

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SUPERCILIOUS ATTACHE

Grant Allen

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THE Count must have been an adept in the gentle art of quick-change disguise; for though we telegraphed full particulars of his appearance from Louvain, the next station, nobody in the least resembling either him or his accomplice the shabby-looking man, could be unearthed in the Paris train when it drew up at Brussels, its first stopping-place. They must have transformed themselves meanwhile into two different persons. Indeed, from the outset, I had suspected his moustache 'twas so very distinguished

When we reached Cologne, the Cantankerous Old Lady overwhelmed me with the warmth of her thanks and praises. Nay, more; after breakfast next morning, before we set out by slow train for Schlangenbad, she burst like a tornado into my bedroom at the Cologne hotel with a cheque for twenty guineas, drawn in my favour. 'That's for you, my dear,' she said, handing it to me, and looking really quite gracious.

I glanced at the piece of paper and felt my face glow crimson. 'Oh, Lady Georgina,' I cried; 'you misunderstand. You forget that I am a lady.'

'Nonsense, child, nonsense! Your courage and promptitude were worth ten times that sum,' she exclaimed, positively slipping her arm round my neck. 'It was your courage I particularly admired, Lois; because you faced the risk of my happening to look inside the outer case, and finding you had abstracted the blessed box: in which case I might quite naturally have concluded you meant to steal it.'

'I thought of that,' I answered. 'But I decided to risk it. I felt it was worth while. For I was sure the man meant to take the case as soon as ever you gave him the opportunity.'

'Then you deserve to be rewarded,' she insisted, pressing the cheque upon me.

I put her hand back firmly. 'Lady Georgina,' I said, 'it is very amiable of you. I think you do right in offering me the money; but I think I should do altogether wrong in accepting it. A lady is not honest from the hope of gain; she is not brave because she expects to be paid for her bravery. You were my employer, and I was bound to serve my employer's interests. I did so as well as I could, and there is the end of it.'

She looked absolutely disappointed; we all hate to crush a benevolent impulse; but she tore the cheque up into very small pieces. 'As you will, my dear,' she said, with her hands on her hips: 'I see, you are poor Tom Cayley's daughter. He was always a bit Quixotic.' Though I believe she liked me all the better for my refusal.

On the way from Cologne to Eltville, however, and on the drive up to Schlangenbad, I found her just as fussy and as worrying as ever. 'Let me see, how many of these horrid pfennigs make an English penny? I never can remember. Oh, those silly little nickel things are ten pfennigs each, are they? Well, eight would be a penny, I suppose. A mark's a shilling; ridiculous of them to divide it into ten pence instead of twelve; one never really knows how much one's paying for anything. Why these Continental people can't be content to use pounds, shillings, and pence, all over alike, the same as we do, passes my comprehension. They're glad enough to get

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English sovereigns when they can; why, then, don't they use them as such, instead of reckoning them each at twenty-five francs, and then trying to cheat you out of the proper exchange, which is always ten centimes more than the brokers give you? What, we use their beastly decimal System? Lois, I'm ashamed of you. An English girl to turn and rend her native country like that! Francs and centimes, indeed! Fancy proposing it at Peter Robinson's! No, I will not go by the boat, my dear. I hate the Rhine boats, crowded with nasty selfish pigs of Germans. What I like is a first-class compartment all to myself, and no horrid foreigners. Especially Germans. They're bursting with self-satisfaction have such an exaggerated belief in their "land" and their "folk." And when they come to England, they do nothing but find fault with us. If people aren't satisfied with the countries they travel in, they'd better stop at home that's my opinion. Nasty pigs of Germans! The very sight of them sickens me. Oh, I don't mind if they do understand me, child. They all learn English nowadays; it helps them in trade that's why they're driving us out of all the markets. But it must be good for them to learn once in a way what other people really think of them civilised people, I mean; not Germans. They're a set of barbarians.'

We reached Schlangenbad alive, though I sometimes doubted it: for my old lady did her boisterous best to rouse some peppery German officer into cutting our throats incontinently by the way; and when we got there, we took up our abode in the nicest hotel in the village. Lady Georgina had engaged the best front room on the first floor, with a charming view across the pine-clad valley; but I must do her the justice to say that she took the second best for me, and that she treated me in every way like the guest she delighted to honour. My refusal to accept her twenty guineas made her anxious to pay it back to me within the terms of our agreement. She described me to everybody as a young friend who was travelling with her, and never gave any one the slightest hint of my being a paid companion. Our arrangement was that I was to have two guineas for the week, besides my travelling expenses, board, and lodging.

