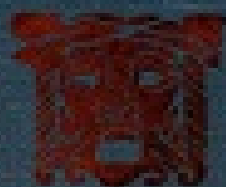


LADY ELEANOR:
LAWBREAKER



ROBERT BARR

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LADY ELEANOR:

LAWBREAKER

By **ROBERT BARR**

Author of Countess Tekla, In the Midst of Alarms, A Woman Intervenes, The Sword Makers, etc.

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LADY ELEANOR: LAWBREAKER

CHAPTER I

Although it was considerably after ten o'clock in the forenoon, dingy stiff curtains still shut out the daylight from the office of Sharp & Clipper, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn. At best it was a darkish room, with massive, somber furnishing, but its present gloom in no way affected the spirits of the two persons conversing therein. Humble Sycamore, though seated at his desk, was paying scant attention to clerky duties. Leaning forward, and occasionally emphasizing the point of his remarks with a quill pen, he was giving a vivid and animated account of his previous evening's visit to the playhouse, which, in those days of 1776, was an adventure of magnitude. Trisket, the page boy, listened spellbound, as one who hears of brilliant and intrepid exploration in an unknown country.

"And did un fight, Mr. Sycamore?" he prompted, breathlessly, as the clerk paused, to give better effect to a telling point.

"Fight? Nay, that he didn't, for a more arrant knave ne'er stood in honest shoe leather. But 'twas a sight to see him shaking with cowardice the while he blustered—his wig awry, and a great pistol in either hand. 'Bob Acres' they called him, and, faith! he *was* an 'acher' to me in honest truth, for I nigh cracked my sides with laughter at him. If you have ne'er seen a play, Trisket—"

"Nay, sir, I never have."

"Then save your ha'pence and see that one to begin on. 'Tis called 'The Rivals,' and well 'tis named, for it can rival aught I've ever seen; though I'm told it was a failure when they tried it first, last year. 'The Rivals' is the name: Dick Sheridan wrote it."

"'Dick' Sheridan! '*Dick!*' You know him, then?" questioned Trisket, in awe-struck tones.

"Not I, forsooth," disclaimed Sycamore, disdainfully. "But one calls these player fellows 'Dick' or 'Ben' or 'Davy,' as 'twere any other vagabond one spoke of. Know him, indeed! I ne'er heard of the knave until last night, and would not have heard of him even then but that I went to Covent Garden to bear a message to the new Lord Brandon, and found his lordship hobnobbing with the rogue as though it were an equal he clinked glasses with. 'Twas 'Dick' here, and 'dear Dick' there, and 'bonny Dick' between the whiles, till one's gorge rose at the very sound of it. And all the time the fellow standing there, tricked out in silk and velvet, as though 't were any gentleman, and as familiar with his lordship as if the old Lord Brandon were not ten feet underground, and the new one were still the playgoing vagabond he had been when his father was alive.

"'I'll make your fortune, Dick,' quoth he, laying his arm across the fellow's shoulders, I'll give your name to all the corners of the earth, and we'll out-Garrick Garrick in his own field.'

"And then, ignoring *me*, they fell to talking of some 'School for Scandal' that the fellow had in mind—as though a school for *that* were needed, and it were a goodly thing to build! And if it were, should not players be the last to sanction it? Should not—"

The rising excitement in Sycamore's tones was abruptly hushed. Outside, a voice uttered a curt command.

"Yes, yes; that will do. Come for me at dusk."

"The master!" cried Trisket softly, springing up from his stool and carrying it with him to the window recess, where he placed it. Hastily he drew back the curtains, exposing a view of old Lincoln's Inn Fields, and the passing figures of two servants bearing Mr. Sharp's empty sedan chair.

Sycamore jumped from his desk, and, bustling about, made a great show of getting the place in order, at the same time berating the boy as though he were solely to blame for the office not being open.

"Sluggard and idler!" he was declaiming loudly, as Humphrey Sharp entered, slowly removing his gloves. "Nigh to eleven, and not a curtain drawn yet! A lazy, idle, dawdling sloth! And with such a gentle, kindly master! You'll end in the workhouse, ingrate!"

"Sycamore!"

The master's tone was keen, and betrayed annoyance. His clerk turned in seeming amazement.

"Eh? Mr. Sharp! Oh, sir, is it you?"

"Aye. You are late this morning, Sycamore," said Mr. Sharp, coldly. "It has gone eleven, and the curtains but this moment drawn. Boy!"

Meekly Trisket came forward to receive the lawyer's hat, gloves, and gold-knobbed cane. Having hung up the hat, and placed near it the other articles, he vanished discreetly to the small outer room.

"It was Trisket's fault, sir," protested Humble Sycamore. "I bade him be here early, as the errand you sent me on last night would keep me up late, and prevent early rising. But the untrustworthy ingrate must needs go to the playhouse, and oversleep himself this morning. You must have heard me scolding him when you entered. A graceless, idle, playgoing imp! I found him sleeping when I came."

"Better have slept for weeks than enter a playhouse once," said Mr. Sharp somewhat wearily. "Heaven knows we've had enough and to spare of player-folk on our minds of late, Sycamore."

"Aye, enough and to spare, sir, as you say."

The lawyer went to his desk and, seating himself before it, began methodically to arrange the accumulation of papers thereon. Presently he glanced across at Sycamore.

"You carried my two messages yesterday?" he asked. "The one to the Lady Eleanor Beaumont, the other to—" he hesitated, sighing a little, "to the new Lord Brandon?"

"I did, sir."

"And both will be here this morning?"

"Both, sir. Lady Eleanor bade me say she'd come as near eleven as possible. She longs to see this fortunate cousin, on whom she has not set eyes since she was a child."

"Fortunate? Yes, he *is* fortunate. It is not given every man to win disinheritance as he won it, to flout a good and godly father by associating with vile player-folk, and then, after adding to his disgrace by becoming one of them—painting his face, and strutting in tinsled finery for *pay*—to come into his own at last. Sycamore, I am sure the late Lord Brandon never destroyed that will. He was at such pains to have me draw it up for him, and to make it clear that not one guinea of his money, not one foot of his land, should go to this dissipated mummer who had defied and disgraced him. All was for his sister's child, the Lady Eleanor Beaumont, and, in his wrath, he made me draw a will that left no weak spot for his son to break. He never forgave that son, never looked on him, nor allowed his name to be mentioned, to the hour of his death. Why, then, should he have destroyed that will—if he *did* destroy it?"

"Lady Eleanor thinks that he must have done so, sir."

"Lady Eleanor! Yes, but—Ah, well! Get me the Brandon deed-box. In this defective world, Sycamore, there would be nothing astonishing in the disappearance of that will were it not that it left everything, without reserve, to Lady Eleanor Beaumont herself. A girl of her high ideals and pride of race, a girl who has often declared herself an usurper, and called it 'cruel her cousin might not have his own'—"

Humble Sycamore paused in amazement on the steps he had mounted to secure the box bearing the white-lettered name "Brandon," and looked round at his employer.

"My faith! You cannot think that she—La, sir, no woman in her senses would plan to rob herself of two hundred thousand pounds. It's not in nature, sir."

"Considering the woman," said Mr. Sharp, thoughtfully, "it's not out of it, I'll be sworn." He was silent long enough to open the deed-box Sycamore had placed before him, and to withdraw from it several bundles of documents and one loose parchment, then he continued: "The will was made and witnessed in my presence at Brandon Hall. With my own eyes I saw Lord Brandon place it in his cabinet, and Lady Eleanor saw it, too. I have here," he picked up the sheet of parchment, "the first rough draft of the instrument as dictated by my lord himself, and practically unchanged in the legal document. Only three persons in the world knew where that document was deposited: Lord Brandon, Lady Eleanor, and myself. Lord Brandon could not have removed it; *I* did not. Thus there remains but one conclusion—a conclusion which

is not weakened by the fact that Lady Eleanor accepts its disappearance as a sign that it no longer exists, and strongly opposes any search being made for it."

"But, God bless us, it's absurd, sir! To suspect a lady of cheating herself out of two hundred thousand pounds—cheating *herself*! My faith, such an accusation would not stand in law for the time it would take to make it."

"No, it would not," agreed the lawyer decisively. "So the question confronting us is: What are Sharp & Clipper to do?"

"That's the question, sir."

"We cannot accuse the young lady of destroying a testament which put her in possession of a large fortune, so our safest plan—"

"Our safest plan, sir, would be to do nothing."

"Exactly so, Sycamore. My opinion is entirely in accordance with yours. Our situation in regard to the Brandon inheritance is a most unusual one."

"Most unusual, sir. I—"

There came a knock at the door, and he left his sentence unfinished. "Come in!" he said, instead, and Trisket entered.

"Lady Eleanor Beaumont, sir, and Miss Selina Chaffers," he announced.

"Show them in," directed Sharp, consulting his watch. "Late, of course. Punctuality may be the politeness of kings, Sycamore, but it is not an attribute of woman."

He rose, bowing with courteous dignity as there entered a very beautiful girl, dressed in deep mourning, followed by her maid and Miss Chaffers, a lady of uncertain age, whose elaborate attire would have been better suited to a girl of eighteen. The clerk hastened to place near Mr. Sharp's desk a comfortable chair for Lady Eleanor; for her companion he arranged a seat more in the background, smiling ingratiatingly at her as he did so. Toward the younger lady his manner expressed the humblest deference; with the elder, his deference was tempered by an obvious desire to flatter and please, an attitude, however, that escaped the notice of any one but the lady herself, who accepted the attentions graciously. Meanwhile Lady Eleanor apologized to the solicitor for her tardy arrival.

"I am afraid," she began, "that we are late—eleven was the hour your clerk mentioned—but my aunt and I are unaccustomed to the streets of London, and we lost our way."

"Indeed, my lady, you are just in time. We were but this moment discussing the case. May I beg you to be seated?" As the girl took the chair Sycamore had placed for her, Mr. Sharp continued, somewhat gravely: "May I ask, Lady Eleanor, whether the will has yet been found?"

"No, Mr. Sharp, it has not been found."

"The search has been abandoned?"

"So far as I am concerned, it has," responded the girl, with a slight gesture of impatience. "But why speak of these things? Surely heaven is a better judge than we of how the matters of earth should be ordained; if it were not heaven's intention, the document had not been destroyed."

"You are convinced it *is* destroyed?"

"How should I know, more than you? Its disappearance would argue its destruction. Perhaps—who can tell—my uncle may have realized how grave was the injustice of the deed which took from a Brandon all a Brandon holds dear—his home, the cradle of his race, the pillar of his strength—and gave them to an unworthy girl."

"Not *unworthy*, Lady Eleanor. You malign yourself."

"All are unworthy to hold a Brandon's heritage who are not Brandons born," declared Lady Eleanor warmly. "What heaven gave my cousin by right of birth, his father was not justified in taking away from him, still less in giving it to me, an alien."

Mr. Sharp regarded her with a penetrating expression.

"If I might quote," he said, "from that half-god, half-knave who cast his pearls to playhouse swine, I'd say 'Methinks the lady doth protest too much.' You are the child of his late lordship's sister, and therefore *not* an alien. Have you seen your cousin, Charles Brandon, lately?"

"Not since we were boy and girl together."

"You have not been to the theater, where, I am told, he struts the boards with shameless effrontery, and plays the lover to women as wanton as himself?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Lady Eleanor, with a little shiver of distaste. "I would as soon defile my mother's grave as cross the threshold of a playhouse door! No, no! My knowledge of my cousin is a memory only—a sweet and tender memory." She smiled, as if at a pleasant reminiscence. "Then he was heir to Brandon Hall: a tall, brave youth, wanting but seven years to make a man of him, and I a child of ten. My mother had taken me with her for a visit to the Hall, and I—dear heaven, what a happy time it was! My cousin bore himself toward me as though I were a princess, not a beggar, and he the most devoted of courtiers. Not a day but had some special glory in it; not a night without its happy dreams. We walked and rode, he and I, through the long leafy lanes, and in the green dusk of bird-enchanted woods; we sang, we romped, we gathered flowers, and once when I fell and bruised my forehead on the earth, he—he took my face between his palms, and kissed me. Oh, I remember it all as if it were yesterday!"

"So it would seem," commented Mr. Sharp, dryly. "Then, in defiance of your uncle's wishes, it is your desire that this profligate, this mummer, this consort of vagabonds and rogues, should come into the birthright he resigned to cast his lot with actors?"

The girl's eyes shone with great seriousness of purpose.

"Yes, oh, yes," she responded. "It is heaven's pleasure as well as mine, else it had not come to pass. Brandon Hall must have a Brandon for its master. We shall see the glory of the house restored. Charles will leave the players and their haunts, and return to his own again. Thus errors of the past will be atoned for!"

"Ah—you think that probable, Lady Eleanor?" asked the old man, quietly.

"I am certain of it, Mr. Sharp," came the answer, ringing with supreme confidence. "When Charles alone represents the race, he'll rise; he is a Brandon; so have no fear."

Seemingly her belief brought little conviction to the solicitor.

"Heaven knows I trust so," he said, "if—if only to justify your faith in him. To understand that his father knew his character, glance over this document." He handed her a parchment. "'Tis a rough draft, almost word for word, of the missing will, the testament actually signed. Read it, my lady, as though it were the dead that spoke to you, and tell me if you think it just such wishes should be disregarded."

Somewhat confused, Lady Eleanor accepted and opened the document; she bent her head over it, reading. Mr. Sharp sat leaning forward, his elbows upon his desk, watching her intently. In their secluded corner, Sycamore and Miss Chaffers conversed in undertones, unheeded by the others.

"The loss of the will matters not to you, Miss Chaffers? You have still those three hundred pounds a year, dear one?"

She nodded assent.

"La, Mr. Sycamore! Be careful, do; they'll hear you," she cautioned, giggling. "How long since you called at Brandon Hall!"

A slight constraint that had been perceptible in the clerk's manner vanished completely at the reassuring news about Miss Chaffers' income.

"I'll call to-morrow, and the next day! I'll call whensoever I may—*Selina!*" he declared, ardently.

"La, how awful!" simpered the lady, coquettishly. "I mean—oh, you naughty men! A girl scarce knows what to do to

escape you!"

The bobbing feathers in her turban sadly interfered with Sycamore's attempts to bend gallantly over Miss Chaffers, and his efforts to blow them aside distinctly marred the effect of his reply.

"Then don't (puff), don't try (puff), my (puff) own!" he whispered.

"La, Mr. Sycamore, aren't you well?" demanded Miss Chaffers, unaware of the cause of his embarrassment, but as she raised her face to look at him the irritating decoration was removed.

"As well as I ever shall be, dear one," he murmured eloquently, "until that purse—I mean, that heart—is wholly mine, my soul's own—"

At this point Mr. Sharp, in the silence becoming aware of their conversation, intervened with a gruff:

"Sycamore!"

The clerk straightened up instantly. "Sir?"

"Business!" reminded Mr. Sharp, curtly, and Sycamore reluctantly returned to his desk, secretly blowing a kiss to Selina from behind his employer's chair, whereupon Miss Chaffers giggled girlishly, hiding her face behind her fan.

Mr. Sharp again turned his attention to Lady Eleanor, who, having finished her perusal of the document, handed it back without a word. The lawyer did not speak at once, divining her agitation.

"Well?" he asked, presently.

For a moment the distressed girl covered her face with both hands.

"It is cruel, it is unjust!" she exclaimed, looking up again. "I thank heaven it was destroyed."

"Ah, it *was* destroyed, then?" persisted Mr. Sharp. "You are sure there is no chance of its ever turning up?"

"No, no! There is never any chance of that, never any chance. Oh, my poor cousin, what an ungenerous, unjust act it was!"

