

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**WHAT WILL HE DO
WITH IT? – VOLUME
11**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

What Will He Do with It? — Volume 11

BOOK XI

CHAPTER I

"THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE NEVER DOES RUN SMOOTH!" MAY IT NOT BE BECAUSE WHERE THERE ARE NO OBSTACLES, THERE ARE NO TESTS TO THE TRUTH OF LOVE? WHERE THE COURSE IS SMOOTH, THE STREAM IS CROWDED WITH PLEASURE-BOATS. WHERE THE WAVE SWELLS, AND THE SHOALS THREATEN, AND THE SKY LOWERS, THE PLEASURE-BOATS HAVE GONE BACK INTO HARBOUR. SHIPS FITTED FOR ROUGH WEATHER ARE THOSE BUILT AND STORED FOR LONG VOYAGE.

I pass over the joyous meeting between Waife and Sophy. I pass over George's account to his fair cousin of the scene he and Hartopp had witnessed, in which Waife's innocence had been manifested and his reasons for accepting the penalties of guilt had been explained. The first few agitated days following Waife's return have rolled away. He is resettled in the cottage from which he had fled; he refuses, as before, to take up his abode at Lady Montfort's house. But Sophy has been almost constantly his companion, and Lady Montfort herself has spent hours with him each day—sometimes in his rustic parlour, sometimes in the small garden-plot round his cottage, to which his rambles are confined. George has gone back to his home and duties at Humberston, promising very soon to revisit his old friend, and discuss future plans.

The scholar, though with a sharp pang, conceding to Waife that all attempt publicly to clear his good name at the cost of reversing the sacrifice he had made must be forborne, could not, however, be induced to pledge himself to unconditional silence. George felt that there were at least some others to whom the knowledge of Waife's innocence was imperatively due.

Waife is seated by his open window. It is noon; there is sunshine in the pale blue skies—an unusual softness in the wintry air. His Bible lies on the table beside him. He has just set his mark in the page, and reverently closed the book. He is alone. Lady Montfort—who, since her return from Fawley, has been suffering from a kind of hectic fever, accompanied by a languor that made even the walk to Waife's cottage a fatigue, which the sweetness of her kindly nature enabled her to overcome, and would not permit her to confess—has been so much worse that morning as to be unable to leave her room. Sophy has gone to see her. Waife is now leaning his face upon his hand, and that face is sadder and more disquieted than it had been, perhaps, in all his wanderings. His darling Sophy is evidently unhappy. Her sorrow had not been visible during the first two or three days of his return, chased away by the joy of seeing him—the excitement of tender reproach and question—of tears that seemed as joyous as the silvery laugh which responded to the gaiety that sported round the depth of feeling with which he himself beheld her once more clinging to his side, or seated, with upward loving eyes, on the footstool by his knees. Even at the first look, however, he had found her altered; her cheek was thinner, her colour paled. That might be from fretting for him. She would be herself again, now that her tender anxiety was relieved. But she did not become herself again. The arch and playful Sophy he had left was gone, as if never to return. He marked that her step, once so bounding, had become slow and spiritless. Often when she sat near him, seemingly reading or at her work, he

noticed that her eyes were not on the page—that the work stopped abruptly in listless hands; and then he would hear her sigh—a heavy but short impatient sigh! No mistaking that sigh by those who have studied grief; whether in maid or man, in young or old, in the gentle Sophy, so new to life, or in the haughty Darrell, weary of the world, and shrinking from its honours, that sigh had the same character, a like symptom of a malady in common; the same effort to free the heart from an oppressive load; the same token of a sharp and rankling remembrance lodged deep in that finest nerve-work of being, which no anodyne can reach—a pain that comes without apparent cause, and is sought to be expelled without conscious effort.

The old man feared at first that she might, by some means or other, in his absence, have become apprised of the brand on his own name, the verdict that had blackened his repute, the sentence that had hurled him from his native sphere; or that, as her reason had insensibly matured, she herself, reflecting on all the mystery that surrounded him—his incognitos, his hidings, the incongruity between his social grade and his education or bearing, and his repeated acknowledgments that there were charges against him which compelled him to concealment, and from which he could not be cleared on earth; that she, reflecting on all these evidences to his disfavour, had either secretly admitted into her breast a conviction of his guilt, or that, as she grew up to woman, she had felt, through him, the disgrace entailed upon herself. Or if such were not the cause of her sadness, had she learned more of her father's evil courses; had an emissary of Jasper's worked upon her sensibilities or her fears? No, that could not be the case, since whatever the grounds upon which Jasper had conjectured that Sophy was with Lady Montfort, the accuracy of his conjectures had evidently been doubted by Jasper himself; or why so earnestly have questioned Waife? Had she learned that she was the grandchild and natural heiress of a man wealthy and renowned—a chief amongst the chiefs of England—who rejected her with disdain? Was she pining for her true position? or mortified by the contempt of a kinsman, whose rank so contrasted the vagrancy of the grandsire by whom alone she was acknowledged?

