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SIR GUY'S GOBLET.

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(MRS. PENNIE-CUMBER.)

Author of "Denis Donne," "Water-Gate," "Played Out," &c.

CHAPTER II.

"Will you like to try some of mine, or will you... Mr. Pomfret came forward to see if he could help me to a selection," he said, and I knew that I was fairly committed to it; so I said "I would try what I knew best," and haltingly stepped by my own timidity, among some reverse poor Guy written and composed ones after a visit to the Dunbar side of our family:—

"There's a breath of freedom on the ground, Where wild the heather grows, That makes it dearer to my heart, Than England's emblem rose; It springs around the distaff, The stars flower of the north, It decks the plains of England, And the bonnets of the Forth.

"Those purple sprigs! no flowers e'er, Blooming in other dells, Are half so sweet to Scottish hearts, As Scotland's bonnet-bells. For on mountain brow, by lowland loch, Through every kind of weather, We roamed about, unshod, unshod, O'er plains of gorse and heather.

"We still can claim a Scottish name, And the Scotch blood in us tell, As pure an English green as we roam, Through Scotland's heather bells. For the breath of freedom's on the soil, Where wild the heather grows, They hold their own most gallantly, Against the English rose.

They all thanked me graciously, and said kind things, all save Ida. The least look still further on the couch she occupied like a throne, and said "such things were beyond her; it was impossible for her to make an effort to be historical, and understand those allusions to the times of Wallace she supposed." She said this to her cousin Guy, and I did feel very grateful to him for not seeming to think it witty, and for making her no answer.

I went to bed that night very tired and very much bewildered, and very much interested in them all. It was so funny that they should be my own people, and still so far from me in all real interest and sympathy. Even while I was accusing them of this in my heart, I was made to feel myself an ingrate by Miss Pomfret coming in to bid me good-night again.

The kind, sprightly old lady stirred the fire to a brighter blaze, and sat herself down in the arm-chair opposite to it.

"I have come to tell you a little about the state of affairs here, my dear," she began, trivially. "I must have you know all about us and care all about us. In the first place, you must know that it is a cherished plan of my father's to see Guy and Ida married to each other."

"Is it?" I replied. "Yes; both my brothers are dead. Ida is the only child of my second brother, Arthur, and Arthur was his father's favourite; in the same way Ida is his favourite grandchild; she has always lived here; he was a member of the Towers, and as she can't be unless she marries Guy, why he wants her to marry Guy, you see."

"And how do they both like the plan?" I asked, beginning to be intensely interested in the romance which had commenced (for me) just outside the railway station.

Miss Pomfret laughed and shook her head. "Ida likes it well enough, but Guy is inscrutable. The less I do, my dear, I'm not so fond of my niece as I am of my nephew."

"What a beauty she is!" I exclaimed. "Yes, she is; and she has never thought of or cared for any one besides her beauty from the moment she had her first beauty. Guy's a great deal too good for her; but that is not what I come in to say. Have you brought your habit with you?"

"I haven't one," I confessed, with bluntness. "Can you ride?" "I used to ride a good deal with Guy in a rough sort of way when we were out for our autumn trips."

"Ah, well! we'll see about a habit for you; meantime you must wear an old skirt. Ida has planned a ride for to-morrow, meaning to take Guy out by herself. Now I mean you to go too, my dear." Then the old lady patted me on the cheek, and left me.

Wishing to think well of what was so lovely, I tried hard not to see on the following day that Ida either grudged me the pleasure Miss Pomfret had procured for me, or that she disliked my society. She opened her great stately blue eyes when I came near to the skirt half lighted, and she shrugged her own well-habituated shoulders when we walked out to mount our horses, and she saw that a very handsome brown gelding had been reserved for me. Then she turned away, and Guy Pomfret put her up on her own beautiful mare, Gurney, and when she was mounted, she (Ida) realised Tennyson's description of that peerless queen very well. I thought,

"She looked so lovely as she swung, The rein with dainty finger tips; A man had given all other bliss, And all his worldly hopes for this, To waste his whole heart in one kiss Upon her perfect lips."

Then my turn came, and I was horribly afraid lest I might fail to rise like a bird to the saddle as Ida had done, and was proportionately grateful to Mr. Pomfret, and Fido when I found myself securely seated without having blundered at all.

"Puck is a charming horse, Miss Dunbar, but he likes to have his own way on the turf," Mr. Pomfret said, as he settled me. Then he added, good-naturedly, almost in a whisper, "Don't let him get his head—ride him on the curb."

