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## LUCILE.

## Dedication.

## TO MY FATHER.

I DEDICATE to you a work, which is submitted to the public with a diffidence and hesitation proportioned to the novelty of the effort it represents. For in this poem I have abandoned those forms of verse with which I had most familiarized my thoughts, and have endeavored to follow a path on which I could discover no footprints before me, either to guide or to warn.

There is a moment of profound discouragement which succeeds to prolonged effort; when, the labor which has become a habit having ceased, we miss the sustaining sense of its companionship, and stand, with a feeling of strangeness and embarrassment, before the abrupt and naked result. As regards myself, in the present instance, the force of all such sensations is increased by the circumstances to which I have referred. And in this moment of discouragement and doubt my heart instinctively turns to you, from whom it has so often sought, from whom it has never failed to receive, support.

I do not inscribe to you this book because it contains anything that is worthy of the beloved and honored name with which I thus seek to associate it: nor yet, because I would avail myself of a vulgar pretext to display in public an affection that is best honored by the silence which it renders sacred.

Feelings only such as those with which, in days when there existed for me no critic less gentle than yourself, I brought to you my childish manuscripts, — feelings only such as those which have, in later years, associated with your heart all that has moved or occupied my own, — lead me once more to seek assurance from the grasp of that hand which has hitherto been my guide and comfort through the life I owe to you.

And as in childhood, when existence had no toil beyond the day's simple lesson, no ambition beyond the neighboring approval of the night, I brought to you the morning's task for the evening's sanction, so now I bring to you this self-appointed task-work of maturer years; less confident indeed of your approval, but not less confident of your love; and anxious only to realize your presence between myself and the public, and to mingle with those severer voices to whose final sentence I submit my work the beloved and gracious accents of your own.

OWEN MEREDITH.

## PART I.

## CANTO I.

## I.

*Letter from the COMTESSE DE NEVERS  
to LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE.*

"I HEAR from Bigorre you are there. I  
am told  
You are going to marry Miss Darcy.  
Of old,

So long since you may have forgotten it  
now,

(When we parted as friends, soon mere  
strangers to grow.)

Your last words recorded a pledge —  
what you will —

A promise — the time is now come to  
fulfil.

The letters I ask you, my lord, to re-  
turn,



I desire to receive from your hand. You discern  
 My reasons, which, therefore, I need not explain.  
 The distance to Serchon is short. I remain  
 A month in these mountains. Miss Darcy, perchance,  
 Will forego one brief page from the summer romance  
 Of her courtship, and spare you one day from your place  
 At her feet, in the light of her fair English face.  
 I desire nothing more, and I trust you will feel  
 I desire nothing much.

"Your friend always,  
 "LUCILE."

## II.

Now in May Fair, of course, — in the fair month of May, —  
 When life is abundant, and busy, and gay :  
 When the markets of London are noisy about  
 Young ladies, and strawberries, — "only just out" :  
 Fresh strawberries sold under all the house-eaves,  
 And young ladies on sale for the strawberry leaves :  
 When cards, invitations, and three-cornered notes  
 Fly about like white butterflies, — gay little notes  
 In the sunbeam of Fashion ; and even Blue Books  
 Take a heavy-winged flight, and grow busy as rooks ;  
 And the postman (that Genius, indifferent and stern,  
 Who shakes out even-handed to all, from his urn,  
 Those lots which so often decide if our day  
 Shall be fretful and anxious, or joyous and gay),  
 Brings, each morning, more letters of one sort or other  
 Than Cadmus himself put together, to bother  
 The heads of Hellenes ; — I say, in the season