Tormented by these doubts, he was unable to solve them by such guarded and delicate questions as he addressed to Sophy herself. For she, when he falteringly asked what ailed his darling, would start, brighten up for the moment, answer, "Nothing, now that he had come back"; kiss his forehead, play with Sir Isaac, and then manage furtively to glide away.

But the day before that in which we now see him alone, he had asked her abruptly, "If, during his absence, any one besides George Morley had visited at Lady Montfort's—any one whom she had seen?" And Sophy's cheek had as suddenly become crimson, then deadly pale; and first she said "no," and then "yes"; and after a pause, looking away from him, she added: "The young gentleman who—who helped us to buy Sir Isaac, he has visited Lady Montfort—related to some dear friend of hers."

"What, the painter!"

"No—the other, with the dark eyes."

"Haughton!" said Waife, with an expression of great pain in his face.

"Yes—Mr. Haughton; but he has not been here a long, long time. He will not come again, I believe."

Her voice quivered, despite herself, at the last words, and she began to bustle about the room—filled Waife's pipe, thrust it into his hands with a laugh, the false mirth of which went to his very heart, and then stepped from the open window into the little garden, and began to sing one of Waife's favourite simple old Border songs; but before she got through the first line, the song ceased, and she was as lost to sight as a ringdove, whose note comes and goes so quickly amongst the impenetrable coverts.

But Waife had heard enough to justify profound alarm for Sophy's peace of mind, and to waken in his own heart some of its most painful associations. The reader, who knows the wrong inflicted on William Losely by Lionel Haughton's father—a wrong which led to all poor Willy's subsequent misfortunes—may conceive that the very name of Haughton was wounding to his ear; and when, in his brief, sole, and bitter interview with Darrell, the latter had dropped out that Lionel Haughton,

however distant of kin, would be a more grateful heir than the grandchild of a convicted felon—if Willy's sweet nature could have admitted a momentary hate, it would have been for the thus vaunted son of the man who had stripped him of the modest all which would perhaps have saved his own child from the robber's guilt, and himself from the robber's doom. Long since, therefore, the reader will have comprehended why, when Waife came to meet Sophy at the riverside, and learned at the inn on its margin that the name of her younger companion was Lionel Haughton—why, I say, he had so morosely parted from the boy, and so imperiously bade Sophy dismiss all thought of meeting "the pretty young gentleman" again.

And now again this very Lionel Haughton to have stolen into the retreat in which poor Waife had deemed he left his treasure so secure! Was it for this he had fled from her? Did he return to find her youth blighted, her affections robbed from him, by the son of Charles Haughton? The father had despoiled his manhood of independence; must it be the son who despoiled his age of its only solace? Grant even that Lionel was worthy of Sophy—grant that she had been loyally wooed—must not that attachment be fruitless—be fatal? If Lionel were really now adopted by Darrell, Waife knew human nature too well to believe that Darrell would complacently hear Lionel ask a wife in her whose claim to his lineage had so galled and incensed him. It was while plunged in these torturing reflections that Lady Montfort (not many minutes after Sophy's song had ceased and her form vanished) had come to visit him, and he at once accosted her with agitated inquiries: "When had Mr. Haughton first presented himself?—how often had he seen Sophy?—what had passed between them?—did not Lady Montfort see that his darling's heart was breaking?"

But he stopped as suddenly as he had rushed into his thorny maze of questions; for, looking imploringly into Caroline Montfort's face, he saw there more settled signs of a breaking heart than Sophy had yet betrayed, despite her paleness and her sighs. Sad, indeed, the change in her countenance since he had left the place months ago, though Waife, absorbed in Sophy, had not much remarked it till now, when seeking to read therein secrets that concerned his darling's welfare. Lady Montfort's beauty was so perfect in that rare harmony of feature which poets, before Byron, have compared to music, that sorrow could no more mar the effect of that beauty on the eye, than pathos can mar the effect of the music that admits it on the ear. But the change in her face seemed that of a sorrow which has lost all earthly hope. Waife, therefore, checked questions that took the tone of reproaches, and involuntarily murmured "Pardon."