On our first morning at Schlangenbad, Lady Georgina sallied forth, very much overdressed, and in a youthful hat, to use the waters. They are valued chiefly for the complexion, I learned; I wondered then why Lady Georgina came there for she hadn't any; but they are also recommended for nervous irritability, and as Lady Georgina had visited the place almost every summer for fifteen years, it opened before one's mind an appalling vista of what her temper might have been if she had not gone to Schlangenbad. The hot springs are used in the form of a bath. 'You don't need them, my dear,' Lady Georgina said to me, with a good-humoured smile; and I will own that I did not, for nature has gifted me with a tolerable cuticle. But I like when at Rome to do as Rome does; so I tried the baths once. I found them unpleasantly smooth and oily. I do not freckle, but if I did, I think I should prefer freckles.

We walked much on the terrace the inevitable dawdling promenade of all German watering-places it reeked of Serene Highness. We also drove out among the low wooded hills which bound the Rhine valley. The majority of the visitors, I found, were ladies Court ladies, most of them; all there for their complexions, but all anxious to assure me privately they had come for what they described as 'nervous debility.' I divided them at once into two classes: half of them never had and never would have a complexion at all; the other half had exceptionally smooth and beautiful skins, of which they were obviously proud, and whose pink-and-white peach-blossom they thought to preserve by assiduous bathing. It was vanity working on two opposite bases. There was a sprinkling of men, however, who were really there for a sufficient reason wounds or serious complaints; while a few good old sticks, porty and whisty, were in attendance on invalid wives or sisters.

From the beginning I noticed that Lady Georgina went peering about all over the place, as if she were hunting for something she had lost, with her long-handled tortoise-shell glasses perpetually in evidence the 'aristocratic outrage' I called them and that she eyed all the men with peculiar attention. But I took no open notice of her little weakness. On our second day at the Spa, I was sauntering with her down the chief street 'a beastly little hole, my dear; not a decent shop where one can buy a reel of thread or a yard of tape in the place!' when I observed a tall and handsome young man on the opposite side of the road cast a hasty glance at us, and then sneak round the corner hurriedly. He was a loose-limbed, languid-looking young man, with large, dreamy eyes, and a peculiarly beautiful and gentle expression; but what I noted about him most was an odd superficial air of superciliousness. He seemed always to be looking down with scorn on that foolish jumble, the universe. He darted away so rapidly,

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however, that I hardly discovered all this just then. I piece it out from subsequent observations.

Later in the day, we chanced to pass a cafe, where three young exquisites sat sipping Rhine wines after the fashion of the country. One of them, with a gold-tipped cigarette held gracefully between two slender fingers, was my languid-looking young aristocrat. He was blowing out smoke in a lazy blue stream. The moment he saw me, however, he turned away as if he desired to escape observation, and ducked down so as to hide his face behind his companions. I wondered why on earth he should want to avoid me. Could this be the Count? No, the young man with the halo of cigarette smoke stood three inches taller. Who, then, at Schlangenbad could wish to avoid my notice? It was a singular mystery; for I was quite certain the supercilious young man was trying his best to prevent my seeing him.

That evening, after dinner, the Cantankerous Old lady burst out suddenly, 'Well, I can't for the life of me imagine why Harold hasn't turned up here. The wretch knew I was coming; and I heard from our Ambassador at Rome last week that he was going to be at Schlangenbad.'

'Who is Harold?' I asked.

'My nephew,' Lady Georgina snapped back, beating a devil's tattoo with her fan on the table. 'The only member of my family, except myself, who isn't a born idiot. Harold's not an idiot; he's an attache at Rome.'

I saw it at a glance. 'Then he is in Schlangenbad,' I answered. 'I noticed him this morning.'

The old lady turned towards me sharply. She peered right through me, as if she were a Rontgen ray. I could see she was asking herself whether this was a conspiracy, and whether I had come there on purpose to meet 'Harold.' But I flatter myself I am tolerably mistress of my own countenance. I did not blench. 'How do you know?' she asked quickly, with an acid intonation.

