Right at Last

Midnight grew into the small hours, some of the men took their departure, but the four at the card table continued playing as if time had no existence.

At last Lord Pontelere rose and threw down his cards with an accompanying oath.

"You've the luck of the devil, Royce," he said. "I have not had a card for the last hour and a half. There——" and he pushed the pile across the table; "how much more do you want?"

Royce made a calculation, and Lord Pontelere scribbled an I O U on a leaf of his betting book and threw it down; his partner did the same, and the two winners, Bertie and Royce, put the gold into their pockets, Lord Pontelere watching them moodily.

"I've had a beastly run of bad luck for the last two months; lost at everything. I am nearly stumped. What's the name of that old Jew you got some coin from the other day, Bertie?"

"He isn't a Jew, he's a Christian, and a very nice old man. His name is Craddock, isn't it, Royce?"

"I forget," said Royce. "Yes, I think so."

"I thought you knew him!" said Lord Dewsbury, with a yawn.

Royce shook his head.

"No; I only remember his name because someone—I forget who—told me they had borrowed some money of him. If you remember, I advised you not to go to him."

Lord Bertie laughed.

"Yes, I know you did; but what was the use of that unless you told me where else to go?"

"Craddock?" said Lord Pontelerk. "Well, I'll have to go to him. Where does he hang out?"

"Here's the address," said Lord Dewsbury. "Chain Court, Fenchurch street."

"Sounds ominous," said Royce, with his faint laugh. "You'll find that he will want a hundred per cent., Pontelerc; they all do! Better let me be your banker?"

Lord Pontelerc declined sullenly, and he and his partner went out. One by one the rest took their departure, and Royce and Lord Bertie were left alone.

"I've been lucky to-night, Royce," he said, pleasantly, his fair boyish face smiling up at the dark one beside him. "That is because I played with you. I wish I always did! How quiet you are to-night! What's the matter—thinking of the mysterious adventure you left us to pursue?"

Royce smiled, then he said, gravely:

"No. The fact is I went money-hunting myself, Bertie."

"No! Really!" said the young fellow. "You?"

Royce laughed grimly.

"Why not?" he said. "Do you think I have come into money and estates? I want money badly——"

"And you offered to lend it to Pontelerc," said Bertie, open-eyed.

Royce smiled again.

"Because I knew he wouldn't take it," he said, quietly. "Pontelere would rather be taken in by the Jews than borrow of me. Besides I wanted to raise that charming scowl on his face. It always amuses me! I wonder whether Pontelere hates me more than I hate him! I think not!"

Bertie laughed.

"But about the money, Royce! If you are hard up, you know, I can lend you some!"

"You lent me some last night," said Royce.

"Never mind, I've won to-night! How much?"

Royce thought a moment, his eyes on the hearthrug.

"Five hundred," he said. "I'll give you my note of hand. You can pass it on to your friend in the city, if you like, when you want some more, that is, if I don't pay you in a day or two."

The young viscount pulled out some bank-notes and gold, and counted the sum.

"There you are, old fellow," he said, carelessly, "and never mind the note, and don't be in a hurry to pay up! I'm flush at present, and, as you say, I can go to old Craddock when I am short again! He is not half a bad old fellow."

Royce shook his head gravely.

"They are all alike, Bertie; better keep out of their clutches."

"Let's live while we've life, Royce! Shall we play again, a quiet little carte?"

"Not to-night," said Royce. "I'll smoke a cigar and then go."

Lord Bertie got the cigars and the two men sat down before the fire talking for a little while.

Then Royce, watching him, saw the young fellow's head droop, and presently he fell asleep.

Merdaunt Royce got up and stood looking at him for a moment with a strange expression. Not pity, nor hate, but a calm, set expression such as the executioner might wear beneath his mask as he stood looking at the condemned sleeping before the last morning.

Then with pursed lips and lowered lids, he picked up the cigar which had fallen from the boy's fingers, and flung it into the fire, took his hat and inverness which the footman had laid on a chair for him, and went quietly out.

He had accomplished his night's work and driven his two flies into his master's web at Chain Court, Fenchurch street!

Quietly and unconcernedly he walked through the now silent streets to his own rooms, and Levater himself would have been unable to read in the serene, dreamy eyes and pale, set pace the thoughts of the man who had been snatched from the gutter, when a boy and trained by Elijah Craddock.

CHAPTER VIII.

