DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XX.

There is always something in the nature of a mountain in a night that is interposed between us and either any promised pleasure or any threatened pain. In the case of pleasure, we are naturally in a hurry to scale it, in order to see how full of sunshine and flowers is the happy valley on the other side; and in the case of pain, we are all scarcely less eager to ascertain how deep is the abyss, how choking the swamp, how angry the waves that wait us beyond the dusky hill.

Burgoyne has no expectation of finding anything agreeable on the further slope of his mountain, and yet the time seems long to him, till he has climbed its crest, and slidden down its other side. Early and splendid as is the new light that takes possession of him and his shutterless bedroom, he upbraids it as a laggard; and the hours that pace by till the one appointed for the explanation of yesterday's mystery seem to him to hobble on crutches. What can Amelia have to say to him that needs such a pomp of preparation? What can have turned Amelia into a Tragedy Queen? What miracle can have made her take the imperative mood? For it was the imperative mood unquestionably which, contrary to all precedent, she had made use of when she had commanded him, most gently it is true, since, being by her nature gentle, she can do nothing ungently, to leave her. He absolutely laughs at the topsy-turviness of the idea. What can she have to say that requires so carefully selected a spot to say it in?—a spot where "it does not matter if she does break down." What, in Heaven's name, can she be going to say that inspires her with such a cold-blooded intention beforehand of breaking down?

Jim's state of mind is something that of the Baron's in "On ne badine pas avec l'amour," on hearing that his daughter's governess had been turning somersaults in a field of luzerne. "Non, en verite, non, mon ami, je n'y comprends absolument rien. Tout cela me paraît une conduite desordonnee, il est vrai, mais sans motif comme sans excuse." If she were any other woman, he should ascribe her behavior to some tiresome but passing tantrum, evoked by his delay in appearing? But in the past eight years how many hundred times has he kept her waiting? and has she ever failed to meet him with the same meek good-humor that has not had even a tinge of reproachful forgiveness in it. As she herself had said, "In all these years how often have I been angry with you?" He has been angry with her times out of mind, angry with her on a thousand unjust and unkind counts; angry with her for her slowness, her bad complexion, her want of a sense of humor; for a hundred things which she cannot help, that she would have altered—oh, how gladly—if she could! But how often has she been angry with him? In vain he searches his memory, hoping to overtake some instance of ill-humor, or even pettishness, that may make the balance between them hang a little more equal. But in vain. She has never been angry with him. And even now neither her face nor her manner—whatever else of strange and unparalleled they may have conveyed—have conveyed the idea of anger.

But if not anger, what then can be the cause that has produced a change so startling in one so little given to impulsive action or eccentricities of emotion? Can she have heard anything about him? anything to his discredit? He searches his conscience, but whether it be that that organ is not a particularly sensitive one, or that it really has no damaging facts to give up, it is silent, or almost so. He has perhaps been rather slack in his attendance upon her of late, but at her own bidding. At his visits to the Le Marchants no one could take exception, dictated as they so obviously have been by philanthropy; and his conversations with Elizabeth—how few and scant! his heart heaves a rebellious sigh at their paucity—might be proclaimed without excision at the market cross. Our thoughts are our own, and are, moreover, so safely pad-locked in our minds that he does not think it worth while to inquire whether, if his future wife could have looked in and seen the restive fancies capering saddleless and bridleless, there, she might have been justified in assuming a crouching attitude and a sorrowfully commanding manner.

He is as far as ever from solving the problem, when—for once in his life before his time at the rendezvous—he presents himself at the familiar door. It is opened to him by Amelia herself. She has often done it before, seeming to know by instinct his ring from that of any other person, but to-day the familiar action disconcerts him. He had expected to be received with a formality and pomp of woe such as yesterday had seemed to threaten; and here is Amelia looking exactly like her ordinary self, except that she is perhaps rather more carefully dressed than usual; but that may be due to the fact of her having, for the first time, assumed the fresh calico gown, which the high summer of the Italian April morning seems to justify. Whether it be due to the calico gown or not, there is an indisputable air of gala about her, and she is smiling. A revulsion of feeling comes over the man, to whom her tragic semi-swooning airs had given a wakeful night. It was a tantrum after all, then, a storm in a teacup. And now her common sense has come to the rescue, and she has seen the folly of quarrelling with her bread and butter. These reflections naturally do not translate themselves into responsive smiles on his face, but she does not seem to notice his dour looks.

