

"Happily, your highness sees no beauty in locks that have the gloss of the raven, and eyes that have the hue of the violet."

"No, I am a constant man, constant to one idea of beauty in a thousand forms—eyes like the summer's light-blue sky, and locks like its golden sunbeams! But to set thy mind at rest, Will, know that I have but compassionated the sickly state of the scholar, whom thou prizest so highly; and I have placed thy fair Sibyll's chamber near her father's. Young Lovell says thou art bent on wedding the wizard's daughter."

"And if I were, *beau sire*?"

Edward looked grave.

"If thou wert, my poor Will, thou wouldst lose all the fame for shrewd wisdom which justifies thy sudden fortunes. No—no—thou art the flower and prince of my new seignorie—thou must mate thyself with a name and a barony that shall be worthy thy fame and thy prospects. Love beauty, but marry power, Will. In vain would thy king draw thee up, if a despised wife draw thee down!"

Hastings listened with profound attention to these words. The king did not wait for his answer, but added, laughingly—

"It is thine own fault, crafty gallant, if thou dost not end all her spells."

"What ends the spells of youth and beauty, *beau sire*?"

"Possession!" replied the king, in a hollow and muttered voice.

Hastings was about to answer, when the door opened, and the officer in waiting announced the Duke of Clarence.

"Ha!" said Edward, "George comes, to importune me for leave to depart to the government of Ireland, and I have to make him weet that I think my Lord Worcester a safer viceroy of the two!"

"Your highness will pardon me; but, though I deemed you too generous in the appointment, it were dangerous now to annul it."

"More dangerous to confirm it. Elizabeth has caused me to see the folly of a grant made over the malmsey—a wine, by the way, in which poor George swears he would be content to drown himself. Viceroy of Ireland! My father had that government, and once tasting the sweets of royalty, ceased to be a subject! No, no, Clarence——"

"Can never meditate treason against a brother's crown. Has he the wit, or the energy, or the genius, for so desperate an ambition?"

"No; but he hath the vanity. And I will wager thee a thousand marks to a silver penny that my jester shall talk giddie Georgie into advancing a claim to be soldan of Egypt, or pope of Rome!"

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE FOSTER-BROTHERS

Sir Marmaduke Nevile was sunning his bravery in the Tower Green, amidst the other idlers of the court, proud of the gold chain and the gold spurs which attested his new rank, and not grieved to have exchanged the solemn walls of Middleham for the gay delights of the voluptuous palace, when, to his pleasure and surprise he perceived his foster-brother enter the gate-



way; and no sooner had Nicholas entered, than a bevy of the young courtiers hastened eagerly towards him.

"Gramercy!" quoth Sir Marmaduke, to one of the by-standers, "what hath chanced to make Nick Alwyn a man of such note, that so many wings of satin and pile should flutter round him like sparrows round an owl, which, by the Holy Rood, his wise face somewhat resembleth."

"Know you not that Master Alwyn, since he hath commenced trade for himself, hath acquired already the repute of the couthliest goldsmith in London? No dague-hilts—no buckles are to be worn, save those that he fashions; and—an' he live, and the House of York prosper—verily, Master Alwyn, the goldsmith, will, ere long, be the richest and best man from Mile-end to the Sanctuary."

"Right glad am I to hear it," said honest Marmaduke, heartily, and approaching Alwyn, he startled the precise trader by a friendly slap on the shoulder.

"What, man, art thou too proud to remember Marmaduke Nevile! Come to my lodgment, yonder, and talk of old days over the king's canary."

"I crave your pardon, dear Master Nevile."

"Master—avaunt! *Sir* Marmaduke—knighted by the hand of Lord Warwick—*Sir* Marmaduke Nevile, lord of a manor he hath never yet seen, sober Alwyn."

Then drawing his foster-brother's arm in his, Marmaduke led him to the chamber in which he lodged.

The young men spent some minutes in congratulating each other on their respective advances in life:—the gentleman, who had attained competence and station, simply by devotion to a powerful patron—the trader, who had already won repute and the prospect of wealth, by ingenuity, application, and toil; and yet,

to do justice, as much virtue went to Marmaduke's loyalty to Warwick, as to Alwyn's capacities for making a fortune. Mutual compliments over, Alwyn said—hesitatingly—

"And dost thou find Mistress Sibyll more gently disposed to thee than when thou didst complain to me of her cruelty?"

"Marry, good Nicholas, I will be frank with thee. When I left the court to follow Lord Warwick, there were rumours of the gallantries of Lord Hastings to the girl, which grieved me to the heart. I spoke to her thereof bluntly and honourably, and got but high looks and scornful words in return. Good fellow, I thank thee for that squeeze of the hand and that doleful sigh. In my absence at Middleham, I strove hard to forget one who cared so little for me. My dear Alwyn, those Yorkshire lasses are parlously comely, and mighty douce and debonnaire. So I stormed cruel Sibyll out of my heart, perforce of numbers."

"And thou lovest her no more?"

"Not I, by this goblet! On coming back, it is true, I felt pleased to clank my gold spurs in her presence, and curious to see if my new fortunes would bring out a smile of approval; and verily, to speak sooth, the donzell was kind and friendly, and spoke to me so cheerly of the pleasure she felt in my advancement, that I adventured again a few words of the old folly. But my lassie drew up like a princess, and I am a cured man."

"By your troth?"

"By my troth!"

Alwyn's head sank on his bosom, in silent thought. Sir Marmaduke emptied his goblet; and really the young knight looked so fair and so gallant, in his new



surcoat of velvet, that it was no marvel if he should find enough food for consolation in a court where men spent six hours a day in making love—nor in vain.

“And what say they still of the Lord Hastings?” asked Alwyn, breaking silence. “Nothing, I trow and trust, that arraigns the poor lady’s honour—though much that may scoff at her simple faith, in a nature so vain and fickle. ‘The tongue’s not steel, yet it cuts,’ as the proverb saith of the slanderer.”

“No! scandal spares her virtue as woman—to run down her cunning as witch! They say that Hastings hath not prevailed, nor sought to prevail—that he is spell-bound. By St. Thomas, from a maid of such character, Marmaduke Nevile is happily rescued!”

“Sir Marmaduke,” then said Alwyn, in a grave and earnest voice—“it behoves me, as true friend, though humble, and as honest man, to give thee my secret, in return for thine own. I love this girl. Ay, ay! thou thinkest that love is a strange word in a craftsman’s lips, but ‘cold flint hides hot fire.’ I would not have been thy rival, Heaven forefend! hadst thou still cherished a hope—or if thou now wilt forbid my aspiring; but if thou wilt not say me nay, I will try my chance in delivering a pure soul from a crafty wooer.”

Marmaduke stared in great surprise at his foster-brother; and though, no doubt, he spoke truth, when he said he was cured of his love for Sibyll, he yet felt a sort of jealousy at Alwyn’s unexpected confession, and his vanity was hurt at the notion that the plain-visaged trader should attempt where the handsome gentleman had failed. However, his blunt, generous, manly nature, after a brief struggle, got the better of these sore feelings, and holding out his hand to Alwyn, he said, “My dear foster-brother, try the hazard and cast thy

dice, if you wilt. Heaven prosper thee, if success be for thine own good! But if she be really given to witchcraft (plague on thee, man, sneer not at the word), small comfort to bed and hearth can such practices bring!”

“Alas!” said Alwyn, “the witchcraft is on the side of Hastings—the witchcraft of fame and rank, and a glozing tongue and experienced art. But she shall not fall, if a true arm can save her; and ‘though Hope be a small child, she can carry a great anchor?’”

These words were said so earnestly, that they opened new light into Marmaduke’s mind, and his native generosity standing in lieu of intellect, he comprehended sympathetically the noble motives which actuated the son of commerce.

“My poor Alwyn,” he said, “if thou canst save this young maid—whom by my troth I loved well, and who tells me yet, that she loveth me as a sister loves—right glad shall I be. But thou stakest thy peace of mind against hers:—fair luck to thee, say I again—and if thou wilt risk thy chance at once (for suspense is love’s purgatory), seize the moment. I saw Sibyll, just ere we met, pass to the ramparts, alone; at this sharp season, the place is deserted—go.”

“I will, this moment!” said Alwyn, rising and turning very pale; but as he gained the door, he halted—“I had forgot, Master Nevile, that I bring the king his signet-ring, new set, of the falcon and fetterlock.”

“They will keep thee three hours in the ante-room. The Duke of Clarence is now with the king. Trust the ring to me, I shall see his highness ere he dines.”

Even in his love, Alwyn had the Saxon’s considerations of business; he hesitated—“May I not endanger



thereby the king's favour and loss of custom?" said the trader.

"Tush, man! little thou knowest King Edward; he cares naught for the ceremonies: moreover, the Neviles are now all-puissant in favour. I am here in attendance on sweet Lady Anne, whom the king loves as a daughter, though too young for sire to so well-grown a donzell; and a word from her lip, if need be, will set all as smooth as this gorget of lawn!"

Thus assured, Alwyn gave the ring to his friend, and took his way at once to the ramparts. Marmaduke remained behind to finish the canary and marvel how so sober a man should form so ardent a passion. Nor was he much less surprised to remark that his friend, though still speaking with a strong provincial accent, and still sowing his discourse with rustic saws and proverbs, had risen in language and in manner with the rise of his fortunes. "An' he go on so, and become lord mayor," muttered Marmaduke, "verily he will half look like a gentleman!"

To these meditations the young knight was not long left in peace. A messenger from Warwick House sought and found him, with the news that the earl was on his road to London, and wished to see Sir Marmaduke the moment of his arrival, which was hourly expected. The young knight's hardy brain somewhat flustered by the canary, Alwyn's secret, and this sudden tidings, he hastened to obey his chief's summons, and forgot, till he gained the earl's mansion, the signet-ring entrusted to him by Alwyn. "What matters it?" said he then, philosophically—"the king hath rings eno' on his fingers not to miss one for an hour or so, and I dare not send any one else with it. Marry, I must plunge my head in cold water, to get rid of the fumes of the wine."

## CHAPTER V

## THE LOVER AND THE GALLANT—WOMAN'S CHOICE.

Alwyn bent his way to the ramparts, a part of which, then, resembled the boulevards of a French town, having rows of trees, green sward, a winding walk, and seats placed at frequent intervals, for the repose of the loungers. During the summer evenings, the place was a favourite resort of the court idlers; but now, in winter, it was usually deserted, save by the sentries, placed at distant intervals. The trader had not gone far in his quest when he perceived, a few paces before him, the very man he had most cause to dread; and Lord Hastings, hearing the sound of a foot-fall amongst the crisp, faded leaves, that strewed the path, turned abruptly as Alwyn approached his side.

At the sight of his formidable rival, Alwyn had formed one of those resolutions which occur only to men of his decided, plain-spoken, energetic character. His distinguishing shrewdness and penetration had given him considerable insight into the nobler as well as the weaker qualities of Hastings; and his hope in the former influenced the determination to which he came. The reflections of Hastings at that moment were of a nature to augur favourably to the views of the humbler lover; for, during the stirring scenes in which his late absence from Sibyll had been passed, Hastings had somewhat recovered from her influence; and feeling the difficulties of reconciling his honour and his worldly prospects to further prosecution of the love, rashly expressed but not deeply felt, he had determined frankly to cut the Gordian knot he could not solve, and