

A MODERN DON QUIXOTE.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS—PART I.

CHAPTER I.

The rain fell softly, finely—warm summer rain, which, instead of cooling the air, seemed to draw the heat from the soil, making the slumberous atmosphere heavier with the varied scents of the wet flowers, the moist moss, the ferns and the dripping grass.

The earth, thirsty after a long drought, yielded to the feet under the trees, the penetrating rain giving it a delicious spring beneath a light tread.

Soon it would be soddened and slippery to a lover of Nature in each and all of her moods, the fragrance of the damp herbage, mingled with that from the ferns and pines, which grew thickly, was intoxicating.

The paths in the woods, inches deep with a yellow carpet of pine needles, scattered foliage, and gorse were better to walk upon than the thickest velvet pile.

Outside, in the open the dripping from the trees was ceaseless and the grass was white with the rain drops; yet a girl, traversing the half-mile that stretched between the Hall and the pine woods, seemed heedless of the fact.

She went swiftly and surely as one who knew every inch of the way, protected by a long thin cloak with its hood drawn round her face.

Denzil, are you here?

She walked on, looking along the by-paths, finally turning along the bye-paths, finally turning off the main way to the left, where the undergrowth was very thick—so thick, that she had to part the bracken and gorse with her hands as she went, until a huge branch blocked the way.

Years before, it had been struck by lightning, and had fallen, but, as the path was seldom used, the squire had not troubled about its removal.

The girl was evidently no stranger to the barrier, and climbed over it easily.

Against the gnarled trunk of a gigantic old pine, scarred and scorched in the past, whence the big limb had been torn, a man was leaning.

He was smoking a cigarette, and also humming softly the "Salve Dimora," from Faust.

As his visitor jumped down lightly in front of him, he uttered an exclamation and put out his hands to assist her.

You impudent child to come out in this rain!

I like it, Denzil, and you know I never take cold.

Your hair is quite wet, he said, touching it lightly, and your shoes must be soaked through. Come back with me at once.

Please, Denzil, wait a little. She looked pleadingly at him. I am come to tell you something; one cannot, in comfort, over there, moving her head in the direction of the Hall.

You must do as I wish, then, or you return instantly!

He laughed as she gasped, and tried to evade the pocket flash which he put to her mouth, but his other hand held her firmly, and she was forced to swallow some of the brandy.

It is fortunate that I had that with me. I wish you could join me in a cigarette, Carina. Smoking, in addition to other excellent points, is a preventive against cold. However, it would be unfair if you were quite perfect. Be quick, child, watching her as he struck a match. By the time I have smoked this you must have told me all, as they say on the melodrama stage.

Carina stamped her foot and frowned. You would not have said that to Marguerite, yet she is older than I, and more experienced.

He put one hand on her shoulder, and drew her nearer, looking at her lovely, petulant face with amusement in his own.

Marguerite will be my wife, and I should prefer to have the smoking room to myself. I was speaking to my little friend—my little sympathetic chum, who has more than a sister to me for twelve years. No sister could be so good to me for there was the charm uniting us that is never felt between blood relations.

I know that you are true as steel, little one, and that you are sweet enough to love me much more than I deserve. Listen, do not turn your head away. No other living person knows me so well as you—knows me in every mood—knows most of my thoughts.

Certainly not Marguerite. She would never enter into my follies as you do, nor would I inflict them on her; the mere telling would take too long, even if one could remember the accumulations of years. I only wished you to understand, child, that you have all the quick sympathy of a woman without her usual affectations—all the strong mental balance of a man without his vices. I can talk to you with such complete confidence that when drawing upon the second capacity, it would please me to feel that you were enjoying the same soothing confidence of a cigarette as myself. Have I apologized enough, little fire-brand?—pinching one small ear.

Have my unusual eloquence made no impression? Carina, answer me! Why are you perverse today?

No, she said gravely, looking straight into his eyes for a moment, and then moving to the fallen branch to sit down; I am not perverse, I understand you, Denzil. You came out to escape the ordeal in the

library, did you not? I knew that you would wish to know the contents of the will; so, directly the important part was read, I got away.

And came all through the rain? I do not know how to thank you, dear little one. Put your feet up here; the wood is less damp than the soil. I think I can guess what you are going to say.

You have absolutely nothing, Denzil. He looked smilingly at her.

