

Night and Morning.

CHAPTER XV.

There was a marriage, Robert Beaufort," said Lord Lilburne, almost enjoying the torture he was about to inflict; "and I hold here a paper that Philip Vandemont—for so we will yet call him—has a moment—*for so we will yet call him*—for a moment. I have but just found it in a secret cavity in the wall of his room. Robert, on this paper to defend the fate, the fortune, the prosperity, the greatness of Philip Vandemont—*for so we will yet call him*, his exile, his ruin. See!"

Robert Beaufort glanced over the paper held out to him—dropped it on the floor, and staggered to a seat. Lilburne could see the document in the bushes, and, limping to his brother-in-law, said with a smile,—

"But the paper is in my possession. I will not destroy it. No; I have no right to destroy it. Besides it would be a crime; but if I give it to you, you can do with it what you please."

"O Lilburne, spare me—spare me. I meant to be an honest man. I—I—" And Robert Beaufort sobbed.

Lilburne looked at him in scornful surprise.

"Do not fear that I shall ever think of you; and who else will know it?"

"Do not fear me. No—I, too, have reasons to hate and to fear this Philip Vandemont; for Vandemont shall be his name, and not Beaufort, in spite of fifty such scraps of paper! He has known—known—my worst foibles, and has secrets of mine—but I will laugh at his knowledge while he is a wandering adventurer—I should tremble at that knowledge if he could thunder it out to the world as Philip Beaufort—*for so we will yet call him!* There I am satisfied with you. Now hear my plan. Prove to Arthur that his master is a convicted felon, by sending the officers of justice after him instantly—off with him again to the Settlements. Do by a single witness—*enrage* Vandemont back to France, and prove to him that he will prove himself a traitor—*with a little money and a little pain*—prove him the accomplice of William Gavtry, a coloner and a murderer! Pshaw! take your paper. Do with it what you will—will it give it to Arthur? At Philip Vandemont's hands, and he will be rich and great, the happiest man between earth and paradise! On the other hand, come and tell me that you have lost it, or that I never gave you such a paper, or that it is such a paper ever existed; and then, perhaps, a little more—*satisfy* me. I say—lose it, and advise with me upon the rest."

Horror-struck, bewildered, the weak man gazed upon the calm face of the Master-villain, as the scholar of the fables might have gazed upon the friend who had won his worldly prosperity home and the loss of his soul hereafter. He had never hitherto regarded Lilburne in his true light. He was appalled by the black heart that lay bare before him.

"I can't describe it—it can't be, faltered out—"I did not care for love of Arthur—*not* talk of gallantry—of vanquishing—I—"

The arrows of the rents you have enjoyed will send you to your goal for life. No; I don't destroy the paper!"

Beaufort rose with a final effort, and then, having arranged with Mr. Jones, hark back, cross to Boulogne, and buy the convict and his sentence—*you will be turned against it. It is all I can do*!"

"No; no; it is not equal to it! Half my estate is gone! It will be—but save—"

"Fut!" interrupted Lord Lilburne, in great disdain. "I am as rich as I want to be. Money does not bribe me."

"I think it is! Lord Lilburne! If—Why, if for one, it is good; for two, it is better; and in every way it is dishonest—it is ruin. What then? You should take the risk—for you must meet ruin if you do not. I cannot. I have nothing to gain!"

"I dare not—I dare not!"—murmured Beaufort, quite spiritless.

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