going to marry one of these people?”

“But Brehgert isn’t one of Melmotte’s set. They tell me that Brehgert isn’t a bad fellow. A vulgar cad, and all that, but nothing wrong about him.”

“He’s a Jew, and he’s seventy.”

“What does it matter to you if he’s eighty? You are determined, then, you won’t go?”

But Lady Monogram had by no means decided. She had paid her price, and she could not bear to lose the thing that she had bought. She cared nothing for Melmotte’s villainy: she had taken it for granted since she had first heard of him, and had only a confused idea of any difference between commerce and fraud. It would grieve her greatly to become known as one who had driven to the door, and had not, after all, met the Emperor and the Prince. But then, should she hear the next morning that the Emperor and the Princes and Princesses, and the world generally, had all been there when she had not – then her grief would be still greater.

She sat down to dinner with her husband and Miss Longestaffe, and could not talk freely on the matter. Miss Longestaffe was still a guest of the Melmottes, although she was visiting the Monograms for a day or two.

“I suppose you’ll go,” said Sir Damask as the ladies left the room.

“Of course we shall – in about an hour,” said Lady Monogram, looking at him in rebuke him for his imprudence.

“Because if you want me I’ll stay, of course; but if you don’t, I’ll go down to the club.”

Then Miss Longestaffe asked, “Is there any doubt about our going tonight?”

“There seems to be a report that the Emperor won’t be there.”

“Impossible!”

“It’s all very well to say impossible, my dear,” said Lady Monogram; “but that’s what people are saying. You see Mr. Melmotte is a very great man, but perhaps – something has turned up. Things of that kind do happen. You had better finish dressing. But I shan’t make sure of going till I hear that the Emperor is there.” Then she descended to her husband. “Damask,” she said, “you must find out whether the Prince and the Emperor are there.”

“Send John to ask,” suggested the husband.

“If you’d go yourself you’d learn the truth in a minute. Take a cab.”

Sir Damask did not like the job. “Go to a man’s house and find out whether a man’s guests are come! I just don’t see it, Ju.”

“If you don’t go, Damask, I must; and I will.”

Sir Damask, after groaning and smoking for half a minute, said that he would go, though it was a confounded bore. He hated emperors and princes. But at last he submitted, and the cab was sent for.

It was past ten when he left his own house. On arriving in Grosvenor Square he could at once see that the party was going on. The house was illuminated, and half the square was already blocked up with carriages. When he got to the door, he saw the royal liveries. There was no doubt. The Emperor and the Princes and the Princesses were all there. But it was nearly eleven before he could reach home.

“It’s all right,” said he to his wife. “They’re there, safe enough.”

“You are sure that the Emperor is there?”

“As sure as a man can be without having seen him.”

Miss Longestaffe was present, and resented the slur cast upon her friends.

“I don’t understand it at all,” she said. “Of course the Emperor is there. Everybody has known for the last month that he was coming. What is the meaning of it, Julia?”

“My dear, you must allow me to manage my own little affairs my own way. I dare say I am absurd. But I have my reason. Now, Damask, if the carriage is there we had better start.” The carriage was there, and they did start. When they reached the house, there was a great crush in the hall. But at last they made their way into the room above, and found that the Emperor of China and all the Royalties had been there – and had departed.

Sir Damask put the ladies into the carriage and went at once to his club.



Chapter 62

The Party

Lady Monogram retired from Mr. Melmotte's house in disgust as soon as she could escape; but we must return to it for a short time. Once the guests were in the drawing-room the sense of failure passed away. The crowd never became so thick as had been anticipated; but still the rooms were fairly full, and Mr. Melmotte consoled himself with the feeling that nothing fatal had as yet occurred.

There can be no doubt that most of the people there did believe that their host had committed some great fraud which might bring him under the arm of the law. Such rumours are always believed. There is an excitement and a pleasure in believing them. Reasonable hesitation at such a moment is dull and phlegmatic. As long as the accused one is not near to ourselves, we are almost ready to think anything of anybody. In this case everybody did believe. It was so probable that such a man should have done something horrible! It was only hoped that the fraud might be great and horrible enough.

Melmotte himself behaved very much better than he would have done had he had no weight at his heart. He made few attempts at beginning any conversation, and answered with brevity when he was addressed. With scrupulous care he ticked off on his memory the names of those who had come, thinking that their presence indicated a verdict of acquittal from them. Seeing the members of the Government all there, he wished that he had come forward in Westminster as a Liberal.

Many things occurred to him as he stood, striving to smile as a host should smile. Half-a-dozen detectives might be already stationed in his own hall, ready to arrest him as soon as the guests were gone. But he bore the burden, and smiled. He had always lived with the consciousness that such a burden lay on him and might crush him at any time. He had known that he had to run these risks, and had told himself that they should never cow him. He had always tried to go as near the wind as he could, while avoiding the heavy hand of the criminal law; but he had also felt that he might be carried into deeper waters than he intended to enter.

Melmotte had not always thought, or even hoped, that he would be so exalted as he was now; but the greatness had grown upon him – and so had the danger. He had prepared himself to bear all mere ignominy with a tranquil mind, and to remember that he had garnered up a store sufficient for future needs and placed it beyond the reach of his enemies. But now he became aware that he might have to bear worse than ignominy.

Perhaps never in his life had he studied his own character and conduct more accurately, or made sterner resolves, than he did as he stood there smiling and bowing. No; he could not run away. He had risen too high. He must stand his ground, and not confess his own guilt by flight. Looking back at the past hour or two he was aware that he had allowed himself to be frightened – and also to seem to be frightened. He should not have asked those questions of Mr. Todd and Mr. Beauclerk.

But there is no remedy for spilt milk. He had faltered at the sudden blow, but he would not falter again. No policeman or magistrate, no defection of friends,

no scorn in the City would affect him. He would go down among the electors tomorrow as though all were right.

And he confessed also to himself that he had sinned in that matter of arrogance. He could see it now. He should have been good-humoured to these great ones whose society he had gained. He should have bound these people to him by a feeling of kindness as well as by his money.

I think he took some pride in his confidence as to his own courage, as he stood there turning it all over in his mind. Very much might be suspected; something might be found out. But the task of unravelling it all would not be easy. It is the small vermin that are trapped at once; but wolves and vultures can fight hard before they are caught. He could make a strong fight. When a man's frauds have been enormous there is a certain safety in their very diversity and proportions. A man who had had the brother of the Sun dining at his table could hardly be sent into the dock like a common felon.

Madame Melmotte during the evening stood at the top of her own stairs greeting the arrivals. She had heard no word of the rumours, and would probably be the last person in that house to hear them. It never occurred to her to see whether the places down the table were full or empty. She sat with her large eyes fixed on the Majesty of China.

Marie Melmotte had declined a seat at the dinner-table. This had caused a quarrel between her and her father, as he wanted her to be seen sitting next to Lord Nidderdale. She was, however, in the drawing-room, standing at first by Madame Melmotte, and afterwards retreating among the crowd. To some ladies she was a person of interest; but no one spoke to her till she saw a girl whom she knew, and whom she addressed, plucking up all her courage. This was Hetta Carbury, who had been brought by her mother.

The tickets for Lady Carbury and Hetta had of course been sent before the elopement; and Lady Carbury was anxious that that affair should not be seen to have caused any personal quarrel between herself and Mr. Melmotte. In her difficulty she had consulted Mr. Broune, who was going to the dinner, and who saw no reason why she should not go.

"The young lady's elopement is no affair of yours," Mr. Broune had said. "I should go, if only to show that you do not consider yourself implicated in the matter."

Lady Carbury did as she was advised, and took her daughter with her. A few minutes before they started from Welbeck Street a note came from Mr. Broune:

"Don't mind what you hear; but come. I am here and as far as I can see it is all right. The E. is beautiful, and P.'s are as thick as blackberries." Lady Carbury understood nothing of this; but of course she went. And Hetta went with her.

Hetta was standing alone in a corner, with her eyes fixed on the awful tranquillity of the Emperor's countenance, when Marie Melmotte timidly crept up and asked her how she was. Hetta was probably not very cordial to the poor girl, as the daughter of the great Melmotte with whom her brother had failed to run away.

"I hope you won't be angry with me for speaking to you," said Marie.

Hetta smiled more graciously.

"I suppose you know about your brother," said Marie, whispering with her eyes turned to the ground.

"I have heard about it," said Hetta. "He never told me himself."

“Oh, I do so wish that I knew the truth. I know nothing. Miss Carbury, I love him so dearly! I wouldn’t have done it if I hadn’t loved him better than anybody in the world. Don’t you think that if a girl really loves a man, that ought to go before everything?”

This was a question that Hetta was hardly prepared to answer. She felt certain that under no circumstances would she run away with a man. “I don’t quite know.”

“I do. What’s the good of anything if you’re broken-hearted? I don’t care what they do to me, if he would only be true to me. Why doesn’t he let me know – something about it?”

This was also difficult to answer. Since that horrid morning on which Sir Felix had stumbled home drunk, four days ago, he had not left the house in Welbeck Street till this evening. He had stayed in bed till dinner-time, would come down half-dressed, and then go back to his bedroom, where he would smoke and drink brandy-and-water and complain of headache. The theory was that he was ill; but he was in fact utterly cowed and did not dare to show himself at his usual haunts. He was aware that he had quarrelled at the club, aware that all the world knew of his intended journey to Liverpool, aware that he had tumbled about the streets intoxicated. This evening, worn out by his confinement, he had crept out intending, if possible, to find consolation with Ruby Ruggles.

“Do tell me. Where is he?” pleaded Marie.

“He has not been very well lately.”

“Is he ill? Oh, Miss Carbury, do tell me.”

“He has been ill. I think he is better now.”

“Why does he not come to me, or send word to me? It is cruel, is it not? Tell me – you must know – does he really care for me?”

Hetta was exceedingly perplexed. The real feeling shown by the girl made Hetta sympathize with her, though she could hardly understand Marie’s lack of reticence in speaking of her love to one who was almost a stranger.

“Felix hardly ever talks about himself to me,” she said.

“If he doesn’t care for me, there shall be an end of it,” Marie said very gravely. “If I only knew! If I thought that he loved me, I’d go through anything for him. I have never talked to anyone but you about it. Isn’t that strange? I have no one to talk to. There’s no disgrace in being in love. But it’s very bad to get married without being in love. That’s what I think.”

“It is bad,” said Hetta, thinking of Roger Carbury.

“But if Felix doesn’t care for me!” continued Marie in a whisper. Now Hetta was strongly of the opinion that her brother did not in the least care for her, and thought that Marie should know the truth. But she had not the strength to tell it.

“Tell me just what you think,” said Marie. Hetta was still silent. “Ah – I see. Then I must give him up?”

“What can I say, Miss Melmotte? Felix never tells me. He is my brother, and of course I love you for loving him.” This was almost more than Hetta meant; but she felt obliged to say some gracious word.

“Do you? Oh! I wish you did. I should so like to be loved by you. Nobody loves me, I think. That man there, Lord Nidderdale, wants to marry me. He is very nice; but he does not love me. That’s the way with men. It isn’t the way with me. I would go with Felix and slave for him if he were poor. Is it all to be over then? Will you give him a message from me?”

Hetta, though doubting the propriety of this, promised that she would.

“Just tell him I want to know; that’s all. I want to know the real truth. I suppose I do know it now. Then I shall not care what happens to me. I suppose I shall marry that young man, though it will be very bad. I shall just be as if I hadn’t any self of my own. But he ought to send me word. Do not you think so?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“You tell him, then,” said Marie, as she crept away.

Nidderdale had been observing her while she had been talking to Miss Carbury. He had heard the rumour about Melmotte, but he had not believed it. That men should gamble, get drunk, run into debt, and make love to other men’s wives, was to him a matter of everyday life. Nothing of that kind shocked him at all. But he was not yet quite old enough to believe in swindling.

He had almost fallen in love with Marie when he saw her last, and was inclined to feel kindly to her now because of the hard things that were being said about her father. And yet he knew that he must be careful. If “he came a cropper” in this matter, it would be such an awful cropper!

“How do you like the party?” he said to Marie.

“I don’t like it at all, my lord. How do you like it?”

“Very much indeed. I think the Emperor is the greatest fun I ever saw. Prince Frederic says that he’s stuffed with hay.”

“I’ve seen him talk.”

“He opens his mouth, of course. There is machinery as well as hay. I think he’s the grandest old buffer out, and I’m awfully glad that I’ve dined with him. I couldn’t make out whether he really ate anything.”

“Of course he did.”

“Have you thought of what we were talking about the other day?”

“No, my lord. Why should I?”

“I’ve been thinking about nothing else the last three months.”

“You’ve been thinking whether you’d get married or not.”

“That’s what I mean,” said Lord Nidderdale.

“It isn’t what I mean, though.”

“I’ll be shot if I can understand you.”

“Perhaps not. And you never will understand me. Oh, goodness; they’re all going, and we must get out of the way. Is that Prince Frederic? He is handsome; isn’t he? Isn’t it odd, having a lot of people in one’s own house, and not being able to speak a word to them? Good night, my lord. I’m glad you liked the Emperor.”

The people went. When they had all gone Melmotte put his wife and daughter into his carriage, telling them that he would follow them on foot to Bruton Street after giving some last directions to the servants. He looked round for Lord Alfred; but Lord Alfred had gone. Melmotte thought of all that he had done for Lord Alfred, and the venom of ingratitude stung him.

He was unusually gracious as he put his wife into the carriage, and remarked that the party had gone off very well.

“I only wish it could have been done a little cheaper,” he said, laughing. Then he went back into the house, and up into the deserted drawing-rooms. The men were busy in the rooms below, and he threw himself into the chair in which the Emperor had sat.

It was wonderful that he, the boy out of the gutter, should entertain at his own house a Chinese Emperor and English and German Royalty – and that he should do so almost with a rope round his neck. Even if this were to be the end of

it all, men would at any rate remember him. The grand dinner would live in history. And it would be remembered, too, that he had been the Conservative candidate for Westminster – perhaps the elected member. Part of him would escape Oblivion, he thought, as he sat there looking at his magnificent suite of rooms from the arm-chair which had been consecrated by the use of an Emperor.

No policemen had come to trouble him yet. There was no tangible sign that things were not to go on as they went before. Had he allowed himself to be terrified by shadows? Of course he had known that there must be such shadows. His life had been made dark by similar clouds before now, and he had lived through the storms. He was thoroughly ashamed of the weakness and fear which had overcome him at the dinner-table. There should be no more shrinking such as that.

As this was passing through his mind a head was pushed in through one of the doors.

“Is that you, Miles?” he said. “Come in. I came up here to see how the empty rooms would look after they were all gone. What became of your father?”

“I suppose he went away.”

“I suppose he did,” said Melmotte, unable to prevent a certain scorn entering his voice. “It went off very well, I think.”

“Very well,” said Miles, still standing at the door. There had been a few words of consultation between him and his father. “You’d better see it out tonight,” his father had said, “as you’ve had a regular salary. I shan’t go near him till I find out how things are going. By G___, I’ve had about enough of him.”

“Why don’t you come in?” said Melmotte. “There’s no Emperor here now for you to be afraid of.”

“I’m afraid of nobody,” said Miles, walking into the room.

“Nor am I. What’s one man that another man should be afraid of him? We’ve got to die, and there’ll be an end of it, I suppose.”

“That’s about it,” said Miles, hardly following the working of his master’s mind.

“I shouldn’t care how soon. When a man has worked as I have done, he gets tired. I suppose I’d better be down at the committee-room about ten tomorrow?”

“That’s the best, I should say.”

“You’ll be there?” Miles Grendall assented slowly. “And tell your father he might as well be there early.”

“All right,” said Miles as left.

“Curs!” said Melmotte almost aloud. “Neither of them will be there. If any evil can be done to me by treachery and desertion, they will do it. Curs!” He walked down into the hall, and through the banqueting-room. What a scene it had been! The defection of the Lord Mayor had hit him the hardest. “What cowards they are!” The men went on with their work, not noticing him, and probably not knowing him. A clerk who had been with Melmotte for years, and who knew his ways, was there to guard the property.

“Good night, Croll,” he said to the man in German. Croll touched his hat and bade him good night. Melmotte listened anxiously to the tone of the man’s voice. Did Croll know of these rumours, and if so, what did he think of them? Croll had helped him through perils before. He paused as though he would ask a question, but resolved at last that silence would be safest. “You’ll see everything safe, eh, Croll?”

Croll said that he would, and Melmotte passed out into the Square. He had not far to go to Bruton Street, but he stood for a few moments looking up at the bright stars. If he could be there, in one of those unknown distant worlds, with all his present intellect and none of his present burdens, he would, he thought, do better than he had done here on earth. But he was Augustus Melmotte, and he must bear his burdens to the end. He could reach no place so distant that he would not be known and traced.



Chapter 63

Mr. Melmotte on the Day of the Election

No parliamentary election in a borough as large as Westminster had yet happened in England since the secret ballot had been established. Men who previously had known how elections would go, now confessed themselves to be in the dark. Three days ago, the odds had been in Melmotte's favour; but on Monday his name had gone down in the betting. Early in the day his supporters had thought little of this, but by late afternoon the news from the City had spread. At six o'clock there were some who suggested that his name should be withdrawn. However, no one dared suggest it to him. On Monday evening the interest of the hour was turned to the dinner.

But Mr. Alf's supporters were very busy. Their Committee had consulted about what should be done as to these charges against Melmotte. The *Pulpit* of that evening alluded to the affair, but gave no name and mentioned no details. The Committee was averse to fighting the election by making the rumours public. If, after all, Melmotte had committed no fraud – or, as was more probable, should not be convicted of fraud – then it would be said that the accusation had been invented for electioneering purposes.

However, the dinner to the Emperor was ridiculed in the newspaper, and the electors were asked whether they felt they should elect a gentleman to Parliament because he had offered to spend a fortune on entertaining royalty. At midnight, when Melmotte was walking home to bed, the general opinion at the clubs was in favour of Mr. Alf.

On the next morning Melmotte was up before eight. As yet no policeman had called for him, nor had any official word reached him that an accusation was to be brought against him. On rising he at once went into the back-parlour which Mr. Longstaffe called his study, and which Mr. Melmotte often used for the work he did at home early in the morning, and late at night.

There were two heavy desks in the room: one of these Mr. Longstaffe had kept locked for his own purposes. When the house had first been let to Melmotte, everything between the two gentlemen had been managed with the greatest ease. Oh dear, yes! Mr. Longstaffe could come whenever he pleased. The ladies would never enter that room. If Mr. Longstaffe could spare it, Mr. Melmotte would take the key of one of the desks. The matter was arranged very pleasantly.

Mr. Melmotte, on entering the room, bolted the door, and then, sitting at his own desk, took certain papers out of the drawers: a bundle of letters and another of documents. From these he took three or four. He tore them into very small fragments and burned the bits over a gas-burner, letting the ashes fall into a large china plate. Then he blew the ashes into the yard through the open window. This he did to all these documents but one. This one he put bit by bit into his mouth, chewing the paper into a pulp till he swallowed it.

When he had done this, and had re-locked his own drawers, he walked across to Mr. Longstaffe's desk and pulled the handle of one of the drawers. It opened. Without touching the contents, he again closed it. He then knelt down and examined the lock, and the hole above, into which the bolt of the lock ran. He again closed the drawer, unlocked the study door, and rang the bell. The servant

found him writing letters at his desk, and was told that he was ready for breakfast. He always breakfasted alone with a heap of newspapers around him, and so he did on this day.

He soon found the paragraph about himself in the *Pulpit*, and read it without a quiver in his face. There was no one to see him, but he had resolved that at no moment would he betray himself by the working of a single muscle. Whatever happened, he would go through it without any sign of shrinking.

At ten he walked down to the central committee-room at Whitehall Place. He thought that he would face the world better walking than in his carriage. He went along Bond Street and Piccadilly, Regent Street and Pall Mall to Charing Cross, with the blandly triumphant smile of a man who had successfully entertained the great guest of the day. As he got near the club he met two or three men whom he knew, and bowed to them. They returned his bow graciously enough, but not one of them stopped to speak to him. He was careful to show no displeasure on his face. He would still be the blandly triumphant Merchant Prince – as long as the police would allow him.

At the committee-room he only found a few underlings. The ballot was under way; but with the ballot – so said these men – there never was any excitement. They looked half-frightened; they had not expected to see him there.

“Has Lord Alfred been here?” Melmotte asked. “Or Mr. Grendall?” No, nobody had been there.

“There is nothing more to be done, I suppose?” said Mr. Melmotte. The senior underling thought that there was nothing more to be done, and Melmotte strolled out again on foot.

He went up into Covent Garden, where there was a polling booth. The place seemed to him to be wonderfully quiet. He was determined to face everything, and he went up to the booth. Here he was recognised by various men, mechanics chiefly, who came forward and shook hands with him. He remained for an hour conversing with people, and at last made a speech to a little knot around him.

He did not allude to the rumour of yesterday; but he spoke freely of the general accusations that had been brought against him previously. He wished the electors to understand that he was proud of his position, and that the law would protect him from such unfair aspersions. He flattered himself that he was too good an Englishman to bother about the attacks which were made on candidates at elections; particularly as he looked forward to a triumphant return. But things had been said, and published, which an election could not justify, and as to these things he must go to law. Then he made some allusion to the Princes and the Emperor, and concluded by saying that it was the proudest boast of his life to be an Englishman and a Londoner.

It was asserted afterwards that this was the only good speech he had ever made; and it was certainly successful. A reporter for the *Breakfast Table*, who was on duty at the place, gave an account of the speech in that paper, and made more of it, perhaps, than it deserved.

It was then noon, and he had to decide what to do next. He was half inclined to go round to all the booths and make speeches. His success at Covent Garden had been very pleasant. But he feared that he might not be so successful elsewhere. An idea struck him that he would go boldly into the City, to his offices in Abchurch Lane, although he would not be expected today. Whatever perils there might be, he would face them.

He got a cab and had himself driven to Abchurch Lane. The clerks there were hanging about doing nothing, as though it were a holiday.

“Mr. Grendall has not been here?” he asked. No; but Mr. Cohenlupe was in Mr. Grendall’s room. At this moment he hardly desired to see Mr. Cohenlupe. That gentleman was privy to many of his transactions, but by no means all. Cohenlupe knew that the estate at Pickering had been purchased and mortgaged. But he knew nothing of the circumstances of the purchase. Melmotte felt that he could not speak to Cohenlupe without danger. They might have to stand in a dock together. But the clerks would talk if he were to leave the office without seeing his old friend. He went therefore into his room, and called to Cohenlupe.

“Ve didn’t expect you here today.”

“Nor did I expect to come,” said Melmotte. “But there isn’t much to do at Westminster while the ballot is going on; so I came to look at the letters. The dinner went off pretty well yesterday, eh?”

“Uncommon. Vy did the Lord Mayor stay away, Melmotte?”

“Because he’s an ass and a cur,” said Mr. Melmotte, with assumed indignation. “Alf and his people had got hold of him. I say it was an insult to the City. I shall be even with him one of these days.”

“Things will go on just the same as usual, Melmotte?”

“Of course. What’s to hinder them?”

“There’s ever so much been said,” whispered Cohenlupe.

“*Said*; yes,” ejaculated Melmotte very loudly. “You’re not such a fool, I hope, as to believe every word you hear.”

“There’s no knowing vat anybody knows,” said Cohenlupe.

“Look here, Cohenlupe,” – and Melmotte also sank his voice to a whisper – “go about just as usual, and say nothing. It’s all right. Any paper with my name to it will come right. I’ve bought some property and have paid for it; and I have bought some, and have not yet paid for it. There’s no fraud in that.”

“No, nothing in that.”

“Hold your tongue, and go about your business. I’m going to the bank now.” Cohenlupe had been very low in spirits; but he was somewhat better after Melmotte’s visit.

Mr. Melmotte walked to the bank where he kept his domestic account rather than his business accounts. He walked straight through to the back room in which sat the manager and the manager’s clerk, and stood before the fire-place just as though nothing had happened.

The manager did not behave nearly as well, and the clerks betrayed their emotion. Melmotte saw it; but he had expected it, and had come on purpose to “put it down.”

“We hardly expected to see you in the City today, Mr. Melmotte.”

“And I didn’t expect to see myself here. But they’re all at work down at Westminster, balloting; and as I can’t vote for myself, I’m of no use. I’ve been at Covent Garden this morning, making a stump speech.”

“And the dinner went off pretty well?” asked the manager.

“Very well, indeed. They say the Emperor liked it better than anything that has been done for him yet.” This was a brilliant flash of imagination. “For a dining companion, I should prefer somebody with a little more to say for himself. But then, perhaps, if you or I were in China we shouldn’t have much to say for ourselves; eh? We had one disappointment. The Lord Mayor didn’t come. But the dinner went on without him.”

Then Melmotte referred to the purpose of his call. He would have to draw large cheques for his private wants. "You don't give a dinner to an Emperor of China for nothing." He drew a regular cheque on his business account for a large sum, and then, as a sort of afterthought, paid in the £250 which he had received from Mr. Broune.

"There don't seem much the matter with him," said the manager, when Melmotte had left.

"He brazens it out, don't he?" said the senior clerk. They inclined to the opinion that the rumours had been a political manœuvre. Nevertheless, Mr. Melmotte would not have been allowed to overdraw at the present moment.



Chapter 64 The Election

Mr. Alf's central committee-room was in Great George Street, and there the battle was kept alive all day. It had been decided that no direct advantage should be taken of the rumour, for there had not been enough time to ascertain its truth. If it was true, Mr. Melmotte would no doubt soon be in jail.

Many had thought that he would escape as soon as the dinner was over, and had been disappointed when they heard that he had been seen walking towards his own committee-room on the following morning. An effort was made to convince some electors that he had withdrawn. When Melmotte was at Covent Garden, a large throng of men went to Whitehall Place to inquire, and found that he had made no attempt at withdrawal.

They who propagated this report certainly damaged Mr. Alf's cause. A feeling grew that Mr. Melmotte was being ill-used. Those evil things had been said – many declared – simply to secure Mr. Alf's success in the election. News of the speech in Covent Garden spread, and did good service to the Conservative cause.

Mr. Alf's friends, hearing this, urged him also to make a speech. Something should be said, if only that it might be reported in the newspapers, to show that they had behaved generously to their enemy.

At about two o'clock, Mr. Alf did make a speech – and a very good speech it was, if correctly reported in the *Evening Pulpit*. But in this speech he did not say a word about his own political ideas, nor even about his own fitness to be a Member of Parliament. Instead, he tried to show that the other man was not fit; and that he and his friends, in wishing to prove Mr. Melmotte's unfitness, had been guilty of nothing shabby.

"Mr. Melmotte," he said, "comes before you as a Conservative, and has told us that he is supported by the whole Conservative party. Where, however, are these Conservative supporters? We have heard, till we are sick of it, of the banquet which Mr. Melmotte gave yesterday. I am told that very few of his Conservative friends could be induced to attend that banquet. The leading merchants of the City refused to grace his table. I say that the leaders of the Conservative party are ashamed of this candidate. Where are they? Look about, and see whether they are walking with him in the streets, or standing with him in public places. They have made a mistake, and they know it."

He ended by alluding to the rumours of yesterday. "I make no allusion to reports which circulated yesterday, and which I believe originated in the City. They may be false or they may be true. But I declared to you long ago that Melmotte was not fit to represent you in parliament. A great British merchant, indeed! Who knew anything of this man two years ago? Ask about him in Hamburg or Vienna or Paris; and you will be told whether this is a fit man to represent Westminster in the British parliament!" This was the tone of Mr. Alf's speech.

At two or three o'clock, nobody knew how the ballot was going. It was supposed that the working-classes were in favour of Melmotte, partly from their love of a man who spends a great deal of money, partly from the belief that he

was being ill-used by the upper classes. It had been asserted that Melmotte was a public robber. Whom had he robbed? Not the poor. There was not a man in London who caused the payment of a larger sum in weekly wages than Mr. Melmotte.

About three o'clock, the editor of the *Morning Breakfast Table* called on Lady Carbury.

"What is it all about?" she asked.

"I don't know what to make of it," said Mr. Broune. "There is a story abroad that Mr. Melmotte has forged some document – and there are other stories about money that he has raised. I should say that it was simply an unfair electioneering trick, were it not that all his own side seem to believe it."

"Do you believe it?"

"I don't know."

"Then he can't be rich at all."

"Even that would not follow. He has such large concerns in hand that he might be very much pressed for funds, and yet be possessed of immense wealth. Everybody says that he pays all his bills."

"Will he be elected?" she asked.

"At present I would bet against him. Nobody is doing anything for him. There can be no doubt that his own party are ashamed of him."

"I am glad Felix did not go to Liverpool," said Lady Carbury.

"It would not have made much difference. She would have been brought back all the same. They say Lord Nidderdale still means to marry her. There must be an immense amount of property somewhere. No one doubts that he was rich when he came to England two years ago, and the Mexican Railway shares were at £15 premium yesterday morning, though they have fallen since. He must have made an enormous amount out of that."

But Mr. Broune was more scathing about Mr. Alf. "A man must be mad who imagines that he can sit for Westminster and edit a London daily paper at the same time. A man who sits in parliament cannot pretend to discuss the doings of parliament with impartiality. Where is Felix now?"

"Do not ask me," said the poor mother. "He lies in bed all day, and is out all night."

"You do not give him any money?"

"I have none to give."

"I should simply take the key of the house from him, or bolt the door if he will not give it up."

"Knowing that he must wander in the streets if I refuse to let him in? A mother cannot do that, Mr. Broune. A child has a hold upon his mother."

Mr. Broune never now thought of kissing Lady Carbury; but when she spoke thus, he got up and took her hand. She pressed it with no fear that she would be kissed. The feeling between them was changed.

Melmotte dined at home that evening with only his wife and daughter. Madame Melmotte had not as yet said a word to anyone about her own fears. But not a single person had called today – the day after the great party; and she thought that the Grendalls would have been with her husband today of all days, during the ballot.

"Is not Mr. Grendall coming?" she asked, as she took her seat at the table.

"No, he is not," said Melmotte.

"Nor Lord Alfred?"

“Nor Lord Alfred.” Melmotte had returned home much comforted by the day’s proceedings. No one had dared to say a harsh word to his face. After leaving the bank he had gone back to his office, and had written letters, just as if nothing had happened. A clerk brought him the evening papers, and expressed his opinion that the election was going well. Mr. Melmotte read Alf’s speech, and consoled himself with thinking that Mr. Alf had not dared to make new accusations against him. All that about Hamburg and Vienna and Paris was as old as the hills.

“I think we shall do pretty well,” he said to the clerk. His very presence in Abchurch Lane gave confidence. And thus when he came home, something of the old arrogance had returned, and he could swagger before his wife and servants.

“The Grendall’s are two d___ curs,” he said.

His wife afterwards crept up to him in the back parlour. “Is there anything wrong, Melmotte?”

“What do you call wrong?”

“I don’t know; but I seem to be afraid of something.”

“I should have thought you were used to that by this time.”

“Then there is something.”

“Don’t be a fool. There is always something.”

“Shall we have to move again?” she asked.

“How am I to tell? Does that girl mean to marry Lord Nidderdale?”

Madame Melmotte shook her head. “I’ll flog her within an inch of her life if she disobeys me. You tell her that I say so.”

“Then he may flog me,” said Marie, when so much of the conversation was repeated to her that evening. “Papa does not know me if he thinks that I’m to be made to marry a man by flogging.” No such attempt was at any rate made that night.

Early the next day a report was current that Mr. Alf had been elected, although the numbers had not yet been counted, and the truth would not be known till seven or eight o’clock in the evening.

Mr. Melmotte again went into the City, and found that things seemed to have returned very much into their usual grooves. The Mexican Railway shares were low, and Mr. Cohenlupe was unhappy; but nothing dreadful had occurred. If nothing dreadful did occur, the railway shares would probably recover.

In the course of the day, Melmotte received a letter from Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, which, of itself, contained no comfort – yet there was comfort to be drawn from it, because of what it did not contain. The letter was unfriendly in its tone, but there was no allusion in it to forgery or criminal proceedings; no hint at anything beyond the not unnatural desire of Mr. Longestaffe and his son to be paid for the property at Pickering.

“We have to remind you,” said the letter, after demands for the money, “that the title-deeds were delivered to you on our receipt of authority from the Messrs. Longestaffe, on the understanding that the purchase-money was to be at once paid by you. We are informed that the property has since been mortgaged by you. This information forces upon us the necessity of demanding that you should at once pay to us the purchase-money, £80,000; or else return to us the title-deeds of the estate.”

This letter declared positively that the title-deeds had been given up on authority received by the lawyers from both the Longestaffes – father and son. Now the accusation brought against Melmotte was that he had forged the signature to the young Mr. Longestaffe’s letter. Slow and Bideawhile were

therefore on his side. As to the simple debt, he cared little about that. Many fine men were walking about London who owed large sums of money which they could not pay.

As Melmotte was sitting at his solitary dinner this evening – for both his wife and daughter had dined early – news was brought to him that he had been elected for Westminster. He had beaten Mr. Alf by almost a thousand votes.

This was a great achievement for someone who had begun the world without a shilling and without a friend – almost without education! Much as he loved money, no triumph of his life had been so great to him as this. Brought into the world in a gutter, without parents, with no good thing ever done for him, he was now a member of the British Parliament for Westminster.

At this moment he enjoyed keenly a certain amount of elation. Of course he had committed forgery; of course he had committed robbery. That was nothing, for he had been cheating and forging and stealing all his life. Of course he was in danger of almost immediate detection and punishment – yet he enjoyed his triumph. They could hardly prevent his taking his seat in the House of Commons. Then if they sent him to penal servitude for life, they would have to say that they had so treated the member for Westminster!

He drank a bottle of claret, and then had some brandy-and-water. He knew that he had better not drink; but why should he not drink while the time lasted? He therefore took his brandy-and-water freely, until he was able to throw his fears behind him, and to assure himself that, after all, he might yet escape. He would drink no more, he said to himself as he filled another beaker. He would work instead. He would put his shoulder to the wheel, and conquer his enemies. It would not be easy to convict a member for Westminster. Was he not the man who had entertained the Emperor of China? Had he not received at his own table all the Princes of the land, and the Prime Minister? To convict him would be a national disgrace.

At any rate, he would not despair. There was a fight to be fought yet, and he would fight it to the end. He drank deeply, and then with careful and almost solemn steps, he made his way to bed.



Chapter 65

Miss Longstaffe Writes Home

Lady Monogram, when she left Madame Melmotte's house after the Emperor's dinner, was not in a good humour. Sir Damask put her and Miss Longestaffe into the carriage without a word, and rushed off to his club in disgust. The affair from beginning to end, including the final failure, had been his wife's doing.

"They may fight it out between them now like the Kilkenny cats," he thought, as he closed the carriage-door on the two ladies.

"What a horrid affair!" said Lady Monogram. "Did anybody ever see anything so vulgar?"

"I don't know why you were so late," said Georgiana.

"Late! Why, it's not yet twelve. I don't suppose it was eleven when we got into the Square."

"You knew they did not mean to stay long. I really think it was your own fault."

"My own fault. Yes; it was my own fault, my dear, to have had anything to do with it. And now I have got to pay for it."

"What do you mean by paying for it, Julia?"

"You know very well. Is your friend going to do us the honour of coming to us tomorrow night?"

"If you mean Mr. Brehgert, he is coming. You desired me to ask him, and I did so."

"Desired you! The truth is, Georgiana, when people get into different sets, they'd better stay where they are." Lady Monogram was so angry that she could not control her tongue.

Miss Longestaffe was ready to tear herself with indignation. That she should have been brought to hear insolence such as this from Julia Triplex! She was almost in tears, and yet anxious to fight rather than weep. But she was in her friend's carriage, and was being taken to her friend's house, was to be entertained by her friend all the next day, and was to see her lover among her friend's guests.

"I wonder what has made you so ill-natured," she said at last. "You didn't use to be like that."

"It's no good abusing me," said Lady Monogram. "Here we are, and I suppose we had better get out – unless you want the carriage to take you anywhere else." Then Lady Monogram marched into the house, and went direct to her room. Miss Longestaffe followed slowly to her own chamber, and having half undressed herself, prepared to write to her mother.

The letter must be written. Mr. Brehgert had twice suggested that he should, in the usual way, go to see Mr. Longestaffe, who was at present in London. But she had asked him to postpone his visit for a day or two. She was now agonized by many doubts.

Mr. Brehgert was rich, certainly. But she already repented of accepting him. If it were really necessary to go down into another, much lower world, a world composed of Brehgerts, Melmottes, and Cohenlupes, would it avail her to be the mistress of a gorgeous house? Caversham had been dull; but it was a home to be

acknowledged before the world. Her mother was dull, and her father pompous and often cross; but they were in the right set – miles removed from the Brehgerts and Melmottes. She would write one letter tonight; but she did not know whether to write to her mother telling her the horrid truth – or to Mr. Brehgert begging that the match should be broken off.

She might have decided on the latter had so many people not already heard of the match. The Monograms had talked of it far and wide. Each morning lately she had feared that a letter from home would call upon her to explain the meaning of some frightful rumours reaching Caversham.

And there were other troubles. She had spoken to Madame Melmotte this evening, and had felt from the manner of her reception that she was not wanted back again. She did not think that she could go back to Grosvenor Square, for ill-will had grown up between her father and Mr. Melmotte. She must return to Caversham. They could not refuse to take her in, though she had betrothed herself to a Jew!

If the story should be told to her mother it would be easier to tell it by letter than face to face. But then if she wrote the letter there would be no retreat – and how should she face her family?

She wondered at her own cowardice. Even Lady Monogram, her old friend Julia Triplex, had trampled upon her. Was it not the business of her life, in these days, to do the best she could for herself? Who sent her to Melmotte's house? Was it not her own father? Then she sat herself square at the table, and wrote to her mother as follows:

My Dear Mamma,

I am afraid you will be very much astonished by this letter, and perhaps disappointed. I have engaged myself to Mr. Brehgert, a member of a very wealthy firm in the City, called Todd, Brehgert, and Goldsheiner. I may as well tell you the worst at once. Mr. Brehgert is a Jew.

(This last word she wrote very rapidly, but largely, determined that there should be no lack of courage apparent in the letter.)

He is a very wealthy man, and his business is about banking and finance. I understand they are among the leading people in the City. He lives at present at a very handsome house at Fulham. I don't know that I ever saw a place more beautifully fitted up. I have said nothing to papa, nor has he; but he says he will be willing to satisfy papa perfectly as to settlements. He has offered to have a house in London if I like, and also to keep the villa at Fulham or else a place somewhere in the country. Or I may have both. No man can be more generous. He has been married before, and has a family, and now I think I have told you all.

I suppose you and papa will be very much dissatisfied. I hope papa won't refuse his consent. It can do no good. I am not going to remain as I am all my life, and there is no use waiting any longer. It was papa who made me go to the Melmottes, who are not nearly so well placed as Mr. Brehgert. If papa has got to be so poor that he is obliged to let the house in town, one must of course expect to be different from what we were.

I hope you won't mind having me back on Wednesday. There is a party here tonight, and Mr. Brehgert is coming. But I can't stay longer with Julia, who doesn't make herself nice, and I do not want to go back to the Melmottes. I fancy that there is something wrong between papa and Mr. Melmotte.

Send the carriage to meet me by the 2.30 train from London – and pray, mamma, don't scold when you see me, or have hysterics. Of course it isn't all nice, but things will never be nice again. I shall tell Mr. Brehgert to go to papa on Wednesday.

Your affectionate daughter,
G.

When the morning came she asked the servant to take the letter away and have it posted, so that she could not be tempted to stop it.

About one o'clock on that day Mr. Longestaffe called at Lady Monogram's. Georgiana trembled at first, but soon perceived that her father had heard nothing of Mr. Brehgert. She immediately told him that she proposed returning home on the following day.

"I am sick of the Melmottes," she said.

"And so am I," said Mr. Longestaffe.

"We should have been delighted to have had Georgiana to stay a little longer," said Lady Monogram; "but we have only one spare bedroom, and another friend is coming. We have a few friends coming tonight, Mr. Longestaffe, and I hope you'll come and see Georgiana. Mr. Brehgert will be here," she continued with a peculiar smile.

"Mr. who?"

"Mr. Brehgert." Lady Monogram looked at her friend. "I hope I'm not revealing any secret."

"I don't understand anything about it," said Mr. Longestaffe. "Georgiana, who is Mr. Brehgert?" He was certain from Lady Monogram's manner that Mr. Brehgert was an accepted lover. Lady Monogram had meant him to understand.

"My dear Georgiana," she said, "I supposed your father knew all about it."

"I know nothing. Who is Mr. Brehgert, Lady Monogram?"

"Mr. Brehgert is a – very wealthy gentleman. Perhaps, Georgiana, you will be glad to be alone with your father." And Lady Monogram left the room.

Was there ever cruelty equal to this! But now the poor girl was forced to speak.

"Papa, I wrote to mamma this morning, and Mr. Brehgert was to come to you tomorrow."

"Do you mean that you are engaged to marry him?"

"Yes, papa."

"Who is he?"

"He is a merchant."

"You can't mean the fat Jew whom I've met with Mr. Melmotte; a man old enough to be your father!"

The poor girl thought that she would try to brazen it out. But she had been so cowed by the manner in which the subject had been introduced that she did not know how to begin.

"Is the man a Jew?" demanded Mr. Longestaffe.

"Yes, papa," she said.

"He is that fat old man?"

"Not as old as you are, papa. He is fifty."

"And a Jew? If you marry him, I will never see him. Tell him not to come to me, for I certainly will not speak to him. You are degraded and disgraced; but you shall not degrade and disgrace me and your mother and sister."

“It was you, papa, who told me to go to the Melmottes.”

“That is not true. I wanted you to stay at Caversham. A Jew! an old fat Jew! Heavens and earth! You – my daughter – that used to take such pride in yourself! Have you written to your mother?”

“I have.”

“It will kill her. It will simply kill her. And you are going home tomorrow?”

“I wrote to say so.”

“There you must remain. I suppose I had better see the man and explain to him that it is utterly impossible. Heavens on earth; a Jew! My daughter! I will take you home myself tomorrow. You had better leave this house today, and come to my hotel in Jermyn Street.”

“Oh, papa, I can’t do that.”

“Why not? You can do it, and you shall do it. I will not have you see him again. If you do not promise me to come, I will send for Lady Monogram and tell her that I will not permit you to meet Mr. Brehgert at her house. I do wonder at her. An old fat Jew!” Mr. Longestaffe walked about the room in despair.

She knew that her father and Lady Monogram between them would be too strong for her. So she had her things packed up, and allowed herself to be carried away. She said one word to Lady Monogram before she went.

“Tell him that I was called away suddenly.”

“I will, my dear. I thought your papa would not like it.”

The poor girl had not enough spirit to upbraid her friend. For the moment, at least, she must yield to everybody and everything. She spent a lonely evening with her father in a dull sitting-room in the hotel, and the following day she was taken down to Caversham. She believed that her father had seen Mr. Brehgert that morning; but he said no word to her, nor did she ask him.

That was on the day after Lady Monogram’s party. Early in the evening, Brehgert, elegantly dressed, made his appearance. Lady Monogram received him with a sweet smile.

“Miss Longestaffe has left me and gone to her father.”

“Oh, indeed.”

“Yes,” said Lady Monogram, bowing her head. She did not say another word to Mr. Brehgert. He stood for about ten minutes in the drawing-room, and then he departed. No one had spoken a word to him. But he was an even-tempered, good-humoured man. When Miss Longestaffe was his wife things would no doubt be different; or else she would probably change her acquaintance.



Chapter 66

“So Shall be my Enmity.”

“You shall be troubled no more with Winifrid Hurtle.” So Mrs. Hurtle had said in perfect good faith to Paul Montague. And when he had said good-bye to her, putting out his hand for the last time, she declined it.

Paul returned home in low spirits. If she had insisted on his taking that letter with the threat of the horsewhip, he might at least have consoled himself with thinking that, however badly he had behaved, her conduct had been worse. He could have made himself warm and comfortable with anger, and could have assured himself that he was right to escape from the clutches of such a wild cat.

