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Gertrude (Chapter 16-18)

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G E R T R U D E .

CHAPTER XVI.

I hope the reader takes interest enough in our madcap friend Ludwell to wish to know what has become of him. It was precisely this wish that led Harlston, who had not seen him for some days, to seek him at his office about ten days before the time of which I have just spoken. It was so much a matter of course with him to meet with Ludwell every day, in the capitol, at his own lodgings, or at the houses of their mutual friends, that he had never before visited him. To say the truth, Ludwell had never pressed it, and, as ceremony was unknown between them, there was no occasion for a formal call. A glance at the room at once explained to the Colonel the reason of this. It appeared to serve both for lodging room and office, but presented few indications of comfort and fewer still of business. There were few books besides novels; few papers besides newspapers. The poor fellow had kept his bed for some days from the consequences of some excess, and now he sat pale and dejected before a dull fire in the midst of the confusion and disarray of a chamber which had not been put in order since the day before. The sight of a visitor called up a mortified blush; but that visitor was his dear friend, and the feeling of mortification was presently forgotten.

But neither that, nor the circumstances in which he found Ludwell, escaped the attention of Harlston, whose heart at once reproached him that he had never before enquired into his mode or means of living.

"I am afraid, Ludwell," said he, after a few minutes of common-place conversation, "that you are not getting on here as well as I had hoped. Nay, do not deny it man. I see how it is. With

my knowledge of your talents, I could have no doubt of your success, and I own I am surprised at indications that show how unequal to your merit it has been."

"To my *merit* indeed, as you say, by which of course I understand you to mean my talents and endowments, but it is fully equal, I am afraid to my *deserts*. A man who has just been meditating upon the folly which has made him, for three whole days, unfit for business of any kind, must be very unteachable, if he charges the want of professional success on the injustice of the world, the caprice of fortune, or on any thing but his own folly. The truth is I am unfit for this calling, and have no business in this place."

"Then why remain here? And with your versatile mind, if this calling does not suit you, why not qualify yourself for some other?"

"Because I have not the means in the first place; and secondly, because it is not worth while. The fault is in myself. I am unfit for any place or any calling."

"For shame Ludwell! How can you submit to think thus meanly of yourself?"

"Because I have so long had occasion to think much more meanly of myself, that it is quite a luxury to be able to say nothing worse of myself as I now am, than I have just said. Don't you see that my manner of saying it is full of self-complacency? To be nothing worse than worthless; to live neglected, but not exactly despised; and to die and be forgotten, instead of being embalmed in well-merited hatred: why, man, such a life and such a reputation are quite saint-like."

"But, Ludwell, thinking and feeling as you now

do, why may you not hope to shake off your remaining faults as well as those you say you have corrected?"

"Because these thoughts and feelings will vanish at the first flush of restored health, at the first breath of fresh air, and, at all events, at the first glance of woman's eye. Ah! there's the rub. To be plain with you, Harlston, that is the reason why I have no business here. I did better two months ago; but it is all over with me now. You know the nonsense I talked about Miss Courtney. Nay, you need not color so high: Do not believe I was fool enough so far to mistake myself or her, as to think but of that which might have been but for my own cursed follies. The prodigal who fed on druff and husks among the swine, comparing his state with that from which he had fallen, was unhappy enough. But what had he done? He had but wasted his substance. Had he wasted himself too? Had he wasted a *mind* richer than the treasures of India? I tell you, Harlston, could I but see one such man as I am conscious I might have been, I should then be sensible of the full depth of my degradation, and begin to repent. But I am kept from this by a sense of that within me, which still looks down on all I see, of what the world calls great. But when I see a paragon of a woman like Miss Courtney, and look around in vain for the man worthy to mate with her, and then feel that I—I *only might* have been that man, then it is that I feel how the Archangel port has been degraded into the semblance of the crawling worm. I do not think of her to love her. Satan could as soon have fallen in love with the purity of Eve. But the contemplation of it made him more sensible of the Hell in his own bosom, and I would fly from hence, for the same reason that the air of paradise was hateful to him."

"To a man who talks in that strain it is hard to know what to say. But what say you to an office? Perhaps I may have influence enough to procure one for you. What kind of one would suit you?"

"I am moderate in my requirements. I would ask but three things. Treasure, leisure and pleasure. A good salary, and nothing to do, in a place abounding with the means of amusement and indulgence.

"You are moderate, indeed."

"To be sure I am. Are there not plenty of such offices; and are they not for the most part filled by just such fellows as myself? Perhaps it is the office that makes them so. That is natural enough. But I think you will acknowledge that a man, who brings to office the proper qualifications, has fairer pretensions than he who has to acquire them afterwards."

"But have you no ambition, Ludwell?"