Of Fair May, in May Fair, there can be no reason  
 Why, when quietly munching your dry-toast and butter,  
 Your nerves should be suddenly thrown in a flutter  
 At the sight of a neat little letter, addressed  
 In a woman's handwriting, containing, half guessed,  
 An odor of violets faint as the Spring, And coquettishly sealed with a small signet-ring.  
 But in Autumn, the season of sombre reflection,  
 When a damp day, at breakfast, begins with dejection ;  
 Far from London and Paris, and ill at one's ease,  
 Away in the heart of the blue Pyrenees, Where a call from the doctor, a stroll to the bath,  
 A ride through the hills on a hack like a lath,  
 A cigar, a French novel, a tedious flirtation,  
 Are all a man finds for his day's occupation,  
 The whole case, believe me, is totally changed,  
 And a letter may alter the plans we arranged  
 Over-night, for the slaughter of Time, — a wild beast,  
 Which, though classified yet by no naturalist,  
 Abounds in these mountains, more hard to ensnare,  
 And more mischievous, too, than the lynx or the bear.

## III.

I marvel less, therefore, that, having already  
 Torn open this note, with a hand most unsteady,  
 Lord Alfred was startled.  
 The month is September ;  
 Time, morning ; the scene at Bigorre ;  
 (pray remember  
 These facts, gentle reader, because I intend  
 To fling all the unities by at the end.)  
 He walked to the window. The morning was chill :



The brown woods were crisped in the cold on the hill :  
 The sole thing abroad in the streets was the wind ;  
 And the straws on the gust, like the thoughts in his mind,  
 Rose, and eddied around and around, as though teasing

Each other. The prospect, in truth, was unpleasant :  
 And Lord Alfred, whilst moodily gazing around it,  
 To himself more than once (vexed in soul) sighed  
 . . . . . "Confound it !"



## IV.

What the thoughts were which led to this bad interjection,  
Sir, or Madam, I leave to your future detection;  
For whatever they were, they were burst in upon,  
As the door was burst through, by my lord's Cousin John.

COUSIN JOHN.

A fool, Alfred, a fool, a most motley fool!

LORD ALFRED.

Who?

JOHN.

The man who has anything better to do;  
And yet so far forgets himself, so far degrades  
His position as Man, to this worst of all trades,  
Which even a well-brought-up ape were above,  
To travel about with a woman in love, —  
Unless she's in love with himself.

ALFRED.

Indeed! why  
Are you here then, dear Jack?

JOHN.

Can't you guess it?

ALFRED.

Not I.

JOHN.

Because I *have* nothing that's better to do.  
I had rather be bored, my dear Alfred, by you,  
On the whole (I must own), than be bored by myself.  
That perverse, imperturbable, golden-haired elf —  
Your Will-o'-the-wisp — that has led you and me  
Such a dance through these hills —

ALFRED.

Who, Matilda?

JOHN.

Yes! she,  
Of course! who but she could contrive so to keep

One's eyes, and one's feet too, from falling asleep  
For even one half-hour of the long twenty-four?

ALFRED.

What's the matter?

JOHN.

Why, she is — a matter, the more I consider about it, the more it demands An attention it does not deserve; and expands  
Beyond the dimensions which even crinoline,  
When possessed by a fair face and saucy Eighteen,  
Is entitled to take in this very small star,  
Already too crowded, as I think, by far.  
You read Malthus and Sadler?

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

To what use,  
When you countenance, calmly, such monstrous abuse  
Of one mere human creature's legitimate space  
In this world? Mars, Apollo, Virorum!  
the case  
Wholly passes my patience.

ALFRED.

My own is worse tried.

JOHN.

Yours, Alfred?

ALFRED.

Read this, if you doubt, and decide.

JOHN (reading the letter).

"I hear from Bigorre you are there. I am told  
You are going to marry Miss Darcy.  
Of old —"

What is this?

ALFRED.

Read it on to the end, and you'll know.

JOHN (continues reading).

"When we parted, your last words recorded a vow —  
What you will" . . . .

Hang it! this smells all over, I swear,  
Of adventures and violets. Was it your hair

You promised a lock of?

ALFRED.

Read on. You'll discern.

JOHN (continues).

