DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XV.—(Continued).

Jim shakes his head, while a rather deeper shade than habitually lies upon it settles on his careworn forehead. It is perfectly true that he knows nothing of young Byng's engagement, but yet he has a shrewd suspicion to what quarter of the town that engagement will lead him.

To Mrs. Byng, who is of almost as enjoying a nature as her son, and whose spirits have been raised to a pitch even higher than their usual one, by the disproof of her presentiment, it is all one where she goes, so that she is taken somewhere, to see something. They stare up at the big young David, and stand before Fra Angelico's ineffably happy Paradiso, which yet brings the tears to the looker's eyes, perhaps out of sheer envy of the little blissful sanits dancing and frolicking so gaily, or pacing so softly in the assured joy of the heavenly country. They look at Botticelli's "Spring," fantastic wanton, with her wildly flowered gown, and her lapful of roses. The room in which she and her joyous mates stand, with their odd smiles, is one of the smaller of the gallery. It is rather a narrow one, and has an open window, giving upon a little court, where, in a neglected garden-close, wallflowers are growing, and sending in their familiar perfume. The sweet Francia saints in the picture hung on the wall directly opposite, and the rapt Madonna, must surely smell them. If they do not, it must be because a young couple, he and she, who are leaning out in their eagerness to enjoy it, have intercepted all the homely fragrance. Jim's eyes are still on the "Spring," and he is thinking half-absently how little kinship she has with the goitered green women, whom his nineteenth century disciples present to the confiding British public as representatives of Sandro Bitticelli's manner, when his attention is diverted by hearing the voice of Mrs. Byng at his elbow addressing him in an excited tone:

"Why, there's Willy! Do not you see? There! leaning out of that window, and who—who is the lady whom he has with him?'

Jim looks quickly in the direction indicated, and at once recognizes a slender grey figure which to-day has not assumed its white holiday gown. Elizabeth, whom he had been pitifully picturing lying heart-struck on a sofa in the seclusion of her own little entresol, probably with lowered blinds and tear-smarting eyes, is leaning on the window-ledge with her pack to the pictures—she whom he had always credited with so delicate a sensibility for Art, with her back to the pictures, as if the live picture which Byng's eager face presents to her pleases her better. A sense of indignation at having been tricked out of his compassion—who had ever seemed to need it less than the suave little figure about whose blonde head a Tuscan sunbeam, stolen through the casement, is amorously playing—makes him forget to answer the question addressed to to him, until it is repeated in a still more urgent key.

"Who is she? Who can she be? Have not you an idea? He has not seen us! Had not we better creep quietly away? Most likely he would rather not meet me; I could not bear to make him look foolish!"

The suggestion that there can be anything calculated to put Willy to the blush in being discovered in conversation with Miss Le Marchant has the effect of giving Burgoyne rapidly back his power of speech.

"What nonsense!" he cries, almost rudely, "I wish you would not let your imagination run away with you so, and of course I know who she is, she is an—an acquaintance of mine. I—I presented Willy to her; she is Miss Le Marchant."

"Miss Le Who?" repeats the mother, eagerly; catching the name as imperfectly as we usually do a name that is unfamiliar to us, proving how much of imagination and memory must go to eke out all our hearing—"an acquaintance of yours, is she? Oh, then, of course" (drawing a long breath of relief), "she is all right."

"All right!" echoes Jim, with an unconscious snappishness of tone, greater than he would have employed in defence of the reputation of any other lady of his acquaintance, probably because, ever since the day when he stood an unwilling eavesdropper by that well on Bellosguardo, a hideous low voice had been whispering to his own sick heart that perhaps she is not "all right!" "All right! of course she is all right."

"But she is lovely!" cries Mrs. Byng, not paying much heed to the testy emphasis of her companion's asseveration, and continuing to stare at the unwitting girl; "what a dear little face! but," the alarm returning again into her voice, "is it possible that she is here alone with him? If so, of course, she is American. Oh! do not say that she is American."

"Of course she is not," answers Burgoyne, half laughing at the plaintive intensity of this last appeal; "of course she is all that there is of most English, and there is her mother, as large as life, within a yard and a half of her, there, do not you see? looking at the Ghirlandajo."

Mrs. Byng removes her eyes from the daughter, and fixes them with a scarcely less degree of interest upon the then indicated parent.

