

A TALE OF TWIN SOULS



WE lounged, some half-dozen of us, weaving smoke-rings and telling one another—for want of a better subject—of the girls who had proposed to us, and it was Lubbock's turn. Lubbock is a man with a past; he has been everything and everywhere, has Lubbock, from a stoker on board one of the P. and O. steamers to private secretary to the Queen of Madagascar, from whom he claims to have received marked attentions. Lubbock sprawled lazily over his arm-chair, as he usually does, with one leg on the arm and his head well back, dreamily smoking and reflecting; doubtless his soul was far away, tossing gently upon the ocean of bygone love, for our reminiscences had, naturally, been of the most sweetly sentimental character, the subject being a highly poetical one; at any rate it was not until the third box of matches had reverberated against his shirt-front that the claims of the present triumphed at length over the delights of memory. Lubbock pulled himself together and cleared his throat. He gave a short laugh and heaved a short sigh, as men do who recall something that was once very sweet, but which belongs to the

far-off past, and the recollection of which provokes rather the smile than the tear. Then he began:—

“I'll tell you about my very first,” he said; “I remember it clearly, because, as I say, it was the first time any girl made the running with me, though of course I have been obliged to refuse a great number of the poor things since that day. I was at Sandown, in the Isle of Wight, at the time, doing a turn on the esplanade as the mysterious singer; a slouch hat and an ostentatiously false beard hooked over my ears did the mystery part of the business, the mystery being far more important and profitable, of course, than the singing, though I sang well enough in those days, and vamped out a capital accompaniment upon a hired piano which was carted round for me by a boy and a donkey.

“I can only suppose that there is an unmistakable air of breeding and aristocracy about me which even a slouch hat and false beard can only partially eclipse but not conceal; for before I had been at Sandown more than a couple of days the report went about that I was the son of a peer, and that my noble father had treated me very shabbily, stopping my allowance



"RUTH IS MY NAME."

and driving me forth from the splendid ancestral home which should be my own one day, on some pretext—I forget what, though I remember my good friends made up a capital story of it, and respected me as much for my undeserved misfortunes as for my noble lineage. I think I had refused, according to these historians, to marry some heiress whose property marched with our own, but I am not quite sure at this distance of time.

"Anyhow, the report gained strength every day, and in a short while the thing was accepted by all as an established fact, and I was an immense favourite upon the beach, where visitors and residents alike crowded to see and hear me, and vied with one another in the generosity of their contributions, and in the most affectionate admiration which they lavished, one and all, upon me for my rank's sake. This was all right, of course, and quite as it should be; and I passed a

most agreeable time, and banked, withal, a considerable sum of money. I was the darling of the beach, the spoilt child of the esplanade, the minion, in a word, of Fortune. Then, as though these lavish gifts were not enough, Dame Fortune added a touch of romance, in order, doubtless, to complete and crown the delightful edifice she had built up for my delectation. It was like this. It was the afternoon, and I was 'off' singing. I did not give myself away by performing too frequently. It was best, I thought, to devote the morning to song and the afternoon to retirement and contemplation. Besides, my donkey, which was a charming donkey but for this one fault, unfortunately, possessed no real ear for music, and used to grow restive after about the sixth song; and once, when the seventh was encored, and I started upon an eighth, it brayed. Now even the son of a peer cannot sing a song with the dignity which befits his rank if a

brute of a donkey joins in. I could not risk a recurrence of such a catastrophe. I respected the wishes of the donkey, therefore, and drew the line, henceforward, at six songs. Well, I was sitting one afternoon upon the third bench of the Esplanade, a seat which was reserved for me by the respectful kindness of the visitors, who usually left me to enjoy it by myself, but who would pass me a hundred times during the afternoon in order to peer at me 'out of the tail of their eye' unobserved, as they fondly imagined, by myself. I was busy reading on this particular afternoon, when, to my annoyance, someone came along and sat down upon my bench, and, worse still, rather close to me. I was annoyed, because this was contrary to the usual etiquette of the place, which was to respect my retirement and my natural tendency, as an aristocrat, to exclusiveness. I therefore drew my soft hat over my eyes in order to show this intruder that I appreciated her intention in transgressing, as she had, the rules of propriety, namely, to stare at my features at close range, and that I should do my best to frustrate that intention.

"She pretended to read, and so did I, and soon I forgot her and became absorbed in my book. But suddenly I was recalled with a start to the present by hearing her address me. As she spoke she moved from her place and came still closer to mine.

