

quickly. "Her title was all right, of course."

"There was another question on the tip of Bob's tongue, but after a glance at Harry's face he did not put it; he could not ask Harry if he had known. "I'm hanged!" he muttered.

"Yes, but you understand why I came here?"

"Yes. That was kind."  
"Oh, no. I want to spike the Major's guns, you know." He laughed a little. "And—well, yes, I think I'm promoting the general happiness too, if you must know. Now I'm off, Bob."

He held out his hand and Bob grasped it. "We'll meet again some day, when things have settled down, beat Duplay for me, Bob. Good-bye."

"That's grit, real grit," muttered Bob as he returned to the house after seeing Harry Tristram on his way."

It was that—or else the intoxication of some influence whose power had not passed away. Whatever it was, it had a marked effect on Bob Broadley. There was an appearance of strength and resolution about it—as of a man knowing what he meant to do and doing it. As he inspected his pigs an hour later, Bob came to the conclusion that he himself was a poor sort of fellow. People who waited for the fruit to fall into their mouths were apt to find that a hand intervened and plucked it. That had happened to him once, and probably he could not have helped it; but he meant to try to prevent its happening again. He was in a ferment all the morning, partly on his own account, as much about the revolution which had suddenly occurred in the little kingdom on the banks of the Blent.

In the afternoon he had his gig brought round and set out for Blentmouth. As he passed Blent Hall, he saw a girl on the bridge—a girl in black looking down at the water. Lady Tristram? It was strange to call her by the title that had been another's. But he supposed it must be Lady Tristram. She did not look up as he passed; he retained a vision of the slack dressiness of her pose. Going on, he met the Iver carriage; Iver and Neeld sat in it, side by side; they waved their hands in careless greeting and went on talking earnestly. On the outskirts of the town he came on Miss Swinkerton and Mrs Trumbler walking together. As he raised his hat, a dim and wholly inadequate idea occurred to him of the excitement into which these good ladies would soon be thrown, a foreshadowing of the wonder, the consternation, the questionings, the bubbling emotions which were soon to stir the quiet backwaters of the villas of Blentmouth. For himself, what was he going to do? He could not tell. He put up his gig at the inn and sauntered out into the street; still he could not tell. But he wandered out to Fairhome, up to the gate, and past it, and back to it, and past it again.

Now would Harry Tristram do that? No; either he would never have come or he would have been inside before this. Bob's new love of boldness did not let him consider whether this was the happiest moment for its display. Those learned in the lore of such matters would probably have advised him to let her alone for a few days, or weeks, or months, according to the subtlety of their knowledge or their views. Bob rang the bell.

Janie was not denied to him, but only because no chance was given to her of denying herself. A footman, unconscious of convulsions external or internal, showed him into the morning-room. But Janie's own attitude was plain enough in her reception of him.

"Oh, Bob, why in the world do you come here to-day? Indeed I can't talk to you to-day." Her dismay was evident. "If there's nothing very particular —"

"Well, you know there is," Bob interrupted.

She turned her head quickly towards him. "I know there is? What do you mean?"

"You've got Harry Tristram's letter, I suppose?"

"What do you know of Harry Tristram's letter?"

"I haven't seen it, but I know what's in it all the same."

"How do you know?"

"He came up to Mingham to-day and told me." Bob sat down by her uninvited; certainly the belief in

boldness was carrying him far. But he did not quite anticipate the next development. She sprang up, sprang away from his neighbourhood, crying.

"Then how dare you come here to-day? Yes, I've got the letter—just an hour ago. Have you come to—to triumph over me?"

"What an extraordinary idea!" remarked Bob in the slow tones of a genuine astonishment.

"You'd call it to condole, I suppose! That's rather worse."

Bob confined himself to a long look at her. It brought him no enlightenment.

"You must see that you're the very —" She broke off abruptly, and, turning away, began to walk up and down.

"The very what?" asked Bob.

She turned and looked at him; she broke into a peevishly nervous laugh. Anybody but Bob—really anybody but Bob—would have known! The laugh encouraged him a little, which again it had no right to do.