"No, Harlston, no. I once had; but the life I have led has left me too little self-respect for ambition. I might affect it; but it would be a mere

mockery. Start me in a career of ambition, and I shall presently find myself sinking spontaneously into a mere ruffler for some fellow, who has ambition, because, not having mind enough to know himself for a fool, nor moral sense enough to feel that he is a knave, he retains his self-respect. But, to speak seriously, as you have proposed it; to be secretary of legation to some gay court where there is nothing to do, would suit me admirably. Send me to Vienna. But, at all events send me somewhere away from this place. At a distance I might bring myself to rejoice at what I could not bear to see—your success with Miss Courtney. You are not worthy of her: no man is. But I know none that comes so near it as you. If there is no pre-occupation, and I think there is none, you will win her, unless Miss Bernard can prevent it; and then, if you keep clear of Miss Bernard, you may be happy. But beware of her at all times: and again I say *beware!*"

You have the strangest prejudice against Miss Bernard, Ludwell, and apparently with the least reason; for you certainly are much indebted to her good nature. For my own part, I am at a loss to see how you fail to incur her displeasure when it seems to be your constant study to provoke it, and, as you yourself say, to baffle all her plans. Though I have no *penchant* for the young lady, and may have reasons of my own for thinking of her as you do, her patience under your attacks shows her to be at least very amiable. Besides, if indeed she has such schemes as you impute to her, it seems to me, that the best temper in the world would be provoked beyond endurance by your constant endeavor to expose them."

"Her displeasure!" exclaimed Ludwell, in a tone of bitter scorn, and at once shaking off all trace of the self-reproachful thoughts to which he had just given utterance. "Her displeasure! If your wonder is that she does not hate me, it may cease, for hate me she does, with all her spirit's strength. But as to any *manifestation* of displeasure, she must be desperate indeed before she will dare to venture upon that."

"Why so? I think I see indications that you have some strange power over her, but I am at a loss to conjecture its source."

"Ah, Harlston! I ought to have told you all about it long ago, but I hated to expose myself to you, by telling you what a *roué* I have been."

"Suppose I know that already. Think you the fame of Captain Ludwell of the U. S. Army, so well established at every cantonment and recruiting station, and so widely blown throughout the Union, has never reached me? Had I not known you personally; had the same tales of waywardness and extravagance been told me of one of whom I never heard before, they would have made it impossible for me to forget the name. To be plain with you, Ludwell, had it not been for our early intimacy, so

long interrupted, and the many good qualities which I knew to be but obscured by your native wildness, I should hardly have cultivated your acquaintance now, and was a little surprised to find you so well received in the best society."

"Nay! If you are already so deep read in my history, and can still tolerate me, after hearing of my misdeeds from the lips of those who rarely have told any thing to my advantage, I suppose one more tale, told by myself, will not make the matter much worse. It is a long story—but here goes."

Ludwell threw himself back in his chair, and closed his eyes as if in an effort at recollection, occasionally interrupting the silence with a short, low, chuckling laugh, that came fitfully bubbling out with the smoke of his cigar.

"Well! you know I was poor, and too idle to qualify myself properly for my profession; but you may need to be told that my self-conceit did not blind me to the deficiency of my acquirements: or it may be that my vanity took a different turn, and prompted the wish to figure in lace and epaulettes. So it was; I shirked the bar, and contrived to get into the army.

"The life suited me wondrous well, especially so much of it as was spent at recruiting stations, where my penchant for the fair-sex might be indulged to the fullest extent. You seem to have heard enough of that sort of thing, and know what sort of reputation I made for myself. Let that pass. If I gave the world reason to think badly of me, I more than indemnified myself, by seeing so much of that same world, (I mean the female part,) that took pleasure in gossiping at my expense, as made me think at least as badly of it. I had a mother once, Harlston; and she was a pure and holy being. I have had sisters; and they were modest and maidenly: and the idea of woman, arrayed in the proper virtues of her sex, is, to me, the most sacred object in nature. But the women that haunt about a garrison, a university, a legislative assembly, or any other place where men are to be found in crowds, Bah!—I declare to God, when I see such a creature as your Miss Courtney, (for remember Harlston, I waive all pretensions in your favor—I have no right to think of such a being,) my spirit yearns to prostrate itself before her, and to pour out its adoration without a hope or thought of finding favor in her eyes.

"Well! It was at — where I was long stationed as a recruiting officer, that I first saw Miss Bernard: and there too I saw the only woman I ever did love, and, as I do not mean to give myself leave to fall in love with Miss Courtney, I may add the only woman I ever shall love. I wish you to believe, that she was all she should be; and to think with me, that, had I married her, I should have been much less what I ought not to be. She was there on a visit to a friend, and so was Miss

Bernard. The last ostensibly: the other had no other object but to spend a few weeks with a near and worthy relative. The two young ladies, both strangers in such a little place, were necessarily thrown together at all entertainments got up in compliment to either, and soon became intimate. My epaulette was the star of the season: there could be no party without me, and I met them wherever they went.

