

Charlotte Brontë's



Shirley *Abridged*

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Introduction

Charlotte Brontë, the oldest of a remarkable trio of sisters, is almost as famous for her life as she is for her work. Born in 1816, she was the third of the six children of Maria and Patrick Brontë. Her father was a clergyman in Haworth, West Yorkshire – an industrialised village near the moors, unhealthy but by no means isolated.

When her mother died in 1821, Charlotte and three of her sisters were sent to boarding school, where the two eldest became ill, dying soon afterwards. (The school was to figure in her book *Jane Eyre* as Lowood School.) Back at home, the four remaining children – Charlotte, Emily, Anne and their brother Branwell – joined together in devising and writing about the imaginary kingdoms of Gondal and Angria, in which they immersed themselves.

After completing her education Charlotte worked as a teacher and a governess, before travelling to Brussels in 1842 with Emily to study languages. Here Charlotte became deeply attached to her married teacher, Constantin Heger; this unrequited passion was to have a lifelong effect on her work. On returning to Haworth she compiled a volume of poems by herself and her sisters Emily and Anne, which was published in 1846. At the same time she began to write novels. Her first, *The Professor*, was rejected by publishers, but her second, *Jane Eyre*, was published in 1847 under the pseudonym Currer Bell, and was an immediate popular success.

While Charlotte was working on her next book, *Shirley*, her brother Branwell died of lung disease and alcoholism, and both Emily and Anne grew increasingly sick with tuberculosis: Emily died in 1848 and Anne the following year. *Shirley* was finished soon after Anne's death. The book came out in 1849 to more muted acclaim than *Jane Eyre*, but Charlotte's reputation as a writer was established, enabling her to meet other literary figures of the day – notably Elizabeth Gaskell, who was to become her correspondent, friend and posthumous biographer.

Charlotte's final novel, *Villette*, was published in 1853. The following year, she married her father's curate Arthur Bell Nicholls. Despite her initial doubts about the marriage, it was happy, though brief. Charlotte became pregnant and suffered from extreme nausea and sickness which weakened her greatly. She died in 1855 at the age of thirty-eight.

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On its publication, *Shirley* sold well; indeed, the book popularised the use of "Shirley" as a girl's name (previously it had been occasionally used as a man's given name, derived from a surname). However, nowadays the novel is much less popular with readers than its predecessor *Jane Eyre*.

Set in the early nineteenth century, in the period just before its author was born, *Shirley* concerns the lives and aspirations of two young women: the rector's

niece Caroline Helstone and the heiress Shirley Keeldar. Despite its setting during the violent Luddite riots, which play a part in the book, its tone as a whole is subdued, with little of the high drama of *Jane Eyre*.

There may be various reasons for this. Firstly, the deaths of Branwell, Emily and Anne during its writing undoubtedly contributed to the book's sober quality, and its recurring themes of severe illness and awareness of death.

Secondly, critical reaction to *Jane Eyre* had not been entirely approving: some readers had denounced both that book and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* as immoral and godless, while Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was also criticised as improper. It may be that Charlotte was determined to make her next book one at which no such criticisms could be levelled, and to write an intellectual work rather than a passionate one. In this, she succeeded. Although *Shirley* contains highly perceptive and incisive passages (especially about the restricted role of women), it lacks a dramatic focus. As Juliet Barker has noted in her outstanding biography of the Brontë family, 'The general consensus of critical opinion was that *Shirley* was better written than *Jane Eyre* but lacked the earlier novel's fire and originality: a worthy successor but not one that would further Currer Bell's reputation.' [Juliet Barker, *The Brontës* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994)]

While Charlotte Brontë looked to history for the events of *Shirley*, she drew on characters known to her to populate the book. The curates, clergymen and other characters were based on people she had known; and Shirley Keeldar herself was intended to be a representation of her sister Emily. While the curates were easily recognised by readers who knew them, Emily was not. It seems that *Shirley* was an idealised Emily – Charlotte's sister as she might have been, had her circumstances been different.

Elizabeth Gaskell described the genesis of the novel and its characters at some length in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* of 1857. Extracts from the relevant chapter of her biography are included at the end of this ebook, [here](#).

Note on the abridgement

Shirley is a wordier novel than *Jane Eyre*, a fact which may have contributed to its comparative unpopularity amongst modern readers. This abridgement reduces the book to about 60% of its original length, and simplifies some language to make its meaning clearer, particularly where words are now little used or have altered in meaning.

Those studying *Shirley* for academic purposes should use this version only as an introduction to the novel. The full book is available free at numerous sites online, including [Project Gutenberg](#), whose edition provided the basis for this abridgement.

Chapter 1

LEVITICAL

Lately an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England: they lie very thick on the hills; every parish has one or more of them. But not of recent years are we about to speak; we are going back to the beginning of this century. Present years are dusty, sunburnt, hot, arid; we will avoid the noon, forget it in siesta, pass the midday in slumber, and dream of dawn.

If you think, from this prelude, that a romance is waiting for you, reader, you never were more mistaken. Do you expect sentiment, passion, and melodrama? Calm your expectations. Something real, cool, and solid lies before you; something unromantic as Monday morning, when people wake knowing that they must rise and go to work. You may have a taste of the exciting, perhaps towards the middle and close of the meal, but the first dish set upon the table shall be one that a Catholic might eat on Good Friday: it shall be cold lentils and vinegar; unleavened bread with bitter herbs, and no roast lamb.

Lately, I say, an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England; but in 1811 that rain had not descended. Curates were scarce then: there was no Pastoral Aid to stretch a helping hand to worn-out old rectors, allowing them to pay a vigorous young colleague from Oxford or Cambridge.

Yet even in those days of scarcity, curates might be found. A certain favoured district in the West Riding of Yorkshire could boast three blossoming within a circuit of twenty miles.

You shall see them, reader. Step into this neat garden-house on the edge of Whinbury; walk forward into the little parlour. There they are at dinner. Allow me to introduce them to you: Mr. Donne, curate of Whinbury; Mr. Malone, curate of Briarfield; Mr. Sweeting, curate of Nunnely. These are Mr. Donne's lodgings; Mr. Donne has kindly invited his brethren to dine. You and I will join the party, and hear what is to be heard. At present, however, they are only eating; and while they eat we will talk aside.

These gentlemen have all the activity of youth – an activity which their moping old vicars wish would be channelled into their pastoral duties, superintending the schools, and visiting the sick. But the young curates feel this to be dull work; they prefer to lavish their energies on visiting each other, rushing backwards and forwards between their respective lodgings – a triangle of visits, which they keep up all the year through. Season and weather make no difference; through snow and hail, wind and rain, they go and dine with each other.

What attracts them it would be difficult to say. It is not friendship, for whenever they meet they quarrel. It is not religion; for they may discuss theology occasionally, but piety – never. It is not the love of eating and drinking: each might have as good a joint and pudding at his own lodgings as at his brother's. Mrs. Gale, Mrs. Hogg, and Mrs. Whipp – their respective landladies – affirm that “it is just to give folk trouble.” By “folk” the good ladies of course mean themselves.

Mr. Donne and his guests, as I have said, are at dinner; Mrs. Gale waits on them, but a spark of the hot kitchen fire is in her eye. She considers that the privilege of inviting a friend to a meal has been over-exercised of late. On Monday Mr. Malone came to breakfast and stayed to dinner; on Tuesday Mr. Malone and Mr. Sweeting came to tea, stayed to supper, occupied the spare bed, and ate breakfast on Wednesday morning; now, on Thursday, they are both here at dinner, and she is almost certain they will stay all night.

Mr. Sweeting is complaining that his slice of roast beef is very tough; Mr. Donne says the beer is flat. If they would only be civil Mrs. Gale wouldn't mind it so much; but "these young parsons is so high and scornful, they set everybody beneath them. They don't treat her civilly, and they are always speaking against Yorkshire ways and Yorkshire folk." Mrs. Gale does not believe them to be real gentlemen. "The old parsons are worth the whole lump of college lads; they have good manners, and are kind to high and low."

"More bread!" cries Mr. Malone, in an accent which proclaims him a native of Ireland. Mrs. Gale hates Mr. Malone more than the other two; but she fears him also, for he is tall and strongly-built, with a high-featured, North-American-Indian sort of face, and a petrified, proud look. Mr. Malone's father called himself a gentleman; he was poor, in debt, and arrogant; and his son was like him.

Mrs. Gale offered him the loaf.

"Cut it, woman," said her guest; and the "woman" cut it accordingly. Had she followed her inclinations, she would have cut the curate also.

The curates had good appetites, and though the beef was "tough," they ate a great deal of it. They swallowed a large amount of the "flat beer," while a dish of Yorkshire pudding and two tureens of vegetables disappeared like leaves before locusts. The cheese, too, was eaten, and a spice-cake vanished like a vision. It was mourned in the kitchen by Abraham, Mrs. Gale's son; he had reckoned upon leftovers, and when his mother brought down the empty plate, he lifted up his voice and wept.

The curates, meantime, sat and sipped their wine. Mr. Malone, indeed, would rather have had whisky; but Mr. Donne did not keep any. While they sipped they argued, not on politics, nor philosophy, nor even theology – but on minute points of ecclesiastical discipline, frivolities which seemed empty as bubbles to all except themselves. Mr. Malone, after two glasses of wine, grew hilarious after his fashion; that is, he said rude things in a hectoring tone, and laughed clamorously at his own brilliance.

His companions were the butt for his humour. Malone had a stock of jokes which he used regularly, seldom varying his wit; for he never considered himself monotonous, and did not care what others thought. He favoured Mr. Donne with sarcasms about his thinness, his turned-up nose, and a threadbare coat which Mr. Donne used to wear when it rained.

Mr. Sweeting was bantered about his small stature and his musical accomplishments – he played the flute and sang hymns like an angel (so some young ladies of his parish thought) – sneered at as "the ladies' pet;" teased about his mamma and sisters, for whom poor Mr. Sweeting had some lingering regard, and of whom he was foolish enough now and then to speak to Malone, from whose nature all feelings of affection had somehow been omitted.

The victims met these attacks each in his own way: Mr. Donne with a stilted complacency; Mr. Sweeting with the indifference of a light, easy nature.

When Malone's raillery became too offensive, they turned the tables on him by asking him how many boys had shouted "Irish Peter!" after him in the street that day (his name being Peter Augustus Malone); asking whether it was the fashion in Ireland for clergymen to carry loaded pistols and a shillelagh when they made pastoral visits; and inquiring what he meant by *storum* (as he pronounced storm).

Malone was soon in a towering passion. He shouted and gesticulated; Donne and Sweeting laughed. He reviled them as Saxons and snobs at the very top of his voice; they taunted him with coming from a conquered land. The little parlour was in uproar. It seemed a wonder that Mr. and Mrs. Gale did not send for a constable to keep the peace. But they were used to these clerical quarrels, and knew that they were as harmless as they were noisy, and that the curates would be the best of friends tomorrow morning.

As the Gales were sitting by their kitchen fire, listening to the thump of Malone's fist on the parlour table, and to the consequent jingle of glasses – as they thus sat, a foot was heard on the door-step, and the knocker rapped sharply. Mr. Gale opened the door.

"Whom have you upstairs in the parlour?" asked a voice – a rather remarkable voice, nasal and abrupt.

"Mr. Helstone, is it you, sir? I could hardly see you in the dusk. Will you walk in?"

"I want to know first whether it is worth my while. Whom have you upstairs?"

"The curates, sir."

"What! all of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"That will do."

With these words entered a middle-aged man, in black. He walked across the kitchen, opened the inner door, and stood listening to the noise above, which was louder than ever.

"Hey!" he exclaimed; "Have you often this sort of work?"

"They're young, you know, sir," said Mr. Gale deprecatingly.

"Young! They want caning. Bad boys! but I'll—"

He passed through the inner door and mounted the stair. Making his entrance without warning, he stood before the curates.

They were silent; they were transfixed. The invader – short of stature, but straight and broad shouldered, with a hawk's head, beak, and eye – folded his arms and surveyed his young friends, if friends they were.

"What!" he began, in a voice made purposely deep and hollow. "What! has the miracle of Pentecost been renewed? Have the cloven tongues come down again? The sound filled the whole house just now. I heard the seventeen languages in full action two minutes since."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Helstone," began Mr. Donne; "take a seat, sir. Have a glass of wine."

But the falcon in the black coat went on:

"Why do I talk about the gift of tongues? Gift, indeed! It was the confusion of tongues which has gabbled me deaf as a post!"

"I assure you, sir, we were only having a little chat together over a glass of wine after dinner – settling the Dissenters!"

“Oh! settling the Dissenters, were you? Was Malone settling the Dissenters? It sounded to me much more like he was settling *you*. Your quarrel was making almost as much noise as Moses Barraclough, the preaching tailor, makes in the Methodist chapel down yonder. It is your fault, Malone.”

“Mine, sir?”

“Yours, sir. Donne and Sweeting were quiet before you came. I wish you had left your Irish habits behind you. Dublin student ways won’t do here. Behaviour which might pass unnoticed in a wild Irish bog will, in a decent English parish, bring disgrace on you, and, far worse, on the church you represent.”

Mr. Helstone, standing straight as a ramrod, looked – despite his clerical hat, coat and gaiters – more like a veteran officer chiding his subalterns than a priest exhorting his sons in the faith. Gospel mildness seemed never to have breathed over that keen brown face, on which firmness and sagacity had carved their lines.

He continued, “I heard Barraclough this wet night bellowing like a bull in the opposition shop; and I find you, gentlemen, tarrying over your half-pint of muddy port wine, and scolding like angry old women. Barraclough, hypocrite as he is, should not attract all the weaver-girls in their ribbons to his chapel. It’s little wonder that you perform the holy service of our church to bare walls. But enough of that. I came to see Malone. I have an errand for thee, O captain!”

“What is it?” inquired Malone discontentedly. “There can be no funeral to take at this time of day.”

“Have you any weapons about you?”

“I have the pistols you gave me. I never part with them. I lay them by my bedside at night. And I have my shillelagh – my blackthorn club.”

“Very good. Will you go to Hollow’s Mill?”

“What is stirring at Hollow’s Mill?”

“Nothing as yet, nor perhaps will be; but Moore is alone there. He has sent all the workmen he can trust to Stilbro’; there are only two women left in the place. It would be a nice opportunity for any of his well-wishers to pay him a visit.”

“I am none of his well-wishers, sir. I don’t care for him.”

“So! Malone, you are afraid.”

“You know me better than that. If I really thought there was a chance of a row I would go: but Moore is a strange man, whom I never pretend to understand; and for the sake of his company I would not stir a step.”

“But there is a chance of a row,” said Mr. Helstone. “Even if a positive riot does not take place, it is unlikely this night will pass tranquilly. You know Moore has resolved to have new machinery in his mill, and he expects two wagon-loads of frames and shears from Stilbro’ this evening. Scott, the overlooker, and a few other men are gone to fetch them.”

“They will bring them in safely enough, sir.”

“Moore says so, and affirms he wants nobody. Some one, however, he must have, in case anything should happen. I call him very careless. He sits in the counting-house with the shutters open; he goes out after dark, wanders right up the hollow, and down Fieldhead Lane, just as if he were the darling of the neighbourhood, rather than its detestation. He takes no warning from the fates of the mill-owners Pearson and Armitage – both shot, one in his own house and the other on the moor.”

“But he would take warning, sir,” interposed Mr. Sweeting, “if he heard what I heard the other day.”

“What did you hear, Davy?”

“You know Mike Hartley the weaver, sir? Well, when he has been drinking for a few weeks, he generally goes up to Nunnely vicarage to tell Mr. Hall a piece of his mind about his sermons, and warn him that he is sitting in outer darkness.”

“That has nothing to do with Moore.”

“He is a violent Jacobin and leveller, sir.”

“I know,” said Mr. Helstone. “When he is very drunk, his mind is always running on regicide.”

“Mr. Hall thinks that Mike has no personal hatred of Moore, but that he wants Moore to be made an example of. Is Mike Hartley in his right mind, do you think, sir?” inquired Sweeting.

“Can’t tell, Davy. He may be crazed, or only crafty, or perhaps both.”

“He talks of seeing visions, sir.”

“Ay! He is a very Daniel for visions. He came last Friday night to describe one that had been revealed to him in Nunnely Park that afternoon.”

“Tell it, sir. What was it?” urged Sweeting.

“Davy, thou shalt hear. Mike is out of work, like many others, unfortunately. Sir Philip Nunnely’s steward gave him a job about the priory. Mike said he was busy hedging late in the afternoon, when he heard a band at a distance – bugles, fifes, and a trumpet. He looked up and amongst the trees he saw moving objects, red and white. The wood was full of them; they poured out and filled the park. He perceived they were soldiers – tens of thousands; but silent as they marched, regiment after regiment, across the park. He followed them to Nunnely Common; the music still played soft and distant. They were in sight half an hour; then they marched away. The whole time he heard neither voice nor footsteps – nothing but the faint music playing a march.”

“Where did they go, sir?”

“Towards Briarfield. Mike followed them, but a column of smoke rolled over the fields, he said, and when it cleared away the soldiers had vanished. Mike decided the vision meant bloodshed and conflict.”

“Do you believe it, sir?” asked Sweeting.

“Do you, Davy? – but come, Malone; why are you not off?”

“I am rather surprised, sir, you did not stay with Moore yourself. You like this kind of thing.”

“So I should have done,” said Mr. Helstone, “if I had not invited Boulby to sup with me. I promised to send you as my substitute; though Moore did not thank me. He would much rather have had me than you, Peter. Should there be any real need of help I shall join you. The mill-bell will give warning. Meantime, go – unless Davy Sweeting or Joseph Donne prefers going. – What do you say, gentlemen?”

“I never touch weapons,” said Mr. Donne.

“No, no, Mr. Helstone. My mother wouldn’t like it,” pleaded Sweeting.

Helstone smiled sardonically; Malone laughed a horse-laugh. He took his pistols, hat and cudgel, and saying that “he never felt more in tune for a shindy in his life,” he left, making the house shake with the bang of the front door behind him.

Chapter 2

THE WAGONS

The evening was pitch dark: star and moon were quenched in black rain-clouds. Malone was not an observer of nature; he could walk miles and never notice when a sunbeam kissed the hill-tops, or when a shower wept over them. He did not, therefore, observe the black vault of the sky, with the furnaces of Stilbro' ironworks throwing a lurid shimmer on the eastern horizon. He just tramped doggedly along the causeway, splashing through the mire-filled cart ruts. He looked only for certain landmarks – the spire of Briarfield Church, and the lights of Redhouse Inn.

When he reached the inn, the glow of a fire through a half-curtained window, a vision of glasses on a round table, and of revellers on an oak settle, nearly drew the curate from his course. He thought longingly of whisky-and-water; but the company in the inn were Mr. Helstone's parishioners; they all knew him. He sighed, and passed on.

He now left the high road to take a short cut to Hollow's Mill across level fields, jumping hedge and wall. He passed only one building here; large and hall-like, though irregular. You could see a high gable, then a long front, and a lofty stack of chimneys. It was dark; not a candle shone from any window. It was absolutely still. The rain and the low whistle of the wind were the sole sounds in its neighbourhood.

Beyond this building, the fields descended rapidly. You could hear the water run in a vale below: one light glimmered in the depth. Malone steered towards it.

He came to a little white house – white even through this dense darkness – and knocked at the door. A servant opened it. By her candle he saw a passage, leading to two doors and a narrow stair with a strip of crimson carpet. The little interior looked clean and fresh.

“Is Mr. Moore in?”

“No, sir, he is at the mill – in the counting-house.”

Here one of the doors opened.

“Are the wagons come, Sarah?” asked a female voice, and a female head appeared. It might not be the head of a goddess – indeed, screws of curl-paper quite forbade that idea – but neither was it the head of a Gorgon, as Malone seemed to think. He shrank bashfully back into the rain, and saying, “I'll go to him,” hurried down a short lane towards a huge black mill.

The work-hours were over; the “hands”, or workers, were gone. The machinery was at rest, the mill shut up. Malone walked round it. Somewhere in its great sooty flank he found a chink of light; he knocked at another door, using his shillelagh to beat a rousing tattoo. A key turned.

“Is it Joe Scott? What news of the wagons, Joe?”

“No; it's myself. Mr. Helstone sent me.”

“Oh! Mr. Malone.” The voice had the slightest possible tone of disappointment. After a moment's pause it continued, politely but formally:

"I beg you will come in, Mr. Malone. I regret Mr. Helstone should have troubled you. There was no need – I told him so."

Malone followed the speaker into a light room – very bright indeed it seemed, after the darkness; but except for its excellent fire, and an elegant lamp on a table, it was a very plain place. The boarded floor was carpetless; the stiff-backed chairs might have come from some farm-house. The only other furnishings were a desk, the table, and some framed plans for buildings and machinery.

Malone hung up his wet coat and hat, drew one of the rheumatic-looking chairs to the hearth, and set his knees almost against the grate.

"Comfortable quarters you have here, Mr. Moore; all snug to yourself."

"Yes, but my sister would be glad to see you, if you would prefer stepping into the house."

"Oh, no! I never was a lady's man, not like my friend Sweeting."

"Sweeting! Which one is that?" asked Moore. "The one with the chocolate overcoat, or the little gentleman?"

"The little one – the cavalier of the Misses Sykes, with the whole six of whom he is in love, ha! ha!"

"Better be in love with all than specially with one, I should think, in that family."

"But he is specially in love with one – which one do you think?"

With a quiet smile Mr. Moore replied, "Dora, of course."

"You are right; Dora it is. But he has no chance, has he, Moore?"

"What has Mr. Sweeting besides his curacy?"

This question seemed to tickle Malone amazingly. He laughed for full three minutes before he answered it.

"What has Sweeting? Why, David has his harp, or rather, his flute. He has a watch, ring, and eyeglass. That's what he has."

"How would he propose to keep Miss Sykes in gowns?"

"Ha! ha! Excellent! I'll ask him that next time I see him. But old Christopher Sykes is rich, is he not?"

"Sykes has an extensive business. But he would be about as likely to take money from the business to give dowries to his daughters as I should be to pull down the cottage there, and build a house as large as Fieldhead."

"Do you know what I heard, Moore, the other day? That you were going to rent Fieldhead (I thought it looked dismal tonight, as I passed it), and that you intended to settle a Miss Sykes there as your wife, ha! ha! Now, which is it?"

"I wonder how often it has been settled that I was to be married since I came to Briarfield. They have assigned me every single woman in the district by turns. First it was the two Misses Wynne; then Miss Armitage; then Ann Pearson. At present you throw on my shoulders all the tribe of the Misses Sykes – why, God knows. I visit nowhere; I do not seek female company. If ever I go to Whinbury, it is only to call on Sykes or Pearson in their counting-houses, where we discuss not courtship, but the cloth we can't sell, the hands we can't employ, and the mills we can't run."

"I go along with you completely, Moore. If there is one notion I hate, it is that of a sentimental marriage – two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their poverty by some fantastic tie of feeling. Humbug! But an advantageous connection is not so bad – eh?"

“No,” responded Moore absently. The subject seemed to have no interest for him. After gazing at the fire with a preoccupied air, he suddenly turned his head.

“Hark!” said he. “Did you hear wheels?”

He went to open the window, and listened. “It is only the wind rising, and the stream rushing. I expected those wagons at six; it is near nine now.”

“Seriously, do you suppose that putting in this new machinery will bring you into danger?” inquired Malone. “Helstone seems to think it will.”

“I only wish the machines – the frames – were safe here, within the walls of this mill. Once in place, I defy the frame-breakers. My mill is my castle.”

“One despises such low scoundrels,” observed Malone. “I almost wish some would call upon you tonight; but the road seemed extremely quiet. I saw nothing astir.”

“You came by the Redhouse?”

“Yes.”

“There would be nothing on that road. It is in the direction of Stilbro’ the risk lies.”

“And you think there is risk?”

“What these fellows have done to others they may do to me. But most of the manufacturers seem paralysed when they are attacked. Sykes, for instance, when his place was burned to the ground, took no steps to discover or punish the miscreants: he gave up as tamely as a rabbit to a ferret. Now I should stand by my trade, my mill, and my machinery.”

“You are rich, Moore?”

“I am very rich in cloth I cannot sell. My warehouse is piled to the roof, since the Orders in Council cut off the American market. And to think that these ridiculous gossips will keep pestering one about being married! As if there was nothing to be done in life but to court some young lady, and go visiting. Oh, *que le diable emporte!*” He broke off and added, more calmly, “I believe women think only of these things, and they naturally fancy men’s minds similarly occupied.”

“Of course,” assented Malone; “but never mind them.” He looked impatiently round, as if something was lacking.

“Mr. Malone,” said Moore, “you must require refreshment after your wet walk.”

“Not at all,” rejoined Malone; but he looked as if the right nail was hit on the head, nevertheless. Moore opened a cupboard.

“I keep food and drink here, for I often spend the evening here alone, and sleep in the mill. Sometimes I am my own watchman. I require little sleep, and it pleases me on a fine night to wander for an hour or two with my musket about the hollow. Mr. Malone, can you cook a mutton chop?”

“Try me.”

“There’s a dishful, then, and there’s the gridiron. Turn them quickly.”

“Never fear. Hand me a knife and fork, please.”

The curate turned up his coat-cuffs, and applied himself to the cookery with vigour. On the table Moore placed plates, a loaf of bread, a black bottle, and two tumblers. He filled a small copper kettle from a large stone jar in a corner, set it on the fire beside the hissing gridiron, got lemons, sugar, and a small china punch-bowl; but while he was brewing the punch a tap at the door called him away.

“Is it you, Sarah?”

“Yes, sir. Will you come to supper, please, sir?”

“No; I shall sleep in the mill. So lock the doors, and tell your mistress to go to bed.”

“You have your household in proper order,” observed Malone approvingly, as he turned the mutton chops. “You are not under petticoat government, like poor Sweeting. Now you and I, Moore – there’s a fine chop for you, full of gravy – you and I will have no grey mares in our stables when we marry.”

“I never think about it. If the grey mare is handsome and tractable, why not?”

“The chops are done. Is the punch brewed?”

“There is a glassful. When Joe Scott and his assistants return they shall have a share, provided they bring the frames intact.”

Malone waxed very exultant over the supper. He laughed at trifles, made bad jokes and applauded them himself, and, in short, grew unmeaningly noisy. His host, on the contrary, remained quiet as before. I shall try to sketch him as he sits at table.

You would probably call him, at first view, a strange-looking man; for he is thin, dark, and foreign-looking, with shadowy hair carelessly streaking his forehead. He seems unconscious that his features are fine, clear and regular; but they hold an anxious expression and have a somewhat haggard appearance. His eyes are large, and grave, and grey; they are searching and thoughtful rather than genial. When he smiles, his face is agreeable – not that it is frank or cheerful even then, but it suggests a considerate nature, patient and forbearing. He is not more than thirty; his figure is tall and slender. He has an outlandish accent, which grates on a British, and especially on a Yorkshire, ear.

Mr. Moore, indeed, was scarcely half a Briton. He came of foreign ancestry by the mother’s side, and had grown up on foreign soil. He cared little for patriotism; he did not attach himself to political parties, to sects, or even to customs. He had a tendency to withdraw from any community he happened to be living in, and considered the interests of Robert Gérard Moore to be more relevant to him than any general philanthropy.

Trade was Mr. Moore’s calling: the Gérards of Antwerp had been merchants for two centuries back. Once they had been wealthy, but the uncertainties of business had loosened the foundations of their credit. The house had stood on a tottering base for a dozen years; and at last, in the shock of the French Revolution, it had fallen, a total ruin. In its fall was involved the Yorkshire firm of Moore, closely connected with the Antwerp house: one of the Antwerp partners, Robert Moore, had married Hortense Gérard, who was to inherit her father’s share in the business. She inherited only debts – which her son Robert accepted, in his turn, as a legacy, saying that one day he would discharge them, and rebuild the fallen house of Gérard and Moore.

If, however, he had a great aim of restoration, he had no money to attain it. When he came to Yorkshire, he – whose ancestors had owned warehouses and factories, a town-house and a country-seat – saw no way open to him but to rent a cloth-mill in an out-of-the-way district; and to take an adjoining cottage to live in, along with a few acres of the steep, rugged land that lined the hollow through which his mill-stream brawled. All this he held at a somewhat high rent (for times were hard, and everything was dear) from the Fieldhead estate.

At the time this history commences, Robert Moore had lived two years in the district. The dingy cottage had been converted into a neat, tasteful residence: part of the rough land had been made into a garden, which he cultivated with singular care. As to the mill, which was an old structure, and fitted up with old machinery, inefficient and out of date, he had from the first held its arrangements in contempt. He aimed for a radical reform, which he had carried out as fast as his limited funds would allow; and the shortage of those funds, and of progress, was a restraint which galled him sorely. Moore ever wanted to push on.

Not being a native, he did not sufficiently care when the new inventions threw the old workpeople out of employ. He never asked himself where the jobless found daily bread; and in this negligence he only resembled thousands of others.

The period of which I write was an overshadowed one in British history. War with Napoleon was at its height: all Europe was involved. England was worn with long resistance, and her weary people cried out for peace on any terms. National honour was become a mere empty name, of no value in the eyes of many, because their sight was dim with famine; and for a morsel of meat they would have sold their birthright.

The "Orders in Council," forbidding neutral powers to trade with France, had offended America, the principal market of the Yorkshire woollen trade, and brought it consequently to the verge of ruin. Minor foreign markets were glutted, and would receive no more wool.

At this crisis, inventions in machinery were introduced into the northern factories, which, greatly reducing the number of hands needed, threw thousands out of work, and left them penniless. A bad harvest supervened. Distress reached its climax. The throes of a sort of moral earthquake were felt heaving under the hills of the northern counties.

But, as is usual in such cases, nobody took much notice. When a food-riot broke out, when a mill was burnt down, or a manufacturer's house was attacked, and the family forced to flee, few measures were taken. A ringleader was detected, or more frequently escaped detection; newspaper paragraphs were written, and there the thing stopped.

As to the sufferers, who could not get work, and consequently could not buy food – they were left to suffer on. It would not do to stop the progress of invention. There was no help; so the unemployed ate the bread and drank the waters of affliction.

Misery generates hate. These sufferers hated the machines; they hated the buildings which contained those machines; they hated the manufacturers who owned those buildings. In the parish of Briarfield, Hollow's Mill was the place held most abominable; Gérard Moore, as a semi-foreigner and progressive mill-owner, was the man most abominated.

And it perhaps rather agreed with Moore's temperament to be hated, especially when he believed the thing for which he was hated to be right. It was with a sense of warlike excitement that he sat in his counting-house on this night, awaiting the arrival of his frame-laden wagons. Malone's presence was unwelcome to him. He would have preferred sitting alone, with his musket for company.

For some ten minutes, Moore had been watching the Irish curate make free with the punch, when suddenly his steady grey eye changed. He raised his hand.

“Chut!” he said in his French fashion. He listened a moment, then rose and went out.

The night was still, dark, and stagnant: the water rushed on full and fast, sounding like a flood in the silence. Moore’s ear, however, caught another sound, very distant, broken and rugged – a sound of heavy wheels crunching a stony road. He lit a lantern, walked down the mill-yard, and opened the gates. The wagons were coming; the dray-horses’ huge hoofs were heard splashing in the mud and water. Moore hailed them.

“Hey, Joe Scott! Is all right?”

Probably Joe Scott was still too distant to hear. He did not answer.

“Is all right, I say?” again asked Moore.

Some one jumped out from the first wagon into the road; a voice cried aloud, “Ay, ay, divil; all’s raight! We’ve smashed ’em.”

And there was a run. The wagons stood deserted.

“Joe Scott!” No Joe Scott answered. “Murgatroyd! Sykes!” No reply. Mr. Moore lifted his lantern and looked into the vehicles. They held neither man nor machinery; they were empty and abandoned.

Now Mr. Moore loved his machinery. He had risked the last of his money on the purchase of these frames. Where were they?

The words “we’ve smashed ’em” rang in his ears. His features relaxed into a singular smile – the smile a determined man wears when his spirit feels a demand on its strength, which it must bear or break. Yet he remained silent, and motionless; for he knew not what to say nor do. He placed the lantern on the ground, and stood with his arms folded, reflecting.

An impatient trampling of one of the horses made him look up. His eye caught the gleam of something white attached to the harness. This proved to be a folded note. It read:

“To the Divil of Hollow’s Miln.

“Your hellish machinery is shivered to smash on Stilbro’ Moor, and your men are lying bound hand and foot in a ditch by the roadside. Take this as a warning from men that are starving, and have starving wives and children. If you get new machines, you shall hear from us again. Beware!”

“Hear from you again? Yes, I’ll hear from you again, and you shall hear from me. On Stilbro’ Moor you shall hear from me in a moment.”

Having led the wagons within the gates, he hastened towards the cottage. Opening the door, he spoke a few words quickly but quietly to the two females who ran to meet him in the passage. He calmed the alarm of one; to the other, the maid-servant, he said,

“Go into the mill, Sarah, and ring the mill-bell as loud as you can. Then get another lantern and help me to light up the front.”