It had been a happy evening for Joan; the one white night in her dull gray life; her cheeks were still flushed, her heart still echoing to his "Say 'yes!'" as he put her cloak round her.

It was all so new, the sensation that filled her heart so novel and startling, that she felt bewildered and confused, as one feels when awakening suddenly from a dream. But she was to be awakened in a very realistic and unmistakable fashion.

The two girls had maintained an ominous and solemn silence during the ride home, and until the colonel had gone off to bed, yawning and slightly unsteady; then as Joan standing before the fire unclasped her cloak, Emmeline spoke.

"Joan," she said, coldly, icily, but with a spiteful fire in her eyes.

"Yes!" said Joan, starting from her dream. "Shall I help you off with your cloaks——"

"No, thanks," said Emmeline, icily, and putting up her hand to keep her off. "It is all very well to assume ignorance and innocence, but though you do it very well—oh, very well indeed!—I don't fancy you will impose on us, certainly you will not on me!"

"What is the matter? What have I done?" exclaimed Joan with dismay.

Julia laughed with incredulous scorn.

"I suppose you are not aware that you have made yourself the talk of the place! But perhaps you enjoy that kind of notoriety."

"I the talk of the place! of Redstaple, do you mean?" asked Joan, mystified and troubled.

"Yes, the talk of the place. I could hear them talking about you in every part of the room."

"About me!" echoed Joan, aghast. "But why?"

"Why? Because people will talk, and naturally, when a girl—a young girl at her first ball—makes herself conspicuous by hanging on to the best parti in the room, and making such a dead set at him that he cannot possibly escape."

Joan's face paled, then crimsoned, not only her face, but her white, palpitating throat.

"Do—do you mean Lord Villiars?" she panted.

"Do I mean Lord Villiars!" echoed Julia, scornfully. "Charming innocence, isn't it, Em?" turning to her sister. "Quite a pattern of rustic unsophistication. How amused Lord Villiars must have been! I saw him laughing with Mr. Fitz-Simon and looking Joan's way; of course he was talking of the girl who had pushed herself on to him and wouldn't be shaken off."

White now to the lips, oJan stood and eyed her, yet not seeing her.

"It is false!" she said at last, the words dropping slowly from her lips.

"False! It is true, unfortunately. I say unfortunately," said Julia, with the air of an impartial judge, "because you happen in a kind of way to belong to us. To dance the first dance with him, when there were dozens of others, old friends, who were entitled to do so, was bad enough; but to entice him out into the corridor, and keep him there for half an hour, and set all the room talking about you, was simply—unwomanly!"

Joan's lips parted, but no words would come for a moment.

"For heaven's sake," said Julia, infuriated by her silence; "don't repeat the tactics to-morrow, or you'll drive him clean out of the place; that is, if you intend going—and I suppose you do?" and she fixed her eyes eagerly on Joan's pale, flower-like face.

"No!" said Joan at last, and her voice came faint and tremulous; "no, I shall not go. I—I have done nothing wrong. It is not true—this that you say. It was not my fault; he——" She for justice. "I will not go to-morrow; I will never speak to Lord Villiars again," and she took her candle and glided from the room, her head bowed, and her eyes full of a vague fear and trouble.

The two girls were on the quivive of excitement the next morning. Joan stopped; not to them would she plead had, for the first time in her life, failed to put in an appearance at breakfast, and had sent word down that she had a headache and would not be able to go to the Wold; and immensely relieved, the two girls were revelling in anticipatory joy.

The mid-day lunch was scrambled through, Joan still not putting in an appearance, and then the colonel, rather shaky and glass-eyed after last night's champagne and brandy and soda, was ready to escort them.

"All depends upon how Villiars likes the place," said the colonel, as they mounted to the terrace; "we must do all we can to persuade him to settle. He'd be a perfect Godsend to the place! Two millions of money! George! it makes my mouth water. Hallo! here he comes! He's got some notion of style, anyhow!" he added, as a dog-cart, with a pair of horses driven tandem, came wheeling down the drive.

The tandem swung around the curve, and the grooms sprang to the horses' heads, as the colonel, with his most effective smile, came forward.

"How, are you, Villiars? You look as bright as a star! Ha, what a thing youth is! Here we are, the girls all anxious to be useful!"

Lord Villiars got down and shook hands all around, the eyes of the girls taking in every detail of his dress, the shapely coat and the sportsmanlike hat. He looked "a lord," every inch of him, they thought.

