DARE HE?

OR, A SAD LIFE STORY

CHAPTER XXI.

"She was perfectly right," says Amelia, still speaking quite quietly; "it is astonishing that I should not have seen it; and it was child-stealing; you were barely twenty-one, and I—I was not very young for a woman even then—I was twenty-three. I ought to have known better."

For once in his life Burgoyne is absolutely bereft of speech. It is always a difficult matter to rebut a charge of being dead-sick of a woman without conveying an insult in the very denial; and when there lies a horrid substratum of truth under the exaggeration of the accusation, the difficulty becomes an impossibility.

"However, it might have been much worse," continues Miss Wilson; "just think if I had overheard it only after I had married you, when I knew that there was nothing but death that could rid you of me. I thank God I have heard it in time."

His throat is still too dry for him to speak; but he stretches out his arm to encircle her in a mute protest at that thanksgiving over her own shipwreck; but, for the first time in her life, she eludes his caress.

"Child-stealing," she repeats, under her breath; "and yet"—with a touching impulse of apology and deprecation—"you seemed old for your age, you seemed so much in earnest; I think you really were"—a wistful pause—"and afterwards, though I could not help seeing that I was not to you what you were to me, yet I thought—I hoped that if I waited—if I was patient—if no one else, no one more worthy of you came between us"—another and still wistfuller delay in her halting speech—"you might grow a little fond of me out of long habit; I never expected you to be more than a little fond of me!"

He has entirely hidden his face in his hands, so that she is without that index to guide her as to the effect produced by her words, and he continues completely silent. Whether, even after her rude awakening, she still, deep in her heart, cherishes some pale hope of a denial, an explaining away of the reported utterances, who shall say? It is with a half-choked sigh that she goes on:

"But you could not; I am not so unjust as not to know that you tried your best. Poor fellow! it must have been uphill work for you"—with a first touch of bitterness—"laboring to love me, for eight years; is it any wonder that you failed? and I was so thick-skinned I did not see it—the 'hide of a hippopotamus' indeed! There could not be a juster comparison; and now all I can do is to beg your pardon for having spoilt eight of your best years—your best years"—with slow iteration; "but come"—more lightly—"you have some very good ones left too; you are still quite young; for a man you are quite young; the harm I have done you is not irreparable; I think"—with an accent of reproach—"you might ease my mind by telling me that the harm I have done you is not irreparable!"

Thus apepaled to, it is impossible for him any longer to maintain his attitude of disguise and concealment. His hands must needs be withdrawn from before his face; and as he turns that face towards her, she perceives with astonishment, almost consternation, that there is an undoubted tear in each of his hard grey eyes.

"And what about the harm I have done to you?" he asks under his breath, as if having no confidence in his voice; "what about the eight best years of your life?"

A look of affection so high and tender and selfless, as to seem to remove her love out of the category of the mortal and the transitory, dawns and grows in her wan face.

"Do not fret about them," she answers soothingly, "they were—they always will have been—the eight best years of my life. They were full of good and pleasant things. Do not forget—I would not for worlds have you forget—I shall never forget myself—that they all came to me through you!"

At her words, most innocent as they are of any intention of producing such an effect, a hot flush of shame rises to his forehead, as his memory presents to him the successive eras into which these eight good years had divided themselves; six months of headlong boyish passion, six months of cooling fever; and seven years of careless, intermittent, matter-of-course, half tenderness.

"Through me?" he repeats, with an accent of the deepest self-abasement; "you do not mean to be ironical, dear; you were never such a thing in your life; you could not be if you tried; but if you knew what a sweep you make me feel when you say the sort of thing you have just said!—and so it is all to come to an end, is it? Good as these eight years have been, you have had enough of them? You do not want any more like them?"

She says neither yes nor no. He remains unanswered, unless the faint smile in her weary eyes and about her drooped mouth can count for a reply.

"And all because you have heard some fool say that I was tired of you?"

The tight smile spreads a little wider, and invades her pale cheeks.

"Worse than tired! sick! sick to death!"