If I had answered the truth, I should have said, 'I know he is here, because I saw a good-looking young man evidently trying to avoid you this morning; and if a young man has the misfortune to be born your nephew, and also to have expectations from you, it is easy to understand that he would prefer to keep out of your way as long as possible.' But that would have been neither polite nor politic. Moreover, I reflected that I had no particular reason for wishing to do Mr. Harold a bad turn; and that it would be kinder to him, as well as to her, to conceal the reasons on which I based my instinctive inference. So I took up a strong strategic position. 'I have an intuition that I saw him in the village this morning,' I said. 'Family likeness, perhaps. I merely jumped at it as you spoke. A tall, languid young man; large, poetical eyes; an artistic moustache just a trifle Oriental-looking.'

'That's Harold!' the Cantankerous Old Lady rapped out sharply, with clear conviction. 'The miserable boy! Why on earth hasn't he been round to see me?'

I reflected that I knew why; but I did not say so. Silence is golden. I also remarked mentally on that curious human blindness which had made me conclude at first that the supercilious young man was trying to avoid me, when I might have guessed it was far more likely he was trying to avoid my companion. I was a nobody; Lady Georgina Fawley was a woman of European reputation.

'Perhaps he didn't know which hotel you were stopping at,' I put in. 'Or even that you were here.' I felt a sudden desire to shield poor Harold.

'Not know which hotel? Nonsense, child; he knows I come here on this precise date regularly every summer; and if he didn't know, is it likely I should try any other inn, when this is the only moderately decent house to stop at in Schlangenbad? And the morning coffee undrinkable at that; while the hash such hash! But that's the way in Germany. He's an ungrateful monster; if he comes now, I shall refuse to see him.'

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Next morning after breakfast, however, in spite of these threats, she hailed me forth with her on the Harold hunt. She had sent the concierge to inquire at all the hotels already, it seemed, and found her truant at none of them; now she ransacked the pensions. At last she hunted him down in a house on the hill. I could see she was really hurt. 'Harold, you viper, what do you mean by trying to avoid me?'

'My dear aunt, you here in Schlangenbad! Why, when did you arrive? And what a colour you've got! You're looking so well!' That clever thrust saved him.

He cast me an appealing glance. 'You will not betray me?' it said. I answered, mutely, 'Not for worlds,' with a faltering pair of downcast eyelids.

'Oh, I'm well enough, thank you,' Lady Georgina replied, somewhat mollified by his astute allusion to her personal appearance. He had hit her weak point dexterously. 'As well, that is, as one can expect to be nowadays. Hereditary gout the sins of the fathers visited as usual. But why didn't you come to see me?'

'How can I come to see you if you don't tell me where you are? "Lady Georgina Fawley, Europe," was the only address I knew. It strikes me as insufficient.'

His gentle drawl was a capital foil to Lady Georgina's acidulous soprano. It seemed to disarm her. She turned to me with a benignant wave of her hand. 'Miss Cayley,' she said, introducing me; 'my nephew, Mr. Harold Tillington. You've heard me talk of poor Tom Cayley, Harold? This is poor Tom Cayley's daughter.'

'Indeed?' the supercilious attache put in, looking hard at me. 'Delighted to make Miss Cayley's acquaintance.'

'Now, Harold, I can tell from your voice at once you haven't remembered one word about Captain Cayley.'

Harold stood on the defensive. 'My dear aunt,' he observed, expanding both palms, 'I have heard you talk of so very many people, that even my diplomatic memory fails at times to recollect them all. But I do better: I dissemble. I will plead forgetfulness now of Captain Cayley, since you force it on me. It is not likely I shall have to plead it of Captain Cayley's daughter.' And he bowed towards me gallantly.

The Cantankerous Old Lady darted a lightning glance at him. It was a glance of quick suspicion. Then she turned her rontgen rays upon my face once more. I fear I burned crimson.

'A friend?' he asked. 'Or a fellow-guest?'

'A companion.' It was the first nasty thing she had said of me.

'Ha! more than a friend, then. A comrade.' He turned the edge neatly.

We walked out on the terrace and a little way up the zigzag path. The day was superb. I found Mr. Tillington, in spite of his studiously languid and supercilious air, a most agreeable companion. He knew Europe. He was full of talk of Rome and the Romans. He had epigrammatic wit, curt, keen, and pointed. We sat down on a bench; he kept Lady Georgina and myself amused for an hour by his crisp sallies. Besides, he had been everywhere and seen everybody. Culture and agriculture seemed all one to him.

When we rose to go in, Lady Georgina remarked, with emphasis, 'Of course, Harold, you'll come and take up your diggings at our hotel?'