"It is true my infernal reputation had gone ahead of me; and, before my *Dulcinea* appeared at —, I had done enough to convince the good people that fame had done me no wrong. But this, though it detracted from my availability for the *great* object of female politics, did not make me unacceptable to the larger part of a society too small to be split into two *cliques*. Hence I was received into full membership, and had the *entree* of almost every house.

"I hope you are prepared to believe that the society of such a woman, as her I will not name, had its proper effect upon me. It had. From the moment I laid my eyes upon her, I was an altered man. Into some of my former vices I have never relapsed; though, God knows, I have since done many things unworthy of one who bears such an image in his mind. But you will see that my subsequent faults have been such as grew out of that affair, and the story I have to tell concerning Miss Bernard may be taken as the first leaf of my history since then, and a very fair specimen of the whole. My vices before were my own. I am since what she has made me.

"The lady of my love had a handsome fortune. The only effect of that on me was to make me hesitate to declare my passion. Had she been poor, I could have said to her, 'our lot is the same; let us share it.' But I doubted my right to ask her to bestow her wealth on me. I dare say this feeling favored my success. I not only did not declare my passion: I tried to conceal it. Hence its manifestations had all the delicacy which so much recommends the attentions of gentlemen to a pure minded woman; and when, at last, it became obvious to others, and was felt even by her, she could not help being sensible that I had not sought to disclose it either by word or act. She was not a woman whose ear gossips would venture to assail with the sort of tales, that might have been told to my disadvantage. She knew me only as she saw me, and she saw me only as the being her influence had made me. I know no other way to account for the fact that my passion was returned; and that when, on the very eve of our separation, a fortuitous concurrence of circumstances drew from me an avowal of my love, it was met by an avowal no less unreserved and tender on her part. Had I not been a liveried slave, I should have accompanied her to her distant home. But the thing was so sudden, that I had no time

to obtain leave of absence, and so we parted—and forever.”

Ludwell paused. His countenance had lost its reckless expression, and his tone was so sad that Harlston could hardly recognize it as his. He bent his head upon his hand, and remained silent for a moment. Continuing in the same attitude he went on thus—

“Poor girl! Poor girl! A mind like yours was not to be cheated into happiness with one you did not love.” Then raising his head, and speaking through his clenched teeth he exclaimed, “And this fiend,—this serpent—this reptile—this painted butterfly, with the harpy’s maw and the scorpion’s sting! I tell you, Harlston, this Miss Bernard is the —. But I will not tell you what she is. I will show her to you as she is. You have seen one point in her character. You shall see others, compared to which, what you have seen shall be as the concealed deformities of sin contrasted with her alluring smile.

“My engagement took place long enough before the departure of my mistress, to give her time to disclose the fact before her departure, to Miss Bernard, who had somehow won her confidence. She herself remained at — where she found herself undisputed mistress of an empire, in which, until then, she had held a subordinate place. Whatever had been thought of me before, I too had, by that time, attained the first place among the young fellows of the village; and, though few of the damsels might have been willing to marry a man, whose fortune was a sword rusting in peace, yet there was not one who would not have been proud to have worn me as a feather in her cap. Few of them forgave Miss —; and Miss Bernard hated her with the poisonous rancor, with which she now hates Miss Courtney. She lost no time in devising means to indulge her malice. I will not weary myself, and disgust you with the particulars of her machinations. It is enough to say, she contrived that my mistress should hear of all the repented offences, with which my recklessness had made the gossips of — familiar, and, in addition to all this, which was true, and enough, God knows, to disgust a pure minded woman, she was made to believe that my passion for her was simulated, and my views altogether mercenary. There was color enough for that too; for you, who know my heedless rattling way of talking, may well believe that I had made many a foolish speech upon the subject, especially before I had any serious thoughts about it. I was questioned about these matters by letters from the lady’s friends, and at once plead guilty, (for I would not lie about it,) to every thing but the interested motives imputed to me. The result was what might have been expected. I stood convicted, by my own confession, as a shameless debauchee, and all my assurances of radical reformation and all my protestations of disinterest-

