

## (11) CHAPTER 6.

AND NOW, reader, observe our happy circle.

*Some time has passed. Adrian, Idris and I, are established in Windsor Castle. Lord Raymond has built a house near Perdita's cottage, as everyone still calls it, near the border of the great park, and he and my sister live there. The five of us have our separate occupations and our common amusements. In England's rare sunlight, we pass whole days in the canopying forest with our books and music. Darker, windy weather might find us on a higher spot, watching the clouds that veil the sky be torn and blown and scattered here and there. Frequent rains shut us indoors, where we spend our day in study; then music and song commence evening's fun. Idris has a natural musical talent and her well-trained voice is full and sweet. We're all as gleeful as summer insects, playful as children; we always smile when we meet one another; we can read contentment and joy in each other's countenances.*

*We travel, occasionally for days on end; we'll cross the country to visit any spot noted for beauty or historical interest. Sometimes we go up to London, and join the amusements of the busy throng; sometimes our retreat is invaded by visitors from town. These changes only make us more sensitive to the delights*

*of our own intimate circle, the peace of our divine forest, and our happy evenings in the halls of our beloved Castle. Our prime festivals we still hold, sentimentally, in Perdita's cottage; we never tire of talking about the past. Jealousy and disquiet are unknown among us. Neither fear nor hope of change disturbs our tranquility. Others say, We might be happy—we say—We are.*

Idris—she had a peculiarly frank, soft, and affectionate disposition. Her temper was always sweet; and although firm and resolute on any point that touched her heart, she was yielding to those she loved. Perdita's nature was less perfect; but tenderness and happiness improved her temper, and softened her natural reserve. Her intelligence was keen and comprehensive, her imagination vivid; she was sincere, generous, a good reasoner. Adrian, the matchless brother of my soul, the sensitive and excellent Adrian, loving all, and beloved by all, yet seemed destined not to find his own missing half to complete his happiness. He'd leave us, and wander alone in the woods, or sail his little skiff, his books his only companions. Often the gayest of our party, he was also the only one visited by fits of despondency. His slender frame seemed overcharged with the weight of life, and his soul appeared rather to inhabit his body than unite with it. I was hardly more devoted to my Idris than to her brother, and she loved him as her teacher, her friend, the benefactor who had secured to her the fulfillment of her dearest wishes.

And Raymond, the ambitious, restless Raymond, whose love of action found its best outlet now in conversational

exchanges about national affairs and moral philosophy: Adrian had the superiority in learning and eloquence; but Raymond possessed a quick penetration and a practical knowledge of life to counter with, and keep a subject in lively play. Lord Raymond, marked for greatness, was content to give up all his schemes of sovereignty and fame, to make one of us, the idling flowers of the field. His kingdom was Perdita's heart, his subjects her thoughts; by her he was loved, respected as a superior being, obeyed, waited on. No task or office, no devotion could be irksome to her, when it came to him. She would sit apart from us and watch him; she would weep for joy to think that Raymond was hers. She erected a temple for him in the depths of her being, and made every aspect of her personality a priestess vowed to his service. Perdita might be wayward, capricious; but her repentance was always bitter, her return entire, and even these discords suited him who was not formed by nature to float idly down the stream of life.

During the first year of their marriage, Perdita presented Raymond with a lovely girl. It was curious to trace the development in this miniature model of its father's traits. The same half-disdainful lips and smile of triumph, the same intelligent eyes, the same brow; she had his hands' tapered fingers and his chestnut hair. How very dear she was to Perdita! In the course of time, I too became a father, and our little darlings, our playthings and delights, called forth a thousand new and delicious emotions.

Truly, our lives were living proof of Plutarch's beautiful

remark, that “our souls have a natural inclination to love, being born as much to love, as to feel, to reason, to understand and remember.”

Years passed like this—five full ones. Orderly months succeeded one another, each dozen like the last. We talked of adopting more active pursuits, but still remained at Windsor, incapable of violating the charm that attached us to our secluded life. We found excuses for our idleness in our children, with whom we occupied ourselves in ways of bringing them up to more splendid careers. And, as Ariosto has it:

*Paremo aver qui tutto il ben raccolto*

*Che fra mortali in più parte si rimembra.*

(in his *Orlando Furioso*: “We seemed to have gathered together here the most distinguished selection from among mortals.”) But the course of events, having flowed so long in hushed tranquility, finally struck obstacles; white-water and breakers disturbed and woke us from our pleasant dream.

A new Lord Protector of England was to be chosen. Raymond, eager to witness and even take part in the election, wanted us to go to London with him. As usual, he got his way.

On our journey up to town I watched him, but could make little of him. If Raymond had united himself to Idris, this Protectorship was the post that would have been his stepping-stone to his nation’s pinnacle. With his desire for power and fame so nearly crowned to the fullest measure, he’d exchanged a scepter for a lute, a kingdom for Perdita. Did he think of this as we rode

along? He was particularly gay, playing with his child, and making jokes over every word anyone uttered. Perhaps he'd spotted the cloud upon Perdita's brow. She kept trying to fight it, but as she looked at Raymond and her girl, her gaze would grow wistful and then her eyes fill with tears, as if she feared some evil would betide them. And so she did. A presentiment of the worst kind hung over her. She leaned from the window looking on the forest, and the turrets of the Castle, and as these were lost behind the intervening landscape, she exclaimed in a passionate voice:

“Scenes of happiness! Scenes sacred to devoted love, when shall I see you again? And when I do, shall I be still the beloved and joyous Perdita I am—or more like the ghost of myself, a lost, heart-broken wanderer among your groves?”