But at the last moment she had been no wild cat to him. She had melted, and become soft and womanly, and exquisitely beautiful; and he returned home sad and dissatisfied with himself. He had destroyed her life. She had said that she was all alone, and had given up everything to follow him. Was he to do nothing for her now?

Yet what could he do? He had made good his escape. He had resolved that he would not marry her, and he knew he had been right. Were he to return to her he would again be thrusting his hand into the fire. But his own selfish coldness was hateful to him when he thought of her left desolate and lonely in Mrs. Pipkin’s lodgings.

During the next three or four days, while the preparations for the dinner and the election were going on, he was busy in regard to the American railway. He again went to Liverpool, and at Mr. Ramsbottom’s advice prepared a letter to the board of directors, in which he resigned his seat. He also wrote a letter to Mr. Fisker, begging that gentleman to come to England, and expressing his own wish to retire altogether from the firm of Fisker, Montague, and Montague, upon receiving the balance of money due to him.

When he wrote these letters at Liverpool the great rumour about Melmotte had not yet sprung up. He returned to London on the day of the festival, and first heard of the report at the Beargarden. The old set there had broken up. Sir Felix Carbury had not been heard of for the last four or five days; and then the whole story of Miss Melmotte’s journey was told to him. Lord Nidderdale had hardly been seen at the club.

“He’s taken up the running with the girl,” said Lord Grasslough. “He was there at the party yesterday, talking to her all night – a sort of thing he never did before. Nidderdale is the best fellow going, but he was always an ass.” Nor had Miles Grendall been seen in the club for three days.

On the next afternoon, almost without a fixed purpose, Paul strolled up to Welbeck Street, and found Hetta alone.

“Mamma has gone to her publisher’s,” she said. “Who has been elected, Mr. Montague?” Paul knew nothing about the election, and cared very little. He said that Melmotte was no longer his chairman.

“Are you out of it altogether, Mr. Montague?” Yes; as far as it lay within his power, he was out of it. With considerable warmth he repudiated all connection with Melmotte, expressing deep regret that circumstances had driven him for a time into that alliance.

“Then you think that Mr. Melmotte is—?”

“A scoundrel; that’s all.”

“You heard about Felix?”

“I heard that he tried to run off with the girl. I don’t know much about it. They say that Lord Nidderdale is to marry her now.”

“I think not, Mr. Montague.”

“I hope not, for his sake. At any rate, your brother is well out of it.”

“Do you know that she truly loves Felix? I do think she is good. The other night at the party she spoke to me. Poor girl; I do pity her. Think what a downfall it will be if anything happens.”

But Paul Montague had not come to discuss Melmotte’s affairs. He was off with one love, and now he thought that he might be on with the other.

“Hetta,” he said, “I am thinking more of myself than of her.”

“I suppose we all do think more of ourselves than of other people,” said Hetta, who knew from his voice at once what he intended.

“Yes; but I am thinking of myself and of you. Hetta, you must know that I love you.”

“Do you?” she said. Of course she knew it. And she thought that he was equally sure of her love. Could he have doubted her love after the few words that had been spoken on that night when Lady Carbury had interrupted them? He must have known that he had her heart! So at least she thought. She had been sewing some morsel of lace, as ladies do when they wish to be not quite doing nothing. Now she allowed her hands to fall into her lap.

“Yes, I do. Hetta, say a word to me. Can it be so? Look at me for one moment.” Her eyes had turned downwards to her work. “If Roger is dearer to you than I am, I will go at once.”

“Roger is very dear to me.”

“Do you love him as I would have you love me?”

She paused for a time, knowing that his eyes were fixed upon her, and then she answered the question in a low voice, but very clearly. “No,” she said; “not like that.”

“Can you love me like that?” He put out both his arms. She raised her hand as if to keep him back, and left it with him when he seized it. “Is it mine?” he said.

“If you want it.”

Then he was at her feet in a moment, kissing her hands and her dress, looking up into her face with his eyes full of tears, ecstatic with joy.

“Want it!” he said. “Hetta, I have never wanted anything but that. Oh, Hetta, my own. Since I first saw you this has been my only dream of happiness. And now it is my own.”

She was very quiet, but full of joy. She did not think that she could ever have loved anybody but him. As to Roger – dear Roger – no; it was not the same thing. “He is as good as gold,” she said, “ever so much better than you are, Paul,” stroking his hair with her hand and looking into his eyes.

“Better than anybody I have ever known,” said Montague.

“I think he is; but that is not everything. I suppose we ought to love the best people best; but I don’t, Paul.”

“I do,” said he.

“No, you don’t. I won’t be called good. Do you know, Paul, I have sometimes thought I would accept him, out of sheer gratitude.”

“Where should I have been?”

“Oh, you! Somebody else would have made you happy. But, Paul, I think he will never love anyone else. I ought not to say so, because it seems to be making so much of myself. But I feel it. He is not young, and yet I think that he never was in love before. There is an unchanging way with him that is awful to think of. He said that he could never be happy unless I would marry him. Oh, Paul, I love you so dearly – but I almost think that I ought to have obeyed him.”

Paul Montague of course had very much to say in answer to this. Even if Roger were an angel, he could have no claim upon her, since he had failed to win her heart.

But what was to be done about poor Roger? Whether for good or bad, Hetta had now given herself to Paul Montague. Should he not be told?

“Do you know, I almost feel that he is like a father to me,” said Hetta, leaning on her lover’s shoulder.

Paul thought it over, and then said that he would himself write to Roger. “Hetta, I doubt whether he will ever speak to me again.”

“I cannot believe that.”

“There is a sternness about him. He has taught himself to think that as I met you in his house, and as he wished you to be his wife, I should not have ventured to love you. He will tell me that I have been untrue to him and ungrateful – and I must bear it, though it will be a great sorrow. I will write to him, and his answer will be all scorn and wrath. You must write to him afterwards. I think he will forgive you, but he will never forgive me.”

Then they parted, she having promised that she would tell her mother directly Lady Carbury came home, and Paul undertaking to write to Roger that evening.

And he did, with infinite difficulty, and much trembling of the spirit. Here is his letter:

My dear Roger,

I think it right to tell you at once what has occurred today. I have proposed to Miss Carbury and she has accepted me. You have long known what my feelings were, and I have also known yours. I have known, too, that Miss Carbury has more than once declined to take your offer. Under these circumstances I cannot think that I have been untrue to our friendship, or that I have proved myself ungrateful for the affectionate kindness which you have always shown me. I am authorised by Hetta to say that, even if I had never spoken to her, it must have been the same to you.

(This was hardly what had been said, but the writer, looking back upon his interview with the lady, thought that it had been implied.)

You once said, that should such a thing occur there must be a division between us ever after. If I thought that you would keep to that threat, I should be very unhappy and Hetta would be miserable. Surely, if a man loves he is bound to tell his love, and to take the chance. You would hardly have thought it manly in me if I had abstained. Dear friend, take a day or two before you answer this, and do not banish us from your heart if you can help it.

Your affectionate friend,
Paul Montague.

Roger Carbury did not take a single day, or a single hour to answer the letter. He received it at breakfast, and after rushing out on the terrace and walking

there for a few minutes, he hurried to his desk and wrote his reply, his face red with wrath, and his eyes glowing with indignation.

You would not have written as you have done, had you not felt yourself to be false and ungrateful. You knew where my heart was, and there you went and undermined my treasure, and stole it away. You have destroyed my life, and I will never forgive you.

You tell me not to banish you both from my heart. How dare you join yourself with her in speaking of my feelings! She will never be banished from my heart. She will be there morning, noon, and night, and as is my love to her, so shall be my enmity to you.

Roger Carbury.

Henrietta told her mother that morning. "Mamma, Mr. Paul Montague has been here, and I have told him—"

"You have not accepted him?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Without even asking me?"

"Mamma, you knew. I will not marry him without asking you."

"Marry him! How is it possible you should marry him? He is a ruined man, and for all I know he may be compromised in Melmotte's wickedness."

"Oh, mamma, do not say that!"

"But I do say it. I did think that you would try to comfort me after all this trouble with Felix. But you are as bad as he is! And you will break your cousin's heart. Poor Roger! he has been so true to us! But you think nothing of that."

"I think very much of my cousin Roger."

"And how do you show it? Now we must starve, I suppose. Hetta, you have been even worse to me than Felix." Then Lady Carbury burst out of the room, and took herself to her own chamber.



Chapter 67

Sir Felix Protects his Sister

Up to this period of his life Sir Felix Carbury had suffered little from his own shortcomings. He had spent all his fortune; he had lost his commission in the army; he had incurred the contempt of everybody that had known him; he had lost friendships and made no new ones; he had pretty nearly ruined his mother and sister. Yet he had eaten and drunk, gambled, hunted, and diverted himself generally like a young man about town.

But now an end seemed to have come. When he was lying in bed in his mother's house he counted up his wealth. He had a few pounds in ready money, and a little roll of Miles Grendall's I.O.U.s, amounting to a couple of hundred pounds – and Mr. Melmotte owed him £600. But what was he to do with himself?

Gradually he learned the story of Marie's journey to Liverpool and back, how Marie's money had been repaid by Mr. Broune, and how his own failure to go to Liverpool had become known. He was ashamed to go to his club, or to show himself in the streets. He was becoming almost afraid even of his mother. Now that the brilliant marriage had broken down, and he had to depend on her for all his comforts, he was no longer able to treat her with absolute scorn; nor was she willing to yield as before.

One thing was clear to him. He must get his money. With this view he wrote both to Miles Grendall and to Melmotte – making no mention of Marie, but merely asking for the amounts due to him. Mr. Grendall sent him no answer whatever. And Melmotte's answer was not exactly what Sir Felix had wished. A clerk from Mr. Melmotte's office called at the house, and handed Felix a scrip in the Railway to the amount claimed, explaining that the money had been left in Mr. Melmotte's hands for the purpose of buying these shares. Sir Felix, who was glad to get anything, signed a receipt and took the scrip.

This took place on the day after the balloting at Westminster, when the result was not yet known, and the shares in the railway were very low indeed. When Sir Felix hurried off into the City he found that they might be worth about half the money due to him. The broker said they might recover; or, more probably, they might go to nothing. Sir Felix cursed the Great Financier aloud, and left the scrip for sale. That was the first time that he had been out of the house before dark since his little accident.

But he was chiefly tormented in these days by the lack of amusement. He did not know how to get through a day in which no excitement was provided for him. He never read. Thinking was beyond him. And he had never done a day's work in his life. He could lie in bed; he could eat and drink, smoke and sit idle. He could play cards; and could amuse himself with women. Beyond these things the world had nothing for him. Therefore he again took himself to the pursuit of Ruby Ruggles.

Poor Ruby had endured a very painful incarceration at her aunt's house. She had been angry and had stormed, swearing that she would be free to come and go as she pleased. Mrs. Pipkin told her that she was free to go, but that if she did, she was not free to return. Then Mrs. Hurtle talked to her, and poor Ruby was quelled

by the American lady's superior strength. But she was very unhappy. John Crumb couldn't have cared for her a bit after all, or he would have come to look after her.

At this point Sir Felix came to Mrs. Pipkin's house, and asked for Ruby at the door. Mrs. Pipkin denied that she was there. But Ruby heard her lover's voice, and rushed up and threw herself into his arms. She swore that she didn't care for her aunt, or for John Crumb, or for anything: only for her lover.

Mrs. Hurtle asked the young man his intentions. Did he mean to marry Ruby? Sir Felix said that he "supposed he might as well some day."

"There," shouted Ruby in triumph, "there!"

Mrs. Pipkin weakly allowed the lovers to remain together for half-an-hour in the dining-room; but when the half-hour was over, she said, "There must be an end of this. You must not come here, Sir Felix, unless you puts your intentions in writing."

To this, of course, Sir Felix made no answer. As he went home he congratulated himself on the success of his adventure. Perhaps when he had realised the money for the shares he would take Ruby for a tour abroad. The money would last for three or four months; which seemed almost an eternity.

Before dinner he found his sister alone in the drawing-room. Lady Carbury had gone to her own room after hearing the distressing story of Paul Montague's love. Hetta was melancholy, thinking of her mother's hard words; yet tinting her thoughts with a rosy hue because of the love which had been declared to her.

She gave Felix a short account of the party, and told him that she had talked with Marie. "I promised to give you a message."

"It's all of no use now," said Felix.

"But I must tell you what she said. I think that she really loves you. She wants you to let her know what you intend to do. If you mean to give her up, I think you should tell her."

"How can I tell her? I don't suppose they would let her receive a letter."

"Shall I write to her – or see her?"

"Just as you like. I don't care."

"Felix, you are very heartless."

"I don't suppose I'm much worse than other men. All of you here put me up to marry her."

"I never put you up to it."

"Mother did. And now because it did not go off, I am to hear nothing but reproaches. Of course I never cared so very much about her."

"Oh, Felix, that is so shocking!"

"I dare say. Other men are just as bad as I am – and a good deal worse too. You believe that there is nobody on earth like Paul Montague." Hetta blushed, but said nothing. "I suppose you'd be surprised to hear that Master Paul is engaged to marry an American widow living at Islington."

"Mr. Montague – engaged – to an American widow! I don't believe it."

"You'd better believe it, for it's true. He travelled about with her for ever so long in the United States, and he had her down with him at the hotel at Lowestoft about a fortnight ago. There's no mistake about it."

"I don't believe it," repeated Hetta. It could not be true. It was impossible that the man should have come to her with such a lie in his mouth as that. Though she felt faint, yet in her heart of hearts she did not believe it. Surely it was some horrid joke, or trick. "Felix, how dare you say such wicked things to me?"

“Wicked? If you have been fool enough to become fond of the man, it is only right you should be told. He is engaged to marry Mrs. Hurtle, and she is lodging in Islington. There,” said he, “that’s where she is;” and he wrote Mrs. Hurtle’s name and address down on a scrap of paper.

“It is not true,” said Hetta, rising from her seat. “I am engaged to Mr. Montague, and I am sure he would not treat me in that way.”

“Will you believe it if Roger Carbury says it’s true?”

“Roger Carbury will not say so.”

“He will. He knows all about it, and has seen the woman. By heaven! Master Paul shall answer to me. But my mother will not scruple to ask Roger, and she will believe what Roger tells her.”

“I do not believe a word of it,” said Hetta, leaving the room. But when she was alone she was very wretched. There must be some foundation for such a tale. She sat upon her bed and cried. Yet why should the man have come to her, asking her hand in marriage, if the tale were really true?

At dinner all sat silent. Soon afterwards Felix slunk away to some music hall or theatre in quest probably of some other Ruby Ruggles.

Then Lady Carbury again attacked her daughter. Felix had told her what he had learned from Ruby, who had seen Paul Montague at the house, and knew that he had taken Mrs. Hurtle to Lowestoft. Mrs. Pipkin had said they were engaged.

“What Felix has told you, my dear, is true. He has been to the house.”

“Has he seen her?”

“I do not know, but Roger Carbury has seen her. If I write to him will you believe what he says?”

“Don’t write to him, mamma.”

“Why not? If this other man is a villain am I not bound to protect you? If your cousin Roger tells you that it is true – that the man is engaged to marry this woman, then I suppose you will be contented.”

“Contented, mamma! I shall never be contented again.”

The story was not altogether displeasing to Lady Carbury, though her daughter’s agony pained her. But she had no wish that Paul Montague should be her son-in-law, and she still thought that Roger might succeed. That night before she went to bed she wrote to him.

“If,” she said, “you know that there is such a person as Mrs. Hurtle, and that Mr. Montague has promised to make her his wife, of course you will tell me. You know what my wishes are about Hetta, and how utterly opposed I am to Mr. Montague’s interference. If it is true, as Felix says, that he is entangled with another woman, he is guilty of gross insolence; and if you know all the circumstances you can surely protect us – and also yourself.”



Chapter 68

Miss Melmotte Declares her Purpose

Poor Hetta passed a very bad night. Paul's courtship had been so graceful, so soft, so modest, and so long continued! The whole state of his mind had, she had thought, been visible to her – gentle and affectionate. He had been aware of her friends' feeling, and had therefore hesitated to declare himself. And yet his love had not been the less true. Poor Hetta had waited, having absolute confidence in his honour and love.

And now she was told that this man had been playing a game so base, and so foolish, that she could find no possible cause for it. Though she was wretched and sore at heart she swore to herself that she would not believe it. She knew that her mother would write to Roger Carbury. She did not dare to appeal to Paul himself.

But there was other wretchedness besides her own. She had given Marie Melmotte's message to her brother, and she must now let Marie have her brother's reply. That might be told in a very few words – “Everything is over!” But it had to be told.

“I want to call upon Miss Melmotte,” she said to her mother at breakfast.

“Why? I thought you hated the Melmottes?”

“I don't hate her, mamma. I have a message for her, from Felix. She wanted to know if all that was over. Of course it is over. They could never be married now; could they, mamma?”

Lady Carbury was beginning to disbelieve in the Melmotte wealth, and thought it impossible in any case that Melmotte should forgive Felix's offence.

“It is out of the question,” she said. “You can go, if you please. I doubt whether the girl will get anybody to take her now.”

So Hetta made her way to Grosvenor Square. Seeing a confusion of carts and workmen outside the house, she hesitated. But she went on, and rang the bell at the door, which was wide open. Within the hall, the pilasters, wreaths and banners, which had been built up with so much trouble, were now being pulled down and hauled away.

Amidst the ruins Melmotte himself was standing. He was now a member of Parliament, and was to take his place that night in the House. It might be only for a short time; but it should be written in the story of his life that he had sat in the House of Commons as member for Westminster.

At present he was careful to show himself everywhere. That morning he had already been into the City, and he was now propitiating the contractor about payment.

Hetta timidly asked one of the workmen whether Miss Melmotte was there.

“Do you want my daughter?” said Melmotte coming forward, and just touching his hat. “She is not living here at present. May I be allowed to tell her who was asking after her?”

“I am Miss Carbury,” said Hetta in a very low voice.

“Oh, indeed! Sir Felix's sister! May I ask whether you have any business with my daughter?”

The story was a hard one to tell; but she did tell it very simply. She had come with a message from her brother. There had been something between her brother and Miss Melmotte, and her brother had felt that it would be best that he should acknowledge that it must all be over.

“I wonder whether that is true,” said Melmotte, with his eyebrows knit. “Because, you know, there has been a deal of falsehood and double dealing. Sir Felix has behaved infamously. A day or two before my daughter started, he gave me a written assurance that the whole thing was over, and now he sends you here. How am I to know what you are really after?”

“I have come because I thought I could do some good,” she said, trembling with anger and fear. “I was speaking to your daughter at your party.”

“Oh, you were there, were you? When one has been deceived like that, one is apt to be suspicious, Miss Carbury. You are not plotting another journey to Liverpool; are you? I will take you across to Bruton Street to see her.”

At his bidding she walked by his side. “May I hear what you say to her?” he asked.

“No. But I have told you, and you can say it for me. If you please, I think I will go home now.”

But Melmotte knew that his daughter would not believe him on such a subject. This girl she probably would believe.

“Oh, you shall see her,” he said. “I don’t suppose she’s such a fool as to try that kind of thing again.”

The door in Bruton Street was opened, and Hetta found herself almost pushed into the hall. She was left alone in the drawing-room for a long time. Then the door was slowly opened and Marie crept into the room.

“Miss Carbury,” she said, “this is so good of you! I do so love you for coming to me! You said you would love me. You will; will you not?” and Marie, sitting down, took her hand and encircled her waist.

“Mr. Melmotte has told you why I have come.”

“Yes; that is, I don’t know. I never believe what papa says to me.” To poor Hetta this announcement was horrible. “He thinks I ought to do just what he tells me, as though my soul were not my own. I won’t agree to that; would you? What does Felix say, dear?”

“It must all be over, Miss Melmotte.”

“Is that all, Miss Carbury?”

“What more can I say? I gave him your message, and I have brought back the answer. My brother, you know, has no income – nothing at all.”

“But I have,” said Marie with eagerness.

“But your father—”

“It does not depend upon papa. If papa treats me badly, I can give it to my husband. I know I can. If I can venture, cannot he?”

“I think it is impossible.”

“Impossible! Nothing should be impossible. Does he love me, Miss Carbury? It all depends on that. That’s what I want to know.” She paused, but Hetta could not answer. “Does he love me? If you know I think you ought to tell me.” Hetta was still silent. “Have you nothing to say?”

“Miss Melmotte—” began poor Hetta very slowly.

“Call me Marie. I don’t even know what your name is.”

“Hetta.”

“Hetta; that’s short for something. But it’s very pretty. I have no brother, no sister. And I’ll tell you, though you must not tell anybody: I have no real mother. Madame Melmotte is not my mamma. And papa is so cruel to me! He beats me sometimes.” Hetta shuddered as she heard this. “But I never will yield for that. When he thumps me I turn and gnash my teeth at him. Can you be surprised that I should be always thinking of my lover? But if he doesn’t love me, what am I to do then?”

“I don’t know what to say.” Hetta’s heart was melted with sympathy. “I wish I could tell you something for your comfort.”

“He will not try again, you think?”

“I am sure he will not.”

“I wonder what he fears. I should fear nothing. Why should we not walk out of the house, and be married anyway? Nobody has a right to stop me.”

“Indeed my brother is sure that he cannot – cannot–”

“Cannot love me, Hetta! Say it out, if it is true.”

“It is true,” said Hetta.

There came over the face of the other girl a stern hard look, and she relaxed her hold on Hetta’s waist.

“Oh, my dear, I do not mean to be cruel, but you asked me for the truth.”

“Yes; I did.”

“Men are not, I think, like girls.”

“I suppose not,” said Marie slowly. “What liars they are, what brutes; what wretches! Why should he break my heart? Did he never love me?”

“It is better that you should think of him no more.”

“Could you? If you had loved a man and agreed to be his wife, could you bear to be told to think of him no more? I won’t love him. No; I’ll hate him. But I must think of him. I’ll marry that other man to spite him, and then, when he finds that we are rich, he’ll be broken-hearted.”

“You should try to forgive him, Marie.”

“Never. Do not tell him that I forgive him. Tell him that I hate him. Did he tell you to say that he did not love me?”

“I wish I had not come,” said Hetta.

“I am glad you have come. It was very kind. I don’t hate *you*. But are you sure he does not love me?”

“I am sure.”

“Then he is a brute. Tell him that I say that he is a false-hearted liar, and that I trample him under my foot. I despise him. He is the worst of all. Papa beats me, but I can bear that. Mamma reviles me and I can bear that. He might have beaten me and reviled me, and I could have borne it. But to think that he was a liar all the time; that I can’t bear.”

Then she burst into tears. Hetta kissed her, tried to comfort her, and left her sobbing on the sofa.

Two or three hours later, Marie Melmotte walked into Madame Melmotte’s room, and declared: “You can tell papa that I will marry Lord Nidderdale whenever he pleases.”

“Your papa will be very glad to hear it,” said Madame Melmotte.

“Yes,” continued Marie passionately. “I’ll marry Lord Nidderdale, or that horrid Mr. Grendall, or his old fool of a father – or the sweeper at the crossing, or anybody else that he chooses. I don’t care who it is. But I’ll lead him such a life

afterwards! I'll make Lord Nidderdale repent the hour he saw me! You may tell papa." And having entrusted this message to Madame Melmotte, Marie left the room.



Chapter 69

Melmotte in Parliament

Melmotte did not return home in time to hear the good news that day. If he were the father-in-law of the eldest son of a marquis, he thought he might almost be safe: charges would hardly be pressed against a Member for Westminster whose daughter was married to the heir of the Marquis of Auld Reekie! But he had not yet heard that his daughter had yielded in reference to Lord Nidderdale.

There was considerable uneasiness felt in some circles as to how Melmotte should take his seat. When he was put forward as the Conservative candidate, the party had intended that his election – if he were elected – should be hailed as a great Conservative triumph. He was elected, but the trumpets had not yet sounded. The party had suddenly become ashamed of their man.

But there was already springing up an idea among another class that Melmotte might become a Conservative man of the people. The new farthing newspaper, *The Mob*, was putting Melmotte forward as a political hero, calling him a Napoleon of the business world who might be forgiven certain irregularities. *The Mob* thought that a good deal should be overlooked in a Melmotte, and that the philanthropy of his great designs should be allowed to cover his sins.

Mr. Melmotte, therefore, was able to hold his head higher than on the unfortunate night of the banquet. He had replied to the letter from Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile with a note, in which he merely said that he would lose no time in settling matters as to the purchase of Pickering. Slow and Bideawhile were of course anxious that things should be settled. They wanted no prosecution for forgery; and they hoped to take some wind out of the sails of the odious Squercum. If Melmotte raised the money, there was no reason why that note purporting to have been signed by Dolly Longestaffe should ever leave their office. They still protested their belief that it did bear Dolly's signature.

But still the money had not been paid. Squercum charged Slow and Bideawhile with having delivered up the title-deeds on the authority of a mere note with a forged signature. He demanded that the note should be impounded. He was informed that Mr. Melmotte had promised to pay the money at once, but that a day or two must be allowed. Mr. Squercum replied that on his client's behalf he should open the matter before the Lord Mayor.

In this way two or three days had passed without any renewal of the accusation, and Melmotte had partly recovered his position. It was pretty well known that Mr. Longestaffe had not received his money; but there was no crime in that. The Longestaffes, father and son, had probably been very foolish. And Slow and Bideawhile might have been remiss in their duty. But those who had expected to see Melmotte behind bars by now felt that they had been deceived.

It would normally have been the pleasant duty of some popular Conservative to introduce Melmotte to the House. But no popular Conservative offered his services. It was suggested that Lord Nidderdale might do it; but though he was a good fellow, he never did anything in Parliament.

Melmotte, who knew little about it, went down to the House at four o'clock, carrying out his resolution that he would be stopped by no phantom fears. He

knew that he was a Member, and he would assume his right. But fortune befriended him. The very leader of the party happened to be entering the House at the same time.

“You had better let me accompany you,” said the Conservative leader, with something of chivalry in his heart. And so Mr. Melmotte was introduced to the House by the head of his party! Was not this a guarantee of the man’s respectability?

Lord Nidderdale saw his father in the lobby of the House of Lords that afternoon and told him what had occurred. The old man had been in a state of great doubt about his son’s marriage to Marie. He was aware of the ruin that would follow if the rumours about Melmotte proved to be true. But he did not believe the rumours, though he was fully determined that the money should be paid down before the marriage took place.

“Old Cure tells me he doesn’t believe a word of it,” said the father. Cure was the family lawyer.

“There’s some hitch about Dolly Longestaffe’s money, sir,” said the son.

“What’s that to us if he has our money ready? I suppose it isn’t easy even for a man like that to get a couple of hundred thousand together. If he has borrowed a trifle from Longestaffe to make up the girl’s money, I shan’t complain. You stand to your guns.”

“You couldn’t let me have a couple of hundred, could you, sir?” suggested the son.

“No, I couldn’t.”

“I’m awfully hard up.”

“So am I.” The old man toddled away.

Lord Nidderdale went to the Beargarden, where he found Grasslough and Miles Grendall dining together, and seated himself at the next table.

“You’ve heard it, I suppose,” said Miles in an awful whisper.

“Heard what?”

“I believe he doesn’t know!” said Lord Grasslough. “Vossner has bolted!”

“Bolted!” exclaimed Nidderdale, dropping his spoon.

“Bolted,” repeated Grasslough. Lord Nidderdale looked round the room and became aware of the awful expression of dismay worn by all the members. “He has sold all our acceptances to a fellow in Great Marlbro’ called Flatfleece.”

“I know him,” said Nidderdale. “A bottle of champagne!” He appealed to the waiter in almost a humble voice. The waiter whispered the terrible announcement that there was not a bottle of champagne in the house.

“Good G ___,” exclaimed the unfortunate nobleman. The others shook their heads.

“Brandy?” suggested Nidderdale. There had been a few bottles of brandy, but they had already been consumed. “Send out and get some brandy,” said Nidderdale; but he had to take silver from his pocket before it could be done.

Then Lord Grasslough told the whole story as far as it was known. Herr Vossner had not been seen since nine o’clock on the preceding evening. The head waiter had known for some weeks that heavy bills were due. And the numerous I.O.U.s written by the members had all been sold to Mr. Flatfleece.

At this moment Dolly Longestaffe came in, having heard the story.

“Here’s a go,” he said. “One thing atop of another! Is that brandy you’re drinking, Nidderdale? Does anybody know anything of that fellow Melmotte?”

“He’s down in the House, as big as life,” said Nidderdale. “He’s all right, I think.”

“I wish he’d pay me my money then. That fellow Flatfleece showed me notes of mine for about £1,500! I write such a beastly hand that I never know whether I’ve written it or not. But, by George, a fellow can’t eat and drink £1,500 in less than six months!”

“There’s no knowing what you can do, Dolly,” said Lord Grasslough.

“It’s some of your card money, perhaps,” said Nidderdale.

“How is a fellow to know? If any fellow writes D. Longestaffe, am I obliged to pay it? Everybody is writing my name! I wish Melmotte wouldn’t go and write my name. Vossner is a swindler; but, by Jove, I know a worse than Vossner.”

With that he turned on his heels and went into the smoking-room. After he was gone, there was silence at the table, for it was known that Lord Nidderdale was to marry Melmotte’s daughter.

In the meantime a scene of a different kind was going on in the House of Commons. Melmotte had been seated on one of the back Conservative benches, and there he remained for a time unnoticed. He sat motionless for an hour, looking round him and wondering. He had never until now been even in the gallery of the House. The place was very much smaller than he had thought, and much less tremendous. The Speaker did not strike him with the awe which he had expected.

For the first hour he hardly caught the meaning of anything that was said. One man got up very quickly after another, some of them barely rising to say the few words that they uttered. It seemed to him to be a very commonplace affair.

Then suddenly the manner of the thing was changed, and one gentleman made a long speech. Melmotte listened: the gentleman was proposing some addition to a commercial treaty and was expounding in very strong language the ruinous injustice to which England was exposed by importing gloves made in a country in which no income tax was levied. Melmotte cared nothing about gloves, and very little about England’s ruin. But in the course of the debate which followed, a question arose about the value of money, and of the conversion of shillings into francs and dollars. About this Melmotte really did know something, and he pricked up his ears.

It seemed to him that a gentleman, one Mr. Brown, whom he knew very well in the city – and who had maliciously stayed away from his dinner – understood nothing at all of what he was saying. Here was an opportunity for revenge – and for showing the world at the same time that he was not afraid of his city enemies! It required some courage certainly; but he had determined that nothing should cow him. He saw no reason why he should not put the old fool right, although he knew nothing of the forms of the House.

Melmotte was still doubting whether to speak, when suddenly Mr. Brown sat down. There did not seem to be any particular end to the speech, nor had Melmotte followed any general thread of argument. But a statement had been made containing, as Melmotte thought, a fundamental error in finance. Nobody at once rose. The subject would have dropped; but on a sudden the new member was on his legs.

Not in living memory had a member got up to make a speech within two or three hours of his first entry into the House. And this gentleman was one whose recent election had been of a very peculiar kind. Some had thought that his appearance in Parliament would be prevented by his disappearance within the walls of Newgate Jail. But here he was, standing up! The courteous attention

which is always shown to a new member when he first speaks, was extended to Melmotte.

As soon as he was on his legs, and found that everybody was silent and listening, a good deal of his courage oozed out of his fingers' ends. He caught the eyes of great men fixed upon him – of men who had not seemed at all great a few minutes before, yawning beneath their hats. Mr. Brown, poor as his speech had been, had, no doubt, prepared it; while Melmotte had not dreamed of putting two words together. He had thought, as far as he had thought at all, that he could rattle off what he had to say just as he might at the Mexican Railway Board. But there was the Speaker, and those three clerks in their wigs, and the mace – and all those eyes! He forgot the very point on which he had intended to crush Mr. Brown.

But his courage was too high to allow him to be quelled. Though he was red in the face, perspiring, and utterly confused, he was determined to make a dash at the matter.

“Mr. Brown is all wrong,” he said. Mr. Brown turned slowly and looked up at him. Some one behind him suggested that he should take off his hat. There was a cry of order, which of course he did not understand. “Yes, you are,” said Melmotte, frowning angrily at poor Mr. Brown.

“The honourable member,” said the Speaker, with the most good-natured voice which he could assume, “is perhaps not yet aware that he should not call another member by his name. He should speak of the gentleman as the honourable member for Whitechapel. And in speaking he should address the chair.”

“You should take your hat off,” said the man behind.

Melmotte did take off his hat, and was made more confused by doing so.

“What he said was all wrong,” he continued; “and I should have thought a man out of the City, like Mr. Brown, ought to have known better.”

Then there were repeated calls of order, and a violent outburst of laughter from both sides of the House. Melmotte stood for a while glaring around him, summoning his pluck for a renewal of his attack on Mr. Brown, determined not to be put down, but still utterly unable to find words. “I ought to know something about it,” he said, sitting down and hiding his indignation and his shame under his hat.

“We are sure that the honourable member for Westminster does understand the subject,” said the leader of the House, “and we shall be very glad to hear his remarks.”

But Mr. Melmotte would not rise again. He had at any rate shown his courage, if not much eloquence. He kept his seat till the regular stampede was made for dinner, and then walked out in as stately a way as he could.

“Well, that was plucky!” said Cohenlupe, the honourable member for Staines, taking his friend's arm in the lobby.

“I don't see any pluck in it. That old fool Brown didn't know what he was talking about, and I wanted to tell them so. It seems to be a stupid sort of place.”

“Has Longestaffe's money been paid?” said Cohenlupe, looking up into his friend's face.

“Don't you trouble your head about Longestaffe,” said Melmotte, getting into his carriage; “leave him and his money to me. I hope you are not scared by what fools say.”

“Oh, dear, no,” said Cohenlupe. But he was meditating his own escape from England, and was trying to remember what happy country would not interfere with the comfort of a retired gentleman such as himself.

That evening Madame Melmotte told her husband that Marie was now willing to marry Lord Nidderdale; but she did not say anything about Marie's threat of the sort of life she would lead her husband.



Chapter 70

Sir Felix Meddles with Many Matters

A brother is duty-bound to defend his sister from ill-usage; but in the way we live now, no duty is more difficult or more indistinct. We are not allowed to fight duels, and banging about another man with a stick is always disagreeable and seldom successful. A John Crumb can do it, perhaps; but not a Sir Felix Carbury.

There is a feeling, too, when a girl has been jilted after the gentleman has had the fun of making love to her for an entire season, and has perhaps even been allowed privileges as her promised husband, that the less said the better. The girl does not mean to break her heart. Though this one has been false, the road to success is still open. But if the affair is made notorious by a fight, the difficulty of finding a substitute will be greatly increased.

Sir Felix had vowed to avenge his sister for her ill-usage by Paul Montague. And Hetta was fool enough to believe him. Two days later, no answer had yet come from Roger Carbury. Hetta's mind was full of her trouble, and she remembered her brother's threat, which Felix had forgotten.

"Felix," she said, "you won't mention that to Mr. Montague!"

"Mention what? Oh! about that woman, Mrs. Hurtle? Indeed I shall. A man who does that kind of thing ought to be crushed; and, by heavens, if he does it to you, he shall be crushed."

"Felix, if it is so, I will see him no more."

"If it is so!"

"Mamma has written to Roger. If you and he both say that he is to marry that woman, I will not see Mr. Montague again. Pray do not go to him."

"Leave that to me," said Sir Felix, walking out of the room with much fraternal bluster. Then he had himself driven to Paul Montague's lodgings. Had Hetta not been foolish enough to remind him of his duty, he would not have done it.

"Montague," he said, with all the dignity that his late sorrows had left to him, "I believe I am right in saying that you are engaged to marry that American lady, Mrs. Hurtle."

"You were never more wrong in your life. What business have you with Mrs. Hurtle?"

"When a man proposes to my sister, I think I've a great deal of business," said Sir Felix.

"Well; yes; I admit that. I beg your pardon. But I am not going to marry Mrs. Hurtle. You can go and ask her if you please. On the other hand, it is the dearest wish of my heart to marry your sister."

"You were engaged to Mrs. Hurtle?"

"My dear Carbury, I don't think I'm bound to tell you all the details of my past life. I tell you that I am not connected with Mrs. Hurtle. If you still doubt, I refer you to the lady herself. Beyond that, I won't go. Of course, Carbury," said Paul, "I wish to regard you as a brother."

Sir Felix blustered, but took no steps towards revenge. Instead he left. He was now near his old haunts, and for the first time since his misadventure,

resolved to go to the Beargarden for a glass of sherry, and in this way gradually creep back to his old habits. But when he arrived there, the club was shut up.

“What the deuce is Vossner about?” said he. He rang the bell, and knocked at the door. One of the servants eventually drew back the bolts, and told him the astounding news: Mr. Vossner had gone away; there had been a meeting of the Committee, and the club was shut.

“By George!” The young baronet was filled with indignation. What business had the club to be shut? Had he not paid his subscription in advance?

He went direct to Mrs. Pipkin’s house. He was admitted by Ruby herself, who was of course delighted to see him.

“Who do you think is in town?” she said. “John Crumb; but though he came here ever so smart, I wouldn’t so much as speak to him, except to tell him to go away.” Sir Felix felt an uncomfortable sensation creep over him. “I don’t know what he should come after me for, when I told him as plain as the nose on his face that I never want to see him again.”

“He’s not of much account,” said the baronet.

“He would marry me immediately, if I’d have him,” continued Ruby, who perhaps thought that her honest old lover should not be spoken of as being of no account. “And he has everything comfortable in his house, and they say he’s ever so much money in the bank. But I detest him,” said Ruby, shaking her pretty head, and leaning on her aristocratic lover’s shoulder.

This took place in the back parlour. Then Mrs. Pipkin ascended from the kitchen prepared to disturb the romantic bliss with wretched references to the cold outer world.

“Well, now, Sir Felix,” she began, “if things is square, of course you’re welcome to see my niece.”

“And what if they’re round, Mrs. Pipkin?” said the gallant Lothario.

“Well, or round either, so long as they’re honest.”

“Ruby and I are both honest; ain’t we, Ruby? I want to take her out to dinner, Mrs. Pipkin. She shall be back before ten. Come, Ruby, get your hat and we’ll be off. I’ve ever so many things to tell you.”

Ever so many things to tell her! They must be to fix a day for the marriage, and to let her know where they were to live, and to settle what dress she should wear – and perhaps to give her the money to go and buy it! Ever so many things to tell her! Ruby looked up into Mrs. Pipkin’s face with imploring eyes.

“Have it been put in writing, Sir Felix?” demanded Mrs. Pipkin with cruel gravity.

“Writing be bothered,” said Sir Felix.

“That’s all very well, Sir Felix. Writing do bother, very often. But when a gentleman has intentions, a bit of writing shows it plainer nor words. Ruby don’t go out to dine unless you puts it into writing.”

“Aunt Pipkin!” exclaimed the wretched Ruby.

“What do you think I’m going to do with her?” asked Sir Felix.

“If you want to make her your wife, put it in writing. And if you don’t, just say so, and walk away, free.”

“I shall go,” said Ruby. “I’m not going to be kept here a prisoner. I can go when I please. You wait, Felix, and I’ll be down in a minute.” The girl ran nimbly upstairs, and began to change her dress.

“She don’t come back here no more, Sir Felix,” said Mrs. Pipkin, in her most solemn tones. “But I’d be loth to see her on the streets.”

“Then why won’t you let me bring her back again?”

“Cause that’d be the way to send her there. You don’t mean to marry her.”

To this Sir Felix said nothing. “You’re not thinking of that. It’s just a bit of sport – she’s an old shoe to be chucked away, a rag to be swept into the dust-bin. I’ve seen scores of ’em. But it’s all nothing to the likes o’ you.”

“I haven’t done her any harm,” said Sir Felix, almost frightened.

“Then go away, and don’t do her any.”

As she spoke, Mrs. Hurtle came downstairs, and was introduced to Sir Felix. Mrs. Hurtle had heard often of Sir Felix Carbury, and was quite as certain as Mrs. Pipkin that he did not mean to marry Ruby Ruggles. In a few minutes Felix found himself alone with Mrs. Hurtle in her own room. He had been anxious to see her since he had heard of her engagement with Paul Montague.

“Sir Felix Carbury,” she said, “I am afraid you are doing that poor girl no good, and are intending to do her none. Would it not be better that you should leave her to marry a man who is really fond of her?”

He could already see something in Mrs. Hurtle’s eye which prevented his at once bursting into wrath; but who was Mrs. Hurtle, that she should interfere with him?

“Upon my word, ma’am,” he said, “I’m very much obliged to you, but I don’t quite know to what I owe the honour of your – your–”

“Interference. I’d interfere to save any woman that God ever made,” said Mrs. Hurtle with energy. “You must leave her, Sir Felix.”

“She may do as she pleases.”

“Do you mean to make her your wife?” asked Mrs. Hurtle sternly.

“Does Mr. Paul Montague mean to make you his wife?” rejoined Sir Felix with an impudent swagger. He had certainly struck the blow hard enough, and it went all the way home. She had not thought that he would have heard anything of her own concerns. She did not know that Hetta Carbury was the girl whom Paul loved. Had Paul talked about her so that this young scamp knew all her story?

She thought awhile before she could answer him.

“I do not see,” she said, “that there is any parallel between the two cases. I am old enough to take care of myself. Should he not marry me, I am as I was before. Will it be so with that poor girl if she allows herself to be taken about the town by you at night?”

“If you’ll answer me, I’ll answer you,” said Sir Felix. “Does Mr. Montague mean to make you his wife?”

“It does not concern you,” said she, flashing upon him. “The question is insolent.”

“It does concern me a great deal. And as you won’t answer me, I won’t answer you.”

“Then, sir, that girl’s fate will be upon your head.”

“I know all about that,” said the baronet.

“And the young man who has followed her up to town will probably know where to find you,” added Mrs. Hurtle.

Without answering, Sir Felix left the room. At any rate, John Crumb was not there at present. When he descended, he found Ruby in the hall, all arrayed.

“You don’t come in here again tonight,” said Mrs. Pipkin, “if you goes out of that there door with that there young man.”

“Then I shall,” said Ruby, linking herself on to her lover’s arm.

“Baggage! Slut!” said Mrs. Pipkin; “after all I’ve done for you, just as though you were my own flesh and blood.”

“I’ve worked for it, haven’t I?” rejoined Ruby.

“You send for your things tomorrow, for you don’t come here no more. As for you,” – and she looked at Sir Felix – “I’d like to shake you.”

Sir Felix left the house with Ruby on his arm. For the moment, she was triumphant and happy. She did not stop to consider whether her aunt would open her door when she returned. She was on her lover’s arm, in her best clothes, and going to dinner. And her lover had told her that he had ever so many things to say to her!

But she would ask no impertinent questions in the first hour of her bliss. It was so pleasant to walk with him up to Pentonville, and turn into a gay tea-garden; so pleasant to hear him order good things! So there we will leave Ruby in her bliss.

At about nine that evening John Crumb called at Mrs. Pipkin’s, and was told that Ruby had gone out with Sir Felix Carbury.

“He’ll have it hot some day,” said John Crumb, glaring. He was allowed to remain waiting for Ruby till midnight, and then, with a sorrowful heart, he departed.



Chapter 71

John Crumb Falls into Trouble

It was on a Friday evening that this happened.

“Of course you must let her in,” Mrs. Hurtle had said to Mrs. Pipkin, after the girl’s departure. Whereupon Mrs. Pipkin had cried. She knew she could not keep the girl out in the streets all night; yet it was hard upon her to be so troubled.

“We usen’t to have ways like that when I was young,” she said, sobbing. Nevertheless she acknowledged that Ruby must be let in when she came back. Then, about nine o’clock, John Crumb came, and it was impossible to conceal the truth from him. Mrs. Hurtle told the poor man the story.

“She’s headstrong, Mr. Crumb,” said Mrs. Hurtle.

“She is that, ma’am. And she went to dinner wi’ the Baro-nite, did she? Didn’t she have no dinner here?”

Mrs. Pipkin spoke up with a keen sense of offence. Ruby Ruggles had had as wholesome a dinner as any young woman in London, for there was “no starvation nor stint in her house.”