Returning to his horses, he unharnessed and stabled them with speed and care. Presently the mill-bell clanged out, with an irregular but loud and alarming din.

On that still night, it was heard a long way away. The guests in the Redhouse Inn were startled by the clamour, and declaring that “there must be

summat to do at Hollow's Miln," they called for lanterns, and hurried there. Scarcely had they thronged into the yard, when the tramp of horses was heard, and a little man in a shovel hat, sitting erect on a shaggy pony, rode in, followed by another rider on a larger steed.

Mr. Moore, meantime, had saddled his own horse, and had lit up his mill, whose long front was now illuminated. A deep hum of voices was heard. Mr. Malone had at last emerged from the counting-house, and stood with his shillelagh grasped in his fist. Mr. Moore appeared, and was immediately confronted by Mr. Helstone of the shovel hat and shaggy pony.

"Well, Moore, what is your business with us? I thought you would want us tonight – me and Tom here. When I heard your mill-bell I could sit still no longer, so I left Boulby to finish his supper alone. But where is the enemy? There is not a pane of glass broken in your windows. Have you had an attack, or do you expect one?"

"I have neither had one nor expect one," answered Moore coolly. "I only ordered the bell to be rung because I want two or three neighbours to stay here in the Hollow while I and a few others go over to Stilbro' Moor."

"To Stilbro' Moor! What to do? To meet the wagons?"

"The wagons are come home an hour ago."

"Then all's right."

"They came home empty; and Joe Scott and company are left on the moor, and so are the frames. Read that scrawl."

Mr. Helstone read the note.

"Hum! Poor fellows in the ditch. This is a wet night for such a bed. Tom and I will go with you. Malone may stay behind and take care of the mill. What is the matter with him? His eyes seem starting out of his head."

"He has been eating a mutton chop."

"Indeed! – Peter Augustus Malone, be on your guard. Eat no more mutton chops tonight. You are left in command of these premises!"

"Is anybody to stay with me?"

"As many of those present as choose. – My lads, how many of you will remain here, and how many will go with me and Mr. Moore on the Stilbro' road, to meet some men who have been assaulted by frame-breakers?"

Three volunteered to go; the rest preferred staying behind. As Mr. Moore mounted his horse, the rector asked him in a low voice whether he had locked up the mutton chops, so that Peter Augustus could not get at them? Moore nodded, and the rescue-party set out.

Chapter 3

MR. YORKE

Messrs. Helstone and Moore trotted forth from the mill-yard gates, at the head of their small company, in the best possible spirits. The lantern showed a lively spark dancing in Moore's eyes; while the rector's face was shining with glee. If any the crew who had been at work on Stilbro' Moor had seen them, they would have had great pleasure in shooting either of them from behind a wall. The leaders knew this; and being men of steely nerves and steady hearts, were elated with the knowledge.

I am aware, reader, that it is a dreadful thing for a parson to be warlike; I am aware that he should be a man of peace: yet I cannot lift up my eyes and hands in horror to denounce the diabolical rector of Briarfield.

He was not diabolical at all. He had simply missed his vocation. He should have been a soldier, and circumstances had made him a priest. He was a conscientious, hard-headed, brave, stern, implacable, faithful little man; almost without sympathy, prejudiced, and rigid, but a man true to principle, intelligent, and sincere. I will not curse Helstone, clerical Cossack as he was.

You would expect that Helstone and Moore, as they rode side by side in the same cause, would converse amicably. Oh no! These two hard-natured men always chafed each other. They argued frequently about the war. Helstone was a high Tory, and Moore was a bitter Whig – a Whig, at least, in opposing the war-party: that was the question which affected his business, and only on that question did he hold any political views at all. He liked to infuriate Helstone by declaring that Bonaparte was invincible, and by coolly suggesting that Britain might as well yield to him, since he must in the end crush every enemy, and reign supreme.

Helstone could not bear these opinions. It was only because Moore was a sort of half-British alien that he could listen to them without indulging his wish to cane the speaker. Another thing, too, allayed his disgust – a fellow-feeling and respect for Moore's stubbornness.

As the party turned into the Stilbro' road, the rain dashed in their faces. Moore, braced up by the raw breeze and sharp drizzle, began to goad his companion.

"Does your Peninsular news please you still?" he asked. "Have you still faith in that false god of a Lord Wellington?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you still believe that this wooden-faced, pebble-hearted idol has power to send fire down from heaven to consume the French?"

"I believe Wellington will flog Bonaparte's marshals into the sea whenever he likes."

"My dear sir, you can't be serious. Bonaparte's marshals are great men, under the guidance of a master-spirit. Your Wellington is the most commonplace of leaders, whose slow movements are further cramped by an ignorant government."

“Wellington is the soul of England. He is the right champion of a powerful, resolute, and honest nation.”

“He is a dull-witted drover, acting for a duller-witted farmer; and arrayed against him is an invincible genius.”

“A usurper. Against righteous, brave resistance is arrayed boastful, selfish, and treacherous ambition. God defend the right!” said Mr. Helstone.

“God often defends the powerful.”

“What! was the handful of Israelites standing beside the Red Sea more powerful than the host of Egyptians drawn up on the other side? Were they more numerous and mighty, eh? They were a poor band, with few better weapons than shepherds’ crooks. But right was with them, Robert Moore; the God of battles was on their side. ‘The Lord saved Israel that day, and left the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore.’ The hand of the Lord dashed the enemy in pieces!”

“You are right; only you forget the true parallel. France is Israel, and Napoleon is Moses. Europe, with her old overgorged empires and rotten dynasties, is corrupt Egypt.”

“I scorn to answer you.”

Moore accordingly answered himself. At least, he added in a lower voice:

“It puzzles me how Napoleon should have condescended to become an emperor, a vulgar humbug; and still more how a people who had once called themselves republicans should have sunk again to the level of mere slaves. I despise France! I can think what I please, Mr. Helstone, both about France and England; and about revolutions, and regicides, and—”

His sentence was cut short by the rapid rolling up of a gig that stopped in the middle of the road.

“Nah, maister; did th’ wagons hit home?” demanded a voice.

“Is that Joe Scott?”

“Ay, ay!” returned another voice; for the gig contained two people. “Ay, Mr. Moore, it’s Joe Scott. I’m bringing him back to you in a bonny pickle. I fand him on the top of the moor yonder, him and three others. What will you give me for restoring him to you?”

“Why, my thanks. That is you, I suppose, Mr. Yorke, by your voice?”

“Ay, lad, it’s me. I was coming home from Stilbro’ market, and just as I got to the middle of the moor, I heard a groan. Some would have whipt on faster; but I pulled up and said, ‘Is there aught wrong anywhere?’ ‘Deed is there,’ somebody says, speaking out of the ground, like. ‘Nobbut four on us liggig in a ditch.’ I bid them get up and move on, for I’d a notion they were all drunk. ‘We’d ha’ done that an hour sin’, but we’re tied,’ says Joe. So I got down and loosed ’em wi’ my penknife; and he rode wi’ me, and t’ others are coming as fast as their feet will bring them.”

“I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Yorke.”

“Are you, my lad? You know you’re not. However, here are the rest now. We’re eleven strong men, and if we could only meet some of these starved ragamuffins of frame-breakers we’d win a grand victory. We could every one be a Wellington – that would please ye, Mr. Helstone – and sich paragraphs as we could contrive for t’ papers! We’ll hev a column and a half i’ th’ Stilbro’ Courier ower this job, as it is, I dare say. I’d expect no less.”

“And I’ll promise you no less, Mr. Yorke, for I’ll write the article myself,” returned the rector.

“To be sure! And mind ye recommend that them as broke t’ frames, and tied Joe Scott up, should be hung. No doubt o’ that.”

“I’d give them short shrift!” cried Moore. “But I mean to let them alone this time, to give them rope enough to hang themselves.”

“Well, we’ll say no more on the subject at present,” said Mr. Yorke. “Here we are at my door, gentlemen, and I hope you and the men will step in for a little refreshment.”

Moore and Helstone at first declined. It was, however, pressed on them so courteously, and the night, besides, was so inclement, and the house looked so inviting, that at last they yielded. Mr. Yorke led the way in.

It will have been remarked that Mr. Yorke varied a little in his speech, alternating between broad Yorkshire and very pure English. His manner was equally variable. He could be polite and affable, and he could be blunt and rough.

He sent the workmen round by the kitchen, saying that he would see them served presently. The gentlemen were ushered in at the front entrance, and found themselves in a hall lined with pictures. Through this they were conducted to a large, cheerful parlour, with a magnificent fire in the grate. There was no splendour, but there was unusual taste – the taste, you would have said, of a travelled man, and a scholar. A series of Italian views of high quality decked the walls. The subjects were all pastoral, the scenes all sunny. There was a guitar and some music on a sofa; there were cameos, beautiful miniatures; a set of Grecian-looking vases on the mantelpiece; and books arranged in two elegant bookcases.

Mr. Yorke rang for wine, and gave orders to the servant for the refreshment of the men in the kitchen. The rector remained standing; he would not touch any wine.

“E’en as you will,” remarked Mr. Yorke. “I reckon you’ll not eat nor drink under my roof, Mr. Helstone, lest we should be forced to be friends; but I am not so particular. You might sup the contents of that decanter, and I’d still feel free to oppose you at every vestry-meeting.”

“It is just what I should expect of you, Mr. Yorke.”

Mr. Yorke addressed Moore, who had thrown himself into an old-fashioned chair by the fireside. “Get up, my lad! That place is mine. Take the sofa, if you will.”

“Why are you so particular to that chair, Mr. Yorke?” asked Moore, lazily vacating it.

“My father were afore me, and that’s all t’ answer I shall gie thee; and it’s as good a reason as Mr. Helstone can give for his notions.”

“Moore, are you ready to go?” inquired the rector.

“Nay; Robert’s not ready, or rather, I’m not ready to part wi’ him. He’s an ill lad, and wants correcting.”

“Why, sir?” asked Moore. “What have I done?”

“Made thyself enemies on every hand.”

“What do I care for that? What difference does it make to me whether your Yorkshire louts hate me or like me?”

“Ay, there it is. The lad is an alien among us. His father would never have talked i’ that way. Go back to Antwerp, mauvaise tête!”

“Mauvaise tête vous-même; blockhead yourself,” retorted Moore, continuing in the French tongue, “I’m only doing my duty; I don’t care about your peasant thugs!”

“On the contrary, my boy, the peasant thugs will laugh at you,” replied Yorke in perfect French.

“C’est bon! It’s all the same to me. Monsieur Yorke, let us talk no more of it.”

“As you wish.” And Mr. Yorke held his peace. While he sits leaning back in his carved oak chair, I will sketch the portrait of this Yorkshire gentleman.

Chapter 4

MR. YORKE (continued)

A Yorkshire gentleman he was in every point; about fifty-five years old, but looking older, for his hair was silver white. His forehead was broad; his face fresh and hale; the harshness of the north was seen in his features, and heard in his voice; every trait was thoroughly English – an inelegant, unaristocratic face. It held pith, intelligence and originality in every furrow; but it was scornful and sarcastic – the face of a man difficult to lead, and impossible to drive.

If you expect Mr. Yorke to be a benevolent, philanthropic old gentleman, reader, you are mistaken. He has spoken with some sense and good feeling to Mr. Moore, but you are not therefore to conclude that he always spoke and thought justly and kindly.

Mr. Yorke lacked the ability to venerate; and he lacked the ability to compare – and hence to feel sympathy. He had too little benevolence and softness in his nature, and he did not value those divine qualities.

He was intolerant to those above him. Kings and priests, dynasties and parliaments, were to him an abomination. He found no use or pleasure in them. His lack of veneration, too, dried up a thousand pure sources of enjoyment. He was not irreligious – he believed in God and heaven; but his God and heaven were those of a man without awe, imagination, or tenderness.

While he claimed to be tolerant, he was bigoted. He spoke of “parsons” and “lords” with unjust harshness and insolence. He could not place himself in the position of those he reviled; he could not allow for their temptations or disadvantages; he could not imagine how he would behave in a similar situation, and he would often express the most ferocious wishes regarding those who he thought had acted ferociously. Mr. Yorke talked about equality, but at heart he was a proud man – very friendly to his workpeople, good to those beneath him, but haughty as Beelzebub to anyone the world judged his superior. Revolt was in his blood: he could not bear control; his father and grandfather before him could not bear it, nor his children after him.

His lack of benevolence made him very impatient of others’ faults; it left no check to his cutting sarcasm. He would sometimes wound and wound again, without noticing how much he hurt, or caring how deep he thrust.

He had no imagination; but his fine ear for music, and correct eye for colour and form, left him the quality of taste; and who cares for imagination? Who does not think it a rather dangerous, senseless attribute – a disease of the mind rather than a gift?

Probably all think it so but those who possess imagination, or fancy they possess it. To hear them speak, you would believe that their hearts would be cold and their eyes dim without that flame, that they would be lonely if this strange companion abandoned them. You would suppose that it gave some glad hope to spring, some fine charm to summer, some tranquil joy to autumn, some consolation to winter, which you do not feel. An illusion, of course; but the fanatics cling to their dream.

As Mr. Yorke did not possess poetic imagination himself, he considered it superfluous in others. Painters and musicians he could tolerate, because he could see the charm of a fine picture, and feel the pleasure of good music; but he would have despised a poet.

I have told you some of his faults, reader: yet he was one of the most honourable and capable men in Yorkshire. He was much beloved by the poor, because he was kind and fatherly to them. To his workmen he was considerate and cordial. When he dismissed them from an occupation, he would try to find them other work, or help them to move to a district where work might be found. It must also be remarked that if any of his workmen showed signs of insubordination, Yorke knew how to crush rebellion at the outset, so that it never spread. He spoke severely of those who did not do the same, saying that any difficulties they had were entirely their own fault, and sometimes taking the workmen's side.

Mr. Yorke's family was the oldest and most respected in the district; and he was one of the most influential men. His education had been good. In his youth, he had travelled on the Continent, and spoke French and Italian; he had collected many good paintings and tasteful rarities. His manners, when he liked, were those of an old-fashioned gentleman; his conversation, when he wished to please, was singularly interesting; and if he usually expressed himself in the Yorkshire dialect, it was because he chose to do so.

Mr. Yorke knew every one for miles round; yet his close friends were very few. He preferred racy, original characters to refined, insipid ones, no matter how exalted they might be. He would spend an hour talking with a shrewd workman, or with some wise old woman amongst his cottagers, yet would not spend a moment on a commonplace fine gentleman or fashionable lady. He forgot that there may be amiable and admirable characters amongst those who cannot be original.

He was cordial with Mr. Moore for several reasons. Firstly, Moore spoke French with a pure accent; and his un-British looks had pleasant associations for Mr. Yorke – they brought back his youthful travelling days in Italy and Paris.

Secondly, he had known Moore's father, and had had business dealings with him. That tie was more substantial, though by no means more agreeable; for his firm had also been implicated in Moore's losses.

Thirdly, he had found Robert himself a sharp man of business. He respected his resolution and acuteness – perhaps also his hardness. A fourth circumstance which drew them together was that Mr. Yorke was one of the guardians of the landowner, not yet twenty-one, on whose estate Hollow's Mill was situated; so Moore frequently had to consult him.

As to Mr. Helstone – between him and Mr. Yorke there was antipathy. Their natures were opposite, and it was said that they had once been rival suitors of the same lady.

Mr. Yorke, when young, preferred sprightly and dashing women. A showy air, a lively wit, a ready tongue attracted him. He never, however, proposed to any of these brilliant belles; instead he fell seriously in love with a girl who presented a complete contrast to them – a girl with the face of a Madonna; a girl of living marble – stillness personified. No matter that she never responded to his opinions, rarely smiled at his jests, and paid him no

attention. No matter that she seemed the opposite of every woman he had previously admired. For him Mary Cave was perfect.

Mr. Helstone, at that time curate of Briarfield, loved Mary too – or at any rate, he fancied her. He did not pretend to have Mr. Yorke's absorbing passion for her, nor the humble reverence of her other suitors. He saw her as she really was. He was, consequently, more master of her and himself. She accepted him at the first offer, and they were married.

Nature never intended Mr. Helstone to make a very good husband, especially to a quiet wife. He thought so long as a woman was silent, nothing could be wrong. If she did not express likes and dislikes, then she had none. He made no pretence of comprehending women. They were a different, probably a very inferior, order of existence to men. A wife could not be her husband's companion, much less his confidante. His wife, after a year or two, was of no great importance to him; and when she one day, as he thought, suddenly – for he had scarcely noticed her decline – took her leave of him and of life, he felt his bereavement – who shall say how little? Yet, perhaps, more than he seemed to feel it; for he was not a man from whom grief easily wrung tears.

His dry-eyed mourning scandalized the old housekeeper and Mrs. Helstone's nurse, who, perhaps, knew more of the deceased lady's capacity for feeling and loving than her husband did. They gossiped together over the corpse, and worked each other up to some indignation against the austere little man who sat in the next room going through papers.

Mrs. Helstone was hardly buried when rumours began to be rife in the neighbourhood that she had died of a broken heart. These magnified quickly into reports of harsh treatment by her husband – reports grossly untrue, but eagerly heard despite that. Mr. Yorke heard them, and partly believed them. Though himself a married man now, united to a woman who seemed a complete contrast to Mary Cave, still he could not forget his great disappointment; and when he heard that Mary had been neglected, perhaps abused, he felt a bitter hatred for Mr. Helstone.

Mr. Helstone was only half aware of this. He neither knew how much Yorke had loved Mary Cave, nor what was rumoured about his own treatment of her. He believed political and religious differences alone separated him and Mr. Yorke. Had he known how the case really stood, he would not have crossed his former rival's threshold.

Mr. Yorke did not resume his lecture of Robert Moore. Instead they began to talk about the unquiet state of the country, and the recent attacks on mills, although each of the three gentlemen had different views on these subjects. Mr. Helstone thought the workpeople were unreasonable and impatient; he thought the government should interfere, and even use military force.

Mr. Yorke wished to know whether this interference would feed the hungry, and give work to those who needed work. He said the public had borne enough, and resistance was now a duty. The mill masters, he believed, had been let down by a "corrupt, base, and bloody" government (these were his words). It was their perseverance in a hopeless, ruinous war which had brought the nation to its knees. It was their monstrously oppressive taxation and the infamous "Orders in Council" that hung a millstone about England's neck.

"But where was the use of talking?" he demanded. "What chance was there of reason being heard in a land whose king was a lunatic, and whose

regent was a debauchee? Where such humbugs as the peerage and a bench of bishops were venerated; and a host of lazy parsons and their families were kept on the fat of the land?"

Mr. Helstone, rising up and putting on his shovel-hat, replied "that he had met with two or three men who held these opinions so long as they were healthy and wealthy; but there came a time," he said, "to all men when they should tremble, and their views be tested. He had been called to the miserable death-bed of one of the church's most rancorous foes; he had seen him stricken with remorse, and desperate to repent. He must warn Mr. Yorke that blasphemy against God and the king was a deadly sin, and that there was such a thing as 'judgment to come.'"

Mr. Yorke "believed fully in the judgment to come. Otherwise, it would be difficult to imagine how the scoundrels who broke innocent hearts, took the bread out of the mouths of the poor, browbeat the humble, and truckled meanly to the rich, were to be properly paid off. But," he added, "he knew that some folk were bound for Hell, just as well as if an angel had told him."

"Sir," said Mr. Helstone with dignity, "Man must know himself, and the place whither his own steps tend."

"Now," interposed Mr. Moore, who had sat silent till now, "you have both proved how cordially you detest each other. For my part, I still hate the fellows who have broken my frames, and have no hate to spare for my acquaintances, and still less for such a vague thing as a government. But really, gentlemen, you both seem very bad. I dare not stay with a rebel and blasphemmer like you, Yorke; and I hardly dare ride home with a tyrannical churchman like Mr. Helstone."

"I am going, however, Mr. Moore," said the rector sternly. "Come with me or not, as you please."

"Nay, he shall go with you," responded Yorke. "It's past midnight, and ye must all go." Leading his guests through the passage, he fairly pushed them out of his front door.

They met their companions hurrying out by the back way. Their horses stood at the gate; they mounted and rode off, Moore laughing, and Helstone deeply indignant.

Chapter 5

HOLLOW'S COTTAGE

Moore was still in good spirits when he rose next morning. He and Joe Scott had spent the night in the mill, on camp-beds kept in the counting-houses. The master was up early, and awoke his man by singing a French song as he dressed.

“Get up, Joseph, and we’ll walk through the mill before the hands come in, and I’ll explain my plans. We’ll have the machinery yet. You never heard of Bruce, perhaps?”

“And the spider? Yes, I hev. Ye mean to say ye’ll persevere.”

“I do.”

“Is there many like you i’ your country?” inquired Joe, as he folded up his bed.

“In my country! Which is my country?”

“Why, France – isn’t it?”

“No, indeed! Just because the French have seized Antwerp, where I was born, does not make me a Frenchman.”

“Dutch, then?”

“Now you are confounding Antwerp with Amsterdam.”

“Flanders?”

“I scorn the insinuation, Joe! Have I a Flemish face, with a clumsy nose and pale blue eyes? Am I all body and no legs? Joe, I’m an Anversois – a native of Antwerp – though my mother came of French lineage, which is why I speak French.”

“But your father were Yorkshire, which maks ye a bit Yorkshire too; and onybody may see ye’re akin to us, ye’re so keen o’ making brass.”

“Joe, you’re an impudent dog.”

“We allus speak our minds i’ this country; and them young parsons and grand folk fro’ London is shocked at it; and we like to gi’e ’em summat to be shocked at, so we can watch ’em widen their eyes, and say, ‘Dear! dear! Whet seveges! How very coarse!’”

“You *are* savages, Joe. You don’t suppose you’re civilized, do you?”

“Middling, maister. I reckon us manufacturing lads i’ th’ north is a deal more intelligent nor th’ farming folk i’ th’ south. Trade sharpens our wits; and mechanics like me is forced to think. When I see an effect, I look straight away for a cause; and then I like reading.”

“You think yourself a clever fellow, Scott.”

“Ay! I’m fairish; but there’s thousands i’ Yorkshire that’s as good as me, and a few that’s better.”

“You’re a sublime fellow; but you’re a conceited noodle too, Joe! You need not think that because you’ve picked up a little mathematics, and the elements of chemistry at the bottom of a dyeing vat, that therefore you’re a neglected man of science. Virtue does not live only in workmen’s cottages. Human nature is human nature everywhere, amongst rich or poor, and in between. Away with you, Joe, and ring the mill bell.”

It was now the middle of February; dawn was just beginning to penetrate the brown obscurity of night with a pale ray. No colour tinged the east, as day slowly lifted a heavy eyelid. The morning was chill; a raw wind blew. It had ceased to rain, but the earth was sodden, and the pools and rivulets were full.

The mill-windows were alight, the bell rung loud, and now the little children came running in, in too great a hurry, let us hope, to feel the cold. Mr. Moore stood at the entrance, counting them as they went by. To those who came late he said a word of reprimand, which was a little more sharply repeated by Joe Scott when they reached the work-rooms. Neither master nor overlooker spoke savagely, although they fined one boy a penny for coming very late.

Though I describe imperfect characters (every character in this book will be found to be more or less imperfect, my pen refusing to draw anything in the model line), I do not handle utterly degraded ones. There are no child-torturers or slave drivers here. I am happy to inform my reader that neither Mr. Moore nor his overlooker ever struck a child in their mill.

Mr. Moore haunted his mill, his dye-house, and his warehouse till the sickly dawn strengthened into day. The sun rose – a clear white disc, as chill as ice. At eight o'clock the signal was given for breakfast; the children, released for half an hour from toil, opened their little tin cans of coffee, and their small baskets of bread.

And now at last Mr. Moore quitted the mill-yard, and went to his house. It was only a short distance from the factory, but secluded by a hedge and high bank on each side of the lane. It was a small, whitewashed place, with a green porch over the door; scanty brown stalks showed in the garden soil beneath the windows, predicting blooming creepers for summer days. Only in sheltered nooks did the first shoots of snowdrop or crocus peep, green as emerald, from the earth. The spring was late; the last deep snow had only just disappeared. Three trees, not lofty, but graceful, rose beside the cottage. It was a snug nest, but one within which the wings of action and ambition could not long lie folded.

Instead of entering the house, Mr. Moore fetched a spade from a shed and began to work in the garden. For about a quarter of an hour he dug, until a window opened, and a female voice called:

“Eh, bien! Tu ne déjeûnes pas ce matin?”

His answer, and the rest of the conversation, I shall translate into English.

“Is breakfast ready, Hortense?”

“Certainly; it has been ready half an hour.”

“Then I am ready too.”

He threw down his spade, and entered the house. The narrow passage led him to a small parlour, where a breakfast of coffee, bread and butter, and stewed pears, was spread on the table. Over this meal presided the lady who had spoken from the window.

She was a little older than Mr. Moore – perhaps thirty-five, tall, and stout; she had very black hair, twisted up in curl-papers, a high colour in her cheeks, and little black eyes. Her forehead was rather corrugated; she had a fretful though not an ill-natured expression. The strangest point was her dress – a short petticoat and a striped cotton camisole.

You will think she is a remarkable slattern, reader. Not at all. Hortense Moore, Mr. Moore's sister, was a very orderly, economical person. The

petticoat, camisole, and curl-papers were her usual morning costume: she adhered to her old Belgian customs.

Mademoiselle had an excellent opinion of herself – an opinion not wholly undeserved, for she possessed some good qualities; but she over-estimated her own virtues, and quite left out her various little defects. You could never have persuaded her that she was prejudiced and narrow-minded, with too much self-importance, and too apt to take offence about trifles; yet all this was true.

However, she could be kind and friendly enough. To her two brothers (for there was another besides Robert) she was very much attached. Louis, however, she knew less well than Robert. He had been sent to an English school when a mere boy, and had followed the arduous and modest career of a teacher. He had taught in a school, and was said now to be tutor in a private family. Hortense thought of him as backward and quiet. She was very proud of Robert, regarding him as the greatest man in Europe; all he said and did was remarkable in her eyes, and she expected others to have the same opinion.

As soon as Robert was seated at the breakfast-table, and she had helped him to some stewed pears and a good-sized Belgian tartine, she began to pour out a flood of amazement and horror at last night's destruction of the frames.

"What a shameful thing to do! It's clear that English workers are wicked beasts, just like English servants – that Sarah, for one!"

"She looks clean and industrious," Mr. Moore remarked.

"Looks? I do not say that she is dirty or idle, but her insolence! She disputed with me a quarter of an hour yesterday about cooking the beef; she said I boiled it to rags, and that my stock was no better than greasy water! Yet I cannot part with the girl lest I should get a worse. You are in the same position with your workmen, my poor brother!"

"I am afraid you are not very happy in England, Hortense."

"It is my duty to be happy where you are, brother; but certainly people here appear to me ill-bred. They consider my habits ridiculous. If a girl from your mill chances to come into the kitchen and finds me in my camisole and petticoat, she sneers. If I accept an invitation to tea, I am put quite into the background; I have not that attention paid me which is my due. The G rards are an excellent family, and the Moores also! They have a right to claim respect. In Antwerp I was always treated with distinction."

"Hortense, in Antwerp we were known as rich; in England we have always been known as poor."

"Again, dear brother, last Sunday, because it was wet, I went to church in my neat black sabots, footwear which one would not indeed wear in a fashionable city, but which in the country I have always used on dirty roads. Believe me, as I paced up the aisle, four ladies laughed and hid their faces behind their prayer-books."

"Well, well! don't wear them again. I told you before they were not quite the thing for this country. And as to the camisole and petticoat, I am not sure about them either. I never see an English lady dressed in such garments. Ask Caroline Helstone."

"Caroline! I consult her about my dress? It is she who on all points should consult me. She is a child."

"She is eighteen – old enough to know all about gowns and petticoats."

"Do not make Caroline of more consequence than she ought to be, brother. At present she is modest and unassuming: let us keep her so."

“With all my heart. Is she coming this morning?”

“At ten, as usual, for her French lesson.”

“You don’t find that she sneers at you, do you?”

“She does not. She appreciates me better than anyone else here; but then she sees more of me. She sees that I have the education and manner of a person well born and well bred.”

“Are you fond of her?” asked Moore.

“I have a regard for her as my relative; and she behaves very well at lessons. But you know, brother, that my manner commands respect. Yet I perceive clearly that Caroline is not perfect, that there is much to be desired in her.”

“Give me a last cup of coffee, and while I am drinking it, amuse me with an account of her faults.”

“Caroline is defective; but with my motherly care she may improve. She has an occasional reserve, which I do not quite like, because it is not sufficiently girlish and submissive; and there are glimpses of an unsettled hurry in her nature, which put me out. Yet she is usually most tranquil, too dejected and thoughtful indeed sometimes. In time, I doubt not, I shall make her uniformly sedate.”

“I don’t understand. What do you mean by ‘unsettled hurry’?”

“For example, when I ask her to read French poetry to practice her pronunciation. She has gone through much of Corneille and Racine, in a very steady, sober spirit, such as I approve. Occasionally she seemed, indeed, apathetic. The other day I gave her a book of short pieces, to learn one by heart. I saw her turning the leaves over impatiently, and curling her lip with scorn. I chided her. ‘Cousin,’ said she, ‘all this bores me to death. Are there not two lines of poetry in all of French literature?’ I inquired what she meant. She begged my pardon, and began to learn assiduously. In half an hour she stood before me, and recited Chénier’s *La Jeune Captive*. If you had heard her, you would have known what I meant by ‘unsettled hurry.’ One would have thought Chénier was more moving than all Racine and Corneille. She has an ill-regulated mind; but she is fortunate in her teacher. I will give her a set of opinions; I will guide her feelings.”

“Be sure you do, Hortense. Here she comes.”

“Ah! She is half an hour early. –My child, what brings you here before I have breakfasted?”

This question was addressed to a young girl who now entered the room, wrapped in a winter mantle which was gathered gracefully round a slender figure.

“I came in haste to see how you were, Hortense, and Robert too. I was sure you would both be grieved by what happened last night. My uncle told me about it at breakfast. He is very angry – but he was with Robert, was he not? Did he not go with you to Stilbro’ Moor?”

“Yes, we set out in martial style, Caroline; but the prisoners we went to rescue met us half-way.”

“Nobody was hurt?”

“Why, no.”

“You were not with the wagons when they were attacked?”

“No.”

“Where are you going this morning?” asked Caroline. “I saw Murgatroyd saddling your horse in the yard.”

“To Whinbury. It is market day.”

“Mr. Yorke is going too. I met him in his gig. Come home with him. Two are better than one, and nobody dislikes Mr. Yorke.”

“Therefore he would be a protection to me, who am hated?” suggested Moore.

“Misunderstood, not hated. What time will you return, Robert?”

“I generally return at seven.”

“Try to be back by six. By seven daylight is quite gone.”

“And what danger do you foresee for me in darkness, Caroline?”

“I am not sure, but we all feel anxious at present. My uncle calls these times dangerous. He says, too, that mill-owners are unpopular.”

“And I am one of the most unpopular? Is not that the fact? You are reluctant to speak out plainly, but you think I may be attacked, like Pearson – who was shot in his own house, through the window.”

“Anne Pearson showed me the bullet,” said Caroline gravely. “You will be back by six?”

“Certainly he will,” affirmed Hortense. “And now, my child, prepare your lessons, while I put the peas to soak for dinner.” She left the room.

“You suspect I have many enemies, then, Caroline,” said Mr. Moore. “Have I no friends?”

“Your sister, and your brother Louis, whom I have never seen; and Mr. Yorke, and my uncle – besides, of course, many more.”

Robert smiled. “You would be puzzled to name your ‘many more,’” said he. “But show me your exercise-book. What careful handwriting! My sister wants to form you like a Flemish school-girl. What life are you destined for, Caroline? What will you do with your French, drawing, and other accomplishments, when they are acquired?”

“You may well say, when they are acquired; for till Hortense began to teach me, I knew precious little. As to the life I am destined for, I cannot tell. I suppose to keep my uncle’s house till – till events offer other occupations for me.”

“A remarkably vague prospect! Are you content with it?”

“I used to be. But there are moments now when I am not quite satisfied. I am earning nothing.”

“You wish to make money, Lina?”

“I do. I should like an occupation; and if I were a boy, it would not be so difficult to find one. I can see such an easy, pleasant way of learning a business, and making my way in life.”

“Go on. Let us hear how.”

“I could be apprenticed to your trade – the cloth-trade. I could learn it from you. I could keep the books and write the letters, while you went to market. I know you want to pay your father’s debts; perhaps I could help you.”

“Help me? You should think of yourself.”

“I do think of myself; but must one think only of oneself?”

“Of whom else dare I think? The poor need to have narrow sympathies. Poverty is selfish and anxious, and sympathy must be checked by Prudence, whose frosty breath is as nipping as any north wind. By poverty, I mean the embarrassed penury of the man in debt.”

