

THE DAUGHTER OF CIRCE BY ROBERT BUCHANAN

CHAPTER I.

THE CURTAIN RISES.

There could be no doubt about it whatever—the play was an unqualified success. During the two first acts its fate had hung in a balance, but at the scene in the penultimate act carried all before it, and the drop fell to unmistakable signs of enthusiasm. The last act, though somewhat slow and explanatory, was pretty enough to sustain the favourable impression, and when the curtain descended for the last time the applause was overwhelming.

The actors and actresses were called and recalled, and then the audience, with one unanimous voice, summoned the author.

Directly Frank Horsham appeared, looking pale and nervous as a convict at the scaffold, the audience rose in acclamation, clapping hands, shouting and waving handkerchiefs; nor were they satisfied till he respired, hand in hand with Petworth, the manager. Even then the tumult did not subside. It continued until the curtain rose and discovered the final scene, the artist smiling and bowing, and in their midst the manager and the happy author, shaking hands.

At last, however, the curtain was down once more, the auditorium was slowly emptying, and Horsham stood on the stage, like a triumphant general on the field of battle.

CHAPTER II.

MARCUS AURELIUS.

Short was a cynic by temperament, and a journalist by profession. He belonged to what has been called the advanced school, in other words, he was a Radical, a realist, and a Progressist of the most fearless order. His watchword was "through," and in the opinion of most people he was thoroughly offensive and thoroughly impossible. He dressed like a hand, and he talked like one. His criticisms on art and literature, published in morning papers, were the despair of the publishers, the Royal Academy and all right-thinking people; his political speeches, delivered informally and always in a room of his own, were the very quintessence of sarcasm, and scorn for society. He had one peculiarity, the least and the most noteworthy, "Formulas," to express his scorn of everything the rest of the world considered sacred. He was in a word a literary bandit—and a thoroughly good fellow.

Passing through the auditorium, he made his way to the vestibule, where nearly all the lights were extinguished. The freeman was about to close the iron gates of the "iron entrance," said Short, "we want to get on."

Standing in the shadows near the box-office he found a familiar, rather stout lady in an opera-cloak. She was not less than thirty years of age, and it was clear that she had once been very pretty, but her face looked worn and tired, and her figure had lost the elasticity of youth. Close to her was a little dark-haired girl of about ten.

"Frank can't get away," explained Short quietly, "and he has asked me to see you home."

"I am so glad it is such a success," said the lady as she took his arm.

"Yes; there's no doubt about it. All the swells are congratulating him, and the newspaper people are delighted. They're going to make a night of it, I fancy. By the way, have you seen the factory?"

"I told him you were tired and would rather go home."

As Short uttered this white lie, he saw his companion's eyes sparkle happily and her face flush with pleasure.

"Oh, yes, quite happy," she answered, "but you're quite right. And you're quite happy now, little woman?"

"It's no use my saying," she answered, "I'm so glad, for Frank's sake."

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CHAPTER III.

ENTER DIANA.

After parting with Short, Horsham followed a narrow passage which led past a green-room and ascending a short flight of wooden stairs leading to the ladies' dressing-rooms.

"White rose," she said, peeping at him near her shoulder. "I love it! Shall I give you some?"

He took up his handkerchief, and held it to her. Smiling brightly, she came close to him and poured the contents of her vial of scented water on his handkerchief. "Everything has gone off splendidly."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRUMPET SOUNDS.

Frank Horsham, the hero of our story, or at all events its central figure, was just thirty-five years of age. For nearly fifteen years he had been a private in the great army of literature, writing much for sale and winning a certain amount of reputation. He had tried all sorts of work, with more or less success, until at thirty he turned his attention to the stage—(but Tom Tiddler's ground, where so many small

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This Story Starts Co-Day.



The one beautiful thing of the night was his wife's face; when he came before the curtain she looked as pleased and happy as a child. Poor little woman!

"We're not there this time," said Petworth, wiping the perspiration from his forehead with a silk handkerchief. "It's good for over a hundred nights, and perhaps longer."

"I hope so," returned Horsham; "only one can't always depend on first-night success."

"It's right; make no mistake about it; it's right. I saw the Gusher just as he was going away, and he means to praise it sky-high. Lord, what a night it has been! Once or twice, especially during that risky scene between the major and his mistress, my heart was in my boots; but all's well, and we'll end the hard way, and now we'll have some fizz."

