

A Man Misjudged.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS—PART I.

CHAPTER I.

Clever? Well, yes, I should think so. The author of 'Necessities' is certainly that. Handsome? Yes; but not scrupulous. No, Bride, he's not, I'm sure.

'How do you know?'
'Well, it's not what I say; it's what everybody says. Even Val—and, of course, Val wouldn't say anything against his brother—even Val says he doesn't quite trust Neville. So you see I must be right.'

'It doesn't follow at all, and I call it mean to say things about people when you don't know. As for Val, I don't care a rap for his opinion.'

Bride McCarthy clenched her small hand and stamped on the ground in righteous indignation.

Her sister looked at her in amazement. 'Why, Bride, what's the matter? Surely you, of all people, are never going to stand up for Neville? Think how horrid he was about that wood—our favorite walk. We can never go there now, and all because of his wretched game.'

'I don't care. Why shouldn't he keep it private if he likes? You know quite well, Peg, you only dislike him because he stands in the way of your marriage with Val. It he were the younger son you'd like him well enough. Val isn't a bit fitted to be the owner of Ard-na-carrig. He'd lose all the money on the race course, and then the house would go to rack and ruin. Oh, yes, it's all very fine to talk, but Neville's worth twenty of Val, although he's so reserved and—and—'

'Uncivil. Yes, he is uncivil, and Val's the brightest, sweetest tempered—'

'Laziest good-for-nothing in Ireland. Faith, he's that; I can't help saying it, if he is my future brother in law. He's not good enough for you, Peg. No, he's not. Why don't you give him up, and marry Brian Tulveney?'

Peggy tossed her head contemptuously. 'Brian Tulveney! Why, he's as ugly as sin, and has no more prospects than—well, than we have.'

'And what prospects has Val?'

'Well, Neville is very delicate, you see, and anything might happen to him, in which case Val would be Sir Valentine; though I'd marry him without any prospects at all.'

Bride turned her head, and looked away over the heather, to where the sea lay, blue and still, below them.

Something like a mist seemed to rise before her eyes, and for a minute she made no answer.

Then she said—
'And you want him to die?'

Peggy became confused.

'Well,' she explained, 'of course, not that. But—, you see, if anything happened—oh! you're very silly, Bride—you know what I mean!'

'Yes,' her sister answered slowly, 'I do.' Peggy jumped up from her seat on a little hillock of turf, and impatiently brushed a few sprigs of dried gorse from her serge skirt.

Her sister had an uncomfortable knack of making her feel embarrassed.

'Come home,' she said; 'it's late.'

As the two girls turned away, a young man, who had been stretched on his back on the other side of the turf wall, rose, and looked after them.

'So,' he said half-bitterly, 'I have one champion, it seems. Also, I am in Val's way.'

There was now a smile on his face—a smile half cynical, half sad; and if you looked into his eyes you saw there an habitual expression of melancholy; altogether he was not a cheerful-looking man, and he knew it.

'Ah, well,' he sighed, 'no doubt Miss Peggy is right in her opinion of me! I should be better out of the world. What good am I to anyone as I am? A miserable creature, with a weak chest and a crusty temper—it doesn't sound lively; and with a fine young fellow like Val waiting to step into my shoes, it's ridiculous that I should go on living. I almost think I'd blow out my brains and end it all, if it wasn't a cowardly way of going out of existence—the sort of thing that broken-down gamblers and deceived lovers effect. A Ffolliott must die like a man, however, he may live—it's a family tradition.'

He looked away over the sea at the distant horizon, against which the funnel of an outward bound Cunard liner sent up a cloud of thick black smoke.

The day was so perfect, the scene so lovely, that hard, bitter thoughts seemed singularly out of place; yet Sir Neville Ffolliott's thoughts were full of bitterness against his brother, against all the world, and more especially against himself.

'Why, could not Val and I have changed places?' he thought; 'then, as the younger son, no one would have cared if I had lived or died; the people would have loved him, whereas they hate me, and he could have wooed and married the fair Peggy long ago. That cursed Fate! What tricks she does play on us all, to be sure. To make me, a feeble, disagreeable wretch, the elder son, and gay, and sweet tempered, lazy, well-beloved Val the younger! What ducks and drakes he would have played with the estate! What a lady-killer he would have been! How the county would have resounded with his praises! And I—oh! it's sickening!'