"I thought you'd be in trouble, and like a bit of cheering up," he said, with a diplomatic air that was ludicrously obvious.

She considered a moment, taking another turn about the room to do it. "What did Harry Tristram say to you?"

"Oh, he told me the whole thing. That—that he's chucked it up, you know."

"I mean about me."

"He didn't say much about you. Just that it was all ended, you know."

"Did he think I should accept his withdrawal?"

"Yes, he seemed quite sure of it," answered Bob. "I had my doubts, but he seemed quite sure of it." Apparently Bob considered his statement reassuring and comforting.

"You had your doubts?"

"Yes, I thought perhaps —"

"You were wrong then, and Harry Tristram was right." She flung the words at him in a fierce hostility.

"Now he's not Lord Tristram any longer. I don't want to marry him." She paused. "You believe he isn't, don't you? There's no doubt?"

"I believe him all right. He's a fellow you can rely on."

"But it's all so strange. Why has he done it? Well, that doesn't matter. At any rate he's right about me."

Bob sat stolidly in his chair. He did not know at all what to say, but he did not mean to go. He had put no spoke in the Major's wheel yet, and to do that was his contract with Harry Tristram, as well as his own strong desire.

"Have you sympathised—or consoled—or triumphed—enough?" she asked; she was fierce still.

"I don't know that I've had a chance of saying anything much," he observed with some justice.

"I really don't see what you have to say. What is there to say?"

"Well, there's just this to say—that I'm jolly glad of it."

She was startled by the blunt sincerity, so startled that she passed the obvious chance of accusing him of cruelty towards Harry Tristram, and thought only of how his words touched herself.

"Glad of it. Oh, if you knew how it makes me feel about myself. But you don't, or you'd never be here now."

"Why shouldn't I be here now?" He spoke slowly, as though he were himself searching for any sound reason.

"Oh, it's —" The power of explanation failed her. People who will not see obvious things sometimes hold a very strong position. Janie began to feel rather helpless. "Do go. I don't want anybody to come and find you here." She had turned from command to entreaty.

"I'm jolly glad," he resumed, settling himself back in his chair, "that the business between you and Harry Tristram's all over. It ought never to have gone so far, you know."

"Are you out of your mind to-day, Bob?"

"And now what about the Major, Miss Janie?"

She flushed red in indignation, perhaps in guilt, too. "How dare you? You've no business to —"

"I don't know the right way to say things, I daresay," he admitted, but with an abominable tranquillity.

"Still, I expect you know what I mean

all the same."

"Do you accuse me of having encouraged Major Duplay?"

"I should say you'd been pretty pleasant to him. But it's not my business to worry myself about Duplay."

"I wish you always understood as well what isn't your business."

"And it isn't what you have done, but what you're going to do that I'm interested in." He paused several moments, and then went on very slowly, "I tell you what it is. I'm not very proud of myself. So if you happen to be feeling the same, why, that's all right, Miss Janie. The fact is, I let Harry Tristram put me in a funk, you know. He was a swell, and he's got a sort of way about him, too. But I'm hanged if I'm going to be in a funk of Duplay." He seemed to ask her approval of the proposed firmness of his attitude. "I've been a bit of an ass about it all, I think," he concluded with an air of thoughtful inquiry.

The opening was irresistible. Janie seized it with impetuous carelessness. "Yes, you have, you have indeed. Only I don't see why you think it's over, I'm sure."

"Well, I'm glad you agree with me," said he. But he seemed now rather uncertain how he ought to go on. "That's what I wanted to say," he added, and looked at her as if he thought she might give him a lead.

The whole thing was preposterous; Janie was bewildered. He had outraged all decency in coming at such a moment, and in talking like this. Then having got—by such utter disregard of all decency—to a point at which he could not possibly stop, he stopped. He even appeared to ask her to go on for him! She stood still in the middle of the room, looking at him as he sat squarely in his chair.

"Since you've said what you wanted to say, I should think you might go."