"So that is the mother, is it? a very nice-looking woman, and what beautiful white hair. Mrs. Le—— what did you say their name was? Ah! Willy has seen us, poor boy!" (laughing) "how guilty he looks! here he comes!"

And in point of fact the young man, having given a very indubitable start and said something hurriedly to his companion, is seen advancing quasi-carelessly to meet the two persons, the object of whose observation he has for some minutes so unconsciously been.

"Is not this a coincidence?" cries Mrs. Byng, with a rather nervously playful accent; "it is a coincidence, though it may not look like one! but do not be afraid; we know our places, we are not going to offer to join you!"

"What should I be afraid of?" replies the young man, the color—always as ready as a school miss' to put him to shame—mantling in his handsome smooth cheeks. "I am like the Spanish hidalgo, who never knew what fear was till he snuffed a candle with his fingers. So you and Jim are having a happy day among the pictures. Do not you like 'Spring'? I love her, though I am sure she was a real baggage!"

But this ingenious attempt to divert the current of his parent's ideas into another channel is scarcely so successful as it deserves.

"Will not you introduce me to her?" she asks eagerly, and not heeding, evidently not even hearing, the empty question contained in the last half of his speech; "does she know that I am your mother? Will not you introduce me to her?"

It seems a simple and natural request enough, and yet the young man perceptibly hesitates. He even tries to turn it off by a clumsy and entirely pointless jest.

"Introduce you to her? to whom? to 'Spring'? I am really afraid that my acquaintance with her scarcely justifies such a liberty!"

A look of surprise and of natural annoyance clouds the cheerful eagerness of Mrs. Byng's face.

"Is that a joke, dear?" she asks, with a rather vexed smile; "it is not a very good one, is it? Well, Jim, I must apply to you, then; you can have no objection to presenting me to your friends?"

"Of course not, of course not," replies he, with a stammering unreadiness, which contrasts somewhat ludicrously with the acquiescence conveyed by his words, "I shall be delighted, only——"

"Only what? Ah, here they come! they save us the trouble of going after them."

As she speaks, indeed, Mrs. Le Marchant and Elizabeth are seen nearing the little group, but it is soon apparent that this movement on their part is by no means owing to any wish or even willingness to make Mrs. Byng's acquaintance. It is indeed solely due to there being no egress from the room at that end of it where they have been standing, so that, if they wish to leave it, they must necessarily retrace their steps and pass the three persons who are so busily discussing them. They do this so quickly and with so resolute an air of not wishing to be delayed in their exit, bestowing a couple of such smileless and formal bows upon the two men, that it would have needed a much more determined obstruction than either of those gentlemen is prepared to offer to arrest their progress. In a moment they are through the doorway and out of sight. Mrs. Byng looks after them with her mouth open.

"They—they—are obliged to go home, they—they are in a great hurry!" says the younger man, observing the displeased astonishment expressed by his mother's countenance, and with a lame effort at explanation.

"So they seemed when first we caught sight of them," retorts she drily.

"They—they are not going out at all at present, they—they do not wish to make any fresh acquaintance; oh, by-the-bye, I forgot something I had to say to—I will be back in a moment!"

So saying, he shoots off in pursuit of the retreated figures, and Mrs. Byng and her escort are again left tete-a-tete.

"Are you quite sure that she is all right?" asks the lady, looking at Jim with a penetrating glance that he does not enjoy, "because, if so, why was she so determined not to know me?"

"How can I tell?" answers he, testily. "Perhaps — who knows?"—laughing unmirthfully—"perhaps she was not sure that you were all right!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"Tous les hommes se haissent naturellement. Je mets en fait que s'ils savaient exactement ce qu'ils disent, les uns des autres, il n'y aurait pas quatres amis dans le monde."

Although Mrs. Byng always speaks of Miss Wilson as "Amelia," and is acquainted with every detail of that young lady's uneventful history—thanks to a long series of direct and interested questions, addressed through a considerable number of years, to her friend Jim, as to his betrothed—she has no personal acquaintance with the latter. She is so determined, however, to repair this omission, now that so highly favorable an opportunity is presented as their common stay in the same small city, that Jim is powerless to hinder her from arranging a joint expedition of the two parties—herself and her son on the one side, and Jim with his future wife and sister-in-law on the other, to Careggi, on the afternoon of the same day as had witnessed her abortive attempt to add Elizabeth Le Marchant and her mother to the list of her acquaintances.