He opened a book which lay on the grass beside him, and read one paragraph aloud.

'In the midst of this busy, toiling selfish crowd of human beings, who are all striving for the same goal, there must, of necessity, be some who are overlooked by the rest. We cannot all be understood as we should wish to be—perhaps our own view of self is one impossible for outsiders. Perhaps they do not think us worth the trouble of interpretation. Be this as it may, they pass us by with a casual nod, and we are left alone—alone in a world where there is barely standing room for each! So we give in, perhaps. It is hard to play to an empty house, and over graves the world writes the word "Failure".'

'Failure! yes,' he said, with a short laugh; 'that, I think, describes me exactly. It is quite certain that no one has as yet thought me worth the trouble of interpretation. Hello, Larry! What is it?'

A man was standing by his side—a burly, drunken looking ruffian in a ragged shirt, and trousers which had long ago seen their best days, and now hung together, as it were, by a thread.

'If ye please, yer honor, I can't pay me rint. Me wife's bad agin, an' the child her's only jist got over the fever. I'm earnin' nothin' at all this month or more, barrin'—'

'Barrin' what you've spent at the Tally Ho. No, you drunken scoundrel. I'm sorry for your wife and children; but this is the third quarter you've not paid your rent, and next Michaelmas out you go! Remember that.'

He walked rapidly away, leaving the discomfited Larry to shake his fist, and mutter curses under his breath, after the retreating figure of his landlord.

'Phwat's up, Larry?' asked a man who was digging potatoes in a field hard by.

'Indade thin, there's enough to trouble me,' was the angry Larry's retort. 'Tis a terrible hard mather he is, is Neville Ffolliott; the worst in all the land, as any wan will tell ye. There's his brother now, Master Val, as different as iver he can be, always ready to hlp the poor, an' let a man off his rint when the prates are bad, or the pig's tuk ill, poor craythur; but this man, shure he's as close fistet as a Jew. The ould mather—God rest his soul!—niver thought to ax for his rint from wan year's ind to another, or if he did, 'twas only: "Larry, me boy, is the rint paid?" 'Tis not, yer honour. "Then pay it immediate, Larry. I will so, yer honour," and no more about it, at all, at all. Begor, if there was more like him 'twould be a better country, an' poor Thady Cleary would niver have mit his death at last Cork Assizes—God rest his soul, poor boy!—for murdering Misher Mulcahy. And work too! I was working wan day in the pratie field when up comes th' ould mather.'

'D'ye know, Larry,' says he, 'in the furrin country I've just come from, where I've been thravelling for awhile, 'tis the women that does all the work.' 'Bedad thin,' says I, 'tis a bad country we live in. I'll do no more. An' sorra a bit did I for the next month or two. But Sir Neville, bad scan to him! comes shakin' along with his ugly face, and pounces on yer all unbeknownst like. "Larry," says he, "there's a field waitin, to be dug over away to yer wheat." An' dig it I must, whither 'tis hot or cold, or even if I've a touch of the rheumatiz. Ah, 'tis a terrible hard mather he is, indade!'

'Tis a bad name he has, for shure,' agreed the other. 'All the country do be talkin' about him. An' yet, when Mickie Farraby's little gossoon was ill with the fever, they do say as 'twas Neville Ffolliott saved his life intirely.'

'Twas to his own inde, thin, I'm thinkin', broke in Larry viciously, 'or niver a look wud the child have got. Ah! John Murphy, don't be belavin' thin stories ye hears. I tells ye that Neville Ffolliott is a dirty, black hearted villain, an' ivery wan else knows it, too; and I tell ye this, John Murphy, 'tisn't much longer we boys'll stand by and see our wives and childer 'tharvin' while that blackguard's livin' like a prince. We'll not be put down much longer, indade, not while there's a man in Ireland as has the soul of a man in him; and by the Holy Vargin, I swear that when the deed's doin', Larry O'Leary won't be far behind. No; there's a day comin' yet when we'll rid the country of all sich black villains; an' when that day does come, it won't be the mather here that'll be the last to go. Good day to ye, John.'

Larry O'Leary turned away and strode homeward, still muttering curses against the tyrants of Ireland, and the local tyrant in particular.

On his way he paused at the Shamrock, one of the two rival taverns which attracted such men as Larry hourly to their doors and there he spent his last remaining shilling, regardless of the wife and 'childer' at home.