ed devotion were thrown away, and I was formally dismissed. Could I have seen the lady and her friends in person, the result might have been different. I endeavored to obtain leave of absence, but in vain. In a tempest of passion, I sent in my resignation. It was accepted, but too late. Before I could escape from my thralldom, to throw myself at her feet and pray a reversal of my sentence, I was stunned by the astounding intelligence that she was actually married to another. What! so soon! How could she love him? The thing was impossible; and she whose pure mind could not endure that any man should approach her as a suitor, whose heart was not dead to every sentiment but that of pure, disinterested, single-minded love, had bartered herself away like a carcass in the shambles, in a match of mere convenience. She had married a good man, a man of talent, a man of wealth, a man of reputation and high and honorable station in a far western state. All these were considerations which should make the connexion desirable. But what was there in it to kindle love? The thing was so revolting that it cured me, at least for the time. But it did more than that. It eradicated all feeling of respect for the sex, all sympathy for what they are often doomed to feel from the tyranny of circumstances. I had read of such things in romances; but I was now convinced that, in real life, they had no existence. I vowed revenge against the whole sex; and was looking about for a victim, when accident pointed out one at hand, and furnished a particular motive to direct my malice against her.”

CHAPTER XVII.

“It was not long,” continued Ludwell, “before I discovered from what hand had come the blow, that had destroyed my hopes; and I at once resolved on a scheme of vengeance, which the excited condition of my mind well qualified me to carry into execution. It was impossible entirely to conceal my dejection; and it was alike impossible not to perceive that Miss Bernard was disposed to console me. In some oriental tale we read of a certain magic sword, the wounds of which could only be cured by the application of the hilt of the same weapon to the wounded part. Miss Bernard seemed to think that she herself wielded such a weapon, and toward me she manifested no less disposition to use its sanative than its destructive properties. In short I began to suspect that the very prudent and scrupulous Miss Bernard, who was shocked at the thought of a union between Miss Courtney, and such an utter *roué* as myself, was not very violently averse to the thought of taking the same *roué* to her own pure bosom. Whether this took its rise in the eagerness of her struggle with others for the notice and admiration of one who had

established himself as the Corypheus of the village gallants I neither knew nor cared. She had this or some other motive for encouraging my attentions; and I became her assiduous follower. The fever of my heart and brain stimulated my faculties; and I am sure I never said so many agreeable things or showed myself in so attractive a light to any other woman. My first advances were not met, as I expected. She presently assumed the coquette, affected to trifle with me, and seemed only to covet the honor and glory of securing the admiration of one for whom all the village belles had been angling; and, as it seemed to all but Miss Bernard herself, who alone was in the secret, angling in vain. By playing off in this way she gave me an opportunity to do the same, to choose my own time, and to keep myself uncommitted until I saw that her affections were completely enthralled. My success was so complete, that her passion got the better of her avarice, and when, at length I found the time to speak, I offered my hand and it was eagerly accepted.

“My victim was now fairly chained to the stake, and the fiercest savage in our forests might have taken profitable lessons from me in the art of tormenting. She was desperately, passionately, madly in love, and I scorched and froze her by turns with attention and neglect. One day I was all devotion, the next I flirted with others, and alarmed her by the keenest sarcasms against every defect or fault of which I knew she must be conscious. Sometimes I strove to shine in her presence, and when I had excited her admiration to the highest pitch, I would shock her by the avowal of the most abominable sentiments and the most damnable principles. By frequent allusions to my past life, I reminded her of the excesses and debaucheries which she had pretended to think made me unfit to be the husband of another woman; and I even ventured to hint, that my life even yet was not much amended. I amused myself especially by avowing my extravagance in money matters, and am now astonished that her fear of being reduced to beggary did not bring her to her senses. But I watched all the changes of her feelings, and varied my treatment, according to the symptoms, so as to give her full experience of that worst of all miseries, the consciousness of being lured to certain destruction, without the power to resist the fatal influence. Mephistophiles was a fool to me.

“At last the time came for the *coup de grace*. You must understand that the lady has a fortune in the funds, yielding an income of about one thousand dollars per annum, which is fully spent on her own person. It was part of our plan, that, having left the army, I should resume the study of the law. I was to accompany her on her return to her own home, about thirty miles from hence, and push my fortune at the bar of this place. So said—so done. I met, at first, with some success, but not so une-

quivocal, that I could not, by affecting a sanguine or desponding mood, sometimes stimulate her hope of a speedy marriage, and then freeze her with the dread of a postponement to the Greek Kalends. Meantime I saw her frequently—that is as often as business carried me into her county, and it would have been worth the price of a play ticket, to have overheard some of our conversations. I will give you a specimen.

“We were sitting together one day, when, after a pause in the conversation, produced by some saucy and embarrassing speech of mine, she resumed it, by saying, ‘You have a very bad character, Mr. Ludwell.’

“‘I am a damned bad man, madam.’

“‘But are you really so bad as people say?’

“‘Why—yes madam. In *that particular*, on which ladies most delight to dwell, and to which they commonly allude, when they say a man is bad, I am perhaps somewhat worse than fame reports me to be.’

