MAYNE REID

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A Romance

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"A Romance"

Chapter One.

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The Half-Brothers.

In a wood, within ten miles of Windsor, two youths are seen, gun in hand, in pursuit of game. A brace of thoroughbred setters, guarding the cover in front, and a well-equipped keeper, walking obsequiously in the rear, precludes any suspicion of poaching; though the personal appearance of the young sportsmen needs no such testimony.

The wood is only an extensive pheasant-cover, and their father is its owner. They are the sons of General Harding, an old Indian officer, who, with a hundred thousand pounds, garnered during twenty years' active service in the East, has purchased an estate in the pleasant shire of Bucks, in the hope of restoring health to a constitution impaired upon the hot plains of Hindostan.

A fine old Elizabethan mansion, of red brick, now and then visible through the openings of the cover, tells that the General has laid out his lacs with considerable taste, while five hundred acres of finely timbered park, a "home farm," and half-a-dozen others rented out—to say nothing of the wood-covers and cottage tenements—prove that the *ci-devant* soldier has not carefully collected a hundred thousand pounds in India to be carelessly squandered in England.

The two young sportsmen, already introduced as his sons, are his only sons; in short, the only members of his family, with the exception of a maiden sister, who, being

sixty years old, and otherwise extremely uninteresting, will not figure conspicuously in our tale, however true it is.

Looking at the two youths, as they step through the pheasant-cover, you perceive there is but slight difference in their size; there is in their age, and still more in their personal appearance. Both are what is termed *dark*; but there is a difference in the degree. He who is the elder, and who bears the baptismal name Nigel, has a complexion almost olive, with straight black hair, that under the sunlight exhibits a purplish iridescence.

Henry, the younger, with fair skin and ruddier cheek, has hair of an auburn brown, drooping down his neck like clusters of Spanish chestnuts.

So great is their dissimilarity in personal appearance, that a stranger would scarce believe the two young sportsmen to be brothers.

Nor are they so in the exact signification of the word. Both can call General Harding father; but if the word “mother” be mentioned, their thoughts would go to two different personages, neither any longer on the earth. Nigel’s should stray back to Hyderabad, to a tomb in the environs of that ancient Indian city; Henry’s to a grave of later date, in the quiet precinct of an English country churchyard.

The explanation is easy. General Harding is not the only man, soldier or civilian, who has twice submitted his neck to the matrimonial yoke, though few ever wedded two wives so different in character as were his. Physically, mentally, morally, the Hindoo lady of Hyderabad was as unlike her Saxon successor as India is to England.

Looking at Nigel Harding and his half-brother, Henry, one could not help perceiving that the dissimilarity had in both cases been transmitted from mother to son, without any great distraction caused by the blood of a common father. An incident, occurring in the cover, gives evidence of this.

Though especially a pheasant preserve, the young sportsmen are not in pursuit of the bird with strong whirring wings. The setters search for smaller game. It is mid-winter. A week ago the youths might have been seen, capped and gowned, loitering along the aisles of Oriel College, Oxford. Now home for the holidays, what better than beating the home-covers? The frost-bound earth forbids indulgence in the grand chase; but it gives rare sport by driving the snipes and woodcocks—both migratory birds among the Chilterns—to the open waters of the running rivulet.

Up the banks of one—a brook that, defying the frost, gurgles musically among the trees—the young sportsmen are directing their search. This, with the setters, tells that woodcock is their game. There are two dogs, a white and a black, both of good breed, but not equally well trained. The black sets steady as a rock; the white quarters more wildly, runs rash, and has twice *flushed* the game, without *setting* it.

The white dog belongs to Nigel; the black to his half-brother.

A third time the setter shows his imperfect training, by flushing a cock before the sportsmen are nigh enough to obtain a fair shot.

The blood sprung from Hyderabad can stand it no longer. It is hot even under the shadows of a winter wood in the

Chilterns.