John Crumb immediately produced a very thick and useful blue cloak, which he had brought with him from Bungay, as a present to the woman who had been good to his Ruby. He assured her that he did not doubt that her food was plentiful. It was some little time before Mrs. Pipkin would allow herself to be appeased; but at last she permitted the garment to be placed on her shoulders. But it was done after a melancholy fashion, with no delight.

“It’s very good of you, Mr. Crumb, to think of an old woman like me, particularly when you’ve such a deal of trouble with a young ’un.”

“It’s like the smut in the wheat, Mrs. Pipkin – it has to be put up with. Is she very partial, ma’am, to that young baro-nite?” This question was asked of Mrs. Hurtle.

“Just a passing fancy, Mr. Crumb,” said the lady.

“They never thinks as how their fancies may well-nigh half kill a man!” Then he sat silent for a while, his eyes fastened on Mrs. Pipkin’s ceiling. Mrs. Hurtle watched him. The man was to her an extraordinary being – so constant, so slow, so unexpressive, so unlike her own countrymen – yet so warm and enduring in his affections!

“Sir Felix Carbury!” he said. “I’ll Sir Felix him one of these days. Shouldn’t she be back by now, ma’am?”

“I suppose they’ve gone to some place of amusement,” said Mrs. Hurtle.

“Like enough,” said John Crumb in a low voice.

“She’s that mad after dancing,” said Mrs. Pipkin.

“And where is it they dance?” asked Crumb, getting up from his chair. Neither of them answered, however, and he sat down again. “Does ’em dance all night at them places, Mrs. Pipkin?”

“They do pretty nearly all that they oughtn’t to do,” said Mrs. Pipkin. John Crumb raised one of his fists, brought it down heavily on the palm of his other hand, and then again sat silent.

"I never knowed as she was fond o' dancing," he said, "or I'd a had dancing for her down at Bungay. D'ye think, ma'am, it's the dancing she's after, or the baro-nite?" This was another appeal to Mrs. Hurtle.

"I suppose they go together," said the lady.

Then there was another long pause, at the end of which poor John Crumb burst out with some violence. "Domn him! Domn him! Did I ever interfere wi' him? Never! But I wull. I wull. I'll swing for this at Bury!"

"Oh, Mr. Crumb, don't talk like that," said Mrs. Pipkin.

"Mr. Crumb is a little disturbed, but he'll get over it presently," said Mrs. Hurtle.

"She's a nasty slut to treat a young man as she's treating you," said Mrs. Pipkin.

"No, ma'am; she ain't nasty," said the lover. "But she's horrid crou'll. If I was to twist his neck, ma'am, would you say as I was wrong?"

"I'd sooner hear that you had taken the girl away from him," said Mrs. Hurtle.

"Half past eleven, is it? She must come some time, mustn't she?"

Mrs. Pipkin, who did not want to burn candles all night long, declared that she did not know. Poor Mr. Crumb remained there for another half-hour, in the hope that Ruby might come. But when the clock struck twelve he was told that he must go. Then he slowly collected his limbs and dragged them out of the house.

"He is a good fellow," said Mrs. Hurtle as soon as the door was closed.

"A deal too good for Ruby Ruggles," said Mrs. Pipkin. "Mr. Carbury says as he's as well to do as any tradesman down in them parts."

"I don't think much of any of the Carburys, Mrs. Pipkin. I suppose we may as well go to bed now. When that girl knocks, of course we must let her in. If I hear her, I'll go down and open the door for her."

Mrs. Pipkin made many apologies to her lodger for the condition of her household. She would stay up herself to answer the door, so that Mrs. Hurtle should not be disturbed. She hoped that Mrs. Hurtle would not be induced to quit the rooms by these disagreeable occurrences.

"I don't mind saying it now, Mrs. Hurtle, but your being here is ever so much to me. Good lodgers is so hard to get!"

However, Mrs. Hurtle cared nothing for disturbances, and rather liked the task of trying to save Ruby. She begged that Mrs. Pipkin would go to bed. Then Mrs. Hurtle took her candle and was on her way to her own sitting-room, when a loud double knock was heard. The door was opened, and there stood Ruby Ruggles, John Crumb, and two policemen! Ruby rushed in, and casting herself on to the stairs began to howl piteously.

"Laws a mercy; what is it?" asked Mrs. Pipkin.

"He's been and murdered him!" screamed Ruby.

"This young woman is living here, is she?" asked one of the policemen.

"She is," said Mrs. Hurtle. But now we must go back to the adventures of John Crumb after he left the house.

He had taken a bedroom at a small inn, which he frequented when business brought him up to London, and he set out to return there. He had turned down a street which he knew would take him to the Islington Angel and was standing with his mouth open, looking about, trying to make certain of his direction, and wondering whether to ask a policeman whom he saw.

Suddenly he heard a woman scream, and knew that it was Ruby's voice. The sound was very near him, but in the glimmer of the gaslight he could not quite see whence it came. Then he heard the voice distinctly: "I won't; I won't," and after that a scream. He rushed after the sound, and turning down a passage, saw Ruby struggling in a man's arms.

She had left the dancing hall with her lover; and there had arisen a question as to her further destiny for the night. Ruby wanted to try her chance at her aunt's door. Sir Felix said that he could make a preferable arrangement for her; and as Ruby was not at once amenable to his arguments he had thought that a little gentle force might help him. He had therefore dragged Ruby into the passage.

He had swallowed several tumblers of brandy and water, so he was brave enough to hold on to Ruby's arm even when she raised her voice. But could he have dreamed that John Crumb was near him? Suddenly he found a hand on his coat, and he was swung violently away against the railings so forcibly as to have the breath almost knocked out of his body. He could hear Ruby's exclamation, "If it isn't John Crumb!"

Then there came upon him a sense of coming destruction, as though the world for him were all over; and, collapsing, he slunk down upon the ground.

"Get up, you viper," said John Crumb. But the baronet thought it better to cling to the ground. "You shall get up," said John, lifting him by his collar. "Now, Ruby, he's a-going to have it." Whereupon Ruby screamed at the top of her voice, much more loudly than before.

"Don't hit a man when he's down," pleaded the baronet.

"I wunt," said John; "but I'll hit a fellow when he's up." He raised Sir Felix as if he were a child, and catching him round the neck with his left arm, struck the poor wretch some half-dozen times violently in the face. And he would have continued had not Ruby flown at him and rescued Sir Felix from his arms.

"He's about got enough of it," said John Crumb as Sir Felix fell to the ground, moaning fearfully.

Ruby's screams of course brought the police. And now the cruellest thing of all was that Ruby in her complaints to the policemen said not a word against Sir Felix, but was bitter in her denunciations of John Crumb. It was in vain that John endeavoured to make them understand that the young woman had been crying out for protection when he had interfered. Ruby was very quick of speech and John Crumb was very slow.

Sir Felix himself could say nothing. He could only moan and make futile efforts to wipe away the stream of blood from his face when the men stood him up leaning against the railings. And John would not say a word against Ruby. Having successfully "dropped into the baro-nite", he was not even angered by her denunciations of himself.

There was soon a third policeman on the spot, and a dozen other persons, who all took part against John Crumb. Two or three of them wiped Sir Felix's face, and thought that he had better be taken straight to hospital. One lady remarked that he was "so mashed and mauled" that she was sure he would never "come to" again. Sir Felix himself asked to be carried away somewhere, though he did not care whither.

At last the policemen decided upon a course of action. They had learned Sir Felix's identity from Ruby and Crumb. He was to be carried in a cab to Bartholomew Hospital by one constable, who would then take his address. Ruby should be conducted to the address she gave. John Crumb must be undoubtedly

locked up in the station-house. He was the offender; no one said a good word for him. He made no objection, buoyed up inwardly by the conviction that he had thoroughly thrashed his enemy.

Thus the two policemen with John Crumb and Ruby came together to Mrs. Pipkin's door. Ruby was still loud with complaints against John Crumb. She threatened the gallows, and handcuffs, and perpetual imprisonment.

But from Mrs. Hurtle the policemen did manage to learn something of the truth. Oh yes; the girl lived there and was respectable. This man whom they had arrested was respectable also, and was the girl's proper lover. The other man who had been beaten was undoubtedly the owner of a title; but he was not respectable, and was only the girl's improper lover.

John Crumb's name was given. "I'm John Crumb of Bungay," said he, "and I ain't afeared of nothin' nor nobody. And I ain't a been a drinking. In course I mauled 'un. And I meant it. That ere young woman is engaged to be my wife."

"No, I ain't," shouted Ruby.

"But she is," persisted John Crumb.

"Well then, I never will," rejoined Ruby.

John Crumb turned upon her a look of love, and put his hand on his heart. Whereupon the senior policeman said that he saw how it all was, but that Mr. Crumb had better come along with him, just for the present. To this arrangement he made no objection.

"Miss Ruggles," said Mrs. Hurtle, "if that young man doesn't conquer you at last you have no heart."

"Indeed and I have, and I don't mean to give it him if it's ever so. He's killed Sir Felix."

Mrs. Hurtle in a whisper to Mrs. Pipkin expressed a wicked wish that he had. After that the three women went to bed.



Chapter 72 “Ask Himself”

Roger Carbury, when he received the letter from Hetta's mother asking about Paul Montague and Mrs. Hurtle, was quite unable to write a reply. He asked himself what advice he would give if he were not personally concerned. He was sure that, as Hetta's cousin, he would tell her that Montague's entanglement with that American woman should have forbidden him to offer his hand to any other lady. He had seen them at Lowestoft, and had known that they were staying together as friends at the same hotel. He knew that she had come to England because of the engagement, which Montague had acknowledged. He knew that Montague made frequent visits to her in London.

He had, indeed, been told by Montague himself that the engagement had been broken off. He believed the man, but put no trust in his firmness; and he had no reason for supposing that Mrs. Hurtle had consented to be abandoned. He could not think that the man was at present fit to engage himself to another woman.

All this was clear to Roger Carbury. But it was equally clear to him that he could not, as a man of honour, assist his own cause by telling a tale against his friend. What was he to do? The girl whom he loved had confessed her love for the other man – who had been, he thought, a foul traitor to himself! He regarded himself as divided from Montague by an undying hostility. That his love for the woman would be equally undying he was quite sure. Already there were floating across his brain ideas of perpetuating his name in the person of some child of Hetta's – but with the distinct understanding that he and the child's father should never see each other.

As he could not trust himself to write an answer to Lady Carbury's letter, he determined to go to London to tell the story face to face. So he made the journey, and knocked at the door in Welbeck Street the morning after the unfortunate meeting between Sir Felix and John Crumb.

The servant-boy who opened the door looked as if there had been some terrible calamity. “My lady” had been summoned to the hospital to see Sir Felix, who was in a very bad way indeed. The boy did not exactly know what had happened, but supposed that Sir Felix had lost most of his limbs by this time. Miss Carbury was upstairs; and would no doubt see her cousin, though she too was dreadfully upset.

“What's this about Felix?” Roger asked her.

“Oh Roger, I am so glad to see you. Felix did not come home last night, and this morning there came a man from the hospital to say that he is there.”

“What has happened to him?”

“Somebody has – beaten him,” said Hetta, whimpering. Then she told the story as far as she knew it. The messenger from the hospital had declared that the young man was in no danger and that none of his bones were broken, but that he was terribly bruised about the face, with some of his teeth knocked out, and his lips cut open. But the surgeon had seen no reason why the young gentleman should not be taken home. “And mamma has gone to fetch him,” said Hetta.

“That’s John Crumb,” said Roger. Hetta had never heard of John Crumb, and simply stared at him. “You have not been told about John Crumb.”

“Why should he beat Felix like that?”

“They say, Hetta, that women are the cause of most troubles in the world.” The girl blushed up to her eyes. “John Crumb is a neighbour of mine and was in love with a girl; and he would have made her his wife and have been good to her. He had a home to offer her, and is an honest man with whom she would have been safe and happy. Your brother saw her and, though he knew that honest fellow had placed his happiness on the girl’s love, he thought – well, I suppose he thought that such a pretty thing as this girl was too good for John Crumb.”

“But Felix has been going to marry Miss Melmotte!”

“You’re old-fashioned, Hetta. It used to be the way – to be off with the old love before you are on with the new; but that seems to be all changed now. Today’s fine young fellows can be in love with two at once. That I fear is what Felix has thought; and now he has been punished.”

“You know all about it then?”

“I think it has been so. I do know that John Crumb had threatened this. If it has been so, who is to blame him?”

Hetta hardly knew whether her cousin, in his manner of telling this story, was speaking of John Crumb or of himself. He would have made her his wife and have been good to her. He had a home to offer her. He was an honest man with whom she would have been safe and happy! He had looked at her while speaking as though it were her own case of which he spoke. And then, when he talked of being off with the old love before you are on with the new, had he not alluded to Paul Montague?

But, if so, he must speak more plainly than that. “It is very shocking,” she said.

“Yes. I pity your mother, and you.”

“It seems to me that nothing ever will be happy for us,” said Hetta. She was longing to be told about Mrs. Hurtle, but she did not dare to ask the question.

“I do not know whether to wait for your mother or not,” said he after a short pause.

“Pray wait for her if you are not busy.”

“Perhaps she would not wish me to be here when she brings Felix back to the house.”

“Indeed she will. She would always like you to be here when there are troubles. Oh, Roger, I wish you could tell me.”

“Tell you what?”

“She has written to you, has she not, about me?”

“Yes. And, Hetta, Mr. Montague has written to me also.”

“He told me that he would,” whispered Hetta.

“Did he tell you of my answer?”

“No. I have not seen him since.”

“You do not think that my answer can have been very kind, do you? I have something of the feeling of John Crumb, though I shall not attempt to show it in the same way.”

“Did you not say the girl had promised to love that man?”

“I did not say; but she had promised. Yes, Hetta, there is a difference. The girl was fickle and went back from her word. You never have done that. I am not

justified in thinking even a hard thought of you. It is not you that I reproach. But he – he has been if possible more false than Felix.”

“Oh, Roger, how has he been false?”

Still he did not wish to tell her the story of Mrs. Hurtle. His friend’s falseness had been towards himself. “He should have left the place and never have come near you,” said Roger, “when he found how it was likely to be with him. He owed it to me not to take the cup of water from my lips.”

Hetta could not admit that her lover had sinned in loving her. “But, Roger,” she said, “the result would have been the same.”

“You may think so. You may feel it. I will not contradict you when you say so. But he didn’t feel it. He didn’t know it. He was to me as a younger brother – and he has robbed me of everything. Hetta, I know I should never have succeeded! My happiness would have been impossible even if Paul had never come home from America. I have told myself so a hundred times, but I cannot therefore forgive him. And I won’t forgive him, Hetta. Whether you are his wife, or another man’s, you must always be to me the dearest creature living. My hatred to him—”

“Oh, Roger, do not say hatred.”

“My hostility to him can make no difference in my feeling to you. If you become his wife you will still be my love. But I shall be separated from you. Should I be dying, then I should send for you. You are the very essence of my life. I have no dream of happiness otherwise than as connected with you. He might have my whole property and I would work for my bread, if I could only have a chance of winning you.”

“Roger,” she said, “I have given it all away now. It cannot be given twice.”

“If he were unworthy would your heart never change?”

“I think – never. Roger, is he unworthy?”

“How can you trust me to answer such a question? He is my enemy. He has been ungrateful to me. He has turned all my sweetness to gall, all my flowers to bitter weeds; he has choked up all my paths. And you ask me whether he is unworthy! I cannot tell you.”

“If you thought him worthy you would tell me,” she said, taking him by the arm.

“No; I will tell you nothing.” He tried gently but ineffectually to remove her hand.

“Roger, if you knew him to be good you would tell me, because you yourself are so good. I ask you because I know I can trust you. I can be nothing else to you, Roger; but I love you as a sister loves a brother. He has my heart. Tell me; is there any reason why he should not also have my hand?”

“Ask him, Hetta.”

“And you will tell me nothing? You will not try to save me though you know that I am in danger? Who is – Mrs. Hurtle? I had never heard of her before Felix told me about her, and told me also that you knew. But I cannot trust Felix. And mamma also bids me ask you. There is such a woman?”

“Certainly.”

“And she has been – a friend of Paul’s?”

“Whatever be the story, Hetta, you shall not hear it from me. Send for him and ask him to tell you about Mrs. Hurtle. I do not think he will lie, but if he lies you will know.”

“And that is all?”

“Hetta, you ask me to be your brother; but I cannot put myself in a brother’s place. I tell you plainly that I am your lover, and shall remain so. Your brother would welcome the man whom you would choose as your husband. I can never welcome any husband of yours. If twenty years were to pass, and you were still Hetta Carbury, I should still be your lover – though an old one. What is now to be done about Felix, Hetta?”

“Ah – what can be done? I think sometimes that it will break mamma’s heart.”

“Your mother makes me angry by her continual indulgence.”

“But you would not have her turn him into the street?”

“I think I might. For a time it might help. Here is the cab. You had better go down and let your mother know that I am here.”

Hetta went down and met her mother and her brother in the hall. Felix was able to descend from the cab, and hurry across the pavement into the house, where he hid himself in the dining-room. His face was bandaged; both his eyes were swollen and blue, and part of his beard had been cut away.

“Roger is upstairs, mamma,” said Hetta.

“Has he come because of Felix?”

“He has come because of your letter. He says that a man named Crumb did it.”

“Oh, Hetta, what am I to do? Where shall I go with this wretched boy?”

“Is he hurt, mamma?”

“Of course he is; horribly hurt. The brute tried to kill him. They say that he will be dreadfully scarred. But oh, Hetta; what am I to do with him?”

Felix was made as comfortable as possible in the parlour, and Lady Carbury then went up to her cousin Roger in the drawing-room. She had learned the truth, though Sir Felix himself had of course lied about every detail. When a young man’s pleasant vices are brought directly under a mother’s eyes, what can he do but lie?

But the policeman who had taken him to the hospital had told her all that he knew about John Crumb and Ruby Ruggles. And when Sir Felix swore that a policeman was holding him while Crumb was beating him, no one believed him. In such cases the liar does not expect to be believed.

“What am I to do with him?” Lady Carbury said to her cousin. “I can’t leave him. I know he is bad. I know that I have done much to make him what he is.” As she said this the tears were running down her poor worn cheeks. “But he is my child. What am I to do with him now?”

This was a question which Roger found it almost impossible to answer. If he had spoken his thoughts he would have declared that Sir Felix had reached an age at which, if a man will go headlong to destruction, he must go headlong to destruction.

“Perhaps take him abroad,” he said. “He would have less opportunity for vice, and for running you into debt.”

Lady Carbury thought of all the hopes she had indulged – her literary aspirations, her Tuesday evenings, her Brounes, her Alfs, and her Bookers, her pleasant drawing-room, and her determination to become somebody in the world. Must she give it all up and retire to some dreary French town because of her son? This seemed to be crueller than all cruelties that she had hitherto endured. Yet she must do this if in no other way could she and her son be together.

“Yes,” she said, “I suppose it would be so. I only wish that I might die, so that were an end of it.”

“He might go out to one of the Colonies,” said Roger.

“Yes – be sent away to kill himself with drink in the bush. I have heard of that. Wherever he goes I shall go.”

As the reader knows, Roger had not lately held Lady Carbury in much esteem. He thought her to be worldly and unprincipled. But now her exceeding love for her son wiped out all her sins. He forgot all her little tricks in his appreciation of an affection which was pure and beautiful.

“If you would like to let out your house for a period,” he said, “mine is open to you. You can take Felix there. I can make a home for myself at the cottage. If you think that would save you, you can try it for six months.”

“And turn you out of your own house? No, Roger, I cannot do that. And Roger; what is to be done about Hetta?” Hetta herself had retreated, so that her mother and Roger could speak freely together.

“Hetta can be trusted to judge for herself,” he said.

“How can you say that when she has just accepted this young man? Is it not true that he is even now living with an American woman whom he has promised to marry?”

“No; that is not true.”

“What is true, then? Is he not engaged to the woman?”

Roger hesitated a moment. “When last he spoke to me about it he declared that the engagement was at an end. I have told Hetta to ask him. Let her tell him that she has heard of this woman from you, and that she needs to know the truth. I do not love him, Lady Carbury. He has no longer any place in my friendship. But I think that if Hetta asks him, he will tell her the truth.”

Roger did not see Hetta again before he returned to Carbury, nor did he see Felix at all. Would it not be better for him to dismiss the whole family from his mind? He might then save himself from a world of cares, and might gradually teach himself to live as though there were no such woman as Hetta Carbury in the world.

But no! The very fact of his love made it his foremost duty to watch over the interests of her he loved, and of those who belonged to her. But among those who belonged to her, he did not recognise Paul Montague.



Chapter 73

Marie's Fortune

When Marie Melmotte assured Sir Felix Carbury that her father had already endowed her with a large fortune which could not be taken from her without her consent, she spoke the truth. She knew of the matter almost as little as it was possible that she should know. Melmotte had kept all the details from her. But it had been necessary for him to explain, or to pretend to explain, much; and Marie's memory and also her intelligence were strong beyond her father's anticipation. He had invested a large sum of money in foreign funds in her name, and he had got her to give him a power of attorney enabling him to draw the income from them on her behalf. This he had done so that he should still have enough money to live in comfort, should he be doomed to obscurity.

But he had failed to consider various circumstances. His daughter might be untrue to him, or in the event of her marriage might fail to release his property; or there might come troubles so great that even the future income would not be enough.

At present, he was tortured by anxiety. Were he to take back this property it would enable him to pay all that was due to the Longestaffes, and more. He did not care about the Longestaffes themselves. But he was painfully aware that not just a simple debt was involved. He had with his own hand written Dolly Longestaffe's signature on the letter which he had found in old Mr. Longestaffe's drawer. He had discovered it in an envelope addressed in Mr. Longestaffe's writing to Messrs. Slow and Bideawhile, and he had posted it himself.

At the time, he was the joint tenant of Mr. Longestaffe's study; and he had long since learned to pick a lock, though he could not then relock it. He had picked a lock, and had found the letter prepared by Mr. Bideawhile. Even if the young man were to swear that the signature was not his, and the old man were to swear that he had left that drawer locked, still there could be no evidence. People might talk. And a crash might come. But there would still be that ample fortune on which to retire and make merry for the rest of his days.

Then there came annoying complications. Rumours of the forgery were spread abroad. If a jury were persuaded that he had done it, of what use then would be all that money? He wondered whether it might not be better to use the money to save him from such ruin, by paying for the Pickering property. Neither Dolly Longestaffe nor Squercum would concern themselves any further if the money were paid. But then the money would be as good as wasted by such a payment, if – as he believed – no firm evidence of the forgery could be produced.

Perhaps Mr. Melmotte attached higher privileges to the British aristocracy than in truth belong to them. He really believed that if he became the father-in-law of the eldest son of the Marquis of Auld Reekie, he would be safe from the fangs of the law. And if he could tide over this bad time, how glorious would it be to have a Marquis for his son-in-law! He knew that Lord Nidderdale would not marry his daughter without property, but he thought that the funds which had been transferred to Marie might suffice; and he had already given proof to the Marquis's lawyer that his daughter possessed them.

Now another complication had arisen which had startled Mr. Melmotte very much indeed. One morning he had sent for Marie to the study and had told her that he required her signature for a deed. She had asked him what deed. He had replied that it was a document regarding money, and that she need not ask any more questions as she would be wanted only to sign the paper.

Then Marie astounded him, not merely by showing him that she understood a great deal more of the transaction than he had thought, but also by a refusal to sign anything at all.

“You have been so unkind to me about Sir Felix Carbury that I won’t do it,” she said. “If I ever marry, the money will belong to my husband!”

His breath almost failed him at these words. He did not know whether to use threats, entreaties, or blows. He tried all three: he told her that he would put her in prison, he besought her not to ruin her parent, and then he shook her violently. But Marie was quite firm. He might cut her to pieces; but she would sign nothing.

This was another reason for sticking to the Nidderdale plan. On weighing things up, therefore, he decided to leave the Longestaffes unpaid and to let Nidderdale have the money. The dangers on all sides were very great; but he intended to be bold. Marie had now said that she would accept Nidderdale – or the sweep at the crossing.

On the Monday after his famous speech in Parliament, one of the Bideawhiles had come to him in the City, asking for payment for Pickering. Mr. Melmotte offered to make the payment in two bills at three and six months’ date, with proper interest allowed. But this offer Mr. Bideawhile rejected indignantly, demanding that the title-deeds should be restored to them.

“You have no right whatever to demand the title-deeds,” said Melmotte. “You can only claim the sum due, and I have already told you how I propose to pay it.”

Mr. Bideawhile was nearly beside himself with dismay. In the whole course of his business, there had never been such a thing as this. Of course Mr. Longestaffe was to blame – so the Bideawhiles declared among themselves. He had been so anxious to have dealings with the man of money that he had insisted that the title-deeds should be given up. But the title-deeds had not been his to surrender; for Pickering was the joint property of him and his son. The house had already been pulled down, and now the purchaser offered bills in lieu of money!

“Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Melmotte, that you have not got the money to pay for what you have bought, and that the title-deeds have already gone out of your hands?”

“I have property of ten times, twenty times the value,” said Melmotte proudly; “but you must know that a man engaged in large affairs cannot always realise such a sum as eighty thousand pounds at a day’s notice.”

Mr. Bideawhile replied that he thought that his client had been robbed, and that he would at once take the severest steps the law put in his power. As Mr. Melmotte shrugged his shoulders and made no further reply, Mr. Bideawhile could only depart.

Mr. Bideawhile was now doubtful about the genuineness of the letter which Dolly declared that he had not signed. Mr. Longestaffe himself had asserted that he had left the letter locked in his own drawer in the room which had become Melmotte’s study. On entering the room with Mr. Bideawhile, in Melmotte’s presence, he had found that his drawer was open.

“Do you mean to say that I have opened your drawer?” said Mr. Melmotte. Mr. Longestaffe had become very red in the face and had replied that he made no such accusation, but he had certainly locked the drawer. He knew his own habits and had never left that drawer open in his life.

“Then you must have changed your habits on this occasion,” said Mr. Melmotte with spirit. Mr. Longestaffe would trust himself to no other word within the house. Mr. Bideawhile could only remark that it was most unfortunate.

The marriage with Nidderdale would upon the whole be the best thing, thought Melmotte, if it could be accomplished. He was driven very hard for money. His chief trust was in Cohenlupe, who dealt with the shares of the Mexican railway: to him he had trusted more than he normally trusted to any man. Cohenlupe assured him that nothing could be done with the railway shares at present; they had fallen almost to nothing. It was at Cohenlupe’s instigation that he had offered the two bills to Mr. Bideawhile.

“Offer ’em again,” said Cohenlupe. “He must take them sooner or later.”

On the Monday afternoon Melmotte met Lord Nidderdale in the lobby of the House.

“Have you seen Marie lately?” he said. Nidderdale had been assured that morning, by his father’s lawyer, that if he married Miss Melmotte now he would undoubtedly become possessed of an income amounting to over £5,000 a year. He had intended to get more than that; but then there probably would be more. No doubt there was a difficulty about Pickering. But Melmotte had been raising money, and had declared that Pickering should be made over to the young people at the marriage. His father had recommended him to get the girl to name a day. The marriage could be broken off at the last minute if the property were not forthcoming.

“I’m going up to your house now,” said Nidderdale.

“You’ll find the women at tea between five and six,” said Melmotte.



Chapter 74

Melotte Makes a Friend

“Have you been thinking any more about it?” Lord Nidderdale said to Marie as soon as Madame Melotte had left them alone together.

“I have thought ever so much more about it,” said Marie.

“And what’s the result?”

“Oh, I’ll have you.”

“That’s right,” said Nidderdale, throwing himself on the sofa so that he might put his arm round her waist.

“Wait a moment, Lord Nidderdale,” she said.

“Call me John.”

“Then wait a moment, John. You think you might as well marry me, though you don’t love me a bit.”

“That’s not true, Marie.”

“Yes, it is. And I think just the same – that I might as well marry you, though I don’t love you a bit.”

“But you will.”

“I don’t know. I don’t feel like it at present. You had better know the exact truth. I have told my father that I would accept you. But you know who I’ve been in love with.”

“But you can’t be in love with him now.”

“Why not? I can’t marry him. I know that. And if he were to come to me, I don’t think that I would. He has behaved badly.”

“Have I behaved badly?”

“Not like him. You never did care, and you never said you cared. You say it now because you think that I shall like it. But it makes no difference now. I don’t mind about your arm being there if we are to be married, only it’s just as well for both of us to look on it as business.”

“How very hard you are, Marie.”

“No, I ain’t. I wasn’t hard to Sir Felix Carbury.”

“Surely you have found him out now.”

“Yes, I have,” said Marie. “He’s a poor creature.”

“He has just been thrashed, you know, in the streets, most horribly.”

Marie had not been told of this, and started back from her lover’s arms.

“Who has thrashed him? Why?”

“There was a young lady in the question, Marie.”

“A young lady? I don’t believe it. You’ve made that up.”

“Indeed, no. I believe he was beaten about a young woman. But it signifies nothing to me. Don’t you think we might fix a day, Marie?”

“I don’t care,” said Marie. “The longer it’s put off the better; that’s all.”

“Because I’m so detestable?”

“No, you ain’t detestable. I think you are a very good fellow; only you don’t care for me. But it is detestable not being able to do what one wants. It’s detestable having to quarrel with everybody. And it’s horribly detestable having nothing on earth to give one any interest.”

“You couldn’t take any interest in me?”

“Not in the least.”

“Suppose you try. Wouldn’t you like to know anything about the place where we live?”

“It’s a castle, I know.”

“Yes; Castle Reekie; ever so many hundred years old.”

“I hate old places. I should like a new house, and a new dress, and a new horse every week – and a new lover. Your father lives at the castle. I don’t suppose we are to live there too.”

“We shall be there sometimes. When shall the wedding be?”

“The year after next.”

“Nonsense, Marie.”

“Tomorrow.”

“You wouldn’t be ready.”

“You may manage it all just as you like with papa. Oh, yes, kiss me; of course you may. What does it matter? I won’t say that I love you. But if ever I do say it, you may be sure it will be true. That’s more than you can say yourself – John.”

So the interview was over and Nidderdale walked back to the house thinking of his lady love, as far as he was capable of thinking. He was fully determined to go on with the marriage. The girl had lately become much more attractive to him than when he had first known her. She certainly was not a fool. And, though she was not altogether like a lady, still she had a manner of her own. And he did think that, in spite of all she said, she was becoming fond of him – as he certainly had become fond of her.

“Have you been with the ladies?” Melmotte asked him.

“Oh yes.”

“And what does Marie say?”

“That you must fix the day.”

“We’ll have it very soon then; some time next month. You’ll want to get away in August. To tell the truth so shall I. I never was worked so hard in my life as I’ve been this summer, with the election and that horrid dinner. And I don’t mind telling you that I’ve had a fearful weight on my mind about money. I never had to find so many large sums in so short a time! And I’m not quite through it yet.”

“I wonder why you gave the dinner then.”

“My dear boy, as regards expenditure that was a flea-bite. The burden of money is very great. I never know whence these panics arise, or why they come, or whither they go. But when they do come, they are like a storm at sea. It is only the strong ships that can stand the fury of the winds and waves. I’ve had it very hard this time.”

“I suppose you are getting right now.”

“Yes. I am not in any fear if you mean that. I don’t mind telling you everything as it is settled now that you are to be Marie’s husband. I know that you are honest, and that you wouldn’t hurt me by repeating anything I say.”

“Certainly not.”

“You see my wife is the best woman in the world, but is utterly unable to understand anything about it. Of course I can’t talk freely to Marie. Cohenlupe is all very well, but I never talk over my affairs with him. It is all on my own shoulders, and I can tell you the weight is a little heavy. It will be the greatest comfort to me in the world if I can get you to have an interest in the matter.”

“I don’t suppose I could ever really be any good at business,” said the modest young lord.

“Still I should be glad to tell you how things are going on. Of course you heard all that was said just before the election. For forty-eight hours I had a very bad time of it. The fact was that Alf and his supporters thought that they could carry the election by running me down. They were perfectly unscrupulous. They couldn’t get their man in, but they did have the effect of depreciating my property suddenly by nearly half a million. Think what that is!”

“I don’t understand how it could be done.”

“Because you don’t understand how delicate a thing is credit. They persuaded a lot of men to stay away from that infernal dinner, and consequently it was spread about the town that I was ruined. The effect upon my shares was instantaneous. The Mexican railway fell from 117 to something quite nominal, so that selling was out of the question. Cohenlupe and I between us had about 8,000 of these shares. Think what that comes to!” Nidderdale tried to calculate it, but failed altogether. “That’s what I call a blow. When a man is concerned as I am with money interests, he is of course exchanging one property for another every day, according as the markets go. I don’t keep such a sum as that in one concern. Nobody does. Then when a panic comes, you see how it hits?”

“Will they never go up again?”

“Oh yes; perhaps higher than ever. But it will take time. And in the meantime I am driven to fall back upon property intended for other purposes. That’s the meaning of what you hear about that place down in Sussex which I bought for Marie. I was obliged to raise forty or fifty thousand wherever I could. But that will be all right in a week or two. And as for Marie’s money – that, you know, is settled.”

He succeeded in making Nidderdale believe every word that he spoke, and he also produced a friendly feeling in the young man – almost a desire to be of service to his future father-in-law. Hazily, as through a thick fog, Lord Nidderdale thought that he did see something of the troubles of commerce, which seemed almost more exciting than whist or loo. He resolved too that whatever the man might tell him would never be divulged. He was somewhat captivated by Melmotte, and went away convinced that the financier was a big man; one with whom he could sympathise, and to whom in a certain way he could become attached.

And Melmotte himself had derived pleasure even from a simulated confidence in his son-in-law. It had been pleasant to talk as though he were a young friend whom he trusted. It was out of the question that he should ever speak the truth about his own affairs, and of course every word he had said to Nidderdale had been intended to corroborate lies. Yet it was a comfort to have someone to whom he could speak, and he much preferred Nidderdale to Miles Grendall.

After this conversation Melmotte went into the House, and Nidderdale strolled away to the Beargarden. The Beargarden had been opened again though with diminished luxury, and with rigid laws as to the payment of ready money. Herr Vossner had never more been heard of, but every note of hand which he had taken from the members was left in the possession of Mr. Flatfleece. Of course there was sorrow and trouble at the Beargarden; but the institution had become absolutely necessary to its members – and to no one more than Dolly Longstaffe.

Now that the club was again open, Dolly could have his dinner and his bottle of wine with the luxury to which he was accustomed.

But at this time Dolly was almost mad with the sense of injury. He had expected that the sale of the Pickering estate would pay all his debts and still leave him a comfortable sum. And now the property was sold, and the title-deeds gone – and he had not received a penny! He did not know whom to be loudest in abusing: his father, the Bideawhiles, or Mr. Melmotte.

He was very open in talking about it at the club. His father was the most obstinate old fool that ever lived. As for the Bideawhiles, he would bring an action against them. Squercum had explained all that to him. But Melmotte was the biggest rogue the world had ever produced.

“By George!” he said, “there’s that infernal scoundrel sitting in Parliament just as if he had not robbed me of my property, and forged my name, by George! He ought to be hung. If any man ever deserved to be hung, that man does.” This he said as Nidderdale was taking his seat at one of the tables.

Nidderdale, leaving his chair, walked up to him very gently.

“Dolly,” said he, “do not go on in that way about Melmotte when I am in the room. I have no doubt you are mistaken, and so you’ll find in a day or two. You don’t know Melmotte.”

“Mistaken!” exclaimed Dolly loudly. “Am I mistaken in supposing that I haven’t been paid my money?”

“I don’t believe it has been owing very long.”

“Am I mistaken in supposing that my name has been forged to a letter?”

“I am sure you are mistaken if you think that Melmotte had anything to do with it.”

“Squercum says—”

“Never mind Squercum. Look here, Dolly. I probably know more of Melmotte’s affairs than you do. If it will induce you to remain quiet for a few days, I’ll make myself responsible for the entire sum he owes you.”

“The devil you will.”

“I will indeed.”

Nidderdale was speaking quietly, but Dolly would not lower his voice.

“That’s out of the question,” he said. “How could I take your money? The truth is, Nidderdale, the man is a thief, and so you’ll find out, sooner or later. He has broken open a drawer in my father’s room and forged my name. Everybody knows it. He will soon be in jail for forgery.”

This was very unpleasant, as everyone knew that Nidderdale was to become engaged to Melmotte’s daughter.

“Since you will speak about it in this public way,” began Nidderdale, “I deny it as publicly. I can’t say anything about the letter except that I am sure Mr. Melmotte did not put your name to it. From what I understand there seems to have been some blunder between your father and his lawyer.”

“That’s true enough,” said Dolly; “but it doesn’t excuse Melmotte.”

“As to the money, it will certainly be paid. What is it? twenty-five thousand?”

“Eighty thousand, the whole.”

“Well – eighty thousand. It’s impossible that such a man as Melmotte shouldn’t be able to raise eighty thousand pounds.”

“Why don’t he do it then?” asked Dolly.

All this unpleasantness made the club less social than it used to be. There was an attempt to get up a game of cards; but Nidderdale would not play because he was offended with Dolly Longestaffe; and Miles Grendall was away in the country, and Carbury was in hiding at home with his face covered in plasters, and Montague in these days never went to the club. At present he was again in Liverpool, having been summoned there by Mr. Ramsbottom.

“By George,” said Dolly, as he ordered more brandy and water, “I think everything is going to come to an end. I do indeed. And now one can’t even get up a game of cards. I feel as though things might never come right again.”

The opinion of the club was divided as to the matter in dispute between Lord Nidderdale and Dolly Longestaffe. It was admitted by some to be “very fishy.” If Melmotte were so great a man why didn’t he pay the money? But most men thought that Dolly did not know what he had signed. And there was a general feeling that people were not bound to be so punctilious in the paying of money as they were a few years ago. No doubt Melmotte would produce the money sooner or later.

In this way of looking at the matter the Beargarden followed the world at large. The world, in spite of all the rumours, in spite of the ruinous depreciation of the Mexican Railway stock, and the undoubted fact that Dolly Longestaffe had not received his money, was inclined to think that Melmotte would “pull through.”



Chapter 75 In Bruton Street

Dolly's lawyer Mr. Squercum was all this time in a perfect fever of hard work and anxiety. He had been quite sharp enough to perceive the whole truth – he needed only to prove it. His enquiries in the city had convinced him that Melmotte did not have enough money to cover his liabilities. Squercum was quite sure that Melmotte was not a falling, but a fallen star. If such were the case, it would be the making of Squercum if he could appear as Melmotte's destroying angel.

So Squercum raged among the Bideawhiles, who did not dare defy him – feeling that they had themselves blundered.

"I suppose you give it up about the letter having been signed by my client," said Squercum to one of the Bideawhiles.

"I give up nothing and I assert nothing," said he. "Whether the letter be genuine or not we had no reason to believe it to be otherwise. The young gentleman's signature is never very plain, and this one is about as alike as any other."

"Would you let me look at it again, Mr. Bideawhile?" The letter was handed over. "He never could have written it had he tried ever so."

"We are not generally on the lookout for forgeries in letters from our clients or our clients' sons."

"Just so, Mr. Bideawhile. But Mr. Longestaffe had already told you that his son would not sign the letter. And after such a declaration as that, the letter – which is in itself a little irregular–"

"I don't know that it's irregular at all."

"Well, it didn't reach you direct from Mr. Longestaffe. And why he would wish to give up his title-deeds without getting anything for them–"

"Excuse me, Mr. Squercum, but that's between Mr. Longestaffe and us."

"Just so; but as Mr. Longestaffe and you have jeopardised my client's property it is natural that I should make a few remarks. I understand that you now do not insist that the signature is genuine."

"I say nothing, Mr. Squercum. I think you'll find it very hard to prove that it's not genuine."

"My client's oath, Mr. Bideawhile. And Mr. Longestaffe says that he locked the letter up in a drawer in the room which Melmotte occupied, and afterwards found the drawer open. I shall bring the matter before the Lord Mayor tomorrow, you know, and ask for an investigation into fraud."

Then Mr. Squercum left and went straight to Mr. Bumby, a barrister well known in the City. Mr. Bumby thought that if a bill at three months could be had for Dolly's share of the property it might be better to take it. When Mr. Squercum suggested that the property itself might be recovered, no genuine sale having been made, Mr. Bumby shook his head.

"Title-deeds give possession, Mr. Squercum. The company which has lent money to Melmotte on the title-deeds will not give them up. Take the bill; and if it is dishonoured run your chance of what you'll get out of the property."

Two days later, three gentlemen met together in the study of the house in Bruton Street from which it was supposed that the letter had been taken. They were Mr. Longestaffe senior, Dolly Longestaffe, and Mr. Bideawhile. The house was still in Melmotte's possession, and although he and Mr. Longestaffe were no longer on friendly terms, he had agreed to a formal request for this meeting. It took place at eleven o'clock – a terribly early hour for Dolly.

"By George, it's hardly worth having if one is to take all this trouble about it," Dolly had said to Lord Grasslough. He was the last to enter the room: neither Mr. Longestaffe nor Mr. Bideawhile had touched the drawer, or even the table.

"Now, Mr. Longestaffe," said Mr. Bideawhile, "show us where you think you put the letter."

"I don't think at all," said he. "I remember it."

"I never signed it," said Dolly.

"Nobody says you did, sir," rejoined the father angrily. "If you will condescend to listen we may perhaps arrive at the truth."

"Now, Mr. Longestaffe," continued the lawyer, "let us see where you put the letter."

The father very slowly opened the second drawer from the top, and took from it a bundle of folded papers.

"There," said he, "the letter was on top of the envelope and they were the two first documents in the bundle." He added that he was quite certain that he had left the drawer locked. He also remembered that about this time Mr. Melmotte had been in the room with him when he had opened it, and locked it again. It was at that time that Mr. Melmotte had offered him a seat on the Board of the Mexican railway.

"Of course he picked the lock, and stole the letter," said Dolly. "It's as plain as a pike-staff."

"I am afraid that it falls short of evidence, however strong the suspicion may be," said the lawyer. "I am thinking how it would go before a jury."

"What I want to know is how we are to get the money," said Dolly. "Squercum says—"

"Adolphus, we don't want to know what Mr. Squercum says."

"I don't see why not. Squercum knows what he's about. If it wasn't for Squercum we shouldn't know as much about it as we do."

Squercum's name was odious to the elder Longestaffe. He hummed and hawed, and fumed and fretted about the room, shaking his head.

"There's nothing more to be done here, sir, I suppose," said Dolly, putting on his hat.

"Nothing more," said Mr. Bideawhile. "I thought it well that I should see in the presence of both of you exactly how the thing stood. I will see whether there is any sign of violence having been used." So saying he knelt down and carefully examined the lock. There was no "sign of violence."

"Whoever has done it, did it very well," said Bideawhile.

"Of course Melmotte did it," said Dolly.

At that moment there was a knock at the door. The lawyer jumped on to his feet and moved away from the table. Mr. Longestaffe bade the stranger come in with a sepulchral voice; and Mr. Melmotte appeared. His presence had not been expected; he was usually in the City at this hour.

"Gentlemen," he said, "perhaps you think that I am intruding."

The elder Longestaffe bowed very coldly. Mr. Bideawhile thrust his thumbs into his waistcoat pockets. Dolly whistled a bar, and then turned a pirouette on his heel, as his way of expressing his surprise at the appearance of his debtor.

"I trust that what I have to say will excuse me. I see, sir," said Melmotte, glancing at the still open drawer, "that you have been examining your desk. I hope that you will be more careful in locking it than you were when you left it before."

"The drawer was locked when I left it," said Mr. Longestaffe.

"Then I should say it must have been locked when you returned to it."

"No, sir, I found it open. I make no deductions and draw no conclusions – but I left it locked and I found it open."

"I should make a deduction and draw a conclusion," said Dolly; "and that would be that somebody else had opened it."

"I did not come here out of the City at very great personal inconvenience to squabble about the lock," said Melmotte. "I thought this a good opportunity for meeting you and making you an offer about this unfortunate business." He paused a moment, but no one spoke. "Mr Bideawhile; if I remember rightly I wrote to you offering to pay the money due to your clients—"

"Squercum is my lawyer," said Dolly.

