

At The Sign Of The Eagle

Gilbert Parker

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AT THE SIGN OF THE EAGLE

By Gilbert Parker

"Life in her creaking shoes
Goes, and more formal grows,
A round of calls and cues:
Love blows as the wind blows.
Blows! . . ."

"Well, what do you think of them, Molly?" said Sir Duke Lawless to his wife, his eyes resting with some amusement on a big man and a little one talking to Lord Hampstead.

"The little man is affected, gauche, and servile. The big one picturesque and superior in a raw kind of way. He wishes to be rude to some one, and is disappointed because, just at the moment, Lord Hampstead is too polite to give him his cue. A dangerous person in a drawing-room, I should

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think; but interesting. You are a bold man to bring them here, Duke. Is it not awkward for our host?"

"Hampstead did it with his eyes open. Besides, there is business behind it--railways, mines, and all that; and Hampstead's nephew is going to the States fortune-hunting. Do you see?"

Lady Lawless lifted her eyebrows. "'To what base uses are we come, Horatio!' You invite me to dinner and--'I'll fix things up right.' That is the proper phrase, for I have heard you use it. Status for dollars. Isn't it low? I know you do not mean what you say, Duke."

Sir Duke's eyes were playing on the men with a puzzled expression, as though trying to read the subject of their conversation; and he did not reply immediately. Soon, however, he turned and looked down at his wife genially, and said: "Well, that's about it, I suppose. But really there is nothing unusual in this, so far as Mr. John Vandewaters is concerned, for in his own country he travels 'the parlours of the Four Hundred,' and is considered 'a very elegant gentleman.' We must respect a man according to the place he holds in his own community. Besides, as you suggest, Mr. Vandewaters is interesting. I might go further, and say that he is a very good fellow indeed."

"You will be asking him down to Craigrue next," said Lady Lawless, inquisition in her look.

"That is exactly what I mean to do, with your permission, my dear. I hope to see him laying about among the grouse in due season."

"My dear Duke, you are painfully Bohemian. I can remember when you were perfectly precise and exclusive, and--"

"What an awful prig I must have been!"

"Don't interrupt. That was before you went aroving in savage countries, and picked up all sorts of acquaintances, making friends with the most impossible folk. I should never be surprised to see you drive Shon McGann--and his wife, of course--and Pretty Pierre--with some other man's wife--up to the door in a dogcart; their clothes in a saddle-bag, or something less reputable, to stay a month. Duke, you have lost your decorum; you are a gipsy."

"I fear Shon McGann and Pierre wouldn't enjoy being with us as I should enjoy having them. You can never understand what a life that is out in Pierre's country. If it weren't for you and the bairn, I should be off there now. There is something of primeval man in me. I am never so healthy and happy, when away from you, as in prowling round the outposts of civilisation, and living on beans and bear's meat."

He stretched to his feet, and his wife rose with him. There was a fine colour on his cheek, and his eye had a pleasant fiery energy. His wife tapped him on the arm with her fan. She understood him very well, though pretending otherwise. "Duke, you are incorrigible. I am in daily dread of your starting off in the middle of the night, leaving me--"

"Watering your couch with your tears?"

"--and hearing nothing more from you till a cable from Quebec or Winnipeg tells me that you are on your way to the Arctic Circle with Pierre or

some other heathen. But, seriously, where did you meet Mr. Vandewaters--Heavens, what a name!--and that other person? And what is the other person's name?"

"The other person carries the contradictory name of Stephen Pride."

"Why does he continually finger his face, and show his emotions so? He assents to everything said to him by an appreciative exercise of his features."

"My dear, you ask a great and solemn question. Let me introduce the young man, that you may get your answer at the fountain-head."

"Wait a moment, Duke. Sit down and tell me when and where you met these men, and why you have continued the acquaintance."

"Molly," he said, obeying her, "you are a terrible inquisitor, and the privacy of one's chamber were the kinder place to call one to account. But I bend to your implacability. . . . Mr. Vandewaters, like myself, has a taste for roving, though our aims are not identical. He has a fine faculty for uniting business and pleasure. He is not a thorough sportsman--there is always a certain amount of enthusiasm, even in the unrewarded patience of the true hunter; but he sufficeth. Well, Mr. Vandewaters had been hunting in the far north, and looking after a promising mine at the same time. He was on his way south at one angle, I at another angle, bound for the same point. Shon McGann was with me; Pierre with Vandewaters. McGann left me, at a certain point, to join his wife at a Barracks of the Riders of the Plains. I had about a hundred miles to travel alone. Well, I got along the first fifty all right. Then came trouble. In a bad place of the hills I fell and broke an ankle bone. I had an Eskimo dog of the right sort with me. I wrote a line on a bit of birch bark, tied it round his neck, and started him away, trusting my luck that he would pull up somewhere. He did. He ran into Vandewaters's camp that evening. Vandewaters and Pierre started away at once. They had dogs, and reached me soon."

"It was the first time I had seen Pierre for years. They fixed me up, and we started south. And that's as it was in the beginning with Mr. John Vandewaters and me."

Lady Lawless had been watching the two strangers during the talk, though once or twice she turned and looked at her husband admiringly. When he had finished she said: "That is very striking. What a pity it is that men we want to like spoil all by their lack of form!"

"Don't be so sure about Vandewaters. Does he look flurried by these surroundings?"

"No. He certainly has an air of contentment. It is, I suppose, the usual air of self-made Americans."

"Go to London, E.C., and you will find the same, plus smugness. Now, Mr. Vandewaters has real power--and taste too, as you will see. Would you think Mr. Stephen Pride a self-made man?"

"I cannot think of any one else who would be proud of the patent. Please to consider the seals about his waistcoat, and the lady-like droop of his shoulders."