Meanwhile the object of his wrath was striding over the heather in the opposite direction, a scowl on his handsome face, and a hatred of life and all mankind ranking in her breast.

'A failure, indeed!' he said.
At the gate of the drive he met his brother, a taller, stronger looking edition of himself, with laughing eyes, and a careless, happy-go-lucky expression on his face. 'You look displeased, Nev,' he began jauntily. 'Anything happened to irritate

you while you've been out?'

Neville was in no mood for jesting, so he answered shortly—

'Yes; that brute O'Leary's been telling me he cannot pay his rent.'

'Which means he doesn't intend to pay at all. Well, poor devil, he's hard up; suppose you let him off this once, Nev.'

Neville turned irritably away, and began to kick at the battered, disreputable-looking gate-post.

'You know nothing at all about it, you young fool,' he said crossly. 'It's the very deuce to get these people to pay their rent, whether they can afford it or no, and it's you that's always bothering me for money to pay your debts. Leave off your betting and steeple-chasing first, and then begin to talk to me of letting O'Leary off.'

Val flushed hotly.

He was the more annoyed as he knew that his brother was right.

'And you grudge me the only pleasures I have in life,' he exclaimed, 'when you have all you want and to spare, being the eldest, while I that could enjoy it all, and marry the sweetest girl in Ireland into the bargain, have nothing. Oh yes! You can look. I know you Neville Ffolliott, you and your speaking ways! It's little enough you care, wrapped up in your precious books, whether I'm starving or not; and yet you were left in charge of me. Ah, well, it's a cruel world, and there's no one to care what becomes of a younger son—barring Peggy herself, God bless her!'

He walked away, his foolish young head in the air, leaving his brother to meditate upon his words or not, as he chose.

'Young fool!' muttered Sir Neville; 'young fool! Think he knows the world already, when all he does know or care about is the racecourse. Well, after all, he's right in a way; I was left in charge of him, and this is how I fulfil my trust. Indeed, it is true I'm a failure; the only thing I'm able to do is to write a popular novel, and at home I can't even look after my own younger brother and keep him out of mischief. In future I must manage better.'

He slowly followed Val to the house, his head bent, his hands in his pockets.

'Yes, a failure!' he muttered again.

CHAPTER II.

Life had always gone hard against Neville Ffolliott.

His father, Sir Brian, was an easy-going, extravagant, reckless country baronet the son of generations of extravagant, reckless country baronets, who had let the place go pretty nearly to the dogs, and in his rash, susceptible youth he had fallen in love with, and married, a pretty English girl, with but a very modest fortune.

Poor Lady Ffolliott, a staid, demure young person, with conscientious ideas about duty and religion, had looked on aghast at the doings of her much adored spouse; but being powerless to prevent them, and finding protestations vain, she had gradually become reconciled, and devoted all her energies to the up bringing of her eldest son in the quiet, respectable, but somewhat monotonous paths in which her father had walked.

She was entirely successful, and Gerald Ffolliott had grown up into as steady and respectable a youth as the best of them; methodical, and filled with ideas about the reformation of his idle tenantry into industrious, peaceable folk, who neither drank, nor fought, nor cursed.

So intent was Lady Ffolliott upon the future of her first-born, that she gave very little thought to the education of her second boy—at least, such part of his education as was best to be taught and learned at home.

He went to school as soon as he was old enough, and won prizes over the heads of his older class mates.

But his mother was never greatly concerned about his doings, and his father was quite wrapped up in his youngest boy, Val.

Somehow they neither of them seemed quite to understand Neville.

'He is a trifle—well, unsympathetic,' poor Lady Ffolliott used to say, but he was really fond of her all the same, and her indifference to him, and obvious partiality for Gerald, hurt him sorely.

When Gerald was nearly of age, he died suddenly.

His mother, who was in bad health at the time, felt the shock so much that she never recovered, and in six months' time she also was dead, leaving her two surviving sons to the care of their father.

After his wife's death, Sir Brian never cared to be much at home.

In the hunting season he rode six days in the week to hounds, taking Val with him, so that Neville, who had no taste for hunting, was left in undisputed possession of the library, where most of his time was spent.

At a very early age he had literary aspirations, and he was always passionately fond of reading; so morning, noon, and night he was to be found in the old leather arm chair, before the bookcases, deep in some dingy volume, that, until his coming had stood unopened for many years upon its shelf.

