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**ERNEST
MALTRAVERS —
VOLUME 06**

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Ernest Maltravers

— Volume 06

BOOK VI

*Perchance you say that gold's the arch-exceller,
And to be rich is sweet?*

—EURIP. *Ion.*, line 641.

* * * *'Tis not to be endured,
To yield our trodden path and turn aside,
Giving our place to knaves.*

—*Ibid.*, line 648

CHAPTER I

*"L'adresse et l'artifice out passe dans mon coeur;
Qu'ou a sous cet habit et d'esprit et de ruse."¹—*

¹ Subtlety and craft have taken possession of my heart; but under this habit one exhibits both shrewdness and wit.

IT was a fine morning in July, when a gentleman who had arrived in town the night before—after an absence from England of several years—walked slowly and musingly up the superb thoroughfare which connects the Regent's park with St. James's.

He was a man, who, with great powers of mind, had wasted his youth in a wandering vagabond kind of life, but who had worn away the love of pleasure, and began to awaken to a sense of ambition.

"It is astonishing how this city is improved," said he to himself. "Everything gets on in this world with a little energy and bustle—and everybody as well as everything. My old cronies, fellows not half so clever as I am, are all doing well. There's Tom Stevens, my very fag at Eton—snivelling little dog he was too!—just made under-secretary of state. Pearson, whose longs and shorts I always wrote, is now head-master to the human longs and shorts of a public school—editing Greek plays, and booked for a bishopric. Collier, I see by the papers, is leading his circuit—and Ernest Maltravers (but /he/ had some talent) has made a name in the world. Here am I, worth them all put together, who have done nothing but spend half my little fortune in spite of all my economy. Egad, this must have an end. I must look to the main chance; and yet, just when I want his help the most, my worthy uncle thinks fit to marry again. Humph—I'm too good for this world."

While thus musing, the soliloquist came in direct personal contact with a tall gentleman, who carried his head very high in the air, and did not appear to see that he had nearly thrown our abstracted philosopher off his legs.

"Zounds, sir, what do you mean?" cried the latter.

"I beg your par—" began the other, meekly, when his arm was seized, and the injured man exclaimed, "Bless me, sir, is it indeed /you/ whom I see?"

"Ha!—Lumley?"

"The same; and how fares it, any dear uncle? I did not know you were in London. I only arrived last night. How well you are looking!"

"Why, yes, Heaven be praised, I am pretty well."

"And happy in your new ties? You must present me to Mrs. Templeton."

"Ehem," said Mr. Templeton, clearing his throat, and with a slight but embarrassed smile, "I never thought I should marry again."

"/L'homme propose et Dieu dispose/," observed Lumley Ferrers; for it was he.

"Gently, my dear nephew," replied Mr. Templeton, gravely; "those phrases are somewhat sacrilegious; I am an old-fashioned person, you know."

"Ten thousand apologies."

"/One/ apology will suffice; these hyperboles of phrase are almost sinful."

"Confounded old prig!" thought Ferrers; but he bowed sanctimoniously.

"My dear uncle, I have been a wild fellow in my day; but with years comes reflection; and under your guidance, if I may hope for it, I trust to grow a wiser and a better man."

"It is well, Lumley," returned the uncle, "and I am very glad to see you returned to your own country. Will you dine with me to-morrow? I am living near Fulham. You had better bring your carpet-bag, and stay with me some days; you will be heartily welcome, especially if you can shift without a foreign servant. I have a great compassion for papists, but—"

"Oh, my dear uncle, do not fear; I am not rich enough to have a foreign servant, and have not travelled over three-quarters of the globe without learning that it is possible to dispense with a valet."

"As to being rich enough," observed Mr. Templeton, with a calculating air, "seven hundred and ninety-five pounds ten shillings a year will allow a man to keep two servants, if he pleases; but I am glad to find you economical at all events. We meet to-morrow, then, at six o'clock."

"/Au revoir/—I mean, God bless you.

"Tiresome old gentleman that," muttered Ferrers, "and not so cordial as formerly; perhaps his wife is /enceinte/, and he is going to do me the injustice of having another heir. I must look to this; for without riches, I had better go back and live /au cinquieme/ at Paris."

With this conclusion, Lumley quickened his pace, and soon

arrived at Seamore Place. In a few moments more he was in the library well stored with books, and decorated with marble busts and images from the studios of Canova and Thorwaldsen.

"My master, sir, will be down immediately," said the servant who admitted him; and Ferrers threw himself on a sofa, and contemplated the apartment with an air half envious and half cynical.

Presently the door opened, and "My dear Ferrers!" "Well, /mon cher/, how are you?" were the salutations hastily exchanged.

After the first sentences of inquiry, gratulation, and welcome, had cleared the way for more general conversation,— "Well, Maltravers," said Ferrers, "so here we are together again, and after a lapse of so many years! both older, certainly; and you, I suppose, wiser. At all events, people think you so; and that's all that's important in the question. Why, man, you are looking as young as ever, only a little paler and thinner; but look at me—I am not very /much/ past thirty, and I am almost an old man; bald at the temples, crows' feet, too, eh! Idleness ages one damnably."

