
Beauty Talbot

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

BY

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BEAUTY TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

MISS LIVY'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

THERE is a pretty by-way of the Great Western, considered a failure as to traffic, and quite as retired as a little country lane or bridle-road. It wound up to the station, Pengley, through a deep cutting made by Nature, and lined with a velvety sward, and trimmings of Nature's own millinery. The station burrowed snugly at the bottom, just as a lap-dog does on his mistress's skirt, and was fenced at the other end from winds and showers, by a sudden hill, where a tunnel

began. The house was like a Swiss station, with a varnished wood verandah overgrown with creepers; and squire and clergyman often said any man would be well off in that little box, and that they would change with Fenton any day. Fenton, the station master, was always treated in a studiously friendly and intimate way;—for the legend ran that, “Fenton was a gentleman;”—had been a lieutenant in the army, had run through everything, and some Sir John had got him this place. He was a very gentlemanly man, a little sensitive, and above his situation; which, wisely and well, was never alluded to, or droned over by him. The little Swiss station was, of course, like a pigeon cot, and from every window hopped little heads in and out, like Sir John Suckling’s mice, and those heads were, of course, the property of the *çi-devant* officer.

Round about it rose and fell a warm cozy sort of country, with a snug and sheltered lane that led up to a village, and another that brought us to a no less sheltered high road, along which wandered the unfrequent tramp, or groaned the laden four horse waggon, and merrily bowled the light coach, which the railway had not yet driven out, as St. Patrick might have done a solitary snake. Half a mile off behind the clump, nestled the village, which was indeed not worth a station, and beyond the village a dotted settlement of not more than half a dozen houses, which was the neighbourhood. These were of an old pattern, and stood scattered like vedettes. Here was none of the herding, and economical clustering of new houses upon ground that is being built upon.

One Saturday evening in winter, which

is the evening of our first little scene, Fenton, the station-master, has just turned in to his office, after standing deferentially on his platform to do homage to the express, which thundered by contemptuously, and would not know Pengley. For the express, Pengley had a sacred awe and admiration, yet mingled with dislike, as for a badge of servitude. It had to do with humble, plebeian trains that came creeping up, after stopping at every station. In a quarter of an hour after the express had gone by, such a decent convoy was due; and now Fenton hears the jingling of bells, and looking through his window sees the Red Hill little carriage coming over the bridge, Mr. Talbot driving, and which will turn presently and trundle down the little lane to the station. Friendly vehicles were often thus seen at a distance, and Fenton always contrived

to detain the train, on some pretext. Mr. Talbot gets out and comes on the platform to talk to Fenton.

"Miss Livy in the next train?" says Fenton.

"Yes," answers Mr. Talbot, taking out a rich and gaudy cigar case of seal skin—a large golden monogram, and crimson watered silk lining, &c.

"You know a good cigar, Fenton?"

Charming and delicate fingers held out the case; choice rings were on them, the finest linen about the wrist, above the wrist a coat of fur. Mr. Talbot was tall, slight, graceful, with black hair, no beard or moustache, because his mouth and smile were considered "charming," and looked no more than five-and-thirty. He was about forty; clothes, everything, were of the best make; he was pale, his hair was parted in the middle, and he was the father

of the heroine of this little narrative, Miss Olivia Talbot.

The two gentlemen walk up and down the station. The station-master never says "sir," but at the same time never alludes, or notices allusions, to his older and better days.

"She went in to get some finery," said Mr. Talbot, "for her mamma and self. Those Hardman people open their staring new house with a dinner to-night."

"Yes," said the other; "look here, and here," pointing to parcels and boxes. "It has been the same for this month back."

"Exactly. Wealth, money, vulgarity, all daubed on in its grossest form. A blazing dinner. But they will find it hard to astonish *me*, even if the chairs were of solid gold. We *have* to go."

"Here is the train."

And out came the one porter, and the one third-class passenger, who was going to get in. The porter began his song, "Pengley! Pengley! Pengley!" going down the carriages, until he opened a door, and, touching his cap, began to take out parcels. Then a young lady, followed by a stout woman in black, came out, and tripped up softly to Mr. Talbot, and gave him a kiss, which she would have done had it been an excursion train, full of grinning "cads" and clodhoppers; but it was a range of desolate saloon carriages, with a scattered gentleman or two, reading newspapers.

This is Miss Livy. The evening is a little grey, but it is easy to see her. She is small, but delicately made, with a peaked velvet hat and green plume, a little gay, with a delicately cut face, which was so like her father's in this way; that any one