"That will make no difference."

"It makes a deal of difference," said Dolly.

"I wrote," continued Melmotte, "offering my bills at three and six months' date."

"They couldn't be accepted, Mr. Melmotte."

"I would have allowed interest. I have never had my bills refused before."

"You must be aware, Mr. Melmotte," said the lawyer, "that the sale of a property is not like an ordinary mercantile transaction. The understanding was that money should be paid in the usual way. And when we learned that the property had been at once mortgaged by you, of course we became – well, I think I may be justified in saying more than suspicious. It was a most unusual proceeding."

"Of course I have been short of money. I have had enemies whose business it has been to run down my credit, and with my credit has fallen the value of stocks in which I have invested. I tell you the truth openly. When I purchased Pickering I had no idea that the payment of such a sum could inconvenience me in the least. When the time came to pay, stocks were so depreciated that it was impossible to sell. Hostile proceedings are threatened against me now. Accusations are made, false as hell," – Mr. Melmotte raised his voice – "which may do me most cruel damage. I have come to say that, if you will stop proceedings which have been commenced in the City, I will have fifty thousand pounds ready for payment on Friday at noon."

"I have taken no proceedings as yet," said Bideawhile.

"It's Squercum," said Dolly.

"Well, sir," continued Melmotte, addressing Dolly, "let me assure you that if these proceedings are stopped the money will be forthcoming; but if not, I cannot produce the money. I little thought two months ago that I should ever have to say that about such a small sum as fifty thousand pounds. But so it is. To raise that money by Friday, I shall have to cripple my resources frightfully. It will be done at a terrible cost. But the money shall be paid. But this cannot be done if I am made to appear before the Lord Mayor tomorrow. The accusations against me are damnably false; but, false as they are, they may be ruinous to me. Now gentlemen, perhaps you will give me an answer."

Both the father and the lawyer looked at Dolly. “I, on behalf of my client,” said Mr. Bideawhile, “will consent to wait till Friday at noon.”

“I presume, Adolphus, that you will agree,” said the elder Longestaffe.

Dolly Longestaffe had been moved by Melmotte’s eloquence. It was not that he was sorry for the man: he was still sure that Melmotte had forged his name or caused it to be forged – but he had been talked into a belief that the money would be paid on Friday.

“I’ll ask Squercum, you know,” he said.

“Mr. Squercum will act as you instruct him,” said Bideawhile.

“I’ll ask Squercum. I’ll go to him at once. I can’t do any more than that. And upon my word, Mr. Melmotte, you’ve given me a great deal of trouble.”

Melmotte with a smile apologized. It was settled that they three should meet in that very room on Friday at noon, and that the payment should then be made – Dolly stipulating that Squercum should also attend. To this Mr. Longestaffe senior yielded with a very bad grace.



Chapter 76 Hetta and her Lover

Lady Carbury was at this time so miserable about her son that she was unable to be as active as she would otherwise have been in her endeavours to separate Paul Montague and her daughter. Roger had returned to Suffolk; so in need of assistance and consolation she turned naturally to Mr. Broune. It had now become almost a part of Mr. Broune's life to see Lady Carbury every day. She told him of Roger's proposals: first, that she should take Sir Felix abroad to live in some second-rate French or German town, and, secondly, that she should live at Carbury manor for six months.

"And where would Mr. Carbury go?" asked Mr. Broune.

"There's a cottage on the place, he says, that he would move to."

Mr. Broune shook his head. He did not think that an offer so quixotically generous should be accepted. As to the German or French town, Mr. Broune said that the plan was no doubt feasible, but he doubted whether it was worth the sacrifice. He was inclined to think that Sir Felix should go to the colonies.

"So that he might drink himself to death," said Lady Carbury, who now had no secrets from Mr. Broune.

Sir Felix was still in the doctor's hands upstairs. There was not in truth much ailing him beyond the cuts on his face. At present, however, he preferred to be an invalid rather than to meet the world.

"As to Melmotte," said Mr. Broune, "they say now that he is in some terrible mess which will ruin him and all who have trusted him."

"And the girl?"

"It is impossible to understand it all. Melmotte was to have been summoned before the Lord Mayor today on some charge of fraud; but it was postponed. And I was told Nidderdale still means to marry the girl."

In all this there was nothing about Hetta. Hetta, however, thought very much of her own condition. She received two letters from her lover, written to her from Liverpool. They had not met since she had confessed her love to him. The first letter she did not at once answer, as she was waiting to hear what Roger Carbury would say about Mrs. Hurtle. Roger Carbury had spoken, leaving her convinced that Mrs. Hurtle was by no means a fiction.

Then Paul's second love-letter had come, full of joy, and love, and contentment – with not a word that suggested the existence of a Mrs. Hurtle. Had there been no Mrs. Hurtle, the letter would have been all that Hetta could have desired; but now she did not know how to answer it. Roger had told her to "ask Paul himself." So she wrote to Paul, as follows:

My dear Paul,

(Had there been no Mrs. Hurtle he would have been her "Dearest Paul.")

My dear Paul,

A strange report has come to me about a lady called Mrs. Hurtle. I have been told that she is an American lady living in London, and that she is engaged to be your wife. I cannot believe this. It is too horrid. But I fear there is something true that will be very sad for me to hear. I first heard it from my brother, and I

have talked to mamma about it, and to my cousin Roger. I am sure Roger knows it all, but he will not tell me. And so I ask you. I am sure I need not tell you that it has made me very unhappy. If you cannot come and see me at once, you had better write. I have told mamma about this letter.

Your affectionate friend,
Henrietta Carbury.

Paul received this letter at Liverpool on the Wednesday morning, and on the Wednesday evening he was in Welbeck Street. He had been quite aware that he needed to tell her the whole history of Mrs. Hurtle. He had meant to keep back – almost nothing. But it had been impossible for him to do so on that one occasion on which he had pleaded his love to her successfully. When he was called away to Liverpool he did consider whether he should write the story. But a man hardly wishes to supply his beloved one with a written record of his folly. And a writer cannot show tenderness by tone of voice. I think therefore that Paul Montague did quite right in hurrying to London.

He asked for Miss Carbury, and when told that Miss Henrietta was with her mother, he sent his name up and said that he would wait in the dining-room. He would not, if it could be helped, make his statement in the presence of Lady Carbury.

Upstairs, there was a little discussion. Hetta pleaded her right to see him alone. She had done what Roger had advised, with her mother's consent. But she must herself hear what her lover had to say. Felix, who was there, suggested that he should go down and see Paul Montague on his sister's behalf; but his mother looked at him with scorn, and his sister quietly said that she would rather go herself. Felix did not say another word, and Hetta left the room alone.

When she entered the parlour Paul stepped forward to take her in his arms. She had prepared herself for this.

"Paul," she said, "let me hear about all this first." She sat down at some distance from him.

"And so you have heard of Mrs. Hurtle," he said, with a faint attempt at a smile.

"Yes. Felix told me, and Roger evidently had heard about her."

"Oh yes; Roger knows the whole history. I don't think your brother is as well informed."

"Perhaps not. But – isn't it a story that – concerns me?"

"Certainly you ought to know it, Hetta. And I trust you will believe that it was my intention to tell it you."

"I will believe anything that you will tell me."

"Well, then, I was engaged to marry Mrs. Hurtle."

"Is she a widow? I suppose she must be a widow if you were going to marry her."

"Yes; she is a widow. She was divorced."

"Oh, Paul! And she is an American?"

"Yes."

"And you loved her?"

Montague did not wish to be interrogated. "If you will allow me I will tell it you all from beginning to end."

“Oh, certainly. But if you meant to marry her you must have loved her.” There was a frown upon Hetta’s brow and a tone of anger in her voice which made Paul uneasy.

“Yes; I loved her once; but I will tell you all.” Then he did tell his story. Hetta listened, not interrupting very often, though when she did interrupt, her words were bitter enough. But she heard the story of the long journey across the American continent, of the ocean crossing when Paul had promised to make this woman his wife.

“Had she been divorced then?” asked Hetta.

Simple as the question was he could not answer it. “I only knew what she told me,” he said, as he went on with his story. Then Mrs. Hurtle had gone on to Paris, and he, as soon as he reached Carbury, had revealed everything to Roger.

“Did you give her up then?” demanded Hetta with stern severity. No, not then. He had gone back to San Francisco, and – he was forced to acknowledge that the engagement had not been broken off. He had written to her on his second return to England, and then she had appeared in London at Mrs. Pipkin’s lodgings in Islington.

“I can hardly tell you how terrible that was,” he said, “for I had by that time become quite aware that my happiness must depend upon you.”

It is odd how stern a girl can be, while her heart is almost breaking with love. Hetta was very stern. “Felix says you took her to Lowestoft – quite the other day.”

Montague had intended to tell almost all. There was something about the journey to Lowestoft which it would be impossible to make Hetta understand. “It was on account of her health.”

“Oh; on account of her health. And did you go to the play with her?”

“I did.”

“Was that for her health?”

“Oh, Hetta, do not speak to me like that! Cannot you understand that when she came here, following me, I could not desert her?”

“I cannot understand why you deserted her at all,” said Hetta. “You say you loved her, and you promised to marry her. I am sure you must have loved her when you took her to the theatre, and down to Lowestoft, for her health. That was only a week ago.”

“It was nearly three weeks,” said Paul in despair.

“Oh; nearly three weeks! You were engaged to her, not three weeks ago.”

“No, Hetta, I was not engaged to her then.”

“I suppose she thought you were when she went to Lowestoft with you.”

“She wanted then to force me to – to – Oh, Hetta, it is so hard to explain, but I am sure you understand. You cannot think that I have, even for one moment, been false to you.”

“But why should you be false to her? Why should I step in and crush all her hopes? I can understand that Roger should think badly of her because she was divorced. Of course he would. But an engagement is an engagement. You had better go back to Mrs. Hurtle and tell her that you are quite ready to keep your promise.”

“She knows now that it is all over.”

“I dare say you will be able to persuade her to reconsider. To have come all the way here from San Francisco after you, she must be very much attached to you. She is a very old friend, and you ought not to treat her unkindly. Good bye,

Mr. Montague. I think you had better lose no time in going back to Mrs. Hurtle.” All this she said with little chokes in her throat, but without a tear or any sign of tenderness.

“You don’t mean to tell me, Hetta, that you are going to quarrel with me!”

“I don’t wish to quarrel with any one. But of course we can’t be friends when you have married – Mrs. Hurtle.”

“Nothing on earth would induce me to marry her.”

“I cannot say anything about that. When they told me this story I did not believe them. It seemed to be impossible that you should have come to me not much more than a week after that trip to Lowestoft.”

“What does it matter?”

“Oh, nothing to you. I think I will go away now, Mr. Montague. It was very good of you to come and tell me all. It makes it so much easier.”

“Do you mean to say that you are going to – throw me over?”

“I don’t want you to throw Mrs. Hurtle over. Good bye.”

“Hetta!”

“No; do not lay your hand upon me. Good night, Mr. Montague.” And so she left him.

Paul Montague was beside himself with dismay. He had never allowed himself for a moment to believe that this affair of Mrs. Hurtle would really separate him from Hetta Carbury. He had been true to her from the first moment in which he had seen her. Even if he had loved some woman before, that would not affect her. Her anger was founded on the presence of Mrs. Hurtle in London. Yet when she had come, could he have refused to see her? Would Hetta have wished him to be so cold and cruel? No doubt he had behaved badly to Mrs. Hurtle; but he had overcome that trouble. And now Hetta was quarrelling with him, though he certainly had never behaved badly to her.

He was almost angry with Hetta as he walked home. Everything that he could do he had done for her. For her sake he had quarrelled with Roger Carbury. For her sake he had determined to endure the spring of the wild cat. For her sake – so he told himself – he had stayed involved with that odious railway company, in order that he might have an income on which to support her. And now she told him that they must part, because he had not been cruelly indifferent to Mrs. Hurtle. There was no logic in it, and, as he thought, very little heart.

“I don’t want you to throw Mrs. Hurtle over,” she had said. Why should Mrs. Hurtle be anything to her? But they were all against him. Roger Carbury, Lady Carbury, and Sir Felix. She could not ever really have loved him. That was the truth. She must be incapable of such love as was his own for her. True love always forgives. And there was so very little to forgive!

Such were his thoughts as he went to bed that night. But he probably omitted to ask himself whether he would have forgiven her very readily had he found that she had been living “nearly three weeks ago” with another lover of whom he had never even heard. But then, there is a wide difference between young men and young women!

Hetta, as soon as she had dismissed him, went up at once to her own room. She was followed by her mother, whose anxious ear had heard the closing of the front door.

“Well; what has he said?” asked Lady Carbury. Hetta was struggling to repress her tears. “You have found that what we told you about that woman was all true.”

“Enough of it was true,” said Hetta. “He is like other men, I suppose. He has entangled himself with some abominable creature and then when he is tired of her thinks that he has nothing to do but to say so, and to begin with somebody else.”

“Roger Carbury is very different.”

“Oh, mamma, you will make me ill if you go on like that. You do not understand in the least.”

“I say he is not like that. He can be trusted.”

“Of course he can be trusted. Who doubts it?”

“If you would give yourself to him, there would be no cause for any alarm.”

“Mamma,” said Hetta, jumping up, “how can you talk to me in that way? As soon as one man doesn’t suit, I am to give myself to another! Nothing on earth will ever induce me to marry Roger.”

“You have told Mr. Montague that he is not to come here again?”

“I don’t know what I told him, but he knows very well what I mean.”

“That it is all over?” Hetta made no reply. “Hetta, I have a right to expect a reply. We have now found out that he has behaved very badly. He has come here to you, with unexampled treachery to your cousin Roger—”

“I deny that,” exclaimed Hetta.

“And at the very time was almost living with this woman who says that she is divorced! Have you told him that you will see him no more?”

“He understood that.”

“If you have not told him so plainly, I must tell him.”

“Mamma, you need not trouble yourself. I have told him very plainly.”

Then Lady Carbury expressed herself satisfied for the moment, and left her daughter to her solitude.



Chapter 77

Another Scene in Bruton Street

When Mr. Melmotte made his promise to Mr. Longestaffe and Dolly to pay them fifty thousand pounds for the purchase of Pickering, he intended to be as good as his word. The reader knows that he had resolved not to sacrifice the property to which he had looked forward as a safe haven when storms should come. But, day by day, every resolution that he made was forced to undergo some change. In addition to this accusation about the Pickering property, there was another, about certain property in the East of London. It was said that he had induced a foolish old gentleman to accept railway shares in lieu of money. The old gentleman had died, and it was asserted that his letter was not genuine. Melmotte had certainly raised between twenty and thirty thousand pounds on the property, and had paid for it in stock which was now worth almost nothing at all. Melmotte thought that he might face this matter successfully if it came upon him single-handed; but now, at this last moment, he had better pay for Pickering.

When he had placed property in his daughter's name, he had done so simply for security. His control over his only daughter was, he thought, free from danger. No girl less likely to defraud her father could have crept quietly about the house. Nor did he now think that she would disobey him when the matter was explained to her. Heavens and earth! That he should be robbed by his own child! It was impossible.

But still he felt he needed to go about this business carefully. He decided that his wife should be present, and that a full explanation should be given to Marie, so that she might understand that the money had in no sense become her own. When he returned to Bruton Street, he brought with him the deeds which Marie would need to sign, and he brought also Mr. Croll, his clerk, to witness the signature.

He went at once to his wife's room. "Is she here?" he asked.

"I will send for her. I have told her."

"You haven't frightened her?"

"It is not very easy to frighten her, Melmotte. She is changed."

"I shall frighten her if she does not do as I say. Bid her come now."

Madame Melmotte left the room, and Melmotte arranged papers upon a table. Having done so, he told Croll to wait in the back drawing-room till he should be called.

Melmotte then stood with his back to the fire-place in his wife's sitting-room, contemplating the coming interview. He would be very gracious – affectionate, if possible – and above all, explanatory. But, by heavens, if this girl should dare to oppose him, he would not be affectionate, nor gracious!

He was already beginning to lose his temper when Marie followed Madame Melmotte into the room. He swallowed his rising anger with an effort.

"Marie," he began, "I spoke to you the other day about some property which was placed in your name when we were leaving Paris."

"Yes, papa."

"You were such a child then that I could hardly explain to you the purpose of what I did."

“I understood it, papa.”

“You had better listen to me, my dear. I don’t think you did quite understand it.”

“You wanted to keep it from going away if you got into trouble.”

This was so true that Melmotte did not know how to contradict it. And he had not intended to talk of the possibility of trouble. “I wanted to lay aside a large sum of money which should not be liable to the ordinary fluctuations of commercial enterprise.”

“So that nobody could get at it.”

“You are a little too quick, my dear. Of course, I had no idea of putting the money beyond my own reach. Such a transaction is very common; and in such cases a man naturally uses the name of someone who is very near and dear to him, and in whom he can put full confidence. This is why I chose you. Of course the property remained exclusively my own.”

“But it is really mine,” said Marie.

“No, miss; it was never yours,” said Melmotte, almost bursting out into anger, but restraining himself. “How could it become yours, Marie? Did I ever make you a gift of it?”

“But it did become mine, legally.”

“By a quibble of law, yes; but not so as to give you any right to it. I always draw the income.”

“But I could stop that, papa; and if I were married, of course it would be stopped.”

Then, quick as a flash of lightning, another idea occurred to Melmotte. “As we are thinking of your marriage,” he said, “it is necessary that a change should be made. Settlements must be drawn up for the satisfaction of Lord Nidderdale and his father. The old Marquis is rather hard upon me, but the marriage is so splendid that I have consented. You must now sign these papers in four or five places. Mr. Croll is in the next room, ready to witness your signature.”

“Wait a moment, papa.”

“Why?”

“I don’t think I will sign them. If I am to be married, I ought not to sign anything except what he tells me.”

“He has no authority over you yet. I have authority over you. Marie, do not give more trouble. I am very much pressed for time. Let me call in Mr. Croll.”

“No, papa,” she said.

A frown came across his brow. The lower jaw squared itself, and the teeth became set, and the nostrils extended – and Marie began to prepare herself to be “cut to pieces.” But Melmotte relaxed the frown as well as he knew how, and tried again.

“I am sure, Marie, that you will not refuse to do this when I explain its importance. I must have that property for use in the city tomorrow, or I shall be ruined.”

“Oh!” shrieked his wife.

“It is true. These harpies have so beset me about the election that they have lowered the price of every stock in which I am concerned. I don’t like bringing my troubles home from the city; but on this occasion I cannot help it. The sum locked up here is very large, and I am compelled to use it to save us from destruction.” This he said very slowly and solemnly.

“But you told me just now you wanted it because I was going to be married,” rejoined Marie.

Melmotte was thrown back for a moment, and almost felt that the time for violence had come. He longed to shake the wickedness and ingratitude out of her. But he once more condescended to argue and explain. “I think you misunderstood me, Marie. Settlements must be made, and of course I must get my own property back into my own hands before that can be done. I tell you once more, my dear, that if you do not do as I bid you, so that I may use that property the first thing tomorrow, we are all ruined. Everything will be gone.”

“This can’t be gone,” said Marie, nodding her head at the papers.

“Marie – do you wish to see me disgraced and ruined? I have done a great deal for you.”

“You turned away the only person I ever cared for,” said Marie.

“Marie, how can you be so wicked? Do as your papa bids you,” said Madame Melmotte.

“No,” said Marie. “If I am to be married to Lord Nidderdale, I ought to sign nothing without telling him. And if the property was once made to be mine, I don’t think I ought to give it up again because papa says that he is going to be ruined. I think that’s a reason for not giving it up again.”

“It isn’t yours to give. It’s mine,” said Melmotte, grinding his teeth.

“Then you can do what you like with it without my signing,” said Marie.

He paused a moment, and then laying his hand gently upon her shoulder, he asked her once again. His voice was changed, and was very hoarse. But he still tried to be gentle.

“Marie,” he said, “will you do this to save your father from destruction?”

But she did not believe a word he said. How could she? He had taught her to regard him as her natural enemy, making her aware that he used her as a chattel for his own advantage, and never allowing her to suppose that he had her happiness in mind. And now he had told her that this money was wanted so that it might be settled on her and her future husband, and at the same time that it might be used to save him from instant ruin. She believed neither story; and she had steeled herself against him in all things.

Melmotte had tried to throw pathos into his voice, but his eyes and his face still threatened her. He was always threatening her. He now repeated his question in the pathetic strain.

“Will you do this now, to save us all from ruin?”

“No,” she said. “I won’t.”

“You won’t!” shouted Melmotte. “Do you mean that you will attempt to rob your father and destroy him by your wickedness?” She shook her head but said no other word.

I will not harrow my readers by a description of the scene which followed. Poor Marie! That cutting her up into pieces was commenced after a most savage fashion. Marie, crouching down, hardly uttered a sound. But Madame Melmotte screamed, “Ah, Melmotte, you will kill her!” And she tried to drag him from his prey.

“Will you sign them now?” said Melmotte, panting. At that moment Croll, frightened by the screams, burst into the room. It was perhaps not the first time that he had interfered to save Melmotte from the effects of his own wrath.

“Oh, Mr. Melmotte, vat is de matter?” asked the clerk.

Melmotte was out of breath and could hardly speak. Marie crouched, cowering, in a corner of a sofa, by no means vanquished in spirit, but feeling that the very life had been crushed out of her body. Madame Melmotte was weeping copiously.

“Will you sign the papers?” Melmotte demanded. Marie, lying all in a heap, merely shook her head. “Pig!” said Melmotte, “wicked, ungrateful pig.”

“Ah, Ma’am-moiselle,” said Croll, “you should oblige your fader.”

“Wretched, wicked girl!” said Melmotte, collecting the papers together. Then he left the room, and with Croll descended to the study.

Madame Melmotte came and stood over the girl. Marie lay with her hair dishevelled and her dress disordered, breathing hard, but uttering no sobs and shedding no tears. The stepmother was so timid that she could not understand the girl’s courage. Melmotte was to her an awful being, powerful as Satan; she never openly disobeyed him, though she daily deceived him, and was constantly detected in her deceptions. Marie seemed to her to have all her father’s stubborn, wicked courage, and much of his power.

Madame Melmotte had believed her husband when he had said that destruction was coming. Her life had been passed in almost daily fear of destruction. She remembered former reverses, and never for a moment in the last two years of splendour had she felt herself to be secure.

At last she asked the girl what she would like to have done for her.

“I wish he had killed me,” Marie said, slowly dragging herself up from the sofa, and retreating to her own room.

In the meantime, in the room below, Melmotte hardly made a reference to his daughter, merely saying that nothing would overcome her wicked obstinacy. Croll did not have the courage to expostulate with him.

Melmotte again laid out the papers, as though he thought that the girl might be brought down to sign them. He explained to Croll how necessary it was that the thing should be done, and how terribly cruel it was that he should be hampered – he did not say *ruined* to his clerk – by the obstinacy of a girl! He explained how totally the girl was without any right to withhold his own property from him.

Then Melmotte declared that he would not feel the slightest scruple in writing Marie’s signature himself. He was the girl’s father and was justified in acting for her. The property was his own property, and he was justified in doing with it as he pleased.

He looked up at the clerk. Croll assented – after a fashion, by no means with comfortable certainty. But he did not hint any disapproval of the step which Melmotte proposed to take.

Then Melmotte went a step farther, and explained that the only difficulty would be that his daughter’s signature would need to be corroborated by a witness. Then he again looked up at Croll. The old clerk’s face took on a stern look which amounted to very strong dissent. And yet Croll had been conversant with some irregular doings in his time.

Melmotte thought, “He knows that the game is pretty well over.” “You had better return to the city now,” he said aloud. “I shall follow you in half an hour. I may bring my daughter with me. In that case I shall want you to be ready.” Croll again smiled, and again assented, and went his way.

But Melmotte made no further attempt upon his daughter. As soon as Croll was gone he searched among various papers in his desk. Having found two signatures, those of his daughter and of his German clerk, he bolted the door and

then set to work tracing them with tissue paper. He practised the two signatures for the best part of an hour. Then he forged them on the various documents; and, having done so, refolded them, placed them in a little locked bag, and then, with the bag in his hand, was taken in his carriage into the city.



Chapter 78

Miss Longstaffe Again at Caversham

Mr. Longestaffe had taken his younger daughter home on the day after his visit to Lady Monogram, and had spoken of her suggested marriage with Mr. Brehgert as utterly out of the question.

Georgiana had made one little fight for her independence at the Jermyn Street Hotel. "Indeed, papa, I think it's very hard," she said.

"I think a great many things are hard; but I have to bear them."

"You can do nothing for me."

"Do nothing for you! Haven't you got a home to live in, and clothes to wear, and a carriage to go about in? What do you expect?"

"You know, papa, that's nonsense. If I don't marry what's to become of me? It isn't that Mr. Brehgert is the sort of man I should choose."

"Do not mention his name to me."

"But what am I to do? It was you that sent me to Mr. Melmotte."

"I didn't send you to Mr. Melmotte."

"It was at your suggestion I went there, papa. And of course I could only see the people he had there."

"There's no use talking any more about it."

"I must talk about it, and think about it too. If I can put up with Mr. Brehgert I don't see why you and mamma should complain."

"A Jew!"

"People don't think about that as they used to, papa. He has a very fine income, and I should always have a house in—"

Then Mr. Longestaffe became furious and loud. "If you mean to tell me that you will marry that man without my consent, I can't prevent it. But you shall not marry him as my daughter. You shall be turned out of my house, and I will never have your name pronounced in my presence again. It is disgusting – degrading – disgraceful!" And then he left her.

On the next morning before he started for Caversham he saw Mr. Brehgert; but he did not tell Georgiana what was said, and she did not have the courage to ask him.

Then there was a sad scene with her mother, Lady Pomona. When they arrived, the poor mother did not go into the hall to meet her child, from whom she had that morning received the dreadful tidings about the Jew. She was helpless in her sorrow. If Georgiana chose to marry a Jew tradesman she could not stop it; but she felt as though the end of all things had come. She could never again hold up her head, never go into society. When her daughter should have married a Jew, she didn't think that she could pluck up the courage to look her neighbours in the face.

Georgiana, finding no one in the hall, went with her maid to her own room, and waited there till Sophia came to her. She strove to regain her courage. Why need she be afraid of anybody? Had she not always been dominant over her mother and sister?

"Oh, Georgey," said Sophia, "this is wonderful news! Such a very odd match!"

“Look here, Sophia, if you don’t like it, you need not talk about it. We shall always have a house in town, and you will not. If you don’t like to come to us, you needn’t. That’s all.”

“George wouldn’t let me go there,” said Sophia.

“Then he had better keep you at home at Toodlam. Where’s mamma?”

“Mamma isn’t at all well; she’s in her own room. She is very much cut up about this.”

As she sought her mother, Georgiana understood that she must stand alone in the world, unless she gave up Mr. Brehgert.

“I’ve come back,” she said, stooping and kissing her mother.

“Oh, Georgiana!” Lady Pomona slowly raised herself, covering her face with her hand. “This is dreadful. It will kill me.”

“What is the good of all that, mamma?”

“It can’t be possible. It’s unnatural. I’m sure there’s something in the Bible against it.”

“Lady Julia Start has done just the same thing – and she goes everywhere.”

“What does your papa say? I’m sure he won’t allow it. If he’s fixed about anything, it’s Jews. An accursed race – expelled from Paradise.”

“Mamma, that’s nonsense.”

“Scattered about all over the world, so that nobody knows who anybody is.”

“One of the greatest judges in the land is a Jew,” said Georgiana, who had already learned to fortify her own case.

“I’m sure that Mr. Whitstable, who is to be your brother-in-law, will never condescend to speak to him.”

Now, if there was anybody whom Georgiana Longestaffe had despised from her youth it was George Whitstable. He had been regarded as a lout when he left school, and had been her common example of rural dullness. He certainly was neither beautiful nor bright; he was a Conservative squire, able to maintain a moderate country house and no more. And now she was told she was not to marry Mr. Brehgert lest she should bring disgrace upon George Whitstable! This was not to be endured.

“Then Mr. Whitstable may keep himself at home at Toodlam and not trouble his head about us. I’m sure I shan’t trouble myself as to what a poor creature like that may think about me. George Whitstable knows as much about London as I do about the moon.”

“Mr. Whitstable is an excellent young man, and I am sure he will make your sister happy; but as for Mr. Brehgert – I can’t bear to hear his name mentioned.”

“Then it shan’t be mentioned again by me.” Georgiana bounced out of the room and did not meet her mother and sister again till she came down before dinner.

Her position was very trying. She presumed that her father had seen Mr. Brehgert, but did not know what had passed between them. It might be that her father had induced Mr. Brehgert to abandon his intention. They had all made her think that she would never become Mrs. Brehgert. She certainly was not prepared to nail her colours upon the mast and to live and die for Brehgert. She was almost sick of the thing herself. But even if she were to back out, it would be known that she had been engaged to a Jew – and then it would be said that the Jew had jilted her.

She was thus vacillating, not knowing whether to go on with Brehgert or to abandon him. That evening Lady Pomona retired immediately after dinner, being

“far from well,” and Sophia went with her. Georgiana was left with her father. Not a word was spoken. He sat behind his newspaper till he went to sleep, and she found herself alone and deserted in that big room. It seemed to her that even the servants treated her with disdain. Her own maid had already given her notice. It seemed the family intended to ostracise her altogether. What would it be like to be left without a single Christian friend?

At ten o’clock she kissed her father’s head and went to bed. Her father grunted less audibly than usual, and she began to fear that her courage would not carry her through sufferings such as these.

On the next day her father returned to town, and the three ladies were left alone. Great preparations were going on for the Whitstable wedding, from which Georgiana was kept apart. George Whitstable came over to lunch, and was made much of. Sophy’s triumph was not to be borne. All Caversham treated her with a new respect. And yet Toodlam was barely a couple of thousand a year – and there were two unmarried sisters!

Lady Pomona went half into hysterics every time she saw her younger daughter. Was Mr. Brehgert with his two houses worth all this? A feeling of intense regret for the things she was losing came over her. Even Caversham, which in old days she had hated, had charms for her now that they were lost for ever. Then she had always considered herself to be the first personage in the house; but now she was decidedly the last.

Her second evening was worse even than the first. When Mr. Longestaffe was not at home the family sat in a small dingy room next to the dining-room, and on this occasion the family consisted only of Georgiana. She went upstairs, and calling her sister, demanded to be told why she was thus deserted.

“Poor mamma is very ill,” said Sophy.

“I won’t stand it if I’m to be treated like this,” said Georgiana. “I’ll go away somewhere.”

“How can I help it, Georgey? It’s your own doing.”

On the next morning there came a letter from Mr. Longestaffe, addressed to Lady Pomona. It contained an enclosure she was allowed to see. It was a letter from Dolly, as follows:

My dear Father,—

Can it be true that Georgey is thinking of marrying that horrid vulgar Jew, old Brehgert? The fellows say so; but I can’t believe it. I’m sure you wouldn’t let her. You ought to lock her up.

Yours affectionately,

A. Longestaffe.

Dolly’s letters made his father very angry, as, short as they were, they always contained advice such as should come from a father to a son, rather than from a son to a father. Nevertheless the head of the family had thought it worth his while to send it to Caversham to be shown to his rebellious daughter.

So Dolly said that she ought to be locked up! As soon as she had read her brother’s letter she tore it into fragments and threw it away.

“How can mamma pretend to care what Dolly says? Who doesn’t know that he’s an idiot?”

“I don’t see why Dolly shouldn’t have an opinion as well as anybody else,” said Sophy.

“As well as George Whitstable? As far as stupidity goes they are about the same. I’ve done with you all. I’ll have nothing more to do with any of you.”

But it is very difficult for a young lady to have done with her family! A young man may go anywhere; but the daughter of a house is compelled to adhere to her father till she shall get a husband. The only way in which Georgey could “have done” with them all at Caversham would be by trusting herself to Mr. Brehgert, and she did not know whether Mr. Brehgert still considered himself as engaged to her.

That day was so tedious she almost offered to help her sister with the wedding garments. She would have done so had Sophy afforded her the slightest opportunity. But Sophy was heartlessly cruel in her indifference. She had been so greatly despised that the charm of despising in her turn was irresistible.

Therefore Georgiana dragged out another day, not knowing what was to be her fate.



Chapter 79

The Brehgert Correspondence

Georgiana felt that she had allowed her father to return to London thinking that she might still be controlled. She was beginning to be angry with Mr. Brehgert, assuming he had taken his dismissal from her father without consulting her. It was necessary that something should be settled, something known. She had all the disadvantages of the Brehgert connection and none of the advantages. She was beginning to think that she herself must write to Mr. Brehgert – only she did not know what to say to him.

But on the Saturday morning she got a letter from Mr. Brehgert. It was handed to her as she was sitting at breakfast with her sister – who at that moment was triumphant with a present of gooseberries which had been sent over from Toodlam.

“Well!” Georgey had exclaimed, “to send gooseberries to his lady love across the country! Who but George Whitstable would do that?”

“I dare say you get nothing but gems and gold,” Sophy retorted. “I don’t suppose that Mr. Brehgert knows what a gooseberry is.” At that moment the letter was brought in. “I suppose that’s from Mr. Brehgert.”

“I don’t think it matters to you who it’s from.” Georgiana tried to be composed and stately, but the letter was too important to allow of composure, and she retired to read it in privacy.

The letter was as follows:

My dear Georgiana,

Your father came to me the day after I was to have met you at Lady Monogram’s party. I told him that I would not write to you till I had taken a day or two to consider what he said to me; and also that I thought that you should have a day or two to consider what he might say to you. He has now repeated what he said at our first interview, almost with more violence; for I must say that I think he has allowed himself to be violent when it was surely unnecessary.

The long and short of it is this. He altogether disapproves of your promise to marry me. He has given three reasons; first that I am in trade; secondly that I am much older than you, and have a family; and thirdly that I am a Jew.

In regard to the first I can hardly think that he is earnest. I am a banker; and I can hardly conceive it to be possible that any gentleman in England should object to his daughter marrying a banker.

As to my age, it is fifty-one. I do not think myself too old to be married again. Whether I am too old for you is for you to judge – as is also that question of my children who, of course, should you become my wife will be to some extent a care upon your shoulders. As this is all very serious you will not, I hope, think me wanting in gallantry if I say that I should hardly have ventured to address you if you had been quite a young girl. No doubt there are many years between us. But the question is one for the lady to decide, and you must decide it now.

As to my religion, I acknowledge the force of what your father says, though I think that a gentleman brought up with fewer prejudices would have expressed himself in language less likely to give offence. However I am a man not easily

offended; and I am ready to take what he has said in good part. I can easily conceive that there should be those who think that the husband and wife should agree in religion. I am indifferent to it myself. I shall not interfere with you if you make me happy by becoming my wife, nor, I suppose, will you with me. Should you have a daughter or daughters I am quite willing that they should be brought up subject to your influence. (There was a plain-speaking in this which made Georgiana look round the room as though to see whether anyone was watching her as she read it.)

But no doubt your father objects to me specially because I am a Jew. If I were an atheist he might, perhaps, say nothing on the subject of religion. On this matter it seems to me that your father has hardly kept pace with the movements of the age. Fifty years ago Society was closed against the Jew, except under special circumstances, and so were all the privileges of high position. But that has been altered. Your father is blind to the change; but I think he does not wish to see.

I say this more to defend myself than to combat his views. It must be for you and for you alone to decide how far his views shall govern you. He has told me, in a rather peremptory fashion, that I have behaved badly because I did not go to him in the first instance when I thought of obtaining the honour of an alliance with his daughter. I have been obliged to tell him that in this matter I disagree with him entirely. I had no acquaintance with him. And again, at the risk of being thought uncourteous, I must say that you are to a certain degree freed by age from that subordination to which a few years ago you probably submitted without question. Your father, no doubt with propriety, had left you to be the guardian of yourself, and I cannot submit to be accused of improper conduct because, finding you in that condition, I availed myself of it.

And now, having said so much, I must leave the question to be decided entirely by yourself. I beg you to understand that I do not at all wish to hold you to a promise merely because the promise has been given. I readily acknowledge that you should consider the opinion of your family. It may well be that your regard for me will not suffice to reconcile you to such a breach from your own family as your father, with much repetition, has assured me will be inevitable.

Take a day or two to think of this and turn it over in your mind. When I last had the happiness of speaking to you, you seemed to think that your parents might raise objections, but that those objections would give way before your own wishes. I was flattered by your so thinking; but I must suppose that you were mistaken. I do not say this as any reproach to you. Quite the contrary. I think your father is irrational; and you may well have failed to anticipate that he should be so.

As to my own feelings, they remain exactly the same as before. Though I do not find myself to be too old to marry, I do think myself too old to write love letters. However, I have a most sincere affection for you; and if you should become my wife it shall be the study of my life to make you happy.

It is necessary that I should allude to one other matter; I have already told your father what I will now tell you. I think it probable that within this week I shall find myself a loser of a very large sum of money through the failure of a gentleman whose bad treatment of me I will the more readily forgive because he was the means of making me known to you. Such a loss, if it falls upon me, will not interfere in the least with the income which I have proposed to settle upon you for your use after my death; and, as your father declares that in the event of your marrying me he will not give you a shilling, he might have abstained from telling

me that I was a bankrupt merchant when I myself told him of my loss. I am not a bankrupt merchant nor at all likely to become so. Nor will this loss interfere with my present mode of living. But I have thought it right to inform you of it, because, if it occurs, I shall probably not keep a second establishment for the next two or three years. But my house at Fulham and my stables there will be kept up just as they are at present.

I have now told you everything which I think it is necessary you should know, in order that you may determine either to keep to or withdraw from your engagement. I hope I need not say that a decision in my favour will make me a happy man.

I am, in the meantime, your affectionate friend,
Ezekiel Brehgert.

This long letter puzzled Georgy a good deal, and left her very much in doubt as to what she would do. She could understand that it was a plain-spoken and truth-telling letter. Not that she gave it praise for those virtues; but it filled her unconsciously with a thorough belief.

But the genuine honesty of the letter was altogether thrown away upon her. She never said to herself, as she read it, that she might safely trust herself to this man, though he were a Jew over fifty, because he was honest. She did not see that the letter was particularly sensible; but she did allow herself to be pained by the total absence of romance. She was annoyed at the first allusion to her age, and angry at the second; and yet she had never supposed that Brehgert had taken her to be younger than she was. Nor had she wished to appear particularly young in his eyes. Nevertheless, she felt the reference to be uncivil, and it had its effect upon her.

And then the allusion to the “daughter or daughters” troubled her. She told herself that it was vulgar – just what a butcher might have said. And although she was quite prepared to call her father irrational and prejudiced, yet she was displeased that Mr. Brehgert should take such a liberty.

But the most distasteful passage in the letter was that which told her of the loss which he might incur through his connection with Melmotte. What right had he to incur a loss which would stop him from keeping his engagement? The town-house had been the great persuasion, and now he absolutely had the face to tell her that there was to be no town-house for three years. When she read this she felt that she ought to be indignant, and for a few moments was minded to sit down and tell the man scornfully that she would have nothing more to say to him.

But on that side too there would be terrible bitterness. How would she have fallen from her greatness when she would be a common bridesmaid at her sister’s wedding! And what would then be left to her in life? There would be no “season” for her, and she would be nobody at Caversham. As for London, she would hardly wish to go there! Everybody would know the story of the Jew. She could have plucked up courage to face the world as the Jew’s wife, but not as the young woman who had wanted to marry the Jew and had failed. If she could get her father to take her abroad at once, she would do it; but she was not now in a condition to make any terms with her father. As all this passed through her mind, she determined that she would so far take Mr. Brehgert’s advice as to postpone her answer till she had considered the matter.

She slept upon it, and the next day she asked her mother a few questions.
“Mamma, have you any idea what papa means to do?”

“In what way, my dear?” Lady Pomona’s voice was not gracious.

“Will he go to London next year?”

“That will depend upon money, I suppose. What makes you ask?”

“Of course I have been very cruelly circumstanced. Everybody must see that. The long and the short of it is this; if I give up my engagement, will he take us abroad for a year?”

“Why should he?”

“You can’t suppose that I should be comfortable in England. If we are to remain here at Caversham, how am I ever to get settled?”

“Sophy is doing very well.”

“Oh, mamma, there are not two George Whitstables – thank God.” She had meant to be humble, but she could not restrain herself from that one shaft. “I am sure that I hope she will be very happy. But that won’t do me any good.”

“I don’t see how you are to find anyone to marry you by going abroad,” said Lady Pomona, “and I don’t see why your papa is to be taken away from his home. He likes Caversham.”

“Then I am to be sacrificed on every side,” said Georgey, stalking out of the room. But still she could not make up her mind what letter she would write to Mr. Brehgert, and she slept upon it another night.

On the next day after breakfast she did write her letter, though when she sat down she had not clearly made up her mind what she would say. But she got it written, and here it is.

My dear Mr. Brehgert,

As you told me not to hurry, I have taken a little time to think about your letter. Of course it would be very disagreeable to quarrel with papa and mamma and everybody. And if I do so, I’m sure somebody ought to be very grateful. But papa has been very unfair. He thinks a great deal of the Longestaffe family, and so, I suppose, ought I. But the world does change so quick that one doesn’t think of anything now as one used to do. Anyway, I don’t feel that I’m bound to do what papa tells me just because he says it. Though I’m not quite so old as you seem to think, I’m old enough to judge for myself, and I mean to do so. You say very little about affection, but I suppose I am to take all that for granted.

I don’t wonder at papa being annoyed about the loss of the money. It must be a very great sum when it will prevent your having a house in London, as you agreed. It does make a great difference, because one could only see one’s friends in London. Fulham is all very well now and then, but I don’t think I should like to live at Fulham all the year through. You talk of three years, which would be dreadful. If as you say it will not have any lasting effect, could you not manage to have a house in town? If you can do it in three years, I should think you could do it now. I should like to have an answer to this question. I do think so much about spending the season in town!

As for the other parts of your letter, I knew very well beforehand that papa would be unhappy about it. But I don’t know why I’m to let that stand in my way when so very little is done to make me happy. Of course you will write to me again, and I hope you will say something satisfactory about the house in London.

Yours always sincerely,

Georgiana Longestaffe.

It probably never occurred to Georgey that Mr. Brehgert might wish to go back from his engagement. She so fully recognised her own value as a Christian lady of high birth that she thought that Mr. Brehgert would be only too anxious to stick to his bargain. Nor had she any idea that there was anything in her letter which could offend him. She thought that she might at least make good her claim to the house in London; and that he would yield to her on this point. But Mr. Brehgert did not lose a day in replying to her.

My dear Miss Longestaffe,

You say it would be very disagreeable to you to quarrel with your papa and mamma; and as I agree with you, I will take your letter as concluding our intimacy. I should not, however, be dealing quite fairly with you or with myself if I gave you to understand that I felt myself to be forced to this conclusion simply by your qualified assent to your parents' views. It is evident to me from your letter that you would not wish to be my wife unless I can supply you with a house in town. But this for the present is out of my power. I would not have allowed my losses to interfere with your settlement, but I must therefore to a certain extent have compromised my children. I should not have been happy till I had replaced them in their former position, and must therefore have abstained from increased expenditure till I had done so. But of course I have no right to ask you to share with me the discomfort of a single home. I may perhaps add that I had hoped that you would have looked for your happiness to another source, and that I will bear my disappointment as best I may.

As you may under these circumstances be unwilling that I should wear the ring you gave me, I return it by post. I trust you will be good enough to keep the trifle you were pleased to accept from me, in remembrance of one who will always wish you well.

Yours sincerely,
Ezekiel Brehgert.

And so it was all over! Georgey, when she read this letter, was very indignant at her lover's conduct. She did not believe that her own letter had at all warranted it. She had been quite sure of him. And now the Jew had rejected her! She read this letter over and over again, and the more she read it the more she felt that in her heart of hearts she had intended to marry him. There would have been inconveniences no doubt; but now she saw nothing before her but a long vista of Caversham dullness, in which she would be trampled upon by her father and mother, and scorned by Mr. and Mrs. George Whitstable.