“This was a stumper. She looked down, and twiddled with the strings of her reticule for a moment, and then looked up with a pretty blushing smile, and asked; ‘Pray, Mr. Ludwell, how often have you been engaged to be married?’

“‘Why madam—if—I *may* consider my present relation to you as an engagement, it will make,’ (a long pause, and affecting to count my fingers,) ‘it will make—ten—times.’

“‘Good gracious!’ exclaimed she. ‘Why you are worse than I am. I have only been engaged *five* times.’

“‘The proportion may be changed yet,’ said I, ‘before all is done.’

“Plain as this hint was, she would not understand it. Stinging as it was, she did not wince. Insulting as it was she could not make up her mind to resent it. But the time was ripe for the *denouement*. I had amused myself long enough; I had tortured her—not enough—no—but as long as I could afford, and nothing remained but to furnish her with a set of clean papers, and quit her.”

“A set of clean papers!” said Harlston. “What does that mean?”

“Why you know, that, however detestable the character of a thorough-paced-coquette is considered, a woman loses nothing by *jilting a lover*. On the contrary, every thing of the sort is a feather in her cap, and however grave matrons and elderly gentlemen may be scandalized, the sort of folks she has to do with are but the more eager to win her favor. But let her *be jilted*, and her power is gone, her charms are stale; and her doom is sealed. Now my malice did not carry me so far as that, and besides, you know, such things lead to unpleasant explanations with brothers and cousins. I was obliged to leave New Orleans once, to avoid the consequences of handing a flower to a little French girl, who thereupon told me, that, if her

father had no objection, she had none. Had I explained her mistake, there were seven brothers, each one 'the butcher of a silk button,' ready to cut my throat. So I said nothing, but in a few days left that part of the world. Before they could tell what to make of my disappearance, the scent was cold, and they knew not where to follow me. I heard no more of it."

"But you have not told me;" said Harlston, "what you mean by a set of clean papers."

"Why I mean a set of documents, which may be handed without a word of explanation, to any one the lady may wish to deceive, affording clear proof of the engagement; of its termination by the sovereign will and pleasure of the lady herself; and of the chagrin and despair of the gentleman, lamenting and deprecating the sentence, but admitting its justice. Armed with such panoply, a woman is secure alike from the censure of the prudent, and the sneers of the vain or malignant."

"From what you have said, I presume it was not easy to bring her to dismiss you."

"There was the difficulty. I tried hard for it, but to no purpose."

"Then you had to leave her, I suppose, without the clean papers."

"By no means. That was not to be thought of. Too much honor for that."

"You speak riddles," said Harlston; "You must have married her unless you could provoke her to do what she did not do! How is that?"

"I will show you," said Ludwell, "the prettiest piece of diplomacy! But first I must give you a little more of the story. When I found all my efforts to provoke the jealousy or resentment of the lady wholly unavailing, I went to see her in one of my most sanguine and ardent moods. My hopes of success in business were bright; my passion impatient; delay was intolerable; and I was all on fire for the consummation of our engagement. I set her on fire too. I besought her to name the day. She assented. An early day? She named one. It required a little address to keep from being married, *then and there*, as we lawyers say. But she named a day: but ten days off, and so I left her the most light-hearted, joyous and enraptured swain you ever saw.

"As soon as I got home, then came a fit of the blues, you know. Prospects dark; ultimate success doubtful: present difficulties, and pressing creditors. Then the thought of inveigling a fond, faithful, trusting woman into the vortex of my ruin! So I sat down and wrote that letter." He handed one which read thus.

"MADAM:

"There is no power in words to express the agony of mind with which I sit down to write this letter. To forfeit all my hopes of happiness; to incur the eternal displeasure of the being whose

favor has been so long the light of my life; to be driven away from the bliss that seemed to court my acceptance, and plunged in the bottomless gulf of despair! How can I think of it? How can I man myself to the duty, that must be followed by such consequences? But it must be done. I will not add to my other sins against you, that of involving you in the misery that overshadows my destiny. I will not do it. I will sooner incur your hatred—aye—even your contempt, than wrong you thus. *Your* contempt! What a thought! *Yours*—whose smile was more to me than the applause of all the world: the reward for which I lived and toiled; despising all the objects of ambition, which, to the vulgar throng, I seemed to covet; or only seeking them, because he, whom you honored with your favor, was bound to show himself worthy of it, by bearing away the prize in every contest for excellence.