“Cherish hope, not anxiety,” urged Caroline. “I feel there is something wrong in your notions of the best way of attaining happiness, as there is in – in your manner to the Yorkshire workpeople.”

“You have often wanted to tell me that, have you not?”

“Yes; very often.”

“The faults of my manner are, I think, only negative. I am not proud. I am only taciturn, and serious.”

“As if your workmen were machines like your frames. In your own house you seem different.”

“I am an alien to them. And for my part I find them irrational, perverse; they hinder me when I long to hurry forward. I don’t expect them to love me.”

“Ah!” said Caroline, shaking her head and heaving a deep sigh.

“I suppose I am not an affectionate man, Caroline. The attachment of a very few people is enough for me.”

“Please, Robert, will you mend my pen before you go?”

“First let me rule your book, for you always manage to draw the lines aslant. There now. If I were a tutor like Louis I might stay and dedicate this morning to you and your studies, whereas I must spend it in Skyes’s wool-warehouse.”

“You will be making money.”

“More likely losing it. There, my horse is ready; I must go. I’ll take a look at the garden first.”

He went out into the garden behind the mill. A sweet fringe of snowdrop, crocus and primrose bloomed in the sunshine under the hot wall of the factory. Moore plucked a little bouquet of flowers, returned to the parlour, and laid them on Caroline’s desk.

“Thank you, Robert. It is pretty; it looks like sparkles of sunshine and blue sky. Good-morning.”

Robert went to the door, stopped as if about to speak; said nothing, and went out. But in a second he re-entered the cottage.

“I forgot my gloves,” he said, and then asked, “You have no binding engagement at home perhaps, Caroline?”

“I never have. Some children’s socks to knit for the Jew’s basket; but they will keep.”

“Forget the Jew’s basket, and spend the day here for a change. Your uncle won’t break his heart at your absence?”

She smiled. “No.”

“Then stay and dine with Hortense; she will be glad of your company. When I return, we will have a little reading in the evening. The moon rises at half-past eight, and I will walk up to the rectory with you at nine. Do you agree?”

She nodded her head, and her eyes lit up.

Moore lingered for two more minutes. He bent over Caroline’s desk and glanced at her grammar, he lifted her bouquet and played with it; his horse stamped impatiently; his groom coughed at the gate, as if he wondered what in the world his master was doing.

“Good-morning,” again said Moore, and finally vanished.

Hortense, coming in ten minutes after, found, to her surprise, that Caroline had not yet begun her exercise.

Chapter 6

CORIOLANUS

Mademoiselle Moore had that morning a somewhat absent-minded pupil. Caroline forgot, again and again, the explanations which were given to her. However, she bore her teacher's chidings cheerfully. Sitting in the sunshine near the window, she felt both happy and good; and looked at her best.

She was fair to look upon. Her figure was light and neat; her face was expressive and gentle; her eyes were handsome, with a winning beam that stole into the heart. Her mouth was very pretty; she had delicate skin, and a fine flow of curling brown hair, arranged with taste. Her style of dress was unobtrusive and inexpensive, but suited her fair complexion. Her present winter dress was of merino wool – the same soft shade of brown as her hair, with a pink ribbon at the collar. She wore no other decoration. So much for Caroline Helstone's appearance.

As to her family, she was the child of parents separated soon after her birth. Her mother was the half-sister of Mr. Moore's father; thus, though there was no shared blood, she was, in a distant sense, the cousin of Robert, Louis, and Hortense. Her father was Mr. Helstone's brother, and was a man whose character friends preferred not to recall after his death. He had made his wife unhappy. The truthful reports about his behaviour had made more credible those rumours which were falsely circulated about his better-principled brother.

Caroline had never known her mother, as she was taken from her in infancy. She had not seen her since. Her father died comparatively young, and her uncle, the rector, had for some years been her sole guardian. He was not much suited to have the charge of a young girl. He had taken little trouble about her education; probably he would have taken none if she had not grown anxious about it, and asked to acquire some knowledge. Still, she had a depressing feeling that she was inferior, with fewer attainments than those of other girls of her age; and she was very glad of the kind offer made by her cousin Hortense to teach her French and fine needle-work.

Mlle. Moore, for her part, delighted in the task, because it gave her importance; she liked to lord it a little over a docile yet quick pupil. When she found that Caroline made rapid and eager progress, she ascribed the improvement entirely to her own superior teaching. She imagined that everything Caroline knew, she had learned from her, even on subjects of which she knew little herself. The idea was not logical, but Hortense had perfect faith in it.

Mademoiselle kept her young cousin to dry studies as closely as she could. She worked her unrelentingly at French grammar, giving her endless "analyses logiques." These were not pleasant to Caroline; she thought she could have learned French just as well without them, and grudged the time spent in pondering over "propositions, principales, et incidents;" and examining whether the proposition was "pleine," "elliptique," or "implicite."

Sometimes she lost herself in the maze, and while Hortense was busy upstairs, would carry her book to Robert in the counting-house, and get the

rough place made smooth by his aid. Mr. Moore possessed a clear, tranquil brain. Caroline's little difficulties seemed to dissolve beneath his eye. In two minutes he would explain all. Repaying him by an admiring and grateful smile, she would leave the mill reluctantly to go back to the cottage, wishing nature had made her a boy instead of a girl, so that she might be Robert's clerk, and sit with him in the counting-house.

Very occasionally she spent the evening at Hollow's Cottage. Sometimes during these visits Moore was away; but sometimes he was at home, and free to talk. When this was the case, the evening hours passed on wings of light. There was no room in England so pleasant as that small parlour when the three cousins occupied it. Hortense, when she was not teaching, or scolding, was good-humoured; she relaxed, and was kind to her young English kinswoman. Sometimes Caroline would ask her to play her guitar and sing; she played with skill, and had a well-toned voice. Her performance would have been completely agreeable, but for her self-important manner.

Mr. Moore, released from business, was, if not lively himself, a willing spectator of Caroline's liveliness, agreeable and ready to respond to her questions. Sometimes he was almost animated, quite gentle and friendly.

The drawback was that by the next morning he was sure to be frozen up again; and however much he seemed, in his quiet way, to enjoy these social evenings, he rarely asked for their recurrence. This puzzled his inexperienced cousin.

"If I had a means of happiness at my command," she thought, "I would employ it often, and not let it lie for weeks aside."

Yet she was careful not to visit unasked, much though she enjoyed her evenings there. Often, indeed, when pressed by Hortense to come, she would refuse, because Robert did not second the request. This morning was the first time he had ever given her an invitation unprompted; and he had spoken so kindly that she was glad for the whole day.

The morning passed as usual. Mademoiselle spent it in bustling from kitchen to parlour, now scolding Sarah, now looking over Caroline's exercise or hearing her lesson. However faultlessly these tasks were achieved, Hortense never praised her, believing that praise was inconsistent with a teacher's dignity. She thought reprimand, however, necessary to maintain authority; and if no error was to be found in the lesson, she would correct the pupil's deportment or dress.

The usual affray took place about the dinner, which Sarah almost flung upon the table, with a look that said quite plainly, "I never dished such stuff in my life afore; it's not fit for dogs." It was a savoury repast enough. The soup was a purée of dried peas, followed by a dish of miscellaneous meat – chopped up with breadcrumbs, seasoned uniquely though not unpleasantly, and baked in a mould – a strange but tasty dish.

Caroline had no objection to this Belgian cookery – indeed, she rather liked it; and it was just as well, for showing any distaste would have injured her in mademoiselle's good graces for ever.

Soon after dinner Caroline coaxed her governess to dress. This manoeuvre required management. To have hinted that the *jupon* – the stiff petticoat – camisole and curl-papers were odious objects would have been unwise, and would be likely to result in Hortense wearing them all day. However, the pupil managed to get the teacher upstairs; and, once in the bedroom, she persuaded

her that she might as well get changed now; and while mademoiselle delivered a solemn homily on her own merit in disregarding all frivolities of fashion, Caroline denuded her of the camisole, invested her with a decent gown, arranged her collar and hair, and made her quite presentable.

But Hortense would put on the finishing touches herself – a thick handkerchief tied round the throat, and a large, servant-like black apron, which spoiled everything. The handkerchief was a *fichu*, worn for propriety; the apron was the sign of a good housewife – she appeared to think that it somehow caused a large saving in her brother’s income. She had given Caroline similar items; and Caroline’s refusal to accept them had caused the only serious quarrel they had ever had.

“I wear a high collar,” said Caroline, “and I should feel suffocated with a handkerchief in addition; and my short aprons do quite as well as that long one.”

Yet Hortense would have insisted, had not Mr. Moore chanced to overhear, and decided that Caroline’s little aprons would suffice, and that as she was still a child, she might for the present dispense with the *fichu*.

His sister was compelled to yield; but she disapproved of the piquant and ladylike neatness of Caroline’s costume. Something more solid and homely she would have considered much more fitting.

The afternoon was devoted to sewing. Mademoiselle, like most Belgian ladies, was skilful with her needle, and devoted countless hours to fine embroidery, sight-destroying lace-work, netting, knitting, and, above all, elaborate stocking-mending. She would give a day to mending two holes in a stocking, and think it a mission nobly fulfilled.

Caroline was condemned to learn this style of darning, which had to imitate exactly the fabric of the stocking – a wearisome process, but considered by Hortense as one of the first duties of a woman. She herself had been expert at darning since she was six; and when she first discovered that Caroline was ignorant of this essential skill, she could have wept with pity. She found a hopeless pair of stockings, and set the ignorant English girl to work.

This task had begun two years ago, and Caroline had the stockings in her work-bag still. They were a grievous burden to her; she would have liked to put them in the fire; and once Mr. Moore, who had observed her sighing over them, had proposed a private cremation in the counting-house; but Caroline knew it would have been unwise.

All this afternoon the two ladies sat and sewed. The sky had darkened; it had begun to rain again. Secret fears began to steal on Caroline that Robert would stay at Whinbury till it cleared. Five o’clock struck, and still the clouds streamed. A sighing wind whispered in the trees; day seemed already closing.

“It will not be fine till the moon rises,” pronounced Mlle Moore, “and I am sure that my brother will not return till then. We will have coffee. It would be vain to wait for him.”

“I am tired. May I leave my work now, cousin?”

“You may, since it grows too dark to do it well. Fold it up; put it away carefully; then step into the kitchen and desire Sarah to bring in the tray.”

“But it has not yet struck six. He may still come.”

“He will not, I tell you. I understand my brother.”

Caroline went obediently into the kitchen, where Sarah was sewing herself a dress.

“You are to bring in coffee,” she said in a spiritless tone; and then she leaned her arm and head against the kitchen mantelpiece, and hung listlessly over the fire.

“How low you seem, miss! It’s because your cousin keeps you so close at work. It’s a shame!”

“Nothing of the kind, Sarah,” was the reply.

“Oh! but I know it is. You’re fit to cry, just because you’ve sat still the whole day. It would make a kitten dull to be mewed up so.”

“Sarah, does your master often come home early from market when it is wet?”

“Hardly ever; but just today he has. I saw Murgatroyd lead his horse into the yard five minutes since. He was in the counting-house with Joe Scott, I believe. I heard him saying something to Joe about having a new set of frames in the mill next week, and that this time he would get four soldiers from Stilbro’ barracks to guard the wagon.”

“Sarah, are you making a gown?”

“Yes. Is it handsome?”

“Beautiful! Get the coffee. I’ll finish cutting out that sleeve for you, and I’ll give you some trimming for it. I have some satin ribbon that will just match it.”

“You’re very kind, miss.”

“Be quick; there’s a good girl. But first put your master’s shoes on the hearth for him. I hear him coming.”

The kitchen door opened; Mr. Moore entered, very wet and cold. Caroline half turned, but then bent over the dress again, her face hidden. There was an attempt to settle her features, which failed. When she at last looked up, she beamed.

“They said you would not come,” she said.

“But I promised to return. You expected me, I suppose?”

“No, Robert; it rained so fast. And you are wet and chilled. Change your clothes. If you took cold, I should – we should blame ourselves.”

“I am not wet through: my riding-coat is waterproof. Dry shoes are all I require. There – the fire is pleasant.”

He stood on the hearth and glanced down for an instant on an uplifted face, flushed and smiling, shaded with silky curls. Sarah was gone into the parlour with the tray; Moore placed his hand a moment on his young cousin’s shoulder, stooped, and left a kiss on her forehead.

“Oh!” said she, “I was miserable when I thought you would not come. I am almost too happy now. Are you happy, Robert? Do you like to come home?”

“I think I do – tonight, at least.”

“You are not fretting about your frames, and your business, and the war?”

“Not just now.”

“Are you positive you don’t feel Hollow’s Cottage too small and dismal for you?”

“At this moment, no.”

“And you are not bitter at heart because rich and great people forget you?”

“No more questions. You are mistaken if you think I am anxious to curry favour with the rich. I only want a career.”

“Which your own talent and goodness shall win you. You were made to be great.”

“And how would that happen? Oh, life is not what you think it, Lina!”

“But you are what I think you.”

“I am not. I am far worse,” said Moore.

“No; far better. I know you are good. I feel in my heart you are so.”

“Ah! You should judge me with your head, Lina.”

“I do; and then I am quite proud of you.”

Mr. Moore’s face coloured; his lips smiled, and yet were compressed; his eyes laughed, and yet he knit his brow.

“Think meanly of me, Lina,” said he. “Men, in general, are a sort of scum, and I am no better than my fellows.”

“It is because you are modest that I have such confidence in your merit.”

“Then why do you say this, Caroline?” he demanded sharply.

“Only to ease my mind by expressing what I think for once; and to make you better satisfied with yourself.”

“By assuring me that you are my sincere friend?”

“Just so, Robert. You are not my enemy, are you?”

The answer was cut short by Sarah and her mistress entering the kitchen in some commotion. They had been disputing about “*café au lait*,” which Sarah said was the queerest mess she ever saw, and a waste of God’s good gifts, as coffee should be boiled in water; and which mademoiselle affirmed to be a royal beverage, a thousand times too good for Sarah.

As they all withdrew into the parlour, Caroline had only time again to question, “Not my enemy, Robert?”

And Moore had replied: “Could I be?” before he sat down at the table.

Caroline scarcely heard mademoiselle’s explosion of wrath about Sarah; Robert laughed a little, and then, entreating his sister to be tranquil, assured her that she should have her choice of maid from all the girls in his mill. Only he feared they would scarcely suit her, as they were ignorant of household work; and just as pert and self-willed as Sarah was.

Mademoiselle admitted the truth of this.

“Shall I try and get you an Antwerp girl?” asked Mr. Moore, who, stern in public, was kind in private.

“An Antwerp girl would not stay, sneered at as she would be by all the young *coquines* in your factory;” then softening, “You are very good, dear brother – excuse my petulance – but my domestic trials are severe. Yet I recollect that our revered mother experienced similar sufferings, though she had the choice of all the best servants in Antwerp.”

Mr. Moore recalled his good mother’s kitchen in Antwerp, and let the subject drop. He consoled Hortense by fetching her guitar, and asking her to play some of their mother’s favourite songs.

Hortense, pleased, looked almost graceful, almost handsome; as she played, her everyday fretful look was gone. She sang with feeling. Seeing that Caroline listened with interest, this increased her good-humour. Caroline’s exclamation at the close of the song, “I wish I could sing and play like Hortense!” rendered her charming for the evening.

Cradled in blissful self-complacency, Hortense took up her knitting. Drawn curtains, a clear fire, a softly-shining lamp, gave the little parlour its best charm.

“What shall we do now, Caroline?” asked Mr. Moore.

“What shall we do, Robert?” repeated she playfully. “You decide.”

“Not play at chess?”

“No.”

“Nor draughts, nor backgammon?”

“No, no; we both hate silent games that only keep one’s hands employed, don’t we?”

“I believe we do. Then shall we talk scandal?”

“About whom? Are we sufficiently interested in anybody to take a pleasure in pulling their character to pieces?”

“For my part, I must say no.”

“And I too. But it is strange, though we want no third – fourth, I mean (she hastily glanced at Hortense), living person here – it would be pleasant to go back to the past, to hear people of long gone generations speak to us and tell us their thoughts.”

“Who shall be the speaker? Is he French?”

“No, Robert. Tonight you shall be entirely English. You shall read an English book. An old book – that shall waken your nature, fill your mind with music; it shall pass like a skilful hand over your heart, and make its strings sound like a lyre. Let glorious William touch your heart.”

“I must read Shakespeare? – with a view to making me better? Is it to operate like a sermon?”

“It is to stir you, to give you new sensations. It is to make you feel your life strongly – not only your virtues, but your vices.”

“What is she saying?” cried Hortense, who had been counting stitches.

“Never mind, sister; let her talk. Let her say anything she pleases tonight. It amuses me.”

Caroline, who had been rummaging at the bookcase, returned with a book.

“Here’s *Coriolanus*,” she said. “Now, read, and discover at once how low and how high you are.”

“Come, then, sit near me, and correct when I mispronounce.”

“I am to be the teacher then? If you are all French, and sceptical and sneering, I’ll put on my bonnet and go home.”

“Sit down. Here I begin.”

He placed the book between them, reposed his arm on the back of Caroline’s chair, and began to read.

He relished the very first scene in *Coriolanus*; as he read he warmed. He delivered the haughty speech of Caius Marcius to the starving citizens suavely, as if he thought his irrational pride was right. Caroline looked up at him with a singular smile.

“There’s a vicious point already,” she said. “You sympathize with that proud patrician who insults his famished fellow-men. Go on.”

He proceeded. The warlike parts did not rouse him much; yet the single-handed fight between Marcius and Tullus Aufidius he delighted in. As he went on, he began to revel in the picture of human nature, to feel the reality stamped upon the characters on the page.

He did not read the comic scenes well; so Caroline read these parts for him, with unexpected spirit and expression. Indeed, her conversation that

evening, whether grave or gay, was intuitive – glittering like the fleeting ripple on a stream.

Coriolanus in glory, Coriolanus in disaster, Coriolanus banished, followed one after the other. Before the vision of the banished man Moore's spirit seemed to pause. He stood on the hearth of Aufidius's hall, seeing greatness fallen, but greater than ever in that low estate. With the revenge of Caius Marcius, Moore perfectly sympathized; and again Caroline whispered, "There I see another glimpse of brotherhood in error."

The march on Rome, the mother's supplication, the long resistance, the final yielding of bad passions to good, the death of Coriolanus and his enemy's final sorrow – all flowed on deep and fast, carrying with them the heart and mind of the reader.

"Now, have you felt anything in Coriolanus like you?" asked Caroline, after her cousin had closed the book.

"Perhaps I have."

"Was he not faulty as well as great?"

Moore nodded.

"And what was his fault? What made him hated by the citizens? What caused him to be banished by his countrymen?"

"What do you think it was?"

"It was pride," said Caroline. "You must not be proud to your workpeople; you must soothe them; you must not be inflexible and austere."

"What puts such notions into your head?"

"A care for your safety, dear Robert, and a fear that you will come to harm. I hear my uncle talk about you. He praises your hard and determined spirit, your scorn of low enemies, and your resolution not 'to truckle to the mob.' Yet I cannot help thinking it unjust to include all poor working-people under the insulting name of 'the mob,' and to treat them haughtily."

"You are a little democrat, Caroline. If your uncle knew, what would he say?"

"I rarely talk to my uncle, and never about such things. He thinks everything but sewing and cooking above women's comprehension."

"And do you fancy you comprehend the subjects on which you advise me?"

"I know it would be better for you to be loved by your workpeople than to be hated by them, and I am sure that kindness is more likely to win their regard than pride. If you were proud and cold to me and Hortense, should we love you? When you are cold to me, as you are sometimes, how can I venture to be affectionate in return?"

"Now, Lina, I've had my lesson; it is your turn. Hortense tells me you were much taken by a little piece of poetry you learned the other day, by Chénier – 'La Jeune Captive.' Do you remember it still?"

"I think so."

"Repeat it, then. Take your time and mind your accent; let us have no English u's."

Caroline, beginning in a low, rather tremulous voice, but gaining courage as she proceeded, repeated the sweet verses of Chénier.

Moore listened at first with his eyes cast down, but soon he raised them. Leaning back in his chair he could watch Caroline without her noticing. Her

eyes had an animating light this evening: at the present moment, she might be called beautiful. When she had finished, she turned to Moore.

“Is that pretty well repeated?” she inquired, smiling like a happy child.

“I really don’t know.”

“Have you not listened?”

“Yes – and looked. You are fond of poetry, Lina?”

“When I meet with real poetry, I cannot rest till I have learned it by heart, and so made it partly mine.”

It struck nine o’clock. Sarah entered, and said that Mr. Helstone’s servant was come for Miss Caroline.

“Then the evening is gone already,” Caroline observed, “and it will be long, I suppose, before I pass another here.”

Hortense had been for some time dozing over her knitting, and made no response.

“You would not mind coming here oftener of an evening?” inquired Robert, as he carefully wrapped her mantle round her.

“I like to come; but I have no desire to be intrusive. I am not hinting to be asked; you must understand that.”

“Oh! I understand thee, child. You sometimes lecture me for wishing to be rich, Lina; but if I were rich, you should live here always.”

“That would be pleasant, even if you were poor. Good-night, Robert.”

“I promised to walk with you up to the rectory.”

“I know you did; but I thought you had forgotten. It is a cold night, and as Fanny is come, there is no need—”

“Here is your muff; don’t wake Hortense. Come.”

The half mile to the rectory was soon traversed. They parted in the garden without a kiss, scarcely with a pressure of hands; yet Robert sent his cousin in excited and joyously troubled. He had been singularly kind to her that day.

For himself, he came home grave, almost morose. As he stood leaning on his yard-gate, musing in the moonlight, he exclaimed abruptly:

“This won’t do! There’s weakness and downright ruin in all this.

However,” he added, dropping his voice, “the frenzy is quite temporary. I know it very well; I have had it before. It will be gone tomorrow.”

Chapter 7

THE CURATES AT TEA

Caroline Helstone was just eighteen years old, and at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to begin. Before that age we sit listening to a tale, a marvellous fiction: our world is heroic, its scenes are dream-scenes, with darker woods and stranger hills, brighter skies, more dangerous waters, wider plains, and sunnier fields than are found in nature.

At eighteen, Elf-land lies behind us, the shores of Reality rise ahead. These shores are still distant; they look so blue, soft, and gentle, we long to reach them. There, we think, we would hunger and thirst no more; whereas many a wilderness or stream of sorrow is to be crossed before true bliss can be tasted. Every joy that life gives must be earned; and earned with hardship.

At eighteen we are not aware of this. Hope, when she smiles on us, and promises happiness, is believed; Love, when he comes wandering like a lost angel to our door, is at once welcomed and embraced. If his arrows penetrate, their wound is like a thrill of new life. That perilous passion – even agony – is believed to be an unqualified good. In short, at eighteen the school of experience is yet to be entered, and her humbling, crushing, grinding, but purifying lessons are yet to be learned.

Alas, Experience! No other teacher has so wasted and frozen a face as yours, none wears a robe so black, none bears a rod so heavy. It is by your lessons alone that man or woman can ever find a safe track through life's wilds.

Caroline, having walked home with Robert, had no wish to pass the rest of the evening with her uncle, and kept aloof till the bell rang for prayers. Mr. Helstone read part of the evening church service in his clear, nasal voice. Afterwards, his niece, as usual, stepped up to him.

“Good-night, uncle.”

“Hey! You’ve been gadding abroad all day – visiting, dining out, and what not!”

“Only at the cottage.”

“And have you learned your lessons?”

“Yes.”

“And made a shirt?”

“Part of one.”

“Well, that will do. Stick to the needle, and you’ll be a clever woman some day. Go to bed now. I’m busy with a pamphlet here.”

Presently the niece was in her small bedroom, in her white dressing-gown, her long hair loosened and falling thick and soft to her waist. As she leaned her cheek on her hand and fixed her eyes on the carpet, before her rose the visions we see at eighteen years.

Her thoughts were pleasant, it seemed, for she smiled. The flattering prophet Hope told her that she had entered on the dawn of a summer day, and her sun would quickly rise. Her expectations seemed based on a solid foundation.

“When people love, the next step is they marry,” she thought. “Now, I love Robert, and I feel sure that Robert loves me. When I looked up at him after repeating Chénier’s poem, his handsome eyes sent the truth through my heart. Sometimes I am afraid to speak to him, lest I should be too frank and forward; but tonight I could have dared to express any thought, he was so indulgent. How kind he was as we walked up the lane! He does not flatter or say foolish things; his love-making (friendship, I mean; I don’t account him my lover, but I hope he will be so some day) is not like what we read of in books. It is quiet, manly, sincere. I do like him; I would be an excellent wife to him; I would tell him of his faults (for he has a few faults), but I would study his comfort, and cherish him, and do my best to make him happy. Now, I feel almost certain that tomorrow evening he will either come here, or ask me to go there.”

She began combing her hair. Turning her head she saw herself in the glass. She made a charming picture; and in undiminished gladness she sought her bed.

And in undiminished gladness she rose the next day. As she entered her uncle’s breakfast-room, and with soft cheerfulness wished him good-morning, even that little man of bronze thought, for an instant, that his niece was growing “a fine girl.” Generally she was quiet and timid with him, but this morning she found many things to say. Only slight topics might be discussed; for with a woman Mr. Helstone would touch on no other. She had taken an early walk in the garden, and she told him what flowers were beginning to spring there; she inquired when the gardener was to trim the borders; she informed him that starlings were beginning to build their nests in the nearby church-tower, and she wondered that the tolling of the church bells did not scare them.

Mr. Helstone opined that “they were like other fools who had just paired – insensible.” Caroline, made perhaps a little too courageous by her good spirits, here hazarded a remark of a kind she had never before ventured to make.

“Uncle,” said she, “you always speak of marriage scornfully. Do you think people shouldn’t marry?”

“It is decidedly the wisest plan to remain single.”

“Are all marriages unhappy?”

“Millions of marriages are unhappy. If everybody confessed the truth, perhaps all are more or less so.”

“You are always vexed when you are asked to marry a couple. Why?”

“Because one does not like to act as accessory to a piece of pure folly.”

Mr. Helstone seemed rather glad of the opportunity to give his niece a piece of his mind on this point. Emboldened, she went a little further.

“But why,” said she, “should it be pure folly? If two people like each other, why shouldn’t they live together?”

“They tire of each other in a month. They are not companions, but fellow-sufferers.”

It was not naïveté which inspired Caroline’s next remark; it was a sense of antipathy to such opinions, and displeasure.

“One would think you had never been married, uncle. Why were you so inconsistent as to marry?”

“Every man is mad once or twice in his life.”

“So you tired of my aunt, and my aunt of you, and you were miserable together?”

Mr. Helstone pushed out his cynical lip, wrinkled his forehead, and gave an inarticulate grunt.

“Did she not suit you? Was she not good-tempered? Were you not sorry when she died?”

“Caroline,” said Mr. Helstone, bringing his hand slowly down to within an inch of the table, and then smiting it suddenly on the mahogany, “in every case there is the rule and there are exceptions. Your questions are stupid and babyish. Ring the bell.”

The breakfast was taken away. Usually uncle and niece would now separate until dinner; but today the niece, instead of quitting the room, went to the window-seat, and sat there. Mr. Helstone looked round uneasily once or twice, as if he wished her away; but she was gazing from the window, and did not seem to mind him. So he continued reading his morning paper – a particularly interesting one, as it contained long dispatches from General Lord Wellington. He little knew what tumultuous thoughts were busy in his niece’s mind, like disturbed bees in a hive.

She was reviewing his character and his sentiments on marriage. Many a time had she reviewed them before, and sounded the gulf between her own mind and his; and then, on the other side of the chasm, she had seen, and now saw, another figure standing beside her uncle: a strange, sinister shape – the half-remembered image of her own father, James Helstone, Matthewson Helstone’s brother.

She had heard rumours of that father’s character; old servants had dropped hints; she knew that he was not a good man, and that he was never kind to her. She recollected some dismal weeks that she had spent with him in a great town somewhere, with no maid to take care of her. She had been shut up, day and night, in a high garret-room, without a carpet, with a bare bed, and scarcely any other furniture. He went out early every morning, and often forgot to return and give her dinner during the day; and at night, when he came back, was like a madman, furious, terrible, or – still more painful – like an idiot, senseless. She knew she had fallen ill in this place, and that one night, when she was very sick, he had come raving into the room, and said he would kill her, for she was a burden to him. Her screams had brought aid; and from the moment she was rescued from him she had never seen him again, except as a dead man in his coffin.

That was her father. Also she had a mother, of whom Mr. Helstone never spoke. Caroline could not remember having seen her; but she knew that she was alive. This mother was then the drunkard’s wife. What had their marriage been? Turning from the window, she said in a low, sad voice:

“You call marriage miserable, I suppose, from what you saw of my father and mother’s. If my mother suffered what I suffered when I was with papa, she must have had a dreadful life.”

Mr. Helstone wheeled about in his chair, and looked over his spectacles at his niece. He was taken aback.

Her father and mother! What had put them into her head? During the twelve years she had lived with him, he had never mentioned them. That she had any recollections or ideas about her parents, he could not imagine.

“Your father and mother? Who has been talking to you about them?”

“Nobody; but I remember something of what papa was, and I pity mamma. Where is she?”

This "Where is she?" had been on Caroline's lips hundreds of times before, but till now she had never uttered it.

"I hardly know," returned Mr. Helstone. "I have not heard from her for years: but wherever she is, she thinks nothing of you; she never inquires about you. I have reason to believe she does not wish to see you. Come, it is school-time. You go to your cousin at ten, don't you?"

Perhaps Caroline would have said more, but Fanny came in with a message for the rector; and his niece set out for the cottage.

The road from the rectory to Hollow's Mill led downwards; she ran almost all the way. Exercise, the fresh air, and the thought of seeing Robert revived her somewhat depressed spirits. Arriving in sight of the white house, the first thing she saw was Moore at his garden gate. He stood in his belted Holland shirt, a light cap on, looking the other way down the lane. She stopped behind a willow, and studied him.

"He has no equal," she thought. "He is as handsome as he is intelligent. What a keen eye he has! What clearly-cut, thin and serious features! I do like his face. I do like him so much – better than those shuffling curates – better than anybody; bonny Robert!"

She greeted "bonny Robert". For his part, I believe he would have disappeared like a phantom, if he could; but he was obliged to stay. He made his greeting brief and cousin-like. The charm of last night had left his manner: he was no longer the same man.

Such sharp disappointment! At first the eager girl would not believe in the change. It was difficult to withdraw her hand from his; it was difficult to turn her eyes from his eyes, till he had expressed something fonder than that cool welcome.

A masculine lover can urge explanation: a feminine lover can say nothing – if she did, the result would be shame and anguish. Take the matter as you find it: ask no questions, utter no remonstrance. You expected bread, and you have got a stone: break your teeth on it, and don't shriek. You held out your hand for an egg, and you were given a scorpion. Show no consternation: close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting you. Never mind; in time, after your hand has quivered long with torture, the scorpion will die, and you will have learned the great lesson – how to endure without a sob. For the rest of your life, if you survive the test – some, it is said, die under it – you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive. You will pretend an easy and placid manner at first, settling down to sorrow and paleness in time, and then a half-bitter stoicism. Half-bitter? No; it should be bitter: bitterness is strength – it is a tonic.

Caroline felt that Robert had done her no wrong; he had told her no lie. It was she that was to blame, if anyone was. Any bitterness should be poured on her own head. She had loved without being asked to love.

Robert, indeed, had sometimes seemed to be fond of her; but why? He could not help finding her pleasing – but his judgment did not approve the feeling, nor did he wish it. He withdrew because he did not choose to have his affections entangled, nor to be drawn into a marriage he believed imprudent.

Now, what was she to do? To give way to her feelings, or to vanquish them? To pursue him, or to turn upon herself? If she is weak, she will try the first and will lose his esteem; if she has any sense, she will govern her emotions. She will determine to look on life steadily, as it is; to begin to learn its severe truths.

It appeared she had a little sense, for she quitted Robert quietly, without complaint, without moving a muscle or shedding a tear, betook herself to her studies under Hortense as usual, and at dinner-time went home without lingering.

When she had dined, and found herself alone, the difficulty that occurred to her was, "How am I to get through this day?"

Last night she had hoped that the evening would be again passed happily with Robert. She had learned her mistake; and yet she could not settle down.

More than once, Robert had walked up after tea to spend an hour with her uncle. The door-bell had rung, his voice had been heard in the passage at twilight; and this had happened twice after he had treated her with peculiar reserve. Though he rarely talked to her in her uncle's presence, he had looked at her reluctantly, and had bid her good-night kindly. Now, he might come this evening, False Hope whispered. She almost knew it was False Hope, and yet she listened.

She tried to read – her thoughts wandered; she tried to sew – but it was unbearably tedious; she opened her desk and attempted to write a French composition – she wrote nothing but mistakes.

Suddenly the door-bell rang. Her heart leaped; she sprang to the door, and peeped through. Fanny was admitting a visitor – a tall man – just the height of Robert. For one second she exulted; but the voice asking for Mr. Helstone was Irish. It was the curate, Malone. He was ushered into the dining-room.