'Of course, my dear aunt. How can you ask? Free quarters. Nothing would give me greater pleasure.'

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She glanced at him keenly again. I saw she had expected him to fake up some lame excuse for not joining us; and I fancied she was annoyed at his prompt acquiescence, which had done her out of the chance for a family disagreement. 'Oh, you'll come then?' she said, grudgingly.

'Certainly, most respected aunt. I shall much prefer it.'

She let her piercing eye descend upon me once more. I was aware that I had been talking with frank ease of manner to Mr. Tillington, and that I had said several things which clearly amused him. Then I remembered all at once our relative positions. A companion, I felt, should know her place: it is not her role to be smart and amusing. 'Perhaps,' I said, drawing back, 'Mr. Tillington would like to remain in his present quarters till the end of the week, while I am with you, Lady Georgina; after that, he could have my room; it might be more convenient.'

His eye caught mine quickly. 'Oh, you're only going to stop a week, then, Miss Cayley?' he put in, with an air of disappointment.

'Only a week,' I nodded.

'My dear child,' the Cantankerous Old Lady broke out, 'what nonsense you do talk! Only going to stop a week? How can I exist without you?'

'That was the arrangement,' I said, mischievously. 'You were going to look about, you recollect, for an unsophisticated Gretchen. You don't happen to know of any warehouse where a supply of unsophisticated Gretchens is kept constantly in stock, do you, Mr. Tillington?'

'No, I don't,' he answered, laughing. 'I believe there are dodos and auks' eggs, in very small numbers, still to be procured in the proper quarters; but the unsophisticated Gretchen, I am credibly informed, is an extinct animal. Why, the cap of one fetches high prices nowadays among collectors.'

'But you will come to the hotel at once, Harold?' Lady Georgina interposed.

'Certainly, aunt. I will move in without delay. If Miss Cayley is going to stay for a single week only, that adds one extra inducement for joining you immediately.'

His aunt's stony eye was cold as marble.

So when we got back to our hotel after the baths that afternoon the concierge greeted us with: 'Well, your noble nephew has arrived, high-well-born countess! He came with his boxes just now, and has taken a room near your honourable ladyship's.'

Lady Georgina's face was a study of mingled emotions. I don't know whether she looked more pleased or jealous.

Later in the day, I chanced on Mr. Tillington, sunning himself on a bench in the hotel garden. He rose, and came up to me, as fast as his languid nature permitted 'Oh, Miss Cayley,' he said, abruptly, 'I do want to thank you so much for not betraying me. I know you spotted me twice in the town yesterday; and I also know you were good enough to say nothing to my revered aunt about it.'

'I had no reason for wishing to hurt Lady Georgina's feelings,' I answered, with a permissible evasion.

His countenance fell. 'I never thought of that,' he interposed, with one hand on his moustache. 'I fancied you did it out of fellow-feeling.'

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'We all think of things mainly from our own point of view first,' I answered. 'The difference is that some of us think of them from other people's afterwards. Motives are mixed.'

He smiled. 'I didn't know my deeply venerated relative was coming here so soon,' he went on. 'I thought she wasn't expected till next week; my brother wrote me that she had quarrelled with her French maid, and 'twould take her full ten days to get another. I meant to clear out before she arrived. To tell you the truth, I was going to-morrow.'

'And now you are stopping on?'

He caught my eye again.

'Circumstances alter cases,' he murmured, with meaning.

'It is hardly polite to describe one as a circumstance,' I objected.

'I meant,' he said, quickly, 'my aunt alone is one thing; my aunt with a friend is quite another.'

'I see,' I answered. 'There is safety in numbers.'

He eyed me hard.

'Are you mediaeval or modern?' he asked.

'Modern, I hope,' I replied. Then I looked at him again. 'Oxford?'

He nodded. 'And you?' half joking.

'Cambridge,' I said, glad to catch him out. 'What college?'

'Merton. Yours?'

'Girton.'

The odd rhyme amused him. Thenceforth we were friends 'two 'Varsity men,' he said. And indeed it does make a queer sort of link a freemasonry to which even women are now admitted.

At dinner and through the evening he talked a great deal to me, Lady Georgina putting in from time to time a characteristic growl about the table-d'hote chicken a special breed, my dear, with eight drumsticks apiece' or about the inadequate lighting of the heavy German salon. She was worse than ever: pungent as a rule, that evening she was grumpy. When we retired for the night, to my great surprise, she walked into my bedroom. She seated herself on my bed: I saw she had come to talk over Harold.