"Yet he is thought to be a young man of parts. He has money, made by his ancestors; he has been round the world; he belongs to societies for culture and--"

"And he will rave of the Poet's Corner, ask if one likes Pippa Passes, and expect to be introduced to every woman in the room at a tea-party, to say nothing of proposing impossible things, such as taking one's girl friends to the opera alone, sending them boxes of confectionery, and writing them dreadfully reverential notes at the same time. Duke, the creature is impossible, believe me. Never, never, if you love me, invite him to Craighuie. I met one of his tribe at Lady Macintyre's when I was just out of school; and at the dinner-table, when the wine went round, he lifted his voice and asked for a cup of tea, saying he never 'drank.' Actually he did, Duke."

Her husband laughed quietly. He had a man's enjoyment of a woman's dislike of bad form. "A common criminal man, Molly. Tell me, which is the greater crime: to rob a bank or use a fish-knife for asparagus?"

Lady Lawless fanned herself. "Duke, you make me hot. But if you will have the truth: the fish-knife business by all means. Nobody need feel uncomfortable about the burglary, except the burglar; but see what a position for the other person's hostess."

"My dear, women have no civic virtues. Their credo is, 'I believe in beauty and fine linen, and the thing that is not gauche.'"

His wife was smiling. "Well, have it your own way. It is a creed of comfort, at any rate. And now, Duke, if I must meet the man of mines and railways and the spare person making faces at Lord Hampstead, let it be soon, that it may be done with; and pray don't invite them to Craighuie till I have a chance to speak with you again. I will not have impossible people at a house-party."

"What a difficult fellow your husband is, Molly!"

"Difficult; but perfectly possible. His one fault is a universal sympathy which shines alike on the elect--and the others."

"So. Well, this is our dance. After it is over, prepare for the Americanos."

Half-an-hour later Mr. Vandewaters was standing in a conspicuous corner talking to Lady Lawless.

"It is, then, your first visit to England?" she asked. He had a dry, deliberate voice, unlike the smooth, conventional voices round him. "Yes, Lady Lawless," he replied: "it's the first time I've put my foot in London town, and--perhaps you won't believe it of an American--I find it doesn't take up a very conspicuous place."

The humour was slightly accentuated, and Lady Lawless shrank a little, as if she feared the depths of divertisement to which this speech might lead; but a quick look at the man assured her of his common-sense, and she answered: "It is of the joys of London that no one is so important but finds the space he fills a small one, which may be filled acceptably by some one else at any moment. It is easy for kings and princes even--we have secluded princes here now--to get lost and forgotten in London." "Well, that leaves little chance for ordinary Americans, who don't bank

on titles."

She looked up, puzzled in spite of herself. But she presently said, with frankness and naivete: "What does 'bank on titles' mean?"

He stroked his beard, smiling quaintly, and said: "I don't know how to put the thing better-it seems to fill the bill. But, anyway, Americans are republicans; and don't believe in titles, and--"

"O, pardon me," she interrupted: "of course, I see."

"We've got little ways of talking not the same as yours. You don't seem to have the snap to conversation that we have in the States. But I'll say here that I think you have got a better style of talking. It isn't exhausting."

"Mr. Pride said to me a moment ago that they spoke better English in Boston than any other place in the world."

"Did he, though, Lady Lawless? That's good. Well, I guess he was only talking through his hat."

She was greatly amused. Her first impressions were correct. The man was interesting. He had a quaint, practical mind. He had been thrown upon his own resources, since infancy almost, in a new country; and he had seen with his own eyes, nakedly, and without predisposition or instruction. From childhood thoroughly adaptable, he could get into touch with things quickly, and instantly like or dislike them. He had been used to approach great concerns with fearlessness and competency. He respected a thing only for its real value, and its intrinsic value was as clear to him as the market value. He had, perhaps, an exaggerated belief in the greatness of his own country, because he liked eagerness and energy and daring. The friction and hurry of American life added to his enjoyment. They acted on him like a stimulating air, in which he was always bold, collected, and steady. He felt an exhilaration in being superior to the rustle of forces round him. It had been his habit to play the great game of business with decision and adroitness. He had not spared his opponent in the fight; he had crushed where his interests were in peril and the sport played into his hands; comforting himself, if he thought of the thing, with the knowledge that he himself would have been crushed if the other man had not. He had never been wilfully unfair, nor had he used dishonourable means to secure his ends: his name stood high in his own country for commercial integrity; men said: he "played square." He had, maybe, too keen a contempt for dulness and incompetency in enterprise, and he loathed red-tape; but this was racial. His mind was as open as his manners. He was utterly approachable. He was a millionaire, and yet in his own offices in New York he was as accessible as a President. He handled things without gloves, and this was not a good thing for any that came to him with a weak case. He had a penetrating intelligence; and few men attempted, after their first sophistical statements, to impose upon him: he sent them away unhappy. He did not like England altogether: first, because it lacked, as he said, enterprise; and because the formality, decorum and excessive convention fretted him. He saw that in many things the old land was backward, and he thought that precious time was being wasted. Still, he could see that there were things, purely social, in which the Londoners were at advantage; and he acknowledged this when he said, concerning Stephen Pride's fond boast, that he was "talking through his hat."

Lady Lawless smiled, and after a moment rejoined:

"Does it mean that he was mumming, as it were, like a conjurer?"

"Exactly. You are pretty smart, Lady Lawless; for I can see that, from your stand-point, it isn't always easy to catch the meaning of sayings like that. But they do hit the case, don't they?"

"They give a good deal of individuality to conversation," was the vague reply. "What, do you think, is the chief lack in England?"

"Nerve and enterprise. But I'm not going to say you ought to have the same kind of nerve as ours. We are a different tribe, with different surroundings, and we don't sit in the same kind of saddle. We ride for all we're worth all the time. You sit back and take it easy. We are never satisfied unless we are behind a fast trotter; you are content with a good cob that steps high, tosses its head, and has an aristocratic stride."

"Have you been in the country much?" she asked, without any seeming relevancy.

He was keen enough. He saw the veiled point of her question. "No: I've never been in the country here," he said. "I suppose you mean that I don't see or know England till I've lived there."

