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A

RECOILING VENGEANCE

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF "HIS HELPMATE," "THE GREAT HESPER," ETC.

"Revenge at first, though sweet,
Bitter ere long, back on itself recoils."

MILTON.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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A RECOILING VENGEANCE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN.

My name is Keene, Anthony Keene. I am a lawyer; sixty-four is my age. You may see what kind of man I am by my portrait; not over pleasant with any one.

George Flexmore and I were friends. He was my first client when I set up in Coneyford, a small town just large enough at that time, as I believed, to keep a lawyer of its own; there are a couple of us now, and

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we have as much to do as we need. Flexmore had just then come into a fortune of £30,000, and he did not know what to do with it. I prevented him from losing it, as he certainly would have done without proper direction, for he was an easy-going man, of a credulous disposition, such as your needy adventurer and shifty speculator love to take in hand. For every man that has money there are ninety-nine who are anxious to spend it for him.

"If any one asks you for money, Flexmore," said I, "don't refuse him: send him to me." And he did so, with this result—he never lost a penny by these good-natured friends.

He had a great respect for me—more than I deserved doubtless. He seemed to think that whatever I did must be right, and I believe it was the sheer force of example that kept him out of matrimony so long. Because I did not care to take a wife, he thought best to keep single. But the conditions were different. I am not an easy-going man, and marriage would have been purgatory for me or my wife, and the result must have been equally bad for both of us in either case. Besides, a lawyer has so much to occupy his thoughts in the interest of his

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clients that he has not an hour in the day to devote to anything else. But Flexmore had nothing to do from morning to night that he might not very well set aside to attend to the wants of somebody else; and as to worries—he hadn't enough to keep him from getting fat.

Now, a man ought to have solicitude for something beyond himself, if it's only to give reasonable activity to his faculties; and Flexmore felt this also. He saw that he ought to have some other object in life than to eát and sleep and kill time—that his life was incomplete, in fact. But he still made pretence of being content with a bachelor's existence.

One day I caught him singing his old song, *When a man's single he lives at his ease*, but in such a lugubrious strain that it would have made me laugh if it had not irritated me.

"That's humbug, Flexmore," said I, "and you know it."

"What," said he, "does not a single man live at his ease?"

"Not when he has only himself to think of. A man's happiness consists in making other people

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happy—unless he's a lawyer. You're not a lawyer, and you ought to be making some one else happy. You'd be more at your ease if you had some one else to think about, and somebody else to think about you."

"Do you mean that I ought to marry, Tony?" he asked, blushing like a girl.

"That is exactly what I do mean, George."

"But I'm fifty. I'm too old to think about marriage now."

"A man's too old to think about marriage when nobody will marry him, not before. There's little Miss Vaughan, who has been waiting to be asked these three years; there are dozens of girls to be chosen from if——"

"Do you think she would have me—that Miss Vaughan?" he interrupted eagerly.

"Well, the best way of deciding that point is to go and ask her this afternoon," said I.

The result of this advice was that Flexmore married Miss Vaughan just six weeks after.

She was much younger than he, as a wife should be. A happier couple I never saw. He lived to

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please her, and she to please him—that was the chief object of their lives.

A year after their marriage they had a child, and

"A NICE FUSS THEY MADE ABOUT IT."

a nice fuss they made about it. I can't abide babies, though they never could believe this, and were continually plaguing me "to kiss the little dear." The

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child did not seem to like it, and I know I hated it; but a lawyer, to please his clients, has to put up with a good many disagreeable duties. However, this mutual repugnance faded away, and we came to like each other in the course of time.

She grew up a pleasant little child, shy and timid, with a clinging affection for lovable persons and things. I never saw anything like the passionate attachment that existed between her and her sweet-tempered mother. It inspired me with a melancholy foreboding, for this strenuous love, I have noticed, too often springs from an inner consciousness (presentiment, if you will) of coming separation.

Poor Mrs. Flexmore had never been a robust person, and—well, to cut short a story that is too painful to dwell upon, she died when little Laure was eleven years old.

Flexmore was then sixty-two, but he was not too old to suffer. The loss unmanned him completely. He took on like a woman and he would have been less a man if he had not, perhaps.

"My poor old friend," said I, "it would have been better to let you live on a bachelor."

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"No, no," he replied. "After such happiness an eternity of suffering would find me still a gainer."

"You have your child—your little Laure," said I, and then to turn his thoughts from the past, I talked about the future, and what he should do for the child's welfare.

Indeed the child's grief gave me almost as much concern as the father's. It was not a passionate outburst, that spends itself like a summer shower and gives place to peace and smiles, but a continued, fruitless yearning for that loved one to come back who was gone for ever.