'He will be very rich, my dear, you know. A great catch in time. He will inherit all my brother's money.'

'Lord Kynaston's?'

'Bless the child, no. Kynaston's as poor as a church mouse with the tithes unpaid; he has three sons of his own, and not a blessed stiver to leave between them. How could he, poor dear idiot? Agricultural depression; a splendid pauper. He has only the estate, and that's in Essex; land going begging; worth nothing a year, encumbered up to the eyes, and loaded with first rent-charges, jointures, settlements. Money, indeed! poor Kynaston! It's my

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brother Marmaduke's I mean; lucky dog, he went in for speculation began life as a guinea-pig, and rose with the rise of soap and cocoa. He's worth his half-million.'

'Oh, Mr. Marmaduke Ashurst.'

Lady Georgina nodded. 'Marmy's a fool,' she said, briefly; 'but he knows which side of his bread is buttered.'

'And Mr. Tillington is his nephew?'

'Bless the child, yes; have you never read your British Bible, the peerage? Astonishing, the ignorance of these Girton girls! They don't even know the Leger's run at Doncaster. The family name's Ashurst. Kynaston's an earl I was Lady Georgina Ashurst before I took it into my head to marry and do for poor Evelyn Fawley. My younger brother's the Honourable Marmaduke Ashurst women get the best of it there it's about the only place where they do get the best of it: an earl's daughter is Lady Betty; his son's nothing more than the Honourable Tom. So one scores off one's brothers. My younger sister, Lady Guinevere Ashurst, married Stanley Tillington of the Foreign Office. Harold's their eldest son. Now, child, do you grasp it?'

'Perfectly,' I answered. 'You speak like Debrett. Has issue, Harold.'

'And Harold will inherit all Marmaduke's money. What I'm always afraid of is that some fascinating adventuress will try to marry him out of hand. A pretty face and over goes Harold! My business in life is to stand in the way and prevent it.'

She looked me through and through again with her X-ray scrutiny.

'I don't think Mr. Tillington is quite the sort that falls a prey to adventuresses,' I answered, boldly.

'Ah, but there are faggots and faggots,' the old lady said, wagging her head with profound meaning. 'Never mind, though; I'd like to see an adventuress marry off Harold without my leave! I'd lead her a life! I'd turn her black hair gray for her!'

'I should think,' I assented, 'you could do it, Lady Georgina, if you gave your attention seriously to it.'

From that moment forth, I was aware that my Cantankerous Old Lady's malign eye was inexorably fixed upon me every time I went within speaking distance of Mr. Tillington. She watched him like a lynx. She watched me like a dozen lynxes. Wherever we went, Lady Georgina was sure to turn up in the neighbourhood. She was perfectly ubiquitous: she seemed to possess a world-wide circulation. I don't know whether it was this constant suggestion of hers that I was stalking her nephew which roused my latent human feeling of opposition; but in the end, I began to be aware that I rather liked the supercilious attache than otherwise. He evidently liked me, and he tried to meet me. Whenever he spoke to me, indeed, it was without the superciliousness which marked his manner towards others; in point of fact, it was with graceful deference. He watched for me on the stairs, in the garden, by the terrace; whenever he got a chance, he sidled over and talked to me. Sometimes he stopped in to read me Heine: he also introduced me to select portions of Gabriele d'Annunzio. It is feminine to be touched by such obvious attention; I confess, before long, I grew to like Mr. Harold Tillington.

The closer he followed me up, the more did I perceive that Lady Georgina threw out acrid hints with increasing spleen about the ways of adventuresses. They were hints of that acrimonious generalised kind, too, which one cannot answer back without seeming to admit that the cap has fitted. It was atrocious how middle-class young women nowadays ran after young men of birth and fortune. A girl would stoop to anything in order to catch five hundred thousand. Guileless youths should be thrown among their natural equals. It was a mistake to let them see too much of people of a lower rank who consider themselves good-looking. And the clever ones were the worst:

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they pretended to go in for intellectual companionship.

I also noticed that though at first Lady Georgina had expressed the strongest disinclination to my leaving her after the time originally proposed, she now began to take for granted that I would go at the end of my week, as arranged in London, and she even went on to some overt steps towards securing the help of the blameless Gretchen.