"Yes, I suppose I might, but —" He was puzzled. He had said what he wanted to say, or thought he had, but it had failed to produce the situation he had anticipated from it. If he went now, leaving matters just as they stood, could he be confident that the spoke was in the wheel? Up to now nothing was really agreed upon, except that he himself had been an ass. No doubt this was a pregnant conclusion, but Bob was not quite clear exactly how much it involved; while it encouraged him, it left him still doubtful. "But don't you think you might tell me what you think about it?" he asked in the end.

"I think I'm not fit to live," cried Janie. "That's what I think about it, Bob." Her voice trembled; she was afraid she might cry soon if something did not happen to relieve the strain of this interview. "And you saw what Harry thought by his sending me that letter. The very moment it happened he sent me that letter!"

"I saw what he thought pretty well, anyhow," said Bob, smiling reflectively again.

"Oh, yes, if that makes it any better for me!"

"Well, if he's not miserable, I don't see why you need be."

"The things you don't see would fill an encyclopaedia!"

Bob looked at his watch; the action seemed in the nature of an ultimatum; his glance from the watch to Janie heightened the impression.

"You've nothing more to say?" he asked her.

"No. I agreed with what you said—that you'd been—an ass. I don't know that you've said anything else."

"All right." He got up and came to her, holding out his hand. "Good-bye for the present, then."

She took his hand and she held it. She could not let it go. Bob allowed it to lie in hers.

"Oh, dear old Bob, I'm so miserable; I hate myself for having done it, and I hate myself worse for being so glad it's undone. It did seem best fill I did it. No, I suppose I really wanted the title, and—and all that. I do hate myself! And now—the very same day—I let you —"

"You haven't let me do much," he suggested consolingly.

"Yes, I have. At least —" She came a little nearer to him. He took hold of her other hand. He drew her to him and held her in his arms.

"That's all right," he remarked, still in tones of consolation.

"If anybody knew this! You won't say a word, will you, Bob? Not for ever so long? You will pretend it was ever so long before I—I mean, between —"

"I'll tell any lie," said Bob, very cheerfully.

She laughed hysterically. "Because I should never be able to look people in the face if anybody knew that on the very same day —"

"I should think—a week would be about right?"

"A week! No, no. Six months."

"Oh, six months be —"

"Well, then, three? Do agree to three?"

"We'll think about three. Still miserable, Janie?"

"Yes, still—rather. Now you must go. Fancy if anybody came!"

"All right, I'll go. But, I say, you might just drop a hint to the major."

"I can't send him another message that I'm—that I've done it again!"

She drew a little away from him. Bob's hearty laugh rang out; his latent sense of humour was touched at the idea of this second communication to the major. For a moment Janie looked angry, for a moment deeply hurt. Bob laughed still. There was nothing for it but to join in. Her own laugh rang out gaily as he caught her in his arms again and kissed her.

"Oh, if anybody knew!" sighed Janie.

But Bob was full of triumph. The task was done, the spoke was in the wheel. There was an end of the major as well as of Harry—and an end to his own long and not very hopeful waiting. He kissed his love again.

There was a sudden end to the scene too—startling and sudden. The door of the room opened abruptly, and in the doorway stood Mrs. Iver. Little need to dilate on the situation as it appeared to Mrs. Iver. Had she known the truth, the thing was bad enough. But she knew nothing of Harry Tristram's letter. After a moment of consternation Janie ran to her, crying.

"I'm not engaged any more to Harry Tristram, mother."

Mrs. Iver said nothing. She stood by the open door. There was no mistaking her meaning. With a shamefaced bow, struggling with an unruly smile, Bob Broadley got through it somehow. Janie was left alone with Mrs. Iver.

Such occurrences as these are very deplorable. Almost of necessity they impair a daughter's proper position of superiority and put her in a relation towards her mother which no self-respecting young woman would desire to occupy. It might be weeks before Janie Iver could really assert her dignity again. It was strong proof of her affection for Bob Broadley that, considering the matter in her own room (she had not been exactly sent there, but a retreat had seemed advisable) she came to the conclusion that, taking good and bad together, she was on the whole glad that he had called.

But to Bob, with the selfishness of man, Mrs. Iver's sudden appearance were rather an amusing aspect. It certainly could not spoil his triumph or impair his happiness.

(To be continued.)

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