"Quite so, Mr. Vandewaters." She smiled to think what an undistinguished name it was. It suggested pumpkins in the front garden. Yet here its owner was perfectly at his ease, watching the scene before him with good-natured superiority. "London is English; but it is very cosmopolitan, you know," she added; "and I fancy you can see it is not a place for fast trotters. The Park would be too crowded for that--even if one wished to drive a Maud S."

He turned his slow keen eyes on her, and a smile broadened into a low laugh, out of which he said:

"What do you know of Maud S? I didn't think you would be up in racing matters."

"You forget that my husband is a traveller, and an admirer of Americans and things American."

"That's so," he answered; "and a staving good traveller he is. You don't catch him asleep, I can tell you, Lady Lawless. He has stuff in him."

"The stuff to make a good American?"

"Yes; with something over. He's the kind of Englishman that can keep cool when things are ticklish, and look as if he was in a parlour all the time. Americans keep cool, but look cheeky. O, I know that. We square our shoulders and turn out our toes, and push our hands into our pockets, and act as if we owned the world. Hello--by Jingo!" Then, apologetically: "I beg your pardon, Lady Lawless; it slipped."

Lady Lawless followed Mr. Vandewaters's glance, and saw, passing on her husband's arm, a tall, fascinating girl. She smiled meaningly to herself, as she sent a quick quizzical look at the American, and said, purposely misinterpreting his exclamation: "I am not envious, Mr. Vandewaters."

"Of course not. That's a commoner thing with us than with you. American girls get more notice and attention from their cradles up, and they want it all along the line. You see, we've mostly got the idea that an Englishman expects from his wife what an American woman expects from her husband."

"How do Americans get these impressions about us?"

"From our newspapers, I guess; and the newspapers take as the ground-work of their belief the Bow Street cases where Englishmen are cornered for beating their wives."

"Suppose we were to judge of American Society by the cases in a Chicago Divorce Court?"

"There you have me on toast. That's what comes of having a husband who takes American papers. Mind you, I haven't any idea that the American papers are right. I've had a lot to do with newspapers, and they are pretty ignorant, I can tell you--cheap all round. What's a newspaper, anyway, but an editor, more or less smart and overworked, with an owner behind him who has got some game on hand? I know: I've been there."

"How have you 'been there'?"

"I've owned four big papers all at once, and had fifty others under my thumb."

Lady Lawless caught her breath; but she believed him. "You must be very rich."

"Owning newspapers doesn't mean riches. It's a lever, though, for tipping the dollars your way."

"I suppose they have--tipped your way?"

"Yes: pretty well. But, don't follow this lead any farther, Lady Lawless, or you may come across something that will give you a start. I should like to keep on speaking terms with you."

"You mean that a man cannot hold fifty newspapers under his thumb, and live in the glare of a search-light also?"

"Exactly. You can't make millions without pulling wires."

She saw him watching the girl on her husband's arm. She had the instinct of her sex. She glanced at the stately girl again; then at Mr. Vandewaters critically, and rejoined, quizzically: "Did you--make millions?"

His eyes still watching, he replied abstractedly. "Yes: a few handfals, and lost a few--'that's why I'm here.'"

"To get them back on the London market?"

"That's why I am here."

"You have not come in vain?"

"I could tell you better in a month or so from now. In any case, I don't stand to lose. I've come to take things away from England."

"I hope you will take away a good opinion of it."

"If there'd been any doubt of it half an hour ago, it would be all gone this minute."

"Which is nice of you; and not in your usual vein, I should think. But, Mr. Vandewaters, we want you to come to Craighuie, our country place, to spend a week. Then you will have a chance to judge us better, or rather more broadly and effectively." She was looking at the girl, and at that moment she caught Sir Duke's eye. She telegraphed to him to come.

"Thank you, Lady Lawless, I'm glad you have asked me. But--" He glanced to where Mr. Pride was being introduced to the young lady on Sir Duke's arm, and paused.

"We are hoping," she added, interpreting his thought, and speaking a little dryly, "that your friend, Mr. Stephen Pride"--the name sounded so ludicrous--"will join us."

"He'll be proud enough, you may be sure. It's a singular combination, Pride and myself, isn't it? But, you see, he has a fortune which, as yet, he has never been able to handle for himself; and I do it for him. We are partners, and, though you mightn't think it, he has got more money now than when he put his dollars at my disposal to help me make a few millions at a critical time."

Lady Lawless let her fan touch Mr. Vandewaters's arm. "I am going to do you a great favour. You see that young lady coming to us with my husband? Well, I am going to introduce you to her. It is such as she--such women--who will convince you--"

"Yes?"

"--that you have yet to make your--what shall I call it?--Ah, I have it: your 'biggest deal,'--and, in truth, your best."

"Is that so?" rejoined Vandewaters musingly. "Is that so? I always thought I'd make my biggest deal in the States. Who is she? She is handsome."

"She is more than handsome, and she is the Honourable Gracia Raglan."

"I don't understand about 'The Honourable.'"

"I will explain that another time."

A moment later Miss Raglan, in a gentle bewilderment, walked down the ballroom on the arm of the millionaire, half afraid that something gauche would happen; but by the time she had got to the other end was reassured, and became interested.

Sir Duke said to his wife in an aside, before he left her with Mr. Vandewaters's financial partner: "What is your pretty conspiracy, Molly?"

"Do talk English, Duke, and do not interfere."

A few hours later, on the way home, Sir Duke said: "You asked Mr. Pride too?"

"Yes; I grieve to say."

"Why grieve?"

"Because his experiences with us seem to make him dizzy. He will be terribly in earnest with every woman in the house, if--"

"If you do not keep him in line yourself?"

"Quite so. And the creature is not even interesting."

"Cast your eye about. He has millions; you have cousins."

"You do not mean that, Duke? I would see them in their graves first. He says 'My lady' every other sentence, and wants to send me flowers, and a box for the opera, and to drive me in the Park."

Her husband laughed. "I'll stake my life he can't ride. You will have him about the place like a tame cat." Then, seeing that his wife was annoyed: "Never mind, Molly, I will help you all I can. I want to be kind to them."

"I know you do. But what is your 'pretty conspiracy,' Duke?"