“I’ll teach the cur a lesson!” cries Nigel, leaning his gun against a tree, and taking a clasp-knife out of his pocket. “What you should have taught him long ago, Doggy Dick, if you’d half done your duty.”

“Lor, Muster Nigel,” replies the gamekeeper, to whom the apostrophe has been addressed, “I’ve whipped the animal till my arms ached. ’Tain’t no use. The steady ain’t in him.”

“I’ll put it into him, then!” cries the young Anglo-Indian, striding, knife in hand, towards the spaniel. “See if I don’t!”

“Stay, Nigel!” interposed Henry. “You are surely not going to do the dog an injury?”

“And what is it to you, if I am? He is *mine*—not *yours*.”

“Only, that I should think it very cruel of you. The fault may not be his, poor dumb brute. As you say, it may be Dick who is to blame, for not properly training him.”

“Thank’ee, Muster Henry! ’Bleeged to ye for yer compliment. In coorse it be all my doin’; tho’ not much thanks for doin’ my best. Howsoever, I’m obleeged to ye, Muster Henry.”

Doggy Dick, who, though young, is neither graceful nor good-looking, accompanies his rejoinder with a glance that bespeaks a mind still more ungraceful than his person.

“Bother your talk—both!” vociferates the impatient Nigel. “I’m going to chastise the cur as he deserves, and not as you may like it, Master Hal. I want a twig for him.”

The twig, when cut from its parent stem, turns out to be a stick, three-quarters of an inch in diameter.

With this the peccant animal is brutally belaboured, till the woods for a mile around re-echo its howlings.

Henry begs his brother to desist.

In vain. Nigel continues the cudgelling.

“Gi’e it him!” cries the unfeeling keeper. “Do the beggar good.”

“You, Dick,” interposes Henry, “I shall report you to my father.”

An angry exclamation from the half-brother, and a sullen scowl from the savage in gaiters, is the only notice taken of Henry’s threat. Nigel, irritated by it, only strikes more spitefully.

“Shame, Nigel! Shame! You’ve beaten the poor brute enough—more than enough. Have done!”

“Not till I’ve given him a mark to remember me!”

“What are you going to do to him? What more?” hurriedly asks Henry, seeing that Nigel has flung away the stick, and stands threateningly with his knife. “Surely you don’t intend —”

“To split his ear! That is what I intend doing!”

“For shame! You shall not!”

“Shall not? But I shall, and will!”

“You shall split my hand first!” cries the humane youth, flinging himself on his knees, and with both hands covering the head of the setter.

“Hands off, Henry! The dog is my own; I shall do what I please to him. Hands off, I say!”

“I won’t!”

“Then take the consequences.”

With his left hand Nigel clutches at the animal’s ear, at the same time lunging out recklessly with the knife blade.

Blood spurts up into the faces of both, and falls in crimson spray over the flax-like coat of the setter.

It is not the blood of Nigel's dog, but his brother's—the little finger of whose left hand shows a deep, longitudinal cut traversing all the way from knuckle to nail.

"You see what you've got by your interference!" cries Nigel, without the slightest show of regret. "Next time you'll keep your claws out of harm's way."

The unfeeling observation, more than the hurt received, at length stirs the Saxon blood of the younger brother.

"Coward!" he cries. "Throw your knife away, and stand up. Though you *are* three years older than I, I don't fear you. You shall pay for this."

Nigel, maddened by the challenge from one whom he has hitherto controlled, drops the knife; and the half-brothers close in a fisticuff, fight with anger as intense as if no kindred blood ran in their veins.

As already stated, there is but slight difference in their size. Nigel the taller, Henry of stouter build. But in this sort of encounter the Saxon sinews soon show their superiority over the more flaccid frame of the Anglo-Indian; and in ten minutes' time the latter appears but too well pleased, when the keeper interferes to prevent his further punishment. Had it gone the other way, Doggy Dick would have allowed the combat to continue.

There is no thought of further sport. For that day, the woodcocks are permitted to remain undisturbed in their shrubby cover.