She is looking straight before her, at the landscape simmering in the climbing sun, the divine landscape new and young as it was before duomo and bell-tower sprang and towered heavenwards. Why should her gaze dwell any more upon him? She has renounced him, her eyes must fain renounce him too. As he hears her words, as he watches her patient profile, the sole suffering thing in the universal morning joy, a great revulsion of feeling, a great compassion mixed with as large a remorse pours in torrent over his heart. These emotions are so strong that they make him deceive even himself as to their nature. It seems to him as if scales had suddenly fallen from his eyes, showing him how profoundly he prizes the now departing good, telling him that life can neither ask nor give anything better than the undemanding, selfless, boundless love about to withdraw its shelter from him. His arm steals round her waist, and not once does it flash across his mind—as to his shame, be it spoken, it has often flashed before—what a long way it has to steal!

"Am I sick of you, Amelia?"

She makes no effort to release herself. It does him no harm that she should once more rest within his clasp. But she still looks straight before her at lucent Firenze and her olives, and says three times, accompanying each repetition of the word with a sorrowful little head-shake:

"Yes! yes! yes!"

He will compel her to look at him, his own Amelia. Have not all her tender looks been his for eight long years? He puts out his disengaged hand, and with it determinately turns her poor quivering face round so as to meet his gaze.

"Am I sick of you, Amelia?"

In the emotion of the moment, it appears to him as if there were something almost ludicrously improbable and lying about that accusation, in which, when first brought against him, his guilty soul had admitted more than a grain of truth. Her faded eyes turned to his, like flowers to their sun; the veracity of his voice and of his eager grey orbs—still softened from their habitual severity by the tears that had so lately wet them—making such a hope, as, five minutes ago, she had thought never again to cherish, leap into splendid life in her sick heart.

"Is it possible?" she murmurs almost inaudibly, "do you mean—that you are not!"

. . . . . .

They go down the hill, past the cottages, and the incurious peasants, hand in hand, her soul running over with a deep joy; and his occupied by an unfamiliar calm, that is yet backed by an ache of remorse, and by—what else? That "else" he himself neither could nor would define. He spends the whole of that day with Amelia, both lunching and dining with her and her family; a course which calls forth expressions of unaffected surprise, not at all tinctured with malice—unless it be in the case of Sybilla, who has never been partial to him—from each of them.

"We have been thinking that Jim was going to jilt you, Amelia!" Cecilia has said with graceful badinage; nor, strange to say, has she been at all offended when Jim has retorted, with equal grace and much superior ill-nature, that on such a subject no one could speak with more authority than she.

The large white stars are making the nightly sky almost as gorgeous as the day's departed majesty had done, ere Jim finds himself back at his hotel. His intention of quietly retreating to his own room is traversed by Byng, who, having evidently been on the watch for him, springs up the stairs, three steps at a time, after him.

"Where have you been all day?" he inquires impatiently.

"At the Anglo-Americain. I wonder you are not tired of always asking the same question and receiving the same answer to it."

"I am not so sure that I should always receive the same answer," replies the other, with a forced laugh—"but stop a bit!"—(seeing a decided quickening of speed in his friend's upward movements)—"my mother is asking for you; she has been asking for you all the afternoon; she wants to speak to you before she goes."

"Goes?"

"Yes, she is off at seven o'clock tomorrow morning—back to England; she had a telegram to-day to say that her old aunt, the one who brought her up, has had a second stroke. No!"—seeing Jim begin to arrange his features in that decorous shape of grave sympathy which we naturally assume on such occasions—"it is no case of great grief; the poor old woman has been quite silly ever since her last attack; but mother thinks that she ought to be there, at—at the end; to look after things, and so forth."

There is an alertness, a something that expresses the reverse of regret in the tone employed by Mrs. Byng's son in this detailed account of the causes of her imminent departure, which, even if his thoughts had not already sprung in that direction, would have set Burgoyne thinking as to the mode in which the young man before him is likely to employ the liberty that his parent's absence will restore to him.

I offered to go with her," says Byng, perhaps discerning a portion at least of his companion's disapprobation.

"And she refused?"