"A well-stocked ranche in Colorado." He did not mean it. And she knew it.

"How can you be so mercenary?" she replied.

Then they both laughed, and said that they were like the rest of the world.

II

Lady Lawless was an admirable hostess, and she never appeared to better advantage in the character than during the time when Miss Gracia Raglan, Mr. John Vandewaters, and Mr. Stephen Pride were guests at Craigrue. The men accepted Mr. Vandewaters at once as a good fellow and a very sensible man. He was a heavy-weight for riding; but it was not the hunting season, and, when they did ride, a big horse carried him very well. At grouse-shooting he showed to advantage. Mr. Pride never rode. He went shooting only once, and then, as Mr. Vandewaters told him, he got "rattled." He was then advised by his friend to remain at home and cultivate his finer faculties. At the same time, Mr. Vandewaters parenthetically remarked to Sir Duke Lawless that Mr. Pride knew the poets backwards, and was smart at French. He insisted on bringing out the good qualities of his comrade; but he gave him much strong advice privately. He would have done it just the same at the risk of losing a fortune, were it his whim--he would have won the fortune back in due course.

At the present time Mr. Vandewaters was in the heat of some large commercial movements. No one would have supposed it, save for the fact that telegrams and cablegrams were brought to him day and night. He had liberally salaried the telegraph-clerk to work after hours, simply to be

at his service. The contents of these messages never shook his equanimity. He was quiet, urbane, dry-mannered, at all times. Mr. Pride, however, was naturally excitable. He said of himself earnestly that he had a sensitive nature. He said it to Mrs. Gregory Thorne, whose reply was: "Dear me, and when things are irritating and painful to you do you never think of suicide?" Then she turned away to speak to some one, as if she had been interrupted, and intended to take up the subject again; but she never did. This remark caused Mr. Pride some nervous moments. He was not quite sure how she meant it. But it did not depress him as it might otherwise have done, for his thoughts were running much in another channel with a foolish sort of elation.

As Lady Lawless had predicted, he was assiduously attentive to her, and it needed all her tact and cheerful frankness to keep him in line. She managed it very well: Mr. Pride's devotion was not too noticeable to the other guests. She tried to turn his attentions to some pretty girls; but, although there were one or two who might, in some weak moments, have compromised with his millions, he did no more than saunter with them on the terrace and oppress them with his lisping egotism. Every one hinted that he seemed an estimable, but trying, young man; and, as Sir Duke said to his wife, the men would not have him at any price.

As for Mr. Vandewaters and Gracia Raglan, Lady Lawless was not very sure that her delicate sympathy was certain of reward. The two were naturally thrown together a good deal; but Miss Raglan was a girl of singular individuality and high-mindedness, and she was keen enough to see from the start what Lady Lawless suspected might happen. She did not resent this,--she was a woman; but it roused in her a spirit of criticism, and she threw up a barrier of fine reserve, which puzzled Mr. Vandewaters. He did not see that Lady Lawless was making a possible courtship easy for him. If he had, it would have made no difference: he would have looked at it as at most things, broadly. He was not blind to the fact that his money might be a "factor", but, as he said to himself, his millions were a part of him--they represented, like whist-counters, so much pluck and mother-wit. He liked the general appreciation of them: he knew very well that people saw him in them and them in him. Miss Raglan attracted him from the moment of meeting. She was the first woman of her class that he had ever met closely; and the possibility of having as his own so adorable a comrade was inspiring. He sat down sometimes as the days went on--it was generally when he was shaving--and thought upon his intention regarding Miss Raglan, in relation to his humble past; for he had fully made up his mind to marry her, if she would have him. He wondered what she would think when he told her of his life; and he laughed at the humour of the situation. He had been into Debrett, and he knew that she could trace her family back to the Crusades.

He determined to make a clean breast of it. One day he was obliged to remain at the house in expectation of receiving important telegrams, and the only people who appeared at lunch were Lady Lawless, Mrs. Gregory Thorne (who was expecting her husband), Miss Raglan; Pride, and himself. While at luncheon he made up his mind to have a talk with Miss Raglan. In the library after luncheon the opportunity was given. It was a warm, pleasant day, and delightful in the grounds.

After one or two vain efforts to escape, Mrs. Gregory Thorne and Lady Lawless resigned themselves to the attentions of Mr. Pride; and for once Lady Lawless did not check Mrs. Thorne's irony. It was almost a satisfaction to see Mr. Pride's bewildered looks, and his inability to know whether or not he should resent (whether it would be proper to

resent) this softly-showered satire.

Mr. Vandewaters and Gracia Raglan talked more freely than they had ever done before.

"Do you really like England?" she said to him; then, waving her hand lightly to the beeches and the clean-cropped grass through the window, "I mean do you like our 'trim parterres,' our devotion to mere living, pleasure, sport, squiring, and that sort of thing?"

He raised his head, glanced out, drew in a deep breath, thrust his hands down in the pockets of his coat, and looking at her with respectful good humour, said: "Like it? Yes, right down to the ground. Why shouldn't I! It's the kind of place I should like to come to in my old days. You needn't die in a hurry here. See?"

"Are you sure you would not be like the old sailors who must live where they can scent the brine? You have been used to an active, adventurous, hurried life. Do you think you could endure this humdrum of enjoyment?"

It would be hard to tell quite what was running in Gracia Raglan's mind, and, for the moment, she herself hardly knew; but she had a sudden, overmastering wish to make the man talk: to explore and, maybe, find surprising--even trying--things. She was astonished that she enjoyed his society so keenly. Even now, as she spoke, she remembered a day and a night since his coming, when he was absent in London; also how the party seemed to have lost its character and life, and how, when Mr. Pride condescended, for a few moments, to decline from Lady Lawless upon herself, she was even pleasant to him, making him talk about Mr. Vandewaters, and relishing the enthusiastic loyalty of the supine young man. She, like Lady Lawless, had learned to see behind the firm bold exterior, not merely a notable energy, force, self-reliance, and masterfulness, but a native courtesy, simplicity, and refinement which surprised her. Of all the men she knew not a half-dozen had an appreciation of nature or of art. They affected art, and some of them went to the Academy or the private views in Bond Street; but they had little feeling for the business. They did it in a well-bred way, with

taste, but not with warmth.