"Those letters I ask you, my lord, to return." . . .  
Humph! . . . Letters! . . . the matter is worse than I guessed;  
I have my misgivings —

ALFRED.

Well, read out the rest,  
And advise.

JOHN.

Eh? . . . Where was I? . . .

(Continues.)

"Miss Darcy, perchance,  
Will forego one brief page from the summer romance  
Of her courtship." . . .

Egad! a romance, for my part,  
I'd forego every page of, and not break my heart!

ALFRED.

Continue!

JOHN (reading).

"And spare you one day from your place  
At her feet." . . .

Pray forgive me the passing grimace.  
I wish you had my place!

(Reads.)

"I trust you will feel  
I desire nothing much. Your friend" . . .

Bless me! "Lucile"?  
The Comtesse de Nevers?

ALFRED.

Yes.

JOHN.

What will you do?

ALFRED.

You ask me just what I would rather ask you.

JOHN.

You can't go.

ALFRED.

I must.

JOHN.

And Matilda?

ALFRED.

O, that

You must manage!

JOHN.

Must I? I decline it, though, flat.  
In an hour the horses will be at the door,  
And Matilda is now in her habit. Before I have finished my breakfast, of course I receive  
A message for "dear Cousin John!" . . .  
I must leave  
At the jeweller's the bracelet which you broke last night;  
I must call for the music. "Dear Alfred is right:  
The black shawl looks best: will I change it? Of course  
I can just stop, in passing, to order the horse.  
Then Beau has the mumps, or St. Hubert knows what;  
Will I see the dog-doctor?" Hang Beau! I will not.

ALFRED.

Tush, tush! this is serious.

JOHN.

It is.

ALFRED.

Very well,

You must think —

JOHN.

What excuse will you make, though?

ALFRED.

O, tell

Mrs. Darcy that . . . lend me your wits,  
Jack! . . . the deuce!  
Can you not stretch your genius to fit a friend's use?  
Excuses are clothes which, when asked unawares,  
Good Breeding to naked Necessity spares.  
You must have a whole wardrobe, no doubt.

JOHN.

My dear fellow!

Matilda is jealous, you know, as Othello.



ALFRED.

You joke.

JOHN.

I am serious. Why go to Serchon?

ALFRED.

Don't ask me. I have not a choice, my dear John.

Besides, shall I own a strange sort of desire,

Before I extinguish forever the fire  
Of youth and romance, in whose shadowy light

Hope whispered her first fairy tales, to excite

The last spark, till it rise, and fade far  
in that dawn

Of my days where the twilights of life  
were first drawn

By the rosy, reluctant auroras of Love:  
In short, from the dead Past the grave-

stone to move;

Of the years long departed forever to take

One last look, one final farewell; to awake  
The Heroic of youth from the Hades of

joy,

And once more be, though but for an  
hour, Jack—a boy!

JOHN.

You had better go hang yourself.

ALFRED.

No! were it but  
To make sure that the Past from the  
Future is shut,

It were worth the step back. Do you  
think we should live

With the living so lightly, and learn to  
survive

That wild moment in which to the grave  
and its gloom

We consigned our heart's best, if the  
doors of the tomb

Were not locked with a key which Fate  
keeps for our sake?

If the dead could return, or the corpses  
awake?

JOHN.

Nonsense!

ALFRED.

Not wholly. The man who gets up  
A filled guest from the banquet, and  
drains off his cup,

Sees the last lamp extinguished with  
cheerfulness, goes

Well contented to bed, and enjoys its  
repose.

But he who hath supped at the tables of  
kings,

And yet starved in the sight of luxurious  
things;

Who hath watched the wine flow, by  
himself but half tasted,

Heard the music, and yet missed the  
tune; who hath wasted

One part of life's grand possibilities;—  
friend,

That man will bear with him, be sure,  
to the end,

A blighted experience, a rancor within:  
You may call it a virtue, I call it a sin.

JOHN.