Henry, binding up his wounded hand in a kerchief, strides direct homewards, followed by the black setter. Nigel stalks

moodily behind, with Doggy Dick by his side, and the blood-besprinkled animal skulking cowed-like at his heels.

General Harding is astonished at the early return of the sportsmen. Is the stream frozen up, and the woodcocks gone to more open quarters?

The blood-stained kerchief comes under his eye, and the split finger requires explanation. So, too, a purple ring around the eye of his eldest born. The truth has to be told, each giving his version.

The younger brother is at a disadvantage: for the testimony is two to one—the keeper declaring against him. For all that, truth triumphs in the mind of the astute old soldier, and although both his sons are severely reprimanded, Nigel receives the heavier share of the censure.

It is a sad day’s sport for all—the black setter alone excepted.

For Doggy Dick does not escape unscathed. Ere parting from the presence of the General, the licence is taken from his pocket; the velveteen shooting jacket stripped from his shoulders; and he receives his discharge, with a caution never to show himself again in the Beechwood preserves, under the penalty of being treated as a poacher.

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Doggy Dick.

Doggy Dick, on being discharged by General Harding, in a short time succeeded in obtaining another and similar situation. It was on an estate bordering that of the General, whose cover came within a field or two of meeting with those of his neighbour. This gentleman was a city magnate, by name Whibley, who, having accumulated a fortune by sharp trading on the Stock Exchange, had purchased the estate in question, and commenced playing squire on an extensive scale.

Between the old officer and the newcomer there was no cordiality; on the contrary, some coolness. General Harding had an instinctive contempt for the vulgar ostentation usually exhibited by these social upstarts, who must needs ride to the parish church in a carriage and pair, though their residence be but three hundred yards from the churchyard gate. Of this class was the gentleman in question.

In addition to the dissimilarity of tastes between a retired officer and a retired stockbroker, a dispute had early occurred between them, about rights of game belonging to a strip of waste that stretched triangularly between their respective properties.

It was a trifling affair, but well calculated to increase their mutual coolness; which at length ended in a hostility—silent, but understood. To this, perhaps, more than any professional merit, was Doggy Dick indebted for his promotion to be head keeper of the Whibley preserves; just

the course which a *parvenu* would take for the satisfaction of his spite.

On that same year, when the shooting season came round, the young Hardings discovered a scarcity of game in their father's preserves. The General did not often go gunning himself, and would not have noticed this falling off; neither, perhaps, would Nigel; but Henry, who was passionately fond of field sports, at once perceived that there was a thinner stock of pheasants than on the preceding season. All the more surprising to him, because it was a good year for game generally, and pheasants in particular. The Whibley covers were swarming with them; and they were reported plentiful in the country around.

It became a question whether General Harding's gamekeeper had properly attended to his trust. No poaching had been reported, except some trifling cases of boys, who had been detected stealing eggs in the hatching season. But this had not occurred on a scale sufficient to account for the scarcity of the game.

Besides, the new gamekeeper, who was reported one of the best, had been provided with a fall set of watchers; and, on the Whibley side, there was a staff not so strong, with Doggy Dick at their head.

While reflecting on this, it occurred to Mr Henry Harding that something might have been done to attract the pheasants across to the Whibley covers. Perhaps a better lay of feed had been there provided for them?

He knew that neither Doggy Dick nor his master owed any good-will towards him or his father; and a trick of this

kind would be compatible with the character of the stockbroker.

Still, there was nothing in it—beyond a certain discourtesy; and it only made it necessary that some steps should be taken to create a counter attraction for the game. Patches of buck wheat were sown here and there, and other favourite pheasant's food was liberally laid through the covers.

On the following season the result was the same, or worse—the strong, whirring wing was sparingly heard among the Harding preserves. Even partridges had become scarce in the Swedes and stubble; while on the Whibley property both were in abundance.