Mr. Vandewaters now startled her by quoting suddenly lines from an English poet unknown to her. By chance she was turning over the Academy pictures of the year, and came at last to one called "A Japanese Beauty of Old Days"--an exquisite thing.

"Is it not fascinating?" she said. "So piquant and fresh."

He gave a silent laugh, as was his custom when he enjoyed anything, and then replied:

"I came across a little book of verses one day in the States. A friend of mine, the president of a big railway, gave it to me. He does some painting himself when he travels in his Pullman in the Rockies. Well, it had some verses on just such a picture as that. Hits it off right, Miss Raglan."

"Verses?" she remarked, lifting her eyebrows. She expected something out of the "poet's corner" of a country newspaper. "What are they?"

"Well, one's enough to show the style. This is it:

"Was I a Samurai renowned,
Two-sworded, fierce, immense of bow?
A histrion angular and profound?
A priest? or porter? Child, although
I have forgotten clean, I know
That in the shade of Fujisan,
What time the cherry-orchards blow,
I loved you once in old Japan."

The verse on the lips of Mr. Vandewaters struck her strangely. He was not like any man she had known. Most self-made Englishmen, with such a burly exterior and energy, and engaged in such pursuits, could not, to save themselves from hanging, have impressed her as Mr. Vandewaters did. There was a big round sympathy in the tone, a timbre in the voice, which made the words entirely fitting. Besides, he said them without any kind of affectation, and with a certain turn of dry humour, as if he were inwardly laughing at the idea of the poem.

"The verses are charming," she said, musingly; "and the idea put that way is charming also. But do you think there would be much amusement in living half-a-dozen times, or even twice, unless you were quite sure that you remembered everything? This gentleman was peculiarly fortunate to recall Fujisan, and the orange orchards--and the girl."

"I believe you are right. One life is about enough for most of us. Memory is all very fine; but you'd want a life set apart for remembering the others after awhile."

"Why do you not add, 'And that would bore one?' Most of the men I know would say so."

"Well, I never used the word that way in my life. When I don't like a thing, that ends it--it has got to go."

"You cannot do that with everything."

"Pretty much, if I set my mind to it. It is astonishing how things'll come round your way if you keep on thinking and willing them so."

"Have you always got everything you wanted?" He had been looking off into the grounds through the open window. Now he turned slowly upon her.

"So far I have got everything I set my mind to get. Little things don't count. You lose them sometimes because you want to work at something else; sometimes because, as in cards, you are throwing a few away to save the whole game."

He looked at her, as she thought, curiously. In his mind he was wondering if she knew that he had made up his mind to marry her. She was suddenly made aware of the masterfulness of his spirit, which might, she knew, be applied to herself.

"Let us go into the grounds," he added, all at once. Soon after, in the shade of the trees, she broke in upon the thread of their casual conversation. "A few moments ago," she murmured, "you said: 'One life is about enough for most of us.' Then you added a disparaging remark about memory. Well, that doesn't seem like your usual point of view--more like

that of Mr. Pride; but not so plaintive, of course. Pray do smoke," she added, as, throwing back his coat, he exposed some cigars in his waistcoat pocket. "I am sure you always smoke after lunch."

He took out a cigar, cut off the end, and put it in his mouth. But he did not light it. Then he glanced up at her with a grave quizzical look as though wondering what would be the effect of his next words, and a smile played at his lips.

"What I meant was this. I think we get enough out of our life to last us for centuries. It's all worth doing from the start, no matter what it is: working, fighting, marching and countermarching, plotting and counterplotting, backing your friends and hating your foes, playing big games and giving others a chance to, standing with your hand on the lynch-pin, or pulling your head safe out of the hot-pot. But I don't think it is worth doing twice. The interest wouldn't be fresh. For men and women and life, with a little different dress, are the same as they always were; and there's only the same number of passions working now, as at the beginning. I want to live life up to the hilt; because it is all new as I go on; but never twice."

"Indeed?" She looked at him earnestly for a moment, and then added: "I should think you would have seen lost chances; and doing things a second time might do them better."

"I never missed chances," he replied, simply: "never except twice, and then--"

"And then?"

"Then it was to give the other fellow a chance."

"Oh!" There was a kind of dubiousness in her tone. He noticed it. "You can hardly understand, Miss Raglan. Fact is, it was one of those deals when you can make a million, in a straight enough game; but it comes out of another man--one, maybe, that you don't know; who is playing just the same as you are. I have had a lot of sport; but I've never crippled any one man, when my engine has been dead on him. I have played more against organisations than single men."

"What was the most remarkable chance you ever had to make a million, and did not?"

He threw back his head, smiling shrewdly. "When by accident my enemy got hold of a telegram meant for me. I was standing behind a frosted glass door, and through the narrow bevel of clear glass I watched him read it. I never saw a struggle like that. At last he got up, snatched an envelope, put the telegram inside, wrote my name, and called a messenger. I knew what was in the message. I let the messenger go, and watched that man for ten minutes. It was a splendid sight. The telegram had given him a big chance to make a million or two, as he thought. But he backed himself against the temptation, and won. That day I could have put the ball into his wicket; but I didn't. That's a funny case of the kind."

"Did he ever know?"

"He didn't. We are fighting yet. He is richer than I am now, and at this moment he's playing a hard game straight at several interests of mine. But I reckon I can stop him."

"You must get a great deal out of life," she said. "Have you always enjoyed it so?" She was thinking it would be strange to live in contact with such events very closely. It was so like adventure.

"Always--from the start."

"Tell me something of it all, won't you?" He did not hesitate.

"I was born in a little place in Maine. My mother was a good woman, they said--straight as a die all her life. I can only remember her in a kind of dream, when she used to gather us children about the big rocking-chair, and pray for us, and for my father, who was away most of the time, working in the timber-shanties in the winter, and at odd things in the summer. My father wasn't much of a man. He was kind-hearted, but shiftless, but pretty handsome for a man from Maine.