"Why could not my foolish heart be content with a bliss which kings might envy? Why did my impatient passion urge me to wring from your shrinking delicacy a promise to crown my happiness by an early union? Why have I placed myself in the unfortunate dilemma of reducing you to beggary, or entitling myself to your displeasure and scorn, by asking you to recall the dear promise, so reluctantly yet tenderly given, so rapturously received, which I myself extorted from you? I know not what I said—what representation of my affairs I made to beguile you to this step. I can well believe that I deceived you, for I was myself deceived—deluded—bewitched. The light of your eyes made all things bright, around me and in prospect: your cheek shed its rosy hue upon my hopes, and I spoke, as of reality, of that which is not, and perhaps may never be. Whether the delusion might not have lasted until too late for your escape, I know not; had not circumstances awaiting my return at once dispelled it, and shown me to myself a beggar—worse than a beggar—a wretch, who owes his bread to the indulgence, his freedom to the forbearance of his creditors; united to whom, you would immediately find yourself driven to the alternative of seeing him spend his life in jail, or surrendering your fortune to procure his liberation. I state the truth thus strongly, not because I dare hope it will secure forgiveness for my fault, but because I would not have you to think me worse than I am. Forgiveness! Pardon! Restoration to your favor, and to the blissful hopes that I have forfeited! These I dare not hope for. I know my doom. I know that to this letter I can expect but one answer; and that will banish me forever from your presence. Of such a sentence I can have no right to complain; and, while I deprecate it, I dare not dispute its justice, as alike due to my offence, and to your own self-respect. Yet, when all is over, I beseech you to try to think as leniently as possible of an offence springing from the ardor of

passion, which is sometimes allowed to extenuate what nothing can excuse: and if ever my image shall rise to your fancy, let it represent me as mourning over my fault, while I groan under my punishment; and as ever wearing in my heart of hearts the memory of your charms and your unmerited goodness. Your wretched, but ever devoted,

PH. LUDWELL."

"Have you read that?" asked Ludwell. "Now look at this," he added, handing another, which Harlston received with a look in which there was more of displeasure than of mirth. It was as follows:

"Your letter does you honor. It is worthy of the delicacy, of the noble disinterestedness of your nature. But how could you so mistake me? I knew all that you seem to think me ignorant of. You yourself had already told me all. Can I blame you for forgetting it when I forgot it myself? I know it was unwise in *you* to press for an early day. It was equally unwise in *me* to name it. Can I recall the feelings, which to my mind extenuate *my own* fault, and yet judge harshly of *yours*. We were both unwise. Be it so. Let it be forgotten. But I shall never bring myself to think it unwise to wait till fortune shall crown your honorable labors with success equal to your merit. Do not, I beseech you, confound me with the cold formalists, who carry etiquette and punctilio into affairs of which the heart alone should judge, and on which the happiness of life depends. I will not wrong myself and offend you by affecting indifference to the delay which prudence prescribes: but I will say, that time shall make no change in me; and that, however your labors may be prolonged, I shall be always ready to cheer and encourage them, and that, end when they may, you will find me still and ever your own faithful

LAURA."

It was with a glistening eye that Harlston looked up after reading this letter. It had been, through life, the prevailing wish of his heart to awaken in the breast of some woman worthy of his love, exactly the sentiment breathed in its simple but fervid words. Ludwell however neither marked this indication of sensibility, nor the somewhat stern look with which Harlston received from his hand another letter. This last document was in the following words:

"MADAM—I am not surprised at your decision. It is but what my own sense of justice anticipated. If ever a ray of hope gleamed into my mind, it was presently swallowed up in the blackness of despair. You could do no otherwise than you have done. I bow submissively to my sentence, and only beg that you will accept my grateful acknowledgments for the gentle terms in which it is communicated. In this, as in all things, you have

acted in a manner worthy of yourself. May your heart be spared every pang that agonizes mine, and may the happiness of your future life be never embittered by one thought of the wretched

LUDWELL."

CHAPTER XVIII.

As soon as Harlston made an end of this most extraordinary letter, he rose slowly from his seat, and taking his hat and gloves, moved toward the door. But Ludwell anticipated him, and stood before it, the reckless smile upon his lip now, for the first time, giving way to an expression of earnest and affectionate expostulation. "Let me pass," said Harlston gravely. "You have convinced me that this woman, of whom you taught me to think so injuriously, is one of whose love any man might be proud, and with whom any man of right feelings might be happy."

"Hear me but a single word," exclaimed Ludwell, "and then, *if you will*, that shall be the last that ever passes between us."

Harlston folded his arms, and fixed his eye coldly upon that of Ludwell, while the latter went on. "Do you forget," said he, "that you know this lady? That you have seen her in my company? That, instead of treating me with scorn, she is manifestly anxious to conciliate me? In short, do you not see, that, when with the papers in her hands she might blast my name and drive me from society, *she* is actually afraid of *me*. This may seem a riddle to you; but you know the fact. So take your seat again, and hear me patiently to the end."

Harlston did as he was requested, and Ludwell proceeded.

