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## Chapter 38 - The News From Glasgow

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THE letters to Lady Lundie and to Mr. Crum having been dispatched on Monday, the return of the post might be looked for on Wednesday afternoon at Ham Farm.

Sir Patrick and Arnold held more than one private consultation, during the interval, on the delicate and difficult subject of admitting Blanche to a knowledge of what had happened. The wise elder advised and the inexperienced junior listened. "Think of it," said Sir Patrick; "and do it." And Arnold thought of it--and left it undone.

Let those who feel inclined to blame him remember that he had only been married a fortnight. It is hard, surely, after but two weeks' possession of your wife, to appear before her in the character of an offender on trial--and to find that an angel of retribution has been thrown into the bargain by the liberal destiny which bestowed on you the woman whom you adore!

They were all three at home on the Wednesday afternoon, looking out for the postman.

The correspondence delivered included (exactly as Sir Patrick had foreseen) a letter from Lady Lundie. Further investigation, on the far more interesting subject of the expected news from Glasgow, revealed--nothing. The lawyer had not answered Sir Patrick's inquiry by return of post.

"Is that a bad sign?" asked Blanche.

"It is a sign that something has happened," answered her uncle. "Mr. Crum is possibly expecting to receive some special information, and is waiting on the chance of being able to communicate it. We must hope, my dear, in to-morrow's post."

"Open Lady Lundie's letter in the mean time," said Blanche. "Are you sure it is for you--and not for me?"

There was no doubt about it. Her ladyship's reply was ominously addressed to her ladyship's brother-in-law. "I know what that means," said Blanche, eying her uncle eagerly while he was reading the letter. "If you mention Anne's name you insult my step-mother. I have mentioned it freely. Lady Lundie is mortally offended with me."

Rash judgment of youth! A lady who takes a dignified attitude, in a family emergency, is never mortally offended--she is only deeply grieved. Lady Lundie took a dignified attitude. "I well know," wrote this estimable and Christian woman, "that I have been all along regarded in the light of an intruder by the family connections of my late beloved husband. But I was hardly prepared to find myself entirely shut out from all domestic confidence, at a time when some serious domestic catastrophe has but too evidently taken place. I have no desire, dear Sir Patrick, to intrude. Feeling it, however, to be quite inconsistent with a due regard for my own position--after what has happened--to correspond with Blanche, I address myself to the head of the family, purely in the interests of propriety. Permit me to ask whether--under circumstances which appear to be serious enough to require the recall of my step-daughter and her husband from their wedding tour--you think it DECENT to keep the widow of the late Sir Thomas Lundie entirely in the dark? Pray consider this--not at all out of regard for me!--but out of regard for your own position with Society. Curiosity is, as you know, foreign to my nature. But when this dreadful scandal (whatever it may be) comes out--which, dear Sir Patrick, it can not fail to do--what will the world think, when it asks for Lady Lundie's, opinion, and hears that Lady Lundie knew nothing about it? Whichever way you may decide I shall take no offense. I may possibly be wounded--but that won't matter. My little round of duties will find me still earnest, still cheerful. And even if you shut me out, my best wishes will find their way, nevertheless, to Ham Farm. May I add--without encountering a sneer--that the prayers of a lonely woman are offered for the welfare of all?"

"Well?" said Blanche.

Sir Patrick folded up the letter, and put it in his pocket.

"You have your step-mother's best wishes, my dear." Having answered in those terms, he bowed to his niece with his best grace, and walked out of the room.

"Do I think it decent," he repeated to himself, as he closed the door, "to leave the widow of the late Sir Thomas Lundie in the dark? When a lady's temper is a little ruffled, I think it more than decent, I think it absolutely desirable, to let that lady have the last word." He went into the library, and dropped his sister-in-law's remonstrance into a box, labeled "Unanswered Letters." Having got rid of it in that way, he hummed his favorite little Scotch air--and put on his hat, and went out to sun himself in the garden.

Meanwhile, Blanche was not quite satisfied with Sir Patrick's reply. She appealed to her husband. "There is something wrong," she said--"and my uncle is hiding it from me."