She got up and walked about the room thinking of vengeance. But what vengeance was possible? She could not ask Dolly to beat him; nor could she ask her father to visit him with paternal indignation. There could be no revenge. For a time – only for a few seconds – she thought that she would write to Mr. Brehgert and tell him that she had not intended to end their engagement. But she could not quite descend to that. However she would keep the watch and chain he had given her, and which somebody had told her had cost more than a hundred and fifty guineas. She could not wear them, as people would know whence they had come; but she might exchange them for jewels which she could wear.

She thought it best to inform her mother. "Mamma," she said, "as you and papa take it so much to heart, I have broken off everything with Mr. Brehgert."

“Of course it must be broken off,” said Lady Pomona. This was so ungracious that Georgey almost flounced out of the room. “Have you heard from the man?” asked her ladyship.

“I have written to him, and it is all settled. I thought that you would have said something kind to me.” And she burst into tears.

“It was so very dreadful,” said Lady Pomona; “I never heard of anything so bad. It was worse than when young what’s-his-name married the tallow-chandler’s daughter.”

“They had neither of them a shilling,” said Georgey through her tears.

“And your papa says this man was next door to a bankrupt. But it’s all over?”

“Yes, mamma.”

“And now we must all remain here at Caversham till people forget it. It has been very hard upon George Whitstable. I once thought he would have been off, and I really don’t know that we could have said anything.” At that moment Sophy entered the room. “It’s all over between Georgiana and that man,” said Lady Pomona.

“I knew it would be,” said Sophia.

“And now I beg that nothing more may be said about it,” said Georgiana. “I suppose, mamma, you will write to papa?”

“You must send him back his watch and chain, Georgey,” said Sophia.

“What business is that of yours?”

“Of course she must. Papa would not let her keep it.”

To such a miserable depth of humility had she been brought! Georgiana, when she looked back on this miserable episode in her life, always blamed her father for her grief, by bringing about her ill-considered intimacy with the Melmottes.



Chapter 80

Ruby Prepares for Service

Our poor old honest friend John Crumb was taken away to the cells after his performance in the street with Sir Felix, and was locked up for the rest of the night. He was not downcast; for it was a great satisfaction to think that he had “served the young man right” in the presence of his Ruby. Although he was not vain, he did think that Ruby must have observed that he was the better man of the two.

Nor did he feel any disgrace from being locked up for the night. He was as meek as a child, and very good-humoured with the policeman, who seemed to understand his nature. As he lay down on the hard bench, he comforted himself with thinking that Ruby would surely never care any more for the “baronite” since she had seen him go down like a cur without striking a blow. He thought a good deal about Ruby, but never blamed her for what had happened.

The next morning he was taken before the magistrates, but was told that he was again free. Sir Felix had refused to make any complaint against him. John Crumb shook hands cordially with the policeman, and suggested beer. The constable, with regrets, was forced to decline, and bade adieu with the hope that they might meet again before long.

From the police-office John went to Mrs. Pipkin’s house, and asked for Ruby. He was told that Ruby was out with the children, and was advised both by Mrs. Pipkin and Mrs. Hurtle not to meet her quite yet.

“You see,” said Mrs. Pipkin, “she’s a thinking how heavy you were upon that young gentleman.”

“But I wasn’t; not particular. Lord love you, he ain’t a hair the worse.”

“You let her alone for a time,” said Mrs. Hurtle. “A little neglect will do her good.”

“Maybe,” said John. “I wouldn’t like her to have it bad.”

Mrs. Hurtle assured him that he should be summoned to town as soon as it was thought that his presence there would serve his purposes; and he took Mrs. Pipkin aside, and suggested that if there were “any hextras,” he was ready to pay for them. Then he took his leave without seeing Ruby, and went back to Bungay.

When Ruby returned with the children she was told that John Crumb had called.

“I thought as he was in prison,” said Ruby.

“What should they keep him in prison for?” said Mrs. Pipkin. “He hasn’t done nothing as he oughtn’t to have done. That young man was dragging you about, and Mr. Crumb just did as anybody ought to have done to prevent it. Prison indeed! It isn’t him as ought to be in prison.”

“And where is he now, aunt?”

“Gone down to Bungay to mind his business, and won’t be coming here any more of a fool’s errand. He must have seen now pretty well what’s worth having, and what ain’t.”

“John Crumb’d be after me again tomorrow, if I just hold up my finger,” said Ruby.

“Then John Crumb’s a fool; and now you go about your work.”

Ruby tossed her head, and slammed the kitchen door, and scolded the servant girl, and then sat down to cry. What was she to do with herself now? She had an idea that Felix would not come back to her after that beating – and she certainly did not like him the better for having been beaten. She did not believe that she would ever dance with him again. That had been the charm of her life in London, and that was now over. And as for marrying her – she began to feel certain that Sir Felix did not intend it.

John Crumb was a big, awkward, dull, uncouth lump of a man, with whom Ruby thought it impossible that a girl should be in love. Love and John Crumb were poles asunder. But—! Ruby did not like wheeling the pram about Islington, and being told by her aunt Pipkin to go about her work.

Mrs. Hurtle was still living in solitude in the lodgings, and took an interest in John Crumb. A man more unlike one of her own countrymen she had never seen.

“I wonder whether he has any ideas at all in his head,” she had said to Mrs. Pipkin. Mrs. Pipkin had replied that Mr. Crumb had certainly a very strong idea of marrying Ruby Ruggles. Mrs. Hurtle had smiled. She was determined to give John Crumb all the aid in her power.

So she took Mrs. Pipkin into her confidence, and prepared a plan of action. On the day after John’s return to Bungay Mrs. Pipkin summoned Ruby into the back parlour, and spoke to her.

“Ruby, this must come to an end now. You can’t stay here always, you know.”

“I’m sure I work hard, Aunt Pipkin, and I don’t get no wages.”

“There’s the keep if there isn’t wages. Besides, there’s other reasons. Your grandfather won’t have you back; that’s certain.”

“I wouldn’t go back to grandfather.”

“But you must go somewheres. You didn’t come to stay here always. You must go into service.”

“I don’t know anybody as ’d have me,” said Ruby.

“You must put a ’vertisement into the paper. You’d better say nursemaid, as you seems to take kindly to children. And I must give you a character; only I shall say just the truth. You mustn’t ask much wages at first.”

Ruby looked very sorrowful, and the tears were near her eyes. The change from the glories of the music hall was so startling and so oppressive!

“It has got to be done, so you may as well put the ’vertisement in this afternoon.”

“You’re going to turn me out, Aunt Pipkin.”

“Well; if that’s turning out, I am. You never acted like I was your mistress. You would go out with that rascalion when I bid you not. Now when you’re in a regular place like, you must mind when you’re spoke to. You must earn your bread, Ruby.”

There was no possible answer to this, and the notice was put into the paper – Mrs. Hurtle paying.

“You know,” said Mrs. Hurtle, “she must stay here really, till Mr. Crumb comes and takes her away.” Mrs. Pipkin expressed her opinion that Ruby was a “baggage” and John Crumb “soft.”

Ruby went hither and thither for a day or two, calling upon the mothers of children who wanted nursemaids. The houses which she visited were not great

and splendid. Many objections were made to her: her ringlets were objectionable. She was too flighty-looking. She spoke up much too free.

At last one mother of five children offered to take her on approval for a month, at £12 a year, Ruby to find her own tea and wash for herself. This was abject slavery. And she who had been the beloved of a baronet, and who might even now be the mistress of a house – if she would only hold up her finger! But the place was accepted, and with broken-hearted sobbings Ruby prepared to depart from aunt Pipkin's roof.

"I hope you like your new place, Ruby," Mrs. Hurtle said on her last day.

"Indeed I don't like it at all. They're the ugliest children you ever see, Mrs. Hurtle."

"Ugly children must be minded as well as pretty ones."

"And their mother is as cross as cross."

"It's your own fault, Ruby. All this has come because you wouldn't keep your word to Mr. Crumb. But for that, your grandfather wouldn't have turned you out of his house."

"He didn't turn me out. I ran away. And it wasn't along of John Crumb, but because grandfather hauled me about by my hair."

"But he was angry about Mr. Crumb. When a young woman becomes engaged to a young man, she ought not to go back from her word. Of course you have brought trouble on yourself. I am sorry that you don't like the place. I'm afraid you must go to it now."

"I am agoing – I suppose," said Ruby.

"I shall write and tell Mr. Crumb where you are."

"Oh, Mrs. Hurtle, don't. What should you write to him for? It ain't nothing to him. I don't want him to know as I'm in service. It's such a come-down."

"There is nothing to be ashamed of in that. What you have to be ashamed of is jilting him. It was a bad thing to do; wasn't it, Ruby?"

"I didn't mean nothing bad, Mrs. Hurtle; only why couldn't he say what he had to say himself, instead of bringing another to say it for him? What would you feel, Mrs. Hurtle, if a man was to come and say it all out of another man's mouth?"

"I don't think I should much care if the thing was well said at last. You know he meant it."

"Yes; I did know that."

"And you know he means it now?"

"I'm not so sure. He's gone back to Bungay. He'll go and get somebody else now."

"Of course he will if he hears nothing about you. I think I'd better tell him. I know what would happen."

"What would happen, Mrs. Hurtle?"

"He'd be up in town again in half a jiffy to see what sort of a place you'd got. Now, Ruby, I'll tell you what I'll do, if you'll say the word. I'll have him up here at once and you shan't go to Mrs. Buggins." Ruby stood still, staring at Mrs. Hurtle. "But if he comes you mustn't behave this time as you did before."

"But I'm to go to Mrs. Buggins tomorrow."

"We'll send to her and tell her to get somebody else. And this man will make you mistress of his house. You say he isn't good at speaking; but I never came across an honest man in my whole life, or one who I think would treat a woman better. What's the use of a glib tongue if there isn't a heart with it? Sir

Felix Carbury could talk, I dare say, but you don't think now he was a very fine fellow."

"He was so beautiful, Mrs. Hurtle!"

"But he hadn't the spirit of a mouse. Well, Ruby, you choose. Shall it be John Crumb or Mrs. Buggins?"

Then Ruby in a very low whisper told Mrs. Hurtle that she might bring John Crumb back again.

"And there shall be no more nonsense?"

"No," whispered Ruby.

On that same night a letter was sent to Mrs. Buggins, which Mrs. Hurtle composed. And then Mrs. Hurtle in her own name wrote a short note to Mr. John Crumb.

Dear Mr. Crumb,

If you will come back to London I think you will find Miss Ruby Ruggles all that you desire.

Yours faithfully,

Winifred Hurtle.

"She's had a deal more done for her than she deserves," said Mrs. Pipkin. "I haven't got no patience with girls like them. Yes; it is for the best; and there's no words to say how good you've been. I hope, Mrs. Hurtle, you ain't thinking of going away because this is all done."



Chapter 81

Mr. Cohenlupe Leaves London

Dolly Longestaffe was promised his money on a Wednesday; the payment to be made on Friday. He had agreed that Squercum should be made to desist from further proceedings. The bother of visiting Squercum was very great, but he began to feel that he almost liked it. The excitement was nearly as good as that of loo. Of course it was a "horrid bore," this doubt about his money. But there was an importance in it that sustained him amidst his troubles. Dolly was elevated to the level of a man of business, and enjoyed his own capacity. Why, it depended chiefly upon him whether Melmotte should or should not be charged before the Lord Mayor.

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have promised," he said to Squercum, sitting in the lawyer's office with a cigar in his mouth. He preferred Squercum to any other lawyer he had met because Squercum's room was untidy, and he could sit where he pleased, and smoke all the time.

"Well; I don't think you ought. Bideawhile shouldn't have asked you to agree to anything in my absence," said Squercum indignantly. "It was very unprofessional on his part."

"It was you told me to go."

"I wanted you to see what they were at in that room. Your father then is quite clear that you did not sign the letter?"

"Oh, yes; the governor is pig-headed, you know, but he's honest."

"All men are honest," said the lawyer, "but they are generally specially honest to their own side. Melmotte has promised to pay the money on Friday, has he?"

"He's to bring it to Bruton Street."

"I don't believe a word of it. How will he bring it? He'll give you a cheque dated for Monday, and that'll give him two days more, and then on Monday there'll be a note to say the money can't be lodged till Wednesday. There should be no compromising with such a man. You only get from one mess into another. I told you not to say anything."

"I suppose we can't help it now. You're to be there on Friday. If you're there, there won't be any more compromising."

Squercum made one or two further unflattering remarks which might have caused offence had there not been such perfectly good feeling between the attorney and the young man.

"If I was a sharp fellow like you, you know," said Dolly, "of course I should get along better; but I ain't, you know." It was settled that they should meet each other, and Mr. Longestaffe senior, Bideawhile, and Melmotte, at twelve o'clock on Friday in Bruton Street.

Squercum was by no means satisfied. He had ferreted things out, till he had pretty nearly got to the bottom of that affair about the houses in the East End, and he had managed to induce the heirs of the old man who had died to employ him. As to Pickering, he had not a doubt about it. Old Longestaffe had been bribed with a seat at the Railway Board to give up the title-deeds; and when he had failed to induce Dolly to do the same, Melmotte had used his ingenuity.

All this was perfectly clear to Squercum. He regarded Melmotte as a grand swindler – perhaps the grandest that the world had ever known; and he could conceive no greater honour than the detection, successful prosecution, and ultimate destroying of so great a man. But he felt himself to have been unfairly hampered by his own client. He did not believe that the money would be paid; but delay might rob him of his Melmotte. He considered it to be out of the question that Melmotte should raise the money – but there were various ways in which a man might escape.

It may be remembered that Croll, the German clerk, preceded Melmotte into the City on Wednesday after Marie's refusal to sign the deeds. He, too, had his eyes open, and had perceived that things were not looking as well as they used to look. Croll had for many years been true to his patron, having been well paid for such truth. When things had gone badly, he had believed in Melmotte, and had been rewarded for his faith.

Mr. Croll had little investments of his own, which would leave him some money should the Melmotte affairs take an awkward turn. Melmotte had never required him to do anything that was actually fraudulent, although Mr. Croll had not been over-scrupulous. But there must be a limit to all things; and why should any man sacrifice himself beneath the ruins of a falling house? Mr. Croll would have been happy to witness Miss Melmotte's signature; but as for that other kind of witnessing, he was unwilling.

"You know what's up now, don't you?" said one of the junior clerks to Mr. Croll when he entered the office in Abchurch Lane.

"A good deal will be up soon," said the German.

"Cohenlupe has gone! He's left no address. Nobody seems to know what's become of him."

"New York," suggested Mr. Croll.

"They seem to think not. He's on the continent somewhere, half across France by this time; but nobody knows what route he has taken. That'll be a poke in the ribs for the old boy; eh, Croll?" Croll merely shook his head. "I wonder what has become of Miles Grendall," continued the clerk.

"Ven de rats is going away it is bad for de house."

"There seems to have been a regular manufactory of Mexican Railway scrip."

"Our governor knew noding about dat," said Croll.

"If they could have been kept up another fortnight they say Cohenlupe would have been worth nearly a million, and the governor would have been as good as the bank. Is it true they are going to have him before the Lord Mayor?"

Croll declared that he knew nothing about it, and settled down to his work.

In two hours he was followed by Melmotte, who knew it was too late that day to raise the money, but hoped to pave the way for getting it the next day, the Thursday. Of course the first news he heard was of the defection of Mr. Cohenlupe. It was Croll who told him. His jaw fell, but he said nothing.

"It's a bad thing," said Mr. Croll.

"Yes. Where has he gone?" Croll shook his head. "It never rains but it pours," said Melmotte. "Well; I'll weather it all yet. I've been worse than I am now, Croll, as you know, and have had a hundred thousand pounds before the month was out."

"Yes, indeed," said Croll.

“But the worst of it is that everyone around me is so damnably jealous. Ever since I stood for Westminster there has been a dead set against me in the City. That affair of the dinner was planned so that it might ruin me. It is hard for one man to stand against all that when he has dealings so large as mine.”

“Very hard, Mr. Melmotte.”

“But they’ll find they’re mistaken yet. I suppose I shall find Brehgert in Cuthbert’s Court.”

“I should say so, Mr. Melmotte.”

Then Mr. Melmotte took his hat and gloves and stick, and went out with his face carefully dressed in its usually jaunty air. But Croll heard him mutter the name of Cohenlupe between his teeth.

Melmotte had a difficult part to act. To look indifferent when the heart is sinking – or has sunk to the very ground – is an agonizing task. A grandly urbane appearance over ruined hopes is beyond the strength of most men. Melmotte very nearly accomplished it. It was only to the eyes of such a one as Herr Croll that the failure was perceptible.

Melmotte found Mr. Brehgert, who at this time had completed his correspondence with Miss Longestaffe, in which he had mentioned the probability of great losses. He had now heard that Mr. Cohenlupe had gone upon his travels, and was therefore sure that his anticipation would be correct.

Nevertheless, he received his old friend with a smile. When large sums of money are concerned there is seldom personal indignation between man and man. The loss of fifty pounds may create personal wrath; but fifty thousand require equanimity.

“So Cohenlupe hasn’t been seen in the City today,” said Brehgert.

“He has gone,” said Melmotte hoarsely.

“I think I once told you that Cohenlupe was not the man for large dealings.”

“Yes, you did,” said Melmotte.

“Well; it can’t be helped. And what is it now?” Then Melmotte explained to Mr. Brehgert what he wanted, taking the various documents out of his bag. Mr. Brehgert understood readily all that was required. He examined the documents, declaring that he did not know how the thing could be arranged by Friday. Melmotte replied that £50,000 was not a very large sum, and the security offered was worth twice that.

“You will leave them with me this evening,” said Brehgert. Melmotte paused for a moment, and said that he would of course do so. He would have given much to have been sufficiently master of himself to have assented without hesitation; but the weight within him was so very heavy!

Having left the papers and the bag with Mr. Brehgert, he walked westwards to the House of Commons. During the last week he had occasionally gone down to the House in the afternoon. Today there was no evening sitting; but his mind was too full of other things to allow him to remember this. As he walked along the Embankment, his thoughts were very heavy. What would be the end of it? Ruin; yes, but there were worse things than ruin. And a short time ago, he had made himself so safe!

As he looked back at it, he could hardly say how he had been driven out of the track that he had laid down for himself. Insane ambition had tempted him away from his anchorage. He blamed himself, not his circumstances. If he could only begin again, how different would his conduct be!

But of what use were such regrets as these? He must take things as they were now, and not allow himself to be carried away by pride or cowardice. And if the worst should come to the worst, then let him face it like a man! There was a certain manliness about him which showed itself in his self-condemnation. Judging himself, he pointed out to himself his own shortcomings. There was much that he was ashamed of; many a little act which recurred to him vividly in this solitary hour as a thing to be repented of.

Yet never for a moment did it occur to him to repent of the fraud in which his whole life had been passed. Though he was inquiring into himself as closely as he could, he never even told himself that he had been dishonest. Fraud and dishonesty had been the very principle of his life, and had so become a part of his blood and bones that even in this extremity of misery he did not question them. Not to cheat, not to be a scoundrel, was a condition of things to which his mind had never turned itself.

But why had he not conciliated Lord Mayors? Why had he been insolent at the India Office? Why had he trusted Cohenlupe? Why had he not stuck to Abchurch Lane instead of going into Parliament? Why had he called down unnecessary notice on his head by entertaining the Emperor of China? It was too late now, and he must bear it; but these were the things that had ruined him.

He walked into Palace Yard and across it, to the door of Westminster Abbey, before he found out that Parliament was not sitting.

“Oh, Wednesday! Of course,” he said, turning round. Now he did not know what use to make of the evening. His house could hardly be very comfortable to him. But in his own house he could at least be alone.

Then, as he walked slowly across the park, thinking intently, he asked himself whether it still might not be best for him to keep the money which was settled on his daughter, to tell the Longestaffes that he could make no payment, and to face the worst that Mr. Squercum could do. Though they should put him on trial for forgery, what of that? He had heard of trials in which the accused criminals had been heroes – had been fêted though no one had doubted their guilt – and had come out unscathed at last. What evidence had they against him? He, the great Melmotte, could certainly command a better lawyer. Surely there need be no despondency while so good a hope remained to him!

He did tremble as he remembered Dolly Longestaffe’s letter, and the letter of the old man who was dead. But would it not be better to face it all than to surrender his money and become a pauper?

But he had given those forged documents into the hands of Mr. Brehgert! Again he had acted in a hurry, without sufficient thought. He was angry with himself for that. But how is a man to give sufficient thought to his affairs when every step is ruinous? Yes – he had certainly put into Brehgert’s hands means of proving him to be absolutely guilty of forgery. He did not think that Marie would disclaim the signatures; nor did he think that his clerk Croll would be urgent against him. But Brehgert, should he discover what had been done, would certainly not permit him to escape.

He would tell Brehgert in the morning that he had changed his mind. He would see him before any action could have been taken on the documents, and Brehgert would restore them to him. Then he would instruct his daughter to hold the money fast, to sign no paper, and to draw the income herself. Having done that, he would let his foes do their worst. They might drag him to jail. But they might fail to convict him! For the present he must do nothing – once he had

recovered and destroyed those documents – and would live as though he feared nothing.

He dined at home alone, in the study, and after dinner carefully went through various bundles of papers, preparing them for the eyes of those lawyers who would probably before long be searching them. While he was doing this, he drank a bottle of champagne, and felt greatly comforted by the process. If he could only hold up his head, he might still live through it all. How much had he done by his own unassisted powers! He had once been imprisoned for fraud at Hamburg, and had come out of jail a friendless pauper; now he was a member of the British House of Parliament, the owner of perhaps the most gorgeously furnished house in London, and commercial giant. He rang the bell and desired that Madame Melmotte might be sent to him, and bade the servant bring him brandy.

In ten minutes his poor wife came crawling into the room. She stood opposite him while he spoke. She never sat in his presence in that room. He asked her where she and Marie kept their jewellery.

“Is anything going to happen, Melmotte?”

“A good deal is going to happen. Are the jewels here in this house, or in Grosvenor Square?”

“They are here.”

“Then have them all packed up, as small as you can. Have them close to hand so that if you have to move you can take them with you. Do you understand?”

“Yes; I understand. What is going to happen, Melmotte?”

“How can I tell? You ought to know by this time that when a man’s work is such as mine, things will happen. You’ll be safe enough. Nothing can hurt you.”

“Shall we have to move?”

“Very likely. What’s the harm of moving?”

“Are they going to send you to prison?”

“Hold your tongue.”

“Tell me, Melmotte.” The poor woman sat down, overcome by her feelings.

“I didn’t ask you to come here for a scene,” said Melmotte. “Do as I bid you about your jewels, and Marie’s. The thing is not to have it to do at the last moment, when you will be flurried. Now you needn’t stay any longer, and it’s no good asking any questions because I shan’t answer them.” So dismissed, the poor woman crept out again, and went to work with her ornaments.

Melmotte sat up most of the night, sipping brandy and water, and sometimes smoking. But he hardly touched a paper after his wife left him.



Chapter 82

Marie's Perseverance

Very early the next morning, Melmotte was told by a servant that Mr. Croll had called and wanted to see him. He was not sure whether he wanted to see Croll. He longed to know the servant's opinion of the clerk's manner, but he did not dare ask.

"See if he has breakfasted, and if not give him something in the study," he said. But Mr. Croll had breakfasted and declined any further refreshment.

Melmotte could not make up his mind whether to meet his clerk. It might be well that he should first go into the City, telling Croll to wait for his return. Over and over again, against his will, the question of flying would present itself to him; but he knew that he could not fly. And if he stood his ground, he must not be afraid to meet any man, let the man come with what thunderbolts he may. Of course sooner or later some man must come with a thunderbolt – and why not Croll as well as another?

He stood in his chamber, with a razor in his hand, and steadied himself. How easily might he put an end to it all! Then he rang his bell and desired that Croll might be shown up into his room.

The three or four minutes which intervened seemed very long. He had absolutely forgotten in his anxiety that the lather was still upon his face. But he could not conquer his anxiety, though he was fighting it at every turn.

When the knock came at his door, he grasped at his own breast as though to support himself. Hoarsely he told the man to come in, and Croll opened the door very gently and slowly. Melmotte had left the bag which contained the papers in possession of Mr. Brehgert, and he now saw that Croll had the bag in his hand. He could see also by the shape of the bag that it contained the papers to which Croll's name had been forged. There was no longer a hope that Croll was ignorant of what had been done.

"Well, Croll," he said with an attempt at a smile, "what brings you here so early?" He was pale as death, and could not stop himself from trembling.

"Herr Brehgert vas vid me last night," said Croll. "He thought I had better bring these back to you. That's all." Croll spoke in a very low voice, but with no threat in his manner.

It all flashed upon Melmotte in a moment. Brehgert had seen Croll, had discovered the forgery, and had taken this way of sending back all the forged documents. He had known Brehgert to be the most good-natured of men, but he could hardly believe in pure good-nature such as this. It seemed that the thunderbolt was not yet to fall.

"Mr. Brehgert came to me," continued Croll, "because one signature was wanting. It was very late, so I took them home, and said I'd bring them to you in the morning."

They both knew that he had forged the documents, Brehgert and Croll; but had resolved together that they would not expose him. Melmotte had wished to get the documents back, and here they were. He found that he could not speak.

"It vas a strong order, Mr. Melmotte," said Croll. Melmotte tried to smile. "I vill not be back in the Lane, Mr. Melmotte."

“Not back at the office, Croll?”

“I tink not. De leetle money coming to me, you will send it. Adieu.” And so Mr. Croll took his final leave of his old master after twenty years.

Melmotte opened the bag, and examined all the documents. It had been necessary that Marie should sign her name some half-dozen times, and Marie’s father had made all the necessary forgeries. It had of course been necessary that each name should be witnessed; but here the forger had left one signature undone! He had aided his own ruin by his carelessness.

Brehgert, he thought, would never tell the tale; but he was by no means so sure of Croll. Croll would probably enter some rival service, and there could be no reason why he should keep the secret. Of course Croll would tell it.

But what harm could the telling of such a secret do him? The girl was his own daughter! The money had been his own money! There had been no fraud; no robbery. Melmotte, as he thought of this, became almost proud of what he had done. But the evidence must be suppressed, so he took the bag and all the papers down with him to the study. Then he ate his breakfast – and suppressed the evidence by the aid of his gas lamp.

When this was done he hesitated as to how to pass his day. He had now given up all idea of raising the money for Longestaffe. He had even considered the language in which he would explain to the gentlemen on the next day the fact that he must leave the matter in their hands. For he had resolved not to evade the meeting. He would throw all the blame on Cohenlupe.

But he could do no good now by going into the City. There would be nothing for him to do. Cohenlupe had gone. Miles Grendall had gone. Croll had gone. He could hardly go to Cuthbert’s Court and face Mr. Brehgert! He would stay at home till it was time for him to go down to the House, and he would dine there, and stand about in the smoking-room, and be visible in the lobbies, and take his seat among his brother legislators – and, if it were possible, rise on his legs and make a speech to them. He was about to have a crushing fall – but the world should say that he had fallen like a man.

About eleven his daughter came to him as he sat in the study. It can hardly be said that he had ever been kind to Marie, but perhaps she was the only person who had ever received indulgence at his hands. He had often beaten her; but he had also often made her presents and smiled on her. Now she had not only disobeyed him, but by her obstinacy had driven him to acts of forgery. He had cause to be angry with Marie. But he had almost forgotten the transaction. He had at any rate forgotten the violence of his own feelings.

“Papa,” she said, “I think that perhaps I was wrong yesterday.”

“Of course you were wrong; but it doesn’t matter now.”

“If you wish it I’ll sign those papers. I don’t suppose Lord Nidderdale means to come any more. Papa, is something going to happen?”

“What do you mean?”

“Some misfortune! Oh, papa, why didn’t you let me marry that other man?”

“He is a penniless adventurer.”

“But he would have had this money that I call my money, and then there would have been enough for us all. Papa, he would marry me still if you would let him.”

“Have you seen him since you went to Liverpool?”

“Never, papa.”

“Or heard from him?”

“Not a line.”

“Then what makes you think he would marry you?”

“He would if I got hold of him and told him. And he is a baronet. And there would be plenty of money for us all. And we could go and live in Germany.”

“We could do that just as well without your marrying.”

“I like him, Papa, and I don’t like anybody else.”

“He wouldn’t take the trouble to go to Liverpool with you.”

“He got tipsy. I know all about that. I don’t mean to say that he’s anything particularly grand. I don’t know that anybody is very grand. He’s as good as anybody else.”

“It can’t be done, Marie. It is too late. There are other things to be thought of now than marriage.”

“You don’t want me to sign the papers?”

“No. But I want you to remember that the money is mine and not yours. It may be that I shall have to trust to you for nearly everything. Do not let me find myself deceived by my daughter.”

“I won’t – if you’ll let me see Sir Felix Carbury once more.”

Then the father became angry. “I tell you, you little fool, that it is out of the question. Why cannot you believe me? Has your mother spoken to you about your jewels? Get them packed up, so that you can carry them away if we have to leave suddenly. You are an idiot to think of that young man. Maybe none of them are very good, but he is about the worst. Go away and do as I bid you.”

That afternoon the servant in Welbeck Street came up to Lady Carbury and told her that there was a young lady downstairs who wanted to see Sir Felix. At this time Sir Felix still had plasters on his face, and was much subdued.

Lady Carbury asked about the lady, suspecting that it was Ruby Ruggles. The servant could say only that the young lady wore a black veil. Lady Carbury directed that she be shown up – and Marie Melmotte was ushered into the room.

“I dare say you don’t remember me, Lady Carbury,” she said.

“Yes, Miss Melmotte, I remember you.”

“How is your son? I hope he is better. They told me he had been horribly used by a dreadful man in the street.”

“Sit down, Miss Melmotte. He is getting better.” Now Lady Carbury had heard from Mr. Broune that “it was all over” with Melmotte. Broune believed that Melmotte had committed various forgeries, and was a ruined man.

“I want to see him,” said Marie. Lady Carbury was silent for a while. “I suppose he told you everything. You know that we were to have been married? I loved him very much, and so I do still. I am not ashamed of telling you.”

“I thought it was all off,” said Lady Carbury.

“I never said so. Does he say so? Your daughter came to me and was very good to me. I do so love her. She said that it was all over; but perhaps she was wrong.”

Lady Carbury was taken greatly by surprise. It seemed to her that this young lady, knowing that her father was ruined, was boldly looking for another home. She gave Marie little credit either for affection or for generosity; yet she was unwilling to answer her roughly.

“I am afraid,” she said, “that it would not be suitable.”

“Why not? They can’t take my money away. There is enough for all of us even if papa wanted to live with us; but it is mine. It is a great deal – thousands a year. We should be rich enough. I ain’t ashamed to come and tell you, because we

were engaged. I know he isn't rich, and I should have thought it would be suitable."

It then occurred to Lady Carbury that if this were true the marriage after all might be suitable. But how was she to find out whether it was true? "I understand that your papa is opposed to it," she said.

"Yes, he is; but papa can't prevent me, and he can't make me give up the money."

Lady Carbury was beside herself with doubt. She needed to see Mr. Broune. What to do with her son was the great trouble of her life, the burden that was breaking her back. Now this girl was not only willing but anxious to take her black sheep and to endow him with thousands a year. If the thousands were there – or even a single thousand a year – what a blessing would such a marriage be!

"My son is upstairs," she said. "I will go up and speak to him."

"Tell him I am here and that I will forgive him everything, and that I love him still, and that if he will be true to me, I will be true to him."

"I couldn't go down to her," said Sir Felix, "with my face all in this way."

"I don't think she would mind that."

"I couldn't do it. Besides, I don't believe about her money. I never did believe it. That was the real reason why I didn't go to Liverpool."

"I think I would see her if I were you, Felix. We could find out about her fortune. She is very fond of you."

"What's the use of that, if her father is ruined?" He would not go down to see the girl – because he could not bear to expose his face, and was ashamed of his wounds. As regarded the money he half-believed and half-disbelieved Marie's story. But getting the money would be a lot of trouble. And how could he kiss his future bride, with his nose bound up with a bandage?

"What shall I say to her?" asked his mother.

"She oughtn't to have come. Tell her just that."

Lady Carbury went very slowly back down to the drawing-room. "Miss Melmotte," she said, "my son feels that nothing can be gained by a renewal of your acquaintance."

"That is his message, is it? Then he is indeed all that they have told me; and I am ashamed that I should have loved him. I am not ashamed of coming here, although you will think that I have run after him. But I'm ashamed of thinking so much of so mean a person. Good-bye, Lady Carbury. I will try to forget him."

Then with a rapid step she walked back to Bruton Street. What should she now do with herself? What sort of life should she prepare for? The life that she had led for the last year had been thoroughly wretched. The poverty and hardship of her early days had been more endurable. In these days of her grandeur, in which she had danced with princes, and seen an emperor in her father's house, and been affianced to lords, she had encountered degradation. She had really loved; but had found out that her golden idol was made of the basest clay. She had declared that bad as the clay was she would still love it; but even the clay had turned away from her and had refused her love!

She was well aware that some catastrophe was about to happen to her father. Catastrophes had happened before. But this blow would be a very heavy blow. They would need to pack up and move to some other, distant city. But go where she might, she would now be her own mistress. That was the one resolution she formed before she re-entered the house in Bruton Street.



Chapter 83

Melmotte Again at the House

On that Thursday afternoon it was known everywhere that Melmotte was ruined. As soon as Cohenlupe had gone, no man doubted it. No one now had a word to say in his favour. The Grendalls had disappeared; Lord Alfred had not been seen since the day of the dinner.

When the Speaker took his seat in the House, soon after four o'clock, there were many members present, and a general feeling that the world was more than ordinarily alive because of Melmotte and his failures. It had been confidently asserted throughout the morning that he would be put upon trial for forgery, and it was known that he had not yet shown himself anywhere that day.

"I wonder where he is," said Mr. Lupton to Mr. Beauchamp Beauclerk in one of the lobbies of the House.

"They say he hasn't been in the City all day. I suppose he's in Longestaffe's house. There's Nidderdale. I wonder what he thinks about it all."

"This is awful; ain't it?" said Nidderdale.

"It might have been worse, I should say, as far as you are concerned," replied Mr. Lupton.

"Well, yes. But I'll tell you what, Lupton. I don't quite understand it all yet. Our lawyer said three days ago that the money was certainly there."

"And Cohenlupe was certainly here three days ago," said Lupton; "but he isn't here now." Lord Nidderdale shook his head and tried to look very grave.

Even ministers were more intent upon Melmotte than upon their own business.

"Do you know anything about it?" asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the Home Secretary.

"I understand that no order has been given for his arrest. I doubt whether they've got their evidence together."

"He's a ruined man, I suppose," said the Chancellor.

"He has been about the grandest rogue we've seen yet. He must have spent over a hundred thousand pounds during the last twelve months on his personal expenses."

At this moment there came a silence over the House which was almost audible. Everybody looked up. An Under-Secretary of State who had just stood up to speak was startled into momentary forgetfulness of his point. Augustus Melmotte, the member for Westminster, was walking up the centre of the House.

He had learnt by this time what to do with his hat in the House. As he entered he wore it on one side of his head, as was his custom. Much of the arrogance of his appearance had come from this habit. He was more determined than ever that no one should see in his face or manner any sign of that ruin which, as he well knew, all men were anticipating. Therefore, perhaps, his hat was a little more cocked than usual, and the lapels of his coat were thrown back a little wider, displaying the large jewelled studs in his shirt. When he had come through the hall, no one had spoken a word to him. He had known that men would shun him; but he was resolved to endure it.

He bowed to the Speaker with more than usual courtesy, raising his hat with care, and seated himself on the third opposition-bench, with more than his usual fling. He was a big man, and always conspicuous in his movements; but there seemed to be a special impudence in the manner in which he took his seat. The Under-Secretary of State who was on his legs was struck almost dumb.

Lord Nidderdale occupied the seat next to Melmotte's. Previously the young lord, fully intending to marry the Financier's daughter, had resolved that he would not be ashamed of his father-in-law, and with honesty and courage he had given Melmotte little lessons as to customs of the House. But it had become obvious during the last two days that the marriage must be abandoned. Why should he any longer be gracious to Melmotte? But he found it hard to get up at once and leave his seat because Melmotte had placed himself by his side.

"Have you been with Marie today?" said Melmotte.

"No – I've not," replied the lord.

"Why don't you go? She's always asking about you now. I hope we shall be in our own house again next week, and then we shall be able to make you comfortable."

Could it be possible that the man did not know that all the world was united in accusing him of forgery? "I think you had better see my governor again, Mr. Melmotte."

"There's nothing wrong, I hope."

"Well – I don't know. You'd better see him. I'm going now. I only came down to make an appearance." He had to cross Melmotte on his way out, and as he did so Melmotte grasped him by the hand.

"Good night, my boy," said Melmotte, quite loudly. Nidderdale was confused and unhappy; and rushed down through the gangway and out through the doors with a hurried step. As he escaped into the lobby he met Lionel Lupton.

"You know what has happened, Nidderdale?"

"About Melmotte, you mean?"

"Yes – he has been arrested in his own house within the last half-hour."

"I wish he had," said Nidderdale. "If you go in you'll find him sitting there as large as life. He has been talking to me as though everything were all right."

Melmotte kept his seat steadily till seven, when the House adjourned till nine. He was one of the last to leave, and then, almost majestically, he descended to the dining-room and ordered his dinner. There were many men there, and no one was very willing to make room for him. But at last he secured a place. Even the waiters were unwilling to serve him; but with patience and endurance he did eventually get his dinner. He was there in his right, as a member of the House of Commons, and such service could not be refused to him.

It was not long before he had the table to himself. But of this he took no apparent notice. He spoke loudly to the waiters and drank his bottle of champagne with evident enjoyment. He looked happy enough; but in truth he was probably the most utterly wretched man in London. Yet, with all the world now gone from him, with nothing before him but extreme misery, he was able to spend the last moments of his freedom in making a reputation for audacity.

He went from the dining-room to the smoking-room, and lit a long cigar. Mr. Brown, who had been corrected by Melmotte in his first speech, was in the room, and Melmotte, with a smile and a bow, offered a cigar to him. It was as good as a play to see Mr. Brown jumping back from any contact with the wicked one, and frowning at his impudence.

“You needn’t think so much, you know, of what I said the other night. I didn’t mean any offence.” So spoke Melmotte, and then laughed with a loud, hoarse laugh.

He sat after that and smoked in silence. Once again he burst out into a laugh, as though peculiarly amused with his own thoughts. Soon after nine he went back again into the House, and took his old place. At this time he had swallowed three glasses of brandy and water, as well as the champagne, and was brave enough almost for anything. There was some debate going on about the game laws – a subject on which Melmotte was as ignorant as one of his own housemaids – but he jumped on to his feet.

What thoughts must have crossed the mind of the Speaker of the House of Commons? He had no official knowledge of Melmotte’s villainy. The man was a member of the House, and as much entitled to speak as another. But it seemed that the Speaker was anxious to save the House from disgrace; for he refused to have his “eye caught” by the member for Westminster.

However, Melmotte was persistent, and determined not to be put down. At last no one else would speak, and Melmotte was again on his legs. The Speaker scowled at him and leaned back in his chair. Melmotte, standing erect, turning his head round from one side of the House to another, remained for half a minute perfectly silent.

He was drunk, but better able than most drunken men to steady himself, and showing in his face no outward signs of intoxication. But he had forgotten that words are needed for the making of a speech, and now he had not a word at his command. He stumbled forward, recovered himself, glanced round the House with anger, and then toppled headlong over the shoulders of Mr. Beauclerk, who was sitting in front of him.

There was much commotion in the House. Mr. Beauclerk hastened, when he regained his own balance, to assist the drunken man. But Melmotte quickly recovered his legs, and reseating himself, put his hat on, and tried to look as though nothing special had occurred. The House resumed its business. He remained in his seat for perhaps ten minutes, and then, somewhat unsteadily, he made his way down to the doors.

His exit was watched in anxious silence. Had he fallen, some one – or rather some two or three – must have picked him up and carried him out. But he did not fall, and no one touched him. When he had got out through the gates, leaning against the wall he hallooed for his carriage, and was taken home to Bruton Street. That was the last which the British Parliament saw of its new member for Westminster.

As soon as he reached home Melmotte went to his sitting-room, and called for more brandy and water. Between eleven and twelve he was left there by his servant with a bottle of brandy, three or four bottles of soda-water, and his cigar-case. He was not so drunk as to give rise to any suspicion in the servant’s mind; and the servant went to bed.

But at nine o’clock on the following morning the maid-servant found him dead upon the floor. Drunk as he had been, more drunk as he probably became during the night – still he was able to deliver himself from the indignities and penalties of the law, by swallowing a dose of prussic acid.



Chapter 84

Paul Montague's Vindication

Hetta Carbury was very miserable after she decided that she had to divide herself altogether from Paul Montague. I think that she was irrational; but to her it seemed that the offence against her dignity as a woman was too great to be forgiven. There can be no doubt that it would have been forgiven with the greatest ease had Paul told the story before it had reached her ears from another source. If he had said to her, I once loved another woman, and that woman is here now in London, a trouble to me, persecuting me, and her history is so and so – you may be sure that she would not have been angry.

But he had been forced to confess rather than tell his own story, and to admit facts which had been concealed. It was that journey to Lowestoft, not yet a month old, which did the mischief. Paul had been staying at the seaside with this woman in amicable intimacy, and had been visiting her daily at Islington! Hetta felt quite sure that he had never passed a day without going there; and meanwhile had been behaving to herself in a manner which implied love for her. She had told herself that her heart was given away to this man; and yet he was spending his hours with a strange American woman, to whom he acknowledged that he had been once engaged. How could she not quarrel with him? She would never forgive him. She would break her heart for him.

She knew well what her mother wanted. Her mother thought that a quarrel with Montague would force her into a marriage with Roger Carbury. But her mother would find out that she was mistaken. Hetta would never marry her cousin, though she would always acknowledge his worth. She was sure now that she would never marry any man.

With what slow fingers, with what heartbroken tenderness did she take out from its case the brooch which Paul had given her! It had been his only present to her. Now it must be sent back; and, no doubt, it would go to that abominable woman! But her fingers lingered as she touched it, and she would fain have kissed it, had she not told herself that she would have been disgraced by such a demonstration of affection. As she would have no further personal correspondence with Paul Montague, she took the brooch to her mother with a request that it might be returned.

“Of course, my dear, I will send it back to him. Is there nothing else?”

“No, mamma; nothing else. I have no letters, and no other present. You always knew everything that took place. If you will just send that back to him – without a word.”

“He has behaved very, very badly, from the beginning,” said Lady Carbury.

But Hetta certainly did not wish to be told of his misbehaviour. No doubt she thought that the young man had behaved very well in falling in love with her – only that he had behaved so badly in taking Mrs. Hurtle to Lowestoft afterwards!

“It’s no good talking about that, mamma. I hope you will never talk of him any more.”

“He is quite unworthy,” said Lady Carbury.

“I can’t bear to – have him – abused,” said Hetta, sobbing.

“My dear Hetta, I have no doubt this has made you for the time unhappy. But you should endeavour not to be so sensitive about it. You have to look out for the future, and you can best do so by resolving that Paul Montague shall be forgotten at once.”

“Oh, mamma, don’t.”

“But, my dear, there is more that I must say. Your future life is before you, and I must think of it. Of course you must be married.”

“There is no of course at all.”

“Of course you must be married,” continued Lady Carbury, “and of course it is your duty to think of the way in which this may be best done. My income is becoming less and less every day. I already owe money to your cousin, and I owe money to Mr. Broune.”

“Money to Mr. Broune!”

“Yes; I had to pay a sum for Felix. And I owe money to tradesmen. I fear that I shall not be able to keep this house. And they tell me – your cousin and Mr. Broune – that it is my duty to take Felix out of London, probably abroad.”

“Of course I shall go with you.”

“Perhaps that may not be necessary. What pleasure could you have in it? Think what my life must be with Felix in some French or German town!”

“Mamma, why don’t you let me be a comfort to you? Why do you speak of me always as though I were a burden?”