"I have a proposal to make to you," she says still smiling. "Father is so well this morning, quite easy, and he has been wheeled into the sitting-room, to see Sybilla. She has been very good about him this time, and quite believes that he has been really bad."

"How good of her," comments Jim grimly; "it will be so easy and so amusing to play at having a swollen toe, would not it?"

"And so," continues Miss Wilson, wisely ignoring his fleer at her sister, "I am perfectly free, and I want you to take me somewhere, some little drive or expedition; you see," with a conciliatory glance at her own modest finery, "I counted upon your saying 'yes;' I dressed so as not to keep you waiting."

Every word of this sentence confirms Burgoyne in the idea implanted by her first address. This is her amende, and she is quite right to make it. But she would have been more right still if her conduct had not rendered it necessary.

Amelia is not the type of woman who through life will gain much by pouts. Perhaps, by-and-bye, very kindly and delicately, he may obliquely hnit this to her. But all that he says aloud is the rather stiff acquiescence conveyed in the words:

"By all means. I am quite at your service."

"And now where shall we go?" continues Amelia, shutting the door behind her and beginning to cross the hotel courtyard at his side; "that is the next thing—not to any gallery or church, I think, if you do not mind; I say such stupid things about Art, and the more I try, the stupider they are; let us go somewhere into the country—I can understand the country. I am not afraid of saying stupid things about it."

Into Burgoyne's mind comes the odious thought that he would not put it past his betroth to say stupid things even about the Tuscan landscape, but he only awaits her decision in a respectful silence while helping her into a fiacre.

"It would be a sin to be under any roof to-day but this one," she says, looking up to the immeasurable azure bridge above her head; "would you mind—could you spare time to go to Fiesole?"

His only answer is to repeat the word Fiesole to the driver, who, with the inevitable tiny poodle-shaven dog beside him, is awaiting the order as to his destination. It is but a little way to Fiesole, as we all know, but yet, as the slow hired vehicle crawls up the steep ascent, with the driver walking alongside, or even lagging behind, there would be time and opportunity to say a good deal. But Amelia says next to nothing. Perhaps the heat makes her sleepy, for it is so hot, so hot between the garden walls, where the rose hedges are beginning to show a pale flush of plenteous pink among their multitude of green buds. Young, indeed, just born as the roses are, the highway dust has already powdered them with its ash-toned white. He does not know it at the time, but those dust-filmed rosebuds have found a home in his memory from which no after-sights, however numerous, will dislodge them. They have reached the village, and left their carriage, and begun, silently still, to ascend the steep lane up which the feet of most of Europe and America have in turn climbed to see the famous view that rewards the little effort. Past the cottages, whose inmates, tranquilly sitting in their doorways, or leaning idly against their doorposts, have probably seen all that is illustrious, notorious, history-making of the day, pass pantingly. Is there a prime minister, a princess, a poet, a prima donna, of the time, that has not toiled up the steep path to the welcome rest of the bench on the high plateau, or the hillside? Jim and Amelia are certainly not likely to figure in the annals of their time, but the peasants look at them with as much or as little interest as if they were. An immortal, unless his immortality is printed on his back in letters as large as those that announce Colman's mustard to the world, has, to the vulgar, very much the air of one of themselves.

Our friends have reached the haven of the stone seat, and, thanks to the earliness of the hour, have it all to themselves, save for a trio of sunburnt women of the people, with handkerchiefs tied over their tanned heads, who tease them to buy straw hand-screens. And when they have bought a couple, and made it kindly but distinctly evident that no amount of worrying will induce them to buy any more, even these leave them in peace and descend the hill again in search of newer victims. They are alone under the sky's warm azure. Beneath their eyes spreads one of those nobly lovely spectacles that Italy and spring, hand in hand, alone can offer. To some, indeed, it may seem that the prospect from the Bellosguardo side of the valley is even more beautiful, since Fiesole, sitting so high as she does, dwarfs the opposite hills, and makes the looker lose their wavy line. They seem flat in comparison, the plain appears wider, the beloved city more distant, and does not show the same exquisite distinctness of separate tower and spire and palace. But yet such a comparison is mere carping. Who can wish for a sight more divinely suave and fair than this from the bench above Fiesole? Not a breath of smoke dares to hang about the glorious old town, dimming its lustre, and between them and it what a spread of manifest color, of more "mingled hue" than the rainbow's "purfled scarf doth show." The mossy tinted olives, twilight and ghostly, even in the dazzling radiance of this superb morning hour, with the blinding green of the young corn about their gray feet, the cypress taper-flames, the gay white houses, terrace-gardened, and, above all, the vast smile of the Tuscan heaven.