"You must have a woman here to comfort her," I said to Flexmore. "You're no good."

He agreed to this, and sent for his deceased brother's widow, as being his nearest female relative, and she came readily enough, a woman of fifty, hard as nails, and stringy as an old crow.

Of course she never had "approved" (that was her word) of her brother's marriage, so she had little sympathy with his loss and no patience with his grief. She looked upon little Laure's distress as unnatural in a child (unusual it certainly was), and her morbid condition as the result of defective education; and

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she set about correcting all this by forcing the little thing to read some instructive and moral books which no conceivable creature could find interest or pleasure in.

Laure had no appetite even when the kind old cook had a free hand and tempted her with pleasant dishes. When the cook's hand was no longer free—about half-an-hour after Mrs. Yeames had taken her things off—the child ate nothing.

"But you must eat; you cannot gain strength if you do not," said Mrs. Yeames severely. "It's very wrong for little girls to reject good food," and when Laure turned away to cry she was told that she must not cry, that she couldn't expect to be happy if she gave way like that, and that all good little girls did as they were bid, and didn't cry when they were told to look pleasant and nice.

After she had been there three days Dr. Awdrey had to be sent for. Laure was feverish and couldn't "hold herself up properly." Dr. Awdrey ordered her to be put to bed at once, gave directions respecting treatment, and sent physic to be administered every two hours.

Mrs. Yeames had studied medicine from a shilling

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handbook that she carried with her as if it were an amulet; she diluted the physic and administered doses when she thought fit.

Little Laure was very much worse when the doctor called the next day; and it was not long before he discovered the reason.

He came down into the library, where I was sitting with Flexmore.

"Your child is in a very dangerous condition," he said firmly.

"Heaven have mercy upon me!" exclaimed my old friend, clasping his hands. "What is to be done?"

"She must have a proper nurse, to begin with," said Dr. Awdrey.

"A proper nurse? there is my sister-in-law."

"Dr. Awdrey said 'a proper nurse,'" said I, for I hated Mrs. Yeames already.

"Do you know of one, doctor?" asked Flexmore.

"Yes; I can get you a professional nurse—one whom I can rely on implicitly, and who can do more than all my physic for the poor child. She is in the Hospital for Little Children at London, and I believe she would come at once if I asked her."

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"Then, for mercy's sake, telegraph to her at once."

When the doctor was gone, Flexmore, in some embarrassment, turned to me.

"It will not work, Tony," said he despondently. "The nurse will never be able to put up with that old—old——"

"Cat," said I, supplying the word he had not the courage to articulate. "Go on."

"Every one of the servants has given notice already. They can't stand her."

"Can you stand her?" I asked.

He looked at me as if hesitating before the heresy of disbelieving in the virtues of a woman whose every action bespoke conscious rectitude, and then summoning up his fortitude he said—"I am afraid I cannot long."

"Of course you can't," said I; "she's turned the whole place topsy-turvy in putting things in order, and left not a bit of comfort anywhere."

"Yes, yes; all the things that my darling loved she has packed away—the little trifles with which she made these rooms so bright and pleasant. I can't bear to see the place altered; and those trifles Tony, I miss them—I miss them."

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"We'll have 'em all back again in twenty-four hours."

"But how are we to get rid of her and all her boxes and her library and things? I believe she has ordered a lot of furniture to be sent on."

"Yes; and I warrant she's settled what she'll wear when she leads you to the altar."

"Never, Tony—I'll never marry again. What! do you think she meditates such a thing?"

"She isn't a widow if she doesn't."

"Good gracious, what have I done? I asked her to come and live here How can I get rid of her?"

"Don't bother yourself about that, George. You leave her to me. Give me full authority to act in your behalf and stick to my directions."

He gave me his word most impressively that he would.

"And will you have it out with her before long?" he asked anxiously.

"Now, directly," said I, rising. "This is just the sort of job I like."

And I went into the sitting-room and sent at once for Mrs. Yeames. Then we had it out. She was a

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tough one to deal with, but not nearly so tough as I am. I tried to be polite, but I fear I insulted her. She certainly said I did, and went into the library to know if her brother-in-law would tolerate such a want of respect on the part of a *mere attorney;* and the question being put directly to Flexmore, whether she or I were to leave that house at once and for ever, he replied that he felt convinced, taking all things into consideration, that he could better afford to lose her than me.

After that there was nothing for the indignant widow to do but to pack up and pack off—which she did, happily, before her fury gave place to more prudential considerations.

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CHAPTER II.

NURSE GERTRUDE.

I DROPPED in on old Flexmore the next day to see if I might be wanted (for it appeared to me not unlikely that Mrs. Yeames might return when she got the better of her vile temper), and found my old friend busy restoring to their wonted places the pictures and *bric-à-brac* so dear to him as evidence of his poor wife's taste and fancy.