Amelia is, for a wonder, free from home claims, Sybilla being more than usually bright, a kind friend having lately provided her with a number of the Lancet, containing a detailed account of an operation, which it seems not over-sanguine to expect she may herself be able to undergo. We all have our Blue Roses, and to "undergo operation," as she technically phrases it, is Sybilla Wilson's Blue Rose. Cecilia is likewise disengaged. The latter circumstance is matter for not unmixed rejoicing to Jim, Cecilia's future connection with himself being too close for him to relish the thought of her somewhat pronounced wooing of Byng being exposed in all its naivete to the clear if good-humored eyes of Byng's mother. But in this he wrongs Cecilia. The garden-party at the villa of Bellosguardo had proved to her that the fruit is hung too high for her fingers to reach, and that philosophy, which had enabled her genuinely to relish the wedding-cake of the man who had jilted her, now teaches her to lay to heart the sarcastic advice offered by Jim, to look at the young man as poor women look at diamonds. Beyond one or two trifling gallantries, for which no one can judge her harshly, she leaves him alone, even though out of good-nature, and from inveterate force of habit, he gives her several openings to make love to him.

The day is one of even Italy's best, an air as soft as feathers, and full of April odors—a bright gay sun. The vines are rushing into leaf; they that ten days ago looked such hopeless sticks; little juicy leaves uncurling and spreading on each, and the mulberry trees, round which they twine, are rushing out too, at the triumphant call of the spring.

The party being of the unmanageable number of five, has to be divided between two fiacres, whereof Mrs. Byng, in pursuance of her determination to know Amelia, insists upon occupying the first in tete-a-tete with Miss Wilson, while Cecilia and the two men fill the other. The latter makes but a silent load. Byng is, for him, out of spirits, and finding that Cecilia has virtually abandoned her suit, is glad to lapse into his own reflections. His example is followed by Jim, whose temper is ruffled by being again obliged to defer the quest he is still feverishly anxious to pursue, despite the shock of the morning's meeting at the Academia.

They reach the villa, and leave their vehicles, glad to think that two of the perennially tired Florentine cab-horses will have a pause of rest, and, having shaken off a tiresome would-be laquais de place, desirous to embitter for them the sweet day and place, they stray at will through the garden among the clipped laurels, the cypresses, the gorgeous red rhododendrons, while beds of mignonette send forth such a steady wave of poignant sweetness as makes the sense of ache with ecstasy of pleasure; and over the conservatory hangs a wistaria so old, so magnificent, with such a niagara of giant flower bunches, as takes an English breath away. They go over the villa itself, pass through the room, and by the bed where Lorenzo, with the grotesque grim face, Lorenzo the Magnificent, gave his last sigh. It would make death even more difficult to face than he is already, if one thought one should have to meet him under such a catafalque.

As they issue out again from the house's shadow into the sun-drenched garden, Mrs. Byng joins Burgoyne, who is walking a little apart.

"I like Amelia," she says, confidentially, "such a nice pillowy sort of woman; not too clever, and oh, Jim, poor soul, how fond she is of you!"

It must always be pleasant to hear that the one absolutely good thing which this life has to offer is lavishly heaped upon us by the person with whom we are to pass that life, and perhaps pleasure is the emotion evidenced by the silent writhe with which Jim receives this piece of information.

"Not, of course, that she told me in so many words," continues his friend, perceiving that her speech is received in a silence that may mean disapproval of any intrusion into the sanctuary of his affections; "but one can see with half an eye; poor Amelia, she beamed all over when I said one or two little civil things about you! She worships the very ground you tread on!"

He writhes again. "I hope that is one of your figures of speech," he answers, constrainedly.

The not unnatural result of the tone in which he utters this sentence, no less than the words themselves, is to quench the fire of Mrs. Byng's benevolent eulogies, and, as she cannot at once hit upon another topic, and is by no means sure that her countenance does not betray the rather snubbed dismay produced by the reception of her amenities, she is not sorry when Jim presently leaves her. Being, however, of a very sanguine disposition, and seeing him a little later sitting peacefully on a garden-seat beside his fiancee, she hopes that her words, though not very handsomely received at the time, may bear fruit later for Amelia's benefit. "And he always was very undemonstrative," she adds to herself consolatorily. "Nobody would have guessed that he was delighted to see me this morning, and yet, of course, he was."