Arnold could have desired no better opportunity than she had offered to him, in those words, for making the long-deferred disclosure to her of the truth. He lifted his eyes to Blanche's face. By an unhappy fatality she was looking charmingly that morning. How would she look if he told her the story of the hiding at the inn? Arnold was still in love with her--and Arnold said nothing.

The next day's post brought not only the anticipated letter from Mr. Crum, but an unexpected Glasgow newspaper as well.

This time Blanche had no reason to complain that her uncle kept his correspondence a secret from her. After reading the lawyer's letter, with an interest and agitation which showed that the contents had taken him by surprise, he handed it to Arnold and his niece. "Bad news there," he said. "We must share it together."

After acknowledging the receipt of Sir Patrick's letter of inquiry, Mr. Crum began by stating all that he knew of Miss Silvester's movements--dating from the time when she had left the Sheep's Head Hotel. About a fortnight since he had received a letter from her informing him that she had found a suitable place of residence in a village near Glasgow. Feeling a strong interest in Miss Silvester, Mr. Crum had visited her some few days afterward. He had satisfied himself that she was lodging with respectable people, and was as comfortably situated as circumstances would permit. For a week more he had heard nothing from the lady. At the expiration of that time he had received a letter from her, telling him that she had read something in a Glasgow newspaper, of that day's date, which seriously concerned herself, and which would oblige her to travel northward immediately as fast as her strength would permit. At a later period, when she would be more certain of her own movements, she engaged to write again, and let Mr. Crum know where he might communicate with her if necessary. In the mean time, she could only thank him for his kindness, and beg him to take care of any letters or messages which might be left for her. Since the receipt of this communication the lawyer had heard nothing further. He had waited for the morning's post in

the hope of being able to report that he had received further intelligence. The hope had not been realized. He had now stated all that he knew himself thus far--and he had forwarded a copy of the newspaper alluded to by Miss Silvester, on the chance that an examination of it by Sir Patrick might possibly lead to further discoveries. In conclusion, he pledged himself to write again the moment he had any information to send.

Blanche snatched up the newspaper, and opened it. "Let me look!" she said. "I can find what Anne saw here if any body can!"

She ran her eye eagerly over column after column and page after page--and dropped the newspaper on her lap with a gesture of despair.

"Nothing!" she exclaimed. "Nothing any where, that I can see, to interest Anne. Nothing to interest any body--except Lady Lundie," she went on, brushing the newspaper off her lap. "It turns out to be all true, Arnold, at Swanhaven. Geoffrey Delamayn is going to marry Mrs. Glenarm."

"What!" cried Arnold; the idea instantly flashing on him that this was the news which Anne had seen.

Sir Patrick gave him a warning look, and picked up the newspaper from the floor.

"I may as well run through it, Blanche, and make quite sure that you have missed nothing," he said.

The report to which Blanche had referred was among the paragraphs arranged under the heading of "Fashionable News." "A matrimonial alliance" (the Glasgow journal announced) "was in prospect between the Honorable Geoffrey Delamayn and the lovely and accomplished relict of the late Mathew Glenarm, Esq., formerly Miss Newenden." The marriage would, in all probability, "be solemnized in Scotland, before the end of the present autumn;" and the wedding breakfast, it was whispered, "would collect a large and fashionable party at Swanhaven Lodge."

Sir Patrick handed the newspaper silently to Arnold. It was plain to any one who knew Anne Silvester's story that those were the words which had found their fatal way to her in her place of rest. The inference that followed seemed to be hardly less clear. But one intelligible object, in the opinion of Sir Patrick, could be at the end of her journey to the north. The deserted woman had rallied the last relics of her old energy--and had devoted herself to the desperate purpose of stopping the marriage of Mrs. Glenarm.

Blanche was the first to break the silence.

"It seems like a fatality," she said. "Perpetual failure! Perpetual disappointment! Are Anne and I doomed never to meet again?"

She looked at her uncle. Sir Patrick showed none of his customary cheerfulness in the face of disaster.