"It's all right, then?" said I.

"Yes; the place begins to look itself again. Every little thing, you know, Tony, she bought with the

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thought that it might please me and make our home sweeter." "She" was the good little wife he had lost.

"Yes; she had good taste and a good heart," said I. "And the old woman—have you heard anything of her?"

"She wrote saying that, in the interest of her dear niece Laure, she would be happy to see me and, if possible, arrange some *modus vivendi*. I thought I would see you before replying."

"Quite right. Give me her letter; I'll answer it for you. I can say you have put the matter in my hands—see? I'll undertake to say she won't come back."

He thanked me with tearful gratitude, and asked me to stay to lunch.

There was such a savoury smell of cooking in the house as I had not inhaled since the coming of Mrs. Yeames, and I accepted without hesitation—the more readily as I wished to see Nurse Gertrude, who, Flexmore told me, had arrived that morning and would in all probability take lunch with us.

I expected to see a comely, motherly, middle-aged woman, and was taken altogether by surprise when

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Nurse Gertrude presented herself in the person of a slight young woman of twenty-two or thereabouts.

Of course I am no judge of female beauty, but I don't think Nurse Gertrude at that time could be considered handsome, or even very pretty. If I have any predilection, it is for large women with round, full figures; and I think I rather like a saucy eye and a nice little turned-up nose.

Now Nurse Gertrude, though by no means short, was, as I have said, slight and thin. She had a very delicate fair complexion and pretty dark hair, to be sure; but her nose was long and her eyes were by no means saucy, but calm and deep and thoughtful. Her expression was cheerful, and she had a pretty trick of blushing, but in repose her face was full of intelligence and solicitude. Her teeth were not regular, but there was the sweetest play in her lips, that harmonized with her voice and gentle laugh. One could not look at her without being impressed with the belief that she was essentially a pure and honest girl, with a very earnest purpose, an amiable disposition, and a clear-seeing, right-feeling mind. Her eyes—they were dark gray—were so true and frank and loyal that one was attracted towards her

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as to a friend whose fidelity and love could never be doubted.

Let me stop while I can, if I say more I shall finish by declaring that she was downright beautiful —an assertion which, though I would not contradict it now, I was far from venturing then.

One thing however did strike me: and this was that in some peculiarity—I know not what—she bore a resemblance to Mrs. Flexmore as I had known her in her younger days. And this seemed also to have struck Flexmore, for more than once I saw him, forgetful of the table, looking at her with the tenderest interest on his poor old woe-begone face.

"Oh, I see how this will end," said I to myself. "He'll marry that girl if she'll have him."

And that was the opinion of a good many other people before long.

Mrs. Yeames, like an old buzzard that has missed its prey, hovered about the neighbourhood, watching the quarry with the jealous intention of preventing any other creature of her own species clawing up what she had failed to secure. She had heard that Flexmore was worth thirty thousand pounds! A nice picking for somebody, and poor old

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Flexmore was no longer a hale and hearty man.

She took a cottage at the other end of the town, and joined a clique of charitable ladies, who could make a shirt for the heathen or pick to pieces the reputation of a fellow-Christian with equal ability.

It is pretty certain they did not leave the character of Nurse Gertrude alone.

Meanwhile Nurse Gertrude fulfilled her duties with the calm self-possession of one conscientiously doing what she feels to be right; and I believe that, if the question ever entered her consideration, she did not care two straws what I or any one else thought about her. What she had come there to do, she did—and as if by magic. With Dr. Awdrey's help she got the fever under in a week, and after that she brought a smile back to the poor child's wasted face, which was of still greater importance; for when one can smile, one can eat and enjoy food. She gave little Laure something to love, and nourished her heart with kindness. That was what she needed: that was what she got. She had been craving for love since her mother was taken away

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and must have died without it, as surely as a plant must die without sunlight.

But how was she to be weaned of this love-food, in order that Nurse Gertrude might in time return to her hospital? Every day her appetite grew by what it fed on. All the clinging affection she had borne to her mother she now exhibited towards Nurse Gertrude. The child had recognized the likeness that had struck me: mother and nurse, unlike in some respects, were still of the same type of woman—and an excellent type too. After a time it became obvious that Laure was not to be weaned, and that to take away Nurse Gertrude would inflict the same terrible suffering the child had endured in losing her mother. Thereupon there were consultations between Flexmore, Dr. Awdrey, and me.

"It is obvious that Nurse Gertrude is very strongly attached to your child," said Dr. Awdrey.

"She is not unhappy here; she looks better than when she came," said Flexmore.