The sun is growing visibly lower, and the Ave Maria comes ringing solemnly from the city. The seat to which Jim has somewhat remorsefully led his lady-love is a stone bench, shaded by a honeysuckle bower, close to a fountain. The fountain is not playing now; but round about it first a marten wheels, dipping in the water the end of her fleet wings, then a little bat prematurely flits, for it is still broad daylight. Broad indeed and bounteous is the daylight of Italy. Around them is the lush unmown grass; full of homely field-flowers, butter-cups, catch-flies, daisies, ragged robin, while from some bush near by a nightingale is pouring out all the infinite variety of her ravishing song. She says so many different things that one can never feel sure that one has heard all that she has to say. Jim leans back listening, with his hands behind his head, steeped in a half-voluptuous sadness. He is oppressed by the thought of Amelia's great love. Is the nightingale's splendid eloquence really the voice of the poor dumb passion beside him, lent to Amelia to plead her cause? The high-flown poetry of the idea fills his heart with an imaginative yearning kindness towards her. He is in the act of turning to face her, with a more lover-like speech on his lips than has hovered there for years, when Amelia herself anticipates him.

(To be continued).

CHARACTER FROM LIPS.

Facts Which Will Send Interested and Curious to Their Mirrors.

The lower lip is the most important part of the mouth as an indicator of character. According to its fulness, freshness in appearance and width it indicates benevolence and liberality. A pale, shrivelled, and narrow lower lip reveals a decided want of these qualities.

There are thick under lips which so hang that they become almost a disfigurement, and these, as well as looking ugly, denote indolence and a love of luxury. Taking the opposite extreme, however, it is not desirable to have pronounced thin lips, for when the outline of the lip is narrow, and united to a mouth with a sinister expression, there is indicated a great deficiency of natural kindness in their owner, a want of warmth and but little capacity to love. Well defined and developed lips, the outlines of which are rounded out, are admired for their beauty and moral worth, being, as they are, tokens of a tender-hearted, amiable, and sympathetic disposition.

Well-closed lips are a sign of discretion. If the upper one is long, in addition to being pressed down firmly upon the lower one, both mental and physical powers appertain to their owner. When the upper lip is very short and the middle teeth of the top row are constantly exposed, a fondness for praise is betrayed.

Frequently another type of mouth is seen, one in which the corners of the mouth descend, indicating a person of a despondent disposition, prone to dwell overmuch upon the serious side of life. But when the corners turn up in the form of a Cupid's bow, their possessor is of a bright and cheerful nature, always finding a silver lining to every cloud and good in everything.

DEATH INSTEAD OF SECRET.

Alchemist and His Family Were Blown to Pieces.

M. Capel, a distinguished chemist and alchemist, of Paris, France, who has long been trying to manufacture gold, brought about the death of himself and his entire family the other night, just when he believed he had solved the golden riddle.

M. Capel had recently hinted to several people that he had made an important discovery in his experiments at gold production, and he wrote to his brother saying that he believed that he was on the way toward solving the problem.

He called his wife and three children into his laboratory at Pomet and showed them what appeared to be a nugget of gold.

He was explaining to them the process he had used, when he inadvertently pushed a basin containing some gunpowder too near the lamp. A terrific explosion followed, blowing up the entire laboratory and leaving it a heap of ruins.

Neighbors rushed to the rescue, and with great difficulty were able to recover the shattered bodies of the alchemist, his wife and three children. The wife was still able to speak, but she died on her way to the hospital. The alchemist has left no trace of his discovery.

TRIED AND FOUND WANTING.

"I see, you have no faith in Mme. De Skynn's wrinkle and wart eradicator?"

"No; I tried it on a large pickle and it failed absolutely."

THE GREATEST COMMON DIVISOR.

Hobbs—I understand that you've had an addition to your family.

Dobbs—More like a multiplication—its triplets.

ANYTHING HE COULD BANK.

"Doctor, how can I ever repay you for your kindness to me?"

"Doesn't matter, old man. Check, money order or cash."

PRUDENT.

"Don't you think you ought to tell father of our engagement, Bob?"

"Was that your father who has just come in?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think I will wait till he has had time to put his slippers on!"

HOME.

DOMESTIC RECIPES.

A Use for Stale Bread and Butter.—Spread half the slice with jam, cover with the other half, form into neat pieces, dip into batter, and fry in deep boiling fat.

Eggless Pancakes.—One quart buttermilk, add 1 teaspoon salt and 1 large teaspoon soda. Stir in wheat flour to make a rather stiff batter. Bake on a hot griddle, and serve hot with plenty of corn cob molasses.

