

A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed

By

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A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED.

“THERE is nothing in the papers, and nobody in the streets,” said Charles Bouverie, as with a disconsolate air he flung down the ‘Times,’ and turned away from the window. “I may as well write to Audley-place, and say that they must kill their own partridges this year; I can’t leave town.” Charles went towards the table, but he had no lady-like powers of filling four sheets with nothing, and the letter was soon sealed. Again he was thrown upon his resources; which have always appeared to me the very worst things on which an unfortunate individual can be thrown in the way of amusement. He looked round the room: there was one gentleman asleep—Charles envied him; and another reading the third side of a newspaper,—he was one of those who never omit even an advertisement—the fourth side yet remained, and Charles envied him too. The fact was, that though, of course, it is the most enviable position in the world, that of having nothing to do, yet one requires to be used to it. Now our hero had been accustomed to the very reverse. Left an orphan to the care of three uncles,—the first intended him for a clergyman; saw to his Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; and fully impressed upon his nephew’s mind the paramount importance of University honours. However, he died; and the second uncle insisted on the senior wrangler taking a place in his counting-house. A will of his own in a young man without a shilling is a superfluity, and Charles took his place on a high stool at a high desk. Just then the third uncle died. He had troubled his head very little about “the only hope of the family” during his life; but after all, the last recollections are often the best, and he recollected his nephew to some purpose. Charles Bouverie was left sole heir to a fine fortune; for the elder Mr. Bouverie died just as he had realized the sum on which he meant to enjoy himself. To the best of our belief, he had seen the pleasure; for the enjoyment of spending money is nothing to that of making it. Charles gave up the ledger as he had given up Euclid; removed to an hotel in the gayer part of town; devoted his mornings to the club instead of the counting-house; and intended to be the happiest of men, in the full indulgence of the *dolce far niente*. Unfortunately, the art of doing nothing requires some learning; and Charles, though he would not have owned the truth on any account, was the least in the world puzzled what to do with himself. London was very empty, and he had as yet but few acquaintance; while he could not help regretting his annual visit at Audley-place. A month of partridges and pheasants is a very real pleasure to a young man country-bred—and forced to spend the other eleven in town.

Our hero approached the window,—that resource of the destitute. There was nothing to be seen, even in St. James’s-street! Three hackney-coaches, and two women in pattens passed by; also a man with an umbrella dripping, which he held rather over a brown paper parcel than himself: at last, a bright spot appeared just above the palace, the rain seemed to melt into luminous streaks on the sky, and the rain-drops that had sprinkled all over the panes of glass began to gather into two or three large drops, and to descend slowly along the surface. They

would have done to bet upon, but there was no one to bet with. The pavement began to dry, and Charles decided on a walk. He reached the clubs, and stood there for five minutes deliberating whether he should turn to the right hand or to the left, having no necessity for turning to either; and here we cannot but say that necessity is "an injured angel." He, she, or it—is never but harsh, stern, and un pitying; and "cruel necessity" is the phrase *par distinction* of all parted lovers. Now I hold that necessity merits more amiable adjectives;—what a great deal of trouble is saved thereby. To an undecided person like myself, the inevitable is invaluable. Before Charles had done standing like Hercules in the allegory between Pleasure and Virtue, *alias* the right and left of St. James's-street—a cabriolet drove rapidly up to the door.

"My dear fellow!" said its occupier, "I am in search of you. I want you to go down with me to my aunt's, and stay there till Wednesday. Her house is within three miles of Croydon, so you could be back in town at an hour's notice. Let me take you to your hotel, and thence I shall get you to drive me down."

Charles accepted the offer with the gratitude of a desperate man; it was just what suited him, and he sprung into the cabriolet in the gayest spirits. Horace Langham, the knight who thus had delivered him from the dragon *ennui*, had long been the object of his especial envy. He was a young man about town, good-looking, well dressed, with all the externals of a gentleman, quite unquestionable. The few needful preparations were soon made, and as they settled themselves in the stanhope, Langham said, "I have made you drive us down, for my horse has been overworked lately. My aunt unluckily has a great prejudice against strange servants; but there is a nice little country-inn close by, so yours will do very well."

The conversation was for a time very animated, for Horace knew something about every one who was anybody; and was very well inclined to tell all he knew. Anecdotes though, like other treasures, must come to an end; and Charles took advantage of a pause to ask if Mrs. Langham had any family.