"Oh, undoubtedly she is better," Dr. Awdrey agreed; "the confinement of the hospital and the air of London were telling upon her—in fact, I must admit that in recommending her I was influenced

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by the consideration that the change would be to her advantage as well as your daughter's."

"If she would only consent to stay here as a companion to dear Laure—in any capacity, on any terms!" said Flexmore. "Do you think she would?"

"Go and ask her," said I.

She was asked; but Dr. Awdrey was the negotiator, for Flexmore had not the courage of a mouse. And Nurse Gertrude acquiesced, setting aside all other considerations for the sake of the child whose love had won her heart. So Dr. Awdrey put it; for my own part, I could not see what sacrifice she had made in exchanging a close hospital ward for a pleasant and airy house, and an ill-paid slavery for a very remunerative position where she was free to do just as she liked. (Dr. Awdrey, in whose hands the whole affair was placed, had stuck Flexmore for a thumping big salary.) No; I looked upon it that this young lady, together with other very good qualities, had a very clear perception of her duty to herself, and that she foresaw as plainly as I did that sooner or later she would become Mrs. Flexmore.

However to stick to the facts of the case: that day Nurse Gertrude came down to dinner without

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the becoming little cap which had previously distinguished her as an official nurse; and if we had

"NURSE GERTRUDE CAME DOWN TO DINNER WITHOUT THE BECOMING LITTLE CAP."

come to think her pretty in her cap, we were bound to admit that she looked still nicer without it—her

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pretty hair drawn neatly up and coiled plainly on her head.

Gracious powers! how the women folk in our little town cackled when the news spread that this person was henceforth to be a sort of housekeeper and companion in Mr. Flexmore's house, and that the servants were no longer to call her Nurse Gertrude, but Miss Dalrymple, if ycu please. Though why they should be astonished was a mystery, considering that according to their own statement they had foreseen this, and "said so all along." Who was this Miss Dalrymple? Nobody knew. Why had she gone into a hospital as nurse? Ah! a good many young women go into hospitals as a sort of refuge, they generally have a history—something to conceal, and, too often, something to expiate by what they consider work of charity, though, as for that, they are paid quite as well as ordinary servants, so there's not much sacrifice on their part. It is well known that many go in with the hope of entrapping some young doctor or medical studeut, while others, like this Miss Dalrymple, contrive to work their way into well-to-do families and play on the sense of gratitude or fancy of some old inbecile, such as poor dear Mr

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Flexmore. These were the views of those miserable women who refer to the members of their little coterie as "very superiah ladies—very superiah!" They questioned Dr. Awdrey about Miss Dalrymple—about her history, her antecedents, her family, &c.

"All I know about Miss Dalrymple," he said, in reply, "is that she has the finest and sweetest character I have ever studied."

Poor Doctor Awdrey! we thought, she has thrown her spell over him at some time; he might have married her if he had only had the sense to let her stop in the hospital; but there was little chance for him now, with old Mr. Flexmore absolutely in her power. With a weak man of that kind, she could easily obtain an offer of marriage, and at any time she could reckon upon Laure's tears supporting her claim for a more definite and satisfactory position.

She was incontrovertibly spoiling that child, Mrs. Yeames declared, quite spoiling her with indulgence; dressing her like a little popinjay, though she was still in mourning; whoever heard of a child of that age being allowed to run wild and do whatever she would, spoiling her things and behaving like a tomboy

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more than anything else. A nice self-willed, perverse, detestable girl she would grow up under such treatment; but there, of course Nurse Gertrude (they wouldn't call her Miss Dalrymple) had only one object, and that was to make herself indispensable, in the opinion of poor dear, dear George! Ah, dear George was much to be pitied.

The worst of it was that "dear George" bore his affliction very patiently, and seemed to like it.

Miss Dalrymple's position was not altogether an enviable one. She must have known of the ill-feeling against her, must have divined the cruel things that were said about her, though she showed no sign of being hurt under the snubs administered freely to her by visitors, who called ostensibly to see how dear little Laure was progressing. With her calm, deliberative disposition she may have foreseen all the consequences of taking the position in Flexmore's house which she now held. She did nothing to controvert the opinion people chose to entertain regarding her; nothing to make them know that she was better than they chose to think. It was only by accident that the truth came out.

We have a flower show in our town once a year.

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The first day is the best of course, and, the prices excluding the poorer kind of people, only the upper sort are there. There was a rumour that titled visitors were staying with the Caselys, and that probably they would visit the show in the afternoon; wherefore you may be sure that Mrs. Yeames and her "superiah" set were all there in full feather.

