

ever, this being written at my desk here on the shop-paper will prevent any misunderstanding."

"Your Aunt Frances has been hatching you—you two!" says Sally, ignoring the letter.

"She is a dear good woman, if ever there was one. I wish mamma was my aunt-by-marriage, and she her!" And then Lætitia went on to tell many things about the present position of the "row" between herself and her mother, concerning which it can only be said that nothing transpired that justified its existence. Seeing that no recognition was asked for of any formal engagement either by the "young haberdasher" himself—for that was the epithet applied to him (behind his back, of course) by the older lady—or by the object of his ambitious aspirations, it might have been more politic, as well as more graceful, on her part, to leave the affair to die down, as love-affairs unopposed are so very apt to do. Instead of which she needs must begin endeavouring to frustrate what at the time of her first interference was the merest flirtation between a Romeo who was tied to a desk all day, and a Juliet who was constantly coming into contact with other potential Romeos—plenty of them. Our own private opinion is that if the Montagus and Capulets had tried to bury the hatchet at a public betrothal of the two young people, the latter would have quarrelled on the spot. Setting their family circles by the ears again would almost have been as much fun as a secret wedding by a friar. You doubt it? Well, we may be wrong. But we are quite certain that the events which followed shortly after the chat between the two girls recorded above either would never have come to pass, or would have taken an entirely different form, if it had not been for the uncompromising character of Mrs. Sales Wilson's attitude towards her daughter's Romeo.

We will give this collateral incident in our history a chapter to itself, for your convenience more than our own. You can skip it, you see, if you want to get back to Krakatoa Villa.

## CHAPTER XXI

OF JULIUS BRADSHAW'S INNER SOUL. AND OF THE HABERDASHER'S BATTLE AT LADBROKE GROVE ROAD. ON CARPET STRETCHING, AND VACCINATION FROM THE CALF. AN AFTER-DINNER INTERVIEW, AND GOOD RESOLUTIONS. EVASIVE TRAPPISTS

You can remember, if you are male and middle-aged, or worse, some little incident in your own early life more or less like that effervescence of unreal passion which made us first acquainted with Mr. Julius Bradshaw and his violin. Do you shake your head, and deny it? Are you prepared to look us in the face, and swear you never, when a young man, had a sleepless night because of some girl whom you had scarcely spoken to, and who would not have known who you were if you had been able to master your trepidation and claim acquaintance; and who, in the sequel, changed her identity, and became what the greatest word-coiner of our time called a "speech-friend" of yours, without a scrap of romance or tenderness in the friendship?

Sally's sudden change of identity from the bewitching little gardener who had fascinated this susceptible youth, to a merely uncommonly nice girl, was no doubt assisted by his introduction just at that moment to the present Mrs. Julius Bradshaw. For it would be the merest affectation to conceal the ultimate outcome of their acquaintance.

When Julius came to Krakatoa Villa, he came already half disillusioned about Sally. What sort of an *accolade* he expected on arriving to keep his passion on its legs, Heaven only knows! He certainly had been chilled by her easy-going invitation to her mother's. A definite declaration of callous indifference would not have been half so effective. Sally had the most extraordinary power of pointing out that she stipulated to be considered as a chap; or conveying it, which came to the same thing. On the other hand, Lætitia, who had been freely spoken of by Sally as "making a great ass of herself about social tommy-rot

and people's positions," and who was aware of the justice of the accusation, had been completely jerked out of the region of Grundy by Julius's splendid rendering of Tartini, and had felt disconcerted and ashamed; for Tishy was a thorough musician at heart. The consequence was an *amende honorable* to the young man, on whom—he having no idea whatever of its provoking cause—it produced the effect that might have been anticipated. Any young lady who wishes to enslave a young man will really do better work by showing an interest in himself than by any amount of fascination and allurements, on the lines of Greuze. We are by no means sure that it is safe to reveal this secret, so do not let it go any farther. Young women are formidable enough, as it is, without getting tips from the camp of the enemy.

Anyhow, Sally became a totally different identity to Mr. Julius Bradshaw. He, for his part, underwent a complete transformation in hers—so much so that the vulgar child was on one occasion quite taken aback at a sudden recollection of his *début*, and said to her stepfather: "Only think, Jeremiah! Tishy's Julius is really that young idiot that came philandering after me Sundays, and I had quite forgotten it!"

The young idiot had settled down to a reasonable personality; if not to a manifestation of his actual self, at any rate as near as he was likely to go to it for some time to come; for none of us ever succeeds in really showing himself to his fellow-creatures outright. That's impossible.

Sally had never said very much to her friend of this pre-introduction phase of Julius—had, in fact, thought little enough about it. Perhaps her taking care to say nothing at all of it in his later phase was her most definite acknowledgment of its existence at any time. It was only a laughable incident. She saw at once, when she took note of that sofa *séance*, which way the cat was going to jump; and we are bound to say it was a cat that soon made up its mind, and jumped with decision.

Mrs. Sales Wilson's endeavour to intercept that cat had been prompt and injudicious. She destroyed whatever chance there was of a sudden *volte-face* on its part—and oh, the glorious uncertainty of this class of cat!—first by taking no notice of it aggressively, next by catching hold of its tail, too late. In the

art of ignoring bystanders, she was no match for the cat. And detention seemed only to communicate impetus.

Julius Bradshaw's first receptions at the Ladbroke Grove House had been based mainly on his Stradivarius. The Dragon may be said to have admitted the instrument, but only to have tolerated its owner, as one might tolerate an organman who owned a distinguished monkey. Still, the position was an ambiguous one. The Dragon felt she had made a mistake in not shutting the door against this lion at first. She had "let him in, to see if she could turn him out again," and the crisis of the campaign had come over the question whether Mr. Bradshaw might, or should, or could be received into the inner bosom of the household—that is to say, the dinner-bosom. The Dragon said no—she drew the line at that. Tea, yes—dinner, no!

After many small engagements over the question in the abstract, the plot thickened with reference to the arrangements of a particular Thursday evening. The Dragon felt that a decisive battle must be fought; the more so that her son Egerton, whom she had relied on to back her against a haberdasher, though he might have been useless against a jockey or a professional cricketer, had gone over to the enemy, and announced (for the Professor had failed to communicate the virus of scholarship to this young man) that he was unanimous that Mr. Bradshaw should be forthwith invited to dinner.

His mother resorted to the head of the household as to a Court of Appeal, but not, as we think, in a manner likely to be effective. Her natural desire to avenge herself on that magazine of learning for marrying her produced an unconciliatory tone, even in her preamble.

"I suppose," she said, abruptly entering his library in the vital centre of a delectable refutation of an ignoramus—"I suppose it's no use looking to you for sympathy in a matter of this sort, but——"

"I'm busy," said the Professor; "wouldn't some other time do as well?"

"I knew what I had to expect!" said the lady, at once allowing her desire to embitter her relations with her husband to get the better of her interest in the measure she desired to pass through

Parliament. She left the room, closing the door after her with venomous quietness.

The refutation would have to stand over; it was spoiled now, and the delicious sarcasm that was on his pen's tip was lost irrevocably. He blotted a sentence in the middle, put his pen in a wet sponge, and opened his door. He jerked it savagely open to express his attitude of mind towards interruption. His "What is it?" as he did so was in keeping with the door-jerk.

"I can speak of nothing to you if you are so *tetchy*"—a word said spitefully, with a jerk explanatory of its meaning. "Another time will do better, now. I prefer to wait."

When these two played at the domestic game of exasperate-my-neighbour, the temper lost by the one was picked up by the other, and added to his or her pack. It was so often her pack that there must have been an unfair allotment of knaves in it when dealt—you know what that means in beggar-my-neighbour? On this occasion Mrs. Wilson won heavily. It was not every day that she had a chance of showing her great forbearance and self-restraint, on the stairs to an audience of a man in leather knee-caps who was laying a new drugget in the passage, and a model of discretion with a dustpan, whose self-subordination was beyond praise; her daughter Athene in the passage below inditing her son Egerton for a misappropriation of three-and-fivepence; and a faint suspicion of Lætitia's bedroom door, on the jar, for her to listen through, above.

It wasn't fair on the Professor, though; for even before he exploded, his lady-wife had had ample opportunity of reconnoitring the battle-field, and, as it were, negotiating with auxiliaries, by a show of gentle sweetness which had the force of announcement that she was being misunderstood elsewhere. But she would bear it, conscious of rectitude. Now, the Professor didn't know there was any one within hearing; so he snapped, and she bit him *sotto voce*, but raised a meek voice to follow:

"Another time will be better. I prefer to wait." This was all the public heard of her speech. But she went into the library.

"What do you want to speak to me about?" Thus the Professor, remaining standing to enjoin the temporary character of the interview; to countercheck which the lady sank in an arm-

chair with her back to the light. Both she and Lætitia conveyed majesty in swoops—filled up *fauterails*—could motion humbler people to take a seat beside them. "Tishy's Goody runs into skirts—so does *she* if you come to that!" was Sally's marginal note on this point. The countercheck was effectual, and from her position of vantage the lady fired her first shot.

"You know perfectly well what I want to speak about." The awkward part of this was that the Professor did know.

"Suppose I do; go on!" This only improved his position very slightly, but it compelled the bill to be read a first time.

"Do you wish your daughter to marry a haberdasher?"

"I do not. If I did, I should take her round to some of the shops."

But his wife is in no humour to be jested with. "If you cannot be serious, Mr. Wilson, about a serious matter, which concerns the lifelong well-being of your eldest daughter, I am only wasting my time in talking to you." She threatens an adjournment with a slight move. Her husband selects another attitude, and comes to business.

"You may just as well say what you have come to say, Roberta. It's about Lætitia and this young musician fellow, I suppose. Why can't you leave them alone?" Now, you see, here was a little triumph for Roberta—she had actually succeeded in getting the subject into the realm of discussion without committing herself to any definite statement, or, in fact, really saying what it was. She could prosecute it now indirectly, on the lines of congenial contradiction of her husband.

"I fully expected to be accused of interfering with what does not concern me. I am not surprised. My daughter's welfare is, it appears, to be of as little interest to me as it is to her father. Very well."

"What do you wish me to do? Will you oblige me by telling me what it is you understand we are talking about?" A gathering storm of determination must be met, the Dragon decides, by a corresponding access of asperity on her part. She rises to the occasion.

"I will tell you about what I do *not* understand. But I do not expect to be listened to. I do *not* understand how any father can remain in his library, engaged in work which cannot possibly

be remunerative, while his eldest daughter contracts a disgraceful marriage with a social inferior." The irrelevance about remuneration was ill-judged.

"I can postpone the Dictionary—if that will satisfy you—and go on with some articles for the Encyclopædia, which pay very well, until after the ceremony. Is the date fixed?"

"It is easy for you to affect stupidity, and to answer me with would-be witty evasions. But if you think to deter me from my duty—a mother's duty—by such pitiful expedients you are making a great mistake. You make my task harder to me, Septimus, but you do not discourage me. You know as well as I do—although you choose to affect the contrary—that what I am saying does not relate to any existing circumstances, but only to what may come about if you persist in neglecting your duty to your family. I came into this room to ask you to exercise your authority with your daughter Lætitia, or if not your authority—for she is over twenty-one—your influence. But I see that I shall get no help. It is, however, what I expected—no more and no less." And the skirts rustle with an intention of getting up and going away injured.

Mrs. Wilson had a case against her husband, if not a strong one. His ideas of the duties of a male parent were that he might incur paternity of an indefinite number of sons and daughters, and discharge all his obligations to them by providing their food and education. Having paid quittance, he was at liberty to be absorbed in his books. Had his payments been large enough to make his wife's administration of the household easy, he might have been justified, especially as she, for her part, was not disposed to allow him any voice in any matter. Nevertheless, she castigated him frightfully at intervals for not exercising an authority she was not prepared to permit. He was nothing but a ninepin, set up to be knocked down, an Aunt Sally who was never allowed to keep her pipe in her mouth for ten consecutive seconds. The natural consequence of which was that his children despised him, but to a certain extent loved him; while, on the other hand, they somewhat disliked their mother, but (to a certain extent) respected her. It is very hard on the historian and the dramatist that every one is not quite good or quite bad. It would make their work so much easier.

But it would not be nearly so interesting, especially in the case of the last-named.

The Professor may have had some feeling on these lines when he stopped the skirts from rustling out of the apartment by a change in his manner.

"Tell me seriously what you wish me to do, Roberta."

"I wish you to give attention, if not to the affairs—that I cannot expect—of your household, at least to this—you may call it foolish and pooh-pooh it—business of Lætitia and this young man—I really cannot say young gentleman, for it is mere equivocation not to call him a haberdasher."

The Professor resisted the temptation to criticize some points of literary structure, and accepted the obvious meaning of this.

"Tell me what he really is."

"I have told you repeatedly. He is nothing—unless we palter with the meaning of words—but a clerk in the office at the stores where we pay a deposit and order goods on a form. They were originally haberdashers, so I don't see how you can escape from what I have said. But I have no doubt you will try to do so."

"How comes he to be such a magnificent violinist? Are they all . . . ?"

"I know what you are going to say, and it's foolish. No, they are not all magnificent violinists. But you know the story quite well."

"Perhaps I do. But now listen. I want to make out one thing. This young man talked quite freely to me and Egerton about his place, his position, salary—everything. And yet you say he isn't a gentleman."

"Of course he isn't a gentleman. I don't the least understand what you mean. It's some prevarication or paradox." Mrs. Wilson taps the chair-arm impatiently.

"I mean this—if he isn't a gentleman, how comes it that he isn't ashamed of being a haberdasher? Because he *isn't*. Seemed to take it all as a matter of course."

"I cannot follow your meaning at all. And I will not trouble you to explain it. The question now is—will you, or will you not, *do something*?"

"Has the young gentleman?"—Mrs. Wilson snorted audibly—

"Well, has this young haberdasher made any sort of definite declaration to Lætitia?"

"I understand not. But it's impossible not to see."

"Would it not be a little premature for me to say anything to him?"

"Have I asked you to do so?"

"I am a little uncertain what it is you have asked me to do."

Mrs. Wilson contrived, by pantomime before she spoke, to express her perfect patience under extremest trial, inflicted on her by an impudent suggestion that she hadn't made her position clear. She would, however, state her case once more with incisive distinctness. To that end she separated her syllables, and accented selections from them, even as a resolute hammer accents the head of a nail.

"Have I not told you *distinctly*"—the middle syllable of this word was a sample nailhead—"a *thousand* times that what I wish you to do—however much you may shirk doing it—is to *speak* to Lætitia—to remonstrate with her about the encouragement she is giving to this young man, and to *point out* to her that a girl in her position—in short, the duties of a girl in her position?" Mrs. Wilson's come-down at this point was an example of a solemn warning to the elocutionist who breaks out of bounds. She was obliged to fall back arbitrarily on her key-note in the middle of the performance. "Have I said this to you, Mr. Wilson, or have I not?"

"Speaking from memory I should say *not*. Yes—certainly *not*. But I can raise no reasonable objection to speaking to Lætitia, provided I am at liberty to say what I like. I understand that to be part of the bargain."

"If you mean," says the lady, whose temper had not been improved by the first part of the speech; "if you mean that you consider yourself at liberty to encourage a rebellious daughter against her mother, I know too well from old experience that that is the case. But I trust that for once your right feeling will show you that it is your *plain duty* to tell her that the course she is pursuing can only lead to the loss of her position in society, and probably to poverty and unhappiness."

"I can tell her you think so, of course," says the Professor, drily.

"I will say no more"—very freezingly. "You know as well as I do what it is your *duty* to say to your daughter. What you will *decide* to say, I do *not* know." And premonitory rustles end in a move to the door.

"You can tell her to come in now—if you like." The Professor won't show too vivid an interest. It isn't as if the matter related to a Scythian war-chariot, or a gold ornament from a prehistoric tomb, or *varix lectiones*.

"At least, Septimus," says the apex of the departing skirts, "you will remember what is due to yourself and your family—I am nobody—so far as not to encourage the girl in resisting her mother's authority." And, receiving no reply, departs, and is heard on the landing rejecting insufficient reasons why the drug-get will not lay flat. And presently issuing a mandate to an upper landing:

"Your father wishes to speak to you in his library. I wish you to go." The last words not to seem to abdicate as Queen Consort.

Lætitia isn't a girl whom we find new charms in after making her mother's acquaintance. You know how some young people would be passable enough if it were not for a lurid light thrown upon their identity by other members of their family. You know the sister you thought was a beauty and dear, until you met her sister, who was gristly and a jade. But it's a great shame in Tishy's case, because we do honestly believe her seeming *da capo* of her mother is more skirts than anything else. We credit their respective *apices* with different dispositions, although (yes, it's quite true what you say) we don't see exactly from what corner of the Professor's his daughter got her better one. He's all very well, but . . .

Anyhow, we are sorry for Tishy now, as she comes uneasily into the library to be "spoken to." She comes in buttoning a glove and saying, "Yes, papa." She was evidently just going out—probably arrested by the voices in the library.

"Well, my dear, your mother wishes me to speak to you. . . . H'm! h'm! By-the-bye," he interrupts himself, "it really is a very extraordinary thing, but it's just like work-people. A man spends all his life laying carpets, and the minute he lays mine it's too big or too small."

"The man outside? He's very tiresome. He says the passage is an unusual size."

"I should have taken that point when I measured it. It seems to me late in the day now the carpet's made up. However, that's neither here nor there. Your mother wishes me to—a—to speak to you, my dear."

"What does she want you to say, papa?"

"H'm—well!—it's sometimes not easy to understand your mother. I cannot say that I have gathered precisely what it is she wishes me to say. Nor am I certain that I should be prepared to say it if I knew what it was."—Tishy brightened perceptibly.—"But I am this far in sympathy with what I suppose to be her meaning"—Tishy's face fell—"that I should be very sorry to hear that you had made any binding promises to any young gentleman without knowing more of his antecedents and connexions than I suppose you do at the present about this—a—musical friend of yours—without consulting me." The perfunctory tone in which he added, "and your mother," made the words hardly worth recording.

But perhaps the way they, in a sense, put the good lady out of court, helped to make her daughter brighten up again. "Dear papa," she said, "I should never dream for one moment of doing such a thing. Nor would Mr. Bradshaw dream of asking me to do so."

"That's quite right, my dear—quite enough. Don't say anything more. I am not going to catechize you." And Tishy was not sorry to hear this, because her disclaimer of a binding promise was only true in the letter. In fact, our direct Sally had only the day before pounced upon her friend with, "You know perfectly well he's kissed you heaps of times!" And Tishy had only been able to begin an apology she was not to be allowed to finish with, "And suppose he has . . . ?"

However, her sense of an untruthfulness that was more than merely technical was based not so much on the bare fact of a kissing-relation having come about, as upon a particular example. She knew it was the merest hypocrisy to make believe that the climax of that interview at Riverfordhook, where there were the moonrise and things, did not constitute a pledge on the part of both. However, Tishy is not the first young lady, let me tell

you—if you don't know already—who has been guilty of equivocation on those lines. It is even possible that her father was conniving at it, was intentionally accepting what he knew to be untrue, to avoid the trouble of further investigation, and to be able to give his mind to the demolition of that ignoramus. A certain amount of fuss was his duty; but the sooner he could find an excuse to wash his hands of these human botherations and get back to his inner life the better.

Perhaps it was a sense of chill at the suspicion that her father was not concerned enough about her welfare that made Lætitia try to arrest his retirement into his inner life. Or it may have been that she was sensitive, as young folk are, at her new and strange experience of Real Love, and at the same time grated on—scraped the wrong way—in her harsh collision with her mother, who was showing Cupid no quarter, and was only withheld from overt acts of hostility to Julius Bradshaw by the knowledge that excess on her part would precipitate what she sought to avert.

Whatever the cause was, her momentary sense of relief that her father was not going to catechize her was followed by a feeling that she almost wished he would. It would be so nice to have a natural parent that was really interested in his daughter's affairs. Poor Tishy felt lonely, and as if she was going to cry. She must unpack her heart, even if it bored papa, who she knew wanted to turn her out and write. She broke down over it.

"Oh, papa—papa! Indeed, I want to do everything you wish—whatever you tell me. I *will* be good, as we used to say." A sob grew in her throat over this little nursery recollection. "Only—only—only—it isn't really quite true about no promises. We haven't made them, you know, but they're *there* all the same." Tishy stops suddenly to avoid a sob she knows is coming. A pocket-handkerchief is called in to remove tears surreptitiously, under a covering pretence of a less elegant function. The Professor hates scenes worse than poison, and Tishy knows it.

"There, there! Well, well! Nothing to cry about. *That's* right." This is approval of the disappearance of the pocket-handkerchief—some confusion between cause and effect, perhaps. "Come, my child—come, Lætitia—suppose now you tell me all about it."