"Thanks! I'll attend to your direction," I replied; and then Mr. Pomfret mounted his own powerful hunter, and we started.

Though it was mid-winter—Christmas-Eve in fact—there was no crispness in the air and no frost on the ground. The roads were muddy and heavy, and the atmosphere mild and humid. We rode slowly for three or four miles along the highway, and then Ida proposed that we should go on some downs that bordered the road, and "have a sharp canter in a sharper air."

"Remember," Mr. Guy Pomfret muttered, as we took the turn and I nodded assent, and drew my curb-rein a little tighter.

Puck went along over the billowing downs in a grand charging canter for about a couple of hundred yards. Then Ida Pomfret's mare flung past us the rider sitting erect and fair, her horse evidently well in hand, though it was going at racing speed. As she bounded ahead, Puck did something extraordinary with all his legs at once (Guy told me afterwards that he "broke"), he reared up his head, then lowered it suddenly with a jerk, and then went off in the wake of the mare at a pace that stretched him out flat nearly, and made my brain whirl.

I do not think that I was terrified, though I was well aware that I had no more control over Puck than I had over destiny. I was dimly conscious of Ida branching off to the right, while I was borne straight on towards what looked like a wall of blue sky. Another moment and I knew I was crossing the brow of a steep hill. Another and other hoofs than Puck's sounded in my ears close behind me—then something rose with a crashing noise, and crashed against me—a sharp snout through my chest—a roar sounded in my ears—horses seemed to be about and around me on every side, and it was all darkness.

When it came light again—that is, when I opened my eyes—I found myself lying on a green mound half way down the slope of a steep hill, with my head resting on Guy Pomfret's arm and Puck standing close by, looking brightly unconscious of having done anything wrong.

"What did I do?" I asked, and Guy replied, "Come an awful cropper with Puck in galloping down slope; but you're not hurt—tell me!—you're not hurt!"

I roused myself then, and found that my foot was in pain and turned the wrong way—my ankle was sprained, in fact. But I was not hurt! Puck! I was much more anxious about the handsome,

brilliant-looking little brown horse than about my own sprained ankle. "What's his name?"

"And where is she?"

"Ida?"

"Has she come," he replied gravely, as Miss Ida made her appearance round me, "as I thought she would, to see if she could help me to a selection?"

Miss Ida Pomfret came up and least forward gracefully on her pommel, still sitting well back in the saddle, to speak to me. "I hope you're not hurt; but I never saw such rash riding in my life, Miss Dunbar."

"Nor did I; but it was not Miss Dunbar's—"

"Mr. Pomfret replied, and I said—

"It really doesn't seem you started Puck."

"I did it most innocently, and saw with surprise that she coloured like fire."

"I suppose you will have nerve enough to ride home, if this boy leads Puck?" she asked; and I said:

"Oh, yes; but Mr. Pomfret shook his head."

"Miss Dunbar has sprained her ankle, Ida."

"Then how is she to get home?" Ida asked, "if you won't let her ride; she can't walk."

"You will see how she is to get home," he answered, picking me up in his arms, as he spoke. Then he mounted his own horse, holding me neatly the while; and I submitted passively through the arrangement.

"Really, Guy?" Miss Ida exclaimed indignantly, "do you think I am going to make one of such a procession?"

"That you'll please yourself about," he replied coolly; then he told the boy to lead Puck home carefully, and started up the hill at a slow pace.

I was half faint with the pain, and presently he saw that I was, I suppose, for he said:

"The sooner I get you home the better, for your sake, Miss Dunbar. This old fellow's gallop is like a rocking chair; tell me if you can bear it."

"He slackened the reins, and the horse went off like an arrow at once."

"Yes, I can bear this," I murmured, as he grasped me more firmly, and Guy Pomfret said:

"That's right—that's plenty; and then sang:

"Great Hebechen such? Der mond schonehell, Kumm! die Todten reiten schonehell."

"Great Hebechen such? Der Todt!"



"Say more of 'Lemors'." I roused myself to utter, as he paused; but he merely repeated the three lines he had already sung, and promised to read me the whole of the marvellous ballad that same afternoon.

I heard Mr. Pomfret tell his aunt when we reached home that "Ida had started off in the way that she knew Puck would never stand, and that Miss Dunbar managed him cleverly till he went down with her." And I saw Miss Rachel and her nephew exchange queer little sympathetic glances; but I did not know what they meant when they said that.