"My mother died when I was six years old. Things got bad. I was the youngest. The oldest was only ten years old. She was the head of the house. She had the pluck of a woman. We got along somehow, until one day, when she and I were scrubbing the floor, she caught cold. She died in three days."

Here he paused; and, without glancing at Miss Raglan, who sat very still, but looking at him, he lighted his cigar.

"Then things got worse. My father took to drinking hard, and we had mighty little to eat. I chored around, doing odd things in the village. I have often wondered that people didn't see the stuff that was in me, and give me a chance. They didn't, though. As for my relatives: one was a harness-maker. He sent me out in the dead of winter to post bills for miles about, and gave me ten cents for it. Didn't even give me a meal. Twenty years after he came to me and wanted to borrow a hundred dollars. I gave him five hundred on condition that he'd not come near me for the rest of his natural life.

"The next thing I did was to leave home--'run away,' I suppose, is the way to put it. I got to Boston, and went for a cabin-boy on a steamer; travelled down to Panama, and from there to Brazil. At Brazil I got on another ship, and came round to San Francisco. I got into trouble in San Francisco with the chief mate of the Flying Polly, because I tried to teach him his business. One of the first things I learned in life was not to interfere with people who had a trade and didn't understand it. In San Francisco I got out of the situation. I took to selling newspapers in the streets.

"There wasn't enough money in it. I went for a cabin-boy again, and travelled to Australia. There, once more, I resigned my position, chiefly because I wouldn't cheerfully let the Mate bang me about the quarter-deck. I expect I was a precocious youth, and wasn't exactly the kind for Sunday-school prizes. In Melbourne I began to speculate. I found a ticket for the theatre where an American actor--our biggest actor today--was playing, and I tried to sell it outside the door of the theatre where they were crowding to see him. The man who bought it was the actor himself. He gave me two dollars more than the regular price. I expect he knew from my voice I was an American. Is there anything peculiar about my voice, Miss Raglan?"

She looked at him quickly, smiled, and said in a low tone: "Yes,

something peculiar. Please go on."

"Well, anyway, he said to me: 'Look here, where did you come from, my boy?' I told him the State of Maine. 'What are you doing here?' he asked. 'Speculating, said I, and seeing things.' He looked me up and down. 'How are you getting on?' 'Well. I've made four dollars to-day,' I answered. 'Out of this ticket?' I expect I grinned. He suddenly caught me by the arm and whisked me inside the theatre--the first time I'd ever been in a theatre in my life. I shall never forget it. He took me around to his dressing-room, stuck me in a corner, and prodded me with his forefinger. 'Look here,' he said, 'I guess I'll hire you to speculate for me.' And that's how I came to get twenty-five dollars a month and my living from a great American actor. When I got back to America--with him--I had two hundred and fifty dollars in cash, and good clothes. I started a peanut-stand, and sold papers and books, and became a speculator. I heard two men talking one day at my stall about a railway that was going to run through a certain village, and how they intended to buy up the whole place. I had four hundred and fifty dollars then. I went down to that village, and bought some lots myself. I made four thousand dollars. Then I sold more books, and went on speculating."

He paused, blew his cigar-smoke slowly from him a moment; then turned with a quick look to Miss Raglan, and smiled as at some incongruous thing. He was wondering what would be the effect of his next words.

"When I was about twenty-two, and had ten thousand dollars, I fell in love. She was a bright-faced, smart girl. Her mother kept a boarding-house in New York; not an up-town boarding-house. She waited on table. I suppose a man can be clever in making money, and knowing how to handle men, and not know much about women. I thought she was worth a good deal more to me than the ten thousand dollars. She didn't know I had that money. A drummer--that's a commercial traveller--came along, who had a salary of, maybe, a thousand dollars a year. She jilted me. She made a mistake. That year I made twenty-five thousand dollars. I saw her a couple of years ago. She was keeping a boarding-house too, and her daughter was waiting on table. I'm sorry for that girl: it isn't any fun being poor. I didn't take much interest in women after that. I put my surplus affections into stocks and shares, and bulling and bearing. . . Well, that is the way the thing has gone till now."

"What became of your father and your brother?" she asked in a neutral tone.

"I don't know anything about my father. He disappeared after I left, and never turned up again. And Jim--poor Jim!--he was shiftless. Jim was a tanner. It was no good setting him up in business. Steady income was the cheapest way. But Jim died of too much time on his hands. His son is in Mexico somewhere. I sent him there, and I hope he'll stay. If he doesn't, his salary stops: he is shiftless too. That is not the kind of thing, and they are not the kind of people you know best, Miss Raglan."

He looked at her, eyes full-front, bravely, honestly, ready to face the worst. Her head was turned away.

He nodded to himself. It was as he feared.

At that moment a boy came running along the walk towards them, and handed Mr. Vandewaters a telegram. He gave the lad a few pence, then, with an apology, opened the telegram. Presently he whistled softly, in a quick

surprised way. Then he stuffed the paper into his waistcoat pocket, threw away his cigar, and turned to Gracia Raglan, whose face as yet was only half towards him. "I hope your news is good," she said very quietly.

"Pretty bad, in a way," he answered. "I have lost a couple of millions--maybe a little more."

She gasped, and turned an astonished face on him. He saw her startled look, and laughed.

"Does it not worry you?" she asked.

"I have got more important things on hand just now," he answered. "Very much more important," he added, and there was that in his voice which made her turn away her head again.

"I suppose," he went on, "that the story you have just heard is not the kind of an autobiography you would care to have told in your drawing-room?"

Still she did not reply; but her hands were clasped tightly in front of her. "No: I suppose not," he went on--"I--I suppose not. And yet, do you know, Miss Raglan, I don't feel a bit ashamed of it, after all: which may be evidence of my lost condition."

Now she turned to him with a wonderful light in her eyes, her sweet, strong face rich with feeling. She put out her hand to his arm, and touched it quickly, nervously.