At whatever house one curate dropped in to dine, another presently followed, often two more. Not that they gave each other the rendezvous, but they were usually all on the run at the same time; so that when Donne, for instance, sought Malone at his lodgings and found him gone out, he inquired of the landlady where he was and then hastened after him.

Thus it chanced on that afternoon that Caroline's ears were three times tortured with the ringing of the bell; for Donne followed Malone, and Sweeting followed Donne. More wine was ordered up from the cellar; and through the closed doors Caroline heard their boyish laughter, and the vacant cackle of their voices. She was afraid they would stay to tea, for she had no pleasure in making tea for that trio.

Yet not only was she destined to be favoured with their company, but also with four other guests – ladies packed in a phaeton now rolling heavily along the road from Whinbury: an elderly lady and three of her buxom daughters were coming to see her. Yes, a fourth time the bell clanged. Fanny announced:

"Mrs. Sykes and the three Misses Sykes."

Caroline wrung her hands, and stood up nervously, awaiting their entrance. In stalked a tall, bilious gentlewoman. In sailed her three daughters, a showy trio, all well-grown, and more or less handsome.

English country ladies, whether young or old, pretty or plain, almost all have a certain expression stamped on their features, which seems to say, "I know – I do not boast of it, but I know that I am the standard of what is proper; let everyone else, therefore, keep a sharp lookout, for if they differ from me in dress, opinion or anything else, then they are wrong."

Mrs. and Misses Sykes were illustrations of this. Miss Mary – a well-looking, well-meaning girl – wore her complacency with some state, though without harshness. Miss Harriet – a beauty – carried it more overbearingly; she

looked high and cold. Miss Hannah, who was conceited, dashing and pushing, flourished hers openly. The mother showed it with the gravity proper to her age.

The reception was got through somehow. Caroline “was glad to see them”, hoped they were well, hoped Mrs. Sykes’s cough was better (Mrs. Sykes had had a cough for the last twenty years), hoped the younger sisters at home were well; to which inquiry the Misses Sykes replied by one simultaneous bow, very majestic and mighty awful.

A pause followed. Mrs. Sykes then inquired after Mr. Helstone, and his rheumatism; and she and all her daughters, combining in chorus, expressed their opinion that he was “a wonderful man for his years.”

Pause second.

Miss Mary, getting up steam in her turn, asked whether Caroline had attended the Bible Society meeting at Nunnely last Thursday night. Caroline’s negative answer brought a simultaneous expression of surprise from the lips of the four ladies.

“We were all there,” said Miss Mary. “We even persuaded papa to go. But he fell asleep while the German Moravian minister was speaking. I felt quite ashamed.”

“And there was Dr. Broadbent,” cried Hannah, “such a beautiful speaker! Yet he is almost a vulgar-looking man.”

“But such a dear man,” interrupted Mary.

“And such a good man, such a useful man,” added her mother.

“Only like a butcher in appearance,” interposed the fair, proud Harriet. “I couldn’t bear to look at him. I listened with my eyes shut.”

Miss Helstone felt her ignorance. Not having seen Dr. Broadbent, she could not give her opinion. Pause third came on. During it, Caroline was feeling what a dreaming fool she was, and how unfit to mix with the ordinary world. She was conscious of how exclusively she had attached herself to the white cottage in the Hollow, and one inmate of that cottage. She was aware that this would not do, and that some day she would be forced to change. She did not exactly wish to resemble the ladies before her, but she wished to become superior to her present self, so as to feel less scared by their dignity.

The sole means she found of reviving the flagging discourse was by asking them if they would stay to tea. Mrs. Sykes had begun, “We are much obliged to you, but—” when in came Fanny.

“The gentlemen will stay the evening, ma’am,” was the message she brought.

“What gentlemen have you?” inquired Mrs. Sykes. At their names, she and her daughters exchanged glances. The curates were not to them what they were to Caroline. Mr. Sweeting was quite a favourite with them; even Mr. Malone rather so, because he was a clergyman.

“Really, since you have company already, I think we will stay,” remarked Mrs. Sykes. “I always like to meet the clergy.”

And now Caroline had to usher them upstairs, help them to unshawl, smooth their hair and make themselves smart; to lead them to the drawing-room, to distribute amongst them books of engravings, or odd things purchased from the Jew-basket.

It ought perhaps to be explained, for the benefit of those who are not *au fait* with the mysteries of the “Jew-basket” and “missionary-basket,” that these are the size of a clothes-basket, dedicated to the purpose of conveying from

house to house a monster collection of pin-cushions, needle-books, card-racks, articles of infant wear, etc., made by the willing or reluctant hands of the Christian ladies of a parish, and sold to the heathenish gentlemen thereof, at exorbitant prices. The proceeds are applied to the conversion of the Jews, or to the regeneration of the interesting coloured population of the globe. Each lady contributor keeps the basket a month, to sew for it, and to foist off its contents on a shrinking male public. Some active-minded women like it; other feebler souls object to it, and would rather see the prince of darkness at their door than that basket, brought with "Mrs. Rouse's compliments; and please, ma'am, she says it's your turn now."

After Miss Helstone had performed the duties of a hostess, she betook herself to the kitchen, to consult with Fanny and Eliza about the tea.

"What a lot of 'em!" cried Eliza, the cook. "And I put off the baking today because I thought there would be plenty of bread till morning. We shall never have enow."

"Are there any tea-cakes?" asked Caroline.

"Only three and a loaf. I wish these fine folk would stay at home till they're asked; and I want to finish trimming my hat."

"Fanny must run down to Briarfield and buy some muffins and crumpets and biscuits. And don't be cross, Eliza; we can't help it now."

"And which tea-things are we to have?"

"Oh, the best, I suppose. I'll get out the silver service. Get it ready as quickly as you can, for the sooner we have tea the sooner they will go – at least, I hope so."

She sighed as she returned to the drawing-room. "Still," she thought, "if Robert would come even now, how bright all would be! There would be an interest in hearing him talk. There can be no interest in hearing any of *them*. How they will gabble when the curates come in! But I suppose I am a selfish fool. These are very respectable gentlefolks. They are just different from me."

She went in.

Yorkshire people in those days took their tea round the table, sitting with their knees under the mahogany. It was essential to have a multitude of plates of bread and butter. It was thought proper, too, that on the centre plate should stand a glass dish of marmalade. They expected to find an assortment of cheesecakes and tarts. If there was also a plate of thin slices of pink ham garnished with parsley, so much the better.

Eliza, the rector's cook, fortunately knew her business. She had been put out of humour at first, but in due time the tea was spread forth in handsome style, and neither ham, tarts, nor marmalade were lacking.

The curates, summoned to this repast, entered joyous; but at once, on seeing the ladies, of whose presence they had not been warned, they came to a halt in the doorway. Malone, in front, stopped short and fell back, almost capsizing Donne behind him. Donne, staggering three paces in retreat, sent little Sweeting into the arms of old Helstone, who brought up the rear. There was some expostulation, some tittering. Malone was requested to mind what he was doing, and pushed forward at last, blushing.

Helstone welcomed his fair guests, shook hands and passed a jest with each, and seated himself snugly between the lovely Harriet and the dashing Hannah. Miss Mary he requested to move to the seat opposite him, so that he might see her if he couldn't be near her. He was always perfectly easy and

gallant to young ladies, and popular amongst them; yet at heart he neither respected nor liked the sex, and those who had been brought into close relation with him had ever feared rather than loved him.

Sweeting, the least embarrassed of the curates, took refuge beside Mrs. Sykes, who he knew was fond of him. Donne, after bowing and saying in a high voice, "How d'ye do, Miss Helstone?" dropped into a seat at Caroline's elbow, to her annoyance, for she had a peculiar antipathy to Donne, on account of his immovable self-conceit and narrowness of mind. Malone, grinning meaninglessly, sat on her other side. She knew neither man would be of any mortal use in keeping up the conversation, handing round cups, or even passing the muffins. Little Sweeting, small and boyish as he was, would have been worth twenty of them.

Malone, though a ceaseless talker when there were only men present, was usually tongue-tied in the presence of ladies. Three phrases, however, he had ready, which he never failed to produce:

1st. "Have you had a walk today, Miss Helstone?"

2nd. "Have you seen your cousin Moore lately?"

3rd. "Does your class at the Sunday school keep up its number?"

These three questions being put and answered, between Caroline and Malone silence reigned.

With Donne it was otherwise; he was exasperating. He had a stock of the most trite small-talk that can be imagined – abuse of the people of Briarfield; of the natives of Yorkshire generally; complaints of the lack of high society; of the backward state of civilization in these districts; and ridicule of the want of style and elegance in the area, as if he, Donne, had been accustomed to very great doings, an insinuation which his underbred manner failed to bear out.

These comments, he seemed to think, must raise him in Miss Helstone's estimation; whereas they brought him to a level below contempt. A Yorkshire girl herself, she hated to hear Yorkshire abused by such a pitiful prater. Then, incensed, she would turn and say it was no proof of refinement to be forever scolding others for vulgarity, and no sign of a good pastor to be eternally censuring his flock. She would ask him what he had entered the church for, since he complained there were only poor people to preach to. Had he been ordained merely to sit in king's houses? These questions were considered by all the curates as bold and impious.

Tea was a long time in progress; the guests gabbled as their hostess had expected. Mr. Helstone kept up a brilliant flow of easy prattle with his neighbours, and even with Miss Mary; though, as Mary was the most sensible and least coquettish of the three, to her the rector was the least attentive. He could not abide sense in women. He liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible, because that was what he held them to be, and wished them to be – inferior, toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour, and to be thrown away.

Hannah was his favourite. Harriet, though beautiful, egotistical, and self-satisfied, was not quite weak enough for him. She had some genuine self-respect amidst much false pride, and she did not babble like one crazy; she would not permit herself to be treated as a doll or a child; she expected to be bent to like a queen.

Hannah, on the contrary, demanded no respect, only flattery. If her admirers told her that she was an angel, she would let them treat her like an

idiot. So very credulous was she, so very silly when flattered and admired, that there were moments when Helstone actually felt tempted to commit matrimony a second time, and to try the experiment of taking her for his wife; but fortunately the boredom of his first marriage, the memory of the weight of the millstone he had once worn round his neck, checked his tenderness, and restrained him from whispering any proposals to Hannah.

She would probably have married him if he had asked her; her parents would have quite approved the match. To them his fifty-five years and leathery heart would have been no obstacles; and as he was a rector, with an excellent living and a good house, and was supposed to have private property (though in that the world was mistaken; every penny of the £5,000 inherited by him from his father had been devoted to the building of a new church at his native village in Lancashire) – her parents, I say, would have delivered Hannah over to his tender mercies without one scruple; and the second Mrs. Helstone would have fluttered through the honeymoon a bright, admired butterfly, and crawled the rest of her days a sordid, trampled worm.

Little Mr. Sweeting, seated between Mrs. Sykes and Miss Mary, looked and felt more content than any monarch. He was fond of all the Misses Sykes; he thought them magnificent girls. He only regretted that Miss Dora happened to be absent – Dora being the one whom he secretly hoped one day to call Mrs. David Sweeting.

The meal at last drew to a close. It would have been over long ago if Mr. Donne had not persisted in sitting with his cup half full of cold tea before him, long after the rest had finished – long, indeed, after chairs were impatiently pushed back, talk flagged, and silence fell. Vainly did Caroline inquire if he would take a little hot tea, as that must be cold, etc.; he would neither drink it nor leave it. He seemed to think that this isolated position gave him importance, that it was dignified and stately to keep all the others waiting. At length, however, the old rector himself got impatient.

“For whom are we waiting?” he asked.

“For me, I believe,” returned Donne complacently.

“Tut!” cried Helstone. Standing up, he said grace, and all quitted the table. Donne, unabashed, still sat ten minutes quite alone, until Mr. Helstone rang the bell for the tea-things to be removed. The curate was at last forced to empty his cup, and to relinquish the role which, he thought, had given him such distinction.

And now music was asked for. This was Mr. Sweeting’s chance to show off. He began, therefore, to persuade the young ladies to favour the company with a song. He went through the whole business of begging, praying, and resisting excuses, and at last succeeded in leading Miss Harriet to the piano. Then out came the pieces of his flute (he always carried them in his pocket). These were screwed together, Malone and Donne meanwhile sneering at him, which the little man did not heed at all. He was convinced they were envious because they could not accompany the ladies as he could.

His triumph began. Malone, chagrined at hearing him pipe up in most superior style, determined to earn distinction too, and approached a sofa on which Miss Helstone was seated. Depositing his great Irish frame near her, he tried a fine speech or two, accompanied by extraordinary and incomprehensible grins. In his efforts to make himself agreeable, he contrived to possess himself of the two long sofa cushions and a square one; with which, after rolling them

about for some time, he managed to erect a sort of barrier between himself and the object of his attentions. Caroline soon made an excuse for moving to the opposite side of the room, and sat next to Mrs. Sykes, with whom she began to discuss ornamental knitting; and thus Peter Augustus was thrown out.

Very sullen he looked when he found himself abandoned on a large sofa, with the charge of three small cushions on his hands. He wanted seriously to cultivate acquaintance with Miss Helstone, because he thought that her uncle possessed money which he would probably leave to his niece. (Gérard Moore knew better: he had seen the neat church that owed its origin to the rector's zeal and cash, and had cursed the expensive caprice which crossed his wishes.)

The evening seemed long to Caroline. She dropped her knitting on her lap, and gave herself up to a sort of brain-lethargy, caused by the unmeaning hum around her – the rattle of the piano keys, the squeaking and gasping of the flute, her uncle's laughter; and more than all, the interminable gossip of Mrs. Sykes murmured close at her ear.

At length, when Mr. Sweeting came up to speak to Mrs. Sykes, she took the opportunity to slip quietly out of the room, and seek a moment's solitude. She went to the dining-room, where the low remnant of a fire still burned in the grate. The place was empty and quiet. Caroline sank into her uncle's large easy-chair, half shut her eyes, and rested her limbs. As to her mind, however, that flew directly to the Hollow. It stood on the threshold of the parlour there, then it passed to the counting-house, and wondered which spot was blessed by the presence of Robert.

It so happened that Robert was much nearer to Caroline than she suspected. He was at this moment crossing the churchyard, approaching the rectory garden-gate – not, however, coming to see his cousin, but intent solely on giving a piece of news to the rector.

Yes, Caroline; you hear the bell ring for the fifth time this afternoon. You start, and you are certain now that this must be he. You lean forward, listening eagerly as Fanny opens the door. Right! That is the voice – low, with the slight foreign accent, but so sweet. You half rise, thinking, "Fanny will tell him Mr. Helstone is with company, and he will go away."

Oh! she cannot let him go. In spite of herself, she walks half across the room, ready to dart out in case he should retreat; but he enters the passage. "Since your master is engaged," he says, "just show me into the dining-room. Bring me pen and ink. I will write a short note for him."

Now, hearing him advance, Caroline would leave the dining room and disappear if she could. She feels caught; she dreads her unexpected presence may annoy him. But there is no way of escape. Her cousin enters: the look of troubled surprise she expected has appeared on his face, has shocked her, and is gone. She has stammered,

"I only left the drawing-room a minute for a little quiet."

There was something so diffident in the way she said this, that anyone might see some saddening change had passed over her prospects. Mr. Moore probably remembered how she had used to meet him with hopeful confidence. He must have seen how the check of this morning had operated. Here was an opportunity for carrying out his new system with effect. Perhaps he found it easier to practise that system in broad daylight, in his busy mill-yard, than in a quiet parlour in the evening.

Fanny lit the candles, brought writing materials, and left the room. Caroline was about to follow her. Moore, if consistent, should have let her go; whereas he stood in the doorway, and gently kept her back.

“Shall I tell my uncle you are here?” asked she, in the same subdued voice.

“No; I can say to you all I had to say to him. You will be my messenger?”

“Yes, Robert.”

“Then you may inform him that I have got a clue to the identity of one, at least, of the men who broke my frames; and that I hope to have him in custody tomorrow. You can remember that?”

“Oh yes!” These two monosyllables were uttered in a sadder tone than ever; and she sighed. “Will you prosecute him?”

“Doubtless.”

“No, Robert. It will set the neighbourhood against you more than ever.”

“That is no reason why I should not do my duty, and defend my property. This fellow is a scoundrel.”

“But his accomplices will take revenge on you. You do not know how the people of this country bear malice. Some of them boast that they can keep a stone in their pocket for years, before they hurl it and hit their mark.”

Moore laughed. “Don’t fear for me, Lina. I am on my guard. Don’t make yourself uneasy about me.”

“How can I help it? You are my cousin. If anything happened—” She stopped.

“Nothing will happen, Lina. To speak in your own language, there is a Providence above all – and if prayers work, yours will benefit me. You pray for me sometimes?”

“You, Louis, and Hortense are always remembered in my prayers.”

“So I have often imagined,” he said. “When, weary and vexed, I have gone to bed without praying, it has occurred to me that another had asked forgiveness for my day, and safety for my night. I hope your prayers for me are acceptable to God; they doubtless would be, if I deserved them.”

“Annihilate that doubt. It is groundless.”

“When a man has been brought up only to make money, and scarcely breathes any other air than that of mills and markets, it seems odd to utter his name in a prayer; and very strange it seems that a good, pure heart should take him in and harbour him. If I could guide that heart, I believe I should counsel it to exclude one who has no higher aim in life than that of patching up his broken fortune.”

The hint, though conveyed tenderly, was understood and felt keenly by Caroline.

“Indeed, I only think – or I will only think – of you as my cousin,” was the quick answer. “I am beginning to understand things better than I did, Robert. I know it is your duty to try to get on, and that it won’t do for you to be romantic; but you must not misunderstand me if I seem friendly. You misunderstood me this morning, did you not?”

“What made you think so?”

“Your look – your manner.”

“But look at me now—”

“Oh! you are different now. At present I dare speak to you.”

“Yet I am the same, except that I have left the tradesman behind me, and am your kinsman now. Caroline—”

Here the company was heard rising in the other room. The carriage was ordered; shawls and bonnets were demanded.

“I must go, Robert.”

“Yes, you must, or they will come in and find us here; and rather than meet all that host in the passage, I will leave through the French window. One minute only – put down the candle – good-night. I kiss you because we are cousins, and so one – two – three kisses are allowable. Caroline, good-night.”

Chapter 8

NOAH AND MOSES

The next day Moore had risen before the sun, and had ridden to Whinbury and back before his sister had made his coffee and breakfast. What business he did there he kept to himself. Hortense asked no questions.

Breakfast over, he went to his counting-house. Henry, Joe Scott's boy, brought in the letters; Moore sat down and glanced them over. They were all short, but not, it seemed, sweet – probably rather sour, on the contrary; for as Moore laid down the last, he sniffed derisively, and his eye glittered in anger. He dashed off a batch of answers, sealed them, and then went to walk through the mill. On coming back he sat down to read his newspaper.

The contents seemed not to absorb him; he turned his head towards the window; he looked at his watch, and appeared preoccupied. It was a fine, mild morning; perhaps he wished to be out in the fields. The door of his counting-house stood wide open, and the breeze and sunshine entered freely.

A dark-blue apparition – Joe Scott, fresh from a dyeing vat – appeared at the open door, uttered the words "He's comed, sir," and vanished.

A large man, broad-shouldered and massive-limbed, clad in fustian garments and grey woollen stockings, entered, was received with a nod, and told to take a seat. He removed his hat (a very bad one), stowed it away under his chair, and wiped his forehead with a spotted cotton handkerchief, saying that it was "raight dahn warm for Febewerry."

Mr. Moore uttered some slight sound of agreement. The visitor carefully deposited an official-looking staff in the corner; then he began to whistle.

"You have what is necessary, I suppose?" said Mr. Moore.

"Ay, ay! all's right."

He renewed his whistling, Mr. Moore his reading. Presently, however, Moore turned to his cupboard, opened it without rising, took out a black bottle – the same he had produced for Malone's benefit – a tumbler, and a jug, placed them on the table, and said:

"Help yourself; there's water in that jar over there."

"Will you tak naught yourseln, Mr. Moore?" inquired his guest, as he mixed a portion, tasted it, and sank back satisfied in his seat. Moore shook his head.

"Yah'd as good," continued his visitor; "it'd set ye up. Tak my advice and try a glass. Them lads that's coming 'll keep ye talking. Ye'll need propping."

"Have you seen Mr. Sykes this morning?" inquired Moore.

"I seed him just afore I set off. He said he aimed to come here, and I sudn't wonder but ye'll have old Helstone too. I seed 'em saddling his little nag as I passed t' rectory."

The trot of the little nag's hoofs was, five minutes after, heard in the yard. A well-known nasal voice cried aloud, "Boy, lead my horse into the stable." Then Helstone came marching in, looking keener and livelier than usual.

“Beautiful morning, Moore. How do? Ha! whom have we here? Sugden! On my word, you lose no time. Your message was delivered to me, Moore. Are you sure you are on the right scent? Have you got a warrant?”

“Sugden has.”

“Then you are going to seek him now? I’ll accompany you.”

“You will be spared that trouble, sir; he is coming to seek me. I’m awaiting his arrival.”

“And who is it?”

Joe Scott had entered, like a sinister indigo phantom. He said:

“It’s a friend of yours, Mr. Helstone: the Rev. Moses Barraclough. The tub orator you call him sometimes, I think.”

“Ah!” said the rector, taking out his snuff-box, and helping himself to a long pinch. “Why, he never was a workman of yours, Moore. He’s a tailor.”

“And so much the worse grudge I owe him, for interfering and setting my men against me.”

“And Moses was actually present at the battle of Stilbro’ Moor, wooden leg and all?”

“Ay, sir,” said Joe; “he went there on horseback. He was the captain, and wore a mask.”

“And how was he found out?”

“He courted Sarah, Mr. Moore’s sarvant lass,” said Joe, “and she would have nothing to say to him. Happen she’d have encouraged him, in spite of his leg and his deceit, just to pass time like. I’ve known some on ’em do as much – ay, I’ve seen trim young women, that looked as pure as daisies, turn out to be nowt but stinging nettles.”

“Sensible fellow,” said Helstone.

“Howsiver, Sarah had another string to her bow. Fred Murgatroyd, one of our lads, is for her; and two-three months ago, Murgatroyd and Moses chanced to meet one Sunday night. They’d both come to ax Sarah to tak a walk wi’ them. They fell out, had a tussle, and Fred was worsted, for he’s young and small, and Barraclough, for all he has only one leg, is almost as strong as Sugden there.”

“In short,” broke in Mr. Moore, “Murgatroyd was jealous of Barraclough; and last night, as he and a friend took shelter in a barn from a shower, they heard Moses talking with some associates within. From their talk it was plain he had been the leader, not only at Stilbro’ Moor, but in the attack on Sykes’s property. Moreover they planned to send a deputation to me this morning, which Barraclough is to head, and which, in the most religious and peaceful spirit, is to entreat me to give up my frames. I rode over to Whinbury this morning, got a constable and a warrant, and I am now waiting for the group. Here comes Sykes.”

Mr. Sykes entered – a tall stout man of about fifty, who looked anxious.

“Have they been? Have you got him? Is it over?” he asked.

“Not yet,” returned Moore. “We are waiting for them.”

“They’ll not come; it’s near noon. Better give it up. It will make a stir – may have fatal consequences.”

“You need not appear,” said Moore. “I shall meet them in the yard; you can stay here.”

“But my name will be seen in the law proceedings. A wife and family make a man cautious.”

Moore looked disgusted. "I have no objection to act alone," he said; "only you will not find safety in yielding. Your partner Pearson gave way, but that did not prevent them from trying to shoot him in his own house."

"My dear sir, take a little wine and water," recommended Mr. Helstone. A brimming tumbler transfigured Mr. Sykes in two minutes. He now announced that he would endure the insolence of the working-classes no longer; he had made up his mind to put them down.

"Take another glass," urged Moore.

Mr. Sykes didn't mind if he did – just to keep the damp out; he had a little cough (here he coughed to prove the fact), and it really was prudent to take precautions.

"Quite prudent, and take them by all means," urged the host.

Mr. Sykes now addressed Mr. Helstone, who stood watching him keenly.

"You, sir, as a clergyman," said he, "may feel it disagreeable to be present amidst scenes of peril. I dare say your nerves won't stand it. You're a man of peace, sir; but we manufacturers, living in the world, and always in turmoil, get quite belligerent. Really, if anybody was to attack my house – thieves or anything – I believe I should enjoy it, such is my spirit."

The rector laughed. Moore would have pressed a third tumbler upon the heroic mill-owner, but Helstone, for the sake of decorum, prevented him.

"Enough is as good as a feast, is it not, Mr. Sykes?" he said; and Mr. Sykes assented regretfully. Moore looked mischievous and sardonic. What would a certain young kinswoman of his have said if she could have seen her dear, good, great Robert just now?

Yes, it was the same man, only seen on a different side – a side Caroline had not yet beheld, though perhaps she suspected its existence. Well, Caroline had, doubtless, her defective side too. And Moore, with all his faults, might be respected, as might old Helstone. Neither of these two would look, think, or speak a lie; the wretched black bottle had no charms for either of them. Both of them looked and were superior beings to poor Sykes.

A trampling sound was heard in the yard. Moore walked to the window; Helstone followed. They looked forth carefully, so that they might not be visible from outside.

A flourishing oratorical cough was now heard, followed by "Whisht!" Moore opened his window an inch or two to admit sound.

"Joseph Scott," began a snuffling voice – Scott was standing sentinel at the counting-house door – "might we inquire if your master be within?"

"He's within, ay," said Joe.

"Would you then, if you please, tell him that twelve gentlemen wants to see him."

"He'd happen ax what for," suggested Joe.

"For a purpose," was the answer.

Joe entered. "Please, sir, there's twelve gentlemen wants to see ye, 'for a purpose.'"

"Good. Sugden, come when I whistle." Moore went out, chuckling dryly. He advanced into the yard, one hand in his pocket, the other in his waistcoat, his cap brim over his eyes, shading their deep dancing ray of scorn.

Twelve men waited in the yard, with two in front: one, a little dapper strutting man with a turned-up nose; the other a broad-shouldered fellow, with

demure, cat like, trustless eyes, and a wooden leg and crutch. He seemed laughing in his sleeve at some person or thing.

“Good-morning, Mr. Barraclough,” said Moore to him.

“Peace be unto you!” answered Mr. Barraclough, entirely closing his naturally half-shut eyes.

“I’m obliged to you. Peace is an excellent thing; but I imagine peace is not your purpose?”

“As to our purpose,” began Barraclough, “it’s one that may sound strange and perhaps foolish to ears like yours, for the childer of this world is wiser in their generation than the childer of light.”

“To the point, if you please.”

“Ye’se hear, sir. It is a grand purpose, and” (changing his voice to a whine) “it’s the Looard’s own purpose.”

“Do you want a subscription to a new Ranter’s chapel, Mr. Barraclough?”

“I hadn’t that duty on my mind, sir; but since ye mention the subject, I’ll tak ony small trifle ye may have to spare.”

With that he doffed his hat, and held it out as a begging-box with a brazen grin.

“If I gave you sixpence you would drink it. You seem a fine fellow,” said Moore dryly; “you don’t mind showing me that your trade is hypocrisy and fraud. You expect to make me laugh at your cleverness, while at the same time you think you are deceiving the men behind you.”

Moses Barraclough’s countenance lowered. He was going to answer, when the second leader stepped forward impatiently, with a self-confident and conceited air.

“Mr. Moore,” commenced he, enunciating each word very slowly, “it might, perhaps, be said that reason rather than peace is our purpose. We come, in the first place, to request you to hear reason; and should you refuse, it is my duty to warn you that measures will be had resort to which will bring you to a sense of the foolishness which seems to guide your proceedings as a tradesman. Hem! Sir, I would beg to allude that as a furriner, coming from a distant quarter of this globe, thrown, as I may say, a perfect outcast on these cliffs of Albion, you have not that understanding of the ways which might conduce to the benefit of the working-classes. If you’d consider to give up this here mill, and go straight home to where you belong, it ’ud happen be as well.”

The other members of the deputation responded: “Hear, hear!”

“Brayvo, Noah!” murmured Joe Scott, who stood behind Mr. Moore. “Moses’ll niver beat that. Cliffs o’ Albion! Moses is dishd.”

Moses, however, refused to be dishd. Casting a somewhat ireful glance at Noah, he launched out in a more serious tone.

“Before you set up your tent among us, Mr. Moore, we lived i’ peace and quietness – yea, in loving-kindness. I can remember some twenty year back, when hand-labour were respected, and no mischief-maker had ventured to introduce these here machines. Now, I’m a tailor myself. Howsiver, my heart is of a softish nature. I’m a very feeling man, and when I see my brethren oppressed, I stand up for ’em. Therefore I advise you to part wi’ your infernal machinery, and tak on more hands.”

“What if I don’t follow your advice, Mr. Barraclough?”

“The Looard pardon you!”

“Are you a Wesleyan now, Mr. Barraclough?”

“Praise God! Bless His name! I’m a joined Methody!”

“Which does not prevent you from being a drunkard and a swindler. I saw you a week ago laid dead-drunk by the roadside, as I returned from Stilbro’ market; and while you preach peace, you spend your life stirring up dissension. You no more sympathize with the poor than you do with me. You incite them to outrage for bad purposes of your own; so does this Noah. You two are restless, meddling, impudent scoundrels, whose motive is selfish ambition. Behind you are some honest though misguided men; but you two I count altogether bad.”

Barraclough was going to speak.

“Silence! You have had your say, and now I will have mine. I will not be dictated to by you. You want me to quit the country, and to part with my machinery. If I refuse, you threaten me. I do refuse. Here I stay, and by this mill I stand, and into it will I convey the best machinery invented. What will you do? Burn down my mill and shoot me? What then? Suppose that building was a ruin and I was a corpse – would that stop invention? Not for a second! Another mill would rise on the ruins of this, and perhaps a more enterprising owner come in my place. Hear me! I’ll make my cloth as I please, and using what means I choose. Whoever interferes with me may take the consequences. I’ll prove I’m in earnest.”

He whistled shrilly and loud. Sugden came out with his staff and warrant.

Moore turned sharply to Barraclough. “You were on Stilbro’ moor,” said he; “I have proof of that. You wore a mask, you knocked down one of my men with your own hand – you! a preacher of the gospel! Sugden, arrest him!”

Moses was captured. There was a cry and a rush to rescue him, but Moore’s right hand, which had lain hidden in his breast, reappeared holding a pistol.

“Both barrels are loaded,” said he. “Keep off!”

He guarded his prey to the counting-house. He ordered Joe Scott to enter with Sugden and the prisoner, and to bolt the door from inside. Then he walked backwards and forwards along the front of the mill, looking meditatively on the ground, but still holding the pistol.

The eleven remaining deputies watched him, talking under their breath to each other. At length one of them approached.

“I’ve not much faith i’ Moses Barraclough,” said he, “and I would speak a word to you myseln, Mr. Moore. It’s out o’ no ill-will that I’m here; it’s just to try to get things straightened. Ye see we’re ill off; our families is poor and pined. We’re thrown out o’ work wi’ these frames; we can earn nought. What is to be done? Mun we lay us down and dee? I’ve no grand words, Mr. Moore, but I feel that a reasonable man should not starve to death. I’m not for shedding blood, and I’m not for pulling down mills and breaking machines – for as ye say, that niver stops invention; but I’ll mak as big a din as ever I can. I know it isn’t right for poor folks to starve. Them that governs mun find a way to help us. Ye’ll say that’s hard to do. So much louder mun we shout out then, to set t’ Parliament-men on to the job.”

“Worry the Parliament-men as much as you please,” said Moore; “but to worry the mill-owners is absurd, and I won’t stand it.”

“Ye’re a raight hard un!” returned the workman. “Won’t ye gie us a bit o’ time? Won’t ye mak your changes more slowly?”

“Others won’t stop. If I did, I should be bankrupt in a month; and would that put bread into your hungry children’s mouths? William Farren, talk to me

no more about machinery. I shall get new frames in tomorrow. If you broke these, I would still get more. I'll never give in."

Here the mill-bell rang twelve o'clock. Moore abruptly turned away and re-entered his counting-house.

His last words had left a harsh impression. By speaking kindly to William Farren, who was a very honest, hard-working man, Moore might have made a friend. It seemed extraordinary that he could turn from such a man without any sympathy. The poor fellow looked haggard with want and hunger; yet there was no malignity in his face; it was worn, dejected, but still patient. How could Moore leave him thus, with the words, "I'll never give in," and not a whisper of good-will, or aid?

Farren, as he went home to his cottage – once a decent, pleasant place, but now, though still clean, very dreary, because so poor – asked himself this question. He concluded that the foreign mill-owner was a selfish, unfeeling, and foolish man. He felt cast down – almost hopeless.

On his entrance his wife served out such dinner as she had to give him and the bairns. It was only porridge, and too little of that. Some of the younger children asked for more, which disturbed William much. While his wife quieted them as well as she could, he went to the doorway to conceal from his family the tears which were gathering in his grey eyes. He cleared his vision with his sleeve, and the melting mood over, a very stern one followed.