Outside in the street a sudden uproar rose, the sound of an excited crowd approaching, but neither Mr. Sharp nor the Lady Eleanor paid the slightest heed.

"Is that your final decision, Lady Eleanor?" questioned the old man, gently, but very earnestly. "For the last time I ask you, is there no likelihood of the late Lord Brandon's will ever being carried into execution?"

"None; if my prayers are answered," replied the girl, her manner as serious as his own.

Then she added, more vehemently, "Let the follies of the dead rest with the dead; I'll stake my honor by the living!"

"A goodly stake, indeed!" cried a laughing voice, "but may it prove no such pest of the 'living' as falls to me."

The lawyer sprang to his feet in amazement, staring indignantly at the intruder, a finely set-up young man who stood leaning against the door he had opened. Lady Eleanor half rose, but as she looked on the handsome, merry face, she sank back into her chair again, her face growing very white.

"Charles! Charles Brandon, at last!" she whispered to herself.

The youth had turned his gaze to the outer room through which he had entered, and now addressed himself to some one there.

"Come in, Dick, prince of wits and king of noble runners!" he urged. "Faith, we have given the rogues the slip, and are rid of them at last."

"Aye, if they do not spot where we dodged in," cried the newcomer, accepting the invitation to enter. "Imperious Kit has set her heart on doing honor to your fortune whether you will or no, and Kitty Clive's not one to be lightly eluded. Egad!"

She'll have London scoured until she finds you, man, and there's half Drury's 'stock' in her wake."

"Her 'wake,' say you, Dick? Faith, there are seven days to every 'wake' in Kitty Clive's vocabulary, so perchance we *may* escape her."

He turned, and bowed extravagantly to all present, doffing his hat with a sweeping gesture that took in the whole company.

"My lords and ladies all, we give you grace," he greeted them gallantly. Then his glance fell on Lady Eleanor, and to her he bowed again, even more deferentially. "'Sweets to the sweet,' oh, fair Ophelia! Dick, bow, you knave! A lovelier face the sun ne'er shone on."

With another quick change he addressed himself to the bewildered solicitor.

"Pardon the interruption, but is this Sharp & Clipper I see before me?"

"I am Humphrey Sharp. Clipper is not here. This is merely my assistant. And may I ask who you are, sir, and why you come dashing into my office thus?"

"Egad, you may do both. To begin with, we 'dashed in,' as you express it, to escape a plague of friends who insisted upon following, and who made a spectacle of us rushing through the street when we cut off and ran like madmen to escape them." He laughed again. "Faith, Dick, Kit in her chair urging her men to run with her, when we broke free and took to our heels, is a sight that will last in my mind forever!" Once more he spoke to the man of law. "So much for how and why I came 'dashing in,' my friend. For who I am: Charles Brandon, at your service; lord, by the grace of God, and heir to Brandon Hall!"

To Lady Eleanor and Humble Sycamore the announcement conveyed no news, but Mr. Sharp was obviously aghast.

"Charles Brandon! Sir—my lord—" he stammered, incredulously.

"Truth, yes. But, sir, the title may go hang for all of me. As for the property, that's a different matter, eh, Dick? There you touch a yearning heart and an empty pocket."

Inclining his head, he placed a hand over his heart, then indicated his hip pocket, but Mr. Sharp paid no heed to his gestures. His attention was concentrated on Lady Eleanor Beaumont.

"My lady, is this the cousin you have wished to meet?" he questioned, sadly.

Brandon swept round, and once more doffed his hat with a brave flourish.

"What, is this my little cousin, the Lady Amelia?"

Eleanor frustrated his attempt to take her hands, drawing back with an air of hauteur that should have discouraged his effusiveness, yet failed to abash him.

"My—my name is Eleanor, sir," she said, coldly.

"Why, so it is!" ejaculated Brandon, airily. "Dolt that I am! Nelly, I used to call you, eh? And where are the flowing locks I used to pull while you quite justly beat me for my rudeness?" Despite her reluctance, he grasped her hands, pulling her this way and that, the better to admire her, laughing appreciatively as he did so. "Little Nell! Bonny coz! How tall you've grown, and—my guiding star—what a beauty! My Nelly shall set the town afire, will she not, Dick? Here, Nell, let me introduce my friend, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, author of 'The Rivals.' You've heard of the play, of course, if you haven't seen it. All London's talking of it, Nell, as 'twill talk afresh when 'The School for Scandal' is finished, and put on at Drury Lane, the long lane that's to have a turning shortly, eh, Dick? Richard, my soul's own soul—my cousin, the Lady Eleanor Beaumont. And here," he turned to Miss Chaffers, "oh, my prophetic soul, my uncle—I beg pardon—my aunt. Aunt Selina, as I live! Well, aunt, how many hearts have you broken at Brandon since I left it? Hundreds, I'll warrant. Egad, you do right to come to town at last, sweet Sal: we'll marry you to a Duke, eh, Dick? Selina, fair Selina, your unworthy nephew kisses your hand."

Miss Chaffers snatched away her hand indignantly.

"Unworthy nephew, indeed! Unworthy reprobate, say I, and always have done!" cried she.

"Aye, so you have, dear aunt," concurred Brandon, sweet-temperedly, "and what a goodly knave am I to verify your kind predictions. Think how many graceless whelps have given the lie to loving relatives, becoming canting, philanthropic, virtuous, honest paragons of perfection, when the downward way was foretold of them. Out on all such thankless dogs, who'd give the lie to those who love them. I am none such! I have proved sinner, basilisk, miscreant, rascal, rogue, doer of evil deeds, and worker of iniquity; all this that my gentle aunt might say: 'I told you so!' Dick, Dick, an' you were not already married, I'd bestow thee on this blushing Hebe here, and write thee down 'mine uncle!'"

Lady Eleanor's beautiful brow contracted as if with pain, while she listened to her cousin's persiflage. She broke into his speech with quiet reproof.

"Sir, I wonder at your levity. Surely, at such a time—"

"Time, say you, Nell? Time is for ruling slaves, sweet coz, and its shackles were not forged to bind one so blest as I."

"So *blest* as you?"

"Aye. Who could be better blest? 'Whatever comes naught matters so that money comes withal.' What am I worth, old Law Books?" he demanded abruptly of Sharp, who responded coldly:

"I do not understand you, sir."

"You'd be wiseacre indeed if you did, for there are times when I scarce understand myself, eh, Dick? But, in plain language, what income falls to me? Heir to all my father had to leave, what money will the estate pay me year by year?"

"I cannot say to a fraction, my lord, but it is something over ten thousand pounds."

"Ten thousand! Not more? Then it is not enough."

"Not enough?" echoed Lady Eleanor, in amazement.

"No, coz; not enough for my purpose! 'T would take two years, and not a stiver spent, to reach the sum I've set my heart on having ready to hand before I'm two months older. And that being so—" Again the young lord directed his attention to Mr. Sharp. "Speak up, Injunctions: what would it sell for?"

"Sell for? Surely, my lord, you—you don't mean Brandon Hall?"

"Aye, that I do. What else have I to sell, Red Tape? Come, let's have the figure in a word."

"The figure—the figure Brandon Hall would sell for?"

"Yes; put up at auction—this week or the next—what would it fetch in cash?"

"My lord!"

The lawyer's tone of horrified dismay seemed slightly to irritate the good-natured young man.

"Lord me no lords," he said, more brusquely than he had yet spoken. "Give answer if you know, or, if you do not—"

The sentence remained incomplete, broken by the sudden entrance of a panting man, and as the door opened to admit him there entered also the sound of many voices, and eager, trampling feet. The newcomer cried breathless caution:

"Charles! Dick! It's all up with the pair of you. I saw where you dodged in, and did my best to throw the others off the scent, but as well try to turn the hounds from a running fox as strive to deflect Kitty Clive from a thing she's set her mind upon. The baggage sent her bearers racing through the streets to get wind of you, and they found, at last, a rattletrap who'd seen you enter here."

Brandon's momentary annoyance vanished, and he threw back his head in laughter.

"Oh, wondrous Kit!" he exclaimed. "You hear, Dick? We're unearthed; and the man who'd run twice from Kitty Clive—perish the thought! Where is she now, Woodward? Close at hand?"

"Aye; and all the others in her train. There's not a man of Covent Garden's 'stock' she has not enlisted in the game. She is determined to make heyday and a holiday of your luck, Charlie, and to be 'in at the death' with horse and hounds, and such a cracking of bottles as will be remembered for a month. I ran ahead to give warning lest you should still be minded to slip the leash, and show her a clean pair of heels."

"Hm-m!" said Brandon. "Who shows his heels once to Kitty Clive is a brave man, but he who shows them twice is—what?"

"A fool, and worse," responded Sheridan, promptly, "for he confounds himself, and flies from what half the town declares is *all* the town contains. To run from Kit? There are no men in London but ourselves who'd dare to do it, and even we, having done it once—"

"Will forget our folly, and not do it again," Brandon concluded. "Let her come, Woodward; man cannot escape his fate, and he who'd escape it when it arrives in such sweet shape as Kitty Clive, deserves the rack—and more. Sweet Kit! Wild Kit! Incomparable Kit! Open the door to her, and let her have her will."

Then he seemed to recall the object of his presence in the dingy business office, and endeavored again to extract an answer from the reluctant man of law.

"Now, Ancient Dockets," he commanded, turning to Sharp, "let's get on with what we have in hand. Or, no! A moment, please. Woodward, my king of Romeos, here's a Juliet to your liking. Aunt Selina, let me present my friend, William Woodward of Garrick's company, who, though a player at a rival house, I can recommend to you as one who does the 'sighing lover' well. Gaze on him, sweet maid, and let your 'eye discourse,' for half the damsels in London town have broke their hearts for love of him. 'Is he not strangely beautiful?' William, my soul's own soul—my aunt, Miss Selina Chaffers, a pearl beyond price, and with a price beyond pearls. I offer to the lucky jeweler who sets her in his home—and takes her out of mine—two thousand pounds in solid cash the day he leads her to the altar. Go in, sweet Will, and heaven prosper—and pity—thee."

Entering into the spirit of Brandon's jocularly, Woodward acknowledged the introduction with exaggerated courtesy, but the financial proposition brought a covetous and calculating flash to the eyes of Humble Sycamore. He abandoned his desk, and crossed to the side of Miss Chaffers, as if determined to brook no rival whom he regarded as a mere playacting vagabond.

"Two thousand pounds!" he murmured inaudibly, and set himself to the task of absorbing Selina's undivided attention, but in this he did not wholly succeed. Miss Chaffers was in her element, and meant to make the most of her opportunity. Coquettishly she evaded the flatteries of both.

"La! Get away!" she simpered. "I never saw the like! You awful men! You tease a girl to death!"

Meanwhile Lord Brandon had become all seriousness again.

"Now, Money Bags," he continued, addressing Mr. Sharp, "we'll back to where we started, and get as near as your sealed and red-tape bound brains will let you go, to the price that Brandon Hall would bring if it were put up, lock, stock, and barrel, to be sold to the highest bidder. Come, out with the price: what will it fetch in good, honest gold?"

Mr. Sharp ignored him, looking instead at Eleanor; speaking to her.

"He'd sell the place, my lady—you hear? He'd *sell* Brandon Hall."

"Aye, that I would," assented Brandon proudly, placing one hand affectionately on Sheridan's shoulder. "For Dickon here, I'd sell my right to enter heaven, or mortgage my warm niche by Satan's kitchen blaze to see Old Drury his, and Teazel, as he's drawn her, tread the boards *alive!*"

"Charlie, what did I tell you?" broke in Woodward. "Here's Kitty herself, and all the crowd with her."

Looking toward the window, the others saw pass a sedan chair borne by liveried attendants, and surrounded by a laughing, boisterous throng. An instant later the door was burst violently open, and the crowd trooped in with cheers and shouting, dividing to left and right as Kitty Clive was carried through it in her chair. Outside the window an eager mob stood peering into the room, in a state of intense excitement.

"Have at ye for a pair of scurvy knaves, to lead a lady such a chase as this!" cried Kitty, leaning from her chair, and laughing at Lord Brandon and Richard Sheridan. "A man, a man! My kingdom for a man! I'm shut in like a bird in a cage, and not a hand stretched forth to set me free."

Sheridan sprang forward to assist her, but she waved him aside.

"Away, ye bundle of immense conceit! 'Twas a man I called for, not a hen-pecked thing like ye!"

"Will I do, Kit, sweet lass?" asked Brandon, leaving Eleanor's side.

"Aye, at a pinch, though it's a poor apology ye are to one who's used to have her pick and call," she answered, giving him her hand, nevertheless. He helped her to alight, then the bearers took up her chair and went out, standing aside for a moment to permit the entrance of two liveried servants bringing hampers.

"Rogue, to run away from me as if I were a thing to fright the eyes of all the town," went on Kitty, with pretended petulance. "Ne'er did men the like to Kitty Clive before, and ye've hurt me in my strongest point, my vanity."

"Nay, Kit," retorted Brandon, "you're armored there so thickly that not a shot could reach you, nor a shaft pass through."

Affecting deep disdain, Kitty Clive turned her back on her cavalier, and thus for the first time glimpsed the righteously horrified features of Miss Selina Chaffers. Instantly she whirled round again, clutching Brandon's arm as though in extreme fear.

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" she ejaculated, melodramatically. "Charlie, ye dog, is yon the ruins of your ancient house? Give it a name, Charlie, give it a name, and 'let me not burst in ignorance.'"

"Miss Chaffers," explained Brandon, "is my maiden aunt a dozen times removed."

"Then remove her once again, and get her out of sight entirely," entreated Kitty. "'The evil that men do lives after them, the good—'" Her bright, alert eyes, searching the dim old room, discovered Lady Eleanor, who had recoiled from the unwelcome intruders, and stood watching them, with evident distress, from the sheltering shadow.

"'What light from yonder window breaks?'" cried Kitty, abruptly changing her quotation. "'It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.' Aha, ye rogue, no wonder that ye flew hotfoot to outwit us all! Is yon an 'auntie,' too, ye dog?"

"It does not matter," said Brandon, coldly. "You'd not understand her like, nor she the like of—us! Come, Sharp, to business, man! You have not told me yet what Brandon Hall, in the market, would bring. Set me its price, and set it so my friends may hear. Put up for sale,—mansion, demesnes, timber, furniture, farms, and all,—what would it bring in good, red English gold?"

"Two hundred thousand pounds at least, my lord."

A murmur of astonishment and delight ran through the room.

"Two hundred thousand pounds!" echoed Brandon, all gravity disappearing. "You hear, Dick? You hear? It's joy, good Dick, it's joy for us at last!"

"And joy for all who know ye, Charlie, lad!" shouted Kitty, and even her boisterousness could not conceal the sincerity of her pleasure. "A bumper, quick! A bumper to the lucky dog. Wine for my lord! Wine for the multitude! Wine for two hundred thousand pounds!"

The servants at the door, setting down the hampers, which were immediately seized upon by the throng, hurried to a table and cleared it of its load of bundled documents by the simple expedient of shooting all off on the floor. Carrying it to the center of the room, they set out on it bottles and glasses taken from the hampers.

"Madam, you go too far!" protested the indignant and wrathful Mr. Sharp. "This is my office; those my deeds!"

But his words availed nothing; for the time being the room and all it contained belonged to Kitty and her friends, and Brandon himself led the revelry.

"Thy deeds be on thy head, then!" he answered, merrily, catching up a bundle of documents and shying it at him. It missed

the lawyer, and crashed through the window, causing some confusion in the watching crowd outside, but Brandon laughed uproariously.

"Whate'er the damage, set it down to me. Two hundred thousand pounds! Up with the Hall for sale to-morrow, man,—lock, stock, and barrel,—to the highest bidder!"