I see you remember the cynical story  
Of that wicked old piece of Experience,

— a hoary  
Lothario, whom dying, the priest by his  
bed

(Knowing well the unprincipled life he  
had led,

And observing, with no small amount  
of surprise,

Resignation and calm in the old sinner's  
eyes)

Asked if he had nothing that weighed on  
his mind:

"Well, . . . no," . . . says Lothario, "I  
think not. I find

On reviewing my life, which in most  
things was pleasant,

I never neglected, when once it was  
present,

An occasion of pleasing myself. On the  
whole,

I have naught to regret"; . . . and so,  
smiling, his soul

Took its flight from this world.

ALFRED.

Well, Regret or Remorse,  
Which is best?

JOHN.

Why, Regret.

ALFRED.

No; Remorse, Jack, of course;  
For the one is related, be sure, to the  
other.

Regret is a spiteful old maid; but her  
brother,

Remorse, though a widower certainly,  
yet

Has been wed to young Pleasure. Dear  
Jack, hang Regret!

JOHN.

Bref! you mean, then, to go?

ALFRED.

Bref! I do.

JOHN.

One word . . . stay!  
Are you really in love with Matilda?

ALFRED.

Love, eh?

What a question! Of course.

JOHN.

Were you really in love  
With Madame de Nevers?

ALFRED.

What; Lucile? No, by Jove,  
Never really.

JOHN.

She's pretty?

ALFRED.

Decidedly so.

At least, so she was, some ten summers  
ago.

As soft and as fallow as Autumn, — with  
hair

Neither black, nor yet brown, but that  
tinge which the air

Takes at eve in September, when night  
lingers lone

Through a vineyard, from beams of a  
slow-setting sun.

Eyes—the wistful gazelle's; the fine  
foot of a fairy;

And a hand fit a fay's wand to wave, —  
white and airy;

A voice soft and sweet as a tune that  
one knows.

Something in her there was, set you  
thinking of those

Strange backgrounds of Raphael . . .  
that hectic and deep

Brief twilight in which southern suns  
fall asleep.

JOHN.

Coquette?

ALFRED.

Not at all. 'T was her own fault. Not  
she!

I had loved her the better, had she less  
loved me.

The heart of a man's like that delicate  
weed

Which requires to be trampled on, boldly  
indeed,

Ere it give forth the fragrance you wish  
to extract.

'T is a simile, trust me, if not new, exact.

JOHN.

Women change so.

ALFRED.

Of course.

JOHN.

And, unless rumor errs,  
I believe that, last year, the Comtesse  
de Nevers\*

Was at Baden the rage, — held an abso-  
lute court

Of devoted adorers, and really made  
sport

Of her subjects.

ALFRED.

Indeed!

JOHN.

When she broke off with you  
Her engagement, her heart did not break  
with it?

ALFRED.

Pooh!

\* O Shakespeare! how couldst thou ask  
"What's in a name?"

'T is the devil's in it when a bard has to frame  
English rhymes for alliance with names that  
are French;

And in these rhymes of mine, well I know that  
I trench

All too far on that license which critics refuse,  
With just right, to accord to a well-brought-up  
Muse.

Yet, though faulty the union, in many a line,  
'Twixt my British-born verse and my French  
heroine,

Since, however auspiciously wedded they be,  
There is many a pair that yet cannot agree,  
Your forgiveness for this pair the author in-  
vites,

Whom necessity, not inclination, unites.



Pray would you have had her dress always in black,  
And shut herself up in a convent, dear Jack?  
Besides, 't was my fault the engagement was broken.

JOHN.

Most likely. How was it?

ALFRED.

The tale is soon spoken.  
She bored me. I showed it. She saw it. What next?

She reproached. I retorted. Of course she was vexed.

I was vexed that she was so. She sulked. So did I.

If I asked her to sing, she looked ready to cry.

I was contrite, submissive. She softened. I hardened.

At noon I was banished. At eve I was pardoned.