The General's gamekeeper, when taken to task, admitted that, during the breeding season, he had found several pheasants' nests rifled of their eggs. He could not account for it. There was no one ever seen in the covers, except occasionally the keepers from the neighbouring estate. But of course *they* would not do such a thing as steal eggs.

"Indeed," thought Henry Harding, "I'm not so sure of that. On the contrary, it appears to be the only way to account for our scarcity of game."

He communicated these thoughts to his father; and Whibley's keepers were forbidden the range. It was deemed discourteous, and widened the breach between the *ci-devant* soldier and the retired stockbroker.

Another breeding season came round, and the young Hardings were at home for the Easter holidays. It was at this time of the year that the chief damage appeared to have been done to the game on the estate.

No amount of winter poaching can cause such havoc in a preserve, as that arising from the destruction, or abstraction, of the eggs. A farmer’s boy may do greater damage in one day than the most incorrigible gang of poachers in a month, with all their nets, traps, guns, and other appliances to boot.

Knowing this, the Harding covers were this year still more carefully watched—additional men being employed. A goodly number of nests was noted, and a better produce expected.

But although the future seemed fair, Henry Harding was not satisfied with the past. He chafed at his disappointment on the two preceding seasons, and was determined on discovering the cause. For this purpose he adopted an expedient.

On a certain day a holiday was given to the keepers on the Harding estate, which included the watchers as well. It was fixed for the date of some races, held about ten miles off. The General’s drag was granted for taking them to the race-course. The holiday was promised a week in advance; so that the fact might become known to the keepers of the adjoining estate.

The race day came; the drag rattled off, loaded with half a score of men in coats of velveteen. They were the keepers and watchers. For that day the Harding preserves were left to take care of themselves—a fine opportunity for poachers.

So a stranger might have thought, but not Henry Harding. Just before the drag drove off, he was seen to enter the covers, carrying a Malacca cane, and take his way towards their farther side, where they were bounded by the

estate of the stockbroker. He walked quietly, almost stealthily, through the copses. A poacher could not have proceeded with greater caution. Between the two preserves there was a strip of common land—the waste already alluded to as having caused contention. Near its edge stood an ancient elm, swathed in ivy. In its first fork, amidst the green festoons, Henry Harding ensconced himself; took a cigar out of his case; lit it; and commenced smoking.

The position he had chosen was excellent for his purpose. On one side it commanded a view of the waste. No one could cross from Whibley to Harding without being seen. On the other, it overlooked a broad expanse of the Harding covers—known to be a favourite haunt of pheasants, and one of their noted places of nesting.

The watcher kept his perch for a considerable time, without discovering anything to reward him for his vigilance. He smoked one cigar, then another, and was half-way through the third. His patience was becoming exhausted, to say nothing of the irksomeness of his seat on the corrugated elm. He began to think that his suspicions—hitherto directed against Doggy Dick—were without foundation. He even reasoned about their injustice. After all, Doggy might not be so bad as he had deemed him.

Speak of the fiend, and he is near; think of him, and he is not far off. So was it in the case of Doggy Dick. As the stump of Henry’s third cigar was burnt within an inch of his teeth, Whibley’s head keeper hove in sight. He was first seen standing on the edge of the Whibley cover, his ill-favoured face protruding stealthily through a screen of “witheys.” In this position he stood for some time, reconnoitring the

ground. Then, stepping out, silent and cat-like, he made his way across the neutral territory, and plunged into the Harding preserves.

Henry scanned him with the eye of a lynx, or detective. There was now the prospect of something to reward him for his long watching, and the strain of sitting upon the elm.

As was expected, Doggy took his way across the open expanse, where several nests had been “noted.” He still kept to his cat-like tread—crouching, and now and then looking suspiciously around him.

This did not hinder him from flushing a pheasant. One rose with a sonorous whirr; while another went fluttering along the sward as if both its wings had been broken.