"Pooh, Lumley, I never saw you look better. And are you really come to settle in England?"

"Yes, if I can afford it. But at my age, and after having seen so much, the life of an idle, obscure /garcon/ does not content me. I feel that the world's opinion, which I used to despise, is growing necessary to me. I want to be something. What can I be? Don't look alarmed, I won't rival you. I dare say literary reputation is a fine thing, but I desire some distinction more substantial and

worldly. You know your own country; give me a map of the roads to Power."

"To Power! Oh, nothing but law, politics, and riches."

"For law I am too old; politics, perhaps, might suit me; but riches, my dear Ernest—ah, how I long for a good account with my banker!"

"Well, patience and hope. Are you are not a rich uncle's heir?"

"I don't know," said Ferrers, very dolorously; "the old gentleman has married again, and may have a family."

"Married!—to whom?"

"A widow, I hear; I know nothing more, except that she has a child already. So you see she has got into a cursed way of having children. And perhaps, by the time I'm forty, I shall see a whole covey of cherubs flying away with the great Templeton property!"

"Ha, ha; your despair sharpens your wit, Lumley; but why not take a leaf out of your uncle's book, and marry yourself?"

"So I will when I can find an heiress. If that is what you meant to say—it is a more sensible suggestion than any I could have supposed to come from a man who writes books, especially poetry: and your advice is not to be despised. For rich I will be; and as the fathers (I don't mean of the Church, but in Horace) told the rising generation, the first thing is to resolve to be rich, it is only the second thing to consider how."

"Meanwhile, Ferrers, you will be my guest."

"I'll dine with you to-day; but to-morrow I am off to Fulham,

to be introduced to my aunt. Can't you fancy her?—grey /gros-de-Naples/ gown: gold chain with an eyeglass; rather fat; two pugs, and a parrot! 'Start not, this is fancy's sketch!' I have not yet seen the respectable relative with my physical optics. What shall we have for dinner? Let me choose, you were always a bad caterer." As Ferrers thus rattled on, Maltravers felt himself growing younger: old times and old adventures crowded fast upon him; and the two friends spent a most agreeable day together. It was only the next morning that Maltravers, in thinking over the various conversations that had passed between them, was forced reluctantly to acknowledge that the inert selfishness of Lumley Ferrers seemed now to have hardened into a resolute and systematic want of principle, which might, perhaps, make him a dangerous and designing man, if urged by circumstances into action.

CHAPTER II

*"Dauph./ Sir, I must speak to you. I have been long
your despised kinsman.*

"Morose./ Oh, what thou wilt, nephew."

—EPICENE.

*"Her silence is dowry eno'—exceedingly soft spoken;
thrifty of her speech, that spends but six words a day."
—/Ibid./*

THE coach dropped Mr. Ferrers at the gate of a villa about three miles from town. The lodge-keeper charged himself with the carpet-bag, and Ferrers strolled, with his hands behind him (it was his favourite mode of disposing of them), through the beautiful and elaborate pleasure-grounds.

"A very nice, snug little box (jointure-house, I suppose)! I would not grudge that, I'm sure, if I had but the rest. But here, I suspect, comes madam's first specimen of the art of having a family." This last thought was extracted from Mr. Ferrers's contemplative brain by a lovely little girl, who came running up to him, fearless and spoilt as she was; and, after indulging a tolerable stare, exclaimed, "Are you come to see papa, sir?"

"Papa!—the deuce!"—thought Lumley; "and who is papa, my dear?"

"Why, mamma's husband. He is not my papa by rights."

"Certainly not, my love; not by rights—I comprehend."

"Eh!"

"Yes, I am going to see your papa by wrongs—Mr. Templeton."

"Oh, this way, then."

"You are very fond of Mr. Templeton, my little angel."

"To be sure I am. You have not seen the rocking-horse he is going to give me."

"Not yet, sweet child! And how is mamma?"

"Oh, poor, dear mamma," said the child, with a sudden change of voice, and tears in her eyes. "Ah, she is not well!"

"In the family way, to a dead certainty!" muttered Ferrers with a groan: "but here is my uncle. Horrid name! Uncles were always wicked fellows. Richard the Third and the man who did something or other to the babes in the wood were a joke to my hard-hearted old relation, who has robbed me with a widow! The lustful, liquorish old—My /dear/ sir, I'm so glad to see you!"

Mr. Templeton, who was a man very cold in his manners, and always either looked over people's heads or down upon the ground, just touched his nephew's outstretched hand, and telling him he was welcome, observed that it was a very fine afternoon.

"Very, indeed; sweet place this; you see, by the way, that I have already made acquaintance with my fair cousin-in-law. She is very pretty."

"I really think she is," said Mr. Templeton, with some warmth,

and gazing fondly at the child, who was now throwing buttercups up in the air, and trying to catch them. Mr. Ferrers wished in his heart that they had been brickbats!

"Is she like her mother?" asked the nephew.