At first Amelia's muteness seems natural and grateful to Jim, as the outcome of the awe and hush that exceeding beauty breathes on the human heart, but by-and-bye, as it is prolonged beyond the limits that seem to him fit or agreeable, it begins to get on his nerves. After having so genuinely and wantonly alarmed him, has she brought him here, without any expressions of regret or remorse, simply to steep herself in a silent luxury of selfish enjoyment? After brooding resentfully on his idea for a considerable time he translates it into speech.

"I thought that you had something to say to me?"

It seems as if her soul had gone out into the sun and April-painted champagne country, and that it is only with an effort and a sigh that she fetches it home again:

"So I have."

"And how much longer am I to wait for it?"

There is no indication of any capacity for patience in his tone.

She brings her look back from the shining morning city, and fixes it wistfully upon him.

"Are you in such a hurry to hear?"

The pathetic streak in her voice, instead of conciliating, chafes him. What is the sense of this paraphernalia of preliminaries? Why not come to the point at once? If indeed there is a point—a fact of which he begins to entertain grave doubts.

"I do not know what you call hurry," he replies drily, "I have been awaiting this mysterious utterance for sixteen or seventeen hours."

Her sallow cheek takes on a pinky tinge of mortification at his accent.

"You are quite right," she answers quickly; "I have no business to keep you waiting. I meant to tell you as soon as we got here; I asked you to bring me here on purpose, only——"

"You told me that you must make the communication at some place where it would not matter if you did break down," says he, rather harshly helping her memory; "you must allow that that was not an encouraging exordium. Do you look upon this"—glancing ironically round—"as a particularly suitable place for breaking down?"

Again that pain-evidencing wave of color flows into her face. There is such an unloving mockery in his displeased voice.

"I shall not break down," she replies, forcing herself to speak with quiet composure; "you need not be afraid that I shall. I know that yesterday I was foolish enough to say the very words you quote, but I was not quite myself then; I did not quite know what I was saying; I had only just heard it."

"It? What it? Is this a new riddle? For Heaven's sake let us hear the answer to the first before we embark on any fresh one!"

"It is no riddle," replies she, her low patient tones contrasting with his exasperated ones, "nothing could be plainer; it was only that I happened to overhear something rather—rather painful—something that was not intended for me."

His angry cheek blanches as his thought flies arrow-quick to the one subject of his perrenial apprehension. Some one has been poisoning her ear with cowardly libels, or yet more dreadful truths about Elizabeth Le Marchant. For a moment or two his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth, then he says in a tone which he uselessly tries to make one of calm contempt alone:

"If you had lived longer in Florence you would know how much importance to attach to its tittle-tattle and cancans."

She shakes her head with a sorrowful obstinacy.

"This was no tittle-tattle, no cancan."

Her answer seems but to confirm him in this horrible suspicion.

"It is astonishing," he says, in a strangled voice, "how ready even the best women are to believe evil; what—what evidence have you of the truth of—of these precious stories?"

"What evidence?" she repeats, fastening her sad eyes upon him—"the evidence of my own heart. I realize now that I have known it all along."

Read by the light of his fears, this response is so enigmatic that it dawns upon him with a flash of inexpressible solace that perhaps he may be on the wrong track after all. His ideas are precipitated into such a state of confusion by this blessed possibility that he can only echo in a stupefied tone:

"Have known what all along?"

She has turned round upon the stone bench upon which they have hitherto been sitting side by side, and, as he in the eagerness of his listening has done the same thing, they are now opposite to one another, and he feels as well as sees her hungry eyes devouring his face.

"That you are sick of me," she answers, in a heart-wrung whisper, "sick to death of me—that was what she said."