"It's very kind of you to come," he said. "Craddock will be here directly; I passed his fly. Ah, here he is," he said, as the fly drove up, and the bent figure of the old man crawled out and he hobbled forward, hat in hand. "Good morning, Craddock. Pity to give you so much trouble."

"No, no, my lord," said Craddock, wheezing, his small, twinkling eyes glittering towards the others. "Colonel Oliver, I think. How do you do, colonel? How do you do, young ladies?"

Then he stopped, for Lord Villiars was standing looking about the terrace with a sweeping glance.

"Where is Miss"—he paused a second—"Miss Ormsby" he said.

'Couldn't put in an appearance," said the colonel, lightly. "Knocked out by the ball. Only a headache. What a lovely morning, isn't it? How I envy you your drive from Redstaple! Such beautiful horses, too——"

"Only a headache!" he said, his eyes fixed on Julia absently, and a faint frown making itself perceptible on his brow. "The air would have done her good."

"So I told her," said Julia, "but she seemed quite determined not to come. Joan is a strange girl, Lord Villiars."

He turned to Craddock moodily. "Where are the keys?" he said, listlessly.

"Here, my lord, here," said Mr. Craddock, shaking them; and he went and opened the great door.

Lord Villiars stood for a moment outside, pulling his mustache, then suddenly he turned to the colonel. "Go inside with the ladies, Oliver: I'll join you presently," and he strode off.

"Enquire which is the Elms," he said curtly to one of the grooms.

The man touched his hat and sprang up, and to the amazement of the party who were watching through the hall window, the dog cart whirled up the drive and disappeared.

Joan had waited until the others had set off for the Wold before she left her room and came down.

She was as pale as a lily and her eyes loomed large dreamily in her sad face. The lunch was still on the table, but she passed through the room, and taking her cloak went into the garden.

There was a seat at the farther end from which she could see the sea, and she was sitting looking at it, and listening to the distant roar which mingled with the voice of Lord Villiars, when she heard the sound of wheels, and the next moment the dog-cart stoppedat the gate.

With a sudden flash of the eyes, Lord Villiars saw her in her bower, and, leaping to the ground, he opened the gate and went towards her.

She remained motionless, her head turned away from him, and his first words were addressed to the back of her head.

"Miss Joan," he said, quietly, but with the masterful tone in his voice she knew so well, "I have come for you."

She looked up, meeting his gaze for a moment, then looked back at the sea in silence.

"Are you better?" he said, bending over her.

"I am quite well," she said, trying to smile carelessly.

"Come, then!" he said quietly.

She shook her head.

"No—I cannot come,' she answered.

"No! A promise is a promise, Miss Joan!—I hold you to yours! I have come for you, and the others are waiting!"

"Oh, why did you?" she exclaimed, in a troubled voice.

"Why? Because you promised. You will not break that promise. Do so at your peril! If you do, I shall drive back to Redstaple, and leave the Wold for ever! See how momentous is your decision, Miss Joan, and you will come!"

Then he took her hand and led her to the dog-cart.

"Are you afraid of the height?" he said. "Allow me!" and, bending, he took her in his arms and lifted her on to the step.

The next moment he was driving her full pelt down to the Wold, and all unconsciously they were a step nearer the fatal issue!

And Julia and Emmeline, watching at the hall window, saw Joan—the despised, deserted Joan—sitting beside him; saw them with feelings which may be imagined, but which no pen of mine is fluent enough to set down!

CHAPTER IX.

As the tandem drove up to the steps, and Lord Villiars lifted Joan from the dog-cart, Julia's and Emmeline's faces turned pale with envy and mortification, and the colonel muttered something inaudible under his mustache; but there was nothing to be done but to "grin and look pleasant," and Julia welcomed his lordship and Joan with effusive smiles on her face.

"Oh, how kind of you, Lord Villiars! And are you better, Joan, dear? I am so glad you have come! The party wouldn't have been complete without you!"

"I had to bring Miss Joan by main force," said Lord Villiars. "But come along, you are going to give your advice, you know! Where's Mr. Craddock?"

"Here, my lord," said the old man, who had been watching the group from under his shaggy, bent brows.

"Lead on, then," said Lord Villiars.

Mr. Craddock shuffled across the hall, his keys rattling as he moved, and opened the door of the dining-room, or banqueting hall; the caretaker, who had brought up the rear, timidly opened the shutters and let in a bar of light, which gleamed winterly upon the faded hangings and udsty furniture.