Then he began to write himself, at first only essays, articles, short stories, for various periodicals, and then as he was fairly successful at these, he determined to write a book.

It was about a month after this and some two years from the time of Lady Ffolliott's death, that Sir Brian was killed out hunting by a fall from his horse.

The animal in question was a vicious brute that he had been warned not to ride; but like all the Ffolliotts, Sir Brian was obstinacy itself, and ride it he would, regardless of his friends' advice and Val's entreaties.

As he lay dying, he beckoned Neville to his side and bade him be a father to his young brother, and Neville promised, though he foresaw that his post would be no secure.

The promise however eased the old man's mind, and he died peacefully enough

having sent for the priest to soothe his troubled conscience—for it was many a day since Sir Brian had attended Mass.

So, at twenty-one, Neville was absolutely his own master, as well as being lord of Ard-na-carrig and its two thousand acres of land.

Unfortunately, he was not the sort of man to be popular with his tenants, nor did he greatly care for their affection, his whole mind being absorbed in the production of his book, 'Necessities.'

In due course it was published, and became the book of the season.

Everyone raved about it, and invitations rained in upon Ard-na-carrig, till finally, Neville took to declining them all, and shutting himself up like a hermit beyond the reach of match making mammas and eligible daughters.

Val laughed at him, and took his place in the society of the district.

'You are a fool, Neville,' he said. 'Why don't you go to the county ball? It'll be splendid.'

'All very fine for you, a younger son,' returned his brother. 'Personally my soul yearns to seek some land where eligible young women are not. I won't have them thrust down my throat. I'm not a marrying man. Can't they see that?'

So things went on for some five or six years, till, at last, the fond parents retired from the field, and left the master of Ard-na-carrig severely alone, much to his relief.

Valentine, meanwhile, on an annuity of about two hundred pounds, had become engaged to the daughter of a neighboring doctor, Miss Peggy McCarthy, and was full of hope and confidence that his marriage would be soon.

'And what are you going to live on?' demanded his brother, severely.

'On my annuity, and love,' replied Val cheerfully.

'Yet you, at present, keep two hunters and half a dozen setters, and go to every race meeting in the country. You think you are going to give up all this when you marry. Not much, my boy. You may for six months, but not longer. Then you'll fall back into your old habits, and there'll be weeping and a gnashing of teeth. Miss Peggy will wish herself home again, and your end will be the bankruptcy court.'

'So you wish me not to marry?'

'I wish you not to make a fool of yourself. Get some work to do, knock off a hunter and a few setters, and learn to look seriously at life. Then marry, if you like but not before.'

'All very well for you to talk. I don't suppose you've ever been in love in your life.'

'And I don't wish to be if it's going to effect my reason. No, no; the owner of an estate, however small and barren it may be, must have a head on his shoulders and not lose it at the sight of a pretty woman. When I want a wife and an heir I'll marry, but till then I keep clear of the fair sex, and I advise you to do the same.'

This was sound advice, but Val was not going to profit thereby.

His devotion to Peggy was even strengthened by it, and that same evening, he went on to the terrace in the moonlight, and wrote an ode three pages long, beginning: 'Oh, fairest star in all my heaven! and comparing her to a pearl, a rose, a lily and a dove in turn.

At twenty-four the blood runs warm, an Irishman's especially, and Val was really in love; so for two long years the engagement had continued, and the young people had alternated daily between the wildest hope and the darkest, deepest despair; but still the end seemed as far off as ever.

Val appeared to be absolutely incapable of any work, and even he realized that two people of remarkably extravagant tastes cannot live very comfortably on two hundred a year.

He was always hoping to win a fortune on the turf, but somehow the fortune was never won; instead, he had been obliged once or twice to sell his hunters or to borrow money from his brother to pay his debts.

At the time when this story opens he was particularly short of means.

'Hang it all, man, why can't you give it up?' cried his brother one evening as they sat at dinner, Val eating next to nothing, but drinking far more than was good for him. 'Why don't you give it up? You know we Ffolliotts never have any luck, so why the deuce do you carry on the game?'

'No luck! What about your book?'

'That made a bit, certainly,' replied Neville, 'but then, I worked at it night and day beforehand. Why, I was a year writing it, and I think I deserved the five hundred I got for it. Why don't you work, too, instead of betting on every race course? That's ruining your health and nerves, and spoiling the girl's life too. You've plenty of brains if you'd only use them the right way.'