The will is both wicked and unjust, she cried hotly. The squire was as good to me as my own father, and I love him as if he had been. He was the best and dearest man in the world. But even if he hears my words now, I repeat that it is a most unjust and wicked will.

Nonsense! But he has the property, and you, I trust are well provided for. I expected this, Carina. The squire was most generous to me in his lifetime; but I always meant to depend on myself at his death. If I had not been a contemptibly lazy brute, I should have begun to work hard when I left Oxford.

When you had been brought up as the adopted son of a man with nine thousand a year and a beautiful home?

We will not go into heroics, child. I am not going to pose as a second Bayard. A couple of thousand pounds to make a start with would have been acceptable; but since they are not mine, let us discuss the facts once and for ever. Bute is a connection of the squire's, his mother being Mrs. Brereton's sister. Whereas I am only the son of a friend.

No ordinary friend. Your father and the squire were at school and college together. Then they were in the same regiment in India for years. Your father risked his life twice to save the squire.

But he was a spendthrift, and, at ten years of age, I was left without a penny. Fortunately, my mother escaped that misery. Alone in the world and penniless! Carina, that generally means the work-house or a charity school. I was that wretched object—a child with no belongings, no relations on either side. Then the squire came. He and his wife brought me up as if I had been their own son, in the place of their own dead boy. God bless them both for all the happiness they gave to me! I went to Winchester and to Oxford. Once, when home for the Long, I found a little fairy to welcome me, and then there was nothing to wish for. When dear Mrs. Brereton died, there was Carina always ready to be with me—the prettiest and daintiest and sweetest of her sex.

Don't! she said, listlessly. You have always been ten times more to me than I to you. It is the nature of things, you being the man—although you always gave in to me. I am alone in the world now. My Aunt Knowles is very kind, but rather than live with her I would sweep a crossing as a servant, anything. It has all come at once.

She laughed drily.

All my money has gone. The bank in which it was placed failed last autumn, and the squire never told me. It was like him. I only knew today. But I want to speak of you Denzil. Bute was never thought of until two years ago. When Mrs. Calthrop lost her husband and came to live near the Hall, her motive for doing so soon became evident. She never lost an opportunity of dining into the squire's ears that her son was his last living relative; that for her part she should like him to assume the name of Brereton, so that the race might not die out. One has only to look in the portrait gallery to see that Bute Calthrop no more resembles the Breretons than I do. How should he? There is no relationship whatever.

Carina was very indignant and her eyes flashed now and then, but she spoke quite calmly.

You were in India by the squire's wish. He took the keenest interest in your military career, and when any fighting was going on he was always so proud when your name was mentioned, I did my best.

I know, dear child. Why distress yourself about it now?

Because you will never understand unless you know everything. There was no one to say to the squire that you had been brought up as his heir, that you were in India, or abroad, because you were ordered there, and he had made you enter the army; you were not staying merely for your own pleasure. How I longed to say that Bute was not a relation only his nephew by marriage, and that it would be a gross injustice to put him before you who had been as a loving son for years, long before he had seen Bute.

Sometimes I was so exasperated that I could hardly speak to Mrs. Calthrop. She was always charming; the velvet paw never once showed the claws underneath. You know that latterly the squire was fading day by day and his mind was more easily influenced, I suppose. She always pretended to love me—there was no escaping her. She watched everything in the house, and almost lived there the last year. A month ago, when Doctor Hamilton said there was no hope, she arrived with her boxes, and announced that she was going to nurse the squire. I believe that Bute did not like it, but he could not interfere. He would have taken her away altogether.

Denzil laughed heartily.

It would have required more than one man—and that man her son—to baffle Mrs. Calthrop.

Yes; she is like Thackeray's "Campaigner." I thought I knew her pretty well, but I did not suspect all her infamy. I rarely left the squire, as you may imagine; but she would pretend that I looked ill, and make him send me for a walk sometimes, and Bridget O'Reilly told me this morning that whenever Mrs. Calthrop was alone with him she was always shooting arrows at you, Denzil, in her crafty way, as if she were sorry. You were reckless and extravagant; your friends were always notorious for their wild conduct, and the Hall would soon be mortgaged if you were its master. She said worse things than that.

The color rose in her face, but she went on quietly.