Byng looks down, and begins to kick the bannisters—they are still on the stairs—idly with one foot.

"Mother is so unselfish that it is always difficult to make out what she really wishes; but—but I do not quite see of what use I should be to her if I did go."

There is a moment's pause; then Burgoyne speaks, in a dry, hortatory elder brother's voice:

"If you take my advice you will go home."

The disinterested counsel of wise elder brothers is not always taken in the spirit it merits; and yet there is no trace of docile and unquestioning acquiescence in Byng's monosyllabic—

"Why?"

"Because, if you stay here, I think you will most likely get into mischief."

The young man's usually good-humored eyes give out a blue spark that looks rather like fight.

"The same kind of mischief that you have been getting into during the past week?" he inquires slowly.

The acquaintance with his movements evidenced by this last sentence, no less than the light they throw upon his own motives, stagger Jim, to the extent of making him accept the sneer in total silence. Is not it a richly deserved one? But the sweet-natured Byng is already repenting it; and there is something conciliatory and almost entreating in the spirit of his last remark:

"I do not know what has happened to my mother," he says, lowering his voice; "there is no one less of a mauvaise langue than she, as you know; but in the case of ——" he breaks off and begins his sentence afresh; "she has been warning me against them again; I can't find that she has any reason to go upon; but she has taken a violent prejudice against her. She says that it is one of her instincts; and you—you have done nothing towards setting her right?"

Perhaps it may be that his young friend's reported metaphor of the "hippopotamus hide" has not served to render him any dearer to Jim; but there is certainly no great suavity in his reply:

"Why should I?—it is no concern of mine."

"No concern of yours, to stand by and see an angel's white robe besmirched by the foul mire of slander?" cries Byng indignantly, and lapsing into that high-flown mood which never fails to make his more work-a-day companion "see blood."

"When I come across such a disagreeable sight it will be time enough to decide whether I will interfere or not. At present I have not met with anything of the kind," returns he, resolutely putting an end to the dialogue by knocking at Mrs. Byng's portal, within which he is at once admitted.

The door of the bedroom communicating with the salon is open, and through it he sees the lady he has come to visit standing surrounded by gaping dress-baskets, strewn raiment, and scattered papers; all the uncomfortable litter that speaks of an imminent departure. She joins him at once, and, shutting the door behind her, sits down with a fagged air.

"I hear," he begins—"Willy tells me—I am very sorry to hear——"

"Oh, there is no great cause for sorrow," rejoins she quickly, as if anxious to disclaim a grief which might be supposed to check or limit her conversation—"poor dear old auntie!—the people who love her best could not wish to keep her in the state she has been in for the last year; oh, dear!"—sighing—"how very dismal the dregs of life are! do not you hope, Jim, that we shall die before we come to be 'happy releases'?"

"I do indeed," replies he gravely; "I expect to be sick—dead-sick of life long before I reach that stage of it."

He looks at her resentfully as she speaks, but she has so entirely forgotten her own application of the accented adjectives to his feelings for Amelia, that she replies only by a rather puzzled but perfectly innocent glance.

"I never was so unwilling to leave any place in my life," she goes on presently, pursuing her own train of thought; "I do not know how to describe it—a sort of presentiment."

He smiles.

"And yet I do not think there are any owls in the Piazza to hoot under your windows!"

"Perhaps not," rejoins she, with some warmth; "but what is still more unlucky than that happened to me last night; they passed the wine the wrong way round the table at the MacIvors. I was on thorns!"

"And you think that the wine going the wrong way round the table gave your aunt a stroke?" inquired Jim, with an irritating air of asking for information.

Mrs. Byng reddens slightly.

"I think nothing of the kind; I draw no inference; I only state a fact; it is a very unlucky thing to send the wine round the wrong way: if you had not spent your life among grizzly bears and cannibals you would have known it too!"

"There are no cannibals in the Rocky Mountains," corrects Jim quietly; and then they both laugh, and recommence their talk on a more friendly footing.

"I am not at all happy about Willy."

"No?"

"It is not his health so much—his color is good, and his appetite not bad."