"Like whom, sir?"

"Her mother—Mrs. Templeton."

"No, not very; there is an air, perhaps, but the likeness is not remarkably strong. Would you not like to go to your room before dinner?"

"Thank you. Can I not first be presented to Mrs. Tem—"

"She is at her devotions, Mr. Lumley," interrupted Mr. Templeton, grimly.

"The she-hypocrite!" thought Ferrers. "Oh, I am delighted that your pious heart has found so congenial a helpmate!"

"It is a great blessing, and I am grateful for it. This is the way to the house."

Lumley, now formally installed in a grave bedroom, with dimity curtains and dark-brown paper with light-brown stars on it, threw himself into a large chair, and yawned and stretched with as much fervour as if he could have yawned and stretched himself into his uncle's property. He then slowly exchanged his morning dress for a quiet suit of black, and thanked his stars that, amidst all his sins, he had never been a dandy, and had never rejoiced in a fine waistcoat—a criminal possession that he well knew would have entirely hardened his uncle's conscience against him. He tarried in his room till the second bell summoned him to

descend; and then, entering the drawing-room, which had a cold look even in July, found his uncle standing by the mantelpiece, and a young, slight, handsome woman, half-buried in a huge but not comfortable /fauteuil/.

"Your aunt, Mrs. Templeton; madam, my nephew, Mr. Lumley Ferrers," said Templeton, with a wave of the hand.

"John,—dinner!"

"I hope I am not late!"

"No," said Templeton, gently, for he had always liked his nephew, and began now to thaw towards him a little on seeing that Lumley put a good face upon the new state of affairs.

"No, my dear boy—no; but I think order and punctuality cardinal virtues in a well-regulated family."

"Dinner, sir," said the butler, opening the folding-doors at the end of the room.

"Permit me," said Lumley, offering his arm to his aunt. "What a lovely place this is!"

Mrs. Templeton said something in reply, but what it was Ferrers could not discover, so low and choked was the voice.

"Shy," thought he: "odd for a widow! but that's the way those husband-buriers take us in!"

Plain as was the general furniture of the apartment, the natural ostentation of Mr. Templeton broke out in the massive value of the plate, and the number of the attendants. He was a rich man, and he was proud of his riches: he knew it was respectable to be rich, and he thought it was moral to be respectable. As for the

dinner, Lumley knew enough of his uncle's tastes to be prepared for viands and wines that even he (fastidious gourmand as he was) did not despise.

Between the intervals of eating, Mr. Ferrers endeavoured to draw his aunt into conversation, but he found all his ingenuity fail him. There was, in the features of Mrs. Templeton, an expression of deep but calm melancholy, that would have saddened most persons to look upon, especially in one so young and lovely. It was evidently something beyond shyness or reserve that made her so silent and subdued, and even in her silence there was so much natural sweetness, that Ferrers could not ascribe her manner to haughtiness or the desire to repel. He was rather puzzled; "for though," thought he, sensibly enough, "my uncle is not a youth, he is a very rich fellow; and how any widow, who is married again to a rich old fellow, can be melancholy, passes my understanding!"

Templeton, as if to draw attention from his wife's taciturnity, talked more than usual. He entered largely into politics, and regretted that in times so critical he was not in parliament.

"Did I possess your youth and your health, Lumley, I would not neglect my country—Popery is abroad."

"I myself should like very much to be in parliament," said Lumley, boldly.

"I dare say you would," returned the uncle, drily. "Parliament is very expensive—only fit for those who have a large stake in the country. Champagne to Mr. Ferrers."

Lumley bit his lip, and spoke little during the rest of the

dinner. Mr. Templeton, however, waxed gracious by the time the dessert was on the table; and began cutting up a pineapple, with many assurances to Lumley that gardens were nothing without pineries. "Whenever you settle in the country, nephew, be sure you have a pinery."

"Oh, yes," said Lumley, almost bitterly, "and a pack of hounds, and a French cook; they will all suit my fortune very well."

"You are more thoughtful on pecuniary matters than you used to be," said the uncle.

"Sir," replied Ferrers, solemnly, "in a very short time I shall be what is called a middle-aged man."

"Humph!" said the host.

There was another silence. Lumley was a man, as we have said, or implied before, of great knowledge of human nature, at least the ordinary sort of it, and he now revolved in his mind the various courses it might be wise to pursue towards his rich relation. He saw that, in delicate fencing, his uncle had over him the same advantage that a tall man has over a short one with the physical sword-play;—by holding his weapon in a proper position, he kept the other at arm's length. There was a grand reserve and dignity about the man who had something to give away, of which Ferrers, however actively he might shift his ground and flourish his rapier, could not break the defence. He determined, therefore, upon a new game, for which his frankness of manner admirably adapted him. Just as he formed

this resolution, Mrs. Templeton rose, and with a gentle bow, and soft though languid smile, glided from the room. The two gentlemen resettled themselves, and Templeton pushed the bottle to Ferrers.

"Help yourself, Lumley! your travels seem to have deprived you of your high spirits—you are pensive."

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