"'Oh, Mr.—er—I don't know what your name is,' she began, 'and I dare say it's quite improper to speak to you, but I must just tell you how very much your singing has done for me.' I stared at her. I wished to gather from her appearance whether she was already a dangerous lunatic, or only as yet tending that way; but she looked perfectly sane; she was, moreover, extremely nice-looking. She was blushing rather prettily; I knew the girl by sight, I had noticed her in the crowd, every day, as I sang. I said, weakly, that I was very happy to hear it.

For the life of me I could not think of anything wiser than this to say. The only other appropriate remark that occurred to me was 'don't mention it'; and of the two I chose the former.

"'I have been longing to tell you this,' she continued; 'I don't know why, but I felt that I must. I have been rather unhappy of late, and your singing of Schubert's "Adieu" the other morning—Oh, dear Mr.—er—I—I can't tell you what it did for me!' Now this was very delightful to one's feelings; I should have been more than human if I had not found it so.

"'My dear young lady,' I said, 'I assure you I am very proud to have been of service to you; such testimony as yours is very dear to the heart of the singer—far more cherished than mere pecuniary recompense.'

"I added these last words with a strong feeling that their truth depended largely upon the sum encashed.

"'Oh, is it really?' she murmured; her voice was a very sweet one; 'I am so very glad. One feels, somehow, that in taking from the soul of another so much as I have received from yours, and making no acknowledgment of the gift, soul does an injustice to soul!' This remark rather staggered me; my word, I thought, we are getting on! Here were we talking of our souls after only two minutes' conversation. But I only said something insurpassably feeble, I can't remember what. It didn't matter a bit; it was her day out, not mine.

"'What a wonderful, wonderful gift is a beautiful voice,' she continued, 'like yours, Mr.—Mr.—Oh, may I not know your name?' She added the last words with marvellous tenderness and softness.

"'I fear I cannot tell you my real name,' I said, 'for there are circumstances which render it imperative that I should keep it secret; but—'

"'I know, I know,' she interrupted, 'at least I have heard so; but tell me a



"A SLOUCH HAT AND A FALSE BEARD CAN ONLY PARTIALLY ECLIPSE."

name by which I may think of you, my—my benefactor.' I really feared she was going to cry; she just touched my arm with her hand, and then drew it back again.

"'Oh,' I said, bracingly, 'any name will do: Smith, or——'

"'No, no, no!' she pleaded. 'Grosvenor Cecil, or Montague—some name that sounds sweet to the ear' I chose Grosvenor; she was charmed: 'Thank you, thank you, Mr. Grosvenor. I shall always think of you and—and bless you under that name. May I tell you mine, and will you think of me by it?'

"'Certainly,' I replied, faintly. I felt that the pace was getting too hot for me, and that I could never last at this rate.

"'Ruth, is my name,' she said, almost as faintly. I felt that this was scarcely playing the game; I had not bargained for Christian names. There was silence after this for a moment or two. My new friend gazed out to sea. I glanced at her; she could not have been more than twenty at most; her eyes had tears in them, and wore a sweet, far-away expression. She turned suddenly and caught me looking at her. A wave of gentle feeling seemed to pass over her face, and she laid her hand upon mine with a gesture which was more than half caressing.

"'I was thinking,' she said, 'how like are our own lives to the lives of ships at sea; those two, for instance, now crossing one another, over yonder; probably those two, like you and me, have never met before this day, and may never meet again, just as—' her voice sank and trembled a little as she concluded her sentence—'just as you and I too may never meet again until we both reach the haven where we would be!'

"I began to look about for assistance. Here had this extraordinary young woman wafted me, in less than ten minutes, within hail of the Hereafter! I was not accustomed to these lightning methods; I gasped for breath; I felt that she was

overdoing the thing. The pace was being forced.

"'It is strange,' she continued, 'that two young souls like our own, both scarred, perhaps, and both forlorn' (what on earth did she know about my soul?) should suddenly light upon one another, as now, and draw comfort, for a few sweet moments, each from each, as we have; for oh, Mr. Grosvenor, you carry your frank soul in your eyes, and I can see that you are receiving from mine as well as abundantly giving!' In that case, I felt, my eyes must be abundantly lying, for beyond an uncomfortable sensation of uncertainty as to what might be coming next, I was conscious of nothing but a growing desire to get up and run clean away, or else to burst into tears.