"Except the Fat Boy in 'Pickwick,' I never heard of any one who had a better."

"But he is not himself; there is something odd about him!"

"Indeed!"

"Have not you noticed it yourself?—do not you think that there is something odd about him? Does not he strike you as odd?"

(To be continued).

Never judge the keenness of a woman's intellect by the sharpness of her tongue.

THE DOMINION BANK.

Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Annual General Meeting of the Stockholders.

THE THIRTY-SIXTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE DOMINION BANK was held at the Banking House of the Institution, Toronto, on Wednesday, January 30th, 1907.

Among those present were noticed:—

Lieut.-Col. Sir Henry Pellatt, Dr. Andrew Smith, Dr. C. O'Reilly, Messrs. W. D. Matthews, James Carruthers, Wm. Ross, W. R. Brock, J. J. Foy, A. Monro Grier, J. J. Dixon, L. H. Baldwin, W. Glenney (Oshawa), Aemilius Baldwin, F. J. Harris, W. C. Harvey, W. J. Dixon, J. G. Ramsey, W. Crocker, R. Mulholland, P. Leadley, W. C. Crowther, Jas. Matthews, David Kidd (Hamilton), W. T. Ramsay, R. M. Gray, J. T. Small, S. Samuel, J. A. Proctor, W. Cecil Lee, G. N. Reynolds, W. G. Cassels, Wm. Davies, F. J. Phillips, H. Gordon Mackenzie, J. Gordan Jones, R. J. Christie, H. B. Hodgins, S. Noxon, Ira Standish, David Smith, A. W. Austin, H. W. A. Foster, Cawthra Mulock, F. D. Benjamin, Jas. Scott, F. H. Gooch, A. R. Boswell, J. F. Kavanagh, A. Foulds, E. C. Burton, Victor Cawthra, W. Mulock, jr., F. J. Stewart, A. H. Campbell, jr., J. D. Trees, A. Bell, Richard Brown, C. A. Bogert, and others.

It was moved by Mr. L. Baldwin, seconded by Mr. F. D. Benjamin, that Mr. W. D. Matthews do take the chair, and that M. C. A. Bogert do act as Secretary. Messrs. A.R. Boswell and W. G. Cassels were appointed Scrutineers.

The Secretary read the Report of the Directors to the Shareholders, and submitted the Annual Statement of the affairs of the Bank, which is as follows:—

To the Shareholders:

The Directors beg to present the following Statement of the result of the business of the Bank for the year ending 31st December, 1906:—

Balance of Profit and Loss Account, 30th December, 1905		$249,437 97
Profit for the year ending 31st December, 1906, after deducting charges of management, etc., and making provision for bad and doubtful debts		539,360 36
		$788,798 33
Dividend 3 per cent., paid 2nd April, 1906 . . .	$90,000 00	
Dividend 3 per cent., paid 3rd July, 1906 . . .	90,000 00	
Dividend 3 per cent., paid 1st October, 1906 . . .	90,000 00	
Dividend 3 per cent., payable 2nd January, 1907 ..	90,000 00	
	$360,000 00	
Transferred to Reserve Fund	400,000 00	760,000 00
Balance of Profit and Loss carried forward		$28,798 33

RESERVE FUND.

Balance at credit of account, 30th December, 1905	$3,500,000 00
Transferred from Profit and Loss Account	400,000 00
	$3,900,000 00

With great regret we have to record the sudden death in May last of Mr. Theodore G. Brough, the late General Manager, who had been in the service of the Bank continuously since 1875. He was the Chief Executive Officer for seven years, during which short time he accomplished much for the development and welfare of the Institution.

Mr. C. A. Bogert, Manager of the Montreal Branch for eight years, and who entered the Bank more than twenty-five years ago, was appointed to succeed him.

On account of the continued expansion of the business of the Bank, your Directors have decided that it is an opportune time to issue the remaining one million dollars of authorized Capital Stock; and, having in view future requirements which may reasonably be expected, have approved of a by-law to be submitted for your consideration at the Annual Meeting, which provides for a further increase in the Capital Stock to the extent of one million dollars. This will make the total authorized Capital five million dollars.