It was a magnificent room, but a shudder ran through Joan's frame at its cold, neglected aspect, and Lord Villiars, who stood near her, with his eyes on her face, shrugged his shoulders.

"What a depressing room," he said. "Fancy dining here alone, with two family portraits frowning down at you and watching every mouthful. Thanks, Mr. Craddock, but I think we'll leave this ghostly apartment undisturbed for the present."

The old man passed through the drawing-room into a smaller anteroom, hung round with amber drapery; there were card tables still open in the centre of the room, and the light from the vaulted ceiling fell in a weird kind of fashion upon the quaint furniture.

"The card room, my lord. A Villiars—Edward, I think—lost two thousand acres in one night in this room," and the old man grinned. "Beyond here is the housekeeper's room, and this," he opened a door leading into a long corridor, "leads to the staircase, by a backway, and the picture gallery and bed chambers."

"All right," said Lord Villiars, cheerfully; "we'll see them all; that is, if you are not tired of the business already," and he turned, not to the colonel or the two Miss Olivers, but to Joan, who started slightly.

"Oh, no," she said.

Mr. Craddock led the way up the stairs into the picture gallery.

Here a long string of Villiars and Arrowfields stretched round the walls, rows of stately and sweet-eyed, beautiful women and knightly men.

"Portrait of the late Earl of Arrowfield!" said Mr. Craddock, stopping before the last portrait on the wall, and leering up at it. "Painted by Gregson; cost four hundred guineas; paid the bill myself, my lord."

They all stood and stared at is as in duty bound, with their heads on one side, and the old man was passing on when Lord Villiars said, thoughtfully:

"There used to be a picture here, Mr. Craddock, used there not?" and he pointed to an empty space next the portrait of the late earl.

Mr. Craddock nodded and coughed.

"Yes, my lord. The countess' picture used to hang there, until she and the earl parted; he had it taken down then."

"It was a pity," said Lord Villiars, musingly. "If I remember rightly, it was the most beautiful face in the gallery."

"It was, my lord, it was," assented the old man. "The earl took it down himself and carried it no one knows where," and he shuffled out into the upper corridor.

"All bedrooms, my lord, sixty-four of them. Here's one; the best!" and he unlocked the door and showed them a handsome room furnished in carved sandalwood, with plush hangings.

"You can now see the hall," he added, pointing over the balustrade, and they went and looked over into the vast space beneath, with its carved oak and mosaic floor, its knights in armor and time eaten flags.

Joan lingered a little behind the others, looking down into the empty space.

All the poetry of her nature was aroused by the antique and faded glories of the place, and a swift, sudden longing came over her to own it all.

(To be Continued.)

Physicians in Germany.

In transmitting the following information, Consul-General T. St. John Gaffney, of Dresden, reports that medical statistics show that physicians have increased out of all proportion to the increase of the population in many parts of Germany:

The percentage increase in population and physicians from 1883 to 1903 was as follows: Province of Brandenburg, population 55 per cent., doctors 302 per cent.; Posen, population 17 per cent., doctors 106 per cent.; Berlin, population 69 per cent., doctors 155 per cent. The following shows the number of the population to each physician; Berlin 776; Posen, 3,426; West Prussia, 3,102; Reuss, 3,725.

In Saxony in 1906 there were 2,257 doctors as compared with 999 in 1883; there was one doctor to 2,016 inhabitants in 1906, against one to 2,081 in 1883. The increase of the population was 47.86 per cent., that of the doctors 125.93 per cent.—Consular Reports.

"Why is the crowd yelling?" "Because the Great Man is speaking." "What is the Great Man saying?" "They don't know. That's what makes 'em yell."—Atlanta Constitution.

WILL SING HIGH TARIFF TUNE IN GRAND OPERA NOTES.

MISS FLORA WILSON.

Des Moines, Ia.—Western standpatters have called on the stage for help, and Miss Flora Wilson, daughter of "Uncle Jim" Wilson, veteran secretary of agriculture, has responded to the call. She will warble before and after her father delivers his standpat speeches to the voters of the middle west.

There have been singers at political meetings before, but a young woman of grand opera attainments has never appeared as a campaign vocalist, and a new interest has been awakened at the meetings at which the secretary and his daughter will appear.

The songs will be the good, old-fashioned tunes glee clubs used to sing at party rallies, designed to make the voters think that the G. O. P. elephant and the American eagle are and always should be inseparable companions.

AMELIA, QUEEN OF SORROWS.