“Everybody is a burden to other people. It is the way of life. But you – if you will only yield in ever so little – you may go where you will be no burden, where you will be accepted as a blessing. You have the opportunity of securing comfort for your whole life, not only for yourself, but for me and your brother.”

“Mamma, you cannot really mean to talk about that now?”

“Why not? Make up your mind to be the wife of your cousin Roger.”

“This is horrid,” said Hetta, bursting out in her agony. “Cannot you understand that I am broken-hearted about Paul, that I love him from my very soul, that parting from him is like tearing my heart in pieces? I know that I must, because he has behaved so very badly – and because of that wicked woman! And so I have. But I did not think that in the very next hour you would bid me give myself to somebody else! I will never marry Roger Carbury. I shall never marry anyone. If you won’t take me with you, I must stay behind and earn my bread. I suppose I could go out as a nurse.” Without waiting for a reply she left the room.

Lady Carbury did not even understand her daughter. She could not conceive that she had in any way acted unkindly. She was simply anxious to get a husband for her child, so that she might live comfortably. But she felt that whenever she spoke common sense to Hetta, her daughter took it as an offence, and flew into tantrums. If there was anything that she could not forgive in life it was romance. And yet she believed that she delighted in romantic poetry!

At present she was very wretched; and was certainly unselfish in her wish to see her daughter comfortably settled before she commenced those miserable roamings with her son which seemed to be her destiny.

In these days she thought a good deal of Mr. Broune’s offer, and of her own refusal. It was odd that since that refusal she had seen more of him than she ever had before. Previously their intimacy had been fictitious; they had played at being friends, knowing little of each other. But now, during the last five or six weeks since she had refused his offer, they had really learned to know each other. In her troubles, she had told him the truth about herself and her son, and he had

responded, not by compliments, but by real aid and true counsel. His whole tone was altered to her, as was hers to him. There was no longer any flattery between them.

In consequence she almost regretted that she had allowed him to escape. But she certainly made no effort to recover the lost prize.

It was on that afternoon, after her disagreement with her daughter, that Marie Melmotte came to her. And, on that same evening, closeted with Mr. Broune, she told him of both occurrences.

“If the girl has got the money—” she began.

“I don’t believe it,” said Broune. “I don’t think that there is any money. And if there is, you may be sure that Melmotte would not let it slip through his fingers. I would not have anything to do with it.”

“You think it is all over with the Melmottes?”

“He will have to stand trial for forgery, without a doubt, and I imagine that it will be found that not a shilling will be saved out of the property.”

“What an extraordinary career it has been!”

“Yes, the strangest thing that has come up in our days. He thought that he could conquer the world, and obtain universal credit. He very nearly succeeded too.”

“You think he has committed forgery?”

“I think so.”

“Then I suppose it is better that Felix should not have married her.”

“Certainly. I don’t think you should regret the loss of such money as his.”

Lady Carbury shook her head. Then she told him her grief about Hetta.

“Ah, there,” said he, “I feel less able to express an opinion.”

“He doesn’t owe a shilling,” said Lady Carbury, “and he is really a fine gentleman.”

“But if she doesn’t like him?”

“Oh, but she does. She thinks him to be the finest person in the world. She would obey him a great deal sooner than she would me. But she has her mind stuffed with nonsense about love.”

“A great many people, Lady Carbury, have their minds stuffed with that nonsense.”

“Yes; and ruin themselves with it, as she will do. Love is like any other luxury. You have no right to it unless you can afford it.”

On the following morning, very early, while Melmotte was still lying undiscovered on the floor of Mr. Longestaffe’s room, a letter was brought up to Hetta by the maid-servant, who told her that Mr. Montague had delivered it.

She put it aside with assumed indifference. But as soon as the girl had left the room she seized her treasure. She opened it, and ran through its contents without allowing herself a moment for thinking whether the excuses made by her lover were such as she ought to accept.

Dearest Hetta,

I think you have been most unjust to me. I have never deceived you in anything, not by a word, or for a moment. Unless you mean to throw me over because I did once love another woman, I do not know what cause of anger you have. I could not tell you about Mrs. Hurtle till you had accepted me, and then I had no opportunity to tell you till the story had reached your ears. I hardly know what I said the other day, I was so miserable at your accusation. But I suppose I

said then, and I again declare now, that I had made up my mind that I could not marry her before I had ever seen you, and that I have never wavered in my determination. I can refer to Roger as to this, because I was with him when I so decided, and made up my mind very much at his instance. This was before I had ever even met you.

If I understand it right you are angry because I have associated with Mrs. Hurtle since then. I am not going back to my first acquaintance with her now. But, after what had occurred, was I to refuse to see her when she came to England to see me? I think that would have been cowardly. Of course I went to her. And when she was all alone here, without a single other friend, and telling me that she was unwell, and asking me to take her down to the seaside, was I to refuse? It was a dreadful trouble to me. But of course I did it.

She asked me to renew my engagement. I declined, telling her that I intended to ask another woman to be my wife. Of course there has been anger and sorrow – anger on her part and sorrow on mine. But there has been no doubt. And at last she yielded.

Of course you do not know all the story, for I cannot tell you all without telling her history. But you know everything that concerns yourself, and I do say that you have no cause whatever for anger. I am writing at night. This evening your brooch was brought to me with three or four cutting words from your mother. But I cannot understand that if you really love me, you should wish to separate yourself from me – or that, if you ever loved me, you should cease to love me now because of Mrs. Hurtle.

I am so absolutely confused by the blow that I hardly know what I am writing. My love for you is so thorough and so intense that I cannot bring myself to look forward to living without you. I cannot think it possible that your love could be made to cease all at a moment. Mine can't.

If you want corroboration of my story go yourself to Mrs. Hurtle. Anything is better than that we should both be broken-hearted.

Yours most affectionately,
Paul Montague.



Chapter 85

Breakfast in Berkeley Square

Lord Nidderdale was greatly disgusted with his own position when he left the House of Commons. Melmotte had behaved with unsurpassable arrogance and vulgarity, and had made the young lord drink the cup of his own disgrace to the very dregs. Everybody now knew that the man had committed forgery upon forgery, and that he was ruined; and yet he had seized Nidderdale by the hand, and called him "his dear boy" before the whole House.

And Nidderdale had made himself conspicuous as this man's advocate. He had quarrelled with one man for saying that Melmotte was a rogue, and had told his friends that in spite of a little vulgarity, Melmotte at bottom was a very good fellow. How was he now to back out of his intimacy with the Melmottes? He was engaged to marry the girl, and could accuse her of nothing. He had some kindly feeling for her. Of course he could not marry her now; but he felt that he owed it to her to explain.

He imagined what he would say. "Of course you know it can't be, now that it turns out that you haven't got any money. And I haven't got any, and we should have nothing to live upon. But, upon my word, I'm very sorry, for I like you very much, and I really think we should have got on uncommon well together."

Between seven and eight he went into the Beargarden, where he saw Dolly Longestaffe and others. Everybody was talking about Melmotte, believing that he was now in custody.

"I wonder whether it's true," Dolly was saying to Lord Grasslough. "He was to meet me and my governor tomorrow, and to pay us what he owes us."

"You won't see the money, Dolly," said Grasslough.

"I don't suppose I shall. By George, what an ass my governor has been. Here's Nidderdale. He could tell us where he is."

When Lord Grasslough asked Nidderdale in a whisper whether he knew anything about Melmotte, he answered out loud.

"Yes; I left him in the House half an hour ago."

"People are saying that he has been arrested."

"He had not been arrested when I left the House." Then he put his hand on Dolly Longestaffe's shoulder. "You were right the other night and I was wrong; but I'm afraid this is a bad look out for both of us."

"Yes, it's deuced bad for me," said Dolly. "You're well out of it. Suppose we have a rubber of whist."

Later that night news was brought to the club that Melmotte had tried to make a speech in the House, very drunk, and had tumbled over.

"By George, I should like to have seen that!" said Dolly.

"I am glad I was not there," said Nidderdale.

It was three o'clock before they left the card table; and Melmotte was lying dead upon the floor in Mr. Longestaffe's house.

On the following morning, at ten o'clock, Lord Nidderdale sat at breakfast with his father in Berkeley Square. The house which Melmotte had hired was only a few hundred yards distant.

Nidderdale was a little late to breakfast, and found his father already buttering his toast. He sat down and poured himself a cup of tea.

"I suppose you were drinking last night," said the old lord. "Well; what have you got to say about all this? You've made a pretty kettle of fish of it."

"I've been guided by you in everything, sir. I suppose the whole thing is over?"

"I don't see why it should be over. I'm told she has her own money." Then Nidderdale described to his father Melmotte's behaviour in the House. "What the devil does that matter?" said the old man. "You're not going to marry the man himself. If the money is hers, she can't lose it if he goes to prison. How do you mean to live if you don't marry this girl?"

"I shall scrape on, I suppose. I must look for somebody else." The Marquis snorted. "At any rate, sir, I can't marry the daughter of a man who is to be put on trial for forgery."

"I can't see what that has to do with you."

"I couldn't do it, sir. And, moreover, I don't believe in the money."

"Then you may go to the devil," said the old Marquis turning round, and lighting a cigar as he took up the newspaper. Nidderdale went on with his breakfast with perfect equanimity.

"They tell me," said the old man, "that one of those Goldsheiner girls will have a lot of money."

"A Jewess," said Nidderdale.

"What difference does that make?"

"None in the least, if the money's really there. I don't suppose the girls would have a hundred thousand each."

"D___ me, sir, we must do something. If you turn up your nose at one woman after another, how do you mean to live?"

"I've been so much in earnest about this girl that I haven't thought of inquiring about anyone else. It's a pity there shouldn't be a regular statement published with the amount of money, and what is expected in return. It'd save a deal of trouble."

"If you can't talk more seriously you'd better go away," said the old Marquis.

At that moment a footman came in and told Lord Nidderdale that a man particularly wished to see him in the hall.

"I believe, my lord, he's one of the domestics from Mr. Melmotte's in Bruton Street," said the footman.

"You'd better go and see," said the Marquis. "Go and tell Melmotte that you are ready to marry the girl, but that you won't stir a step till the money is actually paid over."

"He knows that already," said Nidderdale as he left the room.

In the hall he found Melmotte's butler, a ponderous man who held a letter. He could tell by the man's face that he had some story to tell.

"Is there anything the matter?"

"Yes, my lord. Oh, dear! I think you'll be sorry to hear it. There was none who he seemed to take to so much as your lordship."

"They've taken him to prison!" exclaimed Nidderdale. But the man shook his head. "What is it then? He can't be dead." Then the man nodded, and, putting his hand to his face, burst into tears. "Mr. Melmotte dead! But I saw him last night. How did he die?"

But the ponderous man was so affected that he could not speak. He simply handed over the note in his hand. It was from Marie:

Dear Lord Nidderdale,

The man will tell you what has happened. I feel as though I was mad. I do not know who to send to. Will you come to me, only for a few minutes?

Marie.

He read it standing up in the hall. The Marquis, hearing a word or two, hobbled out to him.

“Mr. Melmotte is dead,” said his son. The old man dropped his stick. “This is a letter from Marie asking me to go there. How did he die?”

“Poison,” said the butler solemnly. “A doctor has been, and there is no doubt. He came home last night and had brandy and soda and cigars; and sat down by himself. Then in the morning, there he was – poisoned! I smelt prussic acid and knew what he had been and done, just like the doctor said.”

Then the Marquis thought that his son had better not go to Bruton Street. “What’s the use? What good can you do? She’ll only be falling into your arms, and that’s what you’ve got to avoid, till you know how things are.”

But Nidderdale’s better feelings would not allow him to follow this advice. He had been engaged to marry the girl, and she in her misery had turned to him.

“I couldn’t refuse her,” he said. “I shall go. It would be abominable to refuse.” And he took up his hat and gloves to go across to Bruton Street.



Chapter 86

The Meeting in Bruton Street

When the news of her husband's death was conveyed to Madame Melmotte, it crushed her altogether. Marie's superior strength of character, and the need to attend to Madame Melmotte, saved her from prostration. Amidst the hysterical sobbings and screams of Madame Melmotte, she was active and effective. She said the servants must send for a doctor, and was told that a doctor and an inspector of police were already in the rooms below.

It was afterwards said by some that Marie Melmotte had shown a hard heart. But the condemnation was wrong. Her feeling for her father had certainly not been affectionate. How could it have been? He had never been sweet or gracious. She had recognised her duty to her father, and had not gone beyond it. She had long known that her father would make her a slave for his own purposes if he could. She had never compared him to other fathers, because she had never known any other families well. After a fashion she had loved him; but she had never respected him, and had spent much of her energy on a resolve never to fear him.

Now that her father had taken himself away with terrible suddenness, leaving her no protector, she felt awe rather than sorrow. Madame Melmotte was altogether overwhelmed; probably not by grief, but by fear of solitude, fear of sudden change, fear of terrible revelations. The same fears were powerful also with Marie; but they did not conquer her. She was strong and conquered them.

She soon knew it all. Her father had destroyed himself, doubtless because his financial troubles had been greater than he could bear. When he had told her to sign the deeds because ruin was impending, he must indeed have told her the truth. He had so often lied to her that she had had no means of knowing whether he was lying then or not. But she had offered to sign the deeds since, and he had told her that it would be of no use – and he had not been angry. She took some comfort in thinking of that.

But what was she to do? She and her pseudo-mother had packed up their jewellery, as instructed. But where should she go? On whose arm could she lean for some support at this terrible time? As for love, and engagements – that was all over. She never for a moment thought of Sir Felix Carbury. But it might be possible that Lord Nidderdale would help her. He was good-natured and manly; so she had written her note and sent it by the butler, thinking of how she would tell the young man that all that nonsense about marrying each other was, of course, to mean nothing now.

When he reached the house, he was shown upstairs into one of the sitting-rooms. As he passed the study door, which was partly open, he saw a policeman within, and knew that the dead man's body was still lying there. He went by rapidly, remembering the look of the man as he had last seen him, and that grasp of his hand, and those odious words. Surely the man must have known when he uttered those words what he intended to do! And yet he had pretended to be anxious about the girl's marriage!

Nidderdale had hardly put his hat down before Marie was with him. He took her by both hands, and looked into her face. There was no trace of a tear, but her whole countenance seemed to him to be altered. She was the first to speak.

“I thought you would come when I sent for you.”

“Of course I came.”

“I knew you would be a friend, and I knew no one else who would. You won’t be afraid, Lord Nidderdale, that I shall ever think any more of that engagement?” She paused a moment, but he had no answer ready. “You know what has happened? Oh, Lord Nidderdale, it is so dreadful! Poor papa! When I think of all that he must have suffered I wish that I could be dead too.”

“Has your mother been told?”

“Oh yes. But Mamma is always nervous and timid, and this has nearly killed her. What ought we to do? This is Mr. Longestaffe’s house, and we were to have left it tomorrow.”

“He will not mind that now.”

“Where must we go? We can’t go back to Grosvenor Square. Who will manage for us? Who will see the doctor and the policemen?”

“I will do that.”

“But there will be things that I cannot ask you to do. Why should I ask you to do anything?”

“Because we are friends.”

“No,” she said, “not really. I have been an impostor. I had no business to know a person like you at all. Oh, if the next six months could be over! Poor papa!” And for the first time she burst into tears.

“I wish I knew what might comfort you,” he said.

“When were we ever comfortable? It has been one trouble after another, one fear after another! And now we are friendless and homeless. I suppose they will take everything that we have.”

“Your papa had a lawyer, I suppose?”

“I think he had many, but I do not know who they were. His clerk, who had been with him for twenty years, left him yesterday. I suppose they will know something in Abchurch Lane; but now that Herr Croll has gone I do not know the name of any of them. Oh, what a life it has been! And now it’s over.”

As she said this it seemed that her strength failed her, for she fell back on the sofa and buried her face in her hands. There was a knock at the front door, which was opened by the servants in the hall. Lord Nidderdale went out to the top of the stairs, and heard the voice of Dolly Longestaffe.

Dolly and his lawyer Mr. Squercum had that morning met his father with Mr. Bideawhile at the corner of the square. They were all coming to receive the money which Mr. Melmotte had promised to pay them, having heard nothing of Mr. Melmotte’s final payment. Squercum was very certain that the money would not be forthcoming, whereas Bideawhile was confident of success.

The two lawyers at once saw, from the face of the man who had opened the door, that things were not going on in their usual course. The butler whispered to Mr. Bideawhile that Mr. Melmotte “was no more.”

“Dead!” exclaimed Mr. Bideawhile. Squercum opened his mouth wide.

“Dead!” muttered Mr. Longestaffe senior.

“Dead!” said Dolly. “Who’s dead?”

Then the butler whispered that Melmotte had swallowed poison during the night.

“It’s about what I expected,” said Squercum.

As the owner of the house, Mr. Longestaffe was shown into the room where Melmotte’s body lay on a sofa. The two lawyers and Dolly followed, as did Lord Nidderdale, and two or three servants. A policeman who was watching the body rose from his seat when the gentlemen entered. They stood round and gazed on the sullen, livid features of the big man, and each lamented that he had ever heard the name of Melmotte.

“Why are you here?” murmured Dolly to Lord Nidderdale.

“She sent for me. We live quite close, you know. I fear it will be rather bad for you; won’t it? He talked to me about his affairs once, but he was such a liar that not a word he said was worth anything.”

“That other thing is all over of course,” suggested Dolly.

Nidderdale nodded, and returned to Marie. There was nothing that the four gentlemen could do, and they soon departed – once Mr. Bideawhile had given orders to the butler concerning the property in the house.

“They had come by appointment to see him,” said Lord Nidderdale to Marie.

“They didn’t know, then?”

“Nothing, till the man told them. I think the best thing I can do,” said Nidderdale, “is to go to Abchurch Lane, and find out who is the lawyer whom he chiefly trusted. If necessary I will find Croll. Then we had better employ the lawyer to arrange everything for you.”

“And where should we go to?”

“Where would Madame Melmotte wish to go?”

“Anywhere we could hide ourselves. Perhaps Frankfurt. But shouldn’t we stay till something has been done here? And couldn’t we have lodgings, so as to get away from the house?”

Nidderdale promised that he himself would look for lodgings, as soon as he had seen the lawyer.

“And now, my lord, I suppose that I never shall see you again,” said Marie.

“I don’t know why you should say that.”

“Because it will be best. Why should you? All this will be trouble enough to you. But I don’t think it has been my fault.”

“Nothing has been your fault.”

“Good-bye, my lord. I shall always think of you as one of the kindest people I ever knew. I thought it best to send to you, but I do not want you to come back.”

“Good-bye, Marie. I shall always remember you.” And so they parted.

After that he did go into the City, and succeeded in finding both Melmotte’s lawyer and Herr Croll. The news of Melmotte’s death had already spread; the crushing blow to him, so said Herr Croll, had been the desertion of Cohenlupe – that and the sudden fall in value of the Mexican Railway shares, after the rumours spread about the Pickering property. It was asserted in Abchurch Lane that Melmotte had allowed himself to become hampered by the want of comparatively small sums of ready money, and in seeking relief had rushed from one danger to another, till at last the waters around him had become too deep even for him, and had overwhelmed him.

As to his death, Herr Croll said that he had been sure that was what Melmotte would do, should his difficulties ever become too great. And he mentioned some other danger involving the use of his own name, but did not elaborate.

Croll added, with grave good-nature, "My lor, de money of de yong lady is all her own. Nobody can toch it." And he nodded.

"I am very glad to hear it for her sake," said Lord Nidderdale as he left.



Chapter 87

Down at Carbury

When Roger Carbury returned to Suffolk after seeing his cousins in Welbeck Street, he was discontented with himself. He knew that he was farther removed than ever from the object on which his whole mind was set. If Hetta Carbury had learned about Paul's engagement with Mrs. Hurtle before she had confessed her love to Paul, she would have buried her love, and might have come to love him, Roger. But Hetta had never heard Mrs. Hurtle's name till she had given herself away. The more Roger thought of this, the more angry he was with Paul Montague, and the more convinced that the man had done him an injury which he could never forgive.

But his grief extended beyond that. He also felt that an injury was being done to the man, and that he was in some sort responsible for that injury. He had declined to tell Hetta any part of the story about Mrs. Hurtle. Yet he knew well that Paul's attention to the American woman had not been because of love, but because Paul had felt that he could not desert her when she asked him for kindness. If Hetta could read the state of Paul's mind as he, Roger, could read it, then she would probably forgive the man. Roger was anxious that Hetta's anger should burn hot, because of the injury done to himself, and he thought that Paul Montague should be punished; but not on false grounds.

As to the girl's misery in losing her lover – even though Roger was devoted to her happiness, I do not think that he was disturbed about that. He told himself that Paul would be an unsafe, fickle husband, and that it would be better for Hetta not to marry him. At the same time he was unhappy as he reflected that he himself was a party to a certain amount of deceit.

And yet he had not said a word. He had referred Hetta to Paul. He tried to quieten his conscience by saying that they must fight it out between themselves, but he was uneasy.

His life at Carbury, at this time, was very desolate. He had become tired of the priest, who kept trying to convert him. Roger had told him that he did not wish to discuss religion with him any more; Father Barham had declared that he could never remain as a friend with any man on those terms. When Roger had persisted, the priest had suggested that his host wished to banish him from Carbury Hall. Roger had made no reply, and the priest was banished. But even this added to his misery. He felt he had been cruel to the priest, yet he could not bid him come back. His neighbours were already saying that he was about to become a Roman Catholic.

He was troubled, too, about old Ruggles, at Sheep's Acre, who had taken to drink, and was making himself a scandal and a nuisance. He declared that his niece and John Crumb were the cause; for now, in his maudlin misery, he attributed as much blame to John Crumb as he did to the girl. This, too, was a grievance to Roger Carbury.

But he did not neglect his work. He was making hay at this time in some meadows down by the river; and was standing by while the men were loading a cart, when he saw John Crumb approaching across the field. He had not seen John

since the eventful journey to London, but he had heard all that had happened. John was now regarded in Bungay as a hero, though very "soft" in the matter of love.

Roger hurried to meet him. Crumb's broad face beamed with a whole sunshine of delight. As Roger came closer he began to laugh, and to wave a bit of paper.

"She's a coomin; she's a coomin," were the first words he uttered.

"I am delighted to hear it," said Roger. "She has made it up with her grandfather?"

"Don't know now't about grandfeyther. She have made it up wi' me."

"Has she written to you, then?"

"Well, squire, she ain't, herself. But it's all as one." And Mr. Crumb thrust Mrs. Hurtle's note into Roger's hand.

Roger was not disposed to think kindly of Mrs. Hurtle. Since he had first heard her name from Paul, he had regarded her as a wicked, intriguing woman. But it certainly did seem that in this case Mrs. Hurtle was trying to do a good turn. Roger said that he thought that what she said of Ruby might be true.

"True, squire!" laughed Crumb. "I ha' nae a doubt it's true. When I dropped into t'other fellow, of course she made her choice. So, squire, I'm going again to Lon'on right away."

When Roger observed that it would be better that Ruby should have some home to which she might at once return, John listed with a renewed grin all the comforts of his own house. It seemed to be his idea that on arriving in London he would at once take Ruby to church and be married out of hand.

But before he left the field he made one speech about Sir Felix. "You ain't a'taken it amiss, squire, 'cause he was your coosin?"

"Not in the least, Mr. Crumb."

"That's koind now. I ain't a done the yong man no harm, and I don't feel no grudge again him."

Roger assured him that he thought that Crumb had behaved well in that encounter, and he expressed a strong wish for the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. John Crumb.

"Oh, ay, we'll be 'appy, squire," said Crumb, as he went exulting out of the field.

On the day after this Roger Carbury received a letter which disturbed him very much. It was from Paul Montague, written a few hours after he had left his letter for Hetta. Paul's letter to Roger was as follows:

My dear Roger,

Though I know that you have cast me off I cannot write to you in any other way. You can answer me, of course, as you please, but I do think that you will owe me an answer, as I appeal to you in the name of justice.

You know what has taken place between Hetta and myself. She had accepted me, and therefore I feel sure that she must have loved me. But she has now quarrelled with me altogether, and has told me that I am never to see her again. Of course I don't mean to put up with this. Who would? You will say that it is no business of yours. But I think that you would not wish that she should be left under a false impression, if you could put her right.

Somebody has told her the story of Mrs. Hurtle. I suppose it was Felix. But she has not been told the truth. Nobody knows the truth as you do. She supposes that I have willingly been passing my time with Mrs. Hurtle during the last two

months. Now, whether or no I have been to blame about Mrs. Hurtle, her coming to England was not desired by me; I felt it to be the greatest possible misfortune. But I owed it to her not to neglect her, as she was a foreigner unknown to anyone. I went to Lowestoft with her at her request, because I could not refuse her so small a favour. You know that it was so, and you know also that whatever courtesy I have shown to Mrs. Hurtle in England, I have been forced to show her.

Though you are angry with me, I appeal to you to tell Hetta the truth as you know it. I think that you, who abhor a falsehood, will see the justice of telling her the truth. I do not want you to say a word for me beyond that.

Yours always,
Paul Montague.

What business is it of mine? This was Roger's first feeling. If Hetta had received any false impression, it had not come from him. He had told no stories against his rival, true or false. He had been so scrupulous that he had refused to say a word at all. And had not Montague deserved any evil that might fall upon him? It would be no more than justice if he were robbed at last of his love. The fact that he had once disgraced himself by offering to make Mrs. Hurtle his wife rendered him unworthy of Hetta Carbury. Such, at least, was Roger's verdict.

And yet he was ill at ease. After all, why should he be a dog in the manger? The girl did not care for him; she looked upon him as an old man. He had let his time for love-making go by, and he ought not to lose himself in regrets for a happiness which he could never attain. In such an emergency as this he should do what was fair and honest, without reference to his own feelings.

And yet the passion which dominated John Crumb was equally strong with Roger Carbury. Unfortunately for Roger, unlike John Crumb, he knew that he would never win the game. In his sadder moments he felt that he ought not to win it. Why, he felt himself at times to be eighty years old. Could he bring himself to take her happiness in hand, altogether sacrificing his own?

In such a mood he did at last answer his enemy's letter, as follows:

I do not know that I am concerned to meddle in your affairs at all. I have told no tale against you, and I do not have any that I wish to tell in your favour. I think that you have behaved badly to me, cruelly to Mrs. Hurtle, and disrespectfully to my cousin. Nevertheless, as you appeal to me on a certain point for evidence which I can give, I do acknowledge that, in my opinion, Mrs. Hurtle's presence in England has not been in accordance with your wishes, and that you accompanied her to Lowestoft, not as her lover but as an old friend whom you could not neglect.

Roger Carbury.

You are at liberty to show this letter to Miss Carbury, if you please; but if she reads part she should read the whole!

There was perhaps more hostility in this letter than the self-sacrifice Roger had intended; and so he felt after the letter had been sent.



Chapter 88

The Inquest

Melmotte had been found dead on Friday morning, and late that evening Madame Melmotte and Marie were moved to lodgings far away up at Hampstead. Herr Croll had known of the place, and at Lord Nidderdale's request had seen that the rooms were instantly made ready. Nidderdale himself had helped them depart. They did not go till nine o'clock in the evening, and Madame Melmotte would fain have stayed one more night in Bruton Street. But Marie was imperious with her mother; so the poor woman was taken away.

On Saturday morning the inquest was held. The servants, the doctor, and the police inspector agreed that Melmotte had come home alone, that nobody had been near him during the night, and that he had been found dead, poisoned by prussic acid. There was no doubt that he had destroyed himself – nor as to the cause.

In such cases it is for the jury to say whether the unfortunate one has been mad at the time. Surviving friends are of course anxious for a verdict of insanity, so that the body can be buried like any other body, and it can always be said afterwards that the poor man was mad.

But let a Melmotte be found dead – a man who has become horrid to the world, a man who has pretended to be rich, a brute who has got into the House of Commons by false pretences, and has disgraced the House by being drunk there – he will not be saved by a verdict of insanity. There was a very strong feeling against Melmotte, and he was declared to have been responsible for his actions when he took the poison.

All the same, I think that during that night he may have become as mad as any other wretch driven beyond his powers of endurance. He could foresee pretty well what would happen. He had committed forgery; he had no money for the Longestaffes, and was well aware what Squercum would do. Although he had assured himself that he would bear it all like a man, we none of us know what load we can bear, and what would break our backs.

His body was carried away, and for a week his name was hateful. But after that, there was a certain amount of whitewashing. In Westminster he was always odious; but Marylebone took him up quite with affection, while Finsbury delighted to talk of the great Financier, and even Chelsea thought that he had been done to death by unkind tongues.

Mr. Longestaffe came back to his house alone. There was much for both him and Dolly to do, in working out how far they had been ruined. They could not get back the title-deeds of the Pickering property without paying the amount which had been advanced upon them, and they could not pay that sum unless they were enabled to do so by funds coming out of the Melmotte estate.

Dolly, as he sat smoking in Mr. Squercum's office, said, "By George, you know, I shall have to go to law with the governor. There's nothing else for it; is there, Squercum?"

Squercum suggested that they had better wait till they found what pickings there might be from the Melmotte estate. "They say that the furnishings, and the

silver plate, and carriages and horses, and all that, ought to fetch between twenty and thirty thousand. There were a lot of jewels, but the women have taken them.”

“By George, they ought to be made to give up everything.” Then Dolly uttered threats against the Bideawhiles, declaring he would “make it very hot for them.”

It was an added annoyance to the elder Mr. Longestaffe that the management of Melmotte’s estate fell at last into the hands of Mr. Brehgert. Now Brehgert, in spite of his many dealings with Melmotte, was an honest man, and also energetic and patient. But he was the man who had wanted to marry Georgiana Longestaffe, and to whom Mr. Longestaffe had been particularly uncivil. Mr. Brehgert needed to be in the house, for the dead man’s papers were still there – those that he had not destroyed – and could not yet be removed.

“Mr. Brehgert must of course have access to my private room, if it is absolutely necessary,” said Mr. Longestaffe; “but he will relieve me from such intrusion as soon as possible.” However, he soon found it preferable to come to terms with the rejected suitor, especially as the man was singularly good-natured after the injuries he had received.

All minor debts were to be paid at once; an arrangement to which Mr. Longestaffe agreed, as it included a sum of £300 due to him for the rent of the house in Bruton Street. Then it became known that there would certainly be a dividend of at least fifty per cent payable on debts which had been owing by Melmotte; an arrangement which was very comfortable to Dolly. Mr. Longestaffe resolved during these weeks that his house in London should be sold, with all its belongings, and that the servants at Caversham should be reduced in number.

All this was communicated to Lady Pomona in a very long letter, which she was instructed to read to her daughters.

“I have suffered great wrongs,” wrote Mr. Longestaffe, “but I must submit to them, and as I submit so must my wife and children. From my daughters I expect cheerful obedience.” Exactly what led him to expect cheerfulness at Caversham it is difficult to say; but the obedience was there. Georgey was for the time broken down, while Sophia was satisfied with her nuptial prospects.

While Mr. Longestaffe remained in London, he saw much of Mr. Brehgert, and formed a kind of friendship with that gentleman, in spite of the abomination of his religion. He once even asked Mr. Brehgert to dine with him in Bruton Street. Mr. Brehgert came, and there was a somewhat singular conversation between the two gentlemen as they sat together over a bottle of Mr. Longestaffe’s old port wine.

Until then not a word had passed between them about the engagement with Georgiana, since the day on which her father had said so many bitter things to the expectant bridegroom. But this evening Mr. Brehgert spoke his mind in a way that at first startled Mr. Longestaffe.

The subject was introduced by a reference which Brehgert made to his own affairs. His loss would be double Mr. Longestaffe’s; but he spoke of it in an easy way, as though it did not sit very near his heart.

“Of course there’s a difference between me and you,” he said. Mr. Longestaffe bowed his head graciously. “In our affairs,” continued Brehgert, “we expect gains, and of course look for occasional losses. When a gentleman in your position sells a property he expects to get the purchase-money.”

“Of course he does, Mr. Brehgert. That’s what made it so hard.”

“I can’t even yet quite understand why he decided to spend such an enormous deal of money here in London. His business was quite irregular, but there was very much of it, and some of it immensely profitable. He took us in completely.”

“I suppose so.”

“I ventured on a speculation with him; and the long and the short of it is that I shall lose about sixty thousand pounds.”

“That’s a large sum of money.”

“Very large; so large as to affect my daily mode of life. In my correspondence with your daughter, I considered it my duty to point out to her that it would be so. I do not know whether she told you.”

This indelicate reference to his daughter altogether upset Mr. Longestaffe. He was so anxious for Brehgert’s assistance that he could not afford to quarrel with the man. But he assumed more than his normal dignity as he said that his daughter had never mentioned the fact.

“It was so. I had promised your daughter that I would maintain a second house when we should be married.”

“It was impossible,” said Mr. Longestaffe – meaning the marriage.

“It would have been quite possible as things were when I proposed. But on looking forward to the loss which I anticipated, I found it best to relinquish my intention for the present, and I thought myself bound to inform Miss Longestaffe.”

“There were other reasons,” muttered Mr. Longestaffe, in a suppressed whisper.

“There may have been; but in the last letter which Miss Longestaffe did me the honour to write to me, she seemed to confine herself almost exclusively to that reason.”

“Why mention this now, Mr. Brehgert? The subject is painful.”

“Because it is not painful to me, Mr. Longestaffe; and because I wish everyone to know that it is not painful. I think that throughout I behaved like a gentleman and an honest man.”

Mr. Longestaffe, in an agony, first shook his head twice, and then nodded three times. “Perhaps less said the soonest mended.”

“I’ve nothing more to say, and I’ve nothing to mend.” With this little speech Brehgert arose to take his leave, promising to do all in his power to complete the arrangement of the Melmotte affairs.

As soon as he was gone Mr. Longestaffe walked about the room and blew out long puffs of breath, as though to cleanse himself from impurities. How vulgar had the man been, how indelicate, how little grateful for the honour which Mr. Longestaffe had shown him by asking him to dinner! A horrid Jew! Yet Mr. Longestaffe was aware that in the present crisis he could not afford to quarrel with Mr. Brehgert.



Chapter 89 “The Wheel of Fortune”

It was a long time now since Lady Carbury’s great historical work had been given to the world. *Criminal Queens* had been one of the more successful books of the season. Messrs. Leadham and Loiter had already published fourth and fifth editions, with advertisements aiming to show that Lady Carbury’s book was the greatest historical work of the century. However, editions can be scanty, and advertisements are very costly. Lady Carbury received from Messrs. Leadham and Loiter a very moderate second cheque, with the warning that there would probably not be a third.

Nonetheless, she did not hesitate as to further attempts. Indeed she had hardly completed the last chapter of her *Criminal Queens* before she was busy on another work; and although the last six months had been a period of trouble, still she had persevered. Every day she had sat at her desk with a firm resolve. Messrs. Leadham and Loiter had offered her certain terms for a novel – terms not very high indeed, and dependent on the approval of the manuscript by their reader. But she had persevered, and the novel was now complete.

It cannot with truth be said that she had any special tale to tell. She had written a novel because Mr. Loiter had told her that novels did better than anything else. She would have written a volume of sermons with the same encouragement, and would have gone about the work in exactly the same fashion. The novel had to be in three volumes, and each volume must have three hundred pages. But what was the fewest number of words needed to fill a page? The money offered was too trifling to allow of much effort on her part. It must be a love story of course; but she thought that she would leave the complications of the plot to come by chance.

The title for the story had been the great thing. It did not occur to her to wait to see what name might best suit her work once it was written. A novel, she knew, was most unlike a rose, which by any name will smell as sweet. “The Faultless Father” or “The Mysterious Mother” would be useless. “Mary Jane Walker” would do, or “Blanche De Veau,” if she were more high-flown. But she thought that something more startling and descriptive would better suit her purpose.

After an hour’s thought a name did occur to her, and she wrote down “The Wheel of Fortune.” She had no particular fortune in mind, and no particular wheel; but the words gave her the plot she needed. A young lady was blessed with great wealth, and lost it all through an uncle, and got it all back by an honest lawyer, and gave it all up to a distressed lover, and found it again in the third volume. And the lady’s name was Cordinga, selected by Lady Carbury as unique in fiction, and in life.

And now with all her troubles thick about her, Lady Carbury finished her work, and having just written the last words in which enduring happiness was given to the young heroine, sat with the sheets piled at her hand. She had allowed herself a certain number of weeks for the task, and had completed it in exactly that time. She gave herself credit for diligence, although she did not pride herself much on the literary merit of the tale. But if she could get the papers to praise it, if she could induce Mudie’s Library to circulate it, if she could make it necessary for

the reading world to have read the book – then she would pride herself very much upon her work.

As she was sitting there, in her own room, Mr. Alf was announced. She expressed warm delight at seeing him. Nothing could be kinder than such a visit, she said, when there was so much to occupy him! Mr. Alf, in his usual mildly satirical way, declared that he was not particularly occupied just at present.

“The Emperor has left Europe at last,” he said. “Poor Melmotte poisoned himself on Friday, and the inquest sat yesterday.”

Of course Lady Carbury was intent upon her book, rather than even that exciting death. Oh, if she could only get Mr. Alf to praise it! She had tried that before, and had failed lamentably. But perhaps it could be done. It did seem that Providence had sent Mr. Alf to her just at this opportune moment.

“I am so tired,” she said, throwing herself back as though stretching her arms out for ease.

“I hope I am not adding to your fatigue,” said Mr. Alf.

“Oh dear, no. It is not the fatigue of the moment, but of the last six months. Just as you knocked at the door, I had finished the novel at which I have been working.”

“Oh – a novel! When is it to appear, Lady Carbury?”

“You must ask Leadham and Loiter that question. I suppose you never wrote a novel, Mr. Alf?”

“I? Oh dear no; I never write anything.”

“I have sometimes wondered whether I have hated or loved it the most. One becomes so absorbed in it! When the mind is attuned to it, one is tempted to think that it is all so good. One cries at one’s own pathos, laughs at one’s own humour, and is lost in admiration at one’s own wisdom.”

“How very nice!”

“But then there comes the other side of the coin. Suddenly everything seems flat, tedious, and unnatural. The heroine who was yesterday alive is found today to be a lump of motionless clay.”

“One’s judgment about oneself always does vacillate,” said Mr. Alf.

“And yet it is so important to judge one’s own work correctly! I can at any rate trust myself to be honest, which is more perhaps than can be said of all the critics.”

“Dishonesty is not the general fault of critics, Lady Carbury, but incapacity. That is the sin which I have striven to conquer. When I gave up the *Evening Pulpit*, I left upon it a staff of writers who know their business.”

“You have given up the *Pulpit*?” asked Lady Carbury with astonishment, readjusting her mind at once. Mr. Alf was no longer editor – but he must still have influence. Should she sink on the ground before him, and beg for a favour?

“Yes, Lady Carbury, I gave it up when I stood for Parliament. Now that the new member has so suddenly vacated his seat, I shall probably stand again. Some gentlemen seemed to think that I was committing a crime against the Constitution in standing for Parliament while managing a newspaper. I never heard such nonsense. Of course I know where it came from.”

“Where?”

“Where else but the *Breakfast Table*? Broune and I have been very good friends, but I do think that he is the most jealous of men. No man can be better qualified to sit in Parliament than a newspaper editor – that is, if he is a capable editor.”

“No one has ever doubted that of you.”

“The only question is whether he is strong enough for the double work. I doubted about myself, and have therefore given up the paper.”

“I suppose you still retain an interest in it?” asked Lady Carbury.

“Some financial interest; nothing more.”

“Oh, Mr. Alf – you could do me such a favour!”

“If I can, you may be sure I will.” False-tongued man! Of course he knew at once what the favour was, and had made up his mind that he would not do it.

“Will you?” Lady Carbury clasped her hands together as if praying. “I never asked you to do anything for me as long as you were editing the paper. I took my chance like others, and I bore what was said of me with a good grace. I never complained, did I?”

“Certainly not.”

“But now that you have left – if you would have *The Wheel of Fortune* done for me, really well done!”

“The Wheel of Fortune?”

“That is the name of my novel,” said Lady Carbury, putting her hand softly upon the manuscript. “Oh, Mr. Alf! a word from you would make it certain. Say that you will have it done. It couldn’t do any harm, and it would sell five hundred copies at once.”

Mr. Alf shook his head.

“A woman is asking you, Mr. Alf. It is for my children that I am struggling. The thing is done every day of the week, with much less noble motives.”

“Not by the *Evening Pulpit*.”

“I thought you might make an exception. I would be so grateful.”

“My dear Lady Carbury, pray believe me when I say that I have nothing to do with it. On no account should I think of meddling with the literary arrangement of the paper. I would not even do it for my sister. Send the book out, and let it take its chance. How much prouder you will be to have it praised because it deserves praise.”

“No, I shan’t,” said Lady Carbury. “I don’t believe that praise is ever given to anybody, except friends.” Mr. Alf shook his head. “Oh yes; that is all very well. Of course you have been a dragon of virtue; but they tell me that the authoress of *The New Cleopatra* is a very handsome woman.” Lady Carbury must have been worried indeed, when she allowed herself to imply that Mr. Alf was too fond of the authoress in question to criticise her in his columns.

“I do not remember the name of the lady to whom you allude,” said Mr. Alf, getting up; “and I am quite sure that the gentleman who reviewed the book – if there be any such lady and any such book – had never seen her!” And he departed.

Lady Carbury was very angry with herself, and with Mr. Alf. She had allowed herself to be carried away, and had wasted any possible good result. The world was hard. She sat weeping over her sorrows; but when she thought of Mr. Alf she could hardly repress her scorn. What lies he had told her! Of course he could have done it had he chosen. She hoped with all her heart that Mr. Alf would spend a great deal of money at Westminster, and then lose his seat.

Next morning she took the manuscript to Messrs. Leadham and Loiter, and was hurt again by the small amount of respect they paid to her sheets. There was the work of six months; her very blood and brains; and Mr. Leadham pitched it across to a clerk of about sixteen years of age, who chucked the parcel unceremoniously under a counter. An author feels that his work should be taken

from him with reverential hands, and placed in an absolutely fireproof safe. Oh, heavens, if it should be lost! or burned! or stolen!

“Will it be safe there?” asked Lady Carbury.

“Quite safe,” said Mr. Leadham, who was rather busy.

“Down there, under the counter?”

“That’s quite right, Lady Carbury. They’re left there till they’re packed.”

“Packed!”

“There are two or three dozen going to our reader this week. He’s in Skye, and we keep them till there’s enough to fill the sack. We send them by sea to Glasgow, because at this time of the year there is not much hurry.”

Oh, heavens! If that ship should be lost on its journey to Glasgow!

That evening, as was now almost his daily habit, Mr. Broune came to see Lady Carbury. Now that they were friends, she had scruples about asking him for any further literary favour. This man had now become so true to her, that she hardly knew how to beg him to do anything which she knew he ought not to do. He had asked her to marry him, for which she felt infinitely grateful. And he had lent her money, and had advised her in her misery.

Her first word to him was about Mr. Alf. “So he has given up the paper?”

“Well, yes; nominally. I don’t suppose he’ll really let it go out of his own hands. As for Westminster, I don’t believe he has a chance. If that poor wretch Melmotte could beat him when everybody was already talking about the forgeries, how could he win now?”

“He was here yesterday. We were speaking of my new book, my novel, and he assured me most positively that he had nothing to do with the paper.”

“He did not care to make you a promise, I dare say. Neither will I make a promise, but we’ll see what we can do. At any rate we will say nothing ill-natured. What is the title?”

“*The Wheel of Fortune.*”

“Let them send it a day or two before it’s out. I can’t answer for the opinion of the reviewer, but nothing shall go in that you would dislike. Good-bye. God bless you.” As he took her hand, he looked at her almost as though the old susceptibility were returning to him.

But after he had gone, it did not occur to her to call him an old goose again. She felt that she had mistaken him back then. That first and only kiss, which she had treated with such derision, had now a somewhat sacred spot in her memory. The man must have really loved her! Was it not marvellous that such a thing should be? And how had it come to pass that she had rejected him when he had given her the chance of becoming his wife?



Chapter 90 Hetta's Sorrow

When Hetta received the letter from Paul Montague, it did not alleviate her misery. Even when she had read it half-a-dozen times, she could not see how she could be reconciled to him.