"'You will be leaving soon, of course,' she went on. 'Will you promise me, dear Mr. Grosvenor' (her lips lingered lovingly over the name), 'that when you move once more in that circle which is yours by right, and from which you cannot, of course, be long absent, will you promise me that you will sometimes think of me kindly as of a dear kindred soul which wanders and wanders, like yonder ship, over the blank ocean of this life, and waits and longs for the day when it shall once more signal that twin-bark which it spoke one sweet, sweet summer afternoon?'

"'Oh, certainly, certainly,' I muttered. Then I pulled myself together and rose to go; I could not possibly live up to this young lady. I said I must get ready for dinner; it was scarcely five yet, but I reflected that wandering souls might be supposed to take their meals when they pleased. I raised my hat and was for departing; but she took my hand and held it tightly in her own; I glanced around in horror, I thought she was going to kiss it. 'Say Good-night, Ruth, just once,' she said, speaking very softly; there were tears in her voice, oceans of tears.

"'Good-night, Ruth,' I said. 'Dear

Ruth,' she added. I made the desired correction. 'Good-night, dear, dear Mr. Grosvenor, she said. Then she dropped my hand and allowed me to depart.

"Now, then, Jack, my boy,' I thought, as I made wonderful pace homewards, is it yourself or the peer's son who has done this thing?' Naturally I concluded that it was I, and not my noble ancestors; my own attractions had proved too much for her; my family had nothing to do with the matter.

"I noticed my friend among the audience next morning; she gazed most intensely at me as I sang, and placed something in my collecting-bag, which I felt could scarcely be money. It proved to be a note. I put it in my pocket. That afternoon, as I sat and read upon my own reserved bench, a man came close up to me, peered under my hat, and said:

"Excuse me, sir, but can I have a word or two with you?"

"I bade him speak on. He looked about to make sure that none listened, then he said: 'What have you been saying to my daughter, sir?"

"Good heavens, man,' I exclaimed, 'how am I to know who your daughter is?' I guessed, nevertheless, that this was the father of Ruth; the thing was developing pleasantly indeed!

"John Daniels, sir, is my name, and my daughter's is Ruth—Ruth Daniels,' he explained. 'I am a grocer and live at Peckham, and I do, thank God, a fair trade; at all events I pay my way without requiring to pass the hat round for money. You are the son of a lord, I understand, and have had the sack from your father; but I wouldn't have a street-singer for a son-in-law, let me tell you, not if his father was Duke of all England!"

"These Daniels, I perceived, were a family who scorned to beat about the bush; both father and daughter had an admirable way of going straight to business; Ruth had taken me to heaven within ten minutes of our first acquaintance,

and here was this estimable tradesman talking glibly of sons-in-law in even a shorter space of time. I begged Mr.



MR. DANIELS.

Daniels to be so amiable as to explain himself.

"Why,' said he, 'my daughter talks of nothing but yourself and twin-souls and some haven you've promised to meet her at, and the like; and what I want to know is just this—what have you been saying to the girl?"

"I assured him that the talk had been mostly upon her part—souls and heaven and such topics being subjects of conversation upon which I was diffident to

speak by reason of my ignorance. I had thanked her, I said, for admiring my singing, and that was about all.

“‘But do you mean to tell me,’ he said, ‘that there’s no understanding between you?’ I enquired what kind of understanding he referred to?

“‘Why, love, and souls, and meeting at havens, and all that sort of foolery,’ said this painfully unromantic grocer. I assured him that no rendezvous had been even mentioned between us nearer than heaven, and that I had not been a party to any appointment even there.

“‘What, don’t you mean to try to marry her, or any foolery of that kind?’ he said, quite cordially; he seemed surprised and delighted at my unexpected attitude. I felt that the moment had arrived to speak up and speak plainly: ‘My dear sir,’ I said, ‘if your daughter were the only woman on this continent, I’d cross over to another on the top of a bathing-machine rather than marry her. There; does that satisfy you?’ This was rather hard on poor Ruth, but it was best to be quite straightforward with this grocer; he did not fail in that respect with me. The man danced for joy—figuratively, I mean; he did not, of course, execute a hornpipe on the sands.

“‘Is it I or my blue blood that has proved so irresistibly attractive to your charming daughter?’ I asked. I don’t know why I thus courted the unpleasant jar which this question deserved and brought upon me; I am always taking the odds.