"Your story has touched me inexpressibly," she said. "I did not know that men could be so strong and frank and courageous as you. I did not know that men could be so great; that any man could think more of what a woman thought of--of his life's story--than of"--she paused, and then gave a trembling little laugh--"of two millions or more."

He got to his feet, and faced her. "You--you are a woman, by heaven!" he said. "You are finer even than I thought you. I am not worthy to ask you what I had in my mind to ask you; but there is no man in God's universe who would prize you as I do. I may be a poor man before sundown. If that happens, though, I shall remember the place where I had the biggest moment of my life, and the woman who made that moment possible."

Now she also rose. There was a brave high look in her face; but her voice shook a little as she said: "You have never been a coward, why be a coward now?"

Smiling, he slowly answered: "I wouldn't if I were sure about my dollars."

She did not reply, but glanced down, not with coquetry, but because she could not stand the furnace of his eyes.

"You said a moment ago," she ventured, "that you have had one big moment in your life. Oughtn't it to bring you good fortune?"

"It will--it will," he said, reaching his hand towards hers.

"No, no," she rejoined archly. "I am going. Please do not follow me." Then, over her shoulder, as she left him: "If you have luck, I shall want

a subscription for my hospital."

"As many thousands as you like," he answered: then, as she sped away: "I will have her, and the millions too!" adding reminiscently: "Yes, Lady Lawless, this is my biggest deal."

He tramped to the stables, asked for and got a horse, and rode away to the railway station. It was dinner time when he got back. He came down to dinner late, apologising to Lady Lawless as he did so. Glancing across the table at Mr. Pride, he saw a peculiar excited look in the young man's face.

"The baby fool!" he said to himself. "He's getting into mischief. I'll startle him. If he knows that an army of his dollars is playing at fox-and-geese, he'll not make eyes at Lady Lawless this way--little ass."

Lady Lawless appeared oblivious of the young man's devotional exercises. She was engaged on a more congenial theme. In spite of Miss Raglan's excellent acting, she saw that something had occurred. Mr. Vandewaters was much the same as usual, save that his voice had an added ring. She was not sure that all was right; but she was determined to know. Sir Duke was amused generally. He led a pretty by-play with Mrs. Gregory Thorne, of whom he asked the details of the day, much to the confusion, not admirably hid, of Mr. Pride; lamenting now and then Mr. Vandewaters's absence from the shooting.

Mr. Vandewaters was cool enough. He said that he had been playing at nine-pins with railways, which was good enough sport for him. Soon after dinner, he was handed two telegrams. He glanced slowly up at Pride, as if debating whether to tell him something. He evidently decided against it, and, excusing himself by saying he was off to take a little walk in Wall Street, went away to the telegraph office, where he stayed three hours.

The magnitude of the concerns, the admirable stoicism with which he received alarming news, his dry humour while they waited between messages--all were so unlike anything the telegraph-clerk had ever seen, or imagined, that the thing was like a preposterous dream. Even when, at last, a telegram came which the clerk vaguely felt was, somehow, like the fall of an empire, Mr. Vandewaters remained unmoved. Then he sent one more telegram, gave the clerk a pound, asked that the reply be sent to him as soon as it came, and went away, calmly smoking his cigar.

It was a mild night. When he got to the house he found some of the guests walking on the veranda. He joined them; but Miss Raglan was not with them; nor were Lady Lawless and Mr. Pride. He wanted to see all three, and so he went into the house. There was no one in the drawing-room. He reached the library in time to hear Lady Lawless say to Mr. Pride, who was disappearing through another door: "You had better ask advice of Mr. Vandewaters."

The door closed. Mr. Vandewaters stepped forward.

He understood the situation. "I guess I know how to advise him, Lady Lawless," he said.

She turned on him quietly, traces of hauteur in her manner. Her self-pride had been hurt. "You have heard?" she asked.

"Only your last words, Lady Lawless. They were enough. I feel guilty in

having brought him here."

"You need not. I was glad to have your friend. He is young and effusive. Let us say no more about it.

"He is tragically repentant; which is a pity. There is no reason why he should not stay, and be sensible. Why should young men lose their heads, and be so absurdly earnest?"

"Another poser, Lady Lawless."

"In all your life you never misunderstood things so, I am sure."

"Well, there is no virtue in keeping your head steady. I have spent most of my life wooing Madame Fortune; I find that makes a man canny."

"She has been very kind to you."

"Perhaps it would surprise you if I told you that at this moment I am not worth ten thousand dollars." She looked greatly astonished. "I do not understand," she said. She was thinking of what this might mean to Gracia Raglan.

"You see I've been playing games at a disadvantage with some ruffians at New York. They have combined and got me into a corner. I have made my last move. If it comes out right I shall be richer than ever; if not I must begin all over again."

Lady Lawless looked at him curiously. She had never met a man like him before. His power seemed almost Napoleonic; his imperturbability was absolute. Yet she noticed something new in him. On one side a kind of grim forcefulness; on the other, a quiet sort of human sympathy. The one, no doubt, had to do with the momentous circumstances amid which he was placed; the other, with an event which she had, perhaps prematurely, anticipated.

"I wonder--I wonder at you," she said. "How do you keep so cool while such tremendous things are happening?"

"Because I believe in myself, Lady Lawless. I have had to take my measure a good many times in this world. I never was defeated through my own stupidity. It has been the sheer luck of the game."

"You do not look like a gamester," she said.

"I guess it's all pretty much a game in life, if you look at it right. It is only a case of playing fair or foul."

"I never heard any Englishmen talk as you do."

"Very likely not," he responded. "I don't want to be unpleasant; but most Englishmen work things out by the rule their fathers taught them, and not by native ingenuity. It is native wit that tells in the end, I'm thinking."

"Perhaps you are right," she rejoined. "There must be a kind of genius in it." Here her voice dropped a little lower. "I do not believe there are many Englishmen, even if they had your dollars--"

"The dollars I had this morning," he interposed.

"--who could have so strongly impressed Gracia Raglan."