About three o'clock I saw Miss Dalrymple come in with Laure; she never missed any occasion of giving pleasure to the child, or of taking it herself, for that matter. She was plainly dressed; but, to my mind, there was no more elegant young lady there. Mrs. Yeames with three of her finest friends stopped them, and with the most distant patronizing inclination of their heads to Miss Dalrymple bent down to kiss Laure and ask after her poor dear papa. Then Mrs. Yeames, taking the child's hand, led her to a bank of cut flowers, asking her whether she could spell the labels attached, and whether she knew what was a *papaver somniferum.*

In the midst of this instructive display of her own acquirements, there was a flutter amongst the visitors, and word was whispered that Mrs. Casely had arrived and had brought Lord Dunover with her. And there,

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sure enough, was Mrs. Casely with a tall, white-haired, aristocratic old gentleman, coming right down upon the little party. There was not time to get away from little Laure and that horrid Nurse Gertrude, when Mrs. Casely met them and introduced his lordship. Dunover bowed stiffly, but suddenly catching sight of Miss Dalrymple his face became illumined with a smile of heartfelt pleasure, and exclaiming, "What, Gertie, my dear, you here!" he took her by both hands and kissed her pretty lips. Then turning to Mrs. Casely he said—

"Mrs. Casely, let me introduce you to my niece—a little democrat who almost shakes my class prejudice, for she prefers independence as a hospital nurse to sharing the fallen fortunes of her family."

Then it was known that Miss Dalrymple was actually the niece of an earl. And she and Laure spent a week at Casely Manor, where Mrs. Yeames and her "superiah" set had never been allowed to stay longer than half an hour.

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CHAPTER III.

MR. LYNN YEAMES MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.

FTER this I said to Flexmore—

"Why on earth don't you marry Miss Dalrymple?"

"Do you think she would have me?" he asked, with a composure that showed that the idea was not unconsidered.

"You can but ask her," I replied. "There's nothing like asking when one is in doubt."

"I believe you think that any woman is to be had

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for the asking. But if I were sure of being accepted, I would not make the offer."

"Why?"

"Because she is worthy of a better man than I am for one thing."

"That she can best decide. What's your next reason?"

"That I have no wish to marry."

"That isn't much of a reason. You have to think of what is best for your daughter and Miss Dalrymple. Your little one ought to have a mother—some one from whom she will be inseparable when you are gone; and there's not a soul in the world better fitted to take the place of a mother than that girl."

"I know it—I know it," said Flexmore; "I have thought of that."

"And then Miss Dalrymple ought to have the opportunity offered her of making her position here less anomalous than it is."

"I have a better plan for her welfare than that, Tony," he said quietly.

"Then let me know it, George; for we must do something to stop the mouths of these cackling scandal-mongers and tittle-tattling widows and spinsters," said I.

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"She must marry Awdrey: that is the husband for that sweet girl," said he.

"Dr. Awdrey!" I exclaimed in astonishment, for I had never thought of him as a marrying man.

"Yes. He loves her—I know he does. Who could see her and know her, and not love her? And he is an excellent fellow. I wish he were a little lighter and better-looking; but I couldn't wish him to have a better heart, or a more lovable disposition. He's a fine man, Tony."

"Yes, he is a fine man," I assented readily, "morally."

"He's not ill-looking; a little serious perhaps."

"That's not astonishing. No one has so much reason to be serious as a fool."

"You do not mean to tell me that Dr. Awdrey is a fool," said my old friend indignantly.

"A fool in a worldly sense he is. In his profession, I grant, he may be as wise as you like. He can see into men's stomachs, but he can't see into their minds. If you can't see through the mask with which most men conceal their true nature, you are bound to be duped. Awdrey is so honest that he cannot believe in knavery; and a man with his confiding disposition

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is the born prey for tricksters. He was cheated into buying a practice that was worth nothing, and he goes a round of thirty miles a day to doctor patients who never pay their fees. Hang me, I'd physic 'em if they tried to serve me in that fashion. However a woman loves her husband none the less for his being serious; and as for looks, in my opinion there's not a man in Coneyford to compare with him; he's six foot in his stockings, and every inch of him a man. That's good enough."

"Then you agree with me that he would be a suitable husband for Miss Dalrymple?"

"Yes, but he won't marry her, for all that. It's as much as ever he can keep his head above water now, and fool as he is—in worldly matters—he wouldn't tie a millstone round his neck."

"Miss Dalrymple is not a millstone," said poor old Flexmore warmly.

"I know that. She's a good woman, and would work herself ill to help her husband, or worry herself ill if she couldn't. That is what Awdrey would not have his wife do, and the only way to prevent it is to keep single. And single he'll keep."

"No, Keene, no; he must marry Gertrude. I have

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thought it all out. My little Laure must have a father as well as a mother when I am gone—and I don't think that is long hence, Tony. I shall not see sixty-four."