She said I had no heart. I said she had no reason.

I swore she talked nonsense. She sobbed. I talked treason.

In short, my dear fellow, 't was time, as you see,

Things should come to a crisis, and finish. 'T was she

By whom to that crisis the matter was brought.

She released me. I lingered. I lingered, she thought,

With too sullen an aspect. This gave me, of course,

The occasion to fly in a rage, mount my horse,

And declare myself uncomprehended. And so

We parted. The rest of the story you know.

JOHN.

No, indeed.

ALFRED.

Well, we parted. Of course we could not Continue to meet, as before, in one spot. You conceive it was awkward? Even Don Ferdinando

Can do, you remember, no more than he can do.

I think that I acted exceedingly well,

Considering the time when this rupture befell,

For Paris was charming just then. It deranged

All my plans for the winter. I asked to be changed, —

Wrote for Naples, then vacant, — obtained it, — and so

Joined my new post at once; but scarce reached it, when lo!

My first news from Paris informs me Lucile

Is ill, and in danger. Conceive what I feel.

I fly back. I find her recovered, but yet Looking pale. I am seized with a contrite regret;

I ask to renew the engagement.

JOHN.

And she?

ALFRED.

Reflects, but declines. We part, swearing to be

Friends ever, friends only. All that sort of thing!

We each keep our letters . . . a portrait . . . a ring . . .

With a pledge to return them whenever the one

Or the other shall call for them back.

JOHN.

Pray go on.

ALFRED.

My story is finished. Of course I enjoin On Lucile all those thousand good maxims we coin

To supply the grim deficit found in our days,

When Love leaves them bankrupt. I preach. She obeys.

She goes out in the world; takes to dancing once more, —

A pleasure she rarely indulged in before. I go back to my post, and collect (I must own

'T is a taste I had never before, my dear John)

Antiques and small Elzevirs. Heigh-ho! now, Jack,

You know all.

JOHN (after a pause).

You are really resolved to go back?

ALFRED.

Eh, where?

JOHN.

To that worst of all places, — the past. You remember Lot's wife?

ALFRED.

'T was a promise when last We parted. My honor is pledged to it.

JOHN.

Well, What is it you wish me to do?

ALFRED.

You must tell Matilda, I meant to have called — to leave word —

To explain — but the time was so pressing —

JOHN.

My lord, Your lordship's obedient! I really can't do . . .

ALFRED.

You wish then to break off my marriage?

JOHN.

No, no! But indeed I can't see why yourself you need take

These letters.

ALFRED.

Not see? would you have me, then, break

A promise my honor is pledged to?

JOHN (humming).

"Off, off, And away! said the stranger" . . .

ALFRED.

O, good! O, you scoff!

JOHN.

At what, my dear Alfred?

ALFRED.

At all things!

JOHN.

Indeed?

ALFRED.

Yes; I see that your heart is as dry as a reed:

That the dew of your youth is rubbed off you: I see

You have no feeling left in you, even for me!

At honor you jest; you are cold as a stone

To the warm voice of friendship. Belief you have none;

You have lost faith in all things. You carry a blight

About with you everywhere. Yes, at the sight

Of such callous indifference, who could be calm?

I must leave you at once, Jack, or else the last balm

That is left me in Gilead you'll turn into gall.

Heartless, cold, unconcerned . . .

JOHN.

Have you done? Is that all? Well, then, listen to me! I presume

when you made Up your mind to propose to Miss Darcy,

you weighed All the drawbacks against the equivalent gains,

Ere you finally settled the point. What remains

But to stick to your choice? You want money: 't is here.

A settled position: 't is yours. A career:

You secure it. A wife, young, and pretty as rich,

Whom all men will envy you. Why must you itch

To be running away, on the eve of all this,

To a woman whom never for once did you miss

All these years since you left her? Who knows what may hap?

This letter — to me — is a palpable trap. The woman has changed since you knew

her. Perchance She yet seeks to renew her youth's broken romance.