The hen looked as if Doggy might have covered her with his hat, or killed her with a stick. He did not attempt to do either; but, bending over the forsaken nest, he took out the eggs, and carefully deposited them in his game-bag!

Out of the same bag he took something, which Henry saw him scatter over the ground in the neighbourhood of the nest. This done, he walked on in search of another.

“Come,” thought Henry, “one brood is enough to be sacrificed in this sort of way—enough for my purpose.”

Throwing away the stump of his cigar, he dropped down from the tree, and rushed after the nest-robber.

Doggy saw him, and attempted to escape to the Whibley covers. But before he could cross the fence, the fingers of his pursuer were tightly clutched upon the collar of his velveteen coat; and he came to the ground, crushing the eggs within his game-bag. This being turned inside out, the

spilt yolks and shattered shells gave proof of the plunder he had committed.

Henry Harding was at this time a strapping youth, with strength and spirit inherited from his soldier father. Moreover, he was acting with right on his side.

The keeper had neither his weight nor his inches, and was further enfeebled by his sense of wrong-doing. Under these circumstances, he saw the absurdity of making resistance. He made none; but permitted the irate youth to cudgel him with the Malacca cane until every bone in his body seemed about to be shattered like the egg-shells late carried in his game-bag.

“Now, you thief!” cried young Harding, when his passion was nearly spent. “You can go back to Mr Whibley’s covers, and hatch whatever plot may suit you and your snob of a master, but no more of my pheasants’ eggs.”

Doggy did not dare to make reply, lest it should tempt a fresh application of the cudgel. Clambering over the fence, he hobbled back across the common, and hid himself among the hazels of the Whibley preserves.

Turning towards the plundered nest, Henry Harding examined the ground in its proximity. He discovered a scattering of buckwheat, that had been steeped in some sweet-smelling liquid. It was the same he had seen Doggy distribute over the sward.

He collected a quantity in his kerchief, and carried it home. On analysis it proved to be poison!

Though there was no trial instituted, the story, with all its details, soon became known in the neighbourhood. Doggy Dick knew better than to bring an action for assault; and the

Hardings were satisfied with the punishment that had been already administered to their disgraced keeper.

As for the retired stockbroker, he had no alternative but discharge his ill-conditioned servant, who from that time became notorious as the most adroit poacher in the parish.

The submissiveness with which he had received the castigation administered by Henry Harding seemed afterwards to have been a source of regret to him: for in future encounters of a similar kind he proved himself a desperate and dangerous assailant—so dangerous that, in a conflict with one of General Harding’s watchers, occurring about a year from that time, he inflicted a severe wound upon the man, resulting in his death. He saved his own neck from the halter by making his escape out of the country; and though traced to Boulogne, and thence to Marseilles—in the company of some jockeys who were taking English horses to Italy—he finally eluded justice by hiding himself in some corner of that classic land, then covered by a network of petty states; most of them not only obstructive to justice, but corrupt in their administration.

Chapter Three.

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The Archery Fête.

Three years had elapsed, and the half-brothers were again home from college. They had both passed beyond the boundaries of boyhood. Nigel was of age, and Henry full grown.

Nigel had become noted for sedateness of conduct, economy in expenditure, and close application to his studies.

Henry, on the other hand, had won a very different character. If not considered an absolute scapegrace, he was looted upon as a young gentleman of somewhat loose habits,—hating books, loving all sorts of jollity, and scorning economy, as if, instead of a virtue, it were the curse of life.

In reality, Nigel was only restrained by an astute, secretive, and selfish, nature; while Henry, with a heart of more generous inclinings, gave way to the seductions of pleasure, with a freedom that would be tempered by time. The General, however satisfied with the conduct of his elder son, was not pleased with the proclivities of the younger; more especially as his heart, like Jacob’s, had a yearning for his last born.

Although struggling against any preference, he could not help thinking at times, how much happier it would have made him if Henry would but imitate the conduct of Nigel—even though their *rôles* should be reversed! But it seemed as if this desire was not to be gratified. During their sojourn within college walls, the rumours of *diableries*, of which his

younger son had been the hero, were scarce compensated by the reports of scholastic triumphs on the part of the elder.