Then Caroline Montfort told him all the tender projects she had conceived for his grandchild's happiness—how, finding Lionel so disinterested and noble, she had imagined she saw in him the providential agent to place Sophy in the position to which Waife had desired to raise her; Lionel, to share with her the heritage of which he might otherwise despoil her—both to become the united source of joy and of pride to the childless man who now favoured the one to exclude the other. Nor in these schemes had the absent wanderer been forgotten. No; could Sophy's virtues once be recognised by Darrell, and her alleged birth acknowledged by him—could the guardian, who, in fostering those virtues to bloom by Darrell's hearth, had laid under the deepest obligations one who, if unforgiving to treachery, was grateful for the humblest service—could that guardian justify the belief in his innocence which George Morley had ever entertained, and, as it now proved, with reason—then where on all earth a man like Guy Darrell to vindicate William Losely's attainted honour, or from whom William Losely might accept cherishing friendship and independent ease, with so indisputable a right to both! Such had been the picture that the fond and sanguine imagination of Caroline Montfort had drawn from generous hope, and coloured with tender fancies. But alas for such castles in the air! All had failed. She had only herself to blame. Instead of securing Sophy's welfare, she had endangered Sophy's happiness. They whom she had desired to unite were irrevocably separated. Bitterly she accused herself—her error in relying so much on Lionel's influence with Darrell—on her own early remembrance of Darrell's affectionate nature and singular sympathies with the young—and thus suffering Lionel and Sophy to grow familiar with each other's winning characters, and carry

on childlike romance into maturer sentiment. She spoke, though briefly, of her visit to Darrell, and its ill success—of the few letters that had passed since then between herself and Lionel, in which it was settled that he should seek no parting interview with Sophy. He had declared to Sophy no formal suit—they had exchanged no lovers' vows. It would be, therefore, but a dishonourable cruelty to her to say, "I come to tell you that I love you, and that we must part for ever." And how avow the reason—that reason that would humble her to the dust? Lionel was forbidden to wed with one whom Jasper Losely called daughter, and whom the guardian she so venerated believed to be his grandchild. All of comfort that Lady Montfort could suggest was, that Sophy was so young that she would conquer what might be but a girl's romantic sentiment—or, if a more serious attachment, one that no troth had cemented—for a person she might not see again for years; Lionel was negotiating exchange into a regiment on active service. "Meanwhile," said Lady Montfort, "I shall never wed again. I shall make it known that I look on your Sophy as the child of my adoption. If I do not live to save sufficient for her out of an income that is more than thrice what I require, I have instructed my lawyers to insure my life for her provision; it will be ample. Many a wooer, captivating as Lionel, and free from the scruples that fetter his choice, will be proud to kneel at the feet of one so lovely. This rank of mine, which has never yet bestowed on me a joy, now becomes of value, since it will give dignity to—to Matilda's child, and—and to—" Lady Montfort sobbed.

Waife listened respectfully, and for the time was comforted. Certainly, in his own heart he was glad that Lionel Haughton was permanently separated from Sophy. There was scarcely a man on earth, of fair station and repute, to whom he would have surrendered Sophy with so keen a pang as to Charles Haughton's son.

The poor young lovers! all the stars seemed against them! Was it not enough that Guy Darrell should be so obdurate! must the mild William Losely be also a malefic in their horoscope?

But when, that same evening, the old man more observantly than ever watched his grandchild, his comfort vanished—misgivings came over him—he felt assured that the fatal shaft had been broken in the wound, and that the heart was bleeding inly.

True; not without prophetic insight had Arabella Crane said to the pining, but resolute, quiet child, behind the scenes of Mr. Ruge's show, "How much you will love one day." All that night Waife lay awake pondering—revolving—exhausting that wondrous fertility of resource which teemed in his inventive brain. In vain!

And now—(the day after this conversation with Lady Montfort, whose illness grieves, but does not surprise him)—now, as he sits and thinks, and gazes abstractedly into that far, pale, winter sky—now, the old man is still scheming how to reconcile a human loving heart to the eternal loss of that affection which has so many perishable counterfeits, but which, when true in all its elements—complete in all its varied wealth of feeling, is never to be forgotten and never to be replaced.

CHAPTER II

AN OFFERRING TO THE MANES.