This is not the time to suppress things. Mrs. Calthrop's greatest accusation, Bridget told me, was that you were "fast," and in a "last" set; you were fond of painted up women. She pretended that she corresponded with people abroad who knew you. Oh, Denzil! why did you not come back? I wrote and told you; but had I known it was as bad as this I would have said more—telegraphed even.

It was all so wickedly, so palpably false. She would not have dared if you had been here. Denzil! why did you not come back sooner? I, myself, did not know all this until today.

She leaned her head on her hands, and sobbed heavily once or twice.

He put one arm around her, and lifted her face.

Dear little one, do not be so distressed. I am strong, and work will not hurt me. Carina, do you think the squire believed all those fabrications? When I saw him he was almost past speaking, you know; but he seemed the same to me.

I am perfectly certain he did not. As certain as that I am talking to you now. I knew by the look on his face that he thoroughly disliked Mrs. Calthrop; but, I suppose, she was clever enough to make him, at the time, take her view of what she called justice.

Without a downright quarrel there was no keeping her away. She had a way of acting as if she were mistress of the house from a sense of duty, of treating me as if I were a mere child. Bridget O'Reilly told her plainly that I had given the orders since Mrs. Brereton died, and she would only take them from me.

Mrs. Calthrop said she appreciated Irish fidelity, and smiled. She was far too diplomatic to quarrel with anyone. The squire was so feeble for the last month that he could not even rise in his bed without assistance, so that the dear old man may have yielded to her persistence for the sake of peace. Mr. Grayson says that as late as last Christmas he made a will leaving everything to you. Bute had a legacy.

But even in this last one you are not omitted, Carina? You were his ward, and surely, would not be forgotten, after the loss of your own inheritance?

I am to have a thousand a year in my own right. But their is a condition.

And that is?

Bute after assuming the name of Brereton, is to marry me.

Denzil Sartoris was silent for a few minutes. How extraordinarily the squire had changed his mind!

Had Marguerite Lascelles also offended him?

Under the circumstances, that is only natural, Carina. Bute is a good fellow at heart, and I believe he will make a kind husband. I thought some time ago that you two might marry one day, and no one is so well fitted to be mistress of the Hall as my little sister. Marguerite is too lazy to turn into a good hostess.

You thought I should marry Bute? she repeated slowly.

Yes. I should like to think of your living happily in the old place when I am abroad. And now come back at once and take a hot bath, little one. It was sweet of you to risk so much; but I shall be in deadly anxiety until you are warm and dry. Come!

He stooped and, lifting her easily, placed her on the other side of the fallen tree limb.

She said nothing until they had reached the border of the woods, and then suddenly faced him, putting both hands on his arm.

May I know your plans, Denzil? Where are you going?

He laughed.

There is a man in Sydney who has a farm and cattle ranches up country, as I say. I was able to do him service when I met him in London three years ago, and he said he would always be glad to see me out there. I thought of offering my services.

You! to turn cow-boy or horse-tamer! Denzil, what folly! When you model a great deal better than so many of the professional sculptors. And your articles on art are read so highly.

Through the rose-coloured glasses between the amateur and the professional, Carina. When I had a good income, besides my pay in a crack regiment, I did not find much difficulty in pleasing people. Now that I have income, and must leave the army, I should experience the reverse side of the medal.

It is the law of nature. A rich soil produces a rich vegetation. When it is known that I am wholly dependent on my exertions, those who formerly thought my work fairly good, will pronounce it worthless. I cannot keep up my present mode of living, and so I prefer to drop out of civilization for a time.

It was a pity, she said, passionately, that you entered the army. You had eighteen months in the studios, and every one said that you had the genius, not merely talent. You ought to have been a sculptor, Denzil!

The squire did not like the idea, child. I know! I know! He sent you into the army; and now, at thirty, you have no

career, through no fault of your own, you have no more. But you must not turn yourself into a mere laborer. Look at your hands.

She held up the left one; the fingers were long and slender, the nails beautifully shaped, the palm slight and hollow.

It was a nervous sensitive hand, but full of vitality and the muscles were very firm. Are you to waste your powers by breaking horses and looking after cattle—by associating with people who have drifted over to the colonies because they have failed to succeed in Europe?

He laughed, and shook her gently to and fro.