I tried to combat this notion, though I myself was far from regarding it as improbable; and then to turn the conversation, I said—

"Well, to go back to what you have been thinking out—what's your idea?"

"I wish to put Awdrey in a position to marry Miss Dalrymple. I know he is poor, but I am rich."

"You'll never get Awdrey to take an independence from you."

"Not while I live—but in time to come when I am gone? This is my idea, Tony. I would leave him every penny I have on the condition that he adopts Laure as his daughter."

"I see your notion. There will then be a second inducement for him to make Miss Dalrymple his wife in the fact that the child is inseparable from her."

"That's it, Tony. Now tell me. What is your opinion on the subject?"

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"Well, I think the idea is a capital good one, so good that I wish I had thought of it myself. I might if there had not been a little too much romance in it for my mind to take readily to. Still, it *is* a good idea."

"Very well, then; draw up a will in accordance with it. Settle everything upon Awdrey, subject to deduction for a few smaller legacies that I will write in."

"I'll sleep on it. We won't hurry. You're good for some time to come."

"Let me have the draft of it in a week at the outside, Tony," he said eagerly.

I promised to do this, and went home, turning the matter over in my mind. I considered from time to time during the week, and finding no material objection to the scheme I put Flexmore's notion into legal form with certain modifications, and then took a rough draft for his inspection.

"Is your master at home?" I asked the girl who opened the door.

"Yes, sir; he's in the library with Mrs. Yeames and Mr. Yeames."

"Mr. Yeames? what Mr. Yeames?" I asked the little maid sharply.

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"Mr. Lynn Yeames is his name, I think, sir; a young gentleman."

"Mrs. Yeames's son. I know him," said I; and then I stood, rubbing my feet on the mat and wondering what on earth he had come upon the scene for. No good, I felt sure.

Mr. Lynn Yeames was the son of Mrs. Yeames by her second marriage. That was not much in his favour, but the rest was still less to his advantage. I had been twice employed by Flexmore on his account: once, to settle some college debts which Mrs. Yeames declared she could not meet, though she could scrape enough together to send him to a university for the gratification of her wretched vanity, when he ought to have been earning his bread, like other lads of his condition; and a second time to stay an action for breach of promise, threatened by a townsman's daughter with whom he had got entangled. Fellows brought up by foolish women on bad principles are always either getting out of scrapes or getting into them, and I asked myself which purpose had procured his uncle the doubtful pleasure of this visit.

I shook myself together, and went into the library with my wits on the alert.

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Lynn Yeames at this time was about four-and-twenty, and his looks would have deceived any one but a lawyer. A sturdy young fellow of average height, but very thick-set, he was dressed in a gray Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, with a pair of legs that would have done credit to a drayman, and seemed to be the object of his mother's constant admiration. His skin was very fair, his eyes very blue, his lips very red; his hair was combed down on one side of his forehead, and he had a small carroty moustache. His manner was effusive, and he affected a rollicking dare-devil air, which went well enough with his full-blooded complexion, and other signs of animal strength, but were not altogether in keeping with a certain slyness in the turn of his eyes and the lowering of their lids. But then this slyness was in harmony with his profession of being up to all the ways of the world and knowing his way about. Most people, I believe, would have been favourably impressed with him, and have liked him the better for failings which might be attributed to youth and exuberant vigour; but I did not like him.

He had come down, it seemed, to spend a few days with the "mater" (I hate young people who can't

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call their dearest friend by the sweetest word in the language, "mother"), and he had only been here a day and was awfully bored already—not a decent billiard board in the place, hags at the bars, and not a light to be seen after ten-thirty. He wanted to know if there was any fishing or shooting, or any mortal thing a man might do to earn a night's repose.

"There's the piano, Lynn, dear," suggested Mrs. Yeames, anxious to show off her son's accomplishments. "You know that you play very well." She said this in French—and bad French too.

To this he replied in a mixture of the two tongues, not loth to show off, that one did not come into the country to play Schubert, and that sort of thing."

"For goodness' sake, sir, let us confine our talk to English or French," said I. "Have you heard anything lately from Miss Kite?" This was the name of the injured young lady at Oxford.

"If you please, do not mention the name of that horrid, designing, worthless person," said Mrs. Yeames.

"She's worth four hundred pounds more than she was, madam," said I; "for that's what I had to pay to make her withdraw her action."

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Mrs. Yeames flicked the dust off her silk gown and looked extremely uncomfortable.

"No new scrape, I hope, Mr. Lynn?" I continued.

"Not exactly. What the deuce should make you suppose there was?" he asked sheepishly, for it takes very little to upset the equanimity of these boisterous young gentlemen.