During the above conversation the stage was being rapidly cleared. The scene, a drawing-room, was left standing, but the furniture and properties were being shifted, giving place to a large table covered with a snowy cloth, on which trays of wine-glasses, plates of sandwiches, and bottles of champagne were rapidly appearing. Meantime numbers of gentlemen and ladies in evening dress began to appear on the stage. They were the usual fashionable contingent invited by Petworth to partake of the festivities on a first-night, numbers of aristocratic well-known hostesses and solicitors, leading actresses, and critics who wrote for the minor journals.

"Take up the curtain," cried Petworth into the fire, "the curtain will be up, showing the empty auditorium."

The stage was soon crowded, a babble of voices filled the air, the popping champagne corks was heard, and Petworth and Caulfield, his faithful lieutenant or acting manager, moved everywhere, beaming amiably, and looking at the audience with kindly glances and words of approbation. His triumph was complete, but he was sensible enough to rate it exactly at its worth.

"The spectators," he thought to himself, "had the nicest field of view that they would have had a good view for me, though they would have drunk Petworth's wine all the same."

A fan touched him on the arm, and turning, he encountered the dark eyes and laughing mouth of Miss Meredith Clive, a well-known actress.

"Mother dear," she said, "that woman was a deep baritone voice, for not only she sang, but she acted. That woman was a simply well acted."

"Did you think her so bad?" asked Horsham, who had just returned from the stage.

"You don't mean that, I know," she said, "but Petworth's taste is not good. She looked like a woman from Merid Vale, got up for a parade on Margate Pier."

"You'll admit, at any rate, that Miss Meredith was better."

"Yes, she was all right," said the actress coldly. "A little amateurish, of course, but decidedly clever. Who coached her? Mother dear, I'm sure."

"She had no coaching whatever, except the few hints I was able to give her. She is a genuine, and this night forward her fortune's made."

"But what a part! I don't see how any actress could fail in it. Why have you never written a part like that?"

Horsham laughed, and turning away, made his way towards the wings. At every step he took he was surrounded by a crowd of well-wishers, and he was soon making his way towards the dressing-rooms, where he came to a man in a smart, thick-set, bearded man, who wore a large cloak and a soft wide-brimmed hat, and had general the appearance of an amiable but somewhat suspicious man.

"Oh! here you are," said this person abruptly. "Do you know Marion is waiting for you in the vestibule? I want to bring your round, but she thought you'd rather she didn't come."

"I thought so."

"You mean you forgot all about her?" returned the other, glancing at you are you ready, or shall I fetch her round?"

Horsham hesitated, looking very perplexed and annoyed.

"Do me a favour," he said at last. "I can't get away just yet. See her into a cab, and tell her I'll follow her as soon as possible."

The bearded man growled, setting his hat on the back of his head and looking steadily into his friend's eyes; then he shrugged his shoulders, and was turning away when Horsham added—

"You'll come back yourself, I'll see, and we can have a drink in the Park."

"Not I," was the reply. "Short and the little woman have, and have a pipe at the fireside. I don't care for the smoke on the stage, and I don't want anyone to talk to me. I suppose you'll be late?"

"I don't know," he said at last. "Perhaps. The play went awfully well, didn't it?"

"Yes, it went well enough. It's the sort of stuff that players seem to like—the wonder-headed beast."

"Of course I could never aspire to pleasing Marcus Aurelius here," said the other, "but I'll be glad to see you for the public, at any rate."

"Anything is good enough for them!" cried Short. "I'll tell you, though, I noticed one really beautiful thing to-night, and it made amends for everything."

"Indeed! what was that?" asked Horsham, picking up his ears.

"Your wife's face!" returned Short quietly. "She was as pleased and happy

as a child when you came before the curtain. The rest of the audience only saw a man once loving, she was looking on at the sun-god, the fountain of all life and light. Poor little woman!"

So saying, Short disappeared, leaving Horsham more irritated than ever.

He looked in the glass. Her face was just what he needed. Her eyes were full of a sweetest of all charms, that of youth. Her eyes were soft yet passionate, her eyebrows dark and finely penciled, her nose Grecian, though just a little inclined to turn heavenward at the tip, her forehead broad and low—the true traits of the ancients. If the face had a fault, it was one which our ancestors considered an additional beauty—the lips were somewhat too full and sensuous, the under one ripe and luscious, as if (to quote Suckling's famous ballad)—

"Some bee had stung it newly."

No wonder that Horsham looked at her in admiration. Not only was she lovely in herself, but she had the finest of all attractions in an author's eyes—she was the woman who had made his thoughts and words live, and had incarnated his first theatrical success.

As he sat down, she poured some scent on a tiny lace handkerchief, and moistened her flushed face.

"White rose," she said, peeping at him near her shoulder. "I love it! Shall I give you some?"