"Only a niece," was the reply.

"Is she pretty?" asked his companion.

"Not if you put it to my conscience," said the other; "but she is likely to be rich: will that do as well?"

Charles coloured, from "a complication of disorders." First he was quite shy enough to be annoyed at its being supposed that he cared whether there were any young ladies in the world or not; and, secondly, he was quite romantic enough to be shocked at the idea of money supplying the want of a pretty face. He was relieved from his embarrassment by Mr. Langham's snatching the reins from his hand, and exclaiming, "Bouverie, we must drive back to town immediately! I have forgotten my aunt's netting silk—she will never forgive me!—old ladies are so cursedly unreasonable. Why did she plague me about her horrid silks? However, if we make haste, we shall yet be in time for dinner.—I wonder why old women are left in the world!"

Without waiting for Charles's reply, he put the horse to its utmost speed, and drove furiously back to town. The drive was now any thing but agreeable: a heavy shower of rain beat directly in their faces, and

Horace's conversation was confined to maledictions on all elderly gentlewomen, and lamentations on his own ill-luck, in having any thing to do with them. The particular shop was reached; the silk was procured, and again they took the road to Croydon.

The rain continued to fall in torrents, and Langham's spirits seemed to have fallen with the barometer. In sullen silence he continued to drive at a furious rate, till Bouverie's sympathies were awakened on behalf of his horse: he was just about "to hint a fault and hesitate dislike," when the clock of a church in the distance struck six.

"It is of no use now," exclaimed the impatient driver, slackening his speed. "We are too late for dinner,—the thing of all others that puts my aunt out; I must lay the blame upon you, she can't say anything to you as a stranger. We must go and dine at that confounded inn."

Wringing wet, they arrived at a disconsolate-looking inn, 'The Swan.' Truly such a sign only could have swung in such weather. A fire was hastily lighted in the best parlour, from whence the smoke drove them; and they took refuge in the kitchen redolent with the smell of recently fried onions, varied with tobacco; for two men sat on one side the fire employed with two pipes. A very tough beefsteak was produced after some delay, badly dressed, for the chimney smoked; this was washed down with some execrable wine,—half cape, half brandy, but called 'sherry.' Charles could far better have endured these minor discomforts than his companion's ill-humour. Controlled towards himself, it broke with double fury on the heads of the landlady and the kitchen-maid. Charles wondered at this in a man whom he had always seen so full of gaiety and good-humour; but Charles had still many things to learn.

Dinner over, time given for "my aunt's afternoon nap not to be disturbed," they set off for the 'Manor-House,' as it was called. The rain was quite over, but the glistening drops on the green sprays of the hawthorn and ash reflected the moonlight, which was now breaking through the masses of dark cloud. A sweet breath came from the late primroses and the early violets in the hedges of the lane through which they had to pass. Had Bouverie been alone he could have loitered on his way; but his companion had long since merged the poetical in the sarcastic,—if the former quality had ever entered into his composition. They soon arrived at the place of their destination, and entered by a picturesque old gate overhung with ivy; a gravel-walk, and a few stone steps, led into the hall. A sedate-looking butler met them there, and said, with a tone and air equally solemn, "Mrs. Langham, my mistress, waited dinner for you one quarter of an hour; the Major's rice was sadly overdone."

"No fault of mine, my good Williams, I assure you," exclaimed Langham, hurrying on to the sitting-room.

It was large, square, and dark; and a voice, that seemed to Charles singularly shrill, came from the upper end,—"Caroline, my dear, you have spilt the water."

He had no time for further observation, when he was led up to a very tall, upright-looking old lady, in a very tall, upright arm-chair, and was presented in turn to Mrs. Langham, her brother, Major Fanshawe, and to Miss Langham.

"Horace," said the old lady, "you kept us waiting dinner a whole quarter of an hour."

"Yes," continued the Major, "and my rice was done to a jelly."

"It was no fault of mine," cried the nephew; "there stands the real culprit. Mr. Bouverie forgot his dressing-case, and we had to drive back for it."

Mrs. Langham's face lost the courteous smile it had summoned up to receive the stranger, and the Major turned aside with a look which said, as plainly as a look could say—and looks speak very plainly sometimes—"What effeminate puppies young men of the present day are!"