'What can I do? I'm too old to begin now.'

'Not a bit of it! There's been plenty of offers made you, only you've been too lazy to accept them. Val, for the sake of the girl you love, why don't you think better of it?'

'Oh! shut up, and don't worry a fellow,' snapped his brother. 'Sure you know I'd die for her, but I'm the son of a baronet, and I can't demean myself by being a bailiff or a gamekeeper. No, no; I'll have the luck some day, and after all we're young yet and can wait.'

'And all this time you're ruining the girl's chances; she's twenty now or nearly that, and she might do well for herself if it wasn't for you.'

'And do you think she'd give me up for a richer or a better man? Not she! She's the truest little girl in all Ireland. God bless her!'

'All the more reason why you should consider her; still, go your own way, it's no business of mine. Perhaps, both you and she will be sorry one day; but one can't expect a fool to think of the future. Certainly, if she's all you say,

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you'll do well to stick to her. Faithful women are none too plentiful, and if you've succeeded in finding one you're a lucky man, that's all I can say. Others, I fear, are not so successful.'

'Confounded old cynic!' was Val's inward reflection as he strolled off to the stable. 'What does he know of women or of love? He can't ever have been in love himself—that sort of chap never is, he's too mighty superior. Well, evidently I can't get any more money out of him, so Croppy must go. What a shame it is that I'm not the eldest. I wouldn't have to wait for Peg then. Hi! Paddy!'

A groom came running out of the stable at his call, a bit, which he was cleaning, in his hands.

'Is it meself yer honour's wantin'?' he inquired.

'It is, Paddy. Look here, I'll have to sell Croppy, I find, after all. What did the colonel offer for him?'

'Tis fifty pounds, yer honour, he was mintonin'.'

'Very well. Tell him I'll take it, and ride Croppy over tomorrow. Don't forget, now,' and he passed on into the stable.

'Poor Master Val!' murmured the groom, looking after him. 'Shure his heart'll be broke intirely, he just dotes on that craythur. 'Tis a shame, now, the mather wouldn't give him the money, an' him that can well afford it, too. Why wasn't the young one born older, begor?'

CHAPTER III.

Peggy and Bride were paying calls.

Calls were by no means congenial to Bride, but Peggy liked well enough to dress in her best frock and big Sunday hat, and go sedately round to the neighboring houses, there to partake of tea and gossip.

Best clothes and afternoon calls suited her, with her trim little figure and patrician features; to Bride they were not so becoming.

In her scarlet jacket and Tam o'Shanter her dark locks flying loose, and her big eyes dancing with glee, she might almost be considered pretty; in drawing-room costume, however, she was distinctly common place—neither plain nor pretty, and only monosyllabic in her replies.

She was waiting on the steps when her sister came out buttoning her gloves.

'Where first?' was her brief and pathetic question.

'Kane's,' was Peggy's reply.

'They set off, Peggy radiant and dainty; Bride cross and awkward.'

At the gate they met the two Ffolliotts—together for a wonder—and Val stopped to accost them with a beaming face.

'Hello, girls! Where are you off to?'

'To Colonel Kane's,' replied Peggy, blushing prettily at her lover's greeting.

'Where are you going?'

'Also to Colonel Kane's,' he answered gaily. 'That goes without saying, Miss Curiosity.'

'But you were going the wrong way,' suggested Bride.

'All roads lead to Rome'; still, I'm thinking I'll be doing better to go your way. Come Peg.'

And the two started off together, leaving Bride and Neville in the middle of the road gazing vacantly after them.

'Er—you are going to the Kane's, too?' inquired Bride, after an awkward pause.

'I wasn't,' said Neville; 'but I suppose I can.'

Bride's face flushed.

'What a rude fellow!' was her unspoken comment; aloud she said icily—

'Don't on my account, pray.'

'Why not?'

'Because I don't care whether you go or not,' she said defiantly.

'But suppose I care?'

'Oh, well, please yourself!' she responded, turning on her heel, and proceeding to follow the others.

Neville hesitated for a moment, then he quietly joined her.

For some time they walked in silence, Bride's rather tip-tilted nose high in the air, Neville ruminating, his eyes on the road.

Then at last Bride broke the silence by saying in exasperated tones—

'If you're coming you may as well talk!'

He looked up, and their eyes met; in his

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