You would have made a good barister, Carina. I am grateful to you for your kind opinions, but everyone would not agree with you.

But will you think of this seriously? Promise that you will, Denzil. And what about—Marguerite?

She could not marry me now. I shall release her.

Carina made no comment. She knew that he might with truth have said "would not" instead of "could not."

I suppose you will go to Lady Knowles for the present? You will forgive me for being absent from your wedding? I shall write often.

When will you tell me of your decision. I will write from London within the next few days.

How horrible it all is! she cried suddenly, her restraint breaking down at last. Oh, Denzil! Denzil! It breaks my heart that you should have to go away like this.

She hid her face against his coat-sleeve, and he felt her shaking from head to foot.

Do not give way, little one. If I decide as you wish, the day may come when you will be glad for me. Should success smile on my work, I shall be sure of Carina's pleasure, shall I not? Look up, dear little one, and smile the answer. There! that is better.

He stooped and kissed the soft, dark hair that curled and waved beneath her hood despite the rain.

Even if I went to Australia, I would come over and see you sometimes. What! Tears still? He laughed to hide his own feelings. I must kiss them away, then, dear, sweet little sympathizer.

She made a violent effort, and chocked back the sobs that were rising in her throat.

With the great tears that welled up slowly from the deep, dark eyes rolling silently down her white face, she made an exquisite picture of grief, and Sartoris' own self-control nearly gave way as he watched her.

No one will ever ever love me half so well as you—the best friend I have in the world. I am not worth it, dear; no man deserves so much affection as some women give. You will be my little sister always, with no possible rival, for I shall never marry. My greatest consolation will be the thought of you living here in the dear old home, and I shall pray that you may have every happiness, dear child.

She flung her arms round his neck, and kissed him passionately twice.

Then without a word, she broke from him quickly and fled back to the house.

As Sartoris entered the hall, a small, shabby brougham, drawn by an old racer, came up the drive.

He turned and awaited its approach.

Why, Marguerite, he said, opening the door for a tall, fair girl, handsomely dressed, what a wretched day for you to come out!

Yes, she said, giving him her hand, and making a little shrug of disgust. A most vile day. But I wanted to see you, Denzil.

CHAPTER II.

Carina had left the library directly Mr. Grayson had read out the fact that Denzil Sartoris was disinherited in favour of Bute Calthrop.

By so doing she missed a scene that would have recompensed her for many unhappy hours.

If she agreed to the will's conditions, she would, as Calthrop's wife have £1000 per annum for her own income.

Should she refuse, Calthrop was to give her a suitable dot. This formed a codicil, and a second, after mentioning legacies to servants, gave Denzil Sartoris £5000.

Mrs. Calthrop sat in the largest easy-chair in the room.

She was a fair, plump little woman, pretty, innocent-looking, and well-dressed. Her son stood by her.

He was handsome, on conventional lines but the waxed moustache only partially hid a weak mouth, and the narrow chin also indicated a weak character.

As the principal contents of the will were read out, Mrs. Calthrop shut her teeth together with a sharp click, and her eyes rested on her son with a gleam of triumph.

She frowned when the codicils were mentioned, but very soon recovered her smiling aspect.

I wish to say that the drawing up of this will was very painful to me, said Mr. Grayson, addressing the room generally. Ten years ago I made a will, leaving The Hall to Mr. Sartoris; six months ago I made a second, with the same provisions, but giving a sum of five thousand pounds each to Miss Calderon and Mr. Calthrop.

No mention of their marriage was made. Mr. Denzil Sartoris was the squire's adopted son for twenty years, and no father could have desired a better one. For generations the Graysons have been the legal advisers of squire of Brereton.

And your services will cease from today, snapped Mrs. Calthrop.

The lawyer bowed and placed a sealed packet on the table.

My resignation was prepared madam. Bute Calthrop came forward hurriedly. I trust you will think better of your decision, Mr. Grayson, he said nervously. The—the alteration in the succession was none of my doing. There is no malice

between me and Denzil Sartoris. I shall make that five thousand into ten.

There is no need to prolong this discussion, said Mrs. Calthrop. Mr. Denzil Sartoris was no relation whatever of the squire and Mr. Calthrop is—which makes all the difference. Mr. Sartoris has lived on charity for years. He will now have to work for his living.

There was a murmur of indignation from everyone in the room except the speaker and her son.