Between rage and confusion, Charles could hardly find his way to a seat, where he sat

"In angry wonder, and in silent shame."

There was, however, no occasion for him to talk. Horace led the conversation, and was very amusing; though, unfortunately for Charles, he had already heard both the scandal and the stories during their drive down. He employed his time in taking a survey of the party. Major Fanshawe was a well-preserved, military-looking man; and it gave him at least ten minutes' consideration to decide whether he wore a wig or not. At last he came to the conclusion that it was the most natural-looking wig that he had ever seen. The old lady took up less time: she seemed staid and severe; and he turned to the younger one. She took up even less time; for the urn almost hid her face, and all he could distinguish was a huge quantity of curls. Now, if there was one thing he hated more than another it was a crop. Like most young men who have always some divinity for the time being whereby to judge of "common mortals," he had his standard of perfection, and *Giulietta Grisi* reigned at this moment his "fancy's queen." Her small classic head put to shame what he somewhat irreverently called, in his own mind, "a mop of hair." Any little interest that might yet have remained was put to flight; when, at length, after many efforts, he hazarded a question—"Do you play?" and the reply was a single, stiff, hard-hearted "No." Now, a young lady without music was, in his eyes, like a flower without perfume. Matters were made still worse when the tea-things were removed, and she drew towards her a large wicker-basket, from whence peeped out flannel, calico, tape, &c. Charles turned away his head, and encountered an encouraging look from the Major, who had drawn nearer towards him. Fanshawe began to talk of the weather; and his auditor was fairly astonished to find how much he had to say about it. He had all but counted the rain-drops; and he was quite aware of every gleam of sunshine that they had had since the morning. He then communicated the important fact that the Manor House fronted due south, and that it was situated on an eminence, which rendered it perfectly dry. "Very necessary for an old house like this. Our house, Sir, is a very old one;—it has the reputation of a ghost. By the bye, that puts me in mind of a very curious—indeed, I may say uncommon—circumstance which happened to me when I was a boy. I was about eight—no, let me see, I was nearly nine. Yes, it was nine; for my birth-day is in February, and the event to which I allude happened in November. Well,—for I am sure you must be impatient for the story

young people always like ghost stories.—I had been in bed some time. My father always insisted on our going soon to rest. You know the old proverb,

‘ Early to bed, early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, and wealthy, and wise.’—

I had been in bed some time. Perhaps I had gone to sleep a little later than usual ; for it was a stormy night, and I never was a sound sleeper. My digestion is not good : I am therefore obliged to be very regular in my hours. Your dressing-case, Sir, did me a great deal of harm to-day ;—we waited dinner half an hour, and the rice was overdone. However, I always make great excuses for young people. When I was a youth, I was somewhat of a coxcomb myself ; indeed, I think, at any time of life, people should never be indifferent to their appearance. I often tell my sister and niece they are too careless.—But I am keeping your curiosity on the rack all this time. So, to return to my story. I had been asleep some time, when I was suddenly awakened by what appeared to me a violent blow on the chest. I started up in my bed ; I could perceive no one, though the rushlight was still burning.—We were always allowed a rushlight.—I jumped up, and ran to my mother’s dressing-room ; I heard the clock strike twelve, as I thought, though afterwards it turned out to be only eleven. Still, as you may easily suppose, it added to my alarm ; for twelve o’clock is, as you know, a disagreeable time to be thinking of ghosts—it being the hour peculiarly appropriated to their appearance. However, I communicated my alarm in perfect safety, and my bedchamber was carefully searched, without discovering the slightest cause for fear. My father was a little inclined to be angry ; but, as my mother justly observed, there were many things for which there was no accounting. You see, my dear young friend,—the Major’s heart had quite warmed to his patient listener,—“ I may well quote Shakspeare’s profound remark, which may have escaped your notice hitherto,—

‘ There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamed of in your philosophy.’

Charles was saved the painful necessity of a reply, by a call on his attention from the other part of the room, and hearing his friend saying, “ Oh, Bouverie is a capital tredrille player ; he used to play it with his uncle. It is the very game for a small circle in the country.”

Our hero could not deny the fact—for a fact it actually was ;—but how it had reached Langham was to him matter of great surprise. Down he sat to the table with Mrs. Langham and the Major, to devote the rest of the evening to spadille, manille, and basto. At ten, the tray came in, with refreshments much lighter than were ever meant to follow a dinner bad as his own had been ; but, as the Major observed, “ suppers were so bad for the digestion.” At half-past ten, bed-candles were brought in, and “ we breakfast punctually at eight ” was formally announced by Mrs. Langham.