Chocolate Caramels.—Boil together 2 lbs. granulated sugar, ¼ lb. grated chocolate, ½ pint milk and ¼ lb. butter. Cook until a little of the mixture will harden when it is dropped into cold water. Flavor with vanilla. Pour into a buttered pan and mark into squares.

Almond Filling for Cake. — Chop enough blanched almonds to make two-thirds of a cup, add the same amount of chopped raisins, mix and spread between layers of warm cake. Ice the top and cover with blanched almonds cut in strips and stuck in like pins all slanting one way.

Stuffed Potatoes.—Cut a piece the size of a dollar from slightly underdone baked potatoes of a uniform size; scoop out the inside and prepare this as for potato souffle. Refill the skins, insert in the top of each a very thin slice of bacon fried crisp and rolled; set in the oven long enough for the potato souffle to puff and color a light brown. The bacon may be rolled while hot, but if left until it cools it crisps and breaks.

Charlotte Russe.—Make a custard of the yolks of two eggs, a quarter pound of sugar and a pint of new milk. Dissolve two-thirds of a box of gelatine in a half-pint of boiling water and strain into the custard. Beat the cream to a stiff froth, then stir into the custard when about blood heat. Line a bowl with lady fingers, pour in the mixture and set away to cool. This is best made in winter.

Orange Jelly.—Half a box of gelatine, a large cup of orange juice, one orange sliced thin, one lemon, two cups sugar and a pint of hot water. Dissolve the gelatine in the water, add the other ingredients, let come to a boil, and pour in a mould. Be careful to remove the seeds. Serve with whipped cream and cake.

Fruit Cookies. — Beat together three cups of brown sugar, a cup of butter, a cup of sour milk, four eggs (well beaten) one teaspoonful added in the milk, two cups of seeded and chopped raisins, one teaspoonful each of cloves and nutmeg and two of cinnamon, and flour enough to make a stiff batter. Drop from a spoon instead of trying to roll out. A cup of chopped nuts is esteemed an improvement by many.

Honey Biscuits. — Take three-quarters of a pound of dried and sifted flour, six ounces of honey, quarter of a pound of caster sugar, two ounces of citron and half an ounce of orange peel, both cut very small. Melt the sugar and honey and mix in gradually the other ingredients. Roll out the paste and cut it into small cakes of a long shape. Bake very carefully in a cool oven till crisp.

Egg Birds' Nests.—Butter four slices of toasted bread, put the whites of four eggs into one bowl and yolks in another. Add salt to the whites, and beat until stiff enough to turn the bowl upside down without spilling the eggs. Pile the beaten whites on the toasted bread, leaving a hole in the centre of each piece. Into this carefully place the yolk of an egg, put a wee bit of butter on it and bake at once to suit the taste. Serve hot.

Dutch Brisket of Beef. — Take some thin slices of bacon and cover the bottom of the stewpan, place a piece of brisket of beef weighing about seven pounds on these, and put a few more slices of bacon on the top. Add two onions, one large carrot, a bunch of herbs, five cloves, half a dozen allspice, some peppercorns, a blade of mace, and two teaspoonfuls of salt. Always cover the meat with water or stock, close the pan, and let its contents just simmer for four hours. Strain off the liquor, thicken and flavor some of it to taste for sauce, place the meat in a roasting tin, keep it basted with a little of the liquor, then boil the remainder rapidly till very much reduced, and pour it over the meat after it is placed on a hot dish. Garnish with small heads of cauliflowers and the vegetables which were stewed with the meat.

OLD NEWSPAPER USES.

It is not easy to think of anything apparently more useless than an old newspaper, torn, crumpled, and looking only fit for the fire; but as a matter of fact there are several ways in which to make use of it.

When sweeping-day comes, and there is no supply of moist tea leaves ready, an old newspaper torn up into shreds and sprinkled with water will prove an excellent substitute for collecting the dust.

When carpets are lifted and beaten it is a good plan to lay several thicknesses of newspapers underneath, either in place of or above the felt or brown paper sold for the purpose. The reason for placing the newspapers above, next to the carpet, is that printer's ink is a splendid moth-preventative.

For cleaning windows and polishing looking-glasses nothing is so good as a wad of damp newspaper pulp, followed by a vigorous polishing with a ball of dry paper rubbed soft in the hands. Unless the paper is made soft in this way it is likely to scratch the surface of the mirror.