“‘Oh, it’s the aristocracy that does the trick with Ruth,’ said my father-in-law—that-might-have-been, brutally; ‘she was always that way; she’s more than a bit gone on chivalry and Norman blood and souls and the like, you know; a trifle wrong in the head on the matter of love and so on; you ain’t the first she’s cottoned up with, by many.’ The vulgar brute! I began to be sorry for poor Ruth; what a parent to drag through the world

with one! I determined to do the girl a good turn; I would do the honest thing by her and save her heart alive.

“‘Look here, my friend,’ I said, ‘I’ll just tell you a little secret. I’m no more a lord than you are; and you can tell Miss Ruth so, if you please!’

“The grateful grocer beamed all over with delight.

“‘Upon my word, young man,’ he said, ‘you’re a better sort than I took you for. Tell her yourself, if you will; she’ll not believe it from me; she’d think I was saying it to put her off.’

“It was not altogether a pleasant undertaking; but I ended by promising to do as this grocer-man desired, and we parted with much cordiality on his part. It was, of course, in a way, painful to my feelings to observe how very pleased this person was to learn that I did not aspire to be his son-in-law. It made no difference that I had no ambition that way. His attitude in the matter was offensive; some people don’t know a good son-in-law when they see one!

“Ruth’s note had informed me that she would be at ‘the same dear spot’ at five o’clock, and I took care to be there betimes, in order to administer the *coup de grâce* when she arrived. She came punctually. She seized my hand, and gazed hungrily into my eyes.

“‘I thought you would not fail me,’ she said. ‘I seem to understand you as though I had known and—and loved you all my life. Is it not wonderful—and beautiful?’ she added the last two words in a softer tone as she took her seat.

“I said it certainly was wonderful; but I did not commit myself to the beauty. Then I pulled myself together, as one about to perform an unpleasant duty, and proceeded to inform her that I had been thinking things over, and had decided that it would not be right to allow her to remain under a misconception: I was not the son of a peer, as she and others supposed, but quite an ordinary commoner

like everyone else, and a very poor one at that.

"I now looked to see my fair one arise in her majesty, and crush me, and depart. To my astonishment the *coup de grâce* did not inflict so much as a skin-wound! She looked in my eyes, and held my arm, and said:

"'Why do you tell me this, Mr. Grosvenor? What is your parentage to me? Were you duke or crossing-sweeper it were the same to me—to us; our souls have met, and greeted one another.' (Confound these souls! I thought.) 'I have recognised you, and you me,' she continued. 'We are kindred souls; I understood your soul's message to mine in your song this morning, and have treasured it.'

"Now this was impossible; for if I know my soul, it does not go in for the kind of telepathy she claimed to have caught it indulging in. I explained to her, rather clumsily, I fear, that I thought she must be mistaken, because it would hardly be right for a man 'in my position' to practise soul-communications with good-looking young ladies.

"This blow took effect. She caught her breath, and seized my arm frenziedly.

"'You are not married?' she gasped. 'Oh, never tell me you are married?'

"Well, I was not married, naturally. I never am. But I had a little affair on the *tapis* just then—a pretty little thing down in Exeter, whom I meant to marry some day, perhaps, if she would have me; so that I felt justified in replying that I was 'next door to it.'

"Ruth seized my hand wildly in both of her own, kissed it frantically, and threw it aside. 'Good-bye, good-bye,' she wailed, 'I see it all, I understand. It is ever thus, twin-souls that may not come together; twin barks that may never speak to one another until they cast anchor for ever, side by side, in the haven where they would be; it is ever thus with those who truly love, oh, it is ever thus. Good-bye, good-bye, be brave.' She was sobbing wildly when she ended her speech; it was really rather touching; however, I promised to be brave, and so she left me and I never saw the poor girl again, save for one moment next morning when I caught sight of her just in the act of passing me in a cab. She was fitting, it appeared, for the vehicle was piled with luggage, and I observed that her prosaic parent sat beside her. I thought she gazed at me rather reproachfully, but no doubt there was a tremendous amount of soul in that last look into my eyes she was ever to take, until, that is, the haven; as for me, I raised my hat, but, as a last concession to the poor little thing, raised it with all the soul I could put into the action. She dangled one hand out of the window for a moment, and then the cab turned a corner, and my twin-soul and I were parted for ever.

"Poor little things!" concluded Lubbock, clearing his throat and smoothing his moustache as he laid his hand caressingly upon the tumbler at his elbow, "one has to be cruel to them sometimes in order to be kind; she was a good-looking girl, too."