To bed he went—hungry, weary, but not the least sleepy ; and he lay awake, thinking whether it would be possible to return to London the next morning. He was the last to make his appearance ; for he had divers misgivings respecting a *tête-à-tête* with Fanshawe, who he saw at once had that worst bump developed that can adorn the head of a bore—viz., long-story-tellativeness.

He entered: Miss Langham's face was again hidden by the urn; but he had a side view of "that odious crop." Mrs. Langham inquired, with old-fashioned politeness, how he had passed the night; so did the Major. "Saw no ghosts?" and forthwith recommenced of "a most curious, I may say unaccountable, thing which happened to me when I was a little boy." It was long enough the previous evening; but at breakfast it was interminable, being ever and anon interrupted by spoonful of egg;—"An egg is very light; I always eat one at breakfast;"—and by slices of toast, accompanied with "Never touch new bread; but toast is easily digested." A light, however, was thrown on the motive of their visit; for Horace was evidently *aux petites soins* with Caroline Langham.

After breakfast, all looked towards the windows; but the rain was pitiless, and the sky was of that sombre and unbroken dulness which bespeaks a whole day's rain, at least. The Major challenged Charles to a game at chess, of which nothing worse need be said, than that it began before ten, and lasted till half-past four; when, saying that it could be finished the next day, his opponent hurried Charles off with an injunction to try and dress in time for dinner.

He was dressed in ample time, for he had no motive to linger on the pleasant duties of the toilette—the only duties that I know of to which the term pleasant can be applied. The dinner was certainly the very perfection of a plain dinner, and to that Charles chiefly devoted his attention, taking especial care not to divert Miss Langham's attention from Horace's whispers by any indiscreet questions. The evening was again ruled by those three Fates, Spadille, Manille, and Basto—but as they were separating for the night, Charles said to his friend, "Of course the least you can do for me will be to ask me to the wedding?"

Horace laughed, and said, "Well, poor little thing—I suppose I must take pity upon her some day or other. One comfort is, that when she is my wife, she cannot be so very fond of me."

No man likes to hear of the conquest of another, and Charles made no effort to prolong the conversation. The next morning was bright, as if the day were as glad as himself of their coming departure. He also most ingeniously out-manceuvred the Major, by first approaching the window to admire the garden; next stepping out upon the turf, and then walking off as fast as he could, resolved that he would not be found till two o'clock, when the stanhope was ordered to the door. The day was delightful—the sunshine entered into the spirits, and the soft warm air was freighted with odours from a garden prodigal in sweets.

From the flower-garden he wandered into a little wilderness which communicated with an orchard. Charles paused for a moment to admire the cherry-trees, covered with fruit, whose yellowish green was just beginning to wear a tinge of red on the side next the sun; when suddenly he espied the Major—gun in hand. He then remembered that he had been vowing vengeance against the sparrows at breakfast. The morning was too lovely to waste on stories of—"When I was a little boy;" so he darted behind a tree, and prepared to make his escape unseen. Now, whether his stir among the branches disturbed the birds, or whether the Major thought that he had carried his gun quite long enough without discharging it, we know not; but at that moment he fired. Charles received the shot in his leg, and, stumbling against a tree, struck his

head with such violence, that he fell stunned on the ground. When he recovered his senses he found himself in bed, with a gentleman at his elbow, who allowed no one but himself to speak.

On this part of our narrative we need not dwell—but the unfortunate visitor was confined for a week to his bed. The fever under which he suffered rendered even an attempt to amuse him dangerous; but before the week was over he had learned to think Mrs. Langham the kindest old lady in the world; and that the Major was to be endured, now that he was not allowed to say above five words at a time. He had also discovered that Miss Langham had a low sweet voice, and the light step of a sylph. He was pronounced equal to sitting up for a few hours; it is almost worth while to be an invalid for the sake of that permission.

“We placed you in this room at Caroline’s suggestion,” said Mrs. Langham; “it is the one which she occupies, and opens into her own little morning room. As she very justly observed, you could then have change, the moment it was needed, without any fatigue.”