A tall woman dressed in black silk advanced from the back and approached the table on which lay the will.

She faced the lawyer and Mrs. Calthrop.

They laugh best who laugh last madam, she observed quietly. Me and my husband—the butler came forward and stood by her—have served the squire for twenty-five years. He knew he could trust us. Last Tuesday afternoon he was supposed to be sleeping, which was why—with a look at Mrs. Calthrop—he was left in peace for awhile.

I really do not see that this woman ought to be allowed—

Bridget O'Reilly drew an envelope from her dress, and gave it to Mr. Grayson.

This is a will made by the squire three days before he died.

It's a lie! a lie! screamed Mrs. Calthrop. Three days before he died, Bridget O'Reilly continued calmly, Doctor Forbes Hamilton came in while my master was writing it. The doctor nodded, and joined the two at the table. The doctor's word is worth more than mine. He can certify that the squire was clear in his mind, and acting of his own free will. Will you please to read it, sir?

Amidst breathless excitement, Mr. Grayson read out a few lines written on a sheet of note paper, stamped with the squire's crest and address.

All former wills were cancelled.

His estate and personal property were left to his beloved adopted son, Denzil Dyne Sartoris, with the exception of the sum of £6000 to his dearly loved ward, Carina Calderon and £5000 to his wife's nephew, Bute Calthrop.

Legacies to faithful were left to the care of Denzil Dyne Sartoris.

There were the signatures of the squire, the two O'Reillys, and Dr. Hamilton.

You witnessed this last Tuesday? Mr. Grayson asked the latter.

I did, and am prepared to testify on oath, that the squire wrote every word without any advice whatever.

Then that will is null and void, said the lawyer, pointing to the parchment on the table; and this one, raising it in the air as he spoke—declares Mr. Denzil Sartoris to be the owner of Brereton Hall!

Mrs. Calthrop was carried from the library in violent hysterics.

The Honorable Mark Lascelles, whose daughter, Marguerite, was engaged to Denzil Sartoris, bore a reputation which was the reverse of honorable.

He had spent a fair fortune inherited from his mother, before he was five and twenty, had gambled, speculated, betted, lent his name to "bogus" companies, and finally captured the widow of a wealthy stock broker.

It took him ten years to spend her money and break her heart and spirit; she then died, leaving him one child—Marguerite.

When it was openly known that the Honorable Mark figured on the turf in disreputable society and at Monte Carlo and the Casinos in rather a doubtful light—was in fact utterly unscrupulous—his eldest brother Lord Blythe came to the rescue.

He agreed to allow Mark five hundred a year on condition that he kept his name out of the papers and himself from the society of blacklegs; he also paid for his niece's education.

But his lordship flatly refused to allow her to meet her cousins, a few interviews having convinced him that she had contracted ideas and opinions which he preferred kept away from his daughters.

As for his brother—one of the conditions imposed with the income was that he never showed his face to the head of the family.

Marguerite had inherited from her father both good looks and an air of birth, which she utilized to the utmost advantage.

She could be fascinating when she chose—could talk well, and was clever enough to be able to suit the taste and mood of her listener.

She dressed well for her uncle generously sent her a good cheque every quarter, and was always a striking figure in a drawing room; but she was too idle to do anything for herself and so she swore off her evening gowns in the house, covering up the décolletage with a shawl and in the afternoons she appeared in tea-gowns.

The ideas of father and daughter were always focussed upon the project of a rich marriage for the latter; and with this view Marguerite cultivated the squire so success fully that he took her for being several years younger than her age, pronounced her a clever, handsome girl and thought she would make a very suitable wife for Denzil.

The Honorable Mark had met Sartoris one day in Paris, and on finding out that he was the squire's heir, had decided to take a cottage near Brereton, under the plea of seeking a quiet place for his shattered health.

This reason was a pretext for returning no invitations, and thus father and daughter were accepted at their own valuation—a thing the world will generally do if one possesses the requisite coolness.

Carina Calderon was never in rapport with the Lascelles.

From both parents she inherited artistic gifts.

Her mother had belonged to one of the old Roman families that hold unbroken annals for centuries.

She possessed a marvellous voice, which had been perfectly trained, and which was the delight of her husband a man of great literary talent.

Lyon Calderon had indeed, for a time,

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