

# **THE LADIES LINDORES**

IN THREE VOLUMES  
VOL. III.

**BY MRS OLIPHANT**

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"TWO OF THE SWEET'ST COMPANIONS IN THE WORLD."  
—*Cymbeline*.

# **THE LADIES LINDORES.**

## CHAPTER XXXII.

Left to themselves, Millefleurs and Beaufort stood opposite to each other for a moment with some embarrassment. To have anything to do with a quarrel is always painful for the third person; and it was so entirely unexpected, out of the way of all his habits, that Beaufort felt himself exceptionally incapable of dealing with it. "Millefleurs," he said with hesitation, "I don't understand all this. That was a very strange tone to take in speaking to—a friend."

He felt for the first time like a tutor discharging an uncomfortable office, knowing that it must be done, yet that he was not the man to do it, and that of all the youthful individuals in the world, the last person to be so lectured was Millefleurs.

"Naturally you think so. The circumstances make all the difference, don't you know," said Millefleurs, with his ordinary composure. "And the situation. In 'Frisco it might not have been of any great consequence. Helping a bully out of the world is not much of a crime there. But then it's never hushed up. No one makes a secret of it: that is the thing that sets one's blood up, don't you know. Not for Torrance's sake—who, so far as I can make out, was a cad—or poor Lady Car's, to whom it's something like a deliverance——"

"Torrance!" cried Beaufort, with a gasp. "Lady—Car! Do you mean to say——"

"Then——" said Millefleurs, "he never told you? That is a curious piece of evidence. They do things straightforward in Denver City—not like that. He never spoke of an event which had made the country ring——"

"Torrance!" repeated Beaufort, bewildered. The world seemed all to reel about him. He gazed at his companion with eyes wide opened but scarcely capable of vision. By-and-by he sat down abruptly on the nearest chair. He did not hear what Millefleurs was saying. Presently he turned to him, interrupting him unconsciously. "Torrance!" he repeated; "let there be no mistake. You mean the man—to whom Carry—Lady Caroline—was married?"

Millefleurs fixed upon him his little keen black eyes. He recalled to himself tones and looks which had struck him at the moment, on which he had not been able to put any interpretation. He nodded his head without saying anything. He was as keen after any piece of human history as a hound on a scent. And now he was too much interested, too eager for new information, to speak.

"And it happened," said Beaufort, "on Thursday—on the day I arrived?" He drew a long breath to relieve his breast, then waved his hand. "Yes; if that is all, Erskine told me of it," he said.

"You have something to do with them also, old fellow," said Millefleurs, patting him on the shoulder. "I knew there was something. Come along and walk with me. I must see it out; but perhaps we had better not meet again just now—Erskine and I, don't you know. Perhaps I was rude. Come along; it is your duty to get me out of harm's way. Was there anything remarkable, by the way, in the fact that this happened just when you arrived?"

Beaufort made no reply; he scarcely heard, so violently were his pulses beating in his ears, so high was the tide of new life rising in his veins. Who can think of the perplexities, even the dangers, of another, when something unparalleled, something that stirs up his very being, has happened to himself? But he allowed himself to be

led out into the open air, which was a relief—to the road leading to Lindores, from which they soon came in sight of Tinto dominating the country round from its platform. Millefleurs stopped at the point where this first came in view, to point out how high it rose above the river, and how the path ascended through the overhanging woods. The Scaur itself was visible like a red streak on the face of the height. "You can see for yourself that horse or man who plunged over that would have little hope," Millefleurs said. But Beaufort did not hear him. He stood and gazed, with a sense of freedom and possibility which went to his head like wine. Even the ordinary bonds of nature did not seem to hold him. His mind seemed to expand and float away over the wide country. Of all people in the world he was the last who could cross that distance actually, who could present himself to the lady there—the widow—the woman who had married Torrance. He could not offer his services or his sympathy to Carry; he alone of all the world was absolutely shut out from her, more than a stranger: and yet he stood gazing at the place where she was, feeling himself go out upon the air, upon the empty space, towards her. The sensation dizzied his brain and bewildered all his faculties. Millefleurs flowed on, making a hundred remarks and guesses, but Beaufort did not hear him. He would have said afterwards, that as he never spoke, it was impossible he could have betrayed himself. But he betrayed himself completely, and something more than himself, to the keen little eyes of Millefleurs.

The day passed as days full of agitation pass—looking long, protracted, endless—blank hours of suspense following the moment of excitement. Sir James Montgomery had gone away shaking his good grey head. He had not believed John Erskine's story—that is, he believed that there was something suppressed.