"She has promised to write to Mr. Crum," he said. "And Mr. Crum has promised to let us know when he hears from her. That is the only prospect before us. We must accept it as resignedly as we can."

Blanche wandered out listlessly among the flowers in the conservatory. Sir Patrick made no secret of the impression produced upon him by Mr. Crum's letter, when he and Arnold were left alone.

"There is no denying," he said, "that matters have taken a very serious turn. My plans and calculations are all thrown out. It is impossible to foresee what new mischief may not come of it, if those two women meet; or what desperate act Delamayn may not commit, if he finds himself driven to the wall. As things are, I own frankly I don't know what to do next. A great light of the Presbyterian Church," he added, with a momentary outbreak of his whimsical humor, "once declared, in my hearing, that the invention of printing was nothing more or less than a proof of the intellectual activity of the Devil. Upon my honor, I feel for the first time in my life inclined to agree with him."

He mechanically took up the Glasgow journal, which Arnold had laid aside, while he spoke.

"What's this!" he exclaimed, as a name caught his eye in the first line of the newspaper at which he happened to look. "Mrs. Glenarm again! Are they turning the iron-master's widow into a public character?"

There the name of the widow was, unquestionably; figuring for the second time in type, in a letter of the gossiping sort, supplied by an "Occasional Correspondent," and distinguished by the title of "Sayings and Doings in the North." After tattling pleasantly of the prospects of the shooting season, of the fashions from Paris, of an accident to a tourist, and of a scandal in the Scottish Kirk, the writer proceeded to the narrative of a case of interest, relating to a marriage in the sphere known (in the language of footmen) as the sphere of "high life."

Considerable sensation (the correspondent announced) had been caused in Perth and its neighborhood, by the exposure of an anonymous attempt at extortion, of which a lady of distinction had lately been made the object. As her name had already been publicly mentioned in an application to the magistrates, there could be no impropriety in stating that the lady in question was Mrs. Glenarm--whose approaching union with the Honorable Geoffrey Delamayn was alluded to in another column of the journal.

Mrs. Glenarm had, it appeared, received an anonymous letter, on the first day of her arrival as guest at the house of a friend, residing in the neighborhood of Perth. The letter warned her that there was an obstacle, of which she was herself probably not aware, in the way of her projected marriage with Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn. That gentleman had seriously compromised himself with another lady; and the lady would oppose his marriage to Mrs. Glenarm, with proof in writing to produce in support of her claim. The proof was contained in two letters exchanged between the parties, and signed by their names; and the correspondence was placed at Mrs. Glenarm's disposal, on two conditions, as follows:

First, that she should offer a sufficiently liberal price to induce the present possessor of the letters to part with them. Secondly, that she should consent to adopt such a method of paying the money as should satisfy the person that he was in no danger of finding himself brought within reach of the law. The answer to these two proposals was directed to be made through the medium of an advertisement in the local newspaper--distinguished by this address, "To a Friend in the Dark."

Certain turns of expression, and one or two mistakes in spelling, pointed to this insolent letter as being, in all probability, the production of a Scotchman, in the lower ranks of life. Mrs. Glenarm had at once shown it to her nearest relative, Captain Newenden. The captain had sought legal advice in Perth. It had been decided, after due consideration, to insert the advertisement demanded, and to take measures to entrap the writer of the letter into revealing himself--without, it is needless to add, allowing the fellow really to profit by his attempted act of extortion.

The cunning of the "Friend in the Dark" (whoever he might be) had, on trying the proposed experiment, proved to be more than a match for the lawyers. He had successfully eluded not only the snare first set for him, but others subsequently laid. A second, and a third, anonymous letter, one more impudent than the other had been received by Mrs. Glenarm, assuring that lady and the friends who were acting for her that they were only wasting time and raising the price which would be asked for the correspondence, by the course they were taking. Captain Newenden had thereupon, in default of knowing what other course to pursue, appealed publicly to the city magistrates, and a reward had been offered, under the sanction of the municipal authorities, for the discovery of the man. This proceeding also having proved quite

fruitless, it was understood that the captain had arranged, with the concurrence of his English solicitors, to place the matter in the hands of an experienced officer of the London police.

Here, so far as the newspaper correspondent was aware, the affair rested for the present.

It was only necessary to add, that Mrs. Glenarm had left the neighborhood of Perth, in order to escape further annoyance; and had placed herself under the protection of friends in another part of the county. Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn, whose fair fame had been assailed (it was needless, the correspondent added in parenthesis, to say how groundlessly), was understood to have expressed, not only the indignation natural under the circumstances but also his extreme regret at not finding himself in a position to aid Captain Newenden's efforts to bring the anonymous slanderer to justice. The honorable gentleman was, as the sporting public were well aware, then in course of strict training for his forthcoming appearance at the Fulham Foot-Race. So important was it considered that his mind should not be harassed by annoyances, in his present responsible position, that his trainer and his principal backers had thought it desirable to hasten his removal to the neighborhood of Fulham--where the exercises which were to prepare him for the race were now being continued on the spot.

"The mystery seems to thicken," said Arnold.

"Quite the contrary," returned Sir Patrick, briskly. "The mystery is clearing fast--thanks to the Glasgow newspaper. I shall be spared the trouble of dealing with Bishopriggs for the stolen letter. Miss Silvester has gone to Perth, to recover her correspondence with Geoffrey Delamayn."

"Do you think she would recognize it," said Arnold, pointing to the newspaper, "in the account given of it here?"

"Certainly! And she could hardly fail, in my opinion, to get a step farther than that. Unless I am entirely mistaken, the authorship of the anonymous letters has not mystified \_her.\_"

"How could she guess at that?"

"In this way, as I think. Whatever she may have previously thought, she must suspect, by this time, that the missing correspondence has been stolen, and not lost. Now, there are only two persons whom she can think of, as probably guilty of the theft--Mrs. Inchbare or Bishopriggs. The newspaper description of the style of the anonymous letters declares it to be the style of a Scotchman in the lower ranks of life--in other words, points plainly to Bishopriggs. You see that? Very well. Now suppose she recovers the stolen property. What is likely to happen then? She will be more or less than woman if she doesn't make her way next, provided with her proofs in writing, to Mrs. Glenarm. She may innocently help, or she may innocently frustrate, the end we have in view--either way, our course is clear before us again. Our interest in communicating with Miss Silvester remains precisely the same interest that it was before we received the Glasgow newspaper. I propose to wait till Sunday, on the chance that Mr. Crum may write again. If we don't hear from him, I shall start for Scotland on Monday morning, and take my chance of finding my way to Miss Silvester, through Mrs. Glenarm."

"Leaving me behind?"

"Leaving you behind. Somebody must stay with Blanche. After having only been a fortnight married, must I remind you of that?"

"Don't you think Mr. Crum will write before Monday?"

"It will be such a fortunate circumstance for us, if he does write, that I don't venture to anticipate it."

"You are down on our luck, Sir."

"I detest slang, Arnold. But slang, I own, expresses my state of mind, in this instance, with an accuracy which almost reconciles me to the use of it--for once in a way."

"Every body's luck turns sooner or later," persisted Arnold. "I can't help thinking our luck is on the turn at last. Would you mind taking a bet, Sir Patrick?"

"Apply at the stables. I leave betting, as I leave cleaning the horses, to my groom."

With that crabbed answer he closed the conversation for the day.

The hours passed, and time brought the post again in due course--and the post decided in Arnold's favor! Sir Patrick's want of confidence in the favoring patronage of Fortune was practically rebuked by the arrival of a second letter from the Glasgow lawyer on the next day.

"I have the pleasure of announcing" (Mr. Crum wrote) "that I have heard from Miss Silvester, by the next postal delivery ensuing, after I had dispatched my letter to Ham Farm. She writes, very briefly, to inform me that she has decided on establishing her next place of residence in London. The reason assigned for taking this step--which she certainly did not contemplate when I last saw her--is that she finds herself approaching the end of her pecuniary resources. Having already decided on adopting, as a means of living, the calling of a concert-singer, she has arranged to place her interests in the hands of an old friend of her late mother (who appears to have belonged also to the musical profession): a dramatic and musical agent long established in the metropolis, and well known to her as a trustworthy and respectable man. She sends me the name and address of this person--a copy of which you will find on the inclosed slip of paper--in the event of my having occasion to write to her, before she is settled in London. This is the whole substance of her letter. I have only to add, that it does not contain the slightest allusion to the nature of the errand on which she left Glasgow."

Sir Patrick happened to be alone when he opened Mr. Crum's letter.

His first proceeding, after reading it, was to consult the railway time-table hanging in the hall. Having done this, he returned to the library--wrote a short note of inquiry, addressed to the musical agent--and rang the bell.

"Miss Silvester is expected in London, Duncan. I want a discreet person to communicate with her. You are the person."

Duncan bowed. Sir Patrick handed him the note.

"If you start at once you will be in time to catch the train. Go to that address, and inquire for Miss Silvester. If she has arrived, give her my compliments, and say I will have the honor of calling on her (on Mr. Brinkworth's behalf) at the earliest date which she may find it convenient to appoint. Be quick about it--and you will have time to get back before the last train. Have Mr. and Mrs. Brinkworth returned from their drive?"

"No, Sir Patrick."

Pending the return of Arnold and Blanche, Sir Patrick looked at Mr. Crum's letter for the second time.

He was not quite satisfied that the pecuniary motive was really the motive at the bottom of Anne's journey south. Remembering that Geoffrey's trainers had removed him to the neighborhood of London, he was inclined to doubt whether some serious quarrel had not taken place between Anne and Mrs. Glenarm--and whether some direct appeal to Geoffrey himself might not be in contemplation as the result. In that event, Sir Patrick's advice and assistance would be placed, without scruple, at Miss Silvester's disposal. By asserting her claim, in opposition to the claim of Mrs. Glenarm, she was also asserting herself to be an unmarried woman, and was thus serving Blanche's interests as well as her own. "I owe it to Blanche to help her," thought Sir Patrick. "And I owe it to myself to bring Geoffrey Delamayn to a day of reckoning if I can."

The barking of the dogs in the yard announced the return of the carriage. Sir Patrick went out to meet Arnold and Blanche at the gate, and tell them the news.

Punctual to the time at which he was expected, the discreet Duncan reappeared with a note from the musical agent.

Miss Silvester had not yet reached London; but she was expected to arrive not later than Tuesday in the ensuing week. The agent had already been favored with her instructions to pay the strictest attention to any commands received from Sir Patrick Lundie. He would take care that Sir Patrick's message should be given to Miss Silvester as soon as she arrived.

At last, then, there was news to be relied on! At last there was a prospect of seeing her! Blanche was radiant with happiness, Arnold was in high spirits for the first time since his return from Baden.

Sir Patrick tried hard to catch the infection of gayety from his young friends; but, to his own surprise, not less than to theirs, the effort proved fruitless. With the tide of events turning decidedly in his favor--relieved of the necessity of taking a doubtful journey to Scotland; assured of obtaining his interview with Anne in a few days' time--he was out of spirits all through the evening.

"Still down on our luck!" exclaimed Arnold, as he and his host finished their last game of billiards, and parted for the night. "Surely, we couldn't wish for a more promising prospect than our prospect next week?"

Sir Patrick laid his hand on Arnold's shoulder.

"Let us look indulgently together," he said, in his whimsically grave way, "at the humiliating spectacle of an old man's folly. I feel, at this moment, Arnold, as if I would give every thing that I possess in the world to have passed over next week, and to be landed safely in the time beyond it."

"But why?"

"There is the folly! I can't tell why. With every reason to be in better spirits than usual, I am unaccountably, irrationally, invincibly depressed. What are we to conclude from that? Am I the object of a supernatural warning of misfortune to come? Or am I the object of a temporary derangement of the functions of the liver? There is the question. Who is to decide it? How contemptible is humanity, Arnold, rightly understood! Give me my candle, and let's hope it's the liver."