"My lord!" protested Sharp, in dismay. Lady Eleanor stepped bravely forward, her beautiful eyes turned appealingly on her cousin.

"Charles! You'd sell Brandon Hall? Sell your ancestral home?"

"Aye, every stick and stone of it to serve the purpose that I have in view. Garrick shall out! Dick Sheridan shall have Drury Lane, and all the world shall wonder!"

Amidst enthusiastic cheers from his comrades, Lord Brandon snatched up a glass, and sprang on to the table.

"I'll make thee, Dick—I'll make thee though I break myself, and tread the boards, a beggar, once again. Old Drury shall be yours; the whole world shall echo to your fame! Up with your glasses: up, you knaves! For Sheridan! For Sheridan! For Sheridan!"

Amidst the wildest acclamations was the toast responded to, but apart from the motley of movement and color stood the slender, black-gowned figure of Lady Eleanor, white-faced, and intensely sad.

"Was it for this," she murmured, "for *this*!"

CHAPTER II

The south front of Brandon Hall was reddened by the last rays of sunset when Lord Brandon summoned the servants to bring wine and glasses. For the five people seated on the grassy terrace before the old Manor House it had been an afternoon of interest and deep significance. Absorbed in the reading of Richard Sheridan's latest play, time's passing had been forgotten, but now the appearance of footmen bearing laden trays was welcomed by all.

"A call from labor to refreshment," cried William Woodward, rising with alacrity. "Speaking for myself, never was it more opportune. My mouth's as dry as a lime pit. You're the host, Charlie, so give us a toast, with no long speech to usher it in, an' you love me."

Brandon sprang to his feet and held aloft a brimming glass.

"The shortest possible, Will; a quartette of words: Here's to 'The Rivals'!"

"Coupled with the name of him who is without a rival—Dick Sheridan," put in the elder of the two ladies present.

"No, Mrs. Lessingham, I beg of you," protested Sheridan. "I also am a Sahara of thirst. I cannot drink to myself, so, here's to the play!"

"The Rivals!' 'The Rivals'!" cried each one, rising.

"And may the verdict of London be as favorable as our own!" added Brandon, amid the clinking of glasses that preceded the drinking of the toast.

"Indeed, Dick," spoke Mrs. Lessingham, as glasses were refilled, "you deserve a double portion of wine, for while we enacted one character apiece you played a dozen in reading the parts we had no actors to speak."

"I should have acquitted myself better under the inspiration of two such pairs of eyes," said Sheridan, gallantly.

"The play will take London by storm," declared Woodward. "It was 'The Rivals' in a double sense; Mrs. Lessingham, Miss Barsanti, and myself from Drury Lane rivaling you and Sheridan from Covent Garden."

"'Tis not rivalry, Will, but coöperation," corrected Brandon. "An alliance, not competition, for next week Richard Brinsley Sheridan is lessee of Drury Lane."

"Ah, I guessed that was in the wind, Charlie, from what you said in the lawyer's office."

"Are we then at your mercy, Dick?" exclaimed the younger lady, beseechingly. "I trust I pleased you in my portrayal of your heroine this afternoon."

"I fell in love with her impersonation, Miss Barsanti," Sheridan assured her, bowing.

"Does Garrick retire, then?" she asked, curiously. "He has threatened to for years."

"Garrick retires," answered Brandon. "So here's to the setting sun!" He raised his glass. "To Garrick, the noblest Roman of them all!"

"We come from London to learn the news that most concerns us," cried Mrs. Lessingham. "Let's make the most of our opportunity, Kate, and curry favor. Dick, we're making eyes at you. Away with the setting sun; it's gone. My toast is to the rising sun!"

"Zounds, Mrs. Lessingham," protested Lord Brandon, "although the material sun has set, you may be too hasty in dismissing the setting sun from the stage. I heard just now the impatient jangle of a bell that may mean Garrick himself. I asked him here to-day, and although he answered neither yes nor no, I expect to see him."

"Gracious, Charlie, you should have given us warning!" exclaimed Miss Barsanti. "Should one of his ill-temperers possess him, which is likely enough after such a journey, what will he say when he finds three members of his company in the very stronghold of the enemy?"

"Have no fear, lady. Garrick and Sheridan are friends, not rivals, and I shall never be called upon to enact the part of Sir

Lucius O'Trigger between them."

"Garrick is my friend," assented Sheridan, "and we are in the midst of amicable negotiations, resulting, we hope, in greatly augmenting Garrick's wealth and Sheridan's fame."

"Each to his humor, and both will be pleased!" cried Mrs. Lessingham. "We have drunk to Mammon, and now I give you Ambition as a toast. Here's to the rising sun that will eclipse all others! Dick, I adore you!"

Sheridan threw back his head, and laughed in delight at the lady's eulogy, but his merriment ceased with startling abruptness as a footman appeared, and made the very distinct announcement:

"Mrs. Sheridan!"

Sheridan turned quickly to face the hooded and cloaked figure following the servant, and the other men stood up more slowly. Miss Barsanti remained seated, while Mrs. Lessingham slowly lowered her glass to the table before her, and stood with eyes downcast and lips compressed.

"So, Mr. Sheridan," said the newcomer, bitterly and deliberately, "I find you rioting here, wine-swilling, rousing the echoes with drunken laughter, while ruin has fallen on us in London."

"My dear, my dear!" implored Sheridan, endeavoring to take her hand, but she struck his aside, clenching and unclenching her own.

"You said you'd be gone a day," she continued, "and a week has passed, with no word from you, while I, striving to save your credit and your honor, am insulted by the lowest in London. The writs are upon us, and your creditors in possession of your house, while you roar with drunken laughter at the flattery of brazen women."

"You are beside yourself, my dear. The journey has exhausted you. I have been away but three days. My stay here has been imperative and important; important not only to me, but to my creditors. We partake of but a parting glass on the eve of my return to London."

"A parting glass! Your return to London! Your return to London will be speedy enough, for you will go back with me within the hour. Am I to battle alone with the results of your spendthrift folly?"

She pointed dramatically to Mrs. Lessingham.

"Who is this creature that cries to all the world that she adores you?"

"My dear, my dear, I implore you," murmured Sheridan, helplessly, but Brandon, stepping forward, intervened with a smile.

"Mrs. Sheridan, I am the culprit. These ladies and this gentleman are my guests, as Mr. Sheridan is; as I hope you will consent to be. Mrs. Lessingham but expressed her admiration, not of your husband, but of his genius in writing a play that will make the broker's men vanish as though a wand from the Arabian Nights were flourished over them."

"So you are Mrs. Lessingham," said Mrs. Sheridan, looking her scornfully up and down. "And pray, is there no *Mr.* Lessingham to be the recipient of your admiration?"

"Madam," responded the other, suavely, "'tis not the fashion to adore our husbands, and I see you are well acquainted with the mode."

"Dear Mrs. Sheridan, permit me a word or two," begged her host. "We have good news for you, if you will but do me the honor to listen. We have been rehearsing your husband's play, which promises great success. These, the actors in it, are my guests: Mrs. Lessingham, Miss Barsanti, and Will Woodward, all of Drury Lane Theater, who, at this moment, expect their chief, David Garrick. Indeed, we mistook your ring at the gate for his, and Garrick's presence would cast a mantle of respectability over even the inmates of Brandon Hall."

"And where, sir, are the ladies of your family?" asked Mrs. Sheridan. "Why do they not contribute the virtue of their presence, pending the arrival of the reputable Mr. Garrick?"

"My dear Elizabeth," urged Sheridan, "I beseech you to remember what we owe Lord Brandon at this crisis. Through his

generosity any action of our creditors is nullified."

"You told me, Richard, that Lord Brandon had an aunt and a cousin, who did the honors of his house. I see neither one nor the other in this company."

"Madam," said Brandon, courteously, "my aunt and cousin differ from myself in this respect; they are not interested in the drama, and it sometimes happens that a man has not that influence with the sex to which he feels his merit entitles him."

Sheridan's manifest embarrassment had communicated itself to the other members of the little party, and at this juncture Woodward interposed, saying:

"Mr. Sheridan, we should sketch over that last act again before dinner. Have we your permission to retire, Lord Brandon?"

"Ah, yes," agreed Brandon, gratefully accepting the timely suggestion. "Many of the lines require more study than we were able to give them this afternoon. I will see you later, and may perhaps throw in a suggestion or two."

He bowed to Mrs. Lessingham and Miss Barsanti, who curtsied, and retired in the wake of Woodward. Sheridan walked restlessly to and fro, while Mrs. Sheridan gazed after the retreating trio, and then turned with some apprehension from her husband to Lord Brandon.

"Lord Brandon, you have no conception of what I have had to endure these three days," she said, more meekly than she had hitherto spoken.

"I am sure you endured it nobly, Mrs. Sheridan, and, indeed, you have my deepest sympathy. Who has been more tracked down by creditors than I? And if I have escaped prison, it was not through plenitude of money, but by amazing good luck, and some knack in the art of swift disappearance. All that is happily past, thank fortune, for both of us, Mrs. Sheridan."

"Our house in Orchard Street is like a raided den of thieves. An execution has been issued, and they are taking an inventory of everything we possess. I have been the victim of ribaldry and laughter, enduring insult and scorn from the bailiff's lowest minions. And to find my husband laughing and drinking with these painted Jezebels—"

She broke down with a sob, but Brandon patted her soothingly on the shoulder, his paternal attitude contrasting ludicrously with his boyish face.

"There, there, Mrs. Sheridan. We men are brutes at best, but your husband is blameless. Only an hour ago, during the play, he was wishing you were here, that he might benefit from your counsel and sympathy."

"I have no desire to be harsh, or unjust—"

"Indeed, madam, you are neither. It is the anxiety of these last days that has overset you, and the tiring journey from London. Let me offer you a glass of wine."

She sipped the wine he poured for her, dabbing her eyes meanwhile with a handkerchief.

"I try to be scrupulously fair and just to every one," she murmured, "and certainly not less so to my husband, whom I love dearly in spite of—"

"Ah, madam, what would we wretched men be, lacking the forgiveness of your angelic sex? We need it constantly—need it as much as we deserve it little. Your husband is as one apart. His thoughts are of you alone, and who should know him better than I? Would that I profited more by his example. And now, Mrs. Sheridan, may I conduct you to your room? I am giving a little dinner to-night in honor of Dick's superb play, and your presence will render the feast the more enjoyable."

"No, no; I must return to-night. Richard, you will come with me?"

"As you please, Elizabeth."

"But surely you will not leave Brandon Hall this evening," urged the young lord. "You are most welcome here."

"I would rather go, Charlie," said Sheridan, with some decision. "I have done here all that is possible, and considering the state of matters in London, my place is there until the house is cleared. Garrick is not likely to come; possibly he

cannot get away. I will see him in town."

"Well, Dick, I shall not press you. You know that both Mrs. Sheridan and yourself are welcome to what my house contains. Old Sharp's assistant is coming with documents for me to sign. He should have been here now, but he is not a valiant horseman, and has doubtless taken his time upon the way. However, if you are determined to go, you must have some refreshment before you depart. Pardon me, madam. Dick, I leave you for a few minutes, and hope you will use the time in persuading Mrs. Sheridan to postpone the journey until to-morrow," and going up the steps from the terrace, Lord Brandon disappeared through the great entrance door of the Hall.

Mrs. Sheridan turned to her husband, who stopped his pacing of the terrace, and gazed gloomily at her.

"Richard, I see you are displeased with me, but what was I to do with those horrible men in the house, and the knowledge that at last we were paupers?"

"I am not censuring you, Betty, but our affairs are much less dismal than you suppose."

"How can they be worse? The bills are enormous, and we haven't a penny to pay them. We are in the gutter, and extravagance has done it. How often have I warned you?"

"Yes, yes, my dear; there is little use in talking of that."

"We are in the very deeps of poverty, Richard, yet I am not dismayed. I will economize and work my fingers to the bone for you."

"No need for that, I think," returned her husband, coldly. "How came you here? By stage coach?"

Mrs. Sheridan drew herself up haughtily.

"No; we are not down to that, yet. I should think, Richard, you would not wish your wife to travel like a bagman."

"I merely asked how you came."

"I ordered a chaise, and, as I have often heard you say that time is money, I had two postilions, and four horses."

"Yes, time is money, when you have to pay for it," said Sheridan, laughing grimly.

"There, I see you grudge me the right even to travel in comfort!"

The lady put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Not at all; I was about to suggest half a dozen outriders. A coach and four is an admirable start for an economical life."

"You always doled out silver if it was for me, but scattered gold where your own pleasures were concerned," she said, in muffled tones. "Here are you in this luxurious mansion, while I am left in a hired house—"

"Tut-tut, Betty. Our house is more luxurious than Brandon Hall."

"You desert me for these painted creatures!"

"They are not painted, but are capable, hard-working, kind-hearted women; neither were you deserted. Lord Brandon asked you to come with me, but you refused to leave London."

"How could I know that disaster was impending?"

"Very well, Elizabeth; let us agree to say no more about it."

"The return journey costs but half as much as coming here, so, if you look at it the right way, it was economical, for you will return with me. I thought of that. If you but gave thought to the future as I do, we would not now be involved in disaster."

"There is no disaster, my dear. I've a thousand pounds in my pocket at this moment."

"Why, where did you get it, Richard? You had nothing when you left London!" And the lady dropped her handkerchief

and hands to her lap.

"No matter for that. It is borrowed money, but we have to-day rehearsed a play that will refund it, and next week I shall be lessee of Drury Lane Theater. So cheer up, my girl. Instead of being at the end, we are at the beginning of prosperity. Lord Brandon has lent me the money, and will lend twenty thousand more before many days are past."

"Richard, I will stop here a week if you like." And Mrs. Sheridan rose, and crossed to her husband.

"No; we go at once to London," said Sheridan, firmly. "Here comes Brandon," he added hastily, as the young man ran lightly down the steps.

"Dick," he cried, "I hope you set forth in glowing language the excellences of this inn under its new management, and have praised the landlord as the best of hosts."

"You were always one of Betty's favorites, Charlie, so it was unnecessary for me to paint the lily. But we must get back to London at once. Our house will need fumigating, and luckily I have the sulphur. I hope you'll have a jolly dinner to-night, and we're both sorry to leave."

"Then come in with me, and partake a foretaste of the feast."

Mrs. Sheridan took his arm, and the three entered the house together.

CHAPTER III

As Lord Brandon and his guests disappeared within Brandon Hall there came a ring at the entrance gate. A servant, opening it, admitted Humble Sycamore, who, lingering without, had been waiting to see the coast clear before entering. The astute Sycamore, being of an ambitious turn of mind, believed in taking thought for his own advancement as well as that of his master's business, and on this visit to Brandon Hall he meant to serve both ends, giving his own the preference.

"His lordship's engaged at present, Mr. Sycamore, with Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan. They're going back to London, sir, in a carriage and four."

Sycamore evinced no disappointment at his lordship's absence, but merely remarked:

"That's what it is to be rich, Miles. They're just a carriage and three to the better of me. I've ridden here on the worst horse in London, and I didn't enjoy it. I must go back the same way, bad luck to it."

"Horseback exercise do be a bit tiring, sir."

"You're right. Is Miss Chaffers within?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here's a shilling for you, all for yourself."

"Thank you, sir."

"Go and tell Miss Chaffers that Mr. Humble Sycamore wishes a word with her. Say I have brought important news from London, and ask her to see me in the garden."

"Certainly, sir."

Sycamore placed on one of the small tables the portfolio he had brought with him, and walked up and down the terrace.