He had listened with the profoundest interest up to a certain point, but after that he had shaken his head. "You would have done better to tell me everything," he said, as he went away. "It would have been more wise—more wise." He shook his head; the very truth of the story went against it. There was so much that fitted into the hypothesis of the country-side. But then there came that *suppressio veri* which took all the value from the statement. Sir James went away fully determined to repeat the story in the most favourable way—to give the best representation of it possible; but he was not satisfied. It was with a most serious face that he mounted his horse and rode away, shaking his head from time to time. "No, no," he said to himself, "that will never hold water—that will never hold water!" When this interview was over, John went back to his library and sat down in his usual chair with a sense of exhaustion and hopelessness which it would be difficult to describe. He had told his story as best he could, searching his memory for every detail; but he had not been believed. He had gone on, growing impassioned in his self-defence—growing indignant, feeling himself powerless in face of that blank wall of incredulity, that steady incapacity to believe. "Why should I tell you a lie?" he cried, at last. "Do not you see? Have you not said that it was for my interest to tell you the truth?" "I am not saying you have told a lie," Sir James said, always shaking his head. "No, no—no lie. You will never be accused of that." When he went away, he had laid his heavy old hand on John's shoulder. "My poor lad, if you had only had the courage to open your heart all the way!" he said. John felt like a victim in the hands of the Inquisition. What did they want him to confess? Half maddened, he felt as if a little more pressure, a few more twists of the screw, would make him accuse himself of anything, and confess all that they might require.



He did not know how long he sat there, silent, doing nothing, not even thinking anything, alone with himself and the cloud that hung over his life, with a consciousness that all his movements were watched, that even this would be something against him, a proof of that remorse which belongs to guilt. And thus the slow moments, every one slower than the other, more full of oppression, rolled over him. Beaufort had disappeared, and did not return till late in the afternoon, when the twilight was falling. A few words only passed between them, and these related solely to Beaufort's thoughts, not to Erskine's.

"It is *her* husband who has been killed," Beaufort said; "you never told me."

"I could not tell you. It was too extraordinary; it was an impiety," John said.

But neither did he ask himself what he meant, nor did Beaufort ask him. They said nothing more to each other, except such civilities as are indispensable when men eat together,—for they dined all the same, notwithstanding the circumstances. In every crisis men must still dine; it is the only thing that is inevitable, in trouble or in joy.

And then the night followed. Night is horrible, yet it is consolatory to those who are in suspense. John could not suppose that his trials were over, that nothing was to follow; but by ten o'clock or so he said to himself, with relief, that nothing could happen to-night. Rolls, too, had evidently arrived at the same conclusion. He was heard to close and bolt the door ostentatiously while it was still early, and there was something in the very noise he made which proclaimed the satisfaction with which he did it. But after this there was a long black evening still, and hours of darkness, to follow,

which John did not know how to get through. Almost he had made up his mind to step out of the window at midnight, as Rolls had suggested, and withdraw from all this alarm and unjust suspicion. He did go out, and felt the cool freshness of the night caress him, hot and weary as he was, and thought with a sigh of distant places far away, where he might be safe from all these frets and passions. But he knew, if he did so, that his cause would be lost for ever—that nothing could save him or his reputation. Perhaps in no case could anything save him: but if he fled, his ruin was certain. "What did it matter," he thought, with bitterness, "that he had no witnesses to produce, that nobody would believe him? And if he were condemned, what would any one care? His mother, indeed, would feel the shame, but more the shame than anything else; and her name was not Erskine, nor that of any of her family. There was no one who actually belonged to him in the wide world, to whom his living or dying could be of any consequence." As he stood alone with these bitter thoughts, on the terrace, looking out upon the night, feeling the wind blow upon him from the fields of sleep, but no other trace in the darkness of the great wide landscape which he knew lay stretched out like a map under cover of the clouds, something breathed another name in his ear. Ah! how did he know if she would care? Sometimes he had thought so, hoped so, vaguely, with a tremor of alarmed delight. But if this shadow of crime came over him, would Edith stoop under it to say a word of consolation?—would she? could she? He stood still for a long time on the terrace, with the lighted window and common life behind him, and all the secrets of the hidden night before, and asked himself what she would do. What would she do? That question, and not the other, was, after all, the great one in life.

Next morning John awoke with the sense of a coming trial, which made his heart jump in his breast the moment he opened his eyes, though it was some time before he recollected what it was. But he did so at last, and accepted the certainty with outward calm. He came down-stairs with a steady conviction of what was about to happen. To make up his mind to it was something. He sat down at the breakfast-table opposite to Beaufort—who was restless and uncomfortable—with a calm which he felt to be fictitious, but which nevertheless was calm.