"What made me suppose it?" I echoed. "Why, seeing you here!"

"I want to find some shooting. That's all I came for."

"I can let you have it, if you are prepared to pay. I have a client who will let you the shooting over two thousand acres."

"That's my sort. Of course I'll pay. When can I begin to blaze away?"

"As soon as you have settled with me. Come to my office and we will arrange it at once."

I wanted to get him away from there, for already I scented the purpose with which he had been brought; and I was anxious to let him the shooting, which was twenty miles off.

"Oh! you cannot go yet, dear," interposed Mrs. Yeames; "you have not seen Laure. How is that little darling, George, dear?"

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"Very well, thank you. She has gone for a walk with Miss Dalrymple."

"Miss Dalrymple? Who is she? a governess?" asked Lynn.

"Something more than that," replied Mrs. Yeames, "quite a friend of the family—a most estimable young lady. She was a professional nurse, but—what do you think?—it turns out she is the niece of the Earl of Dunover!"

This change in Mrs. Yeames's regard towards Gertrude was not surprising, considering what a sycophant the widow was; but nothing could make me believe that in the past twenty-four hours she had said not a word about her to Lynn.

"Gad! I should like to see the young lady—if she *is* young," said Lynn.

"Oh, she is I assure you, and excessively charming and pretty," said Mrs. Yeames; "quite superiah! You really must see her."

While this chatter was going on, I drew the draft of Flexmore's will from my pocket, and, as if endorsing it, I wrote in pencil—

"They want you to invite them to lunch. Don't."

This I handed to Flexmore.

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"Here is a draft of the agreement you asked me for," said I.

He looked at the words I had written, and thanked me. Then he said he hoped his nephew would call in and say good-bye before he left.

After that the visitors were bound to rise and say "Good-bye for the present."

"We'll go to the office and settle about that shooting," said I, rising at the same time.

We left Mrs. Yeames at her cottage, and went on to my place of business. Nothing was said about my old friend Flexmore until we had settled about the shooting, when Lynn said, as he took up his stick and deerstalker—

"Poor old nuncky looks precious shaky."

"He's much better than he was a month ago," I replied.

"Shouldn't think he'd last long, though; should you? He's sixty-two, you know."

"His life's worth ten years' purchase," said I emphatically.

"Is it, though?" Then, after a pause—"I suppose he's pretty warm?"

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"I would give fifty thousand pounds for his estate at this moment."

"Fifty thousand, eh?"

Another pause. Then in a careless tone—

"WE LEFT MRS. YEAMES AT HER COTTAGE."

"Who's this Miss Thingumbob the mater was talking about?"

"Miss Dalrymple. She is a particularly sensible young lady," I replied.

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"That means that she knows how to look after Number One, I suppose?"

"If she did not know how to take care of herself, I shouldn't call her sensible."

"Wouldn't mind marrying the old man if she had the chance, eh?"

"I hope she would not, sincerely."

"Oh, you approve of his marrying Miss Dalrymple, do you?"

"Undoubtedly—for his own sake and the sake of his child. It's the very thing I have been persuading him to do."

That sly look came into the corner of his blue eye and I could fancy him saying to himself—

"Here's an old fool to let me into his client's secrets. He was not sharp enough to see that my object was to put him on the wrong scent, and avert his suspicion from our actual wish and purpose.

"Well, if it is really to nuncky's interest to marry the girl, I hope he may get her," said he, giving me his hand; and we looked straight into each other's face before saying good-bye. I read in his eyes, "But he sha'n't marry her if I can help it." What he read in mine I cannot say.

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Business took me to London, and kept me there hard at it for a fortnight. I had scarcely time to think of old Flexmore, but I went straight to him the moment I returned. I found a perceptible difference in his appearance: he looked a couple of years older.

"I am glad to see you, Tony," he said, holding my hand in his and giving it a trembling shake from time to time. "I am getting anxious about the will. I can't last long, I know; and I am very unsettled in my mind about many things."

"You shall sign the draft, and that will hold good in case of accident, while the copy is being drawn up in form. We'll settle that after dinner—for I mean to dine with you, George. There's game cooking I can smell it."

"Yes; we have had a good deal of game lately. Lynn brings something nearly every day."

"What! he came to stay a week, and is not gone yet?" I cried.

Flexmore shook his head.

"I don't think he means to go away either," he said.

I beat a tattoo on the table while I arranged my ideas on this subject.

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"What does he come here for? Do you know, George?" I asked.

"To see Miss Dalrymple, I believe. He is paying her marked attention."

"I knew it!" I cried, slapping my leg. "I saw what he was after."

"Do you think he means to marry her? Is that what you saw?"