"Courage, Humble, courage," he murmured to himself, "and you've backed a winner. She had three hundred a year of her own, and now his lordship binds the estate to pay her seven hundred a year while she lives. Once this is known, she'll be so proud that I'll have no chance with her, but if I propose before she hears it, then it's a wedding or breach-of-promise case, and I stand to win either way. Strike while the iron's hot, Humble, my boy. All, here she comes!"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Sycamore," said Miss Chaffers, primly. "This is an unexpected pleasure. What brings you to Brandon Hall?"

"The worst horse in London," was the answer discreetly checked unspoken. Aloud Sycamore said:

"Ah, Selina, need you ask? When last we met it was within the cold, unsympathetic precincts of a legal chamber, surrounded by witnesses, in circumstances that froze all expression of affection."

"Expression of affection! What extraordinary language you use, Mr. Sycamore!"

"The term is unfamiliar from practitioners' lips except in breach-of-promise cases. Yet affection rises in my heart at every thought of you."

"Dear me, I don't understand you, Mr. Sycamore," murmured Selina, much flustered.

"Then, Selina, I shall make my meaning plain as an affidavit." He dropped down on his knees. "I offer you the lifelong devotion of a humble but loving heart. Selina, will you be my wife?"

"And this to me!" cried Selina, with hauteur. "Ah, fickle man, you can no longer play with those tender feelings you were wont to trifle with. Your coldness when you learned that the late Lord Brandon had left me penniless was equaled only by your warmth when you found I had three hundred a year of my own. 'Tis that three hundred has brought you hotfoot from London."

"I scorn the imputation, Selina. Three hundred—what's three hundred?"

"It's just four times seventy-five, which I know to be your annual income."

"And can you, fair but cruel Selina, suppose that for paltry pelf I would throw myself on the sward, already becoming damp, at the feet of the most gifted of her sex?"

"Yes," said Miss Chaffers, with cold deliberation, "I can, and do."

Sycamore rose awkwardly, brushing the knees of his trousers.

"No, proud and noble damsel, I came to offer you my new and glorious prospects. I am no hireling now at seventy-five pounds grudgingly paid. There is before me seven hundred pounds a year, which I am eager to share with you, and thus I hastened here on the hardest horse to ride in all London. Could I but win your love, I guarantee we'd share a round thousand between us every year."

"You mean with my three hundred? Can this be true? Have you been taken into partnership with Sharp & Clipper?"

"I have abandoned the law, Selina. No more solicitor's work for me, except to solicit your favor. I shall live as a landed gentleman should, on an income coming from the land, secured by one of the finest estates in England, and that income will last while England lasts."

"I congratulate you. Has some relative died?"

"Distant, Selina, distant. Marriage connection with our family, but a real lord, no less."

"Why, dearie me, Humble," exclaimed Miss Chaffers, melting. "I had no idea that you were connected with the aristocracy."

"I was always a modest man, Selina. I do not boast of our family tree. My name and property I offer to share with you, Selina, be the same more or less, as the law book says."

"Humble Sycamore, your unaffected eloquence warms my trusting heart," said Selina, completely convinced. "I always loved you, Humble, as well you know, cunning flatterer, but I wished to be loved for myself alone."

"So did I, Selina. Forgive my mention of the seven hundred. Is it a go, then?"

"If you mean, will I be your loving wife, my timid, whispered answer is 'Yes.' Oh, be kind to me, Humble."

"I will that. For richer, for poorer, remember, my Selina."

He clasped her in his arms, she languishing her head on his shoulder. The interruption that came was none the less startling for being uttered in the demurest of tones.

"Did you call me, Miss Chaffers?" asked a meek voice, and the two quickly sprang apart, to face Lady Eleanor's maid.

"Oh, Sophia," stammered Miss Chaffers, "I—I wished Miles to clear away these bottles and glasses."

"I will tell him, Miss," said the maid, obediently.

Miss Chaffers turned to the clerk with an assumption of her usual composure.

"I will discover if his lordship is disengaged," she remarked calmly. "Follow me, Mr. Sycamore."

Sophia smiled mockingly as the pair entered the house, then beckoned to Miles, whom she espied hovering about in the background.

"Follow her, indeed!" commented the girl. "Well, she's hooked one at last."

She clattered the bottles and glasses on a tray, and handed it to the man servant.

"Go in with that," she commanded, "and come back as quickly as you can, Miles. I have something important to say: something that will make our fortunes."

"I'll be back in two ticks," said the man.

He returned speedily, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Miles," exclaimed Sophia, but in a low voice, "what do you think of the gang master's brought down from London?"

"They're a rum lot, raising pandy-harmonium all night, and never getting up till lunch time. Do you think Lady Eleanor likes the Lunnon trash?"

"I'm sure she doesn't. She's weeping most of the time, poor lady!"

"Well," said Miles, philosophically, "'tain't no use a-weeping. New masters, new manners, say I. She can't help herself."

"Can't she, though?"

"Well, how can she?"

"That's my secret, Miles. That's what I was going to tell you. That's where you must help me."

"Is she going to marry the new master, and turn out that lot?"

"No, she don't need to marry. Lady Eleanor can turn him and the gang out, whenever she says the word."

"You speak in sphinxes, Sophia; what do you mean?"

"Listen, Miles. At the lawyer's office in London I read the will Lord Brandon left."

"But Lord Brandon didn't leave no will."

"Yes, he did. I read the copy when Lady Eleanor was a-holding of it. Brandon Hall don't belong to new master at all, not a stick or stone of it. It all belongs to Lady Eleanor herself."

"By my fackins, what did she say when she found it out?"

"Found it out? She knew it all the time. She hid the real will so that the new lord would get the estate."

"What a fool! Why did she do that?"

"In love with him, I suppose."

"Nonsense; she'd only seen him two or three days."

"Much you know about it! They were boy and girl here together; grew up hand in hand before old Lord Brandon turned young sprig away."

"That's no way to win a man," declared Miles, contemptuously. "She should have stuck tight to the blunt, then he'd have married her quick enough."

"Yes; money is all you men think of," said the girl, scornfully.

"Me? Oh, I'm not took that way. I'm a-marrying of you for love, I am, although I do hold we should save our wages."

"What need is there for me to save my wages when all the time I know where the will is hid?"

The slower witted Miles failed to grasp the point of her remarks.

"It don't leave no blunt to us, do it?" he asked, stupidly.

"Oh, you are a simple, Miles. I'll get the will, and you'll take it to new master, and say: 'Here's the paper that leaves everything to Lady Eleanor. You give me and Sophia the lease of the Brandon Arms, and two thousand pounds, down on the nail, and you can burn this 'ere will.'"

"Soph, dear, I'd never dare. Young master's got a look in his eyes sometimes—well, he cold chills me, that's what he do. I shouldn't like to make him angry."

"Angry! Could it make a man angry to save all his property for him? But you'll make a mess of it, so I'll do it myself; then we'll have the Brandon Arms, and two thousand pounds in money. Will you help me, Miles?"

"Aye, that I will, lass, but I'd not like to face him when that look comes into his eyes."

"I'll do the facing. You'd bungle it, anyway. I'm not afraid of his looks. Hush, here's his lordship now, but Lady Eleanor's with him. I must see him alone. Not a word of this to a soul; remember, Miles!"

"No fear."

They went back to their respective duties with some alacrity as Lord Brandon and Lady Eleanor came down the steps together. By this time the moon had risen, and lights were visible here and there in the Manor House.

"I wonder what's come over Aunt Selina?" Brandon said, laughing. "I told her just now I'd arranged for her an annuity of seven hundred pounds a year. I thought the news would please her, but it had a contrary effect. She began to storm so hysterically that I fled. She said she had been made ridiculous; as if I could make her more ridiculous than she is, poor old dear."

"Charles, I like neither your jokes nor your laughing," reproved Eleanor, with dignity. "You are heartless. She is my relative."

"She is mine also, Nell. You say I am heartless. I want to show you I am not."

"There is one thing I wish to learn from you. Do you persist in selling this estate?"

"I must, Nell. My word is pledged. But, sweet Nell, you were never meant to be hidden away in this remote corner. London is your world. There is a town house. I'll promise not to sell that. Will you not share it with me?"

"I care nothing for the town house. I loathe London, and all pertaining to it. You may sell it, so far as I'm concerned."

"Indeed, Nell: I wish I had a tithe of London to part with. A man can sell only what he has. But let us cease all talk of barter. This lovely moonlight was not meant for traffic. 'Tis fairy land, and Cupid's very hunting ground, and, thank the god of Love, we are its sole inhabitants."

"What an incorrigible actor you are! The scenery is here, therefore why not the play, say you? Cannot you take a serious view of anything?"

"Serious at five-and-twenty, Nell? Absurd! And yet I'm serious enough in this, my girl. What have you against me, cousin?"

"I charge you with heartless lack of consideration for your father's memory. You have filled his house with revelers, and propose to scatter the patrimony to the winds. To you has been bequeathed more than this mansion and yonder countryside. Your father left to you an exalted station and an honored name. That station you abandon; that name you flaunt upon a London playbill!"

"Why, Nell, a man's life is not to be laid out for him by dead and gone ancestors. They lived their lives, God rest their souls, and by my soul, I shall live mine."

"Your life! And what is your ambition? The founder of your line was ennobled by his sovereign for valor on the field of battle. His stout right arm and courageous heart saved the life of his king, while you, his descendant, would strut upon the boards with your sword of lath, and mimic such as he. If this is the latest outcome of Brandon blood, would God had made me a man to take the place of the deserter."

"I thank God he has done nothing of the kind. Such women as you, Nell, are rare enough already."

"Your levity amazes me."

"Levity? I am in sober earnest. I am what circumstances have made me. A pity they had not turned out a better job."

"Circumstances are not to blame. They give you the right to be a gentleman; you make yourself a mountebank."

"Sweet cousin, you are unfair to me. By the immortal William, I think it to my credit that I am no jailbird. That I have won a place for myself, and an honest place, should be matter for commendation rather than censure. I had no help but my own hand and brain, yet now that I have returned, you, the friend of my boyhood, receive me as if I were a felon."

"That I do not, or I should never stand here with you. If you but fill worthily the place your father left vacant, you will find no stancher friend than I. Cannot I persuade you?"

"Look you, Nell, my word is pledged. You could not ask me to forswear myself. The greatest man alive at this moment is Dick Sheridan, who in my need befriended me; in his need I have pledged myself to befriend him. At this moment Sheridan is in straits, Nell; almost without means. He married for love when he might have married for money, and has got a jealous, extravagant spouse. A catastrophe impends. With twenty thousand pounds Dick can secure Drury Lane, and his fortune is made."

"Then give him twenty thousand pounds. You can do that without selling the house of your forefathers."

"That I shall do, of course, for my theater will take two or three years in the building. I have sworn Dick shall have a temple worthy of him. I am a hero worshiper, Nell, and Dick is my hero. I am no ancestor worshiper like the Chinese. So this estate must go from me; like the alchemists of old, into gold I transmute it."

"You are resolved on that?"

"Absolutely, sweet cousin," responded Brandon, with assumed jauntiness, "so we will waste no more precious time in talking of it. Such an hour as this was not made for the chatter of bargain and sale, but for the sweet whisperings of love. My Nelly!" He attempted to take her hands, but she shrank away from him. "My sweet lass, in whose clear eyes I first read what I did not understand, until now my own heart is interpreter. I love you, Nell. Am I too bold in believing what the eyes of yesterday told me, even though the lips of to-day should deny?"

"Sir, you are mistaken. You mistook me then, and you mistake me now. I do not love you, nor can I ever love again."

"Again? Surely, Nell, you once cared for me, and surely your eyes, that were lit with the glow of heaven, illumining the lawyer's dismal den in London when we met a week ago, gave token you had not forgotten? Nelly—Nelly, you are quenching that conceit with which you taunted me. I am not the monster of self-esteem you think me. The lesson is not needed, Nell; a new fear tugs at my heart. Your cold words—your distant manner—Nelly, my girl, do not torture me. I have always loved you, and you know it."

"I know nothing of the kind, Lord Brandon. If I thought this new fancy, born of a moonlit evening and surroundings that appeal to what you call your heart, was not as evanescent as the moonlight, I should be sorry for you. As it is, I trust this transient emotion will fade quickly from your memory when you are again in London. You may be certain it will not linger in mine."

"You say you never loved me?"

"Never."

"As a girl you never loved me?"

"Your vanity finds that incredible, no doubt."

"Vanity! I have none. But love of you thrills every fiber of me. You say you never loved me. I must take that as true, and am indeed deluded, but it was no vanity that misled me. Such love as mine loomed so huge that it seemed impossible that it could not draw forth its like from you. Great passion calls for great. But though deeply disappointed, I am not cast down—"

"I knew you would not be."

"You are harsh with me. I will win you yet, Nelly."

"Never."

"I swear it. I shall become the man you would have me be. I shall make myself worthy. My o'ertowering passion shall

compel your love."

"It cannot. Never again shall my heart beat to the promptings of love."

"Again? Twice you have used that word, which now takes on a sinister meaning. Again! Why do you say 'again'? Do you love another?"

"If you must know it, I have loved another."

"Who is he?"

"That you have no right to ask. Yet it matters little now who knows it. Like you, he went to London; but, unlike you, he cannot return. My only lover died in London; judge then how bitterly I hate your vaunted town."

"Eleanor, you break my heart. You loved another, and I, fond fool, never suspected it. Curst luck is mine. But, Nelly, your young heart is not forever sunk in an untimely grave?"

"It is."

"It must not be. 'Tis against nature. I, living, protest against the monopoly of the dead. Let me teach you to forget."

"You cannot. To me my lost love is more real than hosts of living men. Were I to tread the streets of London, his wan ghost were at my side, the only vital being in the throng to me, the multitude vanishing from my sight in his dear presence. Dead, you say; all else is dead, and he and I the sole survivors. I swear to God in heaven that none but he shall ever call me wife."

"Then may God in heaven spare a thought for me! None of His creatures need it now so sorely. Nelly, it is for your grief I should sorrow, but I am indeed selfish, as you charge me, and it is my own woe that fills my thoughts. Him you love is dead, yet, dying, loved you. My love lives, but turns from me with loathing."

Sinking into a chair, Brandon flung his arms on the table before it and buried his head in them. Eleanor turned away silently, then impetuously whirled round, taking a step toward him. But her footfall made no sound on the soft grass, and the man with his face hidden guessed nothing of her impulse. He remained motionless, while the girl, checking herself, let her outstretched hands fall to her sides, and went slowly across the terrace, and so into the house.



CHAPTER IV

Miles viewed his arrangement of glasses and decanters with a critical eye, but his thoughts were not exclusively on his task. From the dining room adjoining came shouts of laughter and the clinking of glasses, indications that the banquet was progressing merrily. Miles was making preparations in the sumptuous withdrawing room for coffee and liqueurs, in readiness for the conclusion of the repast. He paused, listening to the sounds of festivity.

"What a rum world this is, to be sure," he soliloquized. "You may laugh—" and he waved his hand toward the curtained door—"but you wouldn't laugh so hearty if you knew the brink you were standing on. With one little push Sophia and I could send you whirling. Lor! To think of it! Young Brandon in all his pride is but a pauper, if he only knew it—a begging pauper!"

"Who's a pauper, Miles?"

Miles, startled, became aware of Humble Sycamore's unobtrusive entrance, and retorted:

"You are, for all I know."

Sycamore helped himself to a glass of wine, and smacked his lips.

"That's what you don't know. Why, I'm just coming in for a thousand a year when I marry Miss Chaffers. No pauper about that, Miles."

"No; she'll be the pauper then."