Three sides of Waife's cottage were within Lady Montfort's grounds; the fourth side, with its more public, entrance, bordered the lane. Now, as he thus sate, he was startled by a low timid ring at the door which opened on the lane. Who could it be?—not Jasper! He began to tremble. The ring was repeated. One woman-servant composed all his establishment. He heard her opening the door—heard a low voice; it seemed a soft, fresh, young voice. His room-door opened, and the woman, who of course knew the visitor by sight and name, having often remarked him on the grounds with Lady Montfort and Sophy, said, in a cheerful tone, as if bringing good news, "Mr. Lionel Haughton."

Scarcely was the door closed—scarcely the young man in the room, before, with all his delightful, passionate frankness, Lionel had clasped Waife's reluctant hand in both his own, and, with tears in his eyes, and choking in his voice, was pouring forth sentences so loosely knit together that they seemed almost incoherent; now a burst of congratulation—now a falter of condolence—now words that seemed to supplicate as for pardon to an offence of his own—rapid transitions from enthusiasm to pity, from joy to grief—variable, with the stormy April of a young, fresh, hearty nature.

Taken so wholly by surprise, Waife, in vain attempting to appear cold and distant, and only very vaguely comprehending what the unwelcome visitor so confusedly expressed, at last found voice to interrupt the jet and gush of Lionel's impetuous emotion, and said as drily as he could: "I am really at a loss to conceive the cause of what appears to be meant as congratulations to me and reproaches to yourself, Mr.—, Mr. Haugh—;" his lips could not complete the distasteful name.

"My name shocks you—no wonder," said Lionel, deeply mortified, and bowing down his head as he gently dropped the old man's hand. "Reproaches to myself!—Ah, sir, I am here as Charles Haughton's son!"

"What!" exclaimed Waife, "you know? How could you know that Charles Haughton—"

LIONEL (interrupting).—"I know. His own lips confessed his shame to have so injured you."

WAIFE.—"Confessed to whom?"

LIONEL.—"To Alban Morley. Relieve me, my father's remorse was bitter; it dies not in his grave, it lives in me. I have so longed to meet with William Losely."

Waife seated himself in silence, shading his face with one hand while with the other he made a slight gesture, as if to discourage or rebuke farther allusion to ancient wrong. Lionel, in quick accents, but more connected meaning, went on—

"I have just come from Mr. Darrell, where I and Colonel Morley (here Lionel's countenance was darkly troubled) have been staying some days. Two days ago I received this letter from George Morley, forwarded to me from London. It says—let me read it: 'You will rejoice to learn that our dear Waife'—pardon that name."

"I have no other—go on."

"'Is once more with his grandchild.'" (Here Lionel sighed heavily—sigh like Sophy's.) "'You will rejoice yet more to learn that it has pleased Heaven to allow me and another witness, who, some years ago, had been misled into condemning Waife, to be enabled to bear incontrovertible testimony to the complete innocence of my beloved friend; nay, more— I say to you most solemnly, that in all which appeared to attest guilt, there has been a virtue, which, if known to Mr. Darrell, would make him bow in reverence to that old man. Tell Mr. Darrell so from me; and add, that in saying it, I express my conviction of his own admiring sympathy—for all that is noble and heroic.'"

"Too much—this is too, too much," stammered out Waife, restlessly turning away; "but—but, you are folding up the letter. That is all?—he does not say more? he does not mention any one else?—eh?—eh?"

"No, sir; that is all."

"Thank Heaven! He is an honourable man! Yet he has said more than he ought—much more than he can prove, or than I—" he broke off, and abruptly asked—"How did Mr. Darrell take these assertions? With an incredulous laugh—eh?—'Why, the old rogue had pleaded guilty!'"

"Sir, Alban Morley was there to speak of the William Losely whom he had known; to explain, from facts which he had collected at the time, of what nature was the evidence not brought forward. The motive that induced you to plead guilty I had long guessed; it flashed in an instant on Guy Darrell; it was not mere guess with him! You ask me what he said? This: 'Grand nature! George is right! and I do bow my head in reverence!'"

"He said that?—Guy Darrell? On your honour, he said that?"

"Can you doubt it? Is he not a gentleman?" Waife was fairly overcome.

"But, sir," resumed Lionel, "I must not conceal from you, that though George's letter and Alban Morley's communications sufficed to satisfy Darrell, without further question, your old friend was naturally anxious to learn a more full account, in the hope of legally substantiating your innocence. He therefore despatched by the telegraph a request to his nephew to come at once to Fawley. George arrived there yesterday. Do not blame him, sir, that we share his secret."