You will also be asked to consider a by-law increasing the number of Directors from seven to nine which it is thought to be advisable owing to the diversity of our interests throughout Canada, and the gradual extension of our operations.

During the twelve months just closed Branches of the Bank were established at the following points, and, when expedient, desirable sites were purchased and suitable offices erected:—In the Province of Ontario, at Chatham, Dresden, Peterborough, Tilbury, Windsor, and in Toronto, at the corners of Avenue Road and Davenport Road and Queen street and Broadview avenue; in the Province of Alberta, at Calgary and Edmonton, and at Regina, Sask.

In addition we have to inform you that in December last the private banking business of Messrs. John Curry & Company, at Windsor, was acquired under terms advantageous to the Shareholders, which transaction included the purchase of a commodious building, well situated in this important centre.

It was found necessary to provide larger premises for our North End Branch, Winnipeg, and for this purpose a valuable property has been secured.

The Directors, following their usual custom, examined the Securities and Cash Reserves of the Bank as on December 31st, 1906, and found them to be correct; they also verified the Head Office Balance Sheet, including all accounts kept with Foreign Agents.

Every Office of the Bank has been carefully inspected during the past twelve months, and each Branch has been visited by the General Manager since his appointment in May last.

The Report was adopted.

E. B. OSLER,
President.

By-laws were passed increasing the number of Directors from seven to nine, and providing for an increase of $1,000,000 in the Capital Stock, which will make the total authorized Capital of the Bank $5,000,000.

The thanks of the Shareholders were tendered to the President, Vice-President and Directors for their services during the year, and to the General Manager and other Officers of the Bank for the efficient performance of their respective duties.

The following gentlemen were elected Directors for the ensuing year:—Messrs. A. W. Austin, W. R. Brock, James Carruthers, R. J. Christie, T. Eaton, J. J. Foy, K.C., M.L.A., Wilmot D. Matthews, A. M. Nanton and E. B. Osler, M.P.

At a subsequent meeting of the Directors, Mr. E. B. Osler, M.P., was elected President, and Mr. Wilmot D. Matthews, Vice-President, for the ensuing term.

GENERAL STATEMENT.

LIABILITIES.

Notes in Circulation		$2,691,986 00
Deposits not bearing interest	$5,364,018 53	
Deposits bearing interest (including interest accrued to date)	31,512,137 94	
		36,876,156 47
Deposits by other Banks in Canada		193,340 96
Balance due to London Agents		2,729,862 98
Total Liabilities to the Public		$42,491,345 81
Capital Stock paid up		3,000,000 00
Reserve Fund	$3,900,000 00	
Balance of Profits carried forward	28,798 33	
Dividend No. 97, payable 2nd January, 1907	90,000 00	
Former Dividends unclaimed	107 25	
Reserved for Exchange, etc.	61,144 74	
Reserved for rebate on Bills Discounted..	122,983 15	
		4,203,033 47
		$49,694,379 28

ASSETS.

Specie	$1,110,131 11	
Dominion Government Demand Notes	3,465,530 00	
Deposit with Dominion Government for Security of Note Circulation	150,000 00	
Notes of and Cheques on other Banks	2,113,531 39	
Balances due from other Banks in Canada	1,052,744 48	
Balances due from other Banks elsewhere than in Canada and the United Kingdom	1,121,390 69	
	$9,013,327 67	
Provincial Government Securities	239,302 85	
Canadian Municipal Securities and British or Foreign or Colonial Public Securities other than Canadian.	696,130 79	
Railway and other Bonds, Debentures and Stocks . .	2,149,265 67	
Loans on Call secured by Stocks and Debentures . ..	3,703,134 50	
		$15,801,161 48
Bills Discounted and Advances Current..	$32,915,267 70	
Overdue Debts (estimated loss provided for)	20,516 40	
Bank Premises	950,000 00	
Other Assets not included under foregoing heads . .	7,433 70	
		33,893,217 80
		$49,694,379 28

Toronto, 31st December, 1906.

C. A. BOGERT,
General Manager.