"You're witness to our arrangement, Miles. Remember that. I'll do something proper for you and Sophia the day I'm married. Sophia saw her in my arms, and I'll warrant you were looking on, too."

"Yes; thank'ee, sir. We'll remember, and we'll witness till we're blind, sir."

"No, keep your eyes open. A blind witness is little good in law, Miles. I've been a-dodging of her since nightfall, for I think somehow she wants to break her bargain."

"Couldn't want that, sir, with a Lunnon gent like you."

"It doesn't seem reasonable, does it? Breach-of-promise, in that case, and heavy damages. You're witnesses, you and Sophia, remember, and I'll do something handsome the day of the verdict. Now, where's Lord Brandon? My horse is saddled and all ready, and I must be in London to-morrow morning. I want him to sign these papers, and then I'm off."

"Beautiful night for a ride, sir."

"Yes; but where's Lord Brandon, so that I can begin to ride?"

"He's in there," said Miles, pointing to the dining room, "but not likely to come out, while drink's a-flowing."

"But there's—"

Miles held up a warning hand. "Hush!" he interrupted, hearing footsteps he recognized "'Tis Miss Chaffers coming." But the clerk had no time to escape.

"Villain!" was the lady's bitter salutation.

"Miles? A villain?" questioned Sycamore.

"No; *you*, Humble Sycamore!"

"You hear that?" cried Sycamore, appealing to Miles. "I'm a villain. You heard it. That's good for a hundred pounds any day before a jury, if it's not proved."

"Brazen thief!"

"Me—a thief?"

"Yes, you, *you!*"

"Defamation of character in its harshest form. Anywhere from one fifty to three hundred. Go on, madam, go on."

"Serpent!"

"Doubtful appellation—say twenty-five quid," said Sycamore, with a pencil noting the statement on his writing tablet.

"Cut-purse, and midnight robber!"

"One moment—robber! Yes, madam?"

"Crawling under false pretenses into a virtuous home!"

"Virtuous home!" Writing. "Prosecution will not deny the home is virtuous, but will dispute the crawling. I rode here. Continue, madam."

"You shameless liar, saying you had in prospect seven hundred a year!"

"I can prove that I had. Shameless liar, I think you said? Quite so." He added it to the list on his tablet. "Universally recognized as a phrase provocative of assault. Madam, be thankful you are not a man, and are thus safe from my just fury. Proceed, madam!"

"*Your* fury! You cowardly cat!"

"Ah, that's a new term. Value uncertain. It may form a precedent. Sycamore *versus* Chaffers—'cowardly cat' rated by intelligent jury at fifteen pounds, let us say. You were about to remark, Miss Chaffers?"

"I was about to remark that I have learned, since I saw you, all about your deep duplicity."

"Duplicity? Thanks. Admirable word, imputing sneaking dishonesty. Anything more?"

"I scorn your contemptible attentions."

"And refuse to marry me?"

"Most assuredly I do."

Sycamore snapped shut his tablets and sighed deeply.

"How prone is the lay mind to exaggeration of expression! You should never enter into a discussion of this sort, madam, without a solicitor by your side, and should use no term unsanctioned by him. Madam, you have stirred me to the depths of my nature."

"You mean scoundrel!"

Hastily Sycamore pulled out his tablets again, and made an entry.

"Scoundrel! Tut-tut-tut-tut! Probably the most costly word in our language. See Bayles *versus* Johnson. Yes, madam?"

"You thought I had no protector!"

"The law protects us all, madam. Yes, you'll find that to be the case."

"What do you mean?"

Sycamore struck a dramatic attitude, hand thrust into the bosom of his coat.

"You have wounded a tender heart, madam; you have imputed to me the basest of motives, madam; you have made use of appellations of contempt and calumny, madam, whose seriousness will be more fully explained by your solicitor when you repeat them to his shuddering ears, madam."

"You are a shuddering ass, sir!" retorted Selina, scornfully.

Sycamore hurriedly abandoned his statuesque pose to make another note.

"That's something new," he commented. "Another precedent, by the Chancellor! This will be a celebrated case. Is an ass that shudders worse than one that maintains an immovable calm? That's a point for the jury. I think so; I think so."

"And yet—and yet—" faltered Selina, wavering perceptibly, "if you could convince me 'twas not avarice that tempted you—if you could prove you were not a mere sordid fortune hunter, how willingly would I take you back into my favor."

"Oh, come now, madam, you are not to think you can mitigate damages by backing water in that fashion. Miles, leave us. You have heard enough."

"More than enough," commented Miles, obeying willingly.

"Perhaps Lord Brandon misjudged you," mused Selina.

"Did he say anything libelous?"

"No; he told me the seven hundred was mine, and not yours. You did lead me to believe it was yours, didn't you, Humble?"

"As there are no witnesses present, I admit, entirely without prejudice, that perhaps you were justified in coming to such a conclusion."

"But, Humble, trusting hearts are more than gold mines, are they not, after all?"

"Well, Selina, the value I have known set on trusting hearts has been entirely within the law courts, and before a susceptible jury. I am bound to state they are rated somewhat higher than the average gold mine of the city."

"Will you forgive me for my seeming distrust of you?"

Sycamore reflected. The law is uncertain in the matter of damages, and a thousand a year in the hand is better than five hundred in the bush, with costs deducted.

"I will forgive you, Selina," he said, magnanimously.

"Oh, Humble," breathed Selina, and embraced him, but, as on a previous occasion, the interruption of a third party caused a speedy separation.

"One is never certain of a moment's peace in this house," grumbled Miss Chaffers, but she allowed her face to betray no annoyance as Lady Eleanor entered, followed by Miles.

"Mr. Sycamore, I have been looking for you everywhere," said her ladyship.

"All the ladies are after me to-night," murmured Sycamore aside, but he said aloud, very respectfully:

"Madam, I am at your service."

"You brought certain papers with you from London, and are doubtless well aware of their purport. Are they deeds of sale?"

"Well, madam, it is not customary for a practitioner to divulge a client's business. You should ask Lord Brandon anything you—"

"You are no practitioner, and Lord Brandon is not your client. Are they deeds of sale?"

"Madam, you embarrass me; still, I suppose there is no real secret about the document. It is merely an agreement of sale, which, when Lord Brandon signs it, completes a bargain made by my master with another client. The Brandon estate is then sold for two hundred and thirteen thousand pounds twelve shillings and tenpence, as valued by commissioners duly appointed, their estimate accepted in advance by both parties."

"Has Lord Brandon signed the agreement?"

"Not yet, madam. It is for that I am waiting. I must to London with it to-night, and my horse is ready."

"Very well. Wait for Lord Brandon in the library. I must see him first, and as I wish to see him alone, perhaps you will leave me here, Aunt Selina."

"You are never going to persuade him not to sell, I hope, Eleanor?" Miss Chaffers asked, in some alarm. "Don't be selfish. Remember, I get seven hundred a year under this bargain."

"You are certain of your seven hundred, Aunt Selina, whatever happens. Leave me, please," and as they obeyed, she turned to Miles. "Tell Lord Brandon I wish to speak with him."

"I cannot, my lady. His lordship ordered me not to disturb him on any account."

"His orders did not refer to me. Do as I bid you."

"Pardon me, my lady; I dare not."

"This is absurd. Stand aside. I will call him myself."

"Indeed, my lady, I must not allow any one to enter. His lordship was most particular; but I'll venture to take in a note, if you let me have it half an hour from now."

"No; I shall await him in the library. Tell him I am there, and must see him as soon as he comes out."

"I will, my lady."

Left alone in the room, Miles went to the door, opened it softly, then beckoned to Sophia, who lingered outside.

"Is the way clear, Miles?" she whispered.

"Yes, yes, my dear; an' a time I've 'ad a-gettin' rid of 'em. Lady Eleanor would see 'is lordship, but I balked 'er. 'Ave ye got the will?"

Instead of answering, Sophia issued her commands.

"Now, Miles," she ordered, "tell his lordship that a lady wants to see him, most particular. That'll fetch him. When you've brought in his lordship, go out by that door,"—she pointed to the one through which she had entered,— "and wait on the other side. Allow no one to interrupt us—you understand?"

"Yes, my dear."

He passed through the heavily curtained doors that led to the dining room, while Sophia walked up and down in agitation, talking to herself.

"I must make no mistake. Dear me, how my heart flutters! Two thousand pounds, and the Brandon Arms, my lord, and there's the parchment to burn. What if he takes it from me, and burns it before my eyes, and refuses to give me anything? I'd proclaim him from the housetops! But then, who would believe me? No, he won't do that. He dare not take the risk! Ah, here they come!"

CHAPTER V

Sophia stood with hands behind her, the right one clasping the will. The curtains parted, showing Lord Brandon, who grasped them high on each side of him, swaying slightly, and steadying himself.

"I thought you said it was Lady Eleanor, fellow!" he reprimanded, turning to Miles.

"No, my lord, I said 'a lady.'"

"Very well; very well. You wish to see me, madam? I—I regret—that I have not the pleasure of knowing you."

"I am maid to Lady Eleanor, sir."

"Ah, yes. Pardon me for not recog-cognizing you. I am most stupid in recalling faces. Her ladyship has sent a message, perhaps?"

"No, my lord. I wished to see you on my own account."

Brandon bowed politely.

"Charmed, I'm sure. What can I do for you, madam?"

"My lord," said Sophia, hurriedly, "Miles and I are to be married, and—"

"Delighted to hear it. I con-congratulate you both, 'pon m' honor. I shall remember you on the wedding day, but you must let me know the date. And now, miss, if you'll excuse me—guests waitin', don't you know. A happy wedding to you, and many of 'em—you know what I mean."

"My lord, 'tis more serious than you think. I beg—"

"Oh, I know, I know. Of course it's serious. You've thought well before taking the plunge, I hope. But nothing venture, nothing win, eh? 'Course not. Blessing on you both. Mind you let me know the date. Good night!"

"My lord, if I can save you two hundred thousand pounds, will you give Miles and me the Brandon Arms and two thousand pounds in coin?"

Brandon checked himself as he turned to leave.

"What?" he exclaimed.

"My lord, you do not own the Brandon estate."

"Oh, yes, I do. I haven't signed the agreement yet. To-morrow I shan't own it, though, but I'll have the money."

"My lord, you do not understand. The late Lord Brandon, your father, left a legal will, and you are cut off with a shilling."

Suddenly sobered, Brandon steadied himself, looking earnestly at the girl.

"My—father—left—a—will?" he repeated, slowly.

"Yes, my lord."

"And cut me off?"

"Yes, my lord."

Brandon returned to his former place near the fire.

"Oh, this is interesting! My guests can wait. Why was the will you speak of not acted upon?"

"It could not be found after your father's death."

"I see. I take it for granted that you have been fortunate enough to discover the missing document?"

"Yes, my lord."

"I thought so. Where is it?"

"If your lordship will give me your word—"

"Where is the will?"

"I trust to your lordship's honor to—"

"Give me the will."

"My lord, you must—"

"Give me the will, girl," demanded Brandon, sternly, advancing a step toward her. The girl handed him the document. He opened it, and read, murmuring half aloud fragments here and there.

"Last Will and Testament—being of sound mind—all my possessions—real and personal—my beloved niece, Eleanor Beaumont—Charles Wynchcraft, Lord Brandon.

"Have you read this?" he asked sharply, turning to Sophia.

"Ye—yes, my lord."

"Does your mistress—does Lady Eleanor know of its existence?"

"No, my lord. Nobody knows of it but me and you. There's the fire behind you, and a moment serves for the burning. I'll say nothing, trusting your lordship to do the right thing by me and Miles."

"Why did you not give this parchment to Lady Eleanor?"

"Oh, my lord, I could not think of such a thing. I could not cheat your lordship out of your just due."

"I see. How came you to find the will?"

"I was rummaging, my lord, and happened on it between the leaves of a big book in the library."

"I daresay you are good at rummaging. You showed it to no one?"

"Oh, no, my lord. I brought it direct to you, for I knew you would do the right thing by me."

"That I will not."

"You will not?"

"The right thing would be to deliver you into custody, but, as you are a woman, I will not do the right thing. You may go."

"Surely you are jesting, my lord."

"I never was more serious."

"Sir, you cannot trifle with me. If you think to cheat me because I was so foolish as to give you the will, I shall proclaim you from one end of the land to the other."

"Do so, hussy. Your proclamation will help me in my profession. It will advertise me."

"You may scoff, but I warn you the solicitors in London know that will was written."

"Naturally, because they wrote it."

Intent on his own thoughts, Lord Brandon did not notice the parting of the curtains, and was unaware of Woodward's entrance until the latter spoke, somewhat uncertainly.

"I say, Charlie, wha' the devil d' ye mean by treating ladies an'—an' gennlemen this fashion? 'S—insult. Deserting festive board, an' all that, Charlie."

"I beg your pardon, Woodward, and also that of the ladies. I have business which will not wait."

"Hang—hang business when festive bowl flowish. Hang—"

Mrs. Lessingham pushed him aside without ceremony, and entered, Miss Barsanti following. They stared at Lord Brandon in amazement.

"What's wrong, Charlie? You look as if you had seen a ghost," cried Mrs. Lessingham.

"I've not seen a ghost, Mrs. Lessingham, but one has just dealt me an unexpected blow. I confess the impact has staggered me."

"It has sobered you, Charlie. It must have been a right-hander from the shoulder."

"It was," agreed Brandon, laughing. "A right hand that held a pen. Didn't you know that the pen is the sharpest stiletto? But no, I cannot say that in your presence. The stiletto that plays havoc with our hearts is a woman's eyes, Miss Barsanti."

"Thanks, Lord Charlie," said Miss Barsanti, curtsying deeply. "And is this," she indicated Sophia by a gesture, "the woman who has dealt the blow?"

Sophia tossed her head.

"Indeed, I'm better than the likes of you, Miss Impudence, and if I open my mouth, and tell—"

"That is exactly what you shall not do," interrupted Brandon, sharply, "or you will sleep in prison to-night. Stand you there, and keep your tongue quiet."

"Oh, what a cruel penalty for a woman," murmured Mrs. Lessingham.

"If you will all retire to the dining hall for a few minutes," requested Brandon, "I will rejoin you when this business is settled."

"Well, of all the proposals!" ejaculated Miss Barsanti. "Are we your guests, or are we not? Who ever heard of the like? Here are we on the edge of a scandal in high life; I know it; I feel it in the air. There stands a woman threatened with prison. Here stands Lord Charlie frightened sober. Enter the Drury Lane Company, and he asks us to go, if you please!"

"Inhospitable! None—none ovvus go!" stammered Woodward.

"Very well; stay you here, if you wish. I need some witnesses. Miles!" he called peremptorily, and the servant promptly obeyed the summons.

"Tell Sycamore to come to me, and bring his papers with him. Get me pens and ink. Ask Lady Eleanor if she will be good enough to give me five minutes."

"Yes, my lord."

"Charlie," said Mrs. Lessingham, "you make me shiver with your precision. You remind me of Garrick when he is preparing a tragedy for the stage. I hope you are not bringing on actors for some dismal denouement?"

"No; I'm rehearsing a comedy. Indeed, I'm not sure but it's a farce."

"Good; do we take a part in it?"

"Only as witnesses."

"Hurrah! We're the blessed audience," exclaimed Woodward.

"That's a new part for us," remarked Miss Barsanti, "and saves the bother of study."

Miles returned almost at once, ushering in Lady Eleanor, who was followed by Humble Sycamore. Acting on his master's instructions, Miles brought forward a table, placed on it pens and ink, and set a chair before it.

Woodward bowed low to Lady Eleanor.

"Delighted, madam, and your most obedient servant," he said, rather thickly. "May I introduce your ladyship to most distinguished company?"