"You do? Good heavens! And that lawyer will be barbarous enough to—but no—he has an interest in not accusing of midnight robbery his daughter's husband; Jasper's secret is safe with him. And Colonel Morley—surely his cruel nephew will not suffer him to make me—me, with one foot in the grave—a witness against my Lizzy's son!"

"Colonel Morley, at Darrell's suggestion, came with me to London; and if he does not accompany me to you, it is because he is even now busied in finding out your son, not to undo, but to complete the purpose of your self-sacrifice. 'All other considerations,' said Guy Darrell, 'must be merged in this one thought—that such a father shall not have been in vain a martyr.' Colonel Morley is empowered to treat with your son on any terms; but on this condition, that the rest of his life shall inflict no farther pain, no farther fear on you. This is the sole use to which, without your consent, we have presumed to put the secret we have learned. Do you pardon George now?"

Waife's lips murmured inaudibly, but his face grew very bright; and as it was raised upwards, Lionel's ear caught the whisper of a name—it was not Jasper, it was "Lizzy."

"Ah! why," said Lionel, sadly, and after a short pause, "why was I not permitted to be the one to attest your innocence—to clear your name?"

I, who owed to you so vast an hereditary debt! And now—dear, dear Mr. Losely—"

"Hush! Waife!—call me Waife still!—and always."

"Willingly! It is the name by which I have accustomed myself to love you. Now, listen to me. I am dishonoured until at least the mere pecuniary debt, due to you from my father, is paid. Hist! Hist!—Alban Morley says so—Darrell says so. Darrell says, 'he cannot own me as kinsman till that debt is cancelled.' Darrell lends me the means to do it; he would share his kinsman's ignominy if he did not. Before I could venture even to come hither, the sum due to you from my father was repaid. I hastened to town yesterday evening—saw Mr. Darrell's lawyer. I have taken a great liberty—I have invested this sum already in the purchase of an annuity for you. Mr. Darrell's lawyer had a client who was in immediate want of the sum due to you; and, not wishing permanently to burthen his estate by mortgage, would give a larger interest by way of annuity than the public offices would; excellent landed security. The lawyer said it would be a pity to let the opportunity slip, so I ventured to act for you. It was all settled this morning. The particulars are on this paper, which I will leave with you. Of course the sum due to you is not exactly the same as that which my father borrowed before I was born. There is the interest—compound interest; nothing more. I don't understand such matters; Darrell's lawyer made the calculation—it must be right."

Waife had taken the paper, glanced at its contents, dropped it in confusion, amaze. Those hundreds lent, swelled into all those thousands returned! And all methodically computed—tersely—

arithmetically-down to fractions. So that every farthing seemed, and indeed was, his lawful due. And that sum invested in an annuity of L500 a year—income which, to poor Gentleman Waife, seemed a prince's revenue!

"It is quite a business-like computation, I tell you, sir; all done by a lawyer. It is indeed," cried Lionel, dismayed at Waife's look and gesture. "Compound interest will run up to what seems a large amount at first; every child knows that. You can't deny Cocker and calculating tables, and that sort of thing. William Losely, you cannot leave an eternal load of disgrace on the head of Charles Haughton's son."

"Poor Charlie Haughton," murmured Waife. "And I was feeling bitter against his memory—bitter against his son. How Heaven loves to teach us the injustice that dwells in anger! But—but—this cannot be. I thank Mr. Darrell humbly—I cannot take his money."

"It is not his money—it is mine; he only advances it to me. It costs him really nothing, for he deducts the L500 a year from the allowance he makes me. And I don't want such an absurd allowance as I had before going out of the Guards into the line—I mean to be a soldier in good earnest. Too much pocket-money spoils a soldier—only gets one into scrapes. Alban Morley says the same. Darrell, too, says, 'Right; no gold could buy a luxury—like the payment of a father's debt!' You cannot grudge me that luxury—you dare not—why? because you are an honest Man."

"Softly, softly, softly," said Waife. "Let me look at you. Don't talk of money now—don't let us think of money! What a look of your father! 'Tis he, 'tis he whom I see before me. Charlie's sweet bright playful eyes—that might have turned aside from the path of duty—a sheriff's officer! Ah! and Charlie's happy laugh, too, at the slightest joke! But THIS is not Charlie's—it is all your own (touching, with gentle finger, Lionel's broad truthful brow). Poor Charlie, he was grieved—you are right—I remember."

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