We had arrived at Schlangenbad on Tuesday. I was to stop with the Cantankerous Old Lady till the corresponding day of the following week. On the Sunday, I wandered out on the wooded hillside behind the village; and as I mounted the path I was dimly aware by a sort of instinct that Harold Tillington was following me.

He came up with me at last near a ledge of rock. 'How fast you walk!' he exclaimed. 'I gave you only a few minutes' start, and yet even my long legs have had hard work to overtake you.'

'I am a fairly good climber,' I answered, sitting down on a little wooden bench. 'You see, at Cambridge, I went on the river a great deal I canoed and sculled: and then besides, I've done a lot of bicycling.'

'What a splendid birthright it is,' he cried, 'to be a wholesome athletic English girl! You can't think how one admires English girls after living a year or two in Italy where women are dolls, except for a brief period of intrigue before they settle down to be contented frumps with an outline like a barrel.'

'A little muscle and a little mind are no doubt advisable adjuncts for a housewife,' I admitted.

'You shall not say that word,' he cried, seating himself at my side. 'It is a word for Germans, "housewife." Our English ideal is something immeasurably higher and better. A companion, a complement! Do you know, Miss Cayley it always sickens me when I hear German students sentimentalising over their madchen: their beautiful, pure, insipid, yellow-haired, blue-eyed madchen; her, so fair, so innocent, unapproachably vacuous so like a wax doll and then think of how they design her in days to come to cook sausages for their dinner, and knit them endless stockings through a placid middle age, till the needles drop from her paralysed fingers, and she retires into frilled caps and Teutonic senility.'

'You seem to have almost as low an opinion of foreigners as your respected aunt!' I exclaimed, looking quizzically at him.

He drew back, surprised. 'Oh, no; I'm not narrow-minded, like my aunt, I hope,' he answered. 'I am a good cosmopolitan. I allow Continental nations all their own good points, and each has many. But their women, Miss Cayley and their point of view of their women you will admit that there they can't hold a candle to English women.'

I drew a circle in the dust with the tip of my parasol.

'On that issue, I may not be a wholly unprejudiced observer,' I answered. 'The fact of my being myself an Englishwoman may possibly to some extent influence my judgement.'

'You are sarcastic,' he cried, drawing away.

'Not at all,' I answered, making a wider circle. 'I spoke a simple fact. But what is your ideal, then, as opposed to the German one?'

He gazed at me and hesitated. His lips half parted. 'My ideal?' he said, after a pause. 'Well, my ideal do you happen to have such a thing as a pocket-mirror about you?'

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I laughed in spite of myself. 'Now, Mr. Tillington,' I said severely, 'if you're going to pay compliments, I shall have to return. If you want to stop here with me, you must remember that I am only Lady Georgina Fawley's temporary lady's-maid. Besides, I didn't mean that. I meant, what is your ideal of a man's right relation to his madchen?'

'Don't say madchen, he cried, petulantly. 'It sounds as if you thought me one of those sentimental Germans. I hate sentiment.'

'Then, towards the woman of his choice.'

He glanced up through the trees at the light overhead, and spoke more slowly than ever. 'I think,' he said, fumbling his watch-chain nervously, 'a man ought to wish the woman he loves to be a free agent, his equal in point of action, even as she is nobler and better than he in all spiritual matters. I think he ought to desire for her a life as high as she is capable of leading, with full scope for every faculty of her intellect or emotional nature. She should be beautiful, with a vigorous, wholesome, many-sided beauty, moral, intellectual, physical; yet with soul in her, too; and with the soul and the mind lighting up her eyes, as it lights up well, that is immaterial. And if a man can discover such a woman as that, and can induce her to believe in him, to love him, to accept him though how such a woman can be satisfied with any man at all is to me unfathomable well, then, I think he should be happy in devoting his whole life to her, and should give himself up to repay her condescension in taking him.'

'And you hate sentiment?' I put in smiling.

He brought his eyes back from the sky suddenly. 'Miss Cayley,' he said, 'this is cruel. I was in earnest. You are playing with me.'

'I believe the chief characteristic of the English girl is supposed to be common sense,' I answered, calmly, 'and I trust I possess it.' But indeed, as he spoke, my heart was beginning to make its beat felt; for he was a charming young man; he had a soft voice and lustrous eyes; it was a summer's day; and alone in the woods with one other person, where the sunlight falls mellow in spots like a leopard's skin, one is apt to remember that we are all human.

That evening Lady Georgina managed to blurt out more malicious things than ever about the ways of adventuresses, and the duty of relations in saving young men from the clever clutches of designing creatures. She was ruthless in her rancour: her gibes stung me.

On Monday at breakfast I asked her casually if she had yet found a Gretchen.

'No,' she answered, in a gloomy voice. 'All slatterns, my dear; all slatterns! Brought up in pig-sties. I wouldn't let one of them touch my hair for thousands.'

'That's unfortunate,' I said, drily, 'for you know I'm going to-morrow.'

If I had dropped a bomb in their midst they couldn't have looked more astonished. 'To-morrow?' Lady Georgina gasped, clutching my arm. 'You don't mean it, child'; you don't mean it?'

I asserted my Ego. 'Certainly,' I answered, with my coolest air. 'I said I thought I could manage you for a week; and I have managed you.'

She almost burst into tears. 'But, my child, my child, what shall I do without you?'

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'The unsophisticated Gretchen,' I answered, trying not to look concerned; for in my heart of hearts, in spite of her innuendoes, I had really grown rather to like the Cantankerous Old Lady.

She rose hastily from the table, and darted up to her own room. 'Lois,' she said, as she rose, in a curious voice of mingled regret and suspicion, 'I will talk to you about this later.' I could see she was not quite satisfied in her own mind whether Harold Tillington and I had not arranged this coup together.

I put on my hat and strolled off into the garden, and then along the mossy hill path. In a minute more, Harold Tillington was beside me.

He seated me, half against my will, on a rustic bench.

'Look here, Miss Cayley,' he said, with a very earnest face; 'is this really true? Are you going to-morrow?'

My voice trembled a little. 'Yes,' I answered, biting my lip. 'I am going. I see several reasons why I should go, Mr. Tillington.'

'But so soon?'

'Yes, I think so; the sooner the better.' My heart was racing now, and his eyes pleaded mutely.

'Then where are you going?'

I shrugged my shoulders, and pouted my lips a little. 'I don't know,' I replied. 'The world is all before me where to choose. I am an adventuress,' I said it boldly, 'and I am in quest of adventures. I really have not yet given a thought to my next place of sojourn.'

'But you will let me know when you have decided?'

It was time to speak out. 'No, Mr. Tillington,' I said, with decision. 'I will not let you know. One of my reasons for going is, that I think I had better see no more of you.'

He flung himself on the bench at my side, and folded his hands in a helpless attitude. 'But, Miss Cayley,' he cried, 'this is so short a notice; you give a fellow no chance; I hoped I might have seen more of you might have had some opportunity of letting you realise how deeply I admired and respected you some opportunity of showing myself as I really am to you before before ' he paused, and looked hard at me.

I did not know what to say. I really liked him so much; and when he spoke in that voice, I could not bear to seem cruel to him. Indeed, I was aware at the moment how much I had grown to care for him in those six short days. But I knew it was impossible. 'Don't say it, Mr. Tillington,' I murmured, turning my face away. 'The less said, the sooner mended.'

'But I must,' he cried. 'I must tell you now, if I am to have no chance afterwards. I wanted you to see more of me before I ventured to ask you if you could ever love me, if you could ever suffer me to go through life with you, to share my all with you.' He seized my trembling hand 'Lois,' he cried, in a pleading voice, 'I must ask you; I can't expect you to answer me now, but do say you will give me at least some other chance of seeing you, and then in time, of pressing my suit upon you.'

Tears stood in my eyes. He was so earnest, so charming. But I remembered Lady Georgina, and his prospective half-million. I moved his hand away gently. 'I cannot,' I said. 'I cannot I am a penniless girl an adventuress. Your family, your uncle, would never forgive you if you married me. I will not stand in your way. I I like you

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very much, though I have seen so little of you. But I feel it is impossible and I am going to-morrow.'

Then I rose of a sudden, and ran down the hill with all my might, lest I should break my resolve, never stopping once till I reached my own bedroom.

An hour later, Lady Georgina burst in upon me in high dudgeon. 'Why, Lois, my child,' she cried. 'What's this? What on earth does it mean? Harold tells me he has proposed to you proposed to you and you've rejected him!'

I dried my eyes and tried to look steadily at her. 'Yes, Lady Georgina,' I faltered. 'You need not be afraid. I have refused him; and I mean it.'

She looked at me, all aghast. 'And you mean it!' she repeated. 'You mean to refuse him. Then, all I can say is, Lois Cayley, I call it pure cheek of you!'