It is true that Nigel himself had been habitually the herald to proclaim these mingled insinuations and successes, for Henry was but an indifferent correspondent. His letters, when they did come, were but too confirmatory of the contents of those written by his brother, being generally solicitations for a little more cash. The *ci-devant* soldier, himself generous to a fault, had never failed to forward the cheque, caring less for the money than the way in which it was spent.

The education of the Harding youths was now considered complete. They were enjoying that pleasant interval of idleness, when the chrysalis of the school or college is about to burst forth into a butterfly, and wing its way through the world.

If the old rancour existed it showed no outward sign. A stranger would have seen nothing between the half-brothers beyond a fair fraternal friendship. Henry was frank and outspoken, Nigel reserved and taciturn; but this was their natural disposition, and no one remarked upon it. In all matters of parental respect, the elder brother was the more noticed. He was implicit in his obedience to the wishes of his father; while Henry, on the other hand, was prone to neglect this duty—though only in matters of minor consequence, such as keeping late hours, lavish expenditure, and the like. Still, by such acts the father’s heart was often sorely grieved, and his affection terribly tested.

At length came a cause that tried the temper of the half-brothers towards one another—one before which the strongest fraternal affection has oft changed into bitter hostility. It was love. Both fell in love, and with the same woman—Belle Mainwaring.

Miss Belle Mainwaring was a young lady, whose fair face and fascinating manners might have turned wiser heads than those of the two ex-collegians. She was older than either; but if not in its first blush, she was still in the bloom of her beauty. Like her baptismal name, she was a belle in her own county, which was that inhabited by the Hardings. She was the daughter of an Indian officer, a poor colonel, who, less fortunate than the General, had left his bones in the Punjaub, and his widow just sufficient to maintain her in a simple cottage residence that stood outside, and not far from, the palings of Beechwood Park.

It was a dangerous proximity for two youths just entering on manhood, and with very little business before them beyond making love, and afterwards settling down with a wife. Both would be amply provided for without troubling their heads about a profession. The paternal estate, under the hammer, would any day have realised a clear hundred thousand; and he who cannot live upon half of this is not likely to increase it by a calling.

That the property would be equally divided there was no reason to doubt. There was no entail; and General Harding was not the man from whom an act of partiality might be expected. The old soldier was not without traits of eccentricity; not exactly crotchets or caprices, but a certain dogmatism of design, and an unwillingness to be thwarted

in his ways, derived no doubt from his long exercise of military authority. This, however, was not likely to influence him in matters of a paternal character; and, unless some terrible provocation should arise, his sons, at his death, would no doubt have an equal share in the earnings of his life.

So thought the social circle in which the Hardings moved, or such part of it as took this much interest in their movements. With such fair presumption of being provided for, what could the young Hardings do but look out for something to love, and, in looking out, upon whom should the eyes of both become fixed but on Belle Mainwaring? They did, with all the ardent admiration of youth; and as she returned their respective glances with that speaking reciprocity which only a coquette can give, both fell in love with her. The inspiration came on the same day, the same hour, perhaps in the same instant.

It was at a grand archery *fête*, given by the General himself, to which Miss Mainwaring and her mother had been invited. The archer god was also present at the entertainment, and pierced the hearts of General Harding's two sons with a single arrow.

There was a remarkable difference in their way of showing it. To Miss Mainwaring, Henry was all assiduity, lavish of little attentions, ran to recover her arrows, handed her her bow, held her sunshade while she bent it, and stood ready to fling himself at her feet. Nigel, on the other hand, kept himself aloof, affected indifference to her presence, tried to pique her by showing partiality to others, with many like manoeuvres suggested by a calculating and crafty

spirit. In one thing the elder brother succeeded—in concealing his new-sprung passion from the spectators.