It was not only that he had sinned against her by associating with another woman, at the very time at which he was becoming engaged to her – but also that he had done this in such a way as to make his offence known to her friends. He had been rejected, and she thought it was impossible that she should recall him. But they should all know that her heart was unchanged. Roger Carbury should certainly know it, if he ever asked her. Though she knew that Paul had behaved badly, yet she would be true to him as far as her own heart was concerned.

And now he told her that she had been unjust to him. He did not fill his letter with entreaties, but with reproaches. And certainly his reproaches moved her more than any prayer would have done. It was too late now to remedy the evil; but she wondered if she had been unjust. The more she thought of it the more puzzled she became. Had she quarrelled with him because he had once been in love with Mrs. Hurtle, or because she had grounds for regarding Mrs. Hurtle as a present rival? Maybe he had indeed been forced by circumstances to go with her to Lowestoft. Having done so, it was no doubt right that he should be rejected; but still there might be hardship in it.

To Hetta herself, it was very hard. She loved the man with all her heart. She could look forward to no happiness in life without him. But yet it must be so.

At the end of his letter he had told her to go to Mrs. Hurtle herself if she wanted corroboration of his story. Of course he knew that she could not go to Mrs. Hurtle. But when the letter had been in her possession three or four days – unanswered, but constantly re-read – she began to think that if she could hear Mrs. Hurtle's story, a good deal that was now dark might become light to her.

As she continued to brood over the letter, by degrees her anger turned from her lover to her mother, her brother, and to her cousin Roger. Paul had of course behaved very badly – but had it not been for them, she might have had an opportunity of forgiving him. They had driven her on to a rejection from which she could now see no escape. In the first agony caused by that awful story of the American woman, she had fallen head foremost into the trap laid for her.

She was almost sure that it was too late to recover her ground. But she could still do battle with her mother and her cousin – if only to show that she would not submit her feelings to their control. She was savage against all authority. Roger Carbury would of course think that any communication between herself and Mrs. Hurtle must be most improper and indelicate. But she was beginning to feel herself capable of throwing propriety and delicacy to the winds.

She would appeal to Mrs. Hurtle. The woman was odious, a nasty scheming American female. But Paul desired that she should hear the woman's story.

So she wrote as follows to Mrs. Hurtle, finding great difficulty in composing a suitable letter. It was stiff, but it sufficed for its purpose.

Madam,

Mr. Paul Montague has referred me to you as to certain circumstances which have taken place between him and you. It is right that I should tell you that I was a short time ago engaged to marry him, but that I have been obliged to break off that engagement in consequence of what I have been told about his acquaintance with you. I write to you, not thinking that anything you will say can change my mind, but because he has asked me to do so, and has, at the same time, accused me of injustice towards him. I do not wish to rest under an accusation of injustice from one to whom I was once warmly attached. If you will receive me, I will call any afternoon you may name.

Yours truly,
Henrietta Carbury.

When the letter was written and posted she was not only ashamed of it, but afraid of it also. What if this Mrs. Hurtle should send back some horribly insolent answer – or send such answer to her mother, instead of herself! She told no word of the letter to anyone. She could not ask her mother for sympathy. There was no friend who would sympathise with her. She must do everything alone.

Mrs. Hurtle, it will be remembered, had at last decided to retire from the contest, though not without many changing phases of her mind. But she had parted with Paul, and had told Mrs. Pipkin that she was no longer engaged to be married. The game had been played and the stakes lost.

But from time to time there arose in her heart a wish for vengeance. Who had spared her? Should she now simply retire to weep in a corner like a love-sick schoolgirl? There were moments when she thought that she could still seize the man by the throat, and dare him to deny that he was false, perjured, and mean.

Then she received a long passionate letter from Paul Montague, written at the same time as those other letters to Roger Carbury and Hetta, in which he told her all the circumstances of his engagement to Hetta Carbury, and implored her to substantiate the truth of his own story. She was amazed that he should write such a letter; but it did not increase either her anger or her sorrow. She told herself that she and this young Englishman were not fit to be mated. He was a tame, sleek household animal, whereas she knew herself to be wild – fitter for the woods than for cities. It had been one of the faults of her life that she had allowed herself to be bound to him by tenderness; and the result had been disastrous, as might have been expected.

Mrs. Pipkin, who had been told her engagement was ended, asked her, “That letter was from Mr. Montague? One gets to know handwritings when letters come frequent.”

“It was from him. And why not?”

“Why not certainly? I wish he’d write every day, so that things would come round again. Nothing ever troubles me so much as broken love.”

“It is all over, and there is no good in talking of it. I shall return to New York on Saturday week.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hurtle! I know he has ill-treated you. I know he has.”

“I am not disposed to talk about it, Mrs. Pipkin. If I had anything to say it would be to the gentleman, and no one else. You have been very kind to me, Mrs. Pipkin, and I shall be sorry to leave you.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hurtle, you’ve been a Godsend to me this summer – I’ve paid everything, butcher, baker, rates and all, just like clockwork. And now you’re going away!” Then Mrs. Pipkin began to sob.

It was after this that Mrs. Hurtle received Hetta's letter. She had as yet returned no answer to Paul Montague, although she had thought of writing to the girl, and had pondered the words that she would use – whether she would tell the tale in a manner to suit Paul's purpose, or so as to bring him utterly to shipwreck. She did not doubt that she could cause the shipwreck if she wished. But such a revenge did not recommend itself to Mrs. Hurtle. She would have preferred a pistol or a horsewhip.

Then came Hetta's note, so stiff, so cold, so true – so like the letter of an Englishwoman, thought Mrs. Hurtle, smiling as she read it. She could see well enough that the girl's heart was still set upon the man. Nevertheless she did not doubt that she could tell the story so as to make it impossible for the girl to marry him – if she chose to do so.

At first she thought that she would not answer the letter at all. What was it to her? But after a while she thought that she might as well see this English chit who had superseded her in Montague's affections. And if all revenge was to be abandoned, why should she not say a kind word so as to smooth away difficulties? Wild cat as she was, kindness was more congenial to her nature than cruelty. So she wrote to Hetta.

Dear Miss Carbury,

If you could call here either Thursday or Friday at any hour between two and four, I shall be very happy to see you.

Yours sincerely,

Winifred Hurtle.



Chapter 91 The Rivals

During these days, the relationship between Lady Carbury and her daughter was constrained. Hetta kept herself aloof, until Lady Carbury was almost frightened at her daughter's silence. She had assured herself that Paul would be forgotten quickly, and that Hetta would soon perceive it to be in her interest to marry her cousin. With this prospect, Lady Carbury thought it to be her duty as a mother to show no sympathy with her girl's sorrow. Such heart-breakings occurred daily. She herself had never been happy in love. She had refused to marry a man she really liked, because her wicked son was so grievous a burden. A woman who had no wealth of her own, she thought, must give up everything, her body, heart and soul, to getting a fitting maintenance for herself.

And Roger was so good. He would not torture Hetta with a cruel temper. He would not drink. He would give her a fair, free life. Lady Carbury repeated to herself that it was a mother's duty to impel her girl to marry such a man. But when she found how harsh her daughter could be in response – how gloomy, silent and severe – she was almost frightened.

"Hetta," she said, "why don't you speak to me?"

On this very day it was Hetta's purpose to visit Mrs. Hurtle at Islington. She had said no word of her intention to anyone. On her return she would tell her mother what she had done. But she was not under her mother's control.

"Mamma, there is nothing we can talk about without making each other unhappy."

"What a dreadful thing to say! Is there no subject in the world to interest you except that wretched young man?"

"None at all," said Hetta.

"What folly, to allow yourself to entertain such thoughts!"

"How am I to control my thoughts? Do you think, mamma, that after I had owned that I loved a man, I could be separated from him, and then not think about it? It is as though I had lost my eyesight and my speech. It is as it would be to you if Felix were to die. It crushes me."

There was an accusation in this allusion to her brother which the mother felt, but to which she could make no reply. It accused her of being more concerned for her son than her daughter.

"You are ignorant of the world, Hetta," she said.

"I am having a lesson in it now, at any rate."

"Do you think it is worse than others have suffered? Do you think that girls are generally able to marry the men upon whom they set their hearts? Marie Melmotte was as warmly attached to your brother as you can be to Mr. Montague."

"Marie Melmotte!"

"The truth is you are indulging a dream. You must wake from it, and shake yourself, and do the best you can for yourself. A girl who has no fortune cannot pick and choose, but must allow herself to be chosen."

"Then a girl is to marry without stopping even to think whether she likes the man or not?"

“She should teach herself to like the man, if the marriage be suitable. I would not have you take a vicious man. But your cousin Roger—”

“Mamma,” said Hetta, getting up, “nothing shall ever make me marry my cousin Roger. It is horrible that you should propose it when you know that I love that other man with my whole heart.”

“One who has treated you so offensively?”

“What reason have I to be offended because he has liked a woman whom he knew before he ever saw me? It has been unfortunate, wretched; but I do not know that I have any right to be angry with Mr. Montague.” She walked out of the room without waiting for a reply.

It was all very sad to Lady Carbury. What pained her most was the unrealistic, romantic view of life which pervaded Hetta’s thoughts – the folly of her idle dreams.

That afternoon Hetta trusted herself all alone to the mysteries of the Marylebone underground railway, and emerged with accuracy at King’s Cross. She walked from there to Islington. She knew the address of Mrs. Hurtle’s lodgings. But when she reached the door she did not at first dare to knock. She walked on to the end of the silent street, striving to collect her thoughts, and trying to plan how she would answer if the woman should be rough and insolent. Should the worst come to the worst, the woman would hardly try to stop her leaving.

Having gone to the end of the street, she returned quickly and knocked at the door. It was opened by Ruby Ruggles, to whom she gave her name.

“Oh laws, Miss Carbury!” said Ruby, looking up into the stranger’s face. Her heart twittered as she showed Miss Carbury to the lodger’s sitting-room.

Hetta put her veil down as she entered the room, moved by a sudden fear of her rival’s scrutiny. Mrs. Hurtle came forward to greet her, putting out both her hands. She was dressed with the most scrupulous care – simply, and in black, without any ornament. She had attired herself so as to look her very best. As she came forward she was gentle in her movements, and wore a pleasant smile.

Hetta at first was almost dumbfounded by her beauty and her self-possession. “Miss Carbury,” she said in her low, rich voice, “May I not ask you to lay aside your veil, so that we may look at each other fairly?”

Hetta, removing her veil without a word, stood gazing at her. She had expected something very different from this! She had thought that the woman would be coarse and big, with fine eyes and a bright colour. As it was they were both of the same dark complexion, with hair nearly black; but Hetta acknowledged to herself that she had no beauty such as this woman’s.

“I am glad that you have come to see me, Miss Carbury.”

“I am glad at any rate that you are not angry,” said Hetta.

“Why should I be angry? It is a poor time we women have, is it not, in becoming playthings to men? So this Lothario that was once mine, is behaving badly to you also. Is it so? He is no longer mine, and you may ask me freely for aid, if there is any I can give you. Now tell me; what can I do, or say?”

“He told me that you could tell me the truth.”

“What truth? I will certainly tell you nothing that is not true. You have quarrelled with him too?”

“Yes.”

“Perhaps you had better tell me of that. I know him so well that I can guess that he should give offence. He can be full of youthful ardour one day, and cautious as old age itself the next. What is it, Miss Carbury?”

Hetta found the telling of her story to be very difficult. "Mrs. Hurtle," she said, "I had never heard your name when he first asked me to be his wife."

"I dare say not. Why should he have told you anything of me?"

"Surely he ought, if he had once promised to marry you. I should have been very different to him had I known that – that–"

"That there was such a woman as Winifrid Hurtle. Then you heard it by chance, and you were offended. Was it not so?"

"And now he tells me that I have been unjust to him. I have not been unjust."

"I am not so sure of that. Shall I tell you what I think? I think that he has been unjust to me, and that therefore your injustice to him is no more than his due. I cannot plead for him, Miss Carbury. But whether you will avenge my wrongs must be for you to decide."

"Why did he go with you to Lowestoft?"

"Because I asked him – and because, like many men, he cannot be ill-natured although he can be cruel. He would have given his hand not to have gone, but he could not refuse. Miss Carbury, you may as well know the truth. He did love me, but he had been talked out of his love by my enemies and his own friends long before he had ever seen you. I followed him here to England because I loved him. He had told me that he did not want me; but I hoped that I might lure him back to his troth. I have utterly failed, and I must return to my own country with a broken spirit. He has misused me foully, and I have simply forgiven him; not because I am a Christian, but because I am not strong enough to punish one that I still love. He has reduced me to a nothing by his falseness, and yet I cannot injure him! But if you choose to punish him it is not for me to stop you." Then she looked at Hetta as though expecting a reply.

But Hetta had no reply to make. Every word that the woman had spoken had in truth been a comfort to her. She was told that however false her lover might have been to this other woman, he had been absolutely true to her. The woman had not spoken kindly of Paul, but she had acquitted him of all sin against Hetta. If he had been false to this American stranger, it did not seem to her to be necessary that she should be angry with him for that reason.

It was all done now. If she could only thank the woman and then go, she could, when alone, make up her mind as to what she would do next. She had not yet told herself she would submit again to Paul Montague. She had only told herself that, within her heart, she was bound to forgive him.

"You have been very kind," she said at last.

"It is well that there should be some kindness where there has been so much that is unkind. Forgive me, Miss Carbury, if I speak plainly to you. Of course you will go back to him. Of course you will be his wife. He has preferred you to me, and as far as I am concerned there is an end of it. You are a girl, whereas I am a woman; and he likes your youth. I have undergone the cruel roughness of the world, which has not as yet touched you. I do not know that you are very superior in other attractions; but that has sufficed, and you are the victor. I am strong enough to acknowledge that I have nothing to forgive in you; and am weak enough to forgive his treachery."

Hetta was now holding the woman by the hand, and weeping, she knew not why.

"I am glad to have seen you," continued Mrs. Hurtle, "so that I may know what his wife was like. In a few days I shall return to the States, and then neither

of you will ever be troubled further by me. Tell him that if he will come and see me once before I go, I will not be more unkind to him than I can help.”

When Hetta did not decline to bear this message she must have resolved that she would see Paul Montague again. She now got herself quickly out of the room, kissing the woman whom she had dreaded and despised. As soon as she was alone in the street she tried to think of it all. How full of beauty was the American woman’s face – how rich and glorious her voice – above all, how powerful and yet how easy and how gracious was her manner! That any man should have loved her and have been loved by her, and then have been willing to part from her, was extraordinary. And yet Paul Montague had preferred her, Hetta Carbury, to this woman! Paul had certainly done well for his own cause when he had referred the younger lady to the elder.

She had been unjust to Paul, and that must be remedied. As she walked quickly back to the railway station she brought herself to love her lover more fondly than she had ever done. He had been true to her from the first hour of their acquaintance. All she wanted was that he should be true to her now. The future must be her own work.

She must at once let her mother know this change in her mind. When she re-entered the house she was no longer sullen, but quite determined that nothing should shake her purpose. She went at once to her mother’s room.

“Hetta, wherever have you been?” asked Lady Carbury.

“Mamma,” she said, “I mean to write to Mr. Montague and tell him that I have been unjust to him.”

“Hetta, you must do nothing of the kind,” said Lady Carbury, rising from her seat. “It will be asking him to come back to you.”

“Yes, mamma: that is what I mean. If he will come, I will receive him. I know he will come. Oh, mamma, let us be friends. Why should you grudge me my love?”

“You have sent him back his brooch,” said Lady Carbury hoarsely.

“He shall give it me again. I have seen that American lady. She is a wonderful woman.”

“And she has told you wonderful lies.”

“She has told me no lies. She said nothing in his favour.”

“I can well believe that. What can anyone say in his favour?”

“But what she told me assured me that Mr. Montague has never behaved badly to me. I shall write to him at once. If you like I will show you the letter.”

“I will tear it up,” said Lady Carbury, full of anger.

“Mamma, I have told you everything, but in this I must judge for myself.” Then Hetta, seeing that her mother would not relent, left the room, and went immediately to write her letter.



Chapter 92

Hamilton K. Fisker Again

Ten days had passed since the meeting narrated in the last chapter – ten days, during which Hetta’s letter had been sent to her lover, but to which she had received no reply – when two gentlemen met each other in Liverpool. These were our young friend Paul Montague, and our not much older friend Hamilton K. Fisker. News of Melmotte’s death had been sent by telegraph to San Francisco. Some weeks earlier, Montague had written to Fisker about the condition of the Railway Company in England, urging him to come to London.

On receiving a reply he had gone to Liverpool, taking counsel with his friend Mr. Ramsbottom, and had awaited Fisker’s arrival. In the meantime Hetta’s letter was lying at the Beargarden. Just at this moment things at the Beargarden were not well managed. They were indeed so ill managed that Paul never received that letter.

“This is a terrible business,” said Fisker on entering the room. “He was the last man I’d have thought would be cut up in that way.”

“He was utterly ruined.”

“The railway would have pulled him through a’most anything if he’d understood how to play it.”

“We don’t think much of the railway here now,” said Paul.

“Ah; that’s because you don’t have spirit enough for a big thing. You nibble at it instead of swallowing it whole. I thought that Melmotte would have had spirit.”

“He had committed forgery. It was the dread of detection which drove him to kill himself.”

“I call it damn clumsy from beginning to end. Only think of Melmotte allowing Cohenlupe to get the better of him!”

“I suppose the thing will be broken up now at San Francisco,” suggested Paul.

“Not if I know it. Why should it be? I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. These shares are at a’most nothing now in London. I’ll buy every share in the market. I’m sorry for him; but what he’s done’ll just be the making of us over there. Will you get out of it, or will you come back to Frisco with me?”

Paul asserted that he would not return to San Francisco, that he was altogether sick of the great railway, and would have nothing more to do with it.

Fisker shrugged his shoulders, and was not displeased. He had convinced himself that Paul Montague was not a fit partner. Fisker had a thorough contempt for scruples in others. The work of robbing mankind was not only the duty, but also the delight and ambition of his life. “And what about Winifrid Hurtle?” he said.

“What makes you ask? She’s in London.”

“Yes, I know; and Hurtle’s at Frisco, swearing that he’ll come after her, only he hasn’t got the money.”

“He’s not dead then?” muttered Paul.

“Dead! no. She’ll have a bad time of it with him yet.”

“But she divorced him.”

“She got a Kansas lawyer to say so, and he’s got a Frisco lawyer to say that there’s nothing of the kind. She hasn’t played her game badly, for she’s put it so that he can’t get hold of a dollar. But I wouldn’t marry her myself till I saw my way clearer out of the wood.”

“I’m not thinking of marrying her.”

“There was talk about it in Frisco; that’s all. And I heard Hurtle say that he meant to drop in on you one of these days.”

On the following day the two men went together to London, and Fisker immediately became immersed in the arrangement of Melmotte’s affairs. He talked to Mr. Brehgert, went in and out of the offices in Abchurch Lane, cross-examined Croll, mastered the books of the Company as far as they were to be mastered, and actually summoned both the Grendalls, father and son, up to London. Lord Alfred ignored the appeal, but advised his son to run up to town.

“You should go, because you took a salary from the Company,” said the careful father, “but don’t say a word.” So Miles Grendall reappeared upon the scene.

But Fisker’s attention was perhaps most usefully paid to Madame Melmotte and her daughter. No one had visited them in their solitude at Hampstead, except Croll, the clerk. Mr. Brehgert had abstained, thinking that the widow would prefer to be alone. Lord Nidderdale had made his adieux. But Fisker had not been two days in London before he was admitted to Madame Melmotte’s presence; and he had not been there four days before he was aware that in spite of all misfortunes, Marie Melmotte was still the possessor of a large fortune.

Marie’s money had been found to be quite distinct from Melmotte’s. She had been right in refusing to sign those papers – unless that refusal led to her father’s act. She was sure that it was not so, because she had offered to sign the papers before her father’s death. But the money was now hers.

Poor Madame Melmotte felt the visits of the American to be a relief in her misery. She was not crushed by grief, but numbed by the suddenness and awe of the catastrophe. The man who had been her merciless tyrant for years had proved powerless against his own misfortunes. She was a woman of very few words; but when Fisker spoke to her of her husband’s affairs, and her future life, and mixed her a small glass of brandy-and-water, and told her that Frisco would be the fittest place for her future residence, she did not find him to be intrusive.

And even Marie liked Fisker, though she had been wooed and almost won both by a lord and a baronet. There was real sorrow in her heart for her father. She was prone to love, though, perhaps, not prone to deep affection. Melmotte had been often cruel to her, but he had also been very indulgent. She had never known real tenderness and care, and had come to regard a blow one day and a jewel the next as the natural condition of things. When her father was dead she remembered for a while the jewels, and forgot the blows. But she also found consolation in Mr. Fisker’s visits.

“I used to sign a paper every quarter,” she said to Fisker, as they were walking together one evening in the lanes round Hampstead.

“You’ll have to do the same now, only leave it in a banker’s hands to draw the money for yourself.”

“And can that be done over in California?”

“Just the same as here. Your bankers will manage it for you without the slightest trouble. There’s only one thing against it all, Miss Melmotte.”

“And what’s that?”

“After the sort of society you’ve been used to here, I don’t know how you’ll get on among us Americans. We’re a pretty rough lot, I guess.”

“I hate swells,” said Marie, flashing round upon him. “They never mean a word that they say. They’re never more than half awake, and don’t care the least about anybody. I hate London.”

“Do you now? I wonder whether you’d hate Frisco?”

“I think it would be a jolly sort of place.”

“Very jolly I find it. And I wonder whether you’d hate – me?”

“Mr. Fisker, that’s nonsense. Why should I hate anybody?”

“But if you come to Frisco, I hope you won’t hate me, you know.” He took her gently by the arm; but she bade him behave himself. Then they returned to their lodgings.

“I don’t think much of your book-keeping,” Fisker said to Miles Grendall in the deserted Board-room of the Mexican Railway. Miles, remembering his father’s advice, answered not a word, but merely looked with assumed amazement at the impertinent stranger.

Fisker had made three or four remarks before this, and had appealed to Paul Montague and Croll, who were present. He had also invited Sir Felix Carbury, Lord Nidderdale, and Mr. Longestaffe, as Directors; but none of them had come.

“Upon my word,” continued Fisker, “it’s astonishing that Melmotte should have put up with this kind of thing. I suppose you understand something of business, Mr. Croll?”

“It was not my department, Mr. Fisker,” said the German.

“Nor anybody else’s either,” said the American. “Of course it’s on the cards, Mr. Grendall, that we shall have to put you into a witness-box, because there are certain things we must get at.” Miles was silent as the grave, but at once made up his mind that he would pass his autumn at some pleasant but economical German retreat, and that this retirement should begin within a very few days; or perhaps hours.

But Fisker was not in earnest. The greater the confusion in the London office, he thought, the better were the prospects of the Company at San Francisco.

When Melmotte’s affairs were ultimately wound up there was found to be nearly enough property to pay all his debts. It was hard to work out who had been robbed, or who had simply been unsuccessful in their attempts to rob others. Some, like poor Mr. Brehgert, had lost heavily without dishonesty. But those who, like the Longestaffes, were able to prove debts, were better off. Dolly got his money, and assured his friend Nidderdale that he meant to turn over a new leaf.

“I shall just make Squercum allow me so much a month, and I shall have all the bills sent to him, and he will do everything, and pull me up if I’m getting wrong. I like Squercum.”

“Won’t he rob you, old fellow?” suggested Nidderdale.

“Of course he will; but he won’t let anyone else do it.”

But these things did not arrange themselves till long after Mr. Fisker’s departure for California. That was delayed while Madame Melmotte’s affairs occupied him. The furniture and plate were sold, but Madame Melmotte was allowed to take whatever she declared to be her own property – including her jewels. It was agreed with Fisker that they were to be taken to New York.

“You’ll get as much for them there as in London, if you like to part with them,” he told her.

In fact Madame Melmotte put herself into Fisker's hands with absolute confidence; and her confidence was justified. It was not by robbing an old woman that Fisker intended to make himself great. Madame Melmotte thought he was the finest gentleman she had ever met.

"I shall do whatever he tells me," she said to Marie. "I'm sure I've nothing to keep me in this country."

"I'm willing to go," said Marie. "I don't want to stay in London."

"I suppose you'll marry him if he asks you?"

"I don't know about that," said Marie. "I don't think I'll marry anybody. What's the use? It's only money. Nobody cares for anything else. Fisker's all very well; but he only wants the money."

"I think he's a very nice young man," said Madame Melmotte.



Chapter 93 A True Lover

Hetta Carbury, having made up her mind that she had been unjust to her lover, wrote to him a letter full of penitence and love, bidding him come back to her. But unfortunately she addressed it to the Beargarden, as he had written to her from that club; and the letter never reached him. When he returned to London he supposed that she had refused even to notice his appeal.

He was, however, determined that he would still make further struggles, even though Mrs. Hurtle, Roger Carbury, and Hetta's mother were, he thought, all hostile to him. But Hetta had owned that she loved him, and Paul still felt instinctively that his prospects could not be altogether hopeless. Yet how should he carry on the fight? The writing of letters is a one-sided, troublesome proceeding, when the person to whom they are written will not answer.

But Hetta had written a second letter, not to her lover. As Roger was the head of her family, and her friend, and entitled in some special way to know all that she did, she wrote to him. She told him that she had made a mistake about Paul, that she was convinced that Paul had always behaved to her with absolute sincerity, and, in short, that Paul was the dearest and most ill-used of human beings. In her enthusiasm she declared that there could be no other chance of happiness for her than that of becoming Paul's wife, and beseeched her dearest friend Roger not to turn against her, but to lend her aid.

As Roger sat on the garden wall at Carbury, with his cousin's letter in his hand, her words affected him heavily. There was no hope for himself. Though he was incapable of change – though he could not look forward to even a passive enjoyment of life without the girl he loved – yet he told himself plainly that he must do without her. He had let time slip by too fast and too far before he had ventured to love, and must now make the best he could of such a broken life as was left to him. But how should he treat the man and woman who had reduced him so low?

If possible he would be unselfish. He could not, indeed, think kindly of Paul Montague; he could not forgive the man's supposed treason. But he did tell himself that in comparison with Hetta the man was nothing to him. He wanted to be able to assure Hetta that she should still be dear to him as a friend. Hetta's child must take the name of Carbury, and must be his heir – as near as possible his own child, in place of the wretched Felix,

In such a case Carbury must be the home of the married couple, if he could induce them to make it so. Though he should never again be able to love Paul Montague, he must live with him for her sake on affectionate terms. He must forgive Hetta altogether, as though there had been no fault; and strive to forgive the man's fault as best he might.

Passionately fond as he was of justice, yet he did not know how to be just himself. He could not see that in truth he had not been betrayed. Nevertheless, when he rose from the wall he had resolved that Paul Montague should be treated as though he were pardoned.

However, he wrote no answer to Hetta's letter – perhaps feeling that it would deprive him of his last chance. Her letter did not require an immediate

answer; she had simply told him how things now stood. Roger's influence with her mother was the assistance which Hetta really wanted, and that could hardly be done by writing. Roger determined that he would again go up to London. He would think it all over on the journey, and then see the people themselves, before he finally committed himself to the abandonment of his own hopes.

He went up to town, and I do not know that hours of thinking helped him much. To follow an argument to an end is not easy or common, and it was hardly within Roger's capabilities. As he walked that night round the square near his hotel, looking up at the bright moon, he asked himself why he should wish to interfere with the happiness of two much younger human beings. But he had had a bath by then, and had eaten his dinner.

The next morning he was in Welbeck Street early. He was at once shown into the drawing-room, where Hetta was sitting. She hurried up to him, and he took her in his arms and kissed her. He had never done such a thing before. He had never even kissed her hand.

Her instinct told her immediately that such a greeting was a sign of affectionate compliance with her wishes.

"Oh, Roger, I am so glad to see you," she said, escaping gently from his arms.

"I could not write an answer, so I came."

"You always do the kindest thing."

"I don't know that I can do anything now. It is all done. Hetta, you have been all the world to me."

"Do not reproach me," she said.

"No. Why should I reproach you? You have committed no fault. I should not have come had I intended to reproach anyone."

"I love you so much for saying that."

"Let it be as you wish, if it must. I have made up my mind to bear it, and there shall be an end of it." As he said this he took her hand, and she put her head upon his shoulder and began to weep. "And still you will be all the world to me," he continued, with his arm round her waist. "As you will not be my wife, you shall be my daughter."

"I will be your sister, Roger."

"My daughter rather. I will hurry to grow old so that I may feel for you as the old feel for the young. And if you have a child, Hetta, he must be as my child. There! If there is anything that I can do to add to your happiness, I will do it. You must believe that to make you happy shall be the only enjoyment of my life."

It had been hardly possible for her to tell him that Paul had not even condescended to answer her letter. And now, overcome by the tenderness of her cousin's affection, she did not know how to mention Paul's name.

"Have you seen him?" she whispered.

"No; it is not for his sake that I am here."

"But you will be his friend?"

"Your husband shall certainly be my friend." At that moment the door was opened. Lady Carbury entered and looked first at her daughter and then at Roger.

"I have come," said he, "to signify my agreement to this marriage." Lady Carbury's face fell very low. "I need not speak again of what were my own wishes. I have learned at last that it could not have been so."

"Why should you say so?" exclaimed Lady Carbury.

"Pray, mamma—" Hetta began.

“I do not know that it need be so at all,” continued Lady Carbury.

“I look upon her as engaged to marry Paul Montague,” said Roger.

“Not at all,” said Lady Carbury.

“Yes; mamma, yes,” cried Hetta boldly. “It is so. I am engaged to him.”

“It is not with my consent – nor, as far as I can understand at present, with the consent of Mr. Montague himself.”

“Mamma!”

“The consent of Paul Montague!” exclaimed Roger. “I think there can be no doubt as to that.”

“There has been a quarrel,” said Lady Carbury.

“Surely he has not quarrelled with you, Hetta?”

“I wrote to him – and he has not answered me,” said Hetta piteously.

Then Lady Carbury gave a full and somewhat coloured account of what had taken place, while Roger listened with admirable patience.

“The marriage is on every account objectionable,” she said at last. “His income is precarious. His conduct with regard to that woman has been very bad. He has been sadly mixed up with that wretched man who killed himself. And now, when Henrietta has written to him in opposition to my express commands, he takes no notice of her.”

Hetta was now seated on a sofa hiding her face and weeping. Roger stood perfectly still, listening with respectful silence till Lady Carbury had finished. Then he was slow to answer.

“I think I had better see him,” he replied. “If, as I imagine, he has not received my cousin’s letter, that matter will be set at rest. As to his income, that I think may be managed. His connection with Mr. Melmotte was unfortunate, but was due to no fault of his.” He was too generous to say a word about Felix and Marie Melmotte. “I will see him, Lady Carbury, and then I will come to you again.”

It was late that evening before Roger found Paul Montague, who had just returned from Liverpool.

“I don’t know what letter you mean,” said Paul.

“You wrote to her?”

“Certainly. I wrote to her twice. My last letter was one which I think she ought to have answered. But I have not had a line from her – not a word!”

“She did answer your letter.”

“What did she say to me?”

“You must ask her that. But I can tell you this; that she wrote to you as a girl writes to the lover whom she wishes to see.”

“Is that true?” exclaimed Paul, jumping up.

“I am here to tell you that it is true. You may go to her, and need have nothing to fear. And now I wish you to hear what I have to say.”

“Of course,” said Paul, sitting down suddenly. Up to this moment Roger had not appeared as a joyous, sympathetic messenger. His face had been severe, and the tone of his voice almost harsh. Paul thought he would probably say very disagreeable things to him, which he must bear as patiently as he could.

“You know what my feelings have been,” Roger began, “and how deeply I have resented what I thought to be an interference with my affections. But no quarrel between us—”

“I have never quarrelled with you.”

“Listen to me for a moment. No anger between us should be allowed to interfere with the happiness of her whom I suppose we both love better than all the rest of the world put together.”

“I do,” said Paul.

“And so do I; and I always shall. But she is to be your wife. She shall be my daughter. Her child shall be my heir. My house shall be her house, if you and she agree. You may now count on my assistance as if I were a father giving you a daughter in marriage. I do this because I will make the happiness of her life the chief object of mine. Now good night. Don’t say anything just now.”

Having so spoken he hurried out of the room, leaving Paul Montague bewildered by the news.



Chapter 94

John Crumb's Victory

In the meantime great preparations were going on down in Suffolk for the marriage of that happiest of lovers, John Crumb. He had been formally reconciled to Ruby – who had submitted to his floury embraces, not with the best grace in the world, but still with a submission that satisfied her future husband. He had been intensely grateful to Mrs. Hurtle, and munificent to Mrs. Pipkin, to whom he presented a purple silk dress, in addition to the cloak which he had already given her. He had expressed no anger against Ruby, and no indignation about the baronite.

He only stayed a few hours in London, but during these few hours he settled everything. When Mrs. Pipkin suggested that Ruby should be married from her house, he declined the suggestion with thanks. He thought that the marriage should be celebrated in Suffolk – the feast being spread at Sheep's Acre farm, if old Ruggles could be talked into giving it; if not, at his own house. Either way, he was determined that there should be a banquet, and succeeded in making Mrs. Hurtle promise to bring Mrs. Pipkin down to Bungay for the occasion.

Then it was necessary to fix the day. Ruby only expressed one wish: namely, that Joe Mixet might not have anything to do with the affair. Crumb had been absurdly impatient, proposing next Tuesday.

"That's out of the question," Ruby had said decisively, and the other ladies agreed. When the 14th of August was named John Crumb scratched his head and muttered something about Thetford fair; but on Mrs. Pipkin telling him that he must not interfere any further, he yielded with a good grace. He merely remained in London long enough to pay a friendly visit to the policeman who had locked him up, and then returned to Suffolk.

Before the wedding day arrived, old Ruggles was persuaded to forgive his granddaughter, and agree to the marriage. The old man held out for a long time, alleging that the girl was no better than she should be; but all the town met this with such a torrent of contradiction that the farmer was driven out of his own convictions. It is to be feared that many lies were told on Ruby's behalf by lips which had been quite ready a fortnight earlier to take away her character. But it was known that John Crumb was ready to punch the head of any man who should hint that Ruby Ruggles had ever done anything unbecoming. And the feeling in favour of Mr. Crumb was so general that the grandfather could not stand against it.

Old Mr. Ruggles held out on one detail. The breakfast was to be given at the King's Head, and the bill was to be paid by the bridegroom. Nor would Mr. Ruggles pay the five hundred pounds down as in early days he had promised to do. But he did consent to have the money settled upon John Crumb at his death; and moreover was persuaded to receive Mrs. Pipkin and Ruby at the farm for the night before the marriage. A private sitting-room at the inn was secured for Mrs. Hurtle – who was supposed to be a lady of too high standing to stay at Sheep's Acre Farm.

On the day before the wedding one trouble for a moment clouded the bridegroom's brow. Ruby had demanded that Joe Mixet should not be among the

performers, and John Crumb had agreed. Yet he felt himself unable to answer such questions as the parson might put to him without the assistance of his friend.

“You could come in behind like, Joe, just as if I knew nothin’ about it,” suggested Crumb.

“What have I done that she should object to me?”

“You didn’t ever go for to – kiss her, did you, Joe?”

“What a one’er you are! That wouldn’t ’a set her again me. It is just because I stood up and spoke for you like a man that night at Sheep’s Acre. I’ll bet you a gallon, old fellow, she and I are the best friends in Bungay before six months are gone.”

So John Crumb agreed that Joe Mixet should be his best man, undertaking to “square it all” with Ruby after the ceremony.

He met the ladies at the station and – for him – was quite eloquent in his welcome to Mrs. Hurtle and Mrs. Pipkin. To Ruby he said but little. But he looked at her in her new hat and outfit with great delight.

“Ain’t she bootiful now?” he said aloud to Mrs. Hurtle on the platform, to the delight of half Bungay, who had accompanied him.

Ruby made a fearful grimace as she turned round to Mrs. Pipkin, and whispered, “He is such a fool!”

Then he conducted Mrs. Hurtle up to the Inn, and himself drove Mrs. Pipkin and Ruby out to Sheep’s Acre.

“Thou’rt come back then, Ruby,” said the old man.

“I ain’t going to trouble you long, grandfather,” said the girl.

“So best. And this is Mrs. Pipkin? They say as you’ve been kind to that girl as would ’a been on the town only for that.”

“Grandfather, that ain’t true,” said Ruby with energy. The old man made no reply, and Ruby took her aunt up into the bedroom. “Now, Mrs. Pipkin,” she pleaded, “how was it possible for any girl to live with an old man like that?”

“But, Ruby, you might have gone to live with John Crumb instead when you pleased.”

“There ain’t much to choose between ’em. What one says is all spite; and the other says nothing at all.”

“Oh Ruby, Ruby,” said Mrs. Pipkin solemnly, “You’ll come to learn some day, that a loving heart is better nor a fickle tongue, specially with vittels certain.”

On the following morning the Bungay church bells rang merrily, and half its population was present to see John Crumb made a happy man. He himself drove the bride and Mrs. Pipkin into the town, smiling and nodding at every one. Poor Ruby would have escaped out of the cart had it been possible. But no escape was within her reach.

“Drat it,” said Mrs. Pipkin, just before they entered the church, “you make me that angry I’m half minded to cuff you. Ain’t he fond o’ you? Ain’t he got a house? Ain’t he well to do all round?”

Ruby, when she reached the church, was too completely quelled to take any notice of Joe Mixet, who was standing there, unabashed, with a splendid nosegay in his button-hole. She certainly could not complain of her husband’s silence. He made his responses to the clergyman so vehemently that they were heard throughout the whole building.

“I, John – take thee Ruby – to my wedded wife–” and so on to the end. And when he came to the “worldly goods” with which he endowed his Ruby, he was very emphatic indeed. He thoroughly enjoyed the ceremony, and would have

liked to be married over and over again, every day for a week, had it been possible.

And then came the breakfast, to which he led the way with Mrs. Hurtle on one arm and Mrs. Pipkin on the other. Thus, in spite of all that poor Ruby had said, she was conducted to the marriage-feast by Joe Mixet. But she was so tamed by circumstances that she was glad to have someone near her who knew how to behave himself.

“Mrs. Crumb, you have my best wishes for your continued ’ealth and ’appiness,” said Joe Mixet. “He’s a good ’un.”

“Oh, I dare say.”

“You just be fond of him and make much of him, and I’m blessed if you mayn’t do a’most anything with him. And he don’t drink hard, but he works hard.”

Ruby said no more, and soon found herself seated by her husband’s side. It certainly was wonderful to her that so many people should pay John Crumb so much respect.

After the breakfast, Mr. Mixet made a speech. “He had had the pleasure of knowing John Crumb and Miss Ruby Ruggles for a great many years, and he’d never known two young people more fitted by the gifts of nature to contribute to one another’s ’appiness. He had understood that Mars and Wenus always lived on the best of terms, and perhaps the company would excuse him if he likened this ’appy young couple to them two ’eathen gods and goddesses. He didn’t remember just at present whether Mars and Wenus had any young family, but he hoped that before long there would be any number of young Crumbs for the Bungay birds to pick up.” The speech, of which only a small sample can be given here, was much admired by the ladies and gentlemen present – with the single exception of poor Ruby.

In the afternoon John took his bride to Lowestoft, and brought her back to all the glories of his own house on the following day. His honeymoon was short, but its influence on Ruby was beneficent. When she was alone with him, and thinking of all that he had done to win her, she did learn to respect him.

“Now, Ruby, give a fellow a kiss – as though you meant it,” he said.

“Oh, John, what nonsense!”

“It ain’t nonsense to me. I’d sooner have a kiss from you than all the wine as ever was swallowed.”

Then she did kiss him, “as though she meant it;” and when she returned with him to Bungay the next day, she had made up her mind that she would endeavour to do her duty by him as his wife.



Chapter 95 The Longstaffe Marriages

In another part of Suffolk, not far from Bungay, Miss Georgiana Longestaffe was in a very miserable plight. Her sister's marriage with Mr. George Whitstable was fixed for the first of September, and poor Georgey's misery was greatly increased by the triumph of that coming wedding. It was only the other day that she had looked down from a great height on her elder sister, and had utterly despised the squire of Toodlam. But now Sophia in her pride of place had become a tyrant, and George Whitstable absolutely gave himself airs.

At this time Mr. Longestaffe was never at home. He had remained in London for the winding up of Melmotte's affairs, leaving poor Lady Pomona to bear her daughter's ill-humour. The family at Caversham consisted therefore of the three ladies, and was enlivened by daily visits from Toodlam.

It was not long before Georgiana quarrelled altogether with her sister, to the point of refusing to act as bridesmaid. The reader may remember that there had been a watch and chain, which two of the ladies of the family had said should be returned to Mr. Brehgert. But a week later Georgiana had not sent them back, as Sophia was happy to point out.

"Georgey," she said one morning in their mother's presence, "don't you think Mr. Brehgert's watch ought to go back to him without any more delay?"

"What have you got to do with it? The watch wasn't given to you."

"I think it ought to go back, or I'm sure papa will be very angry."

"It's no business of yours whether he's angry or not."

"If it isn't sent George will tell Dolly."

This was unbearable! That George Whitstable should interfere in her affairs! "I never will speak to George Whitstable again," she said, getting up from her chair.

"My dear, don't say anything so horrible as that," exclaimed the unhappy mother.

"I do say it. George Whitstable is a miserably stupid fellow! Because you've landed him, you think he's to ride over the whole family."

"I think Mr. Brehgert ought to have his watch and chain back," said Sophia.

"Certainly he ought," said Lady Pomona. "Georgiana, it must be sent back, or I shall tell your papa."

So Georgiana brought the watch and chain to her mother, protesting that she had never thought of keeping them. They were confided to the hands of the odious George Whitstable, who was going to London to see a tailor. But Georgiana, though she was so far beaten, kept up her quarrel with her sister. She would not be bridesmaid. She would never speak to George Whitstable. And she would shut herself up on the wedding day.

She did think herself to be very badly treated. What did her father and mother expect would become of her? Marriage had always been so clearly placed before her eyes as a position to be achieved by her own efforts, that she could not endure the idea of waiting in her father's house till some fitting suitor might find her. She had struggled and struggled, till every thought of her daily life was

pervaded by a conviction that as she grew older the struggle would be more intense.

The swimmer when first he finds himself in the water is confident in his strength. But when he begins to feel that the shore is receding, that his strength is going, then he begins to beat the water with strokes rapid but impotent, and to waste his breath in anxious gaspings. So it was with poor Georgey Longestaffe. Something must be done at once, or it would be of no avail. Twelve years had passed since first she plunged into the stream; and she was as far as ever from the bank – nay, farther. She must strike out with rapid efforts, unless she would let the waters close over her head.

But immersed as she was here at Caversham, the waters were even now closing upon her. The sound of them was in her ears. The ripple of the wave was already robbing her of breath.

She never doubted that failure in her matrimonial projects would be the same as drowning. It had never occurred to her to consider the prospect of living as a tranquil old maid. Nor could she understand that others should contemplate it for her. The battle had been carried on for so many years under the auspices of her parents that she assumed their theory of life was the same as her own.

And now when they deserted her in her real difficulty – when they first told her to live at Caversham all the summer, and then sent her up to the Melmottes, and after that forbade her marriage with Mr. Brehgert – it seemed to her that they were unnatural parents who gave her a stone when she wanted bread, a serpent when she asked for a fish. She had no friend left. There was no one living who seemed to care whether she had a husband or not. She took to walking in solitude about the park, and thought of many things with grim earnestness.

“Mamma,” she said one morning, “I wonder whether papa has any intention at all about me.”

“In what way, my dear?”

“In any way. Does he mean me to live here for ever?”

“I don’t think he intends to have a house in town again.”

“And what am I to do?”

“I suppose we shall stay here at Caversham.”

“And I’m to be buried just like a nun in a convent! Mamma, I won’t stand it.”

“My dear, that is nonsense. You see company here; and as for not standing it, I don’t know what you mean. As long as you are one of your papa’s family of course you must live where he lives.”