It is impossible to deny that Burgoyne's first impulse is one of relief. He has been mistaken then. Elizabeth's secret is in the same state of precarious safety as her enemy's departure from Florence had left it in. His second impulse—our second impulses are mostly are best ones, equally free from the headlongness of our first, and the cold worldly wisdom of the third—is one of genuine indignation, concern, and amazement.

"What? Who said?"

"Mrs. Byng."

His stupefaction deepens.

"Mrs. Byng—Mrs. Byng told you that I was sick of you? Sick to death of you?"

"Oh, no" she cries, even her emotion giving way to her eagerness to correct this misapprehension, "she did not tell me so! How could you imagine such a thing? She is far, far too kind-hearted, she would not hurt a fly intentionally, and would be exceedingly pained if she thought I had overheard her."

He shrugs his shoulders despairingly.

"Je m'y perds! she told you, and she did not tell you; you heard, and you did not hear."

"I am telling it very stupidly, I know," she says, apologetically, "very confusedly; and of course I can't expect you to understand by instinct how it was." She sighs profoundly, and then goes on quickly, and no longer looking at him. "You know she took me to the party, but when we reached the villa, I found that she knew so many people and I so few that I should only be a burden to her if I kept continually by her side, and as I was rather tired—you know that I had not been in bed for two or three nights—I thought I would go into the house and rest, so as to be quite fresh by the time you came. I fancied it was not unlikely you might be a little late."

His conscience, at the unintentional reproach of this patient supposition, reminds him of its existence by a sharp prick. How many times has her poor vanity suffered the bruise of being long first at the rendezvous?

"I discovered that chair by the window under the curtain, the one where you found me."

"Well?"

"It was so quiet there as everybody was in the garden, that I suppose I fell asleep, at least I remember nothing more until suddenly I heard Mrs. Byng's voice saying——"

"Saying what?"

"Her son was with her—he had brought her in to have some tea; it was to him that she was speaking, she was asking him about me, where I was? where he had left me? whether he had seen me lately? And then she said, 'Poor Amelia, Jim really does neglect her shamefully; and yet one cannot help being sorry for him, too; it was such child-stealing in the first instance, and he is evidently dead sick of her! It is so astonishing that she does not see it!'"

There is something almost terrible in the calm distinctness with which Amelia repeats the sentences that had laid the card-house of her happiness in the dust. Certainly she keeps her promise to him to the letter, she gives no slightest sign of breaking down. There is not a tear in her eye, not a quiver in her voice. After a moment's pause, she continues:

"And then he, Mr. Byng, answered, 'Poor soul, it—it is odd! She must have the hide of a hippopotamus.'"

Amelia had finished her narrative, repeating the young man's galling comment with the same composure as his mother's humiliatingly compassionate ones; and for a space her sole auditor is absolutely incapable of making any criticism upon it. He is forbidden, if he had wished it, to offer her even the mtue amends of a dumb endearment, by the reappearance on the scene of a couple of the sun-scorched peasant torments with their straw hand-screens. It is not likely that those so lately bought should have worn out already; but yet they renew their importunities with such determined obstinacy, as if they knew this to be the case; and it is not until they are lightened of two more, that they consent once again to retire, leaving the warm bright plateau to the lovers—if indeed they can be called such.

(To be continued).

POWERFUL SUGGESTION.

A doctor who was recounting some of his experiences of hypnotism, related the following story:—

"I once had a patient who was ill with consumption, and who ought to have gone to a warmer climate, but whose means were insufficient, so I resolved to try what hypnotism would do for him. I had a huge sun chalked on the ceiling of his room, and by suggestion induced him to think it was the sun, which would cure him. The ruse succeeded, and he was getting daily better, when one day on my arrival I found he was dead."

"Did it fail, after all, then?" asked the physician's hearers.

"No," replied the doctor, "he died of sun-stroke."

INNOCENT.

The Colonel (at young Addle Pate's examination for military service): "Is there any reason why you should not serve your three years? Have you any infirmity?"

Young Addle Pate: "Yes, Colonel, I am nearsighted."

"Prove it!"

"Well, do you see that nail over there in the wall?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't."

ON A LINER.

Boro: "Does not the motion of the ship make you sick, Miss Bonds?"

"No, but the conversation I hear on board does."