He looked thoughtfully on the ground; then raised his eyes to Lady Lawless, and said in a low, ringing tone:

"Yes, I am going to do more than 'impress': I am going to convince her."

"When?" she asked.

"To-morrow morning, I hope," was the reply. "I believe I shall have my millions again."

"If you do," she said slowly, "do you not think that you ought to run no more risks--for her sake?"

"That is just what I mean to do, Lady Lawless. I'll settle millions where they ought to be settled, drop Wall Street, and--go into training."

"Into training?" she asked.

"Yes, for a house on the Hudson, a villa at Cannes, a residence in Grosvenor Square, and a place in Devonshire--or somewhere else. Then," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "I shall need a good deal of time to cultivate accent."

"Don't!" she said. "You are much more charming as you are."

They passed into the drawing-room.

"Are these things to be told?" she asked, with a little suggestion in her voice.

"I can trust your discretion."

"Even in such circumstances?" she asked. She paused, with a motion of her fan back towards the room they had left.

"You have taught him a lesson, Lady Lawless. It is rough on him; but he needs it."

"I hope he will do nothing rash," she said.

"Perhaps he'll write some poetry, and refuse to consider his natural appetite."

"Will you go and see him now?" she asked. "Immediately. Good night, Lady Lawless." His big hand swallowed hers in a firm, friendly clasp, and he shook it once or twice before he parted from her. He met Sir Duke Lawless in the doorway. They greeted cheerfully, and then Lawless came up to his wife.

"Well, my dear," he said, with an amused look in his face, "well, what news?"

She lifted her eyebrows at him.

"Something has happened, Molly, I can see it in your face."

She was very brief. "Gracia Raglan has been conquered; the young man from Boston has been foolish; and Mr. Vandewaters has lost millions."

"Eh? That's awkward," said Sir Duke.

"Which?" asked his wife.

Vandewaters found Mr. Pride in his bedroom, a waif of melancholy. He drew a chair up, lighted a cigar, eyed the young man from head to foot, and then said: "Pride, have you got any backbone? If you have, brace up. You are ruined. That's about as mild as I can put it."

"You know all?"--said the young man helplessly, his hands clasped between his knees in aesthetic agony.

"Yes; I know more than you do, as you will find out. You're a nice sort of man, to come into a man's house, in a strange land, and make love to his wife. Now, what do you think of yourself? You're a nice representative of the American, aren't you?"

"I--I didn't mean any harm--I--couldn't help it," replied the stricken boy.

"O, for God's sake, drop that bib-and-tucker twaddle! Couldn't help it! Every scoundrel, too weak to face the consequences of his sin, says he couldn't help it. So help me, Joseph, I'd like to thrash you. Couldn't help it! Now, sit up in your chair, take this cigar, drink this glass of whiskey I'm pouring for you, and make up your mind that you're going to be a man and not a nincompoop--sit still! Don't fly up. I mean what I say. I've got business to talk to you. And make up your mind that, for once, you have got to take life seriously."

"What right have you to speak to me like this?" demanded the young man with an attempt at dignity. Vandewaters laughed loudly.

"Right? Great Scott! The right of a man who thinks a damned sight more of your reputation than you do yourself, and of your fortune than you would ever have wits to do. I am the best friend you've got, and not the less your friend because I feel like breaking your ribs. Now, enough of that. This is what I have to say, Pride: to-night you and I are beggars. You understand? Beggars. Out in the cold world, out in the street. Now, what do you think of that?"

The shock to Mr. Pride was great. Mr. Vandewaters had exaggerated the disaster; but he had done it with a purpose. The youth gasped "My God!" and dropped his glass. Vandewaters picked it up, and regarded him a moment in silence. Then he began to explain their financial position. He did not explain the one bold stroke which he was playing to redeem their fortunes: if possible. When he had finished the story, he said, "I guess that's a bit more serious than the little affair in the library half an hour ago?"

He rose to his feet. "Look here, Pride, be a man. You've never tried it yet. Let me teach you how to face the world without a dollar; how to make a fortune. Then, when you've made it, you'll get what you've never had yet--the pleasure of spending money dug out of your own wits."

He carried conviction into a mind not yet all destroyed by effeminacy and

indulgence of the emotions. Something of the iron of his own brain got into the brain of the young man, who came to his feet trembling a little, and said: "I don't mind it so much, if you only stick to me, Vandewaters."

A smile flickered about the corners of Vandewaters's mouth.

"Take a little more whiskey," he said; "then get into bed, and go to sleep. No nonsense, remember; go to sleep. To-morrow morning we will talk. And see here, my boy,"--he caught him by both arms and fastened his eyes,--"you have had a lesson: learn it backwards. Good night."

Next morning Mr. Vandewaters was early in the grounds. He chatted with the gardener, and discussed the merits of the horses with the groom, apparently at peace with the world. Yet he was watching vigilantly the carriage-drive from the public-road. Just before breakfast-time a telegraph messenger appeared. Vandewaters was standing with Sir Duke Lawless when the message was handed to him. He read it, put it into his pocket, and went on talking. Presently he said: "My agent is coming from town this morning, Sir Duke. I may have to leave to-night." Then he turned, and went to his room.

Lady Lawless had heard his last words.

"What about your ranche in Colorado, Duke?"

"About as sure, I fancy, as your millionaire for Gracia."

Miss Raglan did not appear at breakfast with the rest. Neither did Mr. Pride, who slept late that morning. About ten o'clock Mr. Vandewaters's agent arrived. About twelve o'clock Mr. Vandewaters saw Miss Raglan sitting alone in the library. He was evidently looking for her. He came up to her quietly, and put a piece of paper in her lap.

"What is this?" she asked, a little startled.

"A thousand for your hospital," was the meaning reply.

She flushed, and came to her feet.

"I have won," he said.

And then he reached out and took both her hands.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

But I don't think it is worth doing twice
He wishes to be rude to some one, and is disappointed
I--couldn't help it
Interfere with people who had a trade and didn't understand it
Lose their heads, and be so absurdly earnest
Scoundrel, too weak to face the consequences of his sin

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