The younger was not so fortunate. Before the archery practice was over, every guest upon the ground could tell that, at least, one arrow had been shot home to the mark, and that mark was the heart of young Henry Harding.

Chapter Four.

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A Coquette.

I have often wondered what the world would be without woman: whether, if it were without her, man would care longer to live in it; or whether he would then find it just the place he has been all his life longing for, and would wish never to leave it. I have wondered and pondered upon this point, until speculation became lost in obscurity. It is, perhaps, the most interesting philosophical question of our existence—its most important one; and yet no philosopher, as far as I know, has given a satisfactory answer to it.

I am aware of the two theories that have been propounded—to one another opposite as are the poles. One makes woman the sole object of, our existence—her smile its only blessing. For her we work and watch, we dig and delve, we fight and write, we talk and strive. Without her we would do none of these things; in short, do nothing, since there would be no motive for doing. “What then?” say the advocates of this theory. “Would existence be tolerable without a motive? Would it be possible?” For our part we can only give the interrogative answer of the phlegmatic Spaniard, “*Quien sabe*?”—no answer at all. The other theory is, that woman, instead of being life’s object and blessing, is but its distraction and curse. The supporters of this hypothesis make no pretence to gallantry, but simply point to experience. Without her, say they, the world would be happy, and they triumphantly add, “what is it?”

Perhaps the only way to reconcile the two theories is to steer midway between them; to regard both as wrong, and both as right; to hold woman in this world as being alike a blessing and a bane; or rather that there are two sorts of women in it, one born to bless, the other to curse—mankind.

It grieves me to class Belle Mainwaring with the latter: for she was beautiful, and might have belonged to the former. I knew her myself—if not well, at least sufficiently to give her correct classification. Perhaps I, too, might have fallen under her fascinations, had I not discovered that she was false, and this discovery protected me.

I made my discovery just in time, though by accident. It was in a ball-room. Belle liked dancing, as do most young ladies of the attractive kind; and there were but few balls in the county, public or private, civilian or military, where you might not see her. I met her at the hunt ball of B—. It was the first time I had seen her. I was introduced by one of the stewards who chanced to have an impediment in his speech. It was of the nasal kind, caused by a split lip. In pronouncing the word “captain” the first syllable came out sounding as “count.” There was then a break, and the second, “ain,” might have been taken, or *mis-taken*, for the prefix “von.” My Christian and baptismal names, slurred together as they were by the stammering steward, might have passed muster as Germanic; at all events, for some time afterwards—before I could find an opportunity to rectify the error—I was honoured by Miss Mainwaring with a title that did not belong to me. I was further honoured by having it inscribed upon her dancing card much oftener than I, in my humility, had any right to expect. We danced several

measures together, round and square. I was pleased, flattered—something more—charmed and delighted. Who would not, at being so signalised by one of the belles of the ball-room? And she was one.

I began to fancy that it was all up with me—that I had found not only an agreeable partner for the night, but for life. I was all the better satisfied to see scowling faces around me, and hear whispered insinuations, that I was having more than my share of the charming creature. It was the pleasantest hunt ball I had ever attended.

So far up to a certain hour. Then things became less agreeable. I had deposited my partner on a couch, alongside a stately dame, introduced to me as her mother. I saw that this lady did not take kindly to me; but, on the contrary, sat stiff, frigid, and uncommunicative. Failing to thaw her, I made my bow and sauntered off among the crowd, promising to return to Miss Mainwaring for still another dance, for which I had succeeded in engaging her. Not being able to find any comfort apart from her, I soon returned, and sat down on a chair close to the couch occupied by mother and daughter. As they were engaged in close conversation, neither of them saw me, and of course I did not intrude. But, as their voices were above a whisper, I could not help hearing them; and the mention of my own name made it difficult for me to withdraw.

“A count!” said the mother; “you are beside yourself, my child.”

“But Mr Southwick introduced me to him as such, and he has all the air of it.”

All the air of it!—I liked that.