“Silliness!” cried Raymond. “My dear, what is going on in your little head that you should have become so sublimely dismal all of a sudden? Cheer up!” he ordered her.

The following morning Lord Raymond visited us early; our London places were all in the same part of town, near Hyde Park. He said,

“I come to you with a project, only half certain that you'll agree to help me, but resolved to go through with it, whether you do or not. Promise me secrecy, though, before I describe it. You don't need to contribute to my success, but at least let me pursue it my way.”

“Well, I promise.” So did Idris. “And, so?”

“And so, my dear friends, tell me—why have we come to

London? To be present at the election of a Protector, and to give our yea or nay for a shuffling Sir So-and-So? Or for that noisy Ryland? Do you honestly believe that I brought us all to town for that? No, we will have a Protector of our own. We will set up a candidate, and ensure his success. We will nominate Adrian, and do our best to bestow on him the power to which he is entitled by his birth, and which he merits through his virtues.

“Don’t answer; I know all your objections, and will reply to them in order. First, Whether he will or will not consent to become a great man? Leave the task of persuasion on that point to me; I do not ask you to assist me there. Secondly, Whether he ought to exchange his daytime job of plucking blackberries, and nursing wounded partridges, for the command of a nation? My dear Lionel, we are married men, we’re happy just amusing our wives and dancing around with our children. But Adrian is alone, wifeless, childless, unoccupied. I have long observed him. He pines for want of some interest in life. His heart, exhausted by his early sufferings, is like a recovering invalid who shrinks from all excitement. But his understanding, his charity, his virtues, want a field for exercise and display; and we will procure it for him.

“Besides, is it not a shame, Idris, that your brother’s genius should pass from the earth without having borne fruit? Nature bestowed on him every gift in prodigality—birth, wealth, talent, goodness. Do you think She composed the best of men for no purpose? Believe me, he was destined to be the author of

infinite good to his native England. Doesn't everyone love and admire him? and does he not delight in any chance to show his love to all? Come, I see that you're already persuaded, and will second me when I propose him tonight in Parliament."

"You've got your arguments in excellent order," I replied. "And, if Adrian consents, they are unanswerable. I'd add only one condition—that you do nothing unless he does consent."

Raymond paused. "I'd planned differently; but you may be right. So be it. I'll go instantly to Adrian—and Idris, if he inclines to consent, I hope you won't destroy my labor by persuading him to return to his squirrel circle in Windsor Forest, will you?"

"Trust me," she replied, "to preserve a strict neutrality."

"For my part," said I, "I'm too well convinced of our friend's worth, and the rich harvest of benefits that all England would reap from his Protectorship, to deprive my fellow citizens of such a blessing, if he'll consent to bestow it on them."

In the evening came Adrian's visit; he entered laughing. "Do you two cabal against me? You plan to help Raymond pull a poor visionary from the clouds, away from his heavenly rays and airs, and surround him with the artillery fire of earthly grandeur, instead? I thought you knew me better."

"I do know you better," I replied, "than to think that becoming Lord Protector would make you happy. But the good you'd do for others must appear as some inducement. If the time is ripe, indeed, what better chance to put your theories into practice, and bring about the reforms needed to establish that perfect system of government you love to talk about."

“You speak of an almost-forgotten dream,” said Adrian, sadness growing in his look. “The visions of my boyhood have long since faded in the light of reality; I know now that I am not a man fitted to govern nations. It’s enough for me, if I can keep in wholesome rule the little kingdom of my own mortality.

“But don’t you catch, Lionel, our noble friend’s drift? He might have missed it himself. Lord Raymond was never born to be a drone in the hive and find contentment in our pastoral life. He believes he ought to be satisfied; he imagines his present state and situation to be fixed; even in his own heart, he plans no change for himself. But don’t you see? Under the idea of exalting me, he’s chalking out a new path for himself, one that gives scope to his tremendous mental powers—the path of action from which he has long wandered.

“Let *us* be the ones pushing *him*. Raymond, the noble, the warlike, the great in every quality that can adorn a mind and person; he is fitted to be the Protector of England. If I—that is, if *we* propose him, he’s certain to be elected. As for Perdita, the ambition she fulfilled by marrying Raymond has remained a covered fire; Verney, your sister will rejoice in the glory and advancement of her lord—and, coyly and prettily, be not too discontented with her share. And we, the wise of the land, will return to our Castle, and like Cincinnatus (or George Washington) take to our usual labors, until our friend shall require our help again.”

For many reasons, Adrian’s scheme was by far the more feasible. His determination never to enter into public life could

not be shaken, and the delicacy of his health was a sufficient argument against trying. So—could we induce Raymond to confess his secret wishes for honors and fame? Adrian had already primed him. He entered while we were speaking, with a look and manner that betrayed irresolution and anxiety; but a few words from us decided him. Now hope and joy sparkled in his eyes; the idea of re-embarking on a cherished career made him energetic and bold. Immediately we started to discuss his chances, the merits of the other candidates, and the voters' dispositions.

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