"No; but I saw he had made up his mind to prevent you marrying her!"

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CHAPTER IV.

AN UNLUCKY BEGGAR.

WHAT I had not foreseen was the means by which Lynn Yeames precluded an offer of marriage being made to Miss Dalrymple by his uncle. I had not thought of his making love to her himself; rather I anticipated his taking some underhand measures, in conjunction with his mother, to damage the young lady's character and prejudice Flexmore against her.

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"You have not encouraged your nephew's visits, have you, George?" I asked.

"No; at the same time I could not refuse to receive him. There is nothing in his behaviour I could take exception to. Indeed he has tried his utmost to make himself agreeable."

"I don't doubt that for a moment, hang him! He can make himself pleasant if he likes, or unpleasant either. I warrant he's clever enough to keep his mother out of sight, eh?"

"She has not called since the day you met her here," Flexmore answered.

"And what effect has he made upon Miss Dalrymple with his agreeable ways?"

"I am afraid she likes him. It is only natural she should be brighter and gayer in his society. I am very dull, and there are no visitors here—none of her own age—and then Lynn is clever and lively; he plays nicely, and sings well too——"

"Oh, bother his singing! You don't mean to say he has charmed you with his songs?"

"No. I cannot like him. I fear he is not sincere. I may be prejudiced, but——"

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"You're not. There's no love-making yet a while—Nothing like an engagement?"

"Oh, no! He is simply very attentive, and she could not be ungracious."

"We must stop it at that. There's no time to be lost," said I.

"Do you think he intends to marry her?"

"Not unless he's sure she has money. If your money were settled on her, he would. We will set his mind at rest on that subject."

"How?"

"You must sign your will, and give me permission to make its provisions known to Dr. Awdrey. I wager we will soon put Master Lynn's nose out of joint. With the prospect of making that girl his wife, dear old Awdrey will be another man. Lynn will sink into insignificance by the side of that fine fellow, despite his music and mongrel French."

I took care to be on the road about the time Awdrey was starting on his rounds, and when he came up in his gig I asked him to give me a lift as far as Langly.

He had to shift half-a-dozen books from the seat beside him to make place for me.

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"What on earth are you carting your library about for?" I asked.

"They're only books of reference. Going along straight roads and up-hill I can give the old pony the reins and do a bit of work."

"You're burning the candle at both ends; it's bad enough to sit up half the night over your books."

"It is the only sort of pleasure a man in my position can afford."

"Then you should alter your position."

"It's too late to begin a new career. It will come all right one of these days, perhaps. People will have more confidence in me at sixty. At present I don't look as old as I feel."

"Families don't care for bachelor doctors, that's a fact. You ought to marry!"

"Marry!" exclaimed Awdrey, with a grim laugh, and then he looked ruefully into the distance.

"Yes, marry," I repeated. "There's Miss Dalrymple, you ought to marry her."

The colour mounted to his temple, but he said nothing in reply to my suggestion.

"You've known her some time, and you can't have known her without finding out that she has admirable

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qualities, besides being as pretty a little lady as eyes could wish to rest on."

"That is true," he murmured, caressing the neck of the old pony with the end of his whip.

"Then why haven't you proposed to her?" I asked sharply.

"Because I'm an unlucky beggar," he replied bitterly—"an unlucky beggar."

"No, you're not."

"What, do you think she likes me?" he asked, with eager quickness—that being the sort of luck he I thought alluded to.

"There's no one who doesn't like you."

"Oh, in a general way," said he, in a tone of disappointment. "Well, supposing she had liked me well enough to risk the chance of poverty, do you think it would have been fair to take advantage of her courage, knowing what an unlucky beggar I am?"

"But you're not an unlucky beggar, I keep telling you."

"Perhaps you will show me where my luck lies, for I can't find it."

"I will show you," said I, "if I betray a client's

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confidence to do it. Read that," and I put the draft of old Flexmore's will into his hand, open, that he might have no hesitation in glancing at it.

He just ran his eye down the draft, which could be read at a glance, for I pride myself on writing legibly and bold, and then exclaimed, turning to me in astonishment—

"Great Heavens! Why should Flexmore leave me all this money?"

"That you may be in a position to marry the girl you love, and that his child should have a good woman as well as a good man to protect and befriend her."

He dropped his hand, and I folded up the draft and slipped it back in my pocket. When I glanced at him again he was staring into the distance, and there was moisture on the lower lash of his eye.

"I *am* an unlucky beggar," he murmured again.

"You'll make me mad if you say that again, Awdrey," said I impatiently.

"Too late!" he faltered. "If I had only known this a week ago."

"Well, what difference would that have made? The draft was made out a fortnight ago."

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