"Woodward, if you will permit me, I will do the honors of my house," announced Lord Brandon, very quietly. "Lady Eleanor—Miss Barsanti. Miss Barsanti—Lady Eleanor Beaumont, my cousin. It is no small part of the glory of Mr. Garrick, Lady Eleanor, that Miss Barsanti is one of his most capable co-workers. Lady Eleanor—Mrs. Lessingham, also of Drury Lane. My friend Woodward you have already met. Do not think harshly of us if we seem frivolous. We play our little parts, and vanish, leaving no harm done, satisfied if our acting seems genuine while we occupy the light. I have now to sign an agreement of sale, that this good man, Sycamore, may speed upon his way. I thought it right, Lady Eleanor, that when a man signs away his patrimony his next-of-kin might properly witness the ceremony, therefore I begged the favor of your presence. Sycamore, are the papers ready?"

Sycamore spread them on the table.

"Here you are, my lord. You sign along that penciled line; the witnesses here."

Brandon seated himself and took up a pen. "Right, good scrivener."

"Lord Brandon, I ask you, for the last time, not to sign." Lady Eleanor put her request very earnestly.

"Much as it distresses me, fair cousin, to displease you, I am bound in honor to sign this document, unless there is some stronger reason to urge against it than that of sentiment."

"I *have* a stronger reason. Do not force me to use it. I am resolved that instrument shall not be signed, or if signed, I am determined to nullify it."

"Your reason must be powerful. Explain it, I beg of you."

Eleanor remained silent, her head bowed, and eyes shaded with one hand. Brandon, his pen poised in midair, awaited her answer.

"If ye know any just cause or im-im-im-pediment, I charge ye both—Gad, that's the marriage service! Let's marry the culprits!" cried the jovial Woodward, still under the influence of wine. He had received no such shock as had sobered his friend.

Mrs. Lessingham turned on him sharply with a look of stern rebuke that penetrated even his cloudy perceptions.

"Hush! We are playing at cross purposes here," she whispered.

"Well, madam?" prompted Brandon, still watching his cousin.

"Are you resolved to sign?" questioned Eleanor, her voice very low.

"Resolved!" was the decisive answer.

"Then the fate of the stubborn o'ertake you. Sophia, go to my room, get my keys, unlock the lowest drawer in my cabinet, and bring the parchment you will find there."

Hurriedly the maid went from the room. Brandon put down his pen, and rose, facing Lady Eleanor.

"Does the parchment you send for checkmate me?"

"Most completely, sir."

"Nothing can do that but a will, legally worded, duly signed and witnessed, leaving this property to some other than me."

"You have described the instrument, Lord Brandon."

"Good, and well played," said Brandon, still quietly, but with a grim smile on his lips. "Miles, draw back this table, and clear it of its useless paraphernalia. And Miles, pursue the flying Sophia, else you are like to miss a wife. She told me you were to marry. After her, man, and don't stand gaping there. She is at this moment footing it down the lane. Speed, or your Atalanta is lost, for your golden apples are gone."

"If gold is going, I follow it," said Miles, and was as good as his word.

"My maid is in my room, gone to do my bidding!" cried Eleanor.

"That she is not, dear cousin. She has taken flight, and you'll never see her again. Glad was she to get your order to go. She is a good servant, and forestalls her orders. What you told her to do a moment since, she did half an hour ago. Here is the will," and he produced the parchment from an inner pocket.

Eleanor made an impulsive movement forward.

"Give it to me!"

"Not so. I shall put it in safer custody. Sycamore, is your horse fed and saddled?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Are you ready for the road? Then, my bold highwayman, get you toward London. Take this to your master, and tell him the missing will is found. Register it, replevin it, habeas corpus it, or do whatever your knavish trade finds necessary, and don't forget your fees. Mount, legal freebooter, and away. Off with you!"

Lady Eleanor sprang forward to intercept the clerk, but Brandon stood before and stopped her.

"He must not take that to London," she protested.

"Pardon, madam, but he must."

"I will not have it so. The property is yours."

"Not a stiver of it. You said you would stop the signing, and you have done so, but you cannot have everything your own way, Nell."

Lady Eleanor recognized that here at last was the Brandon spirit she had been so anxious to arouse, and knew, too, that she could not prevail against it. She sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. Mrs. Lessingham stepped forward, her face grave but sympathetic.

"Charlie, does it mean that, after all, you have nothing, when you thought a fortune was yours?"

"Admirably and excellently put, dear Mrs. Lessingham," assented Brandon. "That fact has sobered even Will, here. I am without a roof, so let us from under this one. The Brandon Arms will shelter us to-night."

"Are you so utterly bereft?"

"Absolutely. Most excellent audience, you catch the point precisely. Blessings on such an audience, say I. I told you it was a farce—the Farce of Brandon Hall—for one night only. And so for the road. Away! Stand not upon the order of your going, but go at once."

The two women accepted their dismissal without speaking, but Woodward approached Brandon quite steadily, and placed his hand on the other's shoulder.

"Charlie, I'm sorry for you, hugely sorry. 'Pon my word, I am."

"For me? Nonsense, Will," laughed Brandon. "I'm a free man, I tell you. Off with you! Sorry for me? No need of that, but—Dick Sheridan! Oh, poor Dick Sheridan! Fortune has hit you below the belt."

He followed Woodward to the door, and there paused, turning with a sweeping bow to Eleanor.

"Heiress of Brandon, I salute you," he said, with a courteous sincerity that removed any suspicion of exaggeration from

his words. "Hail, and farewell!"

Then he, too, passed through the doorway, a second time exiled from the home of his ancestors.

CHAPTER VI

That section of St. James's Park surrounding Rosamond's Pond was an ideal place in which to linger. A summerhouse, sheltered by a thick shrubbery, yet open to the lake, held a comfortable bench which invited rest and pleasant meditation, and the banks of the water were studded picturesquely with trees that afforded seclusion without shutting away the sunlight. Lord Brandon, however, leaning on the railing that guarded Rosamond's Pond, evinced no appreciation of the natural beauties about him, and the impatient manner in which he flicked at the herbage with his cane indicated a state of mind little attuned to the peace of the placid water.

"For three mornings I have followed her here," he said, half aloud, "and on the fourth, determined to come to closer quarters, it will be just my luck if she stops away."

The sound of approaching footsteps brought to Brandon's disconsolate face a flush of hope, which as quickly died away when he recognized Richard Sheridan, who seemed to be in high good spirits.

"The top of the morning to you, Lord Misanthrope!" cried the newcomer, cordially. "I heard the sound of your voice, Charlie. What are you doing? Rehearsing or soliloquizing?"

"I am learning my part, to be word perfect when the play comes on."

"And an excellent place you have chosen, Charlie. Bishop Warburton said that this spot was consecrated to disastrous love and elegiac poetry. Are you courting the elegiac Muse, or waiting for some more modern and fashionable goddess?"

"Neither the one nor the other, Dick, but to match your quotation from the bishop, I give you one from Pope, who, in his 'Rape of the Lock,' says:

'This the blest lover shall for Venus take,
And send up vows from Rosamonda's Lake.'

So, my volatile and amorous friend, if you are here to keep a tryst, I will leave the coast of Rosamonda clear for you."

"Charlie, your insinuation is most unjust," laughed Sheridan, easily. "There's no more faithful benedict in town than I. No, I came to find my melancholy Lord of Brandon."

"And how did you know I was here?"

"Still incredulous? Why, by the easiest method in the world. I called to see you at your apartments, and your man informed me you were much depressed these last few days, and had taken to rambling in St. James's Park. He feared the Pond might claim you, as it had done so many others of the dejected, but I told him his master was too good a judge of wine to waste himself on so much insipid water, and further informed him I had news to cheer you, so the honest fellow bade me Godspeed, and here I am. See how simple a tale will put you down, with your dark hints of trysts."

"What is your cheerful news, Sheridan?"

"I am promised the money for certain."

"How much?"

"Twenty thousand pounds."

"Good lord! Has Garrick become generous in his old age, then?"

"Oh, Garrick is not so penurious as the gossips pretend he is."

"It *is* Garrick, then?"

"I am forbidden to say whether or no. I am bound to secrecy."

"Then it's not Garrick?"

"That's as may be. I have given my word. I must not blab, even to you. Truth to tell, I do not know myself for a certainty who the generous donor is. I seem to have made a conquest. The main thing is the gold, and once my hands are upon it, the first thousand goes to you, to repay the timely loan you made me when we thought you were rich. That debt is weighing on my mind, Brandon. To-morrow you shall have it, unless the devil stacks the cards against me once more."

"I shall be glad of the thousand pounds, but not for my own enrichment. The money will not be in my possession an hour."

"What, is the heiress in town?"

"Yes. You see, I took the money from her in all good faith when I thought it my own."

"Does the sour old spinster prove close-fisted? Has she pressed for payment?"

"What sour old spinster?"

"The heiress."

"Why, she is the most beautiful and divine creature the sun ever shone on, and scarce twenty yet."

"Ah, I never saw her, then."

"You saw her at the lawyer's den when first, mistakenly, I went to claim my heritage."

"The lady I met there, who I understood was your relative, seemed nearer twice twenty than the even score."

"Oh, that was Aunt Selina. 'Tis the other I mean."

"I do not remember any other."

"Dick, Dick, where were your eyes?"

"I fear, Charlie, they were gazing in the clouds at the new theater we were to build. I was living in the future rather than the present, and when later I visited Brandon Hall I saw no ladies except those we brought with us from London."

"My cousin entertains rural prejudices against our profession, and although I did introduce to her the coterie from Drury Lane, that was after you had gone. Do you mean to tell me you never noticed her at Sharp & Clipper's office? Why, I certainly introduced you to her."

"I recollect no introduction, and no young lady such as you describe so eloquently," said Sheridan with conviction.

"Then for once, Dick, your eye for beauty failed you. If I should chance to meet her to-day—"

"You have not met her yet?"

"No; I fear my difficulty may be that she will refuse the money."

"I wish I could imbue *my* creditors with a similar reluctance!" murmured Sheridan.

"What I was about to say," went on Brandon, "is this. Am I safe in promising the money within a week?"

"Take my advice, and promise nothing till we have the gold in hand."

"Ah, you are not sure of it? Very well; I shall not mention it. I thought you were in rather an exalted frame of mind, and so became certain of the payment."

"Exalted! Yes; I can think of nothing else; and it elates me, so I sought you out. If a man has mirth or money, let him share it with his friend. Mirth to-day, and money to-morrow."

"Let us trust so."

"Trust; yes. What is life without trust and hope? If I am disappointed again, I shall feel like throwing myself into the cold embrace of Rosamonda here." He waved his hand toward the lake. "But, zounds, Charlie, think of what it means for us if

everything comes right! Drury Lane is ours, then fame and fortune. Away with doubt! We'll believe in the money to-day, even though it escape our clutch to-morrow. Come, Charlie, let's walk over Constitution Hill, and revel in our riches."

"I'll come to-morrow, when the gold's secure."

"But you've no appointment here with a woman, you said."

"I have not spoken to a woman for a month."

"Perhaps you've written to bespeak her company?"

"I have not written to a woman for a year."

"Then let's to Constitution Hill. Ah, here comes at last a fitting companion for the gloomy prince, whom even the chink of gold can't cheer. Bowed head, slow step, dejected mien: an elegiac, poetic form, moving slowly toward the spot of disastrous love. Ah, Charlie, Charlie, and for the moment I believed you! Egad, I am growing old and good."

Brandon glanced behind him, recognized Lady Eleanor Beaumont, and shook Sheridan briskly by the hand.

"Good-by, my friend, good-by. Your news has quite buoyed me up, so now adieu. I'll see you in the morning. I shall do myself the honor to call at Orchard Street, and pay my respects to Mrs. Sheridan. Adieu, God bless you."

"Ah, Charlie, Charlie, no tryst, says you!"

"I gave you my word of honor there was none. If you doubt it, I will run you through."

"No, no, in heaven's name! Where metal is concerned, 'tis gold, and not steel, I yearn for. To be called out by the best swordsman in London, on the very eve of a fortune? That were an anti-climax indeed. I'd refuse, Charlie. But I'm no marplot. Good-by to you." Then he shook his head. "Oh, Charlie, Charlie!" he said, laughing, and walked away.

There was no answering mirth in the eyes that watched his retreat.

"By the plague," muttered Brandon, "I never before knew Dick so tiresome." Then he dismissed Sheridan from his mind, and turned to greet Lady Eleanor, who, absorbed in her own meditations, had not seen him.

"Good morning, Eleanor."

At the sound of his voice the girl looked up quickly, and faced him with a little gasp of astonishment.

"Oh!—I was not expecting to meet any one!" she said. Recovering her self-possession, she advanced, holding out her hand.

"They say that every one meets every one sooner or later in London," remarked Brandon, seeking for an easy conversational opening.

"Is our meeting by chance, then?"

"No; I was waiting for you."

"Waiting for me?"

"Yes; I have been here this hour or more."

"How did you know I was in London?"

"As every one meets every one in London, it naturally follows that every one must some time come to London. If Eleanor came to London, it was but natural she should inhabit her own house. If any one in London were interested in Eleanor, he need but to pass that house each morning, when the windows silently would tell him whether she were in residence or not."

"How charmingly courteous of him, and how indefatigable," said Eleanor, laughing a little. "I need not tell you, then, that I arrived early in the week."

"As for three mornings I have wandered in your neighborhood through this park, the information is superfluous, Nell."

"And why was I kept so long in ignorance of the great favor bestowed upon me? I thought only royalty claimed the silent attendance of one so highly placed as the Earl of Brandon."

"There are always two Queens in England, Nelly, when a man's in love."

"What reply do you expect to such a remark as that?"

"The answer is 'yes,' that three-lettered word which proves that luck's in odd numbers. 'Tis the only word in the lovers' dictionary, you know."

"How should I know? The language would appear to be very limited."

"In its limitation lies its delight, and that word is often spoken by the eyes long before the lips utter it. It is a magic word, like a conjurer's packet, from which all the delights of earth may be produced,—yes, and those of heaven borrowed to make up full measure."

"Your mornings in the park would seem to be employed in composing gallant speeches. St. James's Park must be an inspiring place."

"Park? 'Tis no park. The moment that you set foot in it, it is the Garden of Eden."

"With a silent Eve," she laughed. "That were Paradise indeed. It required three days to break the spell and unloosen her tongue."

"It required courage, Nelly. My first progenitor in the Garden was so quickly thrust out that I dared not venture till now."

"Well, your belated valor appears to have wrought no evil consequence. If this is the Garden of Eden, your words have proved no magician's incantation to waft it into space."

"No; they have been an *open sesame* to reveal new wonders."

"Your visions are so ethereal, Charles, that you make me ashamed to mention my more earthly dream. Do you know why I come here every morning?"

"I can guess. Your hatred of London drives you to even a semblance of the country."

"Semblance of the country? Fie upon you. Where is your Garden of Eden now?"

"I said when you were here, Eleanor. When you are gone, 'tis but St. James's Park again, and this lake not the clear waters of Damascus eulogized in Scripture, but merely Rosamond's Pond sung of by the courtly poet Waller—the lake of disastrous love, they call it."

"I do not hate London," protested Eleanor, going back to his former remark.

"You once said you did, with a scorn that tingles in my memory, for I was part of your contempt."

"Ah, I was overwrought when I said that. I fear I have some excuses to make, and some misunderstandings to clear away. But London fascinates me. I wander about it at night like the Sultan in the Arabian Tales, and regard it with ever increasing wonder."

"Wander about at night? Who goes with you?"

"That would spoil the enchantment; I wander alone."

"Alone! Merciful heaven! Eleanor, you cannot mean that!"