I think that I was almost glad that my ankle was sprained. It was well worth enduring all the pain I did endure, to be made so much of by the two people I liked best at the Towers. Sir Guy came and looked at me as I was stretched out on a couch in Miss Rachel's boudoir (she would not have me imprisoned in my bedroom, she said); looked at me through his eyeglasses, and remarked "It was a pity; but since you had it I was not disgraced at all." But Miss Pomfret and her nephew stayed with me, and did all they could to amuse me; she making little well-considered adjustments of the pillows at brief intervals; he reading me Lancers, and uttering well-adjusted phrases relative to the poem, that made me half afraid to mention it.

Ida was not agreeable when she came home. The accident was, in some measure, my fault to further me in the family, if I use me such an expression. She had "enjoyed her ride immensely," she said, before she was questioned concerning it, "enjoyed her ride immensely, as you can only enjoy a ride when you feel sure nothing awkward can possibly happen," she added, carelessly glancing at me, no one encouraged her to remain with us, so she soon lounged away, gracefully holding up her habit with one hand, the most regal looking little Amazon fairy I had ever seen.

Of course my ankle was well enough for me to get down stairs and join the family circle the following day. Who would not have put pain aside to be with a Pomfret at such a high festival as they held at that culminating point of the season, Christmas Day?

I could not go to church, but I was up and dressed, and down in the drawing room, ready to receive them when they returned. Ida looked like an Angora cat—lovelier than ever, in grey or mauve-coloured velvet and fur. What a beauty the girl was! How could any other woman hope to be looked at beside her?

There was a large company to dinner—a high-borne, wealthy company, who were, to my surprise, to the full as joyous and amusing as any of the Bohemians with whom I had been wont to associate during my brother's life.

After dinner we played at Spanish Merchant, and Buried Cities, and then, as something was said about dancing:

"Are you fond of it?" Guy Pomfret asked me in a low voice, and I answered with a look in my eyes:

"Oh, yes; but I can't now," looking at my ankle.

He did not say a word more to me, but turned to his kind old aunt.

"Why treat her to more dead-rose fruits than must be here in life," he said. "Miss Dunbar is fond of dancing, and Puck has consented to impair her capability for gratifying that fondness."

"Ida has contrived, you mean," the old lady replied (I only knew that she said this afterwards).

"Well, let us tell stories; you begin."

So the Elixir of dancing was given up, and "story telling" was made the order of what remained of the evening.

Guy Pomfret reserved his contribution till the last. Then he told a pretty peculiar golden vase, an old gorgon-embossed golden vase, with handles and a cover, that had been in the family for generations. It was a beautiful, pretty story in itself, and he told it longingly; so much so that I feeling my foolish tears well up, he stayed listening to his thrilling voice any longer, went away by myself to the study.

Presently he followed me. I had hurried myself on a couch, and was sobbing over the memory his story had evoked—the memory of my brilliant, bright, darling brother, who, two years ago, had had told us a story of a goblet in comic verse.

He soon won me to tell him "what was giving me my nervousness to speak of my dear old lady; of our quiet life so soon to be broken up, and my mother's gentle beauty and loving kindness. I ever told him of Guy's song."

"Some day or other I will tell you more about that even now, and I shall be so glad to hear some back to the others, or Ida will be seeking us."

We went back, and found that I had been missed, really missed. Both Sir Guy and Ida asked me, "where I had been all this time," almost eagerly, and old Miss Rachel nodded and laughed at me, and looked generally encouraging.

A week or two after this was writing to Helen, and I suppose that some of the dejection I was feeling on her account made itself manifest in my

face, for Mr. Pomfret asked me, "Why I write things that make me feel miserable?" and I told

"You need not be puffed from her unless you both like it," he said quickly. "I have promised to finish the romance of 'Guy's King' for you—how is it? Then he went on to tell me how, a short time before, he had gone into money-changer's shop in the Strand, and while he was receiving English silver for his French gold, a lady had entered and gazed at a watch and a ring, and a little silver cabinet with the name of 'Guy Dunbar' on it. I guessed it was my poor cousin's widow then, he added, "and I disliked her for what I knew now was some sisterly to help Guy's sister; she wanted you to come here, and I bless her for the set—for, Georgia, will you stay with me always?"

So the end of my letter to Helen was all hope and happiness, and a few months afterwards my health, as Mrs. Pomfret, was drunk by all the family, out of 'Guy's King'.

THE END.