He took up his handkerchief, and held it to her. Smiling brightly, she came close to him and poured the contents of her vial of scented water on his handkerchief. "Everything has gone off splendidly."

He looked long and wistfully at her smiling face.

When he awoke the next morning, Marion was dressed and moving silently about the room. He lay still, and watched her quietly. She had taken a chair from the chair where it had been hung, and was looking at the rose in the buttonhole. She looked up, met his eyes, and smiled quietly.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Eleven o'clock," she answered.

"I lost your buttonhole," she said with a frown, "and had to buy another. Have you sent for the newspapers?"

"Yes, Frank," she replied, coming to the bedside, and handing down to kiss him, while her eyes were full of happy tears. "I've got them all here. They're splendid! They all say the play is a great success."

"Confound him!" cried Horsham angrily. "The dramatist lay in bed, and glanced at the criticisms, all of which were favourable, and most of which were very enthusiastic. There was only one doubtful voice in the chorus of praise, and that was the one morning journal called the 'Trumpet.'"

"The 'Trumpet'?" cried Horsham angrily. "What's the matter, Frank?" asked Marion.

"I saw me from my friends! Short wrote this, and it's just like his infernal impudence."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Short abuses the play? If he does, it's a shame, and I'll never speak to him again."

"He doesn't exactly abuse it," said Horsham, "but he writes a good deal of chaff about the drama in general, and sneers at my piece incidentally—that is, he sneers at my psychology, which is the same thing as sneering at me."

"And he pretends to be your friend?"

"Well, so he is, and he uses a friend's privilege to tell me what he thinks of my work, and everyone knows how to take a crack, and his criticism can do no harm. The 'Telegraph' is capital, and the 'Times' superb. The play's all right, whatever Short may say."

Nevertheless, Horsham read Short's article again and again, with increasing indignation. It was written in the critic's usual uncompromising style, and signed Marcus Aurelius. It was important, as will be presently seen, in the sense that it contained several passages from the offending article.

"The chase of the ancient Goddess, who is supposed to have once been a woman, still continues. From time to time the critics, those well-trained but not too sagacious hounds, have followed the latter with their noses to the ground. Unfortunately, the scent which causes all this enthusiasm is generally that of the 'Herring' called Realism. For the last few years, the critics have been following the latter with their noses to the ground. General confusion, windiness, and gnashing of teeth."

"A man called Zola exclaimed, 'Let us have it by the shambles and the drains. A man called Flaubert said, 'and he laid a female corpse on the dissecting-table. Since that time the student of literature and the drama has been compelled to hunt for his quarry. For a few days the critics, carried away by some new anachronism, have cried, 'Lo, a masterpiece! Lo, a masterpiece! Lo, a masterpiece! It has been quite forgotten that there is just as much realism in the scent of a rose as in that of a dead body—or of a Red Rover.'"

Mr. Frank Horsham in the last conversation to the science of Dramaturgy. He began very well indeed, and his high honor of being when his two last plays were damned; for it almost seemed that he might become a dramatist. Unfortunately, since that time he has been attracted by the galling of the hounds who discover masterpieces. Instead of stopping where he was, in the region of sentiment and common sense, he has determined to turn Realist. Now, an Idealist turned Realist is a sorry sight; a poet turned Prag is a thing to weep over. The ingenious Mr. Spintop, having written 'Modern Aspasia' on the impossible thesis that morality is a mere formula, and that morality is merely a formula. The result in both cases is that what would have been a beautiful and healthy play, is now a mere parody, a caricature, a dissection, and generally a very unwholesome one. The author, who in the old times would have started with the assumption that all women are angels, now begins by asserting that all women are beasts. The shortest cut to history is to write something anti-antiquated, and one who, in a strange way, one's maiden aunt, or one's mother-in-law. We could fill all our columns with the names of masterpieces, but I will mention those of Flaubert to those of Mr. Spintop.

"The last masterpiece was produced last night, and will be printed in every newspaper this morning. The audience should leave loose, and the critics crack themselves delirious. As after act of morbid pathology, for the time being, under the delirium, for in the centre of a phalanx of women, possibly vicious, the belated Idealist turned realist, the critic, the woman, possibly virtuous. We will not go so far as to say that no good woman can be quite virtuous, but we will say that no woman who has few vicious women can altogether escape being moral. The lady in Mr. Horsham's drama, 'The Daughter of Circe,' is Miss Diana Meredith, who was so infected with

as to have lost most of the health, and the masterpiece of to-day is the fossil of to-morrow. Mr. Horsham's drama will flourish luxuriantly, and possibly, we still hope better things of him."