Accordingly he was wheeled on the sofa into the adjoining apartment, and left for a little while to recover from the exertion, with an assurance that she and her niece would soon be with him. Charles took the opportunity of looking about him; and the survey very much raised Miss Langham in his estimation,—there was so much feminine taste in the arrangement of the various trifles scattered round. There was a pretty and well-furnished bookcase: he read the titles on the backs of several, and perceived both French and Italian authors mingled with the English. A number of engravings hung on the walls, all chosen with reference to their subjects, all of which had a little touch of sentiment. Some fresh flowers, grouped as only those who have an eye for colours can group them, were upon the table, and a basket of choice plants was in the window; a guitar rested on a stand of music; in short, nothing was wanting that Charles deemed essential in a lady’s room. He was not left long to his meditations—his hostess and her niece re-appeared, and he was soon engaged in a very pleasant conversation.

Mrs. Langham was called suddenly away; and for a few minutes there was a pause—broken by Charles asking the young lady—“If she had any friends that were musical?”

“No,” replied Caroline. “Indeed we have very few neighbours; my aunt has outlived most of her own friends, and is reluctant to make new ones. We see few strangers, excepting an acquaintance whom Horace now and then brings down—or some old companions of my uncle’s.”

There was something in the familiar appellation “Horace” that jarred on Charles’s ear—and there was another pause: after which he could think of nothing better to say, than—

“Mr. Langham is a very gentlemanlike young man!”

“Do you think so,” replied his companion coldly.

Charles tried to get a glance at her face, but it was hidden by the curls which fell forward as she bent over her knitting.

“And very witty,” continued Bouverie.

“Nay,” said Caroline, “there I cannot agree with you. Ridicule is not wit. He is amusing, for he goes a great deal into society, and retails all he there collects—but I never heard him make an original remark in my life.”

“He seems, however, a great favourite of yours!” exclaimed the invalid, hastily.

“ Ah, well !” returned the young lady ; “ I do not wish to undervalue your friend—I see you are half affronted—but a favourite of mine my cousin never was, nor never can be. He is far too selfish.”

Charles felt a most ungenerous sensation of pleasure, which however he checked, and magnanimously resolved to change the subject.

“ I wonder at seeing a guitar,” said he, “ as you say you have no musical friends ?”

“ I do not keep my guitar,” replied Caroline, laughing, “ for my friends—but for myself !”

“ But of what use is it to you ?” asked the invalid.

“ Not of much use, certainly ; but a great deal of pleasure !”

“ Pleasure !—what pleasure ?”

“ Oh, you may not be fond of music—but I am.”

“ Still, as you do not play it—I do not comprehend the good of the instrument !”

“ But I do play it !” interrupted Caroline.

“ Why !” exclaimed Charles, “ you told me, the first evening, that you did not play !”

“ Ah, I thought that you meant *tredille* !”

Bouverie almost sprang from the sofa.

“ My dear Miss Langham, I am so passionately fond of music ; do lay by your knitting and take your guitar !”

“ With pleasure, if it will keep you quiet !” So saying, with equal grace and simplicity, she began to sing an Italian *barcarolle*.

The light fell on her face, which was turned towards her listener, who perceived for the first time how very pretty it was. The fact was, that he had never looked at her before. We need pursue the subject no farther :—a lady—a guitar—and a wounded cavalier—can have but one denouement—a declaration—and it came in due time ; that is, before the week was out.

“ You must let me speak to your aunt,” said Charles *Bouverie*, the morning after.

“ My dear aunt !” said Caroline, blushing one of those sweet bright blushes which so soon forsake the cheek ; “ you must not mind a little opposition at first.”

“ She favours Mr. Langham then ?”

“ Certainly not ;” but colouring still more deeply, “ your want of fortune—— !”

“ My want of fortune !” cried Charles ; “ why I am all but a millionaire !”

The matter was soon explained. Horace had brought his friend down half as a convenience—half as a foil—and to prevent any possible danger, had represented him as poor : all mistakes were soon cleared up. Settlements and diamonds—blond and *britska* were arranged with all possible despatch ; and Mr. and Mrs. *Bouverie* were soon announced as “ the happy pair, gone during the honey-moon to Paris.” The only regret heard on the subject was one expressed by Horace Langham—“ Very provoking a man must not marry his aunt ! Now that Caroline is so well provided for, my aunt is a speculation well worth consideration.”

L. E. L.