"I never told you the woman could not love. She has passion enough for a whole bevy of the nuns of Covent-Garden. I have said nothing of my experience on that point of her character. She could and did love, and she loved *me*, to distraction, as you see. But now remember that this thing happened five years ago, when the artificial part of her character was not yet formed. She was then only what Nature made her: malignant to her own sex, amorous and a jilt. You know I told you, she said she had been engaged five times, before she ever saw me. Yet I am sure she never loved any other man, and had jilted all her former lovers. I have her own word for both facts. She was then but seventeen. She had had no experience of the strength of her own passions, and had not yet learned to contend with them. How could she? The prudential maxims by which she now governs herself had been instilled from childhood. She had imbibed them, but they were not yet assimilated and become a part of her nature. You have not to learn, at this time of day, the difference between a rule of conduct that we have but adopted,

though with full purpose to govern ourselves by it, and one on which we have acted until it has become habit, so that we cannot shake it off. My excellent, sober, discreet, prudent, virtuous friend, that makes all the difference between you and me. And of the like nature is the difference between Laura Bernard, as she was, when the maxims of her mother had only recommended themselves to her understanding, and as she now is, when they have corrupted her heart. But though she was then wavering between the precept, that taught her to marry for money, and the passion that impelled her to marry for love, she was even then wicked, sensual, false, malignant, and an unprincipled coquette. Of her malignity and falsehood I have full proof. There it is," (pointing to his desk.) "You may see it if you will. Proof full and damning, that she not only told the lady of my love all the disgusting tales concerning me that rumor had made current, but that she added fabrications of her own, and statements that she knew to be false. My knowledge does not now rest, as it did at first, on casual information. I have the letter of the unfortunate lady herself, received not two years ago. It is *there*. It was sent me by that poor broken-hearted girl from her death-bed, with the knowledge of her husband. Yes, she is dead, and this woman is her murderer. She married, as so many women do, in the frenzy of despair; and then, discovering, as she afterwards did, the deception that had been practiced upon her, she sunk under the struggle between her feelings and her sense of duty. Her husband had not failed, (who can fail,) to discover that he had gained her person, but not her heart; and his peace was wrecked by the discovery. She confessed to him that she had not loved him, and implored his forgiveness; and then, at last, when her charms were withered, when the flesh was wasted from her bones, when nothing of her marvellous beauty remained but the unearthly brightness of the eye, and the deceitful bloom upon the cheek, and the white teeth glittering ghastly through the gasping lips, she told him all, beseeching his forgiveness, and charging him to implore mine also. *His* letter is there. All is there.

"And now, my dear fellow," continued Ludwell after a short pause, in which he watched the relaxing sternness of Harlston's countenance, "now that you have banished that expression of grave reproof, I beg you to observe the exact justice with which I measured out my revenge. In kind and degree it was commensurate to the injury, and no more. Of course you know I did but jest, when I spoke of being restrained from exposing this woman by any fear of consequences to myself. I have foreborne to expose her, because I would not injure her too deeply. By this time she feels sure of my forbearance, and safe in my honor and justice. She has never heard a hint of the truth, and it is not my intention that she ever shall hear of it,

unless her conduct makes it necessary. I tell it to you, in full confidence that it will go no farther, and only because it is necessary to put you on your guard against her machinations. Her talent for mischief is equal to her envy and malignity, and, if she fails to win you from Miss Courtney, she will move earth and heaven, and hell to boot, to prevent your union, or to make it wretched."

"It is possible you may be right," said Harlston. "And yet I declare to you, Ludwell, that I would rather have been spared this revelation. It has awakened more degrading ideas of the sex, than ever before found their way into my mind, and I feel the tone of my own morality relaxed by the history of conduct I cannot approve, on the part of one of whose friendship I have had so many evidences, and whom I admire and love."

"You are a stern censor, Harlston; but you are unjust to yourself in not permitting yourself to be amused at my tale, and to me in not admiring my ingenuity. You see the lady has the originals of those two letters of mine, which, to my knowledge, she has shown to many; and as to hers, which puts so different a face on the matter, that she knows is destroyed, or safely locked up in my desk. Here have I been laughing in my sleeve, for five years, with no one to help me enjoy the joke, and now, when an opportunity offers to tell it, you look as grave, as if it had been the history of a bloody murder. I'll be hanged if I don't think I shall have to talk to Laura Bernard herself about it, and let us laugh it over together. If I could tell her, as I could have done yesterday, that I had never betrayed her secret, and never would, I do think she would enjoy the laugh at her own expense. I should like to hear from her what she thought, and how she felt, on reading that last most astonishing letter. How mystified she must have been. But it is a casting of pearls before swine, to offer a joke to your uncompromising morality and grave philosophy. Well—it may be I should have been moral too, had I been born to ten thousand a year, and at liberty to choose my own company and avocations. You ought to allow for those, who, having to struggle through life, and to fight every inch of ground, must fight all sorts of people, and must learn to fight each with his own weapons."