Of all European royalties, probably the most tragic figure is the Queen of Many Sorrows, Amelia of Portugal.

Queen Amelia was born at Orleans House, Twickenham, England, on September 28, 1865, the eldest daughter of the Comte and Comtesso de Paris. Her education in her earliest years was entirely English.

Her marriage was celebrated with much splendor at Lisbon, on May 22, 1886. Her elder son, the ill-fated Prince destined to fall by the bullets of a clique of assassins, was born in the March of the following year, and in the autumn of 1888, he was followed by Manuel, the unfortunate occupant of the uneasiest of all European thrones.

Her heroic conduct on February 1, 1908, when her husband and her eldest son were shot down by anarchists in Lisbon will not readily be forgotten. Here is the event as related to a personal friend in her own words:

"I have a vivid recollection of it all. At the very moment the King was lying dead on the cushions of the carriage I opened out my cloak, hoping with it to shield the Crown Prince from the view of the assassins, and so save his life.

"At the same moment I turned and saw one of the men aiming at me. I believed myself doomed, but I hoped that my son would escape, and that I would be able to give my life for my child, as any true French mother should.

"The thought rushed to my brain that I was dying for my adopted country and my poor boy. All this must have taken less than a second.

"Suddenly the man who was aiming at me threw up his arms and staggered and fell, and I found afterwards that he had been killed by some of the guards."

CATCHES JUDGE ASLEEP.

(Columbus Dispatch.)

Men who are summoned for jury duty are ingenious in their excuses, and it often happens that the selection of a juror is the most diverting part of the case. One who was called in the County Court here complained that he was deaf.

"You say that you are deaf?" remarked the Judge.

"Eh, what is that you say?" said the man.

"I said, are you deaf?" observed the Judge in a louder tone.

"You'll have to speak louder, or I can't hear you."

"I guess we'll excuse you," said the Judge; "you can go."

The deaf man had no trouble in hearing the court's last remark, and sped out of the courtroom.

"I think that's one on the Judge," observed one of the attorneys.

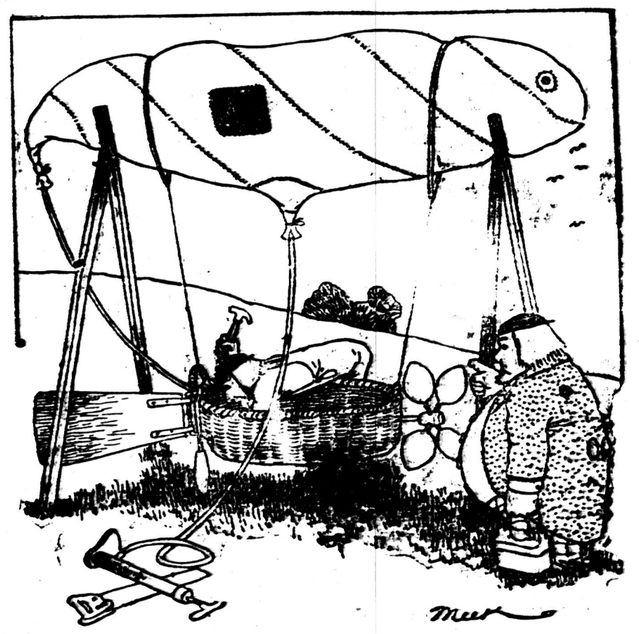
SAME OLD PLAINT.

(Chicago News.)

Jack—I went gunning in the country one day last week.

Tom—Bag anything?

Jack—Nothing but my expenses.



OSGAR UND ADO LF AS AIRONAUTS.

"Come on, Adolf, all oferbo-o-oart."

"All right, Osgar. By der vay, vot iss our destinyadion?"

"Dot remains to be felt. I vill try to pick ouid a soft von."

"I vouldt hate to fall far—I haf a dotzen eggs in diss besket. How vould we go abouid id to lighten der balloon?"

"Dunce! Let ouid some of der gas."

"Haf you a goot entchine in dis e zirship?"

"Yess, I haf dree motors, each mit 40 horsepower."

"So? How much does dot make togedder?"

"A whole lifferystable."

"Vell, I dink I vill go along. But I hate to leafe all our creditors."

"Yese—dot iss vot makes me so ar, too."

Three hours later, after a thrilling flight, they come down in a suburban cornfield.

"Ach," they exclaim, "ad last we haf reached terra firma."

But it wasn't. It was Terre Haute.