'What?' I cried, drawing back.

'Yes, cheek,' she answered, volubly. 'Forty thousand a year, and a good old family! Harold Tillington is my nephew; he's an earl's grandson; he's an attache at Rome; and he's bound to be one of the richest commoners in England. Who are you, I'd like to know, miss, that you dare to reject him?'

I stared at her, amazed. 'But, Lady Georgina,' I cried, 'you said you wished to protect your nephew against bare-faced adventuresses who were setting their caps at him.'

She fixed her eyes on me, half-angry, half-tremulous.

'Of course,' she answered, with withering scorn. 'But, then, I thought you were trying to catch him. He tells me now you won't have him, and you won't tell him where you are going. I call it sheer insolence. Where do you hail from, girl, that you should refuse my nephew? A man that any woman in England would be proud to marry! Forty thousand a year, and an earl's grandson! That's what comes, I suppose, of going to Girton!'

I drew myself up. 'Lady Georgina,' I said, coldly, 'I cannot allow you to use such language to me. I promised to accompany you to Germany for a week; and I have kept my word. I like your nephew; I respect your nephew; he has behaved like a gentleman. But I will not marry him. Your own conduct showed me in the plainest way that you did not judge such a match desirable for him; and I have common sense enough to see that you were quite right. I am a lady by birth and education; I am an officer's daughter; but I am not what society calls "a good match" for Mr. Tillington. He had better marry into a rich stockbroker's family.'

It was an unworthy taunt: the moment it escaped my lips regretted it.

To my intense surprise, however, Lady Georgina flung herself on my bed, and burst into tears. 'My dear,' she sobbed out, covering her face with her hands, 'I thought you would be sure to set your cap at Harold; and alter I had seen you for twenty-four hours, I said to myself, "That's just the sort of girl Harold ought to fall in love with." I felt sure he would fall in love with you. I brought you here on purpose. I saw you had all the qualities that would strike Harold's fancy. So I had made up my mind for a delightful regulation family quarrel. I was going to oppose you and Harold, tooth and nail; I was going to threaten that Marmy would leave his money to Kynaston's eldest son; I was going to lick up, oh, a dickens of a row about it! Then, of course, in the end, we should all have been reconciled; we should have kissed and made friends: for you're just the one girl in the world for Harold; indeed, I never met anybody so capable and so intelligent. And now you spoil all my sport by going and refusing him! It's really most ill-timed of you. And Harold has sent me here he's trembling with anxiety to see whether I can't induce you to think better of your decision.'

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I made up my mind at once. 'No, Lady Georgina,' I said, in my gentlest voice positively stooping down and kissing her. 'I like Mr. Tillington very much. I dare not tell you how much I like him. He is a dear, good, kind fellow. But I cannot rest under the cruel imputation of being moved by his wealth and having tried to capture him. Even if you didn't think so, his family would. I am sorry to go; for in a way I like you. But it is best to adhere to our original plan. If I changed my mind, you might change yours again. Let us say no more. I will go to-morrow.'

'But you will see Harold again?'

'Not alone. Only at dinner.' For I feared lest, if he spoke to me alone, he might over-persuade me.

'Then at least you will tell him where you are going?'

'No, Lady Georgina; I do not know myself. And besides, it is best that this should now be final.'

She flung herself upon me. 'But, my dear child, a lady can't go out into the world with only two pounds in pocket. You must let me lend you something.'

I unwound her clasping hands. 'No, dear Lady Georgina,' I said, though I was loth to say it. 'You are very sweet and good, but I must work out my life in my own way. I have started to work it out, and I won't be turned aside just here on the threshold.'

'And you won't stop with me?' she cried, opening her arms. 'You think me too cantankerous?'

'I think you have a dear, kind old heart,' I said, 'under the quaintest and crustiest outside such a heart ever wore; you're a truculent old darling: so that's the plain truth of it.'

She kissed me. I kissed her in return with fervour, though I am but a poor hand at kissing, for a woman. 'So now this episode is concluded,' I murmured.

'I don't know about that,' she said, drying her eyes. 'I have set my heart upon you now; and Harold has set his heart upon you; and considering that your own heart goes much the same way, I daresay, my dear, we shall find in the end some convenient road out of it.'

Nevertheless, next morning I set out by myself in the coach from Schlangenbad. I went forth into the world to live my own life, partly because it was just then so fashionable, but mainly because fate had denied me the chance of living anybody else's.