"You must remember," he said, "Beaufort, whatever happens, that Dalrulzian is altogether at your command."

"What can happen?" Beaufort asked.

"I scarcely know. I can be taken away, I suppose, and examined somewhere. You had better come with me. You are a barrister, and might help; and besides, it will always be for your advantage to get a little insight into Scotch law."

"I might be of use, perhaps; but in that case, you must tell me everything," Beaufort said.

"I ask no better," said the young man; and he repeated the narrative which he had told to Sir James Montgomery. "Don't you disbelieve me. What I say to you is the whole truth," he said,—"everything that there is to say."

"To disbelieve you would be impossible," said Beaufort, which was the first gleam of consolation he had. They had a long consultation, some of which was surprised by Rolls, who went and came, busy about the door, with sombre and undisguised anxiety.

Beaufort scouted the idea that there could be any question of murder. "Had you done as they suppose—seized the bridle in self-defence, and forced the horse a step too far—it would still only be accident," he said,—“at the very worst and bitterest, manslaughter; though I don't see how it could bear even such a verdict as that. There is no occasion for unnecessary alarm. Anything more is impossible."

At this moment Rolls came in; his countenance was lightened, yet excited. "There is one—that would like to speak to you, sir," he said.

There could be no doubt as to what the summons was. Rolls lingered behind when his master, with changing colour, but self-possession, left the room. He came up to Beaufort stealthily. "Sir," he said—"sir, will *yon* be all true?"

"What? Neither Mr Erskine nor myself is in the habit of saying what is not true."

"That's no doubt the case. I'm saying nothing of him; but you might have smoothed it off a bit, just to soothe him. Will it be all exact *yon* you said about manslaughter? Manslaughter is just culpable homicide, so far as I can see. And what's the punishment for manslaughter (as you call it), if you'll be so kind as say?"

"That depends on the gravity of the case, on the character of the judge, on many things. A year's, two years' imprisonment—perhaps only a month or two. I have known it but a day."

"And previous character would be taken into account?" said Rolls; "and aggravation, and—many a thing more?"

"No doubt; it is a thing upon which no certain rule can be observed. It may be next to no harm at all, or it may be close upon murder. In such a case as this, severity is very unlikely."

"But it will make a pairting," said Rolls, solemnly, "atween him and all he maist cares for. I'm no' of the young maister's mind myself. There are some would have set him far better, and in every way more suitable; but what a man likes himself, it's that will please him, and no' what another man likes. It takes us a' a lang time," said Rolls, shaking his head, "to learn that. Many's the one in my place would think here's just a grand opportunity to pairt him and—them; but you see I take his ain wishes into consideration."

The old servant spoke less to Beaufort than to himself; but the visitor was not accustomed to hold such colloquies with a family butler. He stared, then grew impatient, and disposed to resent the old fellow's familiarity. The next moment the bell rang, and Rolls hurried away. Beaufort followed him out into the hall, where a man was standing evidently on guard. John was at the door of the drawing-room, pale, but perfectly composed. "The dogcart immediately," he said to Rolls, and beckoned to Beaufort to come in. "I am going before the sheriff-substitute about this matter," he said. "Beaufort, you will come with me. Mr Granger, this is my friend Mr Beaufort, an English barrister. He may go with me, I suppose, to watch over my interests? You see that what we were threatened with yesterday has come to pass."

"I see, indeed," said Beaufort, "with sorrow and surprise. What is it that has to be done now?"

"The sheriff will make no objection," said the head of the county police, a plain, grave man, with regret in his face. "It's my duty to take Mr Erskine before the sheriff. The result of the examination will be, let us hope, that he'll come cannily home again, when all has been inquired into in due form. There is no reason to take a gloomy view. The sheriff will maybe find there's no case: and I'm sure I wish so with all my heart."

They all sat round with the utmost gravity to listen to this little speech. It was not a moment for light-heartedness. John sat between the table and the door, in perfect self-command, yet very pale. Notwithstanding all the respect shown to him, and the good feeling from which he had everything to hope, the most innocent of men may be excused a feeling of dismay when he is, to all intents and purposes, arrested on a criminal charge, with issues to his good fame and social estimation, even if nothing more, which it is impossible to calculate. They sat in silence while the dogcart was getting ready, a strange little company. After a while, the officer, to lessen the embarrassment of the moment, and make everything pleasant, began to address various little remarks about the weather and other commonplace topics to the two gentlemen, such as, "This is a very agreeable change from all the wet we've been having;" or, "The news this morning is more satisfactory about that Afghan business." The responses made, as may be supposed, were not very effusive. It was a relief when the dogcart came to the door. Old Rolls stood and watched it go down the avenue, with his countenance firmly set, and a stern resolution gathering about his mouth. Bauby stole out and stood by his side in the morning light, with her apron to her eyes, and her capacious bosom convulsed with sobs. "Eh, that I should have lived to see this day, and shame

come to oor dwallin'!" cried Bauby; "and as bonny a young lad as ever steppit, and as good!"