When women begin to feel youth and their beauty

Slip from them, they count it a sort of a duty

To let nothing else slip away unsecured Which these, while they lasted, might

once have procured.



Lucile's a coquette to the end of her fingers,  
I will stake my last farthing. Perhaps the wish lingers  
To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover  
To the feet he has left; let intrigue now recover  
What truth could not keep. 'T were a vengeance, no doubt—  
A triumph;—but why must *you* bring it about?  
You are risking the substance of all that you schemed  
To obtain; and for what? some mad dream you have dreamed!

ALFRED.

But there's nothing to risk. You exaggerate, Jack.  
You mistake. In three days, at the most, I am back.

JOHN.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,  
Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret;  
Preoccupied, sulky, and likely enough  
To make your betrothed break off all in a huff.  
Three days, do you say? But in three days who knows  
What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

V.

Of all the good things in this good world around us,  
The one most abundantly furnished and found us,  
And which, for that reason, we least care about,  
And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no doubt.  
But advice, when 'tis sought from a friend (though civility  
May forbid to avow it), means mere liability  
In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,  
Which we deem that a true friend is bound to indorse.  
A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.

Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more  
Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed it.  
And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it  
With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,  
That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,  
And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack  
Came to terms, and assisted his cousin to pack  
A slender valise (the one small condescension  
Which his final remonstrance obtained), whose dimension  
Excluded large outfits; and, cursing his stars, he  
Shook hands with his friend and returned to Miss Darcy.

VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turned,  
Ere he locked up and quitted his chamber, discerned  
Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright  
In what Virgil has called "Youth's purple light"  
(I like the expression, and can't find a better).  
He sighed as he looked at her. Did he regret her?  
In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,  
As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,  
And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,  
With their little impertinent look of surprise,  
And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below  
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow,—  
I can only declare, that if I had the chance  
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance  
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now petted  
That fine English mare, I should much have regretted  
Whatever might lose me one little half-hour

Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.  
For, if one drop of milk from the bright Milky-Way  
Could turn into a woman, 't would look, I dare say,  
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

VII.

But, whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh  
With which Alfred Vargrave now watched her ride by,  
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,  
As he turned from the window, he certainly sighed.

## CANTO II.

I.

*Letter from LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE to the COMTESSE DE NEVERS.*

"BIGORRE, Tuesday.

"Your note, Madam, reached me to-day, at Bigorre,  
And commands (need I add?) my obedience. Before  
The night I shall be at Serchon,—where a line,  
If sent to Duval's, the hotel where I dine,  
Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive  
My respects.

"Yours sincerely,

"A. VARGRAVE.

"I leave

In an hour."

II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this, Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,  
Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and pursued,  
In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,  
The reflections that journey gave rise to. And here  
(Because, without some such precaution, I fear  
You might fail to distinguish them each from the rest

Of the world they belong to; whose captives are drest,  
As our convicts, precisely the same one and all,  
While the coat cut for Peter is passed on to Paul)  
I resolve, one by one, when I pick from the mass  
The persons I want, as before you they pass,  
To label them broadly in plain black and white  
On the backs of them. Therefore whilst yet he's in sight,  
I first label my hero.

III.

The age is gone o'er  
When a man may in all things be all.  
We have more  
Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,  
Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to; but out  
Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when  
Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken?  
He is gone with the age which begat him. Our own  
Is too vast, and too complex, for one man alone  
To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close  
In the palm of his hand. There were giants in those  
Irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours,  
In dividing the work, we distribute the powers.  
Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more  
Than the 'live giant's eyesight availed to explore;  
And in life's lengthened alphabet what used to be  
To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.  
A Vanini is roasted alive for his pains,  
But a Bacon comes after and picks up his brains.  
A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle  
And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,  
Till a More or Lavater step into his place:  
Then the world turns and makes an admiring grimace.  
Once the men were so great and so few, they appear,