"Why not?"

"Why not? Alone in the streets of London at night? Nell, you amaze me!"

"You speak as if I had penetrated an African jungle."

"The deadliest African jungle is as Brandon village high street compared with night in London. Lady Eleanor Beaumont strolling alone through the darkened streets of London! Good God, you must not do that again!

"Must not?"

"No; of course you must not. I forbid it."

"I do not recognize your right to say what I shall or shall not do, in that peremptory fashion."

"I am the head of our house, and I ask you never again to go into the streets of London unprotected."

Eleanor drew herself up in anger, but almost at once burst out laughing.

"Charles, do you know why I forgive you for your sudden presumption?" she asked, with no trace of resentment. "For the moment you were a boy again—the boy who tyrannized over me on the shores of Brandon Water. 'You shall not!' you would say, and stamp your foot. I fear I spoiled you, Charlie, by being your willing little slave, fetching and carrying at your command."

"I was an unmitigated little beast."

"Oh, not more than you are now, I imagine, when the polish wears a little thin. I shall have nothing said against that boy, even by myself. When I sank on the grass, weeping—"

"The brute!" interjected Brandon.

"—he would throw himself at my feet, and promise to be an angel did I but desist, and sometimes he was good for as much as half an hour after. Indeed, he would willingly have spent his life for me, though he might have boxed my ears before taking the fatal plunge."

"Nelly, you make me jealous of that unmannerly cub."

Eleanor dreamily indicated the opposite shore of Rosamond's Pond.

"See, over yonder is our favorite playground, and there is Brandon Water, and if those two towers of Westminster Abbey were but one, it would be Brandon Church."

"That is true, now you point it out. So, for all you say of London's fascination, you come here because you are lonely for Brandon Park?"

"Perhaps."

"And because you think of that objectionable boy who threw himself at your feet over yonder. I am jealous of him, and filled with a loathing for him. But let the little scoundrel go. I'll say no more of him. So you come here every morning merely to visit your own Park?"

"My own Park? 'Tis not mine, but yours. 'Twas yours, and despite myself you have thrust it upon me. I walk your halls and wring my hands, your revenge has been so complete. If you, having the will in your possession, had shown it, and confounded me thus, 'twould not have been so cruel, but you waited until I sent for it. You proved to me that I was mean enough to use that testament to stop the sale. Why did you not throw the parchment in the fire?"

"Impossible. Brandon Hall was never mine. First it was my father's; then it was yours."

"Not once in all the centuries had it descended but to a Brandon. Why was it not entailed? I suppose it seemed impossible that any lord of Brandon should leave it to a woman. What right have I to stand between a Brandon and his heritage? Take it, Charles, now; 'tis not too late. Sell it, or do what you wish with it, and build Sheridan a dozen theaters if he needs them."

"Oh, Sheridan? He is in the way of fortune. He expects to-morrow that twenty thousand pounds."

"And from whom?"

"Ah, that he will not tell. Sworn to secrecy, he says, but I suspect old Garrick."

"Are you still friendly with Richard Sheridan, Charles?"

"Friends now, and friends forever."

"I did not know. It sometimes happens, I think, that friendship breaks."

"Not between Dick and me. Nothing could come between us."

"Nothing?"

"No. He is the king of men. Surely you knew that by merely looking at him?"

"I never saw him."

"What, never saw Dick Sheridan?"

"Never; when he was at Brandon Hall I was sulking, you remember."

"But you saw him that day at the lawyer's office. He came there with me. It is incredible that you were in Dick Sheridan's presence, and never looked at him."

"I have no recollection of him."

"Why, it seems strange that you two, brought face to face, should profess no knowledge of one another, for not an hour since he said he had never seen you."

"How came you to be talking of me?"

"Oh, he remembered Aunt Selina, and fancied her the heiress, so I set him right."

"Did you mention my name?"

"I think not; no, I am sure not. I called you my cousin."

"Since he does not dwell in my mind, will you tell me something of him?"

"Oh, he is in every sense a fine gentleman; handsome, debonnair, courteous—"

"Yes, yes; I've heard all that, but would he keep his word with a woman if he had promised her?"

"Well, he kept his word with one woman, and married her."

"Oh, he's married, then?"

"Very much so, as I told you at Brandon Hall. He took the beautiful singer, Miss Lindley, to be his wife. She leads him a dance, I think: furiously jealous, and indeed, Dick himself—"

"I am not interested in her. What I wish to know is this. If Richard Sheridan held a woman's secret, and had sworn to that woman not to reveal it, would he keep his word?"

"Nelly, why do you ask such a question?" Brandon was startled into seriousness.

Eleanor put him off, nonchalantly.

"Oh, 'tis no matter. You need not answer unless you choose."

"Would—Dick Sheridan—keep faith—with a woman?"

"Yes; other than his wife."

"Other than his wife?"

"Oh, I expect no reply," laughed Eleanor. "Indeed, you have replied already. He is not to be depended on."

"I did not say that."

"Your manner says it."

"God's troth, my manner wrongs him, then. Sooth to say, I was not thinking of Sheridan, but of you. Why should little Nelly, from the crystal waters of Brandon Lake, put such a question by the turbid flood of Rosamond's Pond?"

"You make too much of it, Charles. Some day, mayhap, I will tell you why I ask."

"When?"

"Let us say to-morrow, if you will do me the honor to call upon me."

"To-morrow? I shall call upon you to-day, if I may."

"No, you must not. To-morrow."

Brandon frowned, recalling Sheridan's words.

"'Tis strange that you and Sheridan should both—" he hesitated.

"Should both profess never to have seen one another, though we met?"

"Yes, that is strange, also."

"Also? What else is strange?"

"That if I had not been on this spot to meet you, Sheridan would have occupied my place."

"Sheridan?"

"Yes; he left here, laughing, when he saw you approach."

"Indeed, Charlie, I shall laugh and leave you myself, if you look so puzzled. You do not surely mean to hint that I had tryst here with a man I never saw?"

"No, no. 'Tis absurd, of course."

"Perhaps Sheridan laughed because he thought I kept a tryst with you?"

"He pretended that."

"Pretended? Well, you know how untrue it is. I kept tryst only with this semblance of Brandon Water. What reason did Sheridan give for his presence here?"

"He said he was in search of me, to tell of his good fortune in securing the money."

"That reason seems plausible enough."

"Plausible? Yes, that's the word. Plausible. Plausible! Dick Sheridan is a plausible man where women are concerned."

"Am I a woman concerned?"

"No. For a moment your questions and the coincidences disquieted me."

"Will you call it plausible if I say that it is natural I should make some inquiry regarding Mr. Sheridan when you were on the eve of begging yourself on his behalf, and he was the cause of my falling out with you?"

"Did we fall out, Nelly?"

"You were rather harsh with me, Charlie, last time we met, when you flung back in my face the wealth you would so cheerfully have bestowed upon another. Something you said just now touched me, and I pictured to myself you, here in London, passing the house that should have been your own, had justice been done, thinking not of the injustice, however, but of the unworthy tenant. Tell me truly, Charlie, have you been in poverty since you parted from me?"

"Only in that I feared I was bankrupt of your regard."

"Will you not accept this legacy, wrongly left to me?"

"I will accept nothing but yourself, Nelly," said Brandon, holding out his hands.

"I am speaking seriously, Charlie," Eleanor rebuked him gently, drawing back.

"So am I."

"If the bank of Rosamond's Pond is disastrous to a certain sentiment, as you have said, would it not be more auspicious to postpone such talk until to-morrow?"

"No. Let's change the reputation of Rosamond's Pond, and cause it ever after to be named the Haven of Prosperous Love."

Eleanor shook her head just a little wearily.

"I am superstitious, Charlie, and tired of battling with Fate. I will tempt it no further. It is not long until to-morrow."

"Oh, to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow! I like better the shorter word 'to-day.'"

"'No' is a shorter word than 'yes.'"

"Ah, Nell, that is a cruel hint."

"It is but a plain statement of fact to match your own. If 'no' mates with 'to-day,' perhaps 'yes' mates with 'to-morrow.' But now I must tune my talk in unison with my surroundings, and so will tell you something I have recently discovered about my disastrous love. I have some excuses to make, and some misapprehensions to clear away. Charging you with harshness, I confess I also was harsh; yet I feel no fear but that pardon will be granted before I ask it."

"You are right there, Eleanor, did one so sweet and gentle as you need pardon, which I deny."

"This scene is not so disastrous, after all, Charles, when you accord forgiveness so courteously. I said that he I loved had died in London. I find it is not true. He is living still."

"And 'tis that brings you to London?"

"That, and another mission."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"Then his perfection comes into living contrast with my demerit?"

"Charles, this is the misapprehension. I find myself mistaken in him, and confess my disappointment."

"Thank God! I'm human enough to delight in seeing a paragon displaced, even if he be my rival. A ghost I could not combat, but I am afraid of no living man. How far has this giant declined in stature? Has he descended near to my own height?"

"Indeed, Charlie, the qualities of you two are so evenly balanced that I must ask until to-morrow to decide between you," and against her quiet decision not all Lord Brandon's pleadings could prevail.

CHAPTER VII

The drawing room of Richard Sheridan's house in Orchard Street was lighted only by a flickering fire on the hearth and the moonlight coming in through an open long window that led to a balcony outside. On this balcony stood Richard Sheridan himself, peering eagerly and anxiously at the street below. Presently he straightened up, turned quickly, and entered the room, closing and curtaining the window behind him.

"She comes! I cannot be mistaken!" he murmured to himself; then called, more loudly: "Bates!"

The man servant responded at once.

"Light the candles, Bates."

While the lights were being placed on table and mantel-shelf, Sheridan crossed over to a door at the right-hand side of the room, opened it, looked out, then closed and locked it very cautiously.

"Bates," he said, quietly, "I am expecting a lady. Show her in here."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Bates, I am not at home to any one. That is, after you have shown the lady in. Even if the king calls, I am not at home. You understand, Bates?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell any visitor who persists, that I departed for Bath three hours ago. Be precise; there's nothing so varnishes a lie as deft precision, Bates. Sudden illness of Mrs. Sheridan's father, and my wife and I left three hours and ten minutes since. If one insists on entering, on any pretext whatever, before that lady leaves, throttle him, Bates, throttle him."

Bates retired, and Sheridan picked up from the table a letter, over which he pondered.

"Can it be a hoax?" he said to himself. "It comes right on the nick of time, like a hero in the last act.

"I thank you for your courteous answer," he read again, although he knew the contents of the letter by heart. "I desire no security, but must be certain of the utmost secrecy. I will come to-night at eleven, and bring with me a draft for twenty thousand pounds. I can trust no intermediary, and will see no one but yourself. Thus secrecy will be preserved."

He threw down the letter, and paced the room excitedly, up and down, talking and gesticulating.

"Twenty thousand pounds, and Drury Lane is mine! What a prospect! Brandon's promise would have been redeemed had not fate played him so scurvy a trick, raising him on a pinnacle of wealth, only to fling him in the dirt, a pauper. Poor Charlie! Could honesty and good-fellowship be coined, he would be a millionaire. But why does she not come? 'Tis surely past the hour. Yet one must allow a margin for a woman."

No margin, however, was needed. The clock struck the hour, and before the eleventh stroke died away Bates ushered in a lady who was heavily veiled.

"Are you Mr. Sheridan?" she asked at once.

"Yes, madam," replied the author, as directly.

"Richard Brinsley Sheridan?"

"Yes, madam."

"I know little of the customs of London, but enough to be aware that my visit to you at this hour is not in accordance with them."

Sheridan bowed gallantly.

"The visits of an angel to those mortals privileged to receive them, are opportune at any hour."

"You are doubtless accustomed to flattering women," said the visitor, coldly, "and are used to their appreciation of it. I know nothing of you, sir, and I am anxious simply to complete a business transaction in a business way. I warn you at the beginning that any undue gallantry on your part will merely jeopardize the substantial result which may be the outcome of our interview."

"You speak plainly, madam," said Sheridan, taken aback, "and will have no word from me that can offend you."

"I came here alone, and at this hour, that I might avoid recognition or interference. There is none who dare question what I do, but I wish to give gossips no chance of babbling."

Involuntarily Sheridan arched his eye-brows and smiled, but quickly recovered himself, and answered politely:

"You are from the country, perhaps, madam."

"Yes; but I have a town house from which I come to yours. I want to be assured that the sum you have mentioned is sufficient for the project you entertain."

"Ample, madam. With twenty thousand pounds I can secure Drury Lane. Old Garrick, who is rich, and knows I am not, insists on ten thousand pounds paid out of hand. Once Old Drury is mine, I shall have wealthy backers, and the future becomes a gold mine in a halo of fame. I will give you as surety—"

"I wish no surety beyond your word of honor that nothing will ever tempt you to reveal by word, hint, or look, from whom this capital comes."

"I plight my honor, madam."

"If more money is needed, you must give me time to raise it, for this payment almost absorbs my ready store. If it is lost, that should not trouble you, for its destruction will not impoverish me."

"It shall not be lost. It is a golden key, to unlock for us both undreamed-of treasure, and you will profit from your generous investment. I swear to that."

"I wish for no profit. You may give back the key when you have unlocked the treasure house. I hope your valley of diamonds will eclipse that of the Arabian tale. Here is my order for twenty thousand pounds upon Sharp & Clipper, my legal custodians, who will pay you the money to-morrow without question."

Taking a paper from her bag, she laid it on the table before him. Sheridan regarded it almost with incredulity, as though unable to believe this evidence of his good fortune, and when he spoke his emotion was apparent.

"Madam," he said, "I, who can juggle with words upon occasion, find them desert me at this juncture. I know not how to thank you sufficiently—"

There came a sudden and disconcerting rattling at the handle of the locked door; then a determined pounding on the panels.

"Dick! Dick!" called the querulous, suspicious tones of Mrs. Sheridan. "Why are you locked in? What are you doing?"

"By all the awkward gods," muttered Sheridan, "my wife!" Then in accents of assumed unconcern: "Yes, darling; yes, darling, in one moment."

"Open, open, this instant! How dare you lock me out of my own house? Open, I say!"

"Dearest, have patience. An important business conference. Just one more paper to sign, darling!"

He turned to his visitor, speaking now in undertones. "My wife is the best of women, but a trifle—ah—a trifle—that is, impulsive and thoughtless."

"I understand. I will leave you, sir. Good night."

The beating on the door redoubled, but above that sound rose Mrs. Sheridan's shrill protest.

"I hear a woman's voice!" she screamed. "You perjured wretch! Simmons, Bates, break in this door for me!"

"Ten thousand furies!" said Sheridan, angrily. "Oh, madam, pardon my confusion. I seem thankless, but—good night. At a more fitting moment—"

"I comprehend perfectly. Do not trouble to attend me. Unlock that door while I escape by this."

The girl moved quietly toward the door by which she had entered, but paused, dismayed, as a new clamor arose, coming from that direction. Outside, the persuasive voice of Bates assured some one that Mr. Sheridan had left for Bath three hours and more ago.

"Again you lie!" asserted a man's insistent voice. "Attempt to stop me, and I'll run you through."

"Damnation! 'Tis Charles Brandon," breathed Sheridan, in despair, and for the first time his visitor showed signs of agitation.

"Lord Brandon!" she echoed. "I dare not meet him. I must go the other way. What matters your wife?"

"Matters? Good Lord! Madam, I implore you; not that way. I have it in my new play; let us hope the curtains will prove greater protection than my screen. Madam, madam, here!"

He unloosed the curtains drawn across the window recess, and motioned her hastily to step within, then quickly arranged the hanging folds to cover her completely. In the passage without Bates shouted to his fellow servants for assistance.