"I do allow for it, my dear Ludwell, and hence I have not reproved you. But shall I not be sad to think, that a mind like yours should be condemned to this strife, and to an habitual exposure to influences so pernicious? I tell you, I feel *myself* a worse man for barely having *heard* what you tell me. In saying this, do I not admit the reasonableness of the extenuation you offer? But this does not make me mistake wrong for right, or dispose me to laugh at seeing them confounded. Besides, are you sure that this very fault in the character of Miss Bernard, which makes you warn me against her designs on my fortune, may not be chargeable

on you? By your own account, the time was, when she was capable of the most devoted and disinterested love. Can you be sure that her passion did not take its rise sooner than you discovered symptoms of it? May she not have seen a rival in that most unfortunate lady; and may it not have been that in the disclosure she made she intended no injury to any one, but only sought to secure you for herself. But supposing this not to have been the case, and take the story exactly as you tell it; could any thing have happened, better calculated to change her into an unprincipled adventurer, than precisely such an affair of the heart, attended by such a result? Tell me, Mr. Mephistophiles, as you like the name, are you not seeking to punish the sin into which you yourself have beguiled your victim?"

"You put it very strongly, Harlston, and I am afraid there may be more truth in the idea than has ever struck me before. But I cannot agree that my revenge was not fully justified by the injury, nor to exchange the pleasure of thinking of it for the pain of self-reproach. I will take your judgment of the matter a month hence, and if, when you see this woman spinning her web around Miss Courtney, you do not justify me, I will stand condemned."

"You think then that I shall be better qualified to judge of the young lady's character, when I see it under the influence of excited feelings; and when I shall be disposed to attend less to her conduct and motives, than to the effect upon my own happiness. Is it not better, Ludwell, that I should try to give you the benefit of my dispassionate judgment while I may? I certainly do not mean to justify Miss Bernard; but convinced, as I am, from the whole story, that her fault was prompted, not by malice, but by love for you, I ask if it is right that *you* should visit it with such displeasure."

"That sounds well," said Ludwell. "I want to see how you will receive the same plea in her favor, when her love for *you* tempts her to put poison into Miss Courtney's cup."

"If I thought that any woman of the attractions of Miss Bernard loved *me* as she certainly loved *you*, I should think it a misfortune not to be able to return her love; and let her be what she might, I trust I should feel too much gratitude and pity to condemn, with unmitigated severity, any fault into which her passion might betray her. But you do not say that Miss Bernard loves *me*. It is my fortune you tell me she is in love with. So far I believe you, that I have no idea that she has any love for me, and therefore if I find her interfering between Miss Courtney and myself, I shall have to

attribute it to malice, or to the yet baser motive which disposes a woman to sell herself for gold. The analogy to your case will therefore wholly fail."

"But who has told you that, in my case, she acted under any motive but that of malice. I am sure I did not."

"True; but you told me facts from which I clearly infer a different motive."

"And I can draw no such inference; and therefore my judgment of her in my case, and yours, if she injures you in the same way, *ought to be* the same. Now let us see what yours will be, and if it is like mine, you will no longer condemn me."

"I am not urging any thing in condemnation of *you*. I am pleading for *her*, and endeavoring to extenuate her offence by a consideration which ought to mitigate the intensity of your hatred."

"Yes I do hate her; and I would not, for the world, forego the pleasure of hating her. So do not endeavor to persuade me that she acted under the influence of a passion for my own sweet self. It might engage my self-love on her side."

"And, in your case, a most potent ally it would be, Ludwell."

"In my case!" exclaimed Ludwell. "Am I then particularly selfish? Among all my sins, I thought that was not to be numbered."

"I have no doubt you did," said Harlston, with a quiet smile. "Your reckless, thriftless fellows rarely find out that they are the most selfish people in the world. You will do any thing for a friend that you would as lief do as not. I have no doubt you would fight for me. I have no doubt you would give a dollar to a beggar without grudging; for you would, as lief as not, make ducks and drakes with your money in the Potowmac. But for whom but yourself have you lived? Who is the better for your existence? How many, for your own momentary gratification, have you seduced to crime, to misery in this world—perhaps in the next? Has self-love ever permitted you to ask yourself these questions? Does not self-love, at this moment, incite you to resentment against the friend who asks them? Come Phil; this is perhaps the last time I shall have an opportunity of preaching to you, so take it kindly, as it is meant. I can get you the office you wish, and send you away as soon as possible. We may never meet again; and I hope you will now take a new latitude and departure. I cannot better aid you to do so than by correcting your fundamental error, of thinking yourself unselfish. So now take off your beard, dress yourself, and let us go out."

[To be continued.]