"Hold your peace, woman!" said her brother; "ye may see shame come nearer hame or a's done."

"Eh, Tammas, man! what do you ca' nearer hame? My heart's just broken; and what will his mammaw say?" the faithful creature cried.

Meanwhile it might have been a party of pleasure that threaded its way among the trees, somewhat closely packed in the dogcart, but no more than they might have been, starting for the moors. John Erskine drove himself to the examination which was to decide his fate one way or another, with all the appearance of a perfectly free agent. The horse was fresh, the morning bright; and though the four men were a heavy load, they skimmed along the country road as gaily as if all had been well. Tinto was visible for the greater part of the way. They passed by the very gates of Lindores. John had shaken himself together as he took the reins in his hand, and with perhaps a little unconscious bravado, paused now and then to indicate a favourite point of view to his friend. But he had harder work in store. Just before they reached Dunearn, he perceived drawn up by the roadside Lady Lindores's carriage, in which Edith was seated alone. Impossible to describe the feelings with which, as across a gulf of pain and trouble, the unfortunate young man, at this crisis of his fate, looked at the girl with whom, when he last saw her, he had been so near the edge of a mutual understanding. It was impossible for him now to do other than draw up by the side of the carriage to speak to her; and there, in the hearing of the two men who formed his escort, and whose presence was heavy on his heart, the following conversation took place. Edith looked up at

him with a smile and an expression of pleasure which brightened her whole aspect. She was in mourning, and somewhat pale.

"I am waiting for mamma," she said. "One of her pensioners is ill in that cottage. I was glad of the chance of bringing her out for a little air. We are with poor Carry, you know."

"How is Lady Caroline?" John asked.

"Oh, well enough, when one considers all things," said Edith, hastily; and to escape that subject, which was not to be entered on before strangers, she said, "You are going to Dunearn?"

"On painful business," he said. "I wonder if I may ask you one thing?" She looked up at him with a smile which said much—a smile of trust and belief, which might have encouraged any man to speak. Edith had no fear of what he might ask her. For John it was more difficult to command himself and his voice at that moment than at any previous one since his trial began. He cleared his throat with an effort, and his voice was husky. "You will hear things said of me—that may make you turn from—an old friend altogether. I want you not to believe them. And tell Lady Lindores. Do not believe them. It is not true."

"Mr Erskine, what is it—what is it? You may be sure I shall believe nothing against you—nor mamma either! Is it—is it——" her eyes fixed upon him anxiously and upon the stranger beside him, whose face was unknown to her, and who sat blank and passive like a servant, yet who was not a servant. Edith rose in the carriage in her great anxiety, and gazed as if she would have read a volume in John's face. What it cost him to look at her and to keep a kind of smile on his, it would be hard to tell.



"I cannot enter into explanations now. I may not be able to do so soon. Only—tell Lady Lindores."

She held out her hand to him, which he stooped to touch—it was all he could do—and once more gave him an anxious, tender smile. "You may trust both mamma and me," she said.

And in another moment, so it seemed, the dogcart stopped again. John went over the streets of Dunearn like a man in a dream—in a sort of exquisite anguish, a mingled sweetness and bitterness such as never went into words. Their looks seemed to cling together, as, with a start, the horse went on; and now they stopped again and got down—for a very different encounter. Even now, however, John's progress was to be interrupted. Some one called to him as he was about to go into the sheriff's court in the little Town-house of Dunearn. "Is that you, John Erskine? and what has brought you here?" in peremptory tones. He turned round quickly. It was Miss Barbara in her pony-carriage, which Nora was driving. The old lady leaned across the young one and beckoned to him with some impatience. "Come here. What are you doing in Dunearn without coming to me? It's true I'm out, and you would not have found me; but Janet would have understood to be prepared for your luncheon. And what's your business in the Town-house this fine morning, and with strange company?" Miss Barbara said. She cast a keen glance at the man, who stood aside respectfully enough, and yet, backed by his assistant, kept a watchful eye on John.

"I am afraid I cannot wait to tell you now. It is not pleasant business," John said.

"Come round here," said the old lady, imperiously; "can I keep on skreighing to you before all the town? Come round here." Her keen

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