"I suppose he knows what he means," said Horsham, tossing the newspaper aside; "but I don't see it."

He dressed himself, feeling in the highest of spirits, and came down to breakfast. The play had gone so smoothly that no rehearsal had been called; so he had plenty of time to spare. He laughed and chatted merrily with his wife and little daughter, both of whom looked at him with wonder and admiration, as the most glorified of heroes.

"I shall lunch down town, and then come home to dinner. I shall look in on Short as I drive down, and thank him for his impudence."

"If he had written like that of me, I would never forgive him. I hope you will never bring him here again."

But Horsham had the wind in his sails, and could afford to be magnanimous.

My dear Marion, Short is a good fellow, and he's too good-natured. Frank's is a very jealous of your success. I thought he looked annoyed last night."

Horsham laughed, and walked away across the park. Coming out close to Marylebone Church, he took a turn to the street, where he alighted, and in one of the small streets, running down to the Embankment, he found the office of the 'Trumpet.' Passing up stairs by a side passage, he ascended to the second floor, and knocked at a dirty door which opened into a small room, where, in a chair, and obeying the command, as if himself in the presence of the man he sought, sat a man with a white beard and a white hair.

"Here you are," said Horsham. "I've come to ask you what the blazes you mean by that notice in the 'Trumpet.'"

"That notice is the 'Trumpet,'" exclaimed Short, with a grin.

"I should think I had, though I've no objection to such gibberish. It's no use, old fellow. The play's a success, so you may keep your breath to cool your porridge."

"How's Meredith?" asked Short, quietly.

"Of course; but you're in her black belt for ever. She advised me never to speak to you again."

"I'm sorry she's angry," said Short. "I wrote the article after I left her last night. I suppose," he added, glancing keenly at Horsham, "that you're not a bit of a snob."

"Just four o'clock. Have you seen the 'Morning Spectator'?"

"Yes. Poor brute!"

"I'm sorry she's angry, pray?"

"Your critic, Valentine Foxe. How his creature cackles over your last egg! He might almost have said 'his friend.'"

"It's a wonderful notice, is it not?"

"Wonderful, truly. Foxe set pretentious nihil. How much has Petworth given him for doing me such a castigation?"

"Why, he prizes her to the heavens, I'm sure."

"Yes, that's the worst of it."

"She doesn't know him from Adam!"

"Are you quite sure?"

"I'm sure, you're sure, Short! I grant you Foxe isn't a genius, but he writes capital copy, and his influence is enormous."

"My dear Horsham," returned Short, "I'm afraid you're a little bit of a snob. The office of that article said I was a Dramatist, and a big, big D (as he says of you). I would have been glad to have a notice like that in a beneficent Providence, and neatly blew out my brains."

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"I shall lunch down town, and then come home to dinner. I shall look in on Short as I drive down, and thank him for his impudence."

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But Horsham had the wind in his sails, and could afford to be magnanimous.

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"What's that?" asked his companion, smiling.

"The usual complaint, when a man falls in love with his own cleverness and becomes a nuisance to everybody."

"Oh, that's not a bit like that, though he is so clever."

"Good fortune is far harder to bear than bad, answered the philosopher and Mary's man, who has been a thoroughly good fellow when down on his luck, has become a snob and a prig directly he has grown a fortune."

"Frank is a gentleman!" cried his companion. "He would never be a snob or anything of the kind. And he has been so generous and never properly understood."

"Humph!"

They alighted at a small house on the edge of the Park. A young man in a girl, not too tidy in appearance, let them in, and they entered a small dining-room, the ground floor of a three-story house, and a glance at the tablecloth showed that it was not particularly clean.

The little girl was so sleepy and worn that she was sent to bed under the care of the servant.

"I suppose," said a ruffling lady, who also came in, "I have already been drinking your health."

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"Oh, that's not a bit like that, though he is so clever."

"Good fortune is far harder to bear than bad, answered the philosopher and Mary's man, who has been a thoroughly good fellow when down on his luck, has become a snob and a prig directly he has grown a fortune."

"Frank is a gentleman!" cried his companion. "He would never be a snob or anything of the kind. And he has been so generous and never properly understood."

"Humph!"

They alighted at a small house on the edge of the Park. A young man in a girl, not too tidy in appearance, let them in, and they entered a small dining-room, the ground floor of a three-story house, and a glance at the tablecloth showed that it was not particularly clean.

The little girl was so sleepy and worn that she was sent to bed under the care of the servant.

"I suppose," said a ruffling lady, who also came in, "I have already been drinking your health."

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