"Help! Help, Simmons! I am over-borne. Seize his sword, Simmons! Would you, sir!"

There followed a crash as of a falling body, then silence, except for Mrs. Sheridan's increased attack on the door.

"Heaven be praised, they've settled him," panted Sheridan, thankfully, as he unlocked the door to admit his wife.

"So, sir, you make an assignation even in my own house!" she screamed.

"Indeed, Betty," said Sheridan, with attempted jocularly, "the house is neither yours nor mine, but the money lender's."

"You sneering rake, you think to cozen me! I heard you implore her till she fled like guilt, and tumbled headlong down the stair in her haste. Do you think I am deaf?"

"No; nor dumb either. But you are mistaken. There is no woman in the house but yourself."

"Have you the brazenness to say that when I heard her false whispering accents? 'I dare not,' cried she. I'll dare the hussy! Who is she, Dick?"

"My darling, be calm. I assure you—"

"Yes, practice your endearments on her, and then use them to me. Your very lips are white with the perjuries they utter."

"Perjuries are black, sweetheart. You misjudge me, and are most unjust."

"You will not tell me her name?"

"How can I, when there is no name to tell?"

"Then I will confound you by your own witnesses, unless they are as steeped in treachery as you are." She rushed to the other door, opened it, and called loudly: "Bates! Bates!"

"My dear, my dear," protested Sheridan ineffectually, "not before the servants, please," but even as he finished speaking the man came in, very disheveled, as though fresh from a severe struggle.

"Bates, what woman fell down those stairs just now?"

"Woman, madam? *Woman?*"

"Woman, madam, woman!" echoed Mrs. Sheridan, furiously. "Don't stand staring there like a fool, or I'll 'woman, madam,' you! You've seen a woman before now, I warrant, just as your master has, and should be able to recognize one, even if she were a-gallop down the stair. Did she trip as she went down?"

"Trip, madam?"

Mrs. Sheridan made a movement as though she would fly at the man, but her husband intervened, sharply.

"Answer your mistress, blockhead!"

"But 'twas a man, sir."

"Then say so, you clod."

"Madam, 'twas a man."

"A likely story. Well are you prompted by your master! Why should a man fly like a pursued thief?"

"We threw him down the stair, madam. It took the three of us. He drew on me, madam."

"The three of you? Your master has schooled you well. Simmons! Simmons!" she called, peremptorily.

"I'll fetch him, madam," volunteered Bates.

"Indeed, no. I'll not have him primed what to say. I will have the truth. Simmons!"

"Coming, ma'am," and an instant later Simmons appeared, fully as disheveled as Bates, and holding his wrist with great tenderness.

"How came the woman to fall down the stair?"

"There was no woman, ma'am. Some drunk man had driven in the door, and broke the bolt. Jones and I ran when we heard the crash, and then we heard Bates shout. The man had Bates by the throat, ma'am. Then Jones joined in, and we got him out on the street, ma'am."

"There you have it, Elizabeth," said Sheridan quietly. "Order Jones up and convince yourself still further. I hope you're not hurt, Simmons."

"It do sting a bit, sir," confessed Simmons, very gingerly touching his injured wrist.

Mrs. Sheridan stood bewildered, looking from one to the other.

"But I did hear a woman's voice," she said, more quietly.

"It was your imagination, my dear."

"Why was your door locked?"

"Oh, I heard the parley on the stair, and suspected there would be a row. I did not wish you troubled, dear, and if the man broke through, I did not want him to have the run of the house. That's all."

"Oh, Richard dear, forgive me. It's all my love of you."

"There's nothing to forgive, dear. I understand exactly how you felt. But a locked door is the poorest of evidence, sweetheart. I must have peace and quietness if I am to finish my play. You know how I am worried, and these recurring scenes, while useless in the drama, disturb one's tranquility. Will you leave me now, dearest, and let me get on with my work?"

"Surely you've worked enough for one day? It is nearing midnight. Come with me."

"I cannot at the moment, dear. Give me but another half-hour. What are you standing there for, Bates? Why don't you go?"

"If you please, sir, the front door's broke. What are we to do with it?"

"Powers of darkness! How can I tell? If it's broke, then it's there you ought to be, and not here. Leave me, Betty, for a few minutes. I have writing to do."

"But you never write in the drawing room, Dick."

"Oh, I write anywhere in this soothing house. What, there still, Bates?"

"We need a new bolt, sir, and unless I have the money—they will not trust us, sir."

"Place an armchair before the door, and sleep there. Get you gone, before I'm driven mad. I have no money."

Bates and Simmons turned to go, but were suddenly flung aside by the abrupt entrance of Lord Brandon, who carried a drawn sword in his hand. He strode toward Sheridan, his weapon raised threateningly. Mrs. Sheridan shrank back with a little cry, but Brandon heeded no one but her husband.

"You false villain!" he shouted. "Where is Eleanor Beaumont?"

"What do you mean, Charlie? I know no Eleanor Beaumont."

"You do. I followed her to your door. She has been closeted with you this hour or more."

"Sir," said Sheridan, hotly, "you are drunk to come brawling thus."

"Dog, I am more sober than you are, and my blade is steady, you will find. Draw!"

"This is rank lunacy. Lord Brandon, I give you my word of honor—"

"Your word of honor!"

"You wrong me, Brandon. My lips are sealed by a sacred promise. Trust me, Charlie, for old acquaintance sake—"

"Trust you! Trust you, when I have seen the woman I love enter your door alone at midnight? Trust you, when your hired ruffians bar the way to her with the ready lie that you have left London? Trust you, yes; when my steel is through your false heart, then I'll trust you. Draw your weapon!"

"Sir, there is a lady present."

"I know there is. Draw!"

"My wife is here, sir. Where is your manhood, to paralyze her with affright?"

Mrs. Sheridan stood speechless, with staring eyes and clasped hands. Brandon took no notice of her.

"There are two ladies here. 'Tis the other I seek."

"Brandon, to-morrow I'll meet you where you will. I command you to leave my house now. You have done sufficient harm already, speaking thus before a jealous woman. She drinks your words, sir, and you take a coward's advantage of me."

"You say Eleanor Beaumont is not here?"

"I say I never saw her."

"You dare to say Eleanor Beaumont is not here? Then whom did I follow to your accursed door?"

"God's patience; how can I tell what woman Charles Brandon follows through the darkened streets of London?"

"You cannot; true, true. No, upright man, you cannot. But there is something you can do." He tapped with his sword's point the letter lying on the table; the communication received by Sheridan from his unknown correspondent, making the appointment for this evening's interview. "Lady Eleanor's writing is on that sheet. Read it to us, if you dare!"

Mrs. Sheridan forestalled whatever action her distracted husband might have taken, and with a shriek precipitated herself on the letter. She held it to the light, and hysterically read aloud snatches from its contents.

"I thank you for your courteous ... I desire no security; ... the utmost secrecy ... I will come to-night at eleven ... Eleanor Beaumont! Oh, oh, oh, you faithless man! Who is Eleanor Beaumont? Who is Eleanor Beaumont?"

Quietly, yet with dramatic decision, the curtains before the window parted, and Lady Eleanor, now unveiled, took one step forward, allowing the curtains to close behind her.

"I am Eleanor Beaumont," she enunciated, with deliberate calmness.

Lord Brandon and Mrs. Sheridan stared at the girl in speechless amazement, the former with horror on his face, the latter in wild-eyed alarm. Sheridan staggered against the wall, groaning.

"Now Fate has done her worst," he said, hopelessly. "She can do no more. Here is a woman who thinks she may explain and be believed. Could human folly go farther?"

Slowly Eleanor crossed over to the side of Sheridan, and stood there for a moment, looking proudly at the two on the opposite side of the room. When she spoke, it was to Sheridan.

"Richard Sheridan," she said, gently, "every art of fiction you have tried, first to convince a woman, then to convince a man. With the woman you succeeded for a moment, but with the man, never. Our sex is the more trustful of the two. As time wore on, I felt more and more sorry for you, and wondered why you never tried truth, even as an experiment. Only once did you come near its outskirts, when you spoke of your solemn promise to me. Now I have come—I could stand it no longer—to show you the irresistible power of truth."

"They will never believe you. An angel from heaven could not convince them."

"We shall see, for when the worst is known, we need fear naught that follows."

"The worst?"

"Yes; why not tell it?"

"Eleanor, come home!" pleaded her cousin.

"Lord Brandon, you have no right to command me, and if you had, I should not obey, since your impetuosity has discovered my secret."

"I cannot bear this," said Brandon, with manifest agitation.

"Sir, sheathe your sword in woman's company, and remember that ladies claim precedence, for which reason I address myself first to Mrs. Sheridan. Madam, you think you have some right to this man because you married him. Look you how illogical is your contention. What did you bring him? A pretty face, a charming voice, a jealous temper. Turn your eyes on me. I am thought beautiful, my voice is called sweet, and I have not an atom of jealousy in my nature. I care not how often he kisses you, for I am not exacting."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Elizabeth Sheridan.

"Man loves monopoly for himself, but likes it not in others," went on Eleanor, unperturbed. "Sooner or later he tires of the tight rein. Here stands a man harassed by debt, not knowing where to turn for money, mocked by a luxury not his own, ready to mint his soul to coin, even if the transmutation take place in a halo of burning sulphur. But what, madam, if the tempter comes, not with hoofs and horns, but as I come, on wings of gold?"

She crossed to the table, and took up the order for twenty thousand pounds, displaying it before Brandon and Mrs. Sheridan.

"Here is one of the pinions. Mr. Sheridan, you should not leave incriminating documents so carelessly about. My lord's sword touched my letter, but left this much more serious evidence unscathed. This is a potent paper that pours into Sheridan's treasury to-morrow twenty thousand pounds in gold." She turned to Sheridan. "Well have you earned it to-night."

"Why have I given this fortune to him? Listen, madam. For love, love, love! Love such as you know nothing of, for it is a love hopeless of marriage."

"Terror of God!" gasped Sheridan, and had the other two observed him, they must have seen that his amazement was greater than their own. "What are you saying? I swear I never saw your face before!"

"Oh, Richard, my husband!" sobbed Mrs. Sheridan, "I never believed anything against you until now."

"No, madam, you did not," said Eleanor. "Now you see the mighty power of truth. Truth convinces. How happy would you be, madam, could you but recall the bogus disbelief of ten short minutes since. If the shattered remnant of your married bliss could but be pieced together again, how careful you would be of it. You see now what love of a man can do for a woman."

"How dare you flaunt your unholy love in the face of its victim!" cried Lord Brandon. "Shameless woman, you knew Sheridan was married, for I told you."

"This is a nightmare!" exclaimed Richard Sheridan, wildly. "Swearing is useless. Take back your money! You out-Beelzebub an amateur like me. Love? I've not spoken twenty minutes with you in all my life."

"Every word I said was true," continued the girl, calmly.

"Then shame should keep you silent, madam," declared Brandon, hotly.

"Why? I am forced to the utterance of my love by the folly that surrounds me, and as no wedding bells can chime my union with the man I love, when his own action has rendered all hope of it impossible—"

"Oh," cried Brandon, "this is intolerable! My lost Eleanor, come home. Leave this place!"

"When all hope has left me, why should I not proclaim my love? I am not ashamed of it. It grew with me, twining round my heart while yet a child. His boyish lips kissed mine, unloved by others since. When he was torn from me, when evil fate cast us asunder, not a night but I prayed for him; not a day without his dear image in all my thoughts. At last the barriers fell, and he, a man, came to me, a woman. He was frivolous, selfish, veneered with the falsity of London, and yet not wholly selfish, either, for his first wish was to advance his friend, at whatever cost to himself. And I, who had almost committed a crime that he might enjoy the wealth unjustly left to me; I, who would have laid down my life for him—he had forgotten my very name!"

"Eleanor! Eleanor! You wring my heart. I had never forgotten you. In my agitation at meeting you unexpectedly, I misnamed you."

"And when a traitor tricked him of his rights, and when he would not have them at my hand, I could but try to give to Sheridan, his friend, the useless gold that he had promised. Who is Eleanor Beaumont, you cried, madam, and why is she here? She is here to redeem her lover's pledge to your husband, a husband who had not betrayed your trust, but merely tried to soothe your foolish clamor. You have your husband still, but I—I have lost my love. When I set out to fulfill Lord Brandon's promise, anxious only that he should not know my mission, and thus guess my love for him, he followed with drawn sword, and sought to prove me viler than the haunted creatures I passed on my way hither."

Mrs. Sheridan had drawn closer to her husband, and now Sheridan slipped his arm through hers, whispering:

"Come away, wife, we are marplots here."

Elizabeth hesitated, as though she would go to Eleanor, but her husband restrained her, and together they slipped very quietly from the room. Brandon stood with his back against the door, to nullify Eleanor's attempt to leave.

"Eleanor, is this true?" he asked.

"It *was* true. It is true no longer."

"When I thought myself Lord of Brandon, I asked you to be my wife, and you refused. If you cared for me, why would you not marry me?"

"What were you then in my eyes? A man surrounded by profligates, who filled the halls of his fathers with ribald laughter. You had no respect for anything I cherished, and scoffed at all your father loved. I saw you, a selfish man, bent on turning your ancestral home into what might be squandered in London, a Jew of the auction block, ready to sell the very tombs of your ancestors but that they were in the churchyard, and beyond your clutch."

"Ah, Nelly, scant love for me imbues that harsh estimate."

"You were not the man of my dreams, but a soulless money changer. The boy I loved was dead; London had killed him."

"Was it, then, solely for love of the boy that you made this dangerous journey to fulfill the promise of the man?"

"No. In your night of revelry at Brandon Hall I got one brief glimpse of the man I loved. So low had my opinion of you become that I thought if I threatened you with the will you would compromise, be terrified, countermand the sale you had ordered, but retain the property. When you unexpectedly flung it back to me, I saw the man of my imagination. If you had asked me then, I would have married you."

"How could a penniless beggar hope to win where Cræsus had failed?"

"If he knew the woman, and truly loved her, he would have ventured."

"Nelly, I did not know you then, and do not know you now. I seem to have played hop-skip with my fortune, wrong when silent, wrong when I spoke, the intervals between holding untouched luck. Nelly, is it useless for me to speak now?"

"Need you ask? You have smirched me until I cringe within myself. Your drawn sword stabbed my love. In this atmosphere, affection is strangled. I go back to Brandon, and hope the sweet breath of the country will cleanse me from the town fog of falsehood. I go where the birds sing, and the waters murmur truth and purity, there to purge the poison from my soul. Sir, stand aside, and let me pass."

Brandon crossed to the table, standing with his back against it.

"Madam," he said, "the way is clear."

Eleanor did not at once take advantage of the fact, but lingered, arranging her glove, and looking at it steadfastly while she spoke.

"You will not follow me?"

"No." The reply was conclusively firm.

"It will be useless to attempt to see me."

"I understand that."

"How could you think so ill of me?"

"I was a fool."

"You must not come to Brandon Hall."

"Never."

There followed a longer pause, and still Eleanor did not move.

"Will you not take half the income?" she asked at last.

"Not a penny."

"You have treated me harshly."

"I have paid the price," said Lord Brandon, grimly.

"Good night."

"Good night."

The clock began to strike twelve, and the sound seemed to arouse Eleanor from her meditations. She walked slowly toward the door, but Brandon maintained his rigid position against the table.

"A new day—a new day!" murmured Eleanor to herself. "A new day bringing no—hope—to me." She looked over her shoulder. "Good-by," she said, wistfully.

Then Brandon sprang forward, arms outstretched before him.

"Eleanor!" he cried. "Eleanor!" She whirled round, and fell into his embrace. "Eleanor, it is to-morrow!"

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