ON THE FARM.

GIVE THE SEPARATOR GOOD CARE.

The prediction made a few years ago that the farm separator would soon be as common and as necessary on the farm as the mowing machine, is being rapidly fulfilled, writes Prof. C. H. Eckles. Probably no machine used on the farm does what it is made to do any more effectively than the separator, and considering the fact that it is used twice every day in the year it is surprising how seldom it is out of order. Four cows with a separator are equal to five with the old shallow pan, or with a water or tin can separator.

A common mistake made when buying a cream separator is getting one too small. In hundreds of cases small machines have been purchased at first on account of the lower price, only to be exchanged in a short time for a larger size. It is about as hard work to operate one handling 350 pounds per hour as one separating 700, and the added time required for the smaller size amounts every year to more than the extra cost of a larger machine. As a rule the farmer wishes to separate in at least 20 minutes. This means at least a 700-pound machine for 20 cows, and for a ten-cow dairy it does not pay to buy one with less than 450 pounds per hour capacity.

The majority of separators are operated by hand, but power is very convenient and should be used in all large dairies. A small steam boiler with a steam turbine machine is one of the most satisfactory outfits for a dairy of 20 cows or more. This makes it possible to have a small milk room where the milk is separated, and the hot water used for cleaning the utensils.

The tread power is used with satisfaction in many cases. It is easily adjusted to furnish a very good power, and the herd bull or a calf can do the separating as fast as the milk is ready.

The ordinary gasoline engine is not entirely satisfactory on account of its unsteady motion and manner of starting. It may be used by putting in a line shaft and belting to the engine and to the separator with long, rather loose belts. Recently some companies are putting gasoline engines on the market designed especially for running separators, in which these objectionable features have been mostly eliminated.

The bowl should always be handled carefully and not allowed to drop into its place in the frame or onto the floor. In starting the machine, the operator should keep in mind that the high gear gives him a tremendous leverage, and speed should be reached gradually and slowly. The power should be applied throughout the turn of the handle and not alone on the down stroke, as is often done. It is always well to follow the direction book carefully.

About once a month the oil cups should be filled with kerosene to clean out the bearings. Once in two months or oftener, the lower bearings of the machines having two bearings should be taken out and thoroughly cleaned. Attention to these details is what makes an easy-running machine. Bearings are cut out rapidly in many cases by dust blowing in them when the bowl is out. If exposed at all to dust, it is always well to have a canvas covering to slip over the machine as soon as the work is done.

A standard make of separator, if properly handled, should run from three to five years, with little or no repairs outside of new points or balls for the bearings. At the end of this time a new bushing or bearing will probably be needed, and at the end of four or five years it is customary to send the bowl to the manufacturers to be retinned and balanced. The machine should be taken apart and cleaned each time it is used. To facilitate washing it is important to have the proper brushes and tools for the purpose that come with the machine. The water should be used warm but not hot, and should contain a small amount of dairy washing powder. After this washing to loosen and remove all the particles of milk, the parts are rinsed with clean warm water and spread apart to dry to prevent rusting. The dish cloth is not needed and should not be used in cleaning a separator or any other dairy utensil. If a steam boiler is at hand, steaming may take the place of scalding. The bowl is not put together until ready to be used again.

If the cream is sold by the test, some variation in per cent. of fat must be expected, as it always occurs even under the best conditions and is not a sign of inaccurate testing. If it is desired to keep the cream or milk sweet some time, it will be necessary to observe two general principles. These are cleanliness and coldness. To comply with the first means the stable, cows, milk utensils and separator must be kept clean. To meet the requirements of the second means cooling at once to a low temperature. It is not sufficient to set a can of cream or milk in ordinary water and say it is cooled. It must actually be cooled, and a thermometer ought to be used often enough to indicate if it really is being cooled. Cream cooled to 50 degrees at once after separation and held there will keep sweet several days. If cooled to 60 degrees at once, it will keep two days as a rule, without souring. Where two or more lots of cream are to be mixed, that added to the first should first be cooled in a small can by itself, then added to the first lot. If the warm be added to the cooled, the entire lot sours very rapidly.

TOOK NO CHANCE.

Customer: "Will you guarantee your eggs?"

Storekeeper: "Not on your life; you might get careless and drop them."