“Oh, mamma, to hear you talk like that! It is horrible! As if you didn’t know! Sometimes I almost doubt whether papa does know. But you understand it all as well as I do myself. What is to become of me? Is it not enough to drive me mad to be here by myself, without any prospect of anything? Should you have liked at my age to have felt that you had no chance of having a house of your own to live in? Why didn’t you let me marry Mr. Brehgert?”

“You know, my dear,” said Lady Pomona, “that your papa wouldn’t hear of it.”

“If you would have helped me I would have done it in spite of papa. What right has he to domineer over me in that way? Why shouldn’t I have married the man if I chose? I am old enough, surely. Papa won’t do anything to help me. Why shouldn’t he let me do something for myself?”

“You can’t regret Mr. Brehgert!”

“Why not? I do regret him. I’d have him tomorrow if he came. It couldn’t be so bad as Caversham.”

“You couldn’t have loved him, Georgiana.”

“Loved him! Who thinks about love nowadays? You won’t tell me that Sophy is going to marry that idiot because she loves him! When you wanted Dolly to marry Marie Melmotte you never thought of his loving her. I had got over all that kind of thing before I was twenty.”

“I think a young woman should love her husband.”

“It makes me sick, mamma, to hear you talk in that way. When one has been going on for a dozen years trying to do something – and then you turn round upon me and talk about love! Mamma, if you would help me I think I could still manage with Mr. Brehgert.” Lady Pomona shuddered. “*You* have not got to marry him.”

“It is too horrid.”

“I should have a house of my own at least. If I stay here I shall go mad – or die.”

“It is impossible.”

“If you will stand by me, mamma, I am sure it may be done. I would write to him, and say that you would see him.”

“Georgiana, I will never see him.”

“Why not?”

“He is a Jew! I don’t think you know how angry your papa can be.”

“I’m not going to let papa frighten me. What can he do? I don’t suppose he’ll beat me. As for you, mamma, I don’t think you care for me a bit. Because Sophy is going to be married to that oaf, you are become so proud of her that you haven’t a thought for anybody else.”

“That’s very unjust, Georgiana.”

“I know what’s unjust. I tell you, mamma, that I shall write to Mr. Brehgert and say that I am quite ready to marry him. You may tell papa just what I say.”

All this made Lady Pomona very miserable. She did not tell Mr. Longestaffe, but she did discuss her daughter’s threat with Sophia. Sophia thought that Georgiana did not mean it, because – amongst other reasons – she was in the habit of meeting the curate of the next parish almost every day in the park.

“Mr. Batherbolt!” exclaimed Lady Pomona.

“She is walking with Mr. Batherbolt almost every day.”

“But he’s five years younger than she! And he’s got nothing but his curacy! And he’s a celibate! I heard the bishop laughing at him because he called himself a celibate.”

“It doesn’t signify, mamma. I know she is with him constantly. Wilson has seen them. Perhaps papa could get him a living. Or perhaps the bishop would do something. Anything, mamma, would be better than the Jew.”

To this, Lady Pomona agreed. “Of course it is a come-down to marry a curate; but a clergyman is always considered to be decent.”

They did not apprehend anything wrong on Mr. Batherbolt’s part. He was so excellent a young man, and so exclusively given to religion, that, even should Sophy’s suspicion be correct, he might be trusted to walk about the park with Georgiana. Should he at any time ask if he could make the lady his wife, there would be no disgrace in it. He was a clergyman and a gentleman, and the poverty would be Georgiana’s affair.

Mr. Longestaffe returned home on the eve of Sophia's marriage, and with him came Dolly. Dolly considered this a great sacrifice to his family. He found the house not very comfortable, for Georgiana still persisted in her refusal either to be a bridesmaid or to speak to Mr. Whitstable; but still his presence, which was rare at Caversham, gave some assistance. He had brought down an enormous china dog, about five feet high, as a wedding present, which added to the happiness of the meeting. Lady Pomona had determined to tell her husband of those walks in the park with Mr. Batherbolt; but not until after the Whitstable marriage.

But at nine o'clock on the morning of the wedding, they were all astounded by the news that Georgiana had run away with Mr. Batherbolt. She had been up before six. He had met her at the park gate, and had driven her over to catch the early train at Stowmarket.

When the fact was first known it was almost felt, in the consternation of the moment, that the Whitstable marriage must be postponed. But Sophia said a word to her mother, and the marriage went ahead. At first Dolly talked of going after his younger sister, and the father dispatched various telegrams. But the fugitives could not be brought back, and with some little delay, Mr. George Whitstable was made a happy man.

It need only be added that in about a month's time Georgiana returned to Caversham as Mrs. Batherbolt, and that she resided there with her husband in much connubial bliss for the next six months. After that they removed to a small living, for which Mr. Longestaffe had managed to raise the necessary money.



Chapter 96

Where “The Wild Asses Quench Their Thirst”

We must now go back about three weeks in our story, so that the reader may be told how affairs were progressing at the Beargarden. That establishment had received a terrible blow in the defection of Herr Vossner. It was not only that he had robbed the club, and robbed every member of the club who had had personal dealings with him. The sorrow was also in this – that with Herr Vossner all their comforts had gone. Of course Herr Vossner had been a thief. No one had supposed him to be an honest man. But as a thief he had been so comfortable that his absence was regretted with a tenderness almost amounting to love. Dolly Longestaffe had been robbed more outrageously than any other member of the club, and yet Dolly said that London was not worth living in now that Herr Vossner was gone.

The Beargarden had received a blow from which it seemed that there was no recovery. At first it was proposed that trustees should be appointed to pay Vossner’s debts and borrow more money. But the members of the Beargarden hesitated at these honours and responsibilities. Lord Nidderdale declared that he would have nothing to do with it. Mr. Lupton professed his inability as a man of business. Lord Grasslough pleaded his father. Even Dolly Longestaffe declined.

“I have spoken to Squercum,” he said to the Committee, “and Squercum won’t hear of it. What we ought to do is to get some fellow like Vossner, and make him tell us how much he wants to steal above his regular pay. Then we could subscribe that among us.” But Mr. Lupton was of the opinion that the new Vossner might perhaps not know, when thus consulted, the extent of his own cupidity.

The club would therefore be closed on the 12th of August unless some new heaven-inspired idea might be forthcoming for its salvation. One day, Nidderdale, Grasslough, and Dolly were hanging about the steps, drinking sherry and bitters before dinner, when Sir Felix Carbury came creeping round the corner and, in a hesitating manner, entered the door. He had nearly recovered from his wounds, though he had not yet learned to look or speak as though he had not had two of his front teeth knocked out. It was a month since he had been seen at the club. His thrashing had been the wonder of a few days, and then he had been almost forgotten.

Now, with difficulty, he had summoned courage to go down to his old haunt and talk to his associates as though nothing had happened to him.

“By George, here’s Carbury!” said Dolly. Lord Grasslough whistled, turned his back, and walked upstairs; but Nidderdale and Dolly shook hands with him.

“Thought you were out of town,” said Nidderdale. “Haven’t seen you for ever so long.”

“I have been down in Suffolk,” lied Felix. “How are things going on here?”

“They’re not going at all; they’re gone,” said Dolly.

“Everything is smashed,” said Nidderdale. “We shall all have to pay, I don’t know how much.”

“Wasn’t Vossner ever caught?” asked the baronet.

“Caught!” said Dolly. “No. We close altogether next Monday. Flatfleece says the furniture belongs to him under what he calls a deed of sale. Indeed, everything seems to belong to Flatfleece. He’s always in and out of the club, and has got the key of the cellar.”

“That don’t matter,” said Nidderdale, “as Vossner took care that there shouldn’t be any wine.”

“I suppose one can get dinner here?”

“Yes; today you can, and perhaps tomorrow.”

“Isn’t there any playing?” asked Felix with dismay.

“I haven’t seen a card this fortnight,” said Dolly. “There hasn’t been anybody to play. Everything has gone to the dogs. There has been the Melmotte affair, you know; though why fellows shouldn’t play cards because another fellow takes poison, I can’t understand.”

“Melmotte’s death was rather awful,” said Nidderdale.

“Not half so awful as having nothing to amuse one. And now they say the girl is going to marry Fisker.”

“Poor dear!” said Nidderdale. “I was very fond of her.”

“And Carbury too, I suppose,” said Dolly.

“No; I wasn’t. If I’d really been fond of her I should have had her safe to America,” said Sir Felix.

“Come into the smoking-room, Dolly,” said Nidderdale. “I can stand most things, but, by George, that fellow is such a cad that I cannot stand him. You and I are bad enough, but I don’t think we’re so heartless as Carbury.”

“I don’t think I’m heartless at all,” said Dolly. “I’m good-natured to everybody that is good-natured to me. But I do agree about Carbury. It’s very hard to be good-natured to him.”

Even so, Sir Felix managed to get his dinner-table close to theirs and to tell them something of his future prospects. He was going to travel and see the world. He had, according to his own account, completely run through London life and found it barren. He would seek new scenes.

“How jolly for you!” said Dolly. “Is anyone going with you?”

“Well; yes. I’ve got a travelling companion; a very pleasant fellow, who knows a lot, and will be able to coach me up in things. There’s a deal to be learned by going abroad, you know.”

“A parson, I suppose,” said Dolly.

“Well; he is a clergyman. Who told you?”

“I guessed. That should be nice – travelling about Europe with a clergyman. I shouldn’t care for it, but I fancy it will just suit you.”

“It’s an expensive sort of thing, isn’t it?” asked Nidderdale.

“Well – it does cost something. But I want a change.”

“Didn’t you have a row in the street with someone the other day?” This question was asked very abruptly by Lord Grasslough, who was sitting near them. Nidderdale glanced across the table at Dolly, who whistled, and then was silent. Grasslough looked as if he expected an answer.

It was the fear of this that had kept Sir Felix away from the club.

“Yes,” said he; “a fellow attacked me in the street, coming up behind me when I had a girl with me. He didn’t get the best of it though.”

“Oh; didn’t he?” said Grasslough. “I think, upon the whole, you’re right to go abroad.”

“What business is it of yours?” asked the baronet. “I was speaking to my friends, and not to you.”

“I quite appreciate the distinction,” said Lord Grasslough, “and am sorry for Lord Nidderdale and Mr. Longestaffe.”

“What do you mean by that?” said Sir Felix, rising from his chair. His present opponent was not as horrible to him as John Crumb had been, as men in clubs do not often knock each others’ heads.

“Don’t let’s have a quarrel here,” said Mr. Lupton.

“If we must break up, let us break up in peace and quietness,” said Nidderdale.

“Who began it?” said Sir Felix, sitting down again. Whereupon Lord Grasslough walked out of the room. “That fellow is always wanting to quarrel.”

“It takes two men to make a quarrel,” said Dolly.

“Yes; it does,” said Sir Felix, taking this as a friendly observation; “and I’m not fool enough to be one of them.”

“Oh, yes, I meant it,” said Grasslough afterwards up in the card-room. The other men had quickly followed him, leaving Sir Felix alone. “I don’t suppose any of us shall ever be here again, so I thought I would tell him my mind.”

“What’s the use?” said Dolly. “Of course he’s a bad fellow. Most fellows are bad in one way or another.”

“But he’s bad all round.”

“And so this is to be the end of the Beargarden,” said Lord Nidderdale with a peculiar melancholy. “Dear old place! I always felt it was too good to last. I don’t think anybody has liked the Beargarden so much as I have, but I shall never try this kind of thing again. Tomorrow I shall dine at the Carlton. Next session I shan’t miss a day in the House, and I’ll bet anybody a fiver that I make a speech before Easter. I shall take to claret at 20 shillings a dozen, and go about London on the top of an omnibus.”

“How about getting married?” asked Dolly.

“Oh; that’s the governor’s affair. None of you fellows will believe me, but, upon my word, I liked that girl; and I’d have stuck to her – only there are some things a fellow can’t do.”

After a while Sir Felix followed them upstairs, as though nothing unpleasant had happened below. “We can make up a rubber, can’t we?” said he.

“I should say not,” said Nidderdale.

“I shall not play,” said Mr. Lupton.

“There isn’t a pack of cards in the house,” said Dolly. Lord Grasslough didn’t say a word. Sir Felix sat down with his cigar in his mouth, and the others continued to smoke in silence.

“I wonder what has become of Miles Grendall?” asked Sir Felix. “He hasn’t paid me a shilling of the money he owes me.” No one spoke. “And I don’t suppose he ever will. He is the biggest scoundrel I ever met,” said Sir Felix.

“I know one as big,” said Lord Grasslough, “or, at any rate, as little.”

There was another pause, and then Sir Felix left the room muttering something as to the stupidity of having no cards. From that time forth he was never more seen by his associates at the Beargarden.

The other men remained there till well into the night. It was felt by them all that this was the end of the Beargarden, and they whispered sad things in low voices.

“I never felt so much like crying in my life,” said Dolly. “Good-night, old fellows; good-bye. I’m going down to Caversham, and I shouldn’t wonder if I didn’t drown myself.”

How Mr. Flatfleece went to law, and threatened everybody, and singled out poor Dolly Longestaffe as his special victim; and how Dolly Longestaffe, by the aid of Mr. Squercum, utterly confounded Mr. Flatfleece, and brought that ingenious but unfortunate man to ruin, the reader will hardly expect to have told to him in detail.



Chapter 97

Mrs. Hurtle's Fate

Mrs. Hurtle had postponed her journey to New York to go to Bungay for the marriage of Ruby Ruggles, not so much from any love for the persons concerned, as from an irresistible tenderness towards Paul Montague. She longed to see him once again, and found it difficult to leave the land in which he was living. She knew there was no hope for her. She had relinquished him. But still she lingered near him. And in her heart of hearts she liked the somewhat stupid tranquillity of life in England compared to the rough tempests of her past days. She even liked Mrs. Pipkin, and almost loved John Crumb. How different would her life have been if she had met a man as true as John Crumb!

She loved Paul Montague with all her heart, and she despised herself for loving him. How weak he was; how inefficient; how swathed in scruples and prejudices! Yet she loved him for his very faults, finding something sweet in his English manners. The man had been false to her; but then she had not been quite true with him. Neither had meant to deceive. They had played a game against each other; and he had won – because he was a man.

She thought much about these things. He could change his love as often as he pleased, whereas she was ruined by his defection. He could look about for a fresh flower and boldly seek his honey; whereas she could only sit and mourn for the sweets of which she had been robbed.

“So Mr. Fisker was Mr. Montague’s partner, was he?” asked Mrs. Pipkin a day or two after their return from the Crumb marriage. For Mr. Fisker had called on Mrs. Hurtle. “I think he’s a nicer man than Mr. Montague.”

“Mr. Montague is a gentleman.”

“I always did say that of him, Mrs. Hurtle.”

“And Mr. Fisker is – an American citizen. He came to me with news from San Francisco, and has offered to take me back with him. I must go some day, you know.”

“I suppose you must. I couldn’t hope as you’d stay here always, Mrs. Hurtle,” said Mrs. Pipkin, starting to weep.

“Mr. Fisker will be taking other ladies with him, and I might as well join the party. We shall start on the first of September.” As this was said about the middle of August there was still some remnant of comfort for poor Mrs. Pipkin. A fortnight gained was something. Mrs. Hurtle added, with her hand on the door, “By-the-bye, Mrs. Pipkin, I expect Mr. Montague to call tomorrow at eleven. Just show him up when he comes.”

“Mr. Montague – oh! Of course, Mrs. Hurtle.”

On the following morning Mrs. Hurtle dressed herself with more than her usual simplicity, but certainly no less than her usual care, and sat at her desk, although she was too disturbed in her mind to work.

She knew that she had been wrong even to desire to see him. She had forgiven him, and had seen the girl, and what more was to be said? She had not planned what she would now say to him.

Then came the knock at the door. Her heart leaped within her, and she made a last great effort to be tranquil. She heard the steps on the stairs, and then the door was opened and Mr. Montague was announced.

"I thought you would come and see me once again before I went," said Mrs. Hurtle, putting out her hand to greet him. "I hope it has not been a trouble to you."

"I should not have dared to come, had you not asked me. You know that."

"I know nothing of the kind; but as you are here we will not quarrel about it. Has Miss Carbury pardoned you yet?"

"We are friends, if you mean that."

"Of course you are friends. She only wanted to have somebody to tell her that you had been maligned. She was ready to believe anyone who would say a good word for you."

"Did you say a good word for me?"

"Well; no," replied Mrs. Hurtle. "What could I say that was good? I explained to her how very badly you had behaved to me. I let her know that from the moment you had seen her, you had thrown me to the winds."

"It was not so, my friend."

"What did that matter? I could not make her understand during one short and rather agonizing interview how you had allowed yourself to be talked out of your love for me by English propriety even before you had seen her beautiful eyes. But I did tell her what a trouble I had been to you; how you would have shirked me if you could!"

"Winifrid, that is untrue."

"That wretched journey to Lowestoft was the great crime. Mr. Roger Carbury, who is poison to me—"

"You do not know him. He never said a word to her of our being there."

"Who did then? But what matters? She knew it; and, as the only means of whitewashing you in her eyes, I told her how cruel and heartless you had been to me. The baser your conduct had been to me, the truer you were in her eyes. Do I not deserve some thanks? I abased myself in the dust. I knew that she would be triumphant and contented. I told her on your behalf how I had been ground to pieces under your chariot wheels. And now you have not a word of thanks to give me!"

"Every word you say is a dagger."

"Those are mere scratches that I make. Where am I to find a surgeon who can put together my crushed bones? Daggers, indeed! Why have I not thrust one into your heart?" She gazed at him. "Paul, when you go from me to her, you will be happy. But where am I to go for happiness and joy?"

"I wish I could say a word to comfort you."

"You cannot. I never expect comfort again. But, Paul, I will not be cruel to the end. I will tell you all that I know of my concerns, even though it may justify your treatment of me. He is not dead."

"You mean Mr. Hurtle."

"Whom else should I mean? And he says that our divorce was no divorce. Mr. Fisker came here to me with the news. Though he is not a man whom I specially love, I shall return with him to San Francisco. He is taking Madame Melmotte with him, and Melmotte's daughter."

"They say that Fisker will marry Miss Melmotte."

"Why should I object to that? But it will suit me to have friends when I am back in California."

"I hope they will be kind to you," said Paul.

"No; but I will be kind to them. I have conquered others by being kind, but I have never had much kindness myself. Did I not conquer you, sir, by being gentle and gracious? Ah, how kind I was to that poor Hurtle, till he lost himself in drink! And then, Paul, I used to think of better, softer people; and when I met you, I said that my dreams should come true. I did not dare to tell you all the truth. I know I was wrong. Well; I suppose you had better say good-bye to me."

"God bless you, Winifrid!" he said, putting out his hand.

"But he won't. Why should he? I cannot do good. If you would come back to me I should care nothing for that girl's misery. Look here; will you have this back?" She took out a small miniature portrait of himself which he had given her in New York.

"If you wish it I will."

"I would not part with it for all the gold in California. While I live it shall be next my heart. Having once said that I love you, I shall not contradict myself because you have deserted me. Paul, I have loved you, and do love you – oh, with my very heart of hearts." So speaking she threw herself into his arms and covered his face with kisses. "For one moment you shall not banish me. Oh, Paul, my love – my love!"

All this to him was simply agony. He did not want to see her raging like a tigress, as he had thought she might; but he would have preferred a moderate resentment to this flood of tenderness. Of course he stood with his arm round her waist, and of course he returned her caresses; but he did it with such stiff constraint that she felt how chill they were.

"There," she said, smiling through her bitter tears; "you are released now. If I have annoyed you, you must forgive me."

"No; but you cut me to the heart."

"When two persons have made fools of themselves as we have, there must I suppose be some punishment. It is better that you should not come to me again. Good-bye."

He took her hand, and stood for a moment looking at her. Then he tried to pull her towards him as though he would again kiss her. But she repulsed him, smiling the while.

"No, sir; no; never again." She recovered her hand and stood apart from him. "Good-bye, Paul; and now go." He left the room without a word.

She stood still as she listened to his step down the stairs and the opening and closing of the door. She stood for a moment with her arms stretched out, and then fell prone upon the floor. She had spoken the truth when she said that she had loved him with all her heart.

But that evening she bade Mrs. Pipkin drink tea with her, and was more gracious than ever. When the curious landlady asked about Mr. Montague, Mrs. Hurtle seemed to speak without any great pain. They had put their heads together, she said, and had found that the marriage would not be suitable. Each of them preferred their own country, and so they had agreed to part.

During the next fortnight Mrs. Hurtle seemed to take delight in doing all in her power for Mrs. Pipkin and her family. She gave toys to the children, and bestowed upon Mrs. Pipkin a new carpet for the drawing-room. Then Mr. Fisker came and took her away with him to America; and Mrs. Pipkin was left desolate but grateful.

“They tell bad things about them Americans,” she said to a friend. “But I only wish Providence would send me another lodger like the one I have lost. She had that good nature about her she liked to see the bairns eating pudding just as if they was her own.”

I think Mrs. Pipkin was right, and that Mrs. Hurtle, with all her faults, was a good-natured woman.



Chapter 98 Marie Melmotte's Fate

In the meantime Marie Melmotte was living with Madame Melmotte in the Hampstead lodgings, and was taking quite a new look at the world. Fisker had become her devoted servant in terms of her material interests. He had proved that she was the undoubted owner of the money which her father had made over to her. She had now become an excellent woman of business, and was making full use of Mr. Fisker's services. To do him justice, he kept nothing back from her which he learned, probably feeling that he might best achieve success in his project by honesty.

"She's her father's own daughter," he said one day to Croll in Abchurch Lane; for Croll had returned to the daughter's service, and was to go with her and Madame Melmotte to New York.

At first things did not arrange themselves pleasantly between Madame Melmotte and Marie. The reader will perhaps remember that they were not related by blood. Marie was alone in the world, absolutely without a relation, not knowing her mother's name – or even her father's true name. In the various biographies of the great man which were published within a fortnight of his death, various accounts were given as to his early history. The general opinion seemed to be that his father had been a noted coiner in New York, an Irishman of the name of Melmody.

But Marie was the undoubted owner of the money – a fact which was beyond the comprehension of Madame Melmotte. Croll explained it to her a dozen times, but quite in vain. However, her heart was softened by Marie's surrender of the jewels which had been saved. Madame Melmotte thus was in possession of a small treasure of her own.

Madame Melmotte was told that they were to sail for New York on the 3rd of September. But nothing more was told her. She did not know whether Marie was affianced to Hamilton Fisker; and she felt herself injured by being left in the dark. She thought Fisker was a designing man, and trusted herself entirely to Croll.

Fisker was, of course, going on to San Francisco. Marie also had talked of going there. But Madame Melmotte was disposed to prefer New York as a residence. Why should she drag herself across the continent to California? Herr Croll had declared his purpose of remaining in New York. Then it occurred to the lady that, as Melmotte was a name which might be too well known in New York, and which it therefore might be wise to change, Croll would do as well as any other. She and Herr Croll had known each other for a great many years. Croll had some money saved, and she had her jewels. So she smiled upon Croll, and whispered to him; and Croll understood her.

But she needed to know what Marie intended to do.

"My dear," she said one day, "are you going to be married to Mr. Fisker?"

"What makes you ask that?"

"It is important I should know. Where am I to live? What am I to do? Why cannot you tell me?"

"Because I do not know. When I know I will tell you."

And this was true. She did not know. It certainly was not Fisker's fault, for he had asked her often enough. But Marie had now been wooed so many times that the romance of the thing was worn and damaged. She had chosen Sir Felix as her idol, modelled on the books she had read, but she was not now in love with Sir Felix Carbury. Then she had as it were relapsed into the hands of Lord Nidderdale, and felt that he would probably be as good as any other. She had almost learned to like him when the tragedy came, and he had deserted her. She had not been at all angry or bitter. Should she ever meet him again she would shake hands with him and smile. But all this had not made her much in love with matrimony generally. She had over a hundred thousand pounds of her own, and knew that she could do as she pleased with her wealth.

In what way would she shape her life, if she decided to remain her own mistress? Were she to refuse Fisker, how should she begin? If he were banished, her only remaining friends would be her father's widow and Herr Croll. She already guessed Madame Melmotte's purpose in reference to Croll, and did not wish to live with them. Nor could she think it would be pleasant to live alone in perfect independence.

As to Fisker himself – she certainly liked him. He was not beautiful like Felix Carbury, nor had he the easy good-humour of Lord Nidderdale. But he told her that he had a big house at San Francisco, and she certainly desired to live in a big house. He represented himself as a thriving man, and she calculated that he certainly had commercial importance. She had learned that, in the United States, a married woman has greater power over her own money than in England, and this information acted strongly in Fisker's favour. On consideration, she was inclined to think that she would do better in the world as Mrs. Fisker than as Marie Melmotte – if she could see her way clearly in the matter of her own money.

"I have got excellent berths," Fisker said to her one morning at Hampstead, when Madame Melmotte was not present. "There is a cabin for Madame Melmotte and the maid, and a cabin for you. Everything will be comfortable. And there is another lady going, Mrs. Hurtle, whom I think you will like."

"Has she a husband?"

"Well, yes; but you had better not mention him. There is a story I shall tell some day. But you may be sure I should not ask you to associate with anyone you ought not to know."

"Oh, I can take care of myself."

"No doubt, Miss Melmotte. But I meant that I should not introduce a lady whom I hope to make my own lady to any lady whom a lady oughtn't to know. I hope I make myself understood, Miss Melmotte."

"Quite."

"And perhaps I may go on to say that if I could go on board that ship as your accepted lover, I could do a deal more to make you comfortable than just as a mere friend, Miss Melmotte. You can't doubt my heart."

"I don't see why not. I think gentlemen's hearts are things very much to be doubted."

"Miss Melmotte, your experiences have been drawn from this effete and stone-cold country in which passion is allowed no sway. On those golden shores which the Pacific washes, man is still true, and woman is still tender."

"Perhaps I'd better wait and see, Mr. Fisker."

But this was not Mr. Fisker's view of the case. There might be other men desirous of being true on those golden shores. "But you would enter San

Francisco, Miss Melmotte, under much better auspices as a married lady or as a lady just going to be married.”

“Ain’t single ladies much thought of in California?”

“It isn’t that. Come, Miss Melmotte, you know what I mean. Let us go in for life together. We’ve both done uncommon well. I’m spending 30,000 dollars in my own house. You’ll see it all. And I shouldn’t be able to touch a dollar of your money. It would be such a triumph to go into Frisco as man and wife.”

“I shouldn’t think of being married till I had been there a while and looked about me.”

“And seen the house! I know you’ll like the house. But if we were engaged, I could do everything for you. Oh, Miss Melmotte, I do admire you so much!”

“I’ll tell you how it must be then,” she said.

“How shall it be?” He put his arm round her waist.

“Not like that, Mr. Fisker,” she said, withdrawing herself. “It shall be in this way. You may consider yourself engaged to me.”

“I’m the happiest man on this continent,” he said.

“But if I find when I get to San Francisco anything to induce me to change my mind, I shall change it. I like you very well, but I’m not going to take a leap in the dark, and I’m not going to marry a pig in a poke.”

“There you’re quite right,” he said.

“We’ll tell people we’re engaged, but if I don’t like it when I get to Frisco, as you call it, all the ropes in California shan’t make me do it. Well; you may give me a kiss now if you care to.”

On the 3rd of September Madame Melmotte, Marie, Mrs. Hurtle, Hamilton Fisker, and Herr Croll left Liverpool for New York; and the three ladies were determined that they would never return to England. The writer may so far look forward as to declare that Marie Melmotte did become Mrs. Fisker very soon after her arrival at San Francisco.



Chapter 99

Lady Carbury and Mr. Broune

When Sir Felix Carbury declared to his friends at the Beargarden that he intended to travel abroad with a clergyman, he was, for once, not lying. He was indeed going to Germany for the next twelve months. The Bishop of London had recently decided that a small commercial town in north-eastern Prussia was in need of a minister. The income suggested was very small; but the *Morning Breakfast Table* interested itself in the matter, and appealed for subscriptions so successfully that it at last devolved upon Mr. Broune to appoint the clergyman.

And so the Rev. Septimus Blake, who took the post, was also induced to undertake the charge of Sir Felix Carbury for a further payment. Mr. Broune gave Mr. Blake much counsel about the management of the baronet, who should see as much as possible of German life at modest expense; and Mr. Broune emphasised that the clergyman should on no account give Sir Felix the means of returning home early.

Lady Carbury had at first opposed the scheme. She could not endure the idea of driving her son into exile. But Mr. Broune was very obstinate, and, she thought, hard-hearted.

“What is to be the end of it then?” he said to her, almost in anger. For in those days Mr. Broune no longer squeezed her hand and looked into her eyes. His manner had become so different that she regarded him as quite another person. “Do you mean to let him eat up everything you have to your last shilling?”

“Oh, my friend, do not say such horrid things.”

“I have to. What hardship will there be in his living for twelve months with a clergyman in Prussia? What can he do better?”

“If he could only be married!”

“Married! Why should any girl with money throw herself away upon him? Lady Carbury, if you keep him here you will help to ruin him, and will certainly ruin yourself. Let him go.”

She was forced to yield. And Mr. Broune was equally firm in persuading Sir Felix to start upon his travels.

“Your mother,” said Mr. Broune, “will not beggar herself to indulge you. She cannot make you go to Germany, of course. But she can turn you out of her house, and, unless you go, she will do so. If you go, £175 a year will be paid for your maintenance; but if you remain in England you will not get a shilling.”

Felix had no money. No tradesman would give him credit, and his clothes were becoming rusty. There was no prospect of amusement during the coming months; and he thought that any change must be for the better.

He assented, therefore, and was duly introduced to the Rev. Septimus Blake. Before the end of August Sir Felix, with Mr. and Mrs. Blake and the young Blakes, had embarked from Hull for Hamburg – having extracted at the very hour of parting a last five-pound note from his foolish mother.

“It will be just enough to bring him home,” said Mr. Broune with angry energy when he was told of this. But Lady Carbury assured him that Felix would have spent the sum long before they reached their destination.

“Then why the deuce should you give it him?” said Mr. Broune, whose anxiety had been so intense that he had paid half a year’s allowance in advance to Mr. Blake out of his own pocket.

Indeed, he had paid various sums for Lady Carbury; and he came three or four evenings a week, and gave her instructions as to all that she should do.

“I wouldn’t write another novel if I were you,” he said. This was hard, as she had flattered herself that the one novel which she had written was good. Mr. Broune’s own critic had reviewed it in glowing language, although the *Evening Pulpit* had of course abused it. She looked up at him piteously but said nothing.

“I don’t think you’d find it would answer,” said Mr. Broune. “I think I would turn to something else.”

“It is so very hard to get paid for what one does.”

To this Mr. Broune made no reply; but, after sitting for a while in silence, he took his leave. On that very morning Lady Carbury had parted from her son. She was soon to part from her daughter, and she was very sad. She felt that she could hardly keep up that house in Welbeck Street for herself. What should she do? That very morning she had prided herself on her coming success as a novelist, basing her hopes on the review in the *Breakfast Table*. Now she was equally despondent. After what he had said, there would be no more praise in the *Breakfast Table* – and no novel of hers could succeed without that.

On the next day he did not come, and she sat idle and wretched. She could not interest herself in Hetta’s coming marriage. She had not ventured to confess so much to Mr. Broune, but she had in truth written the first pages of a second novel. It was impossible now to even look at what she had written. She spent the evening quite alone; for Hetta was staying down in Suffolk, with the bishop’s wife; and as she thought of her life past and her life to come, she did, perhaps, see something of the error of her ways, and did, after a fashion, repent.

It was all vanity! What real enjoyment had she found in anything? She had taught herself to believe that some day something would come which she would like; but she had never yet in truth found anything to like. It had all been in anticipation, but now even her anticipations were at an end.

The next day Mr. Broune came, and found her still very wretched.

“I shall give up this house,” she said. “I can’t afford to keep it. I don’t know where to go, but I don’t think that it much signifies. Any place will be the same to me now.”

“You wouldn’t go out of London.”

“Why not? I had better go wherever I can live cheapest.”

“I should be sorry that you should be settled where I could not see you,” said Mr. Broune plaintively.

“So shall I – very. You have been more kind to me than anybody. But what am I to do? If I stay in London I can live only in some miserable lodgings. I know you tell me I am wrong; but my idea is that I shall follow Felix wherever he goes, so that I may help him when he needs help. Hetta doesn’t want me. There is nobody else that I can do any good to.”

“I want you,” said Mr. Broune, very quietly.

“Ah – that is so kind of you. You say you want me, because I have so sadly needed you. When I go, you will simply miss an almost daily trouble, but where shall I find a friend?”

“When I said I wanted you, I meant more than that, Lady Carbury. Two or three months ago I asked you to be my wife. You declined, chiefly, I understood,

because of your son's position. That has been altered, and therefore I ask you again. I have convinced myself – not without some doubts, for you shall know all; but, still, I have convinced myself that such a marriage will make me happy, and I think, dearest, you too.”

This was said so quietly and placidly that the words hardly at first brought themselves home to her. She could not feel his offer was in earnest. It was so improbable! Her opinion of herself was so poor, she had become so sick of her own vanities and pretences, that she could not understand that he should in truth want to make her his wife.

At this moment she thought less of herself and more of Mr. Broune than either perhaps deserved. She sat silent, quite unable to look him in the face.

“Well,” he said; “what do you think?”

The long vista of her past life appeared before her eyes. The ambition of her youth which had been taught to look only for money, the cruelty of her husband which had driven her to run from him, the further cruelty of his forgiveness when she returned; the calumny which had made her miserable; then her attempts at life in London, her literary successes and failures, and the wretchedness of her son's career – there had never been happiness, or even comfort, in any of it. Even when her smiles had been sweetest her heart had been heaviest. Could it be that now at last real peace should be within her reach?

Then she remembered that first attempted kiss, when she had told herself that the man was a susceptible old goose. She could not quite understand whether she had been right then, and that the man's feelings, and even nature had since changed – or whether he had really loved her from first to last.

“There is so much against me,” she said. “And I have become so poor!”

“I am not proposing to marry you for your money. Luckily it is not necessary that I should do so.”

“And then I seem to have fallen through in everything. I don't know what I've got to give in return for all that you offer me.”

“Yourself,” he said, stretching out his right hand to her. She found herself compelled to put her own, very slowly, into it. Then he drew her towards him, and in a moment she was kneeling at his feet, with her face buried on his knees. Considering their ages perhaps we must say that their attitude was awkward. But Age is not ashamed of feeling passion – it is only the public display of it which Age regrets.

Little more was said between them. As he went down to his office he told himself that he had done the best, not only for her but for himself also. And yet I think that she had won him more thoroughly by her former refusal than by any other virtue.

She, as she sat alone late into the night, underwent a reversal of spirit. That morning the world had been a perfect blank to her. Now everything was rose-coloured. This man, who had given her such proofs of his affection and truth, was one of the considerable ones of the world. Was it not a career enough for any woman to be the wife of such a man, and to shine with his reflected glory?

Whether her hopes were realised, these pages cannot tell; but before winter was over, Lady Carbury became Mrs. Broune. The house in Welbeck Street was kept, and Mrs. Broune's Tuesday evenings were much more regarded by the literary world than had been those of Lady Carbury.



Chapter 100 Down in Suffolk

It need hardly be said that Paul Montague was not long in visiting Hetta after seeing Roger Carbury. Early on the following morning he was once more in Welbeck Street; and though at first Lady Carbury kept up her opposition, she did it so weakly as to throw very little difficulty in his way. Hetta understood that she need fear nothing, now that Roger was on her side.

“I don’t know what you mean to live on,” Lady Carbury said plaintively. Paul made some vague allusion to his final arrangements with the house of Fisker, Montague, and Montague.

“I don’t see anything like an income,” said Lady Carbury; “but I suppose Roger will make it right. He takes everything upon himself now, it seems.” But this was before the halcyon day of Mr. Broune’s second offer.

It was decided that the marriage was to be the following spring. When this was arranged Roger Carbury conceived the idea that it would be well that Hetta should pass the autumn in Suffolk, so that she might get used to him in the capacity which he now aspired to fill. With that object he induced Mrs. Yeld, the Bishop’s wife, to invite Hetta down to the Bishop’s palace; and Hetta accepted the invitation.

Roger Carbury had undergone a fierce inward contest before he yielded to a recognition of the lovers. Two convictions had been strong in his mind: firstly, that he would be a fitter husband for the girl than Paul Montague, and secondly, that Paul had so ill-treated him that forgiveness would be unmanly. For Roger did not think that an injury should be forgiven unless the man who did the injury repented of it. He felt bound after some fashion to have Paul put into prison; to bring him before a jury, and to get a verdict against him, so that some sentence of punishment might be at least pronounced. How then could he yield?

And Paul Montague had shown himself to be very weak in regard to women. No doubt it was true that Mrs. Hurtle’s appearance in England had been distressing to him. But still he had gone down with her to Lowestoft as her lover, and, to Roger’s thinking, a man who could do that was quite unfit to be the husband of Hetta Carbury. Although he would himself tell no tales, he still felt that Hetta ought to know the truth, and to be induced by that knowledge to reject Paul Montague.

But then over these convictions there came a third, equally strong, which told him that the girl loved Montague and did not love *him*, and that if he loved the girl it was his duty as a man to prove his love by doing what he could to make her happy. As he walked up and down by the moat, with his hands clasped behind his back, mile after mile, he schooled himself to feel that that was his duty. What did love mean if not that? What was devotion if a man would not sacrifice himself on behalf of the beloved one?

So, by degrees, he resolved that the thing must be done. Montague was not all bad. He might become good in good hands. What right had he, Roger, to think that he could judge the man’s fitness better than the girl herself? And so, when many many miles had been walked, he succeeded in conquering his own heart –

though in conquering it he crushed it – and brought himself to the resolve that his life should be devoted to making Mrs. Paul Montague a happy woman.

When he had accomplished that task, he was, I think, more at ease and less troubled in his spirit. The sort of happiness which he had once pictured to himself would certainly never be his. He was quite sure that he would never marry, nor have a child of his own. But if he could induce these people to live at Carbury for at least part of the year, so that there should be some life in the place, he thought that he could awaken himself again, and take an interest in the property. But first he must learn to regard himself as an old man, who had let his life pass by, and must devote himself to making happy the homes of others.

When he asked the Bishop's wife to invite Hetta to stay, Roger wished to teach her to regard Suffolk as the county in which she was to find her home. The day before she came he was over at the Bishop's palace, talking about Hetta to the only friend to whom he had looked for sympathy in his trouble.

"As to settling your property on her or her children," said the Bishop, "it is quite out of the question. Your lawyer would not allow it. Where would you be if you were to marry?"

"I shall never marry."

"Very likely not – but yet you may. How is a man of your age to be certain? You can make your will, doing as you please with your property; and the will, when made, can be revoked."

"I think you hardly understand what I feel," said Roger. "I wish to act exactly as I would do if she were my daughter, and as if her son, if she had one, would be my natural heir."

"But even if she were your daughter, her son wouldn't be your natural heir as long as there was a chance that you might have a son of your own. A man should never put power which properly belongs to him out of his own hands. I think very highly of your cousin. But it is only human nature to suppose that the fact that your property is still at your own disposal should produce a more complete observance of your wishes."

"I do not believe it in the least, my lord," said Roger somewhat angrily.

"That is because you are so carried away by enthusiasm as to ignore the ordinary rules of life. There are not, perhaps, many fathers who have Regans and Gonerils for their daughters; but there are very many who may take a lesson from the folly of King Lear. 'Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown,' the fool said to him, 'when thou gav'st thy golden one away.'"

The Bishop succeeded in so far as Roger abandoned the idea of settling his property on Paul Montague's children. But he was still resolute in his determination to make his own interests subordinate to Hetta's. When he came over, two days afterwards, to see her, he found her in the garden, and walked there with her for a couple of hours.

"I hope all our troubles are over now," he said, smiling.

"You mean about Felix," said Hetta, "and mamma?"

"No, indeed. As to Felix, I think that Lady Carbury has done the best thing in her power. No doubt she has been advised by Mr. Broune, who seems to be a prudent man. And I hope your mother may now be comfortable. But I was not alluding to them. I was thinking of you – and of myself."

"I hope that you will never have any troubles."

"I have had troubles. I mean to speak very freely to you now, dear. I was nearly upset – what I suppose people call broken-hearted – when I was assured

that you would never become my wife. I ought not to have allowed myself to get into such a frame of mind. I should have known that I was too old to have a chance.”

“Oh, Roger, it was not that.”

“Well – that and other things. I should have got over my misery quicker. I should have been stronger. After all, though love is a wonderful incident in a man’s life, it is not that only that he is here for. I have duties marked out for me. But I have conquered my regrets, and I can safely say that I look forward to your presence at Carbury as the source of all my future happiness. I will make Mr. Montague welcome as though he were my brother, and you as though you were my daughter. Please regard me as your best and closest friend, on whom you have the strongest right to depend, of all – except your husband.”

“There is no teaching necessary for that,” she said.

“As a daughter leans on a father I would have you lean on me, Hetta. You will soon come to find that I am very old. I already feel myself to be removed from everything that is young and foolish.”

“You never were foolish.”

“Nor young either, I sometimes think. But now you must promise to do all you can to induce Mr. Montague to make Carbury his residence.”

“We have no plans as yet, Roger.”

“Then it will be so much the easier. Of course you will be married at Carbury?”

“What will mamma say?”

“She will come here, and I am sure will enjoy it. Then, after that, let this be your home – so that you should learn to care about and love the place. It will be your home really, you know, one of these days. You will have to be Squire of Carbury yourself when I am gone, till you have a son old enough to fill that exalted position.” With all his good-will to them both, he could not bring himself to say that Paul Montague should be Squire of Carbury.

“Oh, Roger, please do not talk like that.”

“But it is necessary, my dear. I want you to know my wishes, and, if possible, I would learn what yours are. Of course, I do not wish to dictate to you – and I could not dictate to Mr. Montague.”

“Pray, do not call him Mr. Montague.”

“Well – to Paul then. There goes the last of my anger.” He threw his hands up as though he were scattering his indignation to the air. “I would not dictate to either of you, but it is right that you should know that I hold my property as steward for you, and that I fervently hope that you will both share the interest which I take in the matter. It is the only payment which you and he can make me for my trouble.”

“But Felix, Roger!”

“To a sister,” he said very solemnly, “I will not say a word against her brother; but on that subject I must make my own judgment. In handing on a family property – even one so small as mine – a man owes a duty to those who live on his land, and he owes a duty to his country. And, though it may seem fantastic to say so, I think he owes a duty to his ancestors. These things are to me very holy. I am convinced that by the course I am taking I shall best perform these duties. I do not think, Hetta, that we need say any more about that.”

He then kissed her as he would have kissed a daughter, left her and rode home.

Soon after that, Paul Montague came down to Carbury, and the same thing was said to him, though in a much less solemn manner. Paul was received quite in the old way. Having declared that he would throw all anger behind him, Roger rigidly kept his promise, whatever the cost to his own feelings. Indeed he made a solemn resolution that to Paul he would never again speak of Hetta as the girl whom he himself had loved, though he looked forward to a time, probably many years hence, when he might perhaps remind her of his fidelity. But he spoke much of the land and tenants and labourers, of his own farm, of the amount of the income, and of the necessity of a household budget.

When the spring came round, Hetta and Paul were married by the Bishop at the parish church of Carbury, and Roger Carbury gave away the bride. All those who saw the ceremony declared that the squire had not seemed to be so happy for many a long year. John Crumb, who was there with his wife, loudly declared that the wedding was almost as good fun as his own.

“John, what a fool you are!” Ruby said.

“Yes, I be,” said John, “but not such a fool as to a’ missed a having o’ you.”

“No, John; I was the fool then,” said Ruby.

“We’ll see about that when the bairn’s born,” said John, equally loudly.

Then Ruby held her tongue.

Mr. and Mrs. Broune were also at Carbury, showing by their presence that all family feuds were at an end. Sir Felix was not there. Happily up to this time, Mr. Septimus Blake had continued to keep that gentleman in the German town – no doubt not without considerable trouble to himself.

THE END



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Abridgements are by Emma Laybourn MA PGCE.

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