He stood brooding in silence, when a gentleman in black came up – a clergyman, but not one we have met before. He was about forty years old; plain-looking, and rather grey-haired. He wore an abstracted and somewhat doleful air; but on approaching Farren he looked up with a hearty expression.

"Is it you, William? How are you?" he asked.

"Middling, Mr. Hall. How are ye? Will ye step in and rest ye?"

Mr. Hall was vicar of Nunnely, from which parish Farren originally came, before he had moved to Briarfield to work in the mill. He entered the cottage, and having greeted the wife and children, sat down. He talked very cheerfully about events in his parish since the family had left; he answered questions about his sister Margaret; he asked questions in his turn, and at last, glancing anxiously round at the bare room, and at the faces of the children by his knee, he said abruptly:

"How are you all? How do you get on?"

"We get on poorly," said William; "we're all out of work. I've sold most o' t' household stuff, as ye may see; and what we're to do next, God knows."

"Has Mr. Moore turned you off?"

"He has turned us off; and if he'd tak me on again tomorrow I wouldn't work for him."

"That is not like you, William."

"I know; but I feel I am changing. T' bairns and t' wife are that pinched—"

"Well, my lad, and so are you. These are grievous times; I see suffering wherever I turn. Sit down, and let us talk it over."

Mr. Hall lifted the smallest child on to his knee, and placed his hand on the head of the next smallest.

"Sad times," he said, "and they last long. It is the will of God. His will be done. But He tries us to the utmost."

Again he reflected.

“You’ve no money, William, and you’ve nothing you could sell to raise any?”

“No. I’ve selled t’ chest o’ drawers, and t’ clock, and a mahogany stand, and t’ wife’s bonny tea-tray and set o’ wedding chiney.”

“If somebody lent you a pound or two, could you make any good use of it? Could you get into a new way of doing something?”

Farren did not answer, but his wife said quickly, “Ay, I’m sure he could, sir. He’s a very contriving chap, is our William. If he’d two or three pounds he could begin selling stuff.”

“Please God,” returned William deliberately, “I could buy groceries, and bits o’ tapes, and thread, and I could begin hawking at first.”

“And you know, sir,” interposed Grace, “William would neither drink, nor idle, nor waste, in any way. He’s my husband, and I shouldn’t praise him; but I will say there’s not a soberer, honester man i’ England.”

“Well, I’ll speak to one or two friends, and I think I can promise to let him have five pounds in a day or two – as a loan, mind, not a gift. He must pay it back.”

“I understand, sir. I’m quite agreeable to that.”

“Meantime, there’s a few shillings for you, Grace, just to keep the pot boiling. – Now, bairns, stand in a row and say your catechism, while your mother goes and buys some dinner; for you’ve not had much today, I’ll be bound. You begin, Ben.”

Mr. Hall stayed till Grace came back; then he took his leave, shaking hands with both Farren and his wife, and saying a few brief but very earnest words of religious consolation.

With a mutual “God bless you, sir!” “God bless you, my friends!” they separated.

Chapter 9

BRIARMAINS

Messrs. Helstone and Sykes congratulated Mr. Moore when he returned to them. He was so quiet, however, and so still and grim, that the rector, after glancing shrewdly into his eyes, buttoned up his coat, and said to Sykes:

“Come, sir; your road and mine lie partly together. We’ll bid Moore good-morning.”

“Where is Sugden?” demanded Moore.

“Ah, ha!” cried Helstone. “I’ve not been quite idle. While you were busy parleying with that Farren, I opened this back window, shouted to Murgatroyd to bring Mr. Sykes’s gig round; then I smuggled Sugden and brother Moses – wooden leg and all – through the opening, and saw them mount the gig. Sugden took the reins, and in another quarter of an hour Barraclough will be safe in Stilbro’ jail.”

“Very good; thank you,” said Moore; “and good-morning, gentlemen.” He politely conducted them to the door.

He was taciturn and serious the rest of the day. He did not even bandy repartee with Joe Scott, who looked at him a good deal out of the corners of his eyes, and as he was locking up for the day, observed that it was a grand evening, and he “could wish Mr. Moore to take a bit of a walk up th’ Hollow. It would do him good.”

At this, Mr. Moore burst into a short laugh, and after demanding whether Joe took him for a woman or a child, he seized the keys from his hand, and shoved him out by the shoulders. He called him back, however, to ask:

“Joe, do you know those Farrens? They are not well off, I suppose?”

“No, sir, for they’ve not had work for three month. They’ve selled most o’ t’ stuff out o’ th’ house.”

“He was not a bad workman?”

“Ye never had a better, sir.”

“And decent people – the family?”

“None dacenter. Th’ wife’s a raight cant body, and so clean ye mught eat your porridge off th’ floor. They’re sorely comed down. I wish William could get a job as gardener or summat; he understands gardening.”

“You can go, Joe. You need not stand there staring at me.”

“Ye’ve no orders to give, sir?”

“None. Take yourself off.”

Which Joe did accordingly.

Though this had been a fine day, the air chilled at sunset, the ground crisped, and by dusk frost was insidiously stealing over the grass. It whitened the pavement in front of Briarmains, Mr. Yorke’s house, and made silent havoc among the tender plants in his garden.

In the moonless night, lights from the windows shone vividly. This was no lonely scene; Briarmains stood near the highway. It was an old place, built before the highway was cut. Briarfield town lay scarce a mile off; its hum was heard, its glare distinctly seen. Briar Chapel, a large, new, raw Wesleyan place

of worship, rose a hundred yards distant; and as there was a prayer-meeting being held within its walls, its windows cast a bright reflection on the road, while a hymn roused cheery echoes. The words were distinctly audible, sung with a jaunty buoyancy:

*“Oh! who can explain
This struggle for life,
This travail and pain,
This trembling and strife?”*

After the hymn followed clamorous prayer, accompanied by fearful groans and frantic shouts, and more noisy singing.

Briarmains was quieter. Its windows too were aglow; curtains concealed the interior, but did not entirely muffle the sound of voices and laughter. We are privileged to enter that front door, and to join Mr. Yorke's family within.

This is the usual sitting-room of an evening. Those windows are of brilliantly-stained glass, with purple and amber glittering round a medallion in the centre of each, representing the heads of Shakespeare and Milton. Some Canadian views hang on the walls – green forest and blue water – and in the midst of them blazes a night-eruption of Vesuvius.

The fire is heaped high in the ample chimney. Mr. Yorke sits beside it with a book; but he is not reading – he is watching his children. Opposite him sits his lady: a large woman of grave aspect, wearing an expression of care – the sort of care of a person who deems it her duty to be gloomy. In Mrs. Yorke's opinion, to be cheerful was to be frivolous. Yet she was a very good wife, a careful mother, looked after her children unceasingly, and was sincerely attached to her husband; although if she could, she would not have allowed him any friend in the world besides herself.

Mr. Yorke and she agreed perfectly well; yet he was a social, hospitable man, and in his youth, as has been said, he liked lively, cheerful women. Why he chose her is puzzling. But Yorke had a shadowy side as well as a sunny side to his character, and his shadowy side found sympathy in his wife's overcast nature. For the rest, she was a strong-minded woman; never said a weak or a trite thing; was rather stern and cynical; considered herself right, and the rest of the world all wrong. Her main fault was a brooding suspicion of all men, things and beliefs, which hindered her vision.

It may be supposed that the children of such a pair were not likely to turn out commonplace beings; and they were not. You see six of them, reader. The youngest is a baby on the mother's knee. It is all her own still, and therefore she loves it.

The two next are girls, Rose and Jessy; they are both at their father's knee; they seldom go near their mother, except when obliged to do so. Rose, the elder, is twelve years old; she is like her father, but softened, with round cheeks and grey eyes lit by a serious soul – a young soul yet, but it will mature; and neither father nor mother have a spirit to compare with it. Rose is sometimes a stubborn girl, with a mind thick-sown with the germs of ideas her mother never knew. She has never rebelled yet; but if hard driven, she will rebel one day. Rose loves her father, for he is good to her. He sometimes fears she will not live long, and this idea makes him sadly tender to her.

He has no idea that little Jessy will die young, she is so gay and chattering, arch and original; by turns gentle and rattling; exacting, yet generous; fearless of her mother, yet reliant on anyone who will help her. Jessy,

with her engaging prattle and winning ways, is made to be a pet, and her father's pet she accordingly is.

Let us hold up a magic mirror, and see their destinies.

This place is unfamiliar, but the stone crosses are not; we recognize the cypress and the yew. Here is the place where Jessy sleeps. Much loved was she, much loving. Her death was tranquil and happy in Rose's arms, for Rose had been her stay and defence through many trials.

Now, behold Rose two years later. This landscape is far from England; remote must be those wild, luxuriant shores. Unknown birds flutter round the skirts of that forest; no European river this, on whose banks Rose sits thinking. The little quiet Yorkshire girl is a lonely emigrant in the southern hemisphere. Will she ever come back?

The three eldest of the family are all boys – Matthew, Mark, and Martin. They are seated together in the corner, their three heads much alike at first glance. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, red-cheeked are the whole trio; yet a distinctive character belongs to each.

Matthew, the first-born, seems to have an affinity to one picture in the room – the eruption of Vesuvius. Flame and shadow make up that lad's soul, no English sunshine. You would say he is an Italian stiletto in a sheath of British workmanship. Look at his scowl. Mr. Yorke sees it, and in a low voice he pleads, "Mark and Martin, don't anger your brother." This is the tone adopted by both parents. Matthew is never to be vexed, never to be opposed; they avert provocation from him as assiduously as they would avert fire from a barrel of gunpowder. They are fast making him a tyrant. The younger children feel this, and rebel against the injustice. The dragon's teeth are already sown; discord will one day be the harvest.

Mark is a bonny-looking boy. He is calm and shrewd; he can say the driest, most cutting things in the quietest of tones. Despite his tranquillity, a somewhat heavy brow speaks of temper. Life will never have much joy in it for Mark. By the time he is five-and-twenty he will wonder why people ever laugh, and think merry men are all fools. Mark is now fourteen, but his soul is already thirty.

Martin, the youngest of the three, has another nature. Life may, or may not, be brief for him, but it will certainly be brilliant. He will pass through all its illusions, half believe in them, wholly enjoy them, then outlive them. The boy is plainer than his brothers; but at near twenty he will become handsome. For a space he will be a vain puppy, eager for pleasure and admiration, but also thirsty for knowledge. And what next? I know not.

Altogether, there is much mental power in those six young Yorke heads, much originality and vigour of brain. Mr. Yorke knows this, and is proud of them. Yorkshire has such families here and there – peculiar, racy, strong and clever; somewhat turbulent and proud, wanting polish, but sound and spirited.

A low tap is heard at the parlour door.

"Come in," says Mrs. Yorke, in her funereal tone. And in comes Robert Moore.

Moore's habitual gravity has recommended him to Mrs. Yorke. She has not yet tried to stop her husband from seeing him; she has not yet found out that Moore is a wolf in sheep's clothing – a discovery which she made soon after marriage about most of her husband's bachelor friends, excluding them from her house accordingly.

“Well, is it you?” she says to Mr. Moore. “What are you roving about at this time of night for? You should be at home.”

“Can a single man be said to have a home, madam?” he asks.

“Pooh!” says Mrs. Yorke. “You need not talk nonsense to me; a single man can have a home if he likes. Pray, does not your sister make a home for you?”

“When I was Robert’s age I had five or six sisters,” said Mr. Yorke, “but it did not hinder me from looking out for a wife.”

“And sorely he has repented marrying me,” added Mrs. Yorke, who liked occasionally to crack a dry jest against matrimony, even at her own expense. “He has repented it in sackcloth and ashes, Robert Moore, as you may well believe when you see his punishment” (here she pointed to her children). “Who would burden themselves with such great, rough lads as those, if they could help it? Young sir, when you feel tempted to marry, look twice before you leap.”

“I am not tempted now, at any rate. I think these are not times for marrying.”

Mrs. Yorke nodded in approval; but she said, “That wisdom will be upset by the first fancy that crosses you. Sit down, sir.”

He had no sooner obeyed than little Jessy jumped from her father’s knee and ran into Mr. Moore’s arms, which were promptly held out to receive her.

“He is married now, or as good,” said she to her mother, quite indignantly, as she was lifted lightly to his knee, “for he promised that I should be his wife last summer, the first time he saw me in my new frock. Didn’t he, father?”

“Ay, my little lassie, he promised; I’ll bear witness. He is false.”

“He is not false. He is too bonny to be false,” said Jessy, looking up confidently at her tall sweetheart.

“Bonny!” cried Mr. Yorke. “That’s the proof that he’s a scoundrel.”

“But he looks too sorrowful to be false,” interposed Rose quietly. “If he was always laughing, I should think he forgot promises soon, but Mr. Moore never laughs.”

“Your sentimental buck is the greatest cheat of all, Rose,” remarked Mr. Yorke.

“He’s not sentimental,” said Rose.

Mr. Moore turned to her, surprised and smiling.

“How do you know I am not sentimental, Rose?”

“Because I heard a lady say you were not.”

“A lady!” exclaimed Mr. Yorke. “That has quite a romantic twang. We must guess who it is. Rosy, whisper the name to your father.”

“Rose, don’t be forward,” interrupted Mrs. Yorke, “nor Jessy either. All children, especially girls, should be silent in the presence of their elders.”

“Why have we tongues, then?” asked Jessy pertly; while Rose only looked at her mother with grave deliberation, before asking, “And why especially girls, mother?”

“Firstly, because I say so; and secondly, because reserve is a girl’s best wisdom.”

“My dear madam,” observed Moore, “what you say is excellent; but really it does not apply to these little ones. Let Rose and Jessy talk. I like their prattle; it does me good.”

“Does it not?” asked Jessy. “More good than the rough lads. There are plenty of people who take notice of the boys. When gentlemen come here to dine, it is always the boys that are talked to, and never Rose and me. Mr. Moore is our friend. But mind, Rose, he’s not so much your friend as he is mine. Remember that!” And she held up her small hand with a warning gesture.

Rose was quite accustomed to be admonished by that small hand. Her will daily bent itself to that of the impetuous little Jessy. On pleasant occasions Jessy took the lead, and Rose fell quietly into the background; whereas in the difficulties of life, Rose took her sister’s share upon her, as well as her own. Jessy had already decided that when she married, Rose, an old maid, would live with her, look after her children and keep her house. Jessy possessed charm; while Rose had a fine, generous, true soul, but charm she had not.

“Now, Rose, tell me the name of this lady who denied that I was sentimental,” urged Mr. Moore.

“I don’t know her name.”

“What was she like? Where did you see her?”

“When Jessy and I went to spend the day with Kate and Susan Pearson, the Misses Sykes were sitting in Mrs. Pearson’s drawing-room talking about you.”

“Good. Were they abusing me, Rosy?”

“Some of them called you a misanthrope. I looked for it in the dictionary when I came home. It means a man-hater. And Hannah Sykes said you were a solemn puppy.”

“Better!” cried Mr. Yorke, laughing. “Oh, excellent! Hannah’s a fine girl, but half-witted.”

“A solemn puppy, indeed!” said Moore. “Well, Rose, go on.”

“Miss Pearson said you were affected, and that with your dark hair and pale face you looked like a sentimental noodle.”

Again Mr. Yorke laughed. Mrs. Yorke even joined in this time. “You see in what esteem you are held,” said she; “yet I believe Miss Pearson would like to catch you.”

“And who contradicted her, Rosy?” inquired Moore.

“A lady whom I don’t know, though every Sunday at church she sits in the pew near the pulpit. She is like a picture in our dining-room, that woman with the dove in her hand – at least she has eyes like it, and a straight nose, that makes her face look, somehow, clear.”

“And you don’t know her!” exclaimed Jessy, in a tone of exceeding surprise. “Mr. Moore, I often wonder what world my sister lives in. To think of her going to church every Sunday, and never asking that person’s name. She means Caroline Helstone, the rector’s niece. She was quite angry with Anne Pearson. She said, ‘Robert Moore is neither affected nor sentimental; you mistake his character utterly.’ Miss Helstone is nice; she has a pretty white slender throat; she has long soft curls; she speaks quietly, and she never makes a bustle in moving; she often wears a grey silk dress; she is neat all over. She is what I call a lady, and when I am as tall as she is, I mean to be like her. Shall I suit you if I am? Will you really marry me?”

Moore stroked Jessy’s hair, but then put her a little farther off.

“Oh! you won’t have me? You push me away.”

“Why, Jessy, you care nothing about me. You never come to see me now at the Hollow.”

“Because you don’t ask me.”

Hereupon Mr. Moore gave both the little girls an invitation to visit next day, promising that, as he was going to Stilbro’ in the morning, he would buy them each a present. Jessy was about to reply, when one of the boys broke in:

“I know that Miss Helstone you have been palavering about. She’s an ugly girl. I hate her. I hate all womenites. I wonder what they were made for.”

“Martin!” said his father. “Martin, my lad, thou’rt a swaggering whelp now; thou wilt some day be an outrageous puppy. But stick to those sentiments of thine. See, I’ll write down the words now i’ my pocket-book. Ten years hence, Martin, I’ll remind thee of that speech.”

“I’ll say the same then. I mean always to hate women. They’re such dolls; they do nothing but dress themselves finely, and go swimming about to be admired. I’ll never marry.”

“Stick to it! – Hesther” (addressing his wife), “I was like him when I was his age; and, behold! by the time I was three-and-twenty I curled my hair every night, and wore a ring i’ my ear, and would have worn one i’ my nose if it might charm the ladies. Martin will do the like.”

Martin looked disdainful, but made no reply. Meantime Mark, who had been rummaging amongst some books on a side-table, spoke in a slow, quiet voice, and with an ironic expression.

“Mr. Moore,” said he, “you think perhaps it was a compliment on Miss Caroline Helstone’s part to say you were not sentimental. You turned red, as if you felt flattered. I’ve been looking up ‘sentimental’ in the dictionary, and I find it to mean ‘tinctured with sentiment.’ And ‘sentiment’ means thought, idea, notion. A sentimental man, then, is one who has thoughts and ideas; an unsentimental man is one without thoughts or ideas.”

Rose replied. “There are different kinds of thoughts and ideas, good and bad. Miss Helstone must have taken sentimental to mean having bad thoughts, for she was not blaming Mr. Moore; she was defending him, just as I should have done in her place, for the other ladies seemed to speak spitefully.”

“Ladies always speak spitefully,” observed Martin. “It is the nature of womenites to be spiteful.”

Matthew now spoke for the first time. “What a fool Martin is, always gabbling about what he does not understand!”

“It is my privilege, as a freeman, to gabble on whatever subject I like,” responded Martin.

“You ought to have been a slave,” rejoined the elder brother.

“A slave!”

“Mountebank!” said Matthew.

“Lads, be silent!” exclaimed Mr. Yorke. “Martin, you are a mischief-maker.”

“Did I begin, or Matthew? He accused me of gabbling like a fool!”

“A presumptuous fool!” repeated Matthew.

Here Mrs. Yorke began rocking herself – rather a portentous movement with her, as it was occasionally followed by a fit of hysterics, especially when Matthew was worsted in a conflict.

“I don’t see what right Matthew has to use bad language to me,” said Martin.

“He has no right, my lad; but forgive your brother until seventy-and-seven times,” said Mr. Yorke soothingly.

“Always the same!” murmured Martin, leaving the room.

“Where art thou going, my son?” asked the father.

“Somewhere where I shall be safe from insult. I suppose I may go?”

Matthew laughed insolently. Martin threw a strange look at him, and trembled; but he restrained himself.

“Go, my lad,” said Mr. Yorke; “but remember not to bear malice.”

Martin went, and Matthew sent another insolent laugh after him. Rose, lifting her fair head from Moore’s shoulder, said to Matthew, “Martin is grieved, and you are glad; but I would rather be Martin than you. I dislike your nature.”

Here Mr. Moore, by way of averting a scene, stood up and kissed Jessy and Rose, reminding them to come to the Hollow tomorrow afternoon. He said to Mr. Yorke:

“May I speak a word with you?”

They conferred briefly in the hall.

“Have you employment for a good workman?” asked Moore.

“A nonsense question in these times, when you know that every master has many good workmen to whom he cannot give work.”

“Oblige me by taking on this man, if possible. I must find him a place somewhere.”

“Who is he?”

“William Farren.”

“I know William. An honest man.”

“He has been out of work three months. He has a large family. He was one of the cloth-dressers who came to me this morning to complain and threaten. William did not threaten. He only asked me to give them more time, but you know I cannot do that. I sent them away, after arresting a rascal amongst them – a fellow who preaches at the chapel yonder.”

“Not Moses Barraclough?”

“Yes. But I’m determined to get Farren a place, and I rely on you to give him one.”

“This is cool!” exclaimed Mr. Yorke. “What right have you to rely on me to provide for your dismissed workmen? I’ve heard he’s an honest man, but am I to support all the honest men in Yorkshire? I’ll none of it.”

“Come, Mr. Yorke, what can you find for him to do? You have land. Find him some work on your land, Mr. Yorke.”

“Bob, I thought you cared nothing about the workmen. I don’t understand this change.”

“The fellow spoke truth and sense, while the others merely jabbered. Let him have work.”

“Let him have it yourself, if you are so very much in earnest.”

“I received letters this morning which showed me pretty clearly where I stand,” said Moore, “and it is not far off the end of the plank. If there is no change – if the Orders in Council are not suspended – I do not know where I am to turn. I see no light, and for me to pretend to offer a man a livelihood would be dishonest.”

“Come, let us take a turn outside. It is a starlit night,” said Mr. Yorke.

They went out, and paced the frost-white pavement.

“You have large fruit-gardens at Yorke Mills,” urged Mr. Moore. “Farren is a good gardener. Give him work there.”

“Well, I’ll send for him tomorrow, and we’ll see. And now, my lad, you’re concerned about your affairs?”

“Yes. A second failure would blight the name of Moore completely; and you are aware I had fine intentions of paying off every debt and re-establishing the old firm.”

“You need capital – that’s all.”

“Yes; but you might as well say that breath is all a dead man needs to live.”

“If you were married with a family, I should think your case pretty desperate; but you’re young and unencumbered. I hear gossip now and then about your being on the eve of marriage with this miss and that; but I suppose none of it is true?”

“I am not in a position to be dreaming of marriage. Marriage! I cannot bear the word; it sounds so silly and utopian. I have decided that marriage and love are only for the rich; or the deeply wretched, who never hope to rise out of the slough of utter poverty.”

“If I were you, I should think I could very likely get a wife with a few thousands, who would suit both me and my affairs. Would you try if you had a chance?”

“I don’t know.”

“Would you take an old woman?”

“I’d rather break stones on the road.”

“So would I,” said Yorke. “Would you take an ugly one?”

“Bah! I won’t have an ugly wife.”

“Not if she were rich?”

“Not if she were dressed in gems. I could not love her – I could not endure her. My disgust would break out in despotism, or worse – freeze to utter iciness.”

“What! Bob, if you married an honest, good-natured, wealthy lass, though a little hard-favoured, couldn’t you put up with the plain features?”

“I’ll never try, I tell you. I will have youth, and beauty.”

“And poverty, and a nursery full of bairns you can neither clothe nor feed, and very soon an anxious, faded mother; and then bankruptcy and a life-long struggle.”

“Let me alone, Yorke.”

“If you are romantic, Robert, and especially if you are already in love, it is of no use talking.”

“I am not romantic.”

“And there is no love affair to disturb your judgment?”

“I thought I had said that before.”

“Well, then, there is no reason why you should not profit by a good chance if it offers; therefore, wait and see. I promise ye naught and I advise ye naught; but keep your heart up. Go home, now. Miss Hortense will be wondering where ye are.”

Chapter 10

OLD MAIDS

Spring matured, and the surface of England began to look pleasant: her fields grew green, her gardens bloomed; but at heart she was no better. Still her poor were wretched, still their employers were harassed. Commerce seemed threatened with paralysis, for the war continued; England's blood was shed and her wealth lavished, it seemed, in vain. There were occasionally tidings of successes in the Peninsula, but these came in slowly. Men like Yorke and Moore, shuddering on the verge of bankruptcy, insisted on peace with the energy of desperation.

The British merchant classes are intensely selfish. They think exclusively of making money; they are oblivious of every national consideration but that of extending England's commerce. Chivalry is dead in their hearts. Tradesmen profess to hate war because it is bloody and barbarous; you would think, to hear them talk, that they are gentle and kindly to their fellow-men. This is not the case. Many of them are extremely narrow and cold-hearted; distant, even hostile, to all classes but their own, questioning their very right to exist. Long may it be ere England really becomes a nation of shop-keepers!

Moore was no self-sacrificing patriot, and spoke out against the war. Sometimes, by flashes, he felt there was little reason in his demands. When he heard of all Europe threatened by Bonaparte, and arming to resist him; when he saw Russia menaced, and Russia rising, incensed and stern, to defend her frozen soil, he knew that England could not make concessions to the grasping French leader. When he read Lord Wellington's dispatches in the newspapers, Moore felt that vigilant commander must win victory in the end. But the end, he thought, was still far off; and meantime he, Moore, would be crushed, his hopes ground to dust. It was himself he had to care for.

He soon came to a decisive rupture with his old Tory friend the rector. They quarrelled at a public meeting, and afterwards exchanged some pungent letters in the newspapers. Mr. Helstone denounced Moore as a Jacobin, and would not speak to him when they met. He told his niece that her communications with Hollow's Cottage must cease; she must give up taking French lessons. The language, he observed, was a bad and frivolous one, and most works in French were highly injurious to weak female minds. Caroline must give up French, and give up her cousins too. They were dangerous people.

Mr. Helstone quite expected tears. He had a vague idea that she was fond of going to Hollow's Cottage; also he suspected that she liked Robert Moore's occasional presence at the rectory. He had perceived that when the Irish curate Malone visited, Caroline would disappear upstairs, and remain invisible till called down to supper. On the other hand, when Robert Moore was the guest, she stayed in the room, quietly stitching pin-cushions. Robert paid her little attention; but Mr. Helstone had watched them when they bade each other good-night. He had seen their eyes meet only once. There was nothing in that glance to offend: only Moore smiled slightly, and Caroline coloured as slightly.

Mr. Helstone was annoyed. Why? Impossible to say. If you had asked him, he would have stormed against flirtation and love-making, and vowed he would have no such folly going on under his roof.

For this reason, as well as political ones, he resolved to separate the cousins. He announced his will to Caroline one evening as she was sitting at work near the drawing-room window. The light fell on her face, and it struck him that she was looking paler and quieter than she used to. He had noticed that Robert Moore's name had never, for some three weeks, dropped from her lips; nor had Moore during that time visited the rectory. Some suspicion of secret meetings haunted Mr. Helstone. He thought women needed constant watching. In a dryly significant tone he desired Caroline to cease her daily visits to the Hollow. He expected a start; but saw only a very slight one.

"Do you hear me?" he asked.

"Yes, uncle."

"Of course you mean to attend to what I say?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And there must be no letter-scribbling to your cousin Hortense – no communication whatever. I do not approve of the principles of the family. They are Jacobinical."

"Very well," said Caroline quietly. There was no vexed flushing of the face, no gathering tears; she was thoughtful and obedient.

Yes, perfectly; because the order coincided with her own decision. It was now painful to her to go to Hollow's Cottage; nothing met her there but disappointment. Hope and love had left that little house, for Robert seemed to have deserted it. Whenever she asked after him, he was away from home, or taken up with business.

Only at church had Caroline the chance of seeing him, and there she rarely looked at him. It was both too much pain and too much pleasure to look – it brought too much emotion; and that it was all wasted emotion she had learned to comprehend.

Once, on a dark, wet Sunday, when there were few people at church, Caroline had allowed her eye to seek Robert's pew. He was there alone. Hortense had been kept at home by the rain. He sat with folded arms and eyes cast down, looking very sad and abstracted. By instinct Caroline knew that his thoughts were far away, not merely from her, but from all in which she could sympathize. He was wrapped up in responsibilities in which she could have no part.

She speculated on his feelings, on his life, on his fears, on his fate; mused over the mystery of "business," tried to understand its perplexities and duties, and to enter into his state of mind, to feel what he would feel. She wished earnestly to see things as they were, and not to be romantic. By dint of effort she contrived to get a glimpse of the truth here and there.

"Different, indeed," she concluded, "is Robert's mental condition to mine. I think only of him; he has no leisure to think of me. Love is the chief emotion of my heart – always there, always awake. Quite other feelings absorb him. He is rising now to leave the church, for service is over. Will he turn his head towards me? No. That is hard. A kind glance would have made me happy till tomorrow. He would not give it; he is gone. Strange that grief should now almost choke me, because another human's eye has failed to greet mine."

That Sunday evening, when Mr. Malone came as usual to visit his rector, Caroline withdrew to her chamber, where Fanny had lit her a fire. Closeted there, silent and solitary, what could she do but think? She noiselessly paced to and fro, her head drooped, her hands folded.

Mute was the room, mute the house. The double door of the study muffled the voices of the gentlemen. She had a religious book open on the table, but she could not read it. Its theology was incomprehensible to her, and her own mind was too busy to listen to the language of another mind.

Her imagination was full of pictures – images of Moore, scenes where he and she had been together; winter fireside sketches; a hot summer afternoon in Nunnely Wood; mild spring or mellow autumn moments, when she had sat at his side in Hollow's Copse, listening to the call of the May cuckoo, or sharing the September treasure of nuts and blackberries.

Robert's face was with her; his voice was quite distinct in her ear; his few caresses seemed renewed. But the pictures faded, the voice failed, and where the warm lips had made impress on her forehead, it felt now as if a cold raindrop had fallen. She returned to the real world: she saw her narrow chamber, and heard the rain on the window; for companionship she had own dim shadow on the wall.

Sitting down, she said to herself, "I have to live, perhaps, till I am seventy. Half a century of existence may lie before me. How am I to occupy it? What am I to do to fill the time which spreads between me and the grave?"

She reflected.

"I shall not be married, it appears," she continued. "I suppose, as Robert does not care for me, I shall never have a husband to love, nor little children to take care of. Till lately I had reckoned securely on the duties and affections of wife and mother to occupy my existence; but now I perceive plainly I may have been mistaken. Probably I shall be an old maid. I shall live to see Robert married to some rich lady. I shall never marry. What was I created for, I wonder? Where is my place in the world?"

She mused again.

"Ah! that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve. Other people solve it for them by saying, 'Your place is to do good and help others.' That is right in some measure, and a very convenient doctrine for the people who hold it; but I perceive that certain sets of human beings are very apt to say that other sets should give up their lives to them, and then they reward them by calling them devoted and virtuous. Is this enough? Is there not a terrible hollowness, mockery, want, in that existence which is given away to others? I suspect there is. Does virtue lie in denial of self? I do not believe it. Undue humility creates tyranny in others; weak concession creates selfishness. Each human being has his share of rights. Queer thoughts these that surge in my mind. Are they right thoughts? I am not certain.

"Well, life is short at the best. Seventy years, they say, pass like a dream; and every path trod by human feet ends in the grave, the furrow where the mighty husbandman with the scythe sets the seed he has shaken from the ripe stem; there it falls, decays, and thence it springs again, when the world has rolled round a few times more. So much for the body. The soul meantime wings its long flight upward, folds its wings on the brink of the sea of fire and glass, and gazing through the burning clearness, finds there mirrored the vision of the sovereign Father, the mediating Son, the Creator Spirit. Such words, at least,

have been chosen to express what is inexpressible. The soul's real hereafter who shall guess?"

Her fire was out; the study bell rang for prayers.

The next day Caroline had to spend alone, since her uncle was dining with Dr. Boulton, vicar of Whinbury. The whole time she talked inwardly in the same way, asking what she was to do with life. Fanny, passing in and out of the room on housemaid errands, perceived that her young mistress sat very still, always in the same place, always bent over a piece of work. She did not lift her head to speak to Fanny as usual, and when Fanny remarked that the day was fine, and that she ought to take a walk, she only said, "It is cold."

"You are very diligent at that sewing, Miss Caroline."

"I am tired of it, Fanny."

"Then why do you go on with it? Put it down. Read, or do something to amuse you."

"It is lonely in this house, Fanny. Don't you think so?"

"I don't find it so, miss. Me and Eliza are company for one another; but you are too still. You should visit more. Go upstairs and dress yourself smart, and go and take tea with Miss Mann or Miss Ainley. I am certain either of those ladies would be delighted to see you."

"But their houses are dismal: they are both old maids. I am certain old maids are a very unhappy race."

"Not they, miss. They can't be unhappy; they take such care of themselves. They are all selfish."

"Miss Ainley is not selfish, Fanny. She is always doing good. How devotedly kind she was to her step-mother while the old lady lived; and now when she is quite alone in the world, how charitable she is to the poor, as far as her means permit! Still nobody thinks much of her; and gentlemen always sneer at her!"

"They shouldn't, miss. I believe she is a good woman. But gentlemen think only of ladies' looks."

"I'll go and see her," exclaimed Caroline, starting up; "and if she asks me to stay to tea, I'll stay. How wrong it is to neglect people because they are not pretty and young! And I will call to see Miss Mann too. She may not be amiable, but what has made her unamiable? What has life been to her?"

Fanny helped her dress. "You'll not be an old maid, Miss Caroline," she said, as she tied the sash of her brown silk frock, and smoothed her shining curls; "there are no signs of an old maid about you."

Caroline looked at the mirror. She could see that she had altered within the last month; her complexion was paler, her eyes were circled with shadow; she was not so pretty or so fresh as she used to be. She hinted this to Fanny, who answered that at her age a little falling away signified nothing; she would soon come round again, and be rosier than ever. Fanny then showed singular zeal in wrapping her up in warm shawls, till Caroline was smothered with the weight.

She paid her visits – first to Miss Mann, for this was the most difficult point. Miss Mann was certainly not quite a lovable person. Caroline had always declared she disliked her, and more than once she had joined her cousin Robert in laughing at her. Moore was not usually sarcastic, especially about people weaker than himself; but he had once or twice been present when Miss Mann had visited his sister, and after a while he had gone out into the garden where

Caroline was tending flowers. While watching her he had amused himself with comparing fair, delicate youth with shrivelled age, livid and loveless, and had repeated to the smiling girl the vinegar discourse of the sour old maid. Caroline had said to him:

“Ah! Robert, you do not like old maids. I, too, should come under the lash of your sarcasm if I were an old maid.”

“You an old maid!” he had replied. “A strange idea coming from those lips. I can imagine you, though, at forty, quietly dressed, pale and sunk, but still with those soft eyes. I suppose, too, you will keep your voice, unlike that hard, deep voice of Miss Mann’s. Courage, Cary! Even at fifty you will not be repulsive.”

“Miss Mann did not make herself, or her voice, Robert.”

“Nature made her in the mood in which she makes briars and thorns; whereas for the creation of some women she reserves the May morning hours, when she makes the primrose and the lily.”

Today, ushered into Miss Mann’s little parlour, Caroline found her surrounded by perfect neatness, cleanliness, and comfort, with fresh flowers in the vase on the table, and a bright fire in the grate. Miss Mann herself sat primly and somewhat grimly in a rocking-chair, knitting. She scarcely rose as Caroline entered.

To avoid excitement was one of Miss Mann’s aims in life. She had been composing herself ever since she came down in the morning, and had just attained a state of tranquillity when the visitor’s knock at the door startled her. She was not pleased, therefore, to see Miss Helstone. She received her with reserve, bade her be seated with austerity, and then fixed her with her eye.

This was no ordinary doom – to be fixed with Miss Mann’s eye. Robert Moore had undergone it once, and had never forgotten it. He considered it quite equal to anything Medusa could do.

Certainly Miss Mann had a formidable eye. It was prominent, and showed a great deal of the white, and looked as unwinkingly at you as if it were a steel ball soldered in her head; and when she began to talk in her dry, monotonous tone, you felt as if a graven image of some bad spirit were addressing you. But it was all on the surface. Miss Mann’s goblin grimness scarcely went deeper than the angel sweetness of hundreds of beauties. She was a perfectly honest, conscientious woman, who had performed duties in her day from whose severe anguish many a gazelle-eyed enchantress would have shrunk appalled. She had passed alone through long scenes of suffering, exercised rigid self-denial, sacrificed her time, money and health for those who had repaid her by ingratitude; and now her main – almost her sole – fault was that she was censorious.

Censorious she certainly was. Caroline had not sat five minutes before her hostess, still keeping her under the spell of that Gorgon gaze, began flaying alive certain families in the neighbourhood. She went about this in a cool, deliberate manner. If Caroline ventured to put in a softening word she set it aside with disdain. Still, though pitiless, she was no scandal-monger. She never spread malignant or dangerous reports. It was not her heart so much as her temper that was wrong.

Caroline made this discovery for the first time today, and began to talk to her softly, not in sympathizing words, but with a sympathizing voice. Miss Mann’s loneliness struck her in a new light, as did the character of her ugliness

– a bloodless pallor, and deeply lined face. The girl pitied her; and her tenderness touched Miss Mann in her turn. She did not usually talk about her own affairs, because no one cared to listen; but today she did, and Caroline shed tears as she heard her speak of cruel, slow-wasting sufferings. Well might she be corpse-like, and never smile; well might she wish to avoid excitement! Caroline, when she knew all, acknowledged that Miss Mann was rather to be admired for fortitude than blamed for moroseness.

Miss Mann felt that she was partly understood, and wished to be understood further; for however old, plain and desolate we may be, our hearts preserve still a starved, ghostly longing for appreciation and affection. Miss Mann, drawn on by her listener's attention, spoke of her past life simply; she did not boast, nor exaggerate. Caroline found that the old maid had been a devoted daughter and sister, an unwearied watcher by lingering deathbeds; her malady owed its origin to that long attendance on the sick. To one wretched relative she had been a support in the depths of degradation, and she still kept him from utter destitution.

Miss Helstone stayed the whole evening; and when she left Miss Mann it was with the determination to try in future to excuse her faults; never again to laugh at her; and, above all, not to neglect her, but to come once a week, and offer her sincere affection and respect.

Caroline, on her return, told Fanny she was very glad she had gone out, as she felt much better for the visit. The next day she sought out Miss Ainley. This lady was poorer than Miss Mann, and her dwelling was more humble. It was, however, if possible, yet more exquisitely clean, though Miss Ainley could not afford to keep a servant.

Miss Ainley was very ugly. At first sight, all but very well-disciplined minds were apt to be prejudiced against her, simply on the ground of her unattractiveness. Then she was prim in dress and manner; she looked the complete old maid.

Her welcome to Caroline was formal, though kind; but Miss Helstone knew something of the benevolence of Miss Ainley's heart; all the female neighbourhood knew something of it. No one spoke against Miss Ainley, except lively young gentlemen and inconsiderate old ones, who declared her hideous.

Caroline was soon at home in that tiny parlour, installed in the most comfortable seat near the fire. The young and the old woman were presently deep in kindly conversation, and Caroline became aware of the power of an unselfish and benign mind. Miss Ainley talked never of herself, always of others: and not of their faults, but their wants and sufferings, which she longed to alleviate. She was religious, and spoke of religion often in a way which some people would have enjoyed ridiculing. They would have been hugely mistaken. Sincerity is never ludicrous; it is always to be respected.

Not from Miss Ainley's own lips did Caroline hear of her good works, but she knew much of them nevertheless, from the poor in Briarfield. They were not works of almsgiving. The old maid was too poor to give much. They were the works of a Sister of Charity – far more difficult to perform than those of a Lady Bountiful. She would watch by any sick-bed; she seemed to fear no disease. She would nurse the poorest whom no one else would nurse. She was serene, humble, kind, and equable through everything.

For this goodness she got little reward. Many of the poor became so accustomed to her services that they hardly thanked her. The rich heard of them with wonder, but were silent, from a sense of shame at the difference between her sacrifices and their own. Many ladies, however, respected her deeply. One gentleman – one only – gave her his friendship and perfect confidence. This was Mr. Hall, the vicar of Nunnely, who said that her life came nearer the life of Christ than that of any other human being he had ever met. You must not think, reader, that Miss Ainley's character is a figment of imagination. No. We seek the originals of such portraits in real life only.

Miss Helstone studied well the mind and heart now revealed to her. She found no high intellect – the old maid was merely sensible – but she discovered so much goodness, usefulness, mildness, patience, truth, that she revered Miss Ainley. What was her own love of nature, her sense of beauty, her fervent emotions, compared to the practical excellence of this good woman?

It is true she still felt with pain that the life which made Miss Ainley happy could not make her happy. Active as it was, it seemed deeply dreary, because it was so loveless. Yet, doubtless, it needed only habit to make it practicable. Caroline felt it was despicable to pine sentimentally, to waste youth in aching languor, to grow old doing nothing.

"I will bestir myself," was her resolution, "and try to be wise if I cannot be good."

She proceeded to ask Miss Ainley if she could help her in anything. Miss Ainley told her of some poor families in Briarfield that she could visit, and gave her some needlework to do for certain poor women who had many children, and who were unskilled with the needle.

Caroline went home, and laid her plans. She allotted a portion of her time for her studies, and a portion for doing anything Miss Ainley might direct her to do. The remainder was to be spent in exercise; not a moment was to be left for the indulgence of such fevered thoughts as had poisoned last Sunday evening.

To do her justice, she carried out her plans perseveringly. It was very hard work at first, but it helped her to keep down anguish; it forced her to be busy; it forbade her to brood; and gleams of satisfaction chequered her grey life here and there when she found she had done some good.

Yet I must speak truth. These efforts brought her neither health of body nor peace of mind. She grew more joyless and more wan; her memory kept harping on the name of Robert Moore; an elegy over the past still rung constantly in her ear; the heaviness of a broken spirit settled slow on her buoyant youth. Winter seemed conquering her spring; the mind's soil and its treasures were freezing gradually to barren stagnation.

Chapter 11

FIELDHEAD

Yet Caroline refused tamely to succumb. She had strength in her girl's heart; and men and women never struggle so hard as when they struggle alone, unadvised and unpitied.

Caroline's sufferings were her only spur, and being very real and sharp, they roused her spirit keenly. Bent on victory over a mortal pain, she did her best to quell it. Never had she been so busy, so studious, and, above all, so active. She took long walks in all weathers. Day by day she came back in the evening, pale and weary-looking, yet seemingly not fatigued; for as soon as she had thrown off her bonnet and shawl, she would, instead of resting, begin to pace her apartment. Sometimes she would not sit down till she was literally faint.

She said she did this to tire herself well, so that she might sleep soundly at night. But if that was her aim it was unattained; for at night, when others slumbered, she was tossing on her pillow, or sitting at the foot of her bed in the darkness. Often, unhappy girl! she was crying in a sort of intolerable despair, which smote down her strength, and reduced her to childlike helplessness.

When thus prostrate, temptations besieged her. Weak suggestions whispered in her weary heart to write to Robert, and say that she was unhappy because she was forbidden to see him and Hortense, and beg him to remember her. One or two such letters she actually wrote, but she never sent them: shame and good sense stopped her.

At last she reached the point when it seemed she could bear her life no longer, that she must find a change somehow, or her heart and head would fail under the pressure. She longed to leave Briarfield, to go to some very distant place.

She longed for something else too: the deep, secret, anxious yearning to find and know her mother strengthened daily; but with the desire came doubt – if she knew her mother, would she love her? She had never heard that mother praised. Her uncle seemed to regard her with antipathy; an old servant, who had lived with Mrs. James Helstone for a short time after her marriage, spoke of her with chilling reserve, and said she did not understand her. These expressions were ice to the daughter's heart.

But one plan seemed likely to bring her hope of relief. It was to take a situation as a governess; she could do nothing else. Eventually she found courage to speak of it to her uncle.

Her long walks lay on lonely roads; but in whatever direction she had rambled, her homeward path always led her near the Hollow. She regularly visited its brink at twilight, and rested at a certain stile. From there she could look down on the cottage, the mill, the dewy garden: from there was visible the counting-house window, from whose panes at a fixed hour shone the ray of the lamp. Her errand was to watch for this ray, her reward to catch it.

There were nights when it failed to appear. She knew then that Robert was from home, and went away doubly sad; whereas its kindling elated her, like

the promise of some indefinite hope. If, while she gazed, a shadow appeared before the light, her heart leaped. That was Robert; she had seen him. She would return home comforted, and persuaded that, if she could get near him, he might welcome her yet, he might extend his hand and draw her to him, as he used to do. That night, though she might weep, she would fancy her tears less scalding; her head ached less.

The shortest path from the Hollow to the rectory passed a certain mansion: the old and tenantless dwelling called Fieldhead. Tenantless it had been for ten years, but it was no ruin. Mr. Yorke had kept it in good repair, and an old gardener and his wife had lived in it, cultivated the grounds, and maintained the house.

Fieldhead was picturesque, grey and mossy: the old latticed windows, the stone porch, the walls, the chimney-stacks, were rich in sepia lights and shades. The trees behind were fine and spreading; the cedar on the front lawn was grand; and the granite urns over the arch of the gateway were pleasing to the eye.

One mild May evening Caroline, passing near about moonrise, and unwilling yet to go home, sat down on the mossy ground near the gate of Fieldhead, and gazed through it towards the cedar and the mansion. It was a still, cloudless night; the gables, facing west, reflected the clear amber of the horizon; the cedar was black. Under its dense, raven boughs a glimpse of sky opened gravely blue. It was full of the moon, which looked solemnly down on Caroline.

She felt the view was mournfully lovely. She wished she could be happy and have peace. Where now was Robert? she asked. Not at the Hollow; she had watched for his lamp, and had not seen it.

Suddenly the door within the stone porch of the hall opened, and two men came out – one elderly and white-headed, the other young, dark-haired, and tall. They walked across the lawn and through a gate in the garden wall. Caroline saw them pass the stile, descend the fields and disappear. Robert Moore had passed before her with his friend Mr. Yorke. Neither had seen her.

The apparition was fleeting; but at its electric passage her veins kindled, her soul surged. It left her desperate.

“Oh, had he only been alone! had he only seen me!” was her cry. “He would have said something. He would have given me his hand. He does, he must, love me a little. Oh, Heaven is cruel!” Thus, in the utter sickness of longing and disappointment, she went home.

The next morning at breakfast, where she appeared white-faced and miserable-looking, she asked Mr. Helstone:

“Have you any objection, uncle, to my inquiring for a situation in a family?”

Her uncle, ignorant of all his niece was undergoing, scarcely believed his ears.

“What whim now? Are you bewitched? What can you mean?”

“I am not well, and need a change,” she said.

He examined her. He saw that the rose had faded to a snowdrop; her bloom had vanished, her flesh wasted; she sat before him drooping, colourless, and thin. But for the soft expression of her brown eyes, the delicate lines of her features, and the flowing abundance of her hair, she would no longer have any claim to be called pretty.

“What on earth is the matter with you?” he asked. “How are you ailing?”

No answer; only the brown eyes filled, the pale lips trembled.

“Look out for a situation, indeed! For what situation are you fit? What have you been doing with yourself? You are not well.”

“I should be well if I left home.”

“These women are incomprehensible. They are full of unpleasant surprises. Today you see them bouncing, red as cherries, and round as apples; tomorrow they look as feeble as dead weeds. And why? That’s the puzzle. She has her meals, her liberty, a good house to live in, and good clothes to wear. Yet there she sits a poor, little, pale, puling chit. Provoking! I suppose I must send for advice. Will you have a doctor, child?”

“No, uncle. A doctor could do me no good. I merely want change of air and scene.”

“Well, that you can have. You shall go to a watering-place. I don’t mind the expense. Fanny shall accompany you.”

“But, uncle, some day I must do something for myself; I have no fortune. I had better begin now.”

“While I live, you shall not be a governess, Caroline. I will not have it said that my niece is a governess.”

“But the later in life one makes a change of that sort, uncle, the more difficult and painful it is. I should wish to get accustomed to the work.”

“I beg you will not harass me, Caroline. I mean to provide for you. Bless me! I am only fifty-five; my health is excellent. There is plenty of time to take measures. Don’t make yourself anxious about the future. Is that what frets you?”

“No, uncle; but I long for a change.”

He laughed. “There speaks the very woman!” cried he. “A change! Always fantastical and whimsical! Well, it’s in her sex.”

“But it is not fantasy and whim, uncle. It is necessity, I think. I feel weaker than formerly. I believe I should have more to do.”

“Admirable! She feels weak, and therefore she should be set to hard labour. There are two guineas to buy a new frock. Come, Cary, never fear.”

“Uncle, I wish you were less generous and more—”

“More what?”

Sympathizing was the word on Caroline’s lips, but she checked herself. Her uncle would have laughed at that namby-pamby word.

Finding her silent, he said, “The fact is, you don’t know precisely what you want.”

“Only to be a governess.”

“Pooh! mere nonsense! Don’t mention it again. I have finished breakfast. Ring the bell, and then run away and amuse yourself.”

“What with? My doll?” asked Caroline to herself as she quitted the room.

A week or two passed; her bodily and mental health neither grew worse nor better. She was now precisely in that state when, if her constitution had contained the seeds of consumption or slow fever, those diseases would have rapidly developed, and would soon have carried her quietly from the world. People never die of love or grief alone. If they have no other malady, they may become pale and thin, but they live on; and though they cannot regain youth and gaiety, they may regain strength and serenity.

Everyone noticed the change in Miss Helstone's appearance, and most people said she was going to die. She never thought so herself. Her appetite was diminished; she knew it was because she wept so much at night. Her strength was lessened; she could account for it. Sleep was hard, and her dreams were distressing. But she felt that in the far future this time of misery should be got over, and she should once more be calm, though perhaps never again happy.

Meanwhile her uncle urged her to visit their acquaintance. This she evaded doing. She could not be cheerful in company; she felt she was observed with more curiosity than sympathy. Old ladies were always offering her their advice, recommending remedies; young ladies looked at her in a way from which she shrank. Their eyes said they knew she had been "disappointed"; by whom, they were not certain.

Commonplace young ladies can be quite as worldly and hard as commonplace young gentlemen. Grief and calamity they despise; they regard them as the judgments of God on the lowly. With them, to "love" is merely to contrive a scheme for achieving a good match; to be "disappointed" is to have their scheme frustrated.

All this Caroline knew, and she kept her pale face and wasted figure as much out of sight as she could. Living thus in seclusion, she ceased to hear news of the little events of the neighbourhood.

One morning her uncle came into the parlour, where she sat trying to find some pleasure in painting wild flowers, and said to her in his abrupt manner, "Come, child, leave that work. Get your bonnet on. I want you to make a call with me."

"With you, uncle?" She was surprised; she was not accustomed to make calls with her uncle.

"Quick! I have no time to lose. I am going to Fieldhead."

"Fieldhead! Why?"

"We are going to see Miss Shirley Keeldar. She has been at Fieldhead a week. I met her at a party last night – that party to which you would not go. I was pleased with her. I choose that you shall make her acquaintance. It will do you good."

"She is now twenty-one and come of age, I suppose?"

"Yes, and will reside for a time on her property. I lectured her on the subject; I showed her her duty. She is not intractable. She is rather a fine girl; nothing lackadaisical about her."

"I don't think she will want to see me. What good can I do her?"

"Pshaw! Put your bonnet on."

"Is she proud, uncle?"

"Don't know. She holds her head high, and probably can be saucy enough. She wouldn't be a woman otherwise. Away now for your bonnet at once!"

Caroline was not naturally very confident, and her depression of spirits had not increased her courage to face strangers. She quailed as she and her uncle walked up the broad approach to Fieldhead. She followed Mr. Helstone reluctantly into the sombre old hallway.

Very sombre it was – long, vast, and dark; one window lit it dimly. The wide old chimney contained no fire; it was filled instead with willow-boughs. The high gallery, opposite the entrance, was in shadow. Carved stags' heads, with real antlers, looked down grotesquely from the walls. This was neither a

grand nor a comfortable house; it was antique, rambling, and inconvenient. A property of a thousand a year belonged to it, which had descended, for lack of male heirs, on a female. There were richer families in the district, but the Keeldars were the oldest family, and as lords of the manor, took precedence.

Mr. and Miss Helstone were ushered into a gloomy, oak-lined parlour, furnished in old style. On each side of the high mantelpiece stood two antique chairs of oak, solid as thrones, and in one of these sat a lady. But if this were Miss Keeldar, she must have come of age at least twenty years ago. She was matronly, and her attire was plain and old-fashioned to the point of eccentricity.

This lady received the visitors with a mixture of ceremony and diffidence. She seemed anxious to be proper, yet uncertain and embarrassed. Miss Helstone felt this, sympathized with the stranger, and knowing by experience what was good for the timid, took a seat quietly and began to talk to her with a gentle ease, made confident for the moment by the presence of one less self-possessed than herself.

She and this lady would, if alone, have got on extremely well together. The lady had a soft and tuneful voice, which Caroline liked; it atoned for the formal manner. In ten minutes they would have been friends. But Mr. Helstone stood on the rug looking at the strange lady with his keen, sarcastic eye, impatient at her lack of aplomb. His hard gaze discomfited the lady. She tried to make little speeches about the weather, etc.; but Mr. Helstone found himself somewhat deaf. Whatever she said he pretended not to hear distinctly, and she was obliged to go over each elaborately-constructed nothing twice.

The effort soon became too much for her. She was just rising in a perplexed flutter, nervously murmuring that she would go and look for Miss Keeldar, when Miss Keeldar saved her the trouble by appearing. It was to be presumed at least that this was she who now came in from the garden.

There is real grace in ease of manner, and so old Helstone felt when an erect, slight girl walked up to him, holding with her left hand her little silk apron full of flowers; and, giving him her right hand, said pleasantly, "I knew you would come to see me, though you do think Mr. Yorke has made me a Jacobin. Good-morning."

"But we'll not have you a Jacobin," returned he. "No, Miss Shirley; now that you are amongst us, I'll teach you sound doctrine."

"Mrs. Pryor has anticipated you," she replied, turning to the elder lady. "Mrs. Pryor, you know, was my governess, and is still my friend. She has drilled me well in both theology and history, I assure you, Mr. Helstone."

The rector immediately bowed very low to Mrs. Pryor. The ex-governess disclaimed skill either in political or religious controversy, explained that she thought such matters little adapted for female minds, but assured him she was truly attached to the Establishment. She added that she was averse to change, and said something scarcely audible about the danger of new ideas.

"Miss Keeldar thinks as you think, I hope, madam."

"It can scarcely be expected that the eager and young should hold the opinions of the cool and middle-aged."

"Oh! oh! we are independent; we think for ourselves!" cried Mr. Helstone. "We are a little Jacobin, for anything I know – a little freethinker. Let us have a confession of faith on the spot."

And he took the heiress's two hands – causing her to let fall her cargo of flowers – and seated her by him on the sofa.

“Say your creed,” he ordered.

“The Apostles’ Creed?”

“Yes.”

She said it like a child.

“Now for St. Athanasius’s.”

“Let me gather up my flowers. Here is Tartar coming; he will tread upon them.”

Tartar was a rather large, strong, ugly and fierce-looking dog, of a breed between mastiff and bulldog, who at this moment entered through the glass door, and snuffed the fresh flowers scattered on the rug. As he was turning round preparatory to lying down upon them, Miss Helstone and Miss Keeldar simultaneously stooped to the rescue.

“Thank you,” said the heiress. “Is this your daughter, Mr. Helstone?”

“My niece Caroline.”

Miss Keeldar shook hands with her, and they looked at each other.

Shirley Keeldar (she had no Christian name but Shirley: her parents, who had wished to have a son, bestowed on her the family name they would have bestowed on a boy) – Shirley Keeldar was no ugly heiress. She was agreeable to the eye. She was perhaps an inch or two taller than Miss Helstone, and gracefully made. Her face, too, possessed a graceful charm. It was intelligent and expressive. Her eyes were of the darkest grey, and her hair of the darkest brown. Her features were distinguished – by which I do not mean that they were high, bony, and Roman, being indeed rather small and slight; but only that they were spirited and mobile. She examined Caroline seriously, her head a little on one side, with a thoughtful air.

“You see she is only a feeble chick,” observed Mr. Helstone.

“She looks younger than I. How old are you?” she inquired in a manner that would have been patronizing if it had not been solemn and simple.

“Eighteen years and six months.”

“And I am twenty-one.” She said no more, but busied herself in arranging her flowers.

“And St. Athanasius’s Creed?” urged the rector. “You believe it all, don’t you?”

“I can’t remember it quite all. I will give you a nosegay, Mr. Helstone, when I have given your niece one.”

She selected a little bouquet of delicate flowers, relieved by a spray of dark greenery. Tying it with silk from her work-box, she placed it on Caroline’s lap; and then she put her hands behind her, and stood bending slightly towards her guest, in the attitude of a grave but gallant little cavalier. This effect was aided by the style in which she wore her hair, parted on one temple, and brushed in a glossy sweep above the forehead, whence it fell freely in natural-looking curls.

“Are you tired with your walk?” she inquired.

“No; it is only a mile.”

“You look pale. Is she always so pale?” she asked, turning to the rector.

“She used to be as rosy as the reddest of your flowers.”

“Why is she altered? Has she been ill?”

“She tells me she wants a change.”

“She ought to have one. You ought to give her one. You should send her to the coast.”

“I will, before summer is over. Meantime, I intend her to make acquaintance with you, if you have no objection.”

“I am sure Miss Keeldar will have no objection,” here observed Mrs. Pryor. “I think I may say that Miss Helstone’s frequent presence at Fieldhead will be esteemed a favour.”

“You speak my sentiments precisely, ma’am,” said Shirley, “and I thank you. Let me tell you,” she continued, turning again to Caroline, “that my governess does not welcome everyone as she has welcomed you. You are distinguished more than you think. As soon as you are gone, I shall ask Mrs. Pryor’s opinion of you, for I have found her judgment of character wondrous accurate. Already I foresee a favourable answer. Do I not guess rightly, Mrs. Pryor?”

“My dear, you said you would ask my opinion when Miss Helstone was gone, not in her presence.”

“No; and perhaps it will be long before I obtain it. – I am sometimes sadly tantalized, Mr. Helstone, by Mrs. Pryor’s extreme caution. On some people’s characters I cannot get her to pronounce a sentence, entreat as I may.”

Mrs. Pryor smiled.

“Yes,” said her pupil, “I know what that smile means. You are thinking of Mr. Moore of the Hollow. Do you know him?” she asked Mr. Helstone.

“Ay! ay! Your tenant. You have seen a good deal of him, no doubt, since you came?”

“I have been obliged to see him. There was business to transact. Business! Really the word makes me conscious I am indeed no longer a girl. I am an esquire! Shirley Keeldar, Esquire, ought to be my title. They gave me a man’s name; I hold a man’s position. And when I see such people as that stately Anglo-Belgian – that Gérard Moore – before me, gravely talking to me of business, really I feel quite gentlemanlike. But I find it a little difficult to understand Mr. Moore, whether to like him or not. I have entreated Mrs. Pryor to say what she thinks of him, but she still avoids returning a direct answer. Do you like him, Mr. Helstone?”

“Not at all, just now. His name is entirely blotted from my good books.”

“What is the matter? What has he done?”

“My uncle and he disagree on politics,” interposed the low voice of Caroline. At once she felt with nervous acuteness that she had better not have spoken, and coloured to the eyes.

“What are Moore’s politics?” inquired Shirley.

“Those of a tradesman,” returned the rector; “narrow, selfish, and unpatriotic. The man is eternally speaking against the continuance of the war. I have no patience with him.”

“The war hurts his trade. He said that yesterday. What other objection have you to him?”

“That is enough.”

“He looks the gentleman,” pursued Shirley, “and it pleases me to think he is such.”

Caroline, shredding a flower, answered in distinct tones, “Decidedly he is.” Shirley flashed an arch, searching glance at her.

“You are his friend, at any rate,” she said.

“I am both his friend and his relative,” was the prompt reply. “Robert Moore is my cousin.”

“Oh, then you can tell me all about him. Give me a sketch of his character.”

Embarrassment seized Caroline. She could not, and did not, attempt to comply. Her silence was immediately covered by Mrs. Pryor, who asked Mr. Helstone about various families in the neighbourhood, with whose connections she was acquainted.

Shirley soon withdrew her gaze from Miss Helstone. She did not renew her interrogations, but proceeded to make a nosegay of flowers for the rector. She presented it to him as he left.

“Be sure you wear it for my sake,” said she.

“Next my heart, of course,” responded Helstone. “Mrs. Pryor, take care of this young squire of Briarfield. Don’t let him exert himself too much; don’t let him break his neck in hunting; especially, let him mind how he rides down that dangerous hill near the Hollow.”

“I like a descent,” said Shirley; “and I like that romantic Hollow with all my heart.”

“Romantic, with a mill in it?”

“Romantic with a mill in it. The old mill and the white cottage are each admirable in their way.”

“And the counting-house, Mr. Keeldar?”

“I adore the counting-house.”

“And the trade? The greasy wool, the polluting dyeing-vats?”

“The trade is to be thoroughly respected.”

“And the tradesman is a hero? Good!”

“I am glad to hear you say so. I thought the tradesman looked heroic.” Mischief and glee sparkled all over her face as she bandied words with the old Cossack, who almost equally enjoyed the contest.

“Captain Keeldar, why are you so fond of trade?”

“Because I am a mill-owner, of course. Half my income comes from the works in that Hollow.”

“Don’t enter into partnership – that’s all.”

“You’ve put it into my head!” she exclaimed, with a joyous laugh. “It will never get out. Thank you.” And waving her white hand, she vanished within the porch, while the rector and his niece passed out through the arched gateway.

Chapter 12

SHIRLEY AND CAROLINE

Shirley showed she had been sincere in saying she should be glad of Caroline's society, by frequently seeking it. Indeed, if she had not sought it, she would not have had it, for Miss Helstone was slow to make friends. She was always held back by the idea that people could not want her, that she could not amuse them; and she felt that a brilliant, happy, youthful creature like the heiress of Fieldhead would not find her interesting.

Though in about a month Shirley had made the acquaintance of most of the nearby families, and was on quite free and easy terms with all the Misses Sykes and Misses Pearson, yet it appeared she found none of them very congenial: she fraternized with none of them, to use her own words. If she had really been lord of the manor of Briarfield, there was not a single fair one amongst them whom she would have wished to ask to become Mrs. Keeldar, lady of the manor. She made this remark to Mrs. Pryor, who received it very quietly, as she did most of her pupil's off-hand speeches, responding, "My dear, do not allow that strange habit of alluding to yourself as a gentleman to become usual."

Shirley never laughed at her former governess; therefore she took her remonstrance in silence. She stood near the window, looking at the grand cedar on her lawn, watching a bird on one of its boughs. Presently she began to chirrup to the bird; her chirrup grew clearer; before long she was whistling a tune, very deftly.

"My dear!" expostulated Mrs. Pryor.

"Was I whistling?" said Shirley. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I had resolved not to whistle in your company. But yesterday evening, as I was coming up our lane, I heard a gentleman whistling that very tune on the other side of the hedge, and that reminded me."

"What gentleman was it?"

"Mr. Moore – the only gentleman in the neighbourhood who is not grey-haired. My two venerable favourites, Mr. Helstone and Mr. Yorke, it is true, are fine old beaux, infinitely better than any of the stupid young ones."

Mrs. Pryor was silent.

"You do not like Mr. Helstone, ma'am?" asked Shirley.

"My dear, Mr. Helstone's office secures him from criticism."

"You generally leave the room when he is announced."

"Do you walk out this morning, my dear?"

"Yes, I shall go to the rectory, and find Caroline Helstone, and make her take some exercise. She shall have a breezy walk over Nunnely Common."

"If you do, my dear, please remind Miss Helstone to wrap up well, as there is a fresh wind, and she appears to me to require care."

"You shall be obeyed, Mrs. Pryor. Will you not accompany us?"

"No, my love; I cannot walk so quickly as you."

Shirley easily persuaded Caroline to go with her, and when they were out on the quiet road, traversing the solitary sweep of Nunnely Common, she as

easily drew her into conversation. The first feelings of diffidence overcome, Caroline felt glad to talk with Miss Keeldar. Shirley said she liked the green sweep of the common, and, better still, the heath on its ridges, which reminded her of moors. She had seen moors when she was travelling on the borders near Scotland. She remembered particularly a journey on a sultry day, when they had crossed what seemed a boundless waste of deep heath, and had seen nothing but wild sheep, heard nothing but the cries of wild birds.

“I know how the heath would look on such a day,” said Caroline; “purple-black – a deeper shade of the sky, and that would be livid.”

“Yes, there were brassy edges to the clouds, and here and there a white gleam, which you expected would kindle into lightning.”

“Did it thunder?”

“It muttered distant peals, but the storm did not break till evening, after we had reached our inn at the foot of a range of mountains. I stood at the window an hour watching the clouds come down. The hills seemed rolled in a sullen mist, and when the rain fell in sheets, suddenly they were blotted out; they were washed from the world.”

“I have seen such storms in Yorkshire, and they made me think of the Deluge. Miss Keeldar, just stand still now, and look at Nunnely dale and wood.”

They halted on the green brow of the common, and looked down on the deep valley; on meadows, some pearled with daisies, some golden with king-cups. On Nunnwood – the sole remnant of an ancient forest – slept the shadow of a cloud; the distant hills were dappled, the horizon tinted like mother-of-pearl; silvery blues, soft purples and rose-shades, all melting into fleeces of white cloud, like a remote glimpse of heaven’s foundations.

“Our England is a bonny island,” said Shirley, “and Yorkshire is one of her bonniest nooks.”

“You are a Yorkshire girl too?”

“I am. Five generations of my race sleep under Briarfield Church.”

Caroline offered her hand, which was accordingly shaken. “We are compatriots,” said she.

“Yes,” agreed Shirley, with a grave nod. She pointed to the forest. “Were you ever in the heart of Nunnwood?”

“Many a time.”

“What is it like?”

“The trees are huge and old, with trunks as firm as pillars, while the boughs sway to every breeze. In the deepest calm their leaves are never quite hushed, and in a high wind a sea thunders above you. Can you see a break in the forest? That is a dell, lined with green, and crowded about with the very oldest oaks. In the bottom lie the ruins of a nunnery.”

“We will go – you and I, Caroline – to that wood, early some fine summer morning, and spend a long day there. We can take pencils and sketch-books, and any interesting reading book we like; and of course something to eat. We could carry our own provisions. It would not tire you too much to walk so far?”

“Oh no; especially if we rested in the wood. And I know all the pleasantest spots. I know where wild strawberries abound; I know some lonely, quite untrodden glades, carpeted with strange mosses. I know groups of trees that ravish the eye – oak, delicate birch, glossy beech; and ash trees stately as

Saul, standing isolated; and wood-giants clad in bright shrouds of ivy. Miss Keeldar, I could guide you.”

“You would be dull with me alone?”

“I should not. I think we should suit; and what third person is there who would not spoil our pleasure?”

“Indeed, I know of none of our own ages – no lady at least. And as to gentlemen—”

“An excursion becomes quite a different thing when there are gentlemen,” interrupted Caroline. “We were going simply to see the old trees, the old ruins; to pass a day in quietude.”

“You are right; and the presence of gentlemen dispels the last charm, I think. If they are of the wrong sort, like your Malones, and your young Sykes, irritation takes the place of serenity. If they are of the right sort, there is still a change that is difficult to describe.”

“We forget Nature.”

“And then Nature forgets us, and withdraws the peaceful joy with which she would have filled our hearts. Instead she gives us more elation and more anxiety.”

“Our power of being happy lies a good deal in ourselves, I believe,” remarked Caroline. “I have gone to Nunnwood with a large party – all the curates and other gentry and ladies – and I found it insufferably tedious; and I have gone quite alone, or accompanied only by Fanny, and have roamed about and sketched, or read; and enjoyed much quiet happiness. But that was when I was young – two years ago.”

“Did you ever go with your cousin, Robert Moore?”

“Yes; once.”

“What sort of a companion is he?”

“A cousin, you know, is different to a stranger.”

“I am aware of that; but cousins, if they are stupid, are more insupportable than strangers, because you cannot so easily keep them at a distance. But your cousin is not stupid?”

“No; but the society of clever men brings its own peculiar pain also. You wonder whether you are worthy to be his associate.”

“Oh! there I cannot follow you,” cried Shirley. “I consider myself worthy to be the associate of the best of gentlemen. Your uncle, by-the-bye, is not a bad specimen of the elderly gentleman. I am always glad to see his brown, keen, sensible old face. Are you fond of him? Is he kind to you? Now, speak the truth.”

“He has brought me up from childhood, I doubt not, precisely as he would have brought up his own daughter, if he had had one; and that is kindness. But I am not fond of him. I would rather be out of his presence than in it.”

“Strange, when he makes himself so agreeable.”

“Yes, in company; but he is stern and silent at home. As he puts away his hat in the rectory hall, so he locks away his liveliness: the smile and jest are for society.”

“Is he tyrannical?” asked Shirley.

“Not in the least. He is simply a man who is liberal rather than good-natured, and scrupulously equitable rather than truly just – if you understand me.”

“Oh yes! Genuine justice springs from sympathy and considerateness, of which, I can imagine, my bronzed old friend is quite devoid.”

“I often wonder, Shirley, whether most men resemble my uncle at home; whether it is necessary for us to be new and unfamiliar to them in order to seem agreeable in their eyes; and whether it is impossible for them to retain a constant interest and affection for those people they see every day.”

“I don’t know. I can’t clear up your doubts. I ponder over similar ones myself sometimes. But if I were convinced they were all hard and unsympathizing, I would never marry. I should not like to find out that what I loved did not love me, and never could despise any effort I might make to please. Once I made that discovery, I would long to go away.”

“But you could not if you were married.”

“No, I could not. There it is. I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought! It suffocates me! Nothing irks me like the idea of being a burden and a bore! Now, when I feel my company superfluous, I can comfortably fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil, and withdraw to solitude. If married, that could not be.”

“I wonder we don’t all make up our minds to remain single,” said Caroline. “We should if we listened to my uncle. He always speaks of marriage as a burden; and I believe whenever he hears of a man being married, he regards him as a fool.”

“But, Caroline, surely men are not all like your uncle.”

“I suppose we each find an exception in the one we love, till we are married,” suggested Caroline.

“I suppose so. And we fancy him to be like ourselves; we imagine a sense of harmony. We think his voice promises a heart that will never harden against us; we read faithful affection in his eyes. I don’t think we should trust to what they call passion, Caroline. I believe it is a mere fire of dry sticks, blazing up and vanishing. But we see him kind to animals, to children, to poor people, and kind to us likewise, good, considerate. He does not flatter women, but he is patient with them, and seems to find their company congenial. Then we observe that he is just, that he always speaks the truth, that he is conscientious. We feel joy and peace when he comes into a room; we feel sad when he leaves it. We know that this man has been a kind son, and a kind brother. Will any one dare to tell me that he will not be a kind husband?”

“My uncle would say it unhesitatingly. ‘He will be sick of you in a month,’ he would say.”

“Mrs. Pryor would seriously hint the same.”

“Mrs. Yorke and Miss Mann would darkly suggest ditto.”

“If they are right,” said Shirley, “it is good never to fall in love.”

“Very good, if you can avoid it.”

“I choose to doubt them.”

“I am afraid that proves you are already caught,” said Caroline.

“Not I. But if I were, I would consult neither man nor woman, but the mouse that steals out of the wainscot; the bird that pecks at my window for a crumb; the dog that licks my hand and sits beside my knee. Did you ever see anyone whom such creatures seemed instinctively to rely on?”

“We have a black cat and an old dog at the rectory. I know somebody onto whose knee that black cat loves to climb; and the old dog always comes

out of his kennel and wags his tail, and whines affectionately when somebody passes.”

“And what does that somebody do?”

“He quietly strokes the cat, and when he must disturb her by rising, he puts her softly down. He always whistles to the dog and gives him a caress.”

“Does he? Is it not Robert?”

“It is Robert.”

“Handsome fellow!” said Shirley, with enthusiasm. Her eyes sparkled. “Bless him! he is both graceful and good.”

“I was sure you would see that he was.”

“I liked him when I met him. I admire him now. When beauty is blended with goodness, Caroline, there is a powerful charm.”

“When intelligence is added, Shirley?”

“Who can resist it? He is a noble being. I tell you when they are good they are the lords of the creation – they are the sons of God. Indisputably, a great, good, handsome man is the first of created things.”

“Above us?”

“I would scorn to contend for empire with him. Shall my left hand dispute for precedence with my right? Shall my heart quarrel with my pulse?”

“Husbands and wives quarrel horribly, Shirley. But are we men’s equals, or are we not?”

“Nothing ever charms me more than when I meet my superior – one who makes me sincerely feel that he is my superior. It degrades to stoop; it is glorious to look up. What frets me is that when I try to esteem, I am baffled.”

“Miss Keeldar, will you come in? We are now at the rectory gates.”

“Not today, but tomorrow I shall fetch you to spend the evening with me. Caroline Helstone, if you really are what at present you seem, you and I will suit. I have never in my whole life been able to talk to a young lady as I have talked to you this morning. Kiss me – and good-bye.”

Mrs. Pryor seemed as friendly as Shirley. She, who went nowhere else, called at the rectory one afternoon, when the rector happened to be out. It was rather a close day; the heat had flushed her, and she seemed flustered too at entering a strange house. She sat on the sofa, trembling, and fanning herself with her handkerchief with nervous discomposure.

Caroline marvelled at this unusual want of self-command in a lady of her years, and also at the lack of strength in one who appeared robust – for Mrs. Pryor said repeatedly that the fatigue of her walk and the heat were the reasons for her weakness. Caroline gently removed her shawl and bonnet: attentions that Mrs. Pryor would not have accepted from everyone. In general she recoiled from touch with embarrassment and coldness. To Miss Helstone’s little light hand, however, she yielded, and seemed soothed. In a few minutes she ceased to tremble, and grew quiet and tranquil.

Her usual manner being resumed, she began to talk of ordinary topics. She was a good converser. Her language, always a little formal, was well chosen; her sentiments were just; her information was varied and correct. Caroline felt it more pleasant to listen to her than she could have anticipated.

On the wall opposite them hung three pictures – the centre one, that of a lady; the two others, male portraits.

“That is a beautiful face,” said Mrs. Pryor, after a brief pause. “It is a portrait from the life, I presume?”

“It is a portrait of Mrs. Helstone.”

“Of Mrs. Matthewson Helstone? Of your uncle’s wife?”

“It is, and is said to be a good likeness. Before her marriage she was thought the beauty of the district.”

“I should say she was. It is, however, a passive face. She could not have been what is generally termed ‘a woman of spirit.’”

“I believe she was a remarkably still, silent person,” said Caroline.

“One would scarcely have expected, my dear, that your uncle should have chosen a partner of that description. Is he not fond of being amused by lively chat?”

“In company he is. But he always says he could never do with a talking wife. He must have quiet at home.”

“Mrs. Matthewson lived only a few years after her marriage, I believe?”

“About five years.”

“Well, my dear,” pursued Mrs. Pryor, rising to go, “I hope you will frequently come to Fieldhead. You must feel lonely here, having no female relative in the house; you must pass much of your time alone.”

“I am inured to it. I have grown up by myself. May I arrange your shawl for you?”

Mrs. Pryor submitted. “Should you require help in your studies,” she said, “you may command me. I hope to have frequent conversations with you. I should wish to be of use to you.”

Miss Helstone thanked her, thinking what a kind heart was hidden under her visitor’s seeming chilliness. Observing that Mrs. Pryor again glanced at the portraits, Caroline explained:

“The likeness that hangs near the window, you will see, is my uncle, taken twenty years ago; the other is his brother James, my father.”

“They resemble each other,” said Mrs. Pryor; “yet a difference of character may be traced in the brow and mouth.”

“What difference?” inquired Caroline, accompanying her to the door. “James Helstone – my father – is generally considered by strangers to be the better-looking of the two. Do you think his picture handsome, Mrs. Pryor?”

“It is much finer featured than that of your uncle.”

“But what is the difference of character you mean? Tell me. I wish to see if you guess right.”

“My dear, your uncle is a man of principle. His forehead and his lips are firm, and his eye is steady.”

“And my father? Do not be afraid of offending me. I always like the truth.”

“Do you like the truth? Good. Keep to that preference. The other, my dear, if he had been living now, would probably have given little support to his daughter. It is, however, a graceful head. My dear” (turning abruptly), “you believe in the importance of principle?”

“I am sure no character can have true worth without it.”

“You have considered the subject?”

“Often. Circumstances early forced it upon my attention.”

“The lesson was not lost, then, though it came so prematurely. My dear, do not stand in the draught; you will take cold. Good-afternoon.”

Miss Helstone's new acquaintances soon became of value to her: their society was, she felt, a privilege and a chance of relief. A new turn was given to her thoughts, lessening the force of their pressure on one worn-down point.

Soon she was content to spend whole days at Fieldhead, doing by turns whatever Shirley or Mrs. Pryor wished; now one would claim her, now the other. The elder lady was not demonstrative, but she was assiduous. I have hinted that she was a peculiar person, and this was evident in the interest she showed in Caroline. She watched all her movements; it seemed as if she wished to guard her steps. It gave her pleasure to be asked by Miss Helstone for advice. She gave her aid with such quiet enjoyment that Caroline before long took delight in depending on her.

Shirley Keeldar's complete docility with Mrs. Pryor had at first surprised Caroline, as did the fact of the reserved ex-governess being so much at ease in the house of her young pupil; but she soon found everyone must prize Mrs. Pryor when they knew her. Despite her old-fashioned gowns and formal speech, she was a kind and truthful counsellor.

As to dependency or inferiority – Caroline did not feel it in talking to Shirley, so why would Mrs. Pryor? Shirley was rich: she possessed a thousand a year, and Caroline not a penny; and yet there was a safe sense of equality when with her, never known with the ordinary Briarfield gentry.

The reason was that Shirley's head ran on other things than money and position. She was glad to be independent; at times she was even elated at the notion of being lady of the manor, and having tenants and an estate. She was especially tickled when reminded of "all that property" down in the Hollow – the mills, gardens and cottage; but her serious thoughts tended elsewhere. To admire the great, reverence the good, and be joyous with the genial, was very much Shirley's way, rather than thinking of her social superiority.

Miss Keeldar had first taken an interest in Caroline because she was quiet, and looked delicate and in need of care. Her liking increased greatly when she discovered that Caroline understood and responded to her own way of thinking and talking. She had hardly expected it. Miss Helstone, she fancied, looked too pretty and soft to be anything out of the common way; and she wondered at the self-won knowledge and speculations working in that girlish head.

Caroline's taste, too, was like her own. They delighted in the same books, and could have the comfort of laughing together over works of false sentimentality and pompous pretension. Caroline, she found, could tell the true from the false. The minds of the two girls often chimed sweetly in harmony.

One evening they chanced to be alone in the oak-parlour. They had passed a long wet day together without tedium. It was now almost dark; candles were not yet brought in; both were meditative and silent.

A western wind roared high round the hall, driving wild clouds and stormy rain; all was tempest outside, all deep peace within. Shirley sat at the window, listening to the restless complaints of the gale, which made her pensive. Snatches of sweet ballads haunted her ear; now and then she sang a stanza, obeying the fitful impulse of the wind. Caroline, at the darkest end of the room, was just discernible by the ruby shine of the fire, pacing to and fro, muttering fragments of poetry. She spoke very low, but Shirley heard her:

*“Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,*

*Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.”*

Here she stopped.

“Go on,” said Shirley.

“I was only repeating ‘The Castaway.’”

“I know. If you can remember it, say it all.”

So Caroline went through it. The wild sea, the drowning mariner, the reluctant ship swept on in the storm, were made real by her; and so was the heart of the poet, who wept for his own God-abandoned misery, and cried from the depths:

*“No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished – each alone!
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.”*

“I hope William Cowper is safe and calm in heaven now,” continued Caroline. “Poor man: he was nearly broken-hearted when he wrote that poem, and it almost breaks one’s heart to read it. But he found relief in writing it – I know he did. It seems to me, Shirley, that nobody should write poetry to show off intellect. Who cares for that sort of poetry? And who does not care for real feeling?”

“It seems you care for it; yet you managed to recite it with a steady voice, Caroline.”

“Cowper’s hand did not tremble in writing the lines. Why should my voice falter in repeating them? I believe that in writing ‘The Castaway’ the deadly spasm passed from his heart, he wept abundantly, and was comforted.”

Shirley remarked, “One could have loved Cowper, if it were only for the sake of comforting him.”

“You never would have loved Cowper,” rejoined Caroline promptly. “He was not made to be loved by woman.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I say. I know there are natures in the world – and very noble natures too – whom love never comes near. You might have sought Cowper with the intention of loving him, and you would have looked at him, pitied him, and left him, forced away by a sense of the impossible, the incongruous, as the crew were borne from their drowning comrade by ‘the furious blast.’”

“You may be right. Who told you this?”

“And what I say of Cowper, I say of Rousseau. Was he ever loved? He loved passionately; but was his passion ever returned? I am certain, never. And if there were any female Cowpers and Rousseaus, I should say the same of them.”

“Who told you this? Did Moore?”

“Why should anybody have told me? Have I not an instinct? Moore never talked to me either about Cowper, or Rousseau, or love.”

“Do you like characters of the Rousseau type, Caroline?”

“Not at all, as a whole. I sympathize intensely with certain dazzling qualities they possess. But they are made of clay and gold: taken altogether, I feel them unnatural, unhealthy, repulsive.”

“I dare say I should be more tolerant of a Rousseau than you would, Cary. By the way, you must miss that Cousin Robert of yours very much, now that you and he never meet.”

“I do.”

“And he must miss you?”

“He does not.”

“I imagine,” pursued Shirley, who had lately got a habit of introducing Moore’s name into the conversation, even when it seemed to have no business there – “I imagine that he was fond of you, since he took so much notice of you.”

“He never was fond of me; he took pains to prove he only just tolerated me.”

Caroline now habitually thought of Robert’s feelings in this scanty measure. She had her own reasons for being less sanguine than ever about hopeful views of the future.

“Of course, then,” observed Miss Keeldar, “you only just tolerated him in return?”

“Shirley, men and women are so different; women have so few things to think about, men so many. You may have a friendship for a man, while he is almost indifferent to you. Robert used to go to London sometimes for a week or a fortnight. Well, while he was away, I found his absence a void. Of course, I had my usual occupations; still I missed him. As I sat by myself in the evenings, I used to feel a strange conviction that if I could magically see Robert – where he was, how occupied – I should learn the width of the chasm between us.”

“Caroline,” demanded Miss Keeldar abruptly, “don’t you wish you had a profession?”

“I wish it fifty times a day. I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing to fill my head and hands and to occupy my thoughts. Labour may not make us happy, but it can prevent us from breaking our hearts with a tyrant pain. Besides, successful labour has its reward.”

“But labour and professions, they say, make women masculine, coarse, unwomanly.”

“And what does it signify if never-to-be-married women are unattractive or not? Provided they are decorous and neat, it is enough. Old maids should be allowed to be as grave and plain-looking as they please.”

“You might be an old maid yourself, Caroline, you speak so earnestly.”

“I shall be one. It is my destiny. I will never marry a Malone or a Sykes; and no one else will ever marry me.”

Here fell a long pause. Shirley broke it.

“Lina – did not Moore call you Lina sometimes?”

“Yes. It is short for Caroline in his native country.”

“Well, Lina, do you remember my one day noticing a curl missing from your hair, and your telling me that it was Robert’s fault, as he had once cut off a lock?”

“Yes.”

“If he was as indifferent to you as you say, why did he steal your hair?”

“I don’t know – yes, I do. It was my doing, not his. He was going to London; and the night before he went, I had found in his sister’s workbox a short lock of black hair. Hortense told me it was her brother’s, and a keepsake.

He was sitting near the table. He has plenty of hair; I thought he could spare me one curl, so I asked for it. He said, on condition that he might have a tress from my head. So he got one of my long locks of hair, and I got one of his short ones. I keep his, but I dare say he has lost mine. It was one of those silly deeds it distresses the heart and sets the face on fire to think of; one of those small but sharp recollections that return, lacerating your self-respect like tiny penknives, and forcing from your lips, as you sit alone, sudden, insane-sounding interjections.”

“Caroline!”

“I do think myself a fool, Shirley, in some respects. But I said I would not make you my confessor, for you cannot reciprocate foible for foible; you are not weak. How steadily you watch me now, like an eagle!”

“What a study of character you are. – Come in!”

This was said in answer to a tap at the door. Caroline saw the servant put a note into Shirley’s hands, and heard the words, “From Mr. Moore, ma’am.”

“Bring candles,” said Miss Keeldar. “It is a note on business.” But when candles were brought, she neither opened nor read it, before Caroline went home.

Chapter 13

FURTHER COMMUNICATIONS ON BUSINESS

Shirley enjoyed at times an easy indolence. There were periods when she took delight in thinking and doing nothing – moments when her simple existence, with the world around and heaven above her, seemed to give her such happiness that she did not need to lift a finger to increase the joy. Often, after an active morning, she would spend a sunny afternoon lying on the turf, in the shade of a tree. No society did she need but Caroline's; no spectacle did she ask but the deep blue sky, and such cloudlets as sailed across it; no sound but the bee's hum, the leaf's whisper. Her sole book in such hours was the dim chronicle of memory, or the page of blissful anticipation of the future. In her past were sweet passages, in her future rosy hopes.

Yet one such day when Caroline looked down at her, Shirley's cheek was wet.

"Shirley, why do you cry?" asked Caroline.

Miss Keeldar smiled, and turned her picturesque head. "Because it pleases me mightily to cry," she said. "My heart is both sad and glad. But you good, patient child – why do you not cry too? I only weep tears; you might weep gall, if you choose."

"Why should I weep gall?"

"Mateless, solitary bird!" was the only answer.

"And are not you too mateless, Shirley?"

"At heart – no."

"Oh! who nestles there, Shirley?"

But Shirley only laughed gaily at this question, and started up. "I have dreamed a mere day-dream, bright and baseless!"

Miss Helstone was by this time free from illusions: she fancied she knew pretty well where her own destiny and that of some others were leading. Yet she was still frequently drawn of an evening to the field-stile overlooking the Hollow.

On the night after the incident of the note, she had been there, watching for her beacon – watching vainly: no lamp was lit. She turned for home; in passing Fieldhead, its moonlight beauty attracted her glance. Tree and hall rose peaceful under the moon; pearly paleness gilded the building. The broad pavement in front shone pale also, gleaming as if some spell had transformed the dark granite to marble. On the silvery space were two human figures, at first motionless and mute; presently they moved in step, and spoke low. Caroline scrutinized them earnestly.

"Is it Mrs. Pryor and Shirley?"

Certainly it is Shirley. Who else has a shape so lithe, and proud, and graceful? And her face, too, is visible – careless and pensive, mocking and tender. Her curls caress her shoulder with their tendril rings. That is Shirley.

Her companion then is, of course, Mrs. Pryor?

Yes, if Mrs. Pryor is six feet tall, and is wearing men's clothes. The figure walking at Miss Keeldar's side is a tall young man; it is her tenant, Robert Moore.

The pair speak softly – Caroline cannot hear them. She is not eavesdropping; and so she lingers.

There was a time when, on summer nights, Moore used to walk with his cousin along a narrow terrace in the Hollow.

“But he used to hold my hand,” thought Caroline; “he does not touch hers. And yet she does not look haughty now. Robert must think hers a fine face; she has such generous yet soft fire in her eyes. She smiles – what makes her smile so sweet? Robert must have felt its beauty. They look to me like two happy spirits on a silver shore, beyond the death-flood. They have reached it; they walk there united. And what am I, standing here in shadow and concealment, my mind darker than my hiding-place? I am one of this world – a poor doomed mortal, who asks hopelessly why she was born, why she lives.

“This is the worst time I have come to yet; still I am prepared for it. I gave Robert up to Shirley, the first moment I saw her – rich, youthful, and lovely. She has him now. He is her lover. She is his darling. When they are married, they will both be happy, and I do not grudge them their bliss; but I groan under my own acute misery. Truly I ought not to have been born; they should have smothered me at the first cry.”

Here, Shirley and her companion turned toward the gate, and some of their conversation became audible. Caroline would not stay to listen. She passed away noiselessly. The reader, however, may remain and hear.

“I cannot imagine why nature did not give you a bulldog's head, for you have a bulldog's tenacity,” said Shirley.

“Not a flattering idea. Am I so ignoble?”

“And also you have the bulldog's silent way of coming up noiselessly behind, to seize fast, and hold on.”

“This is guess-work. In your presence I have been no bulldog.”

“Your very silence indicates your race. How little you talk, yet how deeply you scheme!”

“I know the ways of these people. I have learnt their intentions. My note last night informed you that Barraclough's trial had ended in his conviction and sentence to transportation. His associates will plot vengeance. I shall lay my plans: I shall be prepared – that is all. Do you approve of what I propose?”

“I shall stand by you so long as you are defending yourself.”

“Good!” said Moore. “Even if you disapproved, I believe I should act the same way; but I now feel satisfied. On the whole, I relish the task.”

“I dare say you do. So would old Helstone. Shall I speak to him? I will, if you like.”

“Act as you please. But I should inform you that Mr. Helstone is somewhat prejudiced against me.”

“I have heard all about your differences. Depend upon it, they will melt away. He cannot resist the temptation of an alliance under present circumstances.”

“I should be glad to have him; he is of true metal. An old blade, and rusty somewhat, but the edge still excellent.”

“Well, you shall have him, Mr. Moore, if I can win him. It will cost me several cups of tea, toast and cake, and an ample measure of persuasion. It grows rather chill.”

“I see you shiver. Am I wrong to keep you here? Yet it is so calm – I even feel warm – and society such as yours is a rare pleasure to me. If you were wrapped in a thicker shawl—”

“I might stay longer, and forget how late it is, which would dismay Mrs. Pryor. We keep early hours at Fieldhead, Mr. Moore; and so, I am sure, does your sister at the cottage.”

“Yes; but Hortense and I have an understanding that we shall each do as we please. Three nights a week I sleep in the mill; when it is moonlight and mild, I often haunt the Hollow till daybreak.”

“When I was a very little girl, Mr. Moore, my nurse used to tell me tales of fairies being seen in that Hollow. You will be falling under enchantment.”

“I fear it is done,” said Moore, in a low voice.

“But there are worse things than fairies to be guarded against,” pursued Miss Keeldar.

“Things more perilous.”

“Far more so. For instance, how would you like to meet Michael Hartley, that mad Calvinist and Jacobin weaver? They say he is a poacher, and often goes abroad at night with his gun.”

“I have already had the luck to meet him. We held a long argument together one night. A strange little incident it was; I liked it.”

“Liked it? I admire your taste! Michael is not sane. Where did you meet him?”

“In the deepest spot in the glen,” said Moore. “We sat down near the bridge in moonlight. We had a talk about politics and religion. Michael was near crazed, but there was a wild interest in his ravings. The man would be half a poet, if he were not wholly a maniac. He solemnly informed me that hell was waiting for me, and that he read the mark of the beast on my brow. He said he had beheld the manner of my doom, and left me with these words, ‘The end is not yet.’”

“Have you seen him since?”

“About a month afterwards, in returning from market, I met him and Moses Barraclough, both drunk. They were praying at the roadside. They accosted me as Satan, and bid me flee. Then just a few days ago, Michael appeared at my counting-house door, in his shirt-sleeves. He delivered the comforting message that he wished Mr. Moore to set his house in order, as his soul was likely shortly to be required.”

“Do you make light of these things?”

“The poor man had been drinking for weeks, and was in a state bordering on delirium tremens.”

“Then he is the more likely to try to fulfil his own prophecies. Mr. Moore, go home!”

“So soon? It is early yet.”

“It is late. For my part, I am going in. Will you promise me not to wander in the Hollow tonight?”

“If you wish it.”

“I do wish it. Do you consider life valueless?”

“On the contrary, of late I regard my life as invaluable. Existence is neither aimless nor hopeless to me now,” said Moore, “and it was both three months ago. I was then drowning. All at once a hand was stretched to me – such a delicate hand I scarcely dared trust it; its strength, however, has rescued me from ruin.”

“Are you really rescued?”

“For the time. Your assistance has given me another chance.”

“Live to make the best of it. Don’t offer yourself as a target to Michael Hartley; and good-night!”

Caroline had promised to spend the next evening at Fieldhead. The gloomy hours beforehand she spent shut up in her own apartment, only leaving it to join her uncle at meals, and avoiding inquiries from Fanny by telling her that she was busy altering a dress.

She did sew. She plied her needle ceaselessly, but her brain worked faster than her fingers. More intensely than ever, she desired a fixed occupation. Her uncle must be once more entreated, but first she would consult Mrs. Pryor. Her head laboured to make plans: now and then, a tear would fall on her busy hands; but this sign of emotion was rare and quickly effaced. She would re-thread her needle, and work on.

Late in the afternoon she reached Fieldhead, and appeared in the oak parlour just as tea was brought in. Shirley asked her why she came so late.

“Because I have been making my summer dress,” said she.

“In which I will like to see you,” said Shirley. “You are a lady-like little person, Caroline. Is she not, Mrs. Pryor?”

Mrs. Pryor never paid compliments on personal appearance. On this occasion she only swept Caroline’s curls from her cheek, and observed, “You get somewhat thin, my love, and somewhat pale. Do you sleep well?” And she gazed at her anxiously.

“I sometimes dream melancholy dreams,” answered Caroline; “and if I lie awake at night, the rectory seems a dreary old place. You know it is very near the churchyard, and it is said that there are graves underneath the out-kitchens. I rather long to leave the rectory.”

“My dear, you are surely not superstitious?”

“No, Mrs. Pryor; but I think I grow what is called nervous. I see things under a darker aspect than I used to do. I have fears I never used to have; and I have an inexpressible weight on my mind which I would give the world to shake off, and I cannot do it.”

“Strange!” cried Shirley. “I never feel so.” Mrs. Pryor said nothing.

“Fine weather and pleasant scenes give me no pleasure,” continued Caroline. “Calm evenings are not calm to me. Is this weakness of mind, Mrs. Pryor, or what is it? I cannot help it. I often struggle against it. I reason; but reason and effort make no difference.”

“You should take more exercise,” said Mrs. Pryor.

“Exercise! I exercise till I am ready to drop.”

“My dear, you should go away from home.”

“Mrs. Pryor, I should like to. I wish to be a governess, as you have been. It would oblige me greatly if you would speak to my uncle on the subject.”

“Nonsense!” broke in Shirley. “What an idea! Be a governess! Better be a slave. Why should you dream of such a painful step?”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Pryor, “you are very young to be a governess, and not sufficiently robust. The duties a governess undertakes are often severe.”

“I believe I want severe duties to occupy me.”

“Occupy you!” cried Shirley. “When are you idle? I never saw a more industrious girl. You are always at work. Come, sit by my side, and take some tea. Don’t you care for my friendship, then, that you wish to leave me?”

“Indeed I do, Shirley; I shall never find another friend so dear.”

Miss Keeldar put her hand into Caroline’s with impulsive affection.

“If you think so, you had better make much of me,” she said, “and not run away. I hate to part with those to whom I am become attached. Mrs. Pryor there sometimes talks of leaving me, and says I might find someone more advantageous, but I should as soon think of exchanging an old-fashioned mother for something modish. As for you – why, I began to flatter myself we were thoroughly friends; that you liked Shirley almost as well as Shirley likes you.”

“I do like Shirley. I like her more every day. But that does not make me strong or happy.”

“And would it make you strong or happy to go and live as a dependent amongst utter strangers? It would not. It is not in your nature to bear the desolate life governesses generally lead; you would fall ill. I won’t hear of it.”

And Miss Keeldar paused, having said this very decidedly. Soon she went on, “Why, it is my daily pleasure now to look out for you, to know that my quiet, shrewd companion and mistress is coming; that I shall have her sitting in the room to look at or to talk to, as we please. This may be selfish, but it is true.”

“I would write to you, Shirley.”

“And what are letters? Only a stopgap. Drink some tea, Caroline. Eat something – you eat nothing. Laugh and be cheerful, and stay at home.”

Miss Helstone shook her head and sighed. She felt how difficult it would be to persuade anyone to help her make the change which she believed desirable. But this cure for circumstances which she could fully explain to none, least of all to Shirley, seemed, in all eyes but her own, incomprehensible.

There really was no financial need for her to leave a comfortable home and “take a situation.” So her friends thought; but of Caroline’s strange sufferings, which she desired so eagerly to escape, they had no idea. It was both impossible and hopeless to explain; to wait and endure was her only plan.

“Now, is your mind quieter?” inquired Shirley. “Will you stay at home?”

“I shall not leave it against the approval of my friends,” was the reply; “but I think in time they will be obliged to think as I do.”

During this conversation Mrs. Pryor looked uneasy. Her extreme habitual reserve would rarely permit her to interrogate others. She had a multitude of questions she never ventured to put. Had she been alone with Caroline, she might have spoken: but Miss Keeldar’s presence sealed her lips, and nervous scruples kept her from interfering. She merely showed her concern for Miss Helstone indirectly, by asking her if the fire made her too warm, closing a window whence she imagined a draught blew, and often glancing at her.

Shirley resumed. “Having destroyed your plan,” she said, “which I hope I have done, I shall construct a new one of my own. Every summer I make an excursion. This season I propose spending two months either at the Scotch

lochs or the English lakes – that is, I shall go provided you consent to accompany me. If you refuse, I shall not stir.”

“You are very good, Shirley.”

“I would be very good if you would let me. I have every intention to be good. I know I think of myself more than anybody else; but who does not? However, when Captain Keeldar is made comfortable, and has a sensible, congenial comrade, it gives him a thorough pleasure to make that comrade happy. Should we not be happy, Caroline, in the Highlands? Or if you can bear a sea-voyage, we can go to the Isles – the Hebrides, Shetland, the Orkney Islands. Would you not like that? I see you would. Your face is all sunshine at the mention of it.”

“I should like it very much,” returned Caroline, to whom, indeed, the notion of such a tour was gloriously reviving. Shirley rubbed her hands.

“Come; I can do a good deed with my cash,” she exclaimed. “My thousand a year can bring health to the drooping, and consolation to the sad. This summer, we shall go out into the North Atlantic, beyond the Shetlands, perhaps to the Faroe Isles. We will see seals and mermaids. Caroline is laughing, Mrs. Pryor. I have done her good.”

“I shall like to go, Shirley,” said Miss Helstone. “I long to hear the ocean-waves, and to see them as I have imagined them in dreams, like tossing banks of green light, strewn with vanishing and reappearing wreaths of foam. I shall delight to see those lone rock-islets where the sea-birds live unmolested. We shall be on the track of the Vikings; we shall almost see the shores of Norway.”

“Will you think of Fitful Head now when you lie awake at night, of gulls shrieking round it, and waves tumbling upon it, rather than of the graves under the rectory back-kitchen?”

“I will try; and instead of musing about shrouds and coffins, I will fancy seals lying in the sunshine on solitary shores; of happy flocks of unscared birds.”

“And what will become of that weight you said you had on your mind?”

“I will try to forget it in imagining a herd of whales rushing through the deep, a hundred of them wallowing and rolling in the wake of a patriarch bull.”

“I hope our boat will meet with no such herd, Caroline. I should not like to be capsized by the patriarch bull.”

“I suppose you expect to see mermaids, Shirley?”

“One of them, at any rate – and she is to appear like this. I am to be walking by myself on deck, under a full harvest moon. Something will rise white on the surface of the sea, over which that moon hangs glorious. The object glitters and sinks. It rises again. I think I hear it cry out; I call you up from the cabin; we see an image emerging from the dim wave. We both see the long hair, the lifted foam-white arm. It glides nearer; a human face is plainly visible, with an alluring glance. It beckons. Were we men, we should spring into the cold billow; being women, we stand safe, though not without dread. She feels herself powerless; anger crosses her face; she cannot charm, but she will appal us; she rises high, and glides revealed on the dark wave-ridge. Temptress-terror! monstrous likeness of ourselves! Are you not glad, Caroline, when at last, with a wild shriek, she dives?”

“But, Shirley, she is not like us. We are neither temptresses, nor terrors, nor monsters.”

“Some of our kind, it is said, are all three. There are men who ascribe to ‘woman,’ in general, such attributes.”

“My dears,” here interrupted Mrs. Pryor, “does it not strike you that your conversation is rather fanciful?”

“But there is no harm in our fancies; is there, ma’am?”

“Mermaids do not exist; why speak of them as if they did? My dear, I think there is an arrival. I heard a step in the lane while you were talking.”

Shirley went to the window.

“Yes, there is some one,” said she, turning quietly away; a sensitive flush animated her face. She cast her gaze down, and seemed to think as she waited.

The servant announced Mr. Moore, and Shirley turned. He seemed very tall as he entered, and stood in contrast with the three ladies. He was looking well; a renewed youth and hope glowed in his eye. His face was as cheerful as it was earnest.

“I am just returned from Stilbro’,” he said to Miss Keeldar; “and I thought I would call to tell you the result of my mission.”

“Your visit is well timed,” she said. “Sit down. We have not finished tea. Are you English enough to enjoy tea, or do you faithfully adhere to coffee?”

Moore accepted tea, and paid his respects to Mrs. Pryor with grave modesty. Then he looked at Caroline – not, however, for the first time: his glance had fallen upon her before. He gave her his hand, and asked her how she was. Miss Helstone replied quietly. She was in the shadow, and the friendly protection of early twilight kept out of view each traitorous blush.

Moore took the empty chair near her, opposite Miss Keeldar. Caroline, screened by his very closeness, and sheltered by the deepening dusk, soon regained mastery of her feelings. He addressed Miss Keeldar.

“I went to the barracks,” he said, “and had an interview with Colonel Ryde. He approved my plans, and promised the aid I wanted. Indeed, he offered more soldiers than I require – half a dozen will suffice. I don’t intend to be swamped by redcoats. They are needed for appearance rather than anything else. My main reliance is on my own civilians.”

“And on their captain,” interposed Shirley.

“What, Captain Keeldar?” inquired Moore, smiling slightly, in a tone of respectful raillery.

“No,” returned Shirley, answering the smile; “Captain Gérard Moore, who trusts to the prowess of his own right arm, I believe.”

“Furnished with his counting-house ruler,” added Moore. Resuming his usual gravity, he went on: “I received by this evening’s post a note from the Home Secretary in answer to mine. It appears they are uneasy at the state of matters here in the north; they especially condemn the weakness of the mill-owners. They say, as I have always said, that inaction can only encourage disorder, and lead to bloodshed. There is the note – I brought it for your perusal; and there is a batch of newspapers, containing further accounts of uprisings in Nottingham, Manchester, and elsewhere.”

He laid them before Miss Keeldar. While she read them he took his tea quietly; but his eyes were busy, watching the two young ladies.

Miss Keeldar, directly opposite, was easily seen. Her clear cheek was tinted still with the colour which had risen into it a few minutes since. Her dark lashes looking down as she read, the dusky yet delicate line of her eyebrows, the gloss of her curls, made her heightened complexion look like the bloom of a

wild flower. There was natural grace in her attitude, and her silk dress, though simply fashioned, was almost splendid in the shifting brightness of its tints. On her arm she wore a bracelet of gold and ivory. There was something brilliant in the whole picture. It is to be supposed that Moore thought so, as his eye dwelt long on it, but he seldom permitted his feelings to show in his serious face.

He could not see Caroline without manœuvring a little. He leaned back in his chair, and looked down on her. Miss Helstone had no brilliancy. Sitting in the shade, without ornaments, her modest muslin dress colourless but for its narrow stripe of pale azure, the very brownness of her hair and eyes invisible by this faint light, she was, compared with the heiress, as a graceful pencil sketch compared with a vivid painting. Since Robert had seen her last a great change had been wrought in her. If he perceived it, he said nothing.

“How is Hortense?” asked Caroline softly.

“Very well; but she misses you.”

“Tell her that I miss her, and that I write and read some French every day.”

“She will ask if you sent your love; she is always particular on that point. You know she likes attention.”

“My very best love. And say to her that whenever she has time to write me a little note I shall be glad to hear from her.”

“Hortense will be ready to shed tears. She is tenderhearted about her pupil; yet she reproaches you sometimes for obeying your uncle’s injunctions too literally. Affection, like love, will be unjust now and then.”

Caroline made no answer; for indeed her heart was troubled, and she would have raised her handkerchief to her eyes if she had dared. If she had dared, too, she would have declared how the very flowers in the garden of Hollow’s Cottage were dear to her; how the little parlour of that house was her earthly paradise; how she longed to return to it, as Eve, in her exile, must have longed to revisit Eden. Not daring, however, to say these things, she held her peace, waiting for Robert to say something more. It was long since his voice had addressed her; if she could have imagined that the meeting gave him pleasure, to her it would have been blissful. Yet, even in doubt, the meeting was as welcome as sunshine to the cage of an imprisoned bird. To be near Robert was to be revived.

Miss Keeldar laid down the papers.

“And are you glad or sad for all these menacing tidings?” she asked him.

“Neither; but I certainly am instructed. I see that our only plan is to be firm. Efficient preparation and a resolute attitude are the best means of averting bloodshed.”

As the candles were brought in, he rose to show her a particular paragraph; it seemed that he expected disturbances around Briarfield, though in what form was not specified. Neither Caroline nor Mrs. Pryor asked questions.

Miss Keeldar, however, spoke with interest, life, and earnestness. There was nothing coquettish in her demeanour; whatever she felt for Moore, she felt it seriously. And serious, too, were his feelings, apparently, for he made no effort to dazzle or impress. Notwithstanding, his deeper voice and somewhat harder mind gave him an aspect of command. Miss Keeldar looked happy in conversing with him, and her joy seemed twofold – joy of the past and present, of memory and of hope.

These were Caroline's ideas of the pair. She tried not to suffer, but suffered miserably nevertheless. A few minutes before, her famished heart had tasted a crumb of nourishment; but the feast was snatched from her, spread before another, and she remained a bystander at the banquet.

The clock struck nine; it was Caroline's time for going home. She gathered up her work, and bade Mrs. Pryor a quiet good-night, receiving from her a warmer pressure of the hand than usual. She stepped up to Miss Keeldar.

"Good-night, Shirley!"

Shirley started up. "What! Are you going already?"

"It is past nine."

"I never heard the clock. You will come again tomorrow, and be happy tonight, will you not? Remember our plans."

"Yes," said Caroline; "I have not forgotten."

But she felt that no plans could permanently restore her mental tranquillity. She turned to Robert, who stood close behind her. As he looked up, the light of the candles fell full on her face. All its paleness, all its change, all its forlorn meaning were clearly revealed. Whether Robert saw it, nothing indicated.

"Good-night!" she said, shaking like a leaf, hastily offering her thin hand, anxious to depart quickly.

"You are going home?" he asked, not touching her hand.

"Yes."

"Is Fanny come for you?"

"Yes."

"I may as well accompany you a step of the way; not up to the rectory, though, lest my old friend Helstone should shoot me from the window."

He laughed, and took his hat. Caroline spoke of unnecessary trouble; he told her to put on her bonnet and shawl. They were soon both in the open air. Moore drew her hand under his arm, just in his old, kind manner.

"You may run on, Fanny," he said to the housemaid. When the girl had got a little in advance, he enclosed Caroline's hand in his, and said he was glad to find she was a familiar guest at Fieldhead. He hoped her intimacy with Miss Keeldar would continue; such society would be both pleasant and improving.

Caroline replied that she liked Shirley.

"And there is no doubt the liking is mutual," said Moore. "If she professes friendship, be certain she is sincere. She cannot feign; she scorns hypocrisy. And, Caroline, are we never to see you at Hollow's Cottage again?"

"I suppose not, unless my uncle should change his mind."

"Are you much alone now?"

"Yes, a good deal."

"Have you been quite well lately?"

"Quite."

"You must take care of yourself. Be sure not to neglect exercise. I fancied you somewhat altered – a little fallen away, and pale. Is your uncle kind to you?"

"Yes; he is just as he always is."

"Not too attentive, then. And what ails you? Tell me, Lina."

"Nothing, Robert." But her voice faltered.

"That is to say, nothing that you will tell me. I am not to be taken into confidence. Separation is to estrange us, is it?"

"I do not know. Sometimes I fear it is."

"But it ought not to. 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot?'"

"Robert, I don't forget."

"It is two months, I should think, Caroline, since you were at the cottage. Have you ever passed that way in your walk?"

"I have come to the top of the fields sometimes of an evening and looked down. Once I saw Hortense in the garden watering her flowers, and now and then I have waited for your lamp to shine out from the counting-house, and I have seen your outline between it and the window. I knew it was you."

"I wonder I never met you. I occasionally walk to the top of the Hollow's fields after sunset."

"I know," said Caroline. "I almost spoke to you one night, you passed so near me."

"Did I? And I did not see you! Was I alone?"

"I saw you twice, and neither time were you alone."

"Who was my companion?"

"The first time you were with Mr. Yorke; and the second time, somebody with dark curls, and a sparkling necklace. But I only just got a glimpse of you both; I did not wait to hear you converse."

"It appears you walk invisible. Henceforth, when sitting in the counting-house at dead of night, I shall imagine that Caroline may be leaning over my shoulder reading with me from the same book, or sitting at my side."

"You need fear no such infliction. I do not come near you; I only stand afar off, watching what may become of you."

"When I walk out along the hedgerows in the evening, I shall fancy the flutter of every little bird over its nest is a movement made by you; tree-shadows will take your shape; in the white sprays of hawthorn I shall imagine glimpses of you. Lina, you will haunt me."

"I will never be where you would not wish me to be, nor see nor hear what you would wish unseen and unheard."

"I shall see you in my very mill in broad daylight. Indeed, I have seen you there once. A week ago, amongst the mill-girls, moving to and fro, I seemed to see a figure resembling yours. It was some effect of light; when I walked up to the group, I found only buxom lasses in pinafores."

"I shall not follow you into your mill, Robert, unless you call me there."

"Nor is that the only time on which imagination has played me a trick. One night, when I came home late from market, I walked into the cottage parlour and thought I saw you. There was no candle; moonbeams poured through the panes. There you were, Lina, at the window, dressed in white. For half a second your face seemed turned towards me; for half a second my idea was to go and take your hand, to welcome you. Two steps forward broke the spell. The drapery of the dress changed; the face dissolved. When I reached the spot, there was nothing but the sweep of a white muslin curtain, and a plant in a flower-pot. It was a mere illusion."

"I wonder you have time for such illusions, occupied as your mind must be."

"So do I. But I find I have two natures – one for the world and business, and one for home and leisure. Gérard Moore is a hard dog, but your cousin Robert is sometimes a dreamer."

“Your two natures agree with you. I think you are looking in good spirits and health. You have quite lost that harassed air of a few months ago.”

“Certainly I am disentangled of some difficulties. I have got clear of some shoals, and have more sea-room.”

“And, with a fair wind, you hope to make a prosperous voyage?”

“I hope it – yes – but hope is deceptive. The mariner must always expect a tempest.”

“But you are a skilful pilot, Robert; you will weather the storm.”

“My kinswoman always thinks the best of me, but I will take her words for a good omen, as if she is one of those birds that signifies good luck to the sailor.”

“I can do nothing for you. I have no power. It is of no use saying I have the will to serve you. Yet I have that will. I wish you fortune and true happiness.”

“When did you ever wish me anything else? Oh! we have reached the churchyard. We are to part here, I suppose. It is so fine a night, I have no particular wish to return yet to the Hollow. Tell Fanny to go in. Say we are coming. A few minutes will make no difference.”

The church clock struck ten.

“My uncle will be coming out: he always surveys the church and churchyard at this hour.”

“And if he does? I should find pleasure in eluding him. We could be under the east window when he is at the porch; as he came round to the north side we could wheel off to the south; we might even hide behind the monuments.”

“Robert, what good spirits you have! Go! go!” added Caroline hastily. “I hear the front door—”

“I want to stay.”

“You know my uncle will be terribly angry. He forbade me to see you. Go, Robert; I hear him cough.”

“It is strange how much I wish to stay!”

“You remember what he did to Fanny’s—” began Caroline, and stopped abruptly short of saying “sweetheart.” She did not wish to suggest the idea.

Moore was less scrupulous. “Fanny’s sweetheart?” he said. “He gave him a shower under the pump, did he not? He’d do as much for me, I dare say, with pleasure. But he would make a distinction between a cousin and a lover, would he not?”

“Oh, he would not think of you in that way, of course not; his quarrel with you is political. Yet I should not like the breach to be widened, and he is so testy. For your own sake and mine, Robert, go!”

She gave him a beseeching look. Moore covered her clasped hands an instant with his, said “Good-night!” and went.

Caroline was in a moment at the kitchen door behind Fanny. The shadow of the shovel-hat at that very instant fell on a moonlit tomb. The rector emerged, erect as a cane, from his garden, and proceeded his slow march through the cemetery. Moore was almost caught. He had to “dodge” after all, around the church, and kneel for full ten minutes behind a monument, his hat off, his dark eye shining, and his lips parted with inward laughter at his position; for the rector meantime stood coolly star-gazing within three feet of him.

Mr. Helstone, however, had no suspicion on his mind. He was not aware that his niece had been out that day, and imagined her to be reading in her chamber – where, indeed, she was by this time, though not reading, but standing at her window with fast-throbbing heart, peeping anxiously from behind the blind. At last she heard Mr. Helstone come in; she saw Robert vault the churchyard wall; she then went down to prayers.

When she returned to her chamber, it was to meet the memory of Robert. Long she sat at her window, long gazed down on the old garden and church, on the tombs laid out grey and calm in moonlight. She was with Moore in spirit; she was at his side; she heard his voice; she gave her hand into his hand; it rested warm in his fingers. When the church clock struck, a little mouse familiar to her chamber – an intruder for which she would never permit Fanny to lay a trap – came rattling amongst the trinkets on the dressing-table, to nibble a bit of biscuit laid ready for it. Then Caroline looked up, recalled to the real world, and said half aloud, as if to some unseen accuser:

“I am not cherishing love dreams; I am only thinking because I cannot sleep. Of course, I know he will marry Shirley.”

She resumed the dream, nestling to the vision’s side – listening to, conversing with it. It paled at last. As dawn approached, the setting stars and breaking day dimmed the creation of fancy; the wakened song of birds hushed her whispers. The tale became a vague murmur. The shape turned cold and ghostly grey. She was left solitary at last. She crept to her couch, chill and dejected.

Chapter 14

SHIRLEY SEEKS TO BE SAVED BY WORKS

“Of course, I know he will marry Shirley,” were her first words when she rose in the morning. “And he ought to marry her. She can help him.”

But the cruel next thought was, “Oh! I shall be wholly forgotten when they are married! And what shall I do when Robert is quite taken from me? Where shall I turn? My Robert! I wish I could call him mine. But I am poverty; Shirley is wealth and power, and beauty too, and love. I cannot deny it. She loves him. Let them be married, then. But afterwards I shall be nothing to him. As for being his sister, and all that stuff, I despise it. I will be all or nothing to a man like Robert. Once that pair is united, I will certainly leave them. As little could I fill the place of their mutual friend as that of their deadly foe. Robert is a first-rate man: I love him. I would be his wife if I could; as I cannot, I must go where I shall never see him. – Sunder me then, Providence. Part us speedily.”

Late in the afternoon, the apparition of one of the people haunting her thoughts passed the parlour window. Miss Keeldar sauntered slowly by with her usual mixture of wistfulness and carelessness.

“What do you mean by not coming to see me this afternoon, as you promised?” she asked Caroline as she entered.

“I was not in the humour,” replied Miss Helstone truthfully.

Shirley had already fixed on her a penetrating eye.

“No,” she said; “I see you are not in the humour for loving me. You are in one of your sunless, inclement moods, when a fellow-creature’s presence is not welcome to you. You have such moods. Are you aware of it?”

“Do you mean to stay long, Shirley?”

“Yes. I am come for tea, and must have it before I go. I shall take the liberty of removing my bonnet without being asked.”

And this she did.

“A pretty expression you have on your face,” she went on, still gazing keenly and rather pityingly at Caroline. “Wonderfully self-supported you look, you solitude-seeking, wounded deer. Are you afraid Shirley will bother you if she discovers that you are hurt?”

“I never do fear Shirley.”

“But sometimes you dislike her; often you avoid her. Shirley can feel when she is shunned. If you had not walked home in the company you did last night, you would have been a different girl today. What time did you reach the rectory?”

“By ten.”

“Humph! You took three-quarters of an hour to walk a mile. Was it you, or Moore, who lingered so?”

“Shirley, you talk nonsense.”

“He talked nonsense – that I doubt not. I feel disposed to call him out – I have felt desperately irritated all day.”

“You don’t ask me why,” she went on, after a pause, “you little silent, over-modest thing; and you don’t deserve that I should pour out my secrets into

your lap. Upon my word, I could have duelled with Moore yesterday. I have pistols, and can use them.”

“Stuff, Shirley! Which would you have shot – me or Robert?”

“Neither, perhaps. More likely a bat or a tree. He is a puppy, your cousin – a quiet, serious, ambitious puppy. I see him standing before me, talking his half-stern, half-gentle talk, bearing me down with his set purpose; and then – I have no patience with him!”

Miss Keeldar started off on a rapid walk through the room.

“You are mistaken,” urged Caroline anxiously. “Robert is no puppy or flirt; I can vouch for that.”

“You vouch for it! Do you think I’ll take your word on the subject? To advance Moore’s fortune you would cut off your right hand.”

“But not tell lies. And I assure you that he was just civil to me last night – that was all.”

“I never asked what he was. I can guess. I saw him from the window take your hand.”

“That is nothing. I am his cousin, you know.”

“I feel indignant, and that is the long and short of the matter,” responded Miss Keeldar. “All my comfort is broken up by his manœuvres. He keeps intruding between you and me. Without him we should be good friends; but that six feet of puppyhood perpetually eclipses our friendship. He makes me seem to you a mere bore and a nuisance.”

“No, Shirley, no.”

“He does. You did not want my society this afternoon, and I feel it hard. You are naturally somewhat reserved, but I am a sociable person. I have such regard for you that I could have you with me always, and not for a second do I ever wish to be rid of you. You cannot say as much about me.”

“Shirley, I like you. I am every day growing fonder of you. You know I am too English to get up a vehement friendship all at once; but you are so different to everyday young ladies. I esteem you, I value you; you are never a burden to me. Do you believe me?”

“Partly,” replied Miss Keeldar, smiling rather incredulously; “but quiet as you look, you have hidden depths. Then you are certainly not happy, and unhappy people are often preoccupied, and not in the mood for companionship. Moreover, there is a sort of unhappiness which not only depresses, but corrodes; and that, I fear, is your portion. Will pity do you any good, Lina? If it will, take some from Shirley; it is genuine.”

“Shirley, I never had a sister; but it flashes on me how sisters feel towards each other – affection which no shocks can uproot, which little quarrels only trample for an instant; affection that no passion can outrival, with which even love itself cannot do more than compete. Love hurts us so, Shirley. It is so tormenting, so racking, and it burns away our strength with its flame. Affection brings no pain and fire, only sustenance and balm. I am supported and soothed when you are near, Shirley. Do you believe me now?”

“We really are friends, then, Lina?”

“We really are,” returned the other, drawing Shirley towards her, and making her sit down, “chance what may.”

“Come, then; we will talk of something else.” But at this moment the rector came in, and the “something else” was not again alluded to till the

moment of Shirley's departure. She delayed a few minutes in the passage to say:

"Caroline, I wish to tell you that I have a great weight on my mind; my conscience is uneasy. Not my private conscience, you must understand, but my lord-of-the-manor conscience. I have got into the clutch of an eagle with iron talons. I have fallen under a stern influence, which I cannot resist. Something will be done soon, I fear, which it does not please me to think of. To ease my mind, I mean to enter on good works. Don't be surprised, therefore, if you see me all at once turn outrageously charitable. I have no idea how to begin, but you must give me some advice. We will talk more on the subject tomorrow; and just ask that excellent Miss Ainley to step up to Fieldhead. I have some notion of putting myself under her tuition."

On the morrow Caroline found Shirley sitting gravely at her desk, with an account-book, a bundle of banknotes, and a well-filled purse before her. She was looking mighty serious, but a little puzzled. She said she had been "casting an eye" over the weekly expenditure in housekeeping at the hall, trying to find out where she could retrench; that she had also just seen Mrs. Gill, the cook, and had sent that person away with a notion that her mistress was crazed.

"I have lectured her on the duty of being careful," said she, "in a way quite new to her. I surprised myself; for I never thought about the subject of economy till lately. But it is all theory; for when I came to the practical part, I could not take off a single pound of butter, lard, bread, cold meat, or other kitchen item whatever. And I could not ask the meaning of unaccountable pounds of candles. We do not wash for the parish, yet I viewed in silence bills for enough soap and bleaching-powder to run a laundry. Carnivorous I am not, nor is Mrs. Pryor, yet I only opened my eyes a little wider when I saw the vast butchers' bills. Caroline, you may laugh at me; I am a coward. I blushed and hung my head before Mrs. Gill, when she ought to have been faltering confessions to me. I found it impossible even to hint, much less to prove, that she was a cheat. I have no true courage."

"Shirley, my uncle says there are not ten thousand men in England as genuinely fearless as you."

"I am fearless, physically; I am never nervous about danger. I was not afraid when Mr. Wynne's great bull bellowed and made a run at me, as I was crossing the lea; but I was afraid of seeing Mrs. Gill brought to shame. You have ten times my strength of mind on certain subjects, Caroline. You, whom nothing can induce to pass a bull, however quiet he looks, would have firmly shown my housekeeper she had done wrong; then you would have gently and wisely admonished her; and at last, I dare say, you would have sweetly forgiven her. Of this I am incapable. However, I find we live within our means. I have money in hand, and I really must do some good with it. The Briarfield poor must be helped. What ought I to do, think you, Lina? Had I not better distribute the cash at once?"

"No, indeed, Shirley; I have often noticed that your only notion of charity is to give shillings and half-crowns in a careless, free-handed sort of way. You suggested Miss Ainley; to Miss Ainley I will apply. And, meantime, promise to not begin throwing away your money!"

"It is not an immense sum, but I feel responsible for its disposal; and really this responsibility weighs heavily on my mind. They say that there are

some families starving in Briarfield. I must and will help them. We should help each other through seasons of want and woe as well as we can.”

“You do help others, Shirley. You give a great deal as it is.”

“Not enough. I must give more. Let me listen to Mercy as long as she is near me. After all, if my property is attacked, I shall defend it like a tigress. If the poor rise in the form of the mob, I shall turn against them; I must resist them, and I will.”

“You talk like Robert.”

“I feel like Robert, only more fiercely. Let them meddle with Robert, or Robert’s mill, and I shall hate them. If once they violently wrong me or mine, I shall quite forget pity for their wretchedness.”

“Shirley, how your eyes flash!”

“Because my soul burns. Would you let Robert be borne down by a mob?”

“If I had your power to aid Robert, I would use it as you mean to use it. If I could be such a friend to him as you can be, I would stand by him, as you mean to do, till death.”

“And now, Lina, your eyes glow. However, it is not yet come to fighting. I want to prevent mischief. I cannot forget that these embittered feelings of the poor have their origin in suffering. To allay this suffering, and thereby lessen their hate, I will give; and I must give wisely. We must introduce some clear, calm, practical sense into our councils. So go and fetch Miss Ainley.”

Caroline put on her bonnet and departed. It may, perhaps, appear strange that neither she nor Shirley thought of consulting Mrs. Pryor; but they were wise in abstaining. To have consulted her would only have caused her painful embarrassment. She was better read and a deeper thinker than Miss Ainley, but of administrative energy she had none. She would give her own modest mite to charity; but as to forming plans on a large scale, that was out of the question.

It was a bright day for Miss Ainley when she was summoned to Fieldhead; when she was seated with all honour and deference at a table with paper, pen and – best of all – cash before her, and requested to draw up a plan for bringing relief to the destitute poor of Briarfield. She, who knew them all, had studied their wants, who had again and again felt how they might best be helped, was fully competent for the task, and a meek exultation gladdened her kind heart as she answered the eager questions put by the two girls.

Shirley placed at her disposal £300, at which Miss Ainley’s eyes filled with joyful tears. She quickly drew up a simple, sensible plan for its expenditure; and she doubted not that the lady of Fieldhead’s example would be followed by others. She should try to get additional subscriptions, and to form a fund; but first she must consult the clergy. Yes, Mr. Helstone, Dr. Boulton and Mr. Hall must be consulted (for not only must Briarfield be relieved, but Whinbury and Nunnely). She would not take a single step unauthorized by them.

The clergy were sacred beings in Miss Ainley’s eyes; no matter how insignificant the individual, his station made him holy. The very curates – who, in their trivial arrogance, were hardly worthy to carry her umbrella – were regarded by her as infant saints. If their little vices and enormous absurdities were pointed out to her, she could not see them; the white surplice covered a multitude of sins.

Shirley, knowing of this harmless infatuation, stipulated that the curates were to have no voice in the disposal of the money; their meddling fingers were not to be inserted into the pie. The rectors, of course, might be trusted. They had experience and sagacity, and Mr. Hall, at least, had sympathy for his fellow-men; but the youth under them must be kept down in subordination and silence.

It was with some horror that Miss Ainley heard this language. Caroline, however, putting in a mild word or two in praise of Mr Sweeting, calmed her again. Sweeting was, indeed, Miss Ainley's own favourite. She had at times offered him sponge-cake and glasses of cowslip wine, when he came to see her in her little cottage, with truly motherly regard. The same offerings she had once presented to Malone; but he showed such open scorn that she had never repeated it. To Donne she always served the treat, and was happy to see his approbation proved by his eating two pieces of cake, and putting a third in his pocket.

Miss Keeldar proposed to collect the clergy together that evening at Fieldhead. Miss Ainley was to meet them, and the plan was to be discussed.

Shirley managed to get the senior priesthood together accordingly, and before the old maid's arrival, she had talked all the gentlemen into the most charming mood imaginable. She herself had taken in hand Dr. Boulton and Mr. Helstone. The first was a stubborn old Welshman, opinionated and obstinate, yet a man who did a great deal of good, though not without making some noise about it. The latter we know. She had rather a friendly feeling for both, especially for old Helstone; and it cost her no trouble to be quite delightful to them. She took them round the garden, and gathered them flowers, like a kind daughter. Mr. Hall she left to Caroline – or rather, to Caroline Mr. Hall consigned himself.

He generally sought Caroline in every gathering where they both happened to be. He was not a lady's man, though all ladies liked him; he was something of a book-worm. His frankness, integrity and piety won him friends at every level. It was only with young, fashionable ladies he felt a little shy. Being himself a plain man – plain in appearance, manners and speech – he seemed to fear their dash, elegance, and airs.

But Miss Helstone had neither dash nor airs, and her elegance was of a very quiet order. Mr. Hall was a fluent, cheerful talker, and Caroline liked him to sit next to her in a party, and thus keep her safe from Peter Malone, Joseph Donne, or John Sykes; and Mr. Hall availed himself of this privilege whenever he could. Such preference shown by a single gentleman to a single lady would normally have set the gossips talking; but as Cyril Hall was forty-five, slightly bald, and slightly grey, nobody ever thought he was likely to marry Miss Helstone. Nor did he think so himself. He was wedded already to his books and his parish. His kind sister Margaret, spectacled and learned like himself, made him happy in his single state; he considered it too late to change. Besides, he had known Caroline as a little girl; he had bought her toys, and felt that her friendship for him held a daughterly respect.

When Miss Ainley arrived, she was welcomed kindly by everyone. Mrs. Pryor and Margaret Hall made room for her on the sofa; they formed a trio which the gay and thoughtless would have scorned as quite worthless and unattractive – yet which had its own quiet value, as many a suffering and friendless human knew.

Shirley opened the business and showed the plan.

“I know the hand which drew that up,” said Mr. Hall, glancing at Miss Ainley, and smiling. Boulby heard and deliberated with protruded under lip. His consent he considered too weighty to be given in a hurry. Helstone glanced sharply round with an alert, suspicious expression, as if he felt that something in petticoats was somehow trying underhand to acquire too much influence, and make itself important.

Shirley caught and comprehended the expression. “This scheme is nothing,” said she carelessly. “It is only an outline – a mere suggestion. You, gentlemen, are requested to draw up your own rules.”

And she fetched her writing-case, smiling queerly to herself. She produced paper and pen, drew an arm-chair to the table, and begged Helstone to sit there. For a minute he was a little stiff, wrinkling his forehead strangely. At last he muttered, “Well, you are neither my wife nor my daughter, so I’ll be led for once; but mind – I know I am led. Your little female manoeuvres don’t blind me.”

“Oh!” said Shirley, putting the pen into his hand, “you must regard me as Captain Keeldar today. This is quite a gentleman’s affair – yours and mine entirely. The ladies there are only our aides-de-camp.”

He smiled a little grimly, and began to write. He asked questions, and consulted his brethren, disdainfully lifting his glance over the curly heads of the two girls and the demure caps of the elder ladies. In the discussion all three gentlemen, to their credit, showed they knew the poor of their parishes, and their separate wants. Each rector knew where clothing was needed, where food would be most acceptable, where money could be safely bestowed. Wherever their memories fell short, Miss Ainley or Miss Hall could help them out; but both ladies took care not to speak unless spoken to.

Shirley stood behind the rectors, leaning over their shoulders now and then to glance at the rules drawn up and the list of cases, listening, and at intervals smiling her queer smile – a smile not ill-natured, but significant. Men rarely like people who read their inward nature too clearly. It is good for women, especially, to have mild, dim eyes, that never penetrate below the surface of things. Thousands, knowing this, keep their eyelids drooped; but the most downcast glance can, on occasion, take its survey of life.

When all was settled to Miss Keeldar’s liking, and the clergy had entered so fully into the spirit of her plans as to promise £50 each, as the first subscriptions to the fund, she ordered supper to be served. She had previously directed Mrs. Gill to exercise her utmost skill. Mr. Hall was an abstemious man, indifferent to luxury; but Boulby and Helstone both liked good cookery. The supper put them into excellent humour. A glass of fine wine was tried, and Captain Keeldar was complimented on his taste. He had succeeded in gratifying his priestly guests; and was radiant with glee.

Chapter 15

MR. DONNE'S EXODUS

The next day Shirley told Caroline how delighted she felt that the little party had gone off so well.

"I rather like to entertain a circle of gentlemen," said she. "It is amusing to observe how they enjoy their meal. They retain something of the naïveté of children about food, and one likes to please them – that is, when they show the decent restraint of our admirable rectors. Moore has not that child's simplicity. Did you ever find out his accessible point, Caroline? you have seen more of him than I."

"It is not food, at any rate," returned Caroline, smiling. She always felt a shy pleasure in discussing her cousin's character. Left to herself, she would never have touched on the subject; but when invited, the temptation of talking about him was irresistible. "But," she added, "I really don't know what it is, for whenever I watched Robert, my scrutiny was baffled by finding he was watching me."

"There it is!" exclaimed Shirley. "He is never off his guard. He won't give you an advantage. Even when he does not look at you, he seems to be busy tracing your words to their source, contemplating your motives. Oh! I know that sort of character. It piques me singularly. How does it affect you?"

This question was a specimen of one of Shirley's sharp, sudden turns. Caroline used to be flustered by them at first, but she had now got used to parrying them.

"Pique you? In what way?" she said.

"Here comes a diversion!" exclaimed Shirley, breaking off and running to the window. "I never told you of a superb conquest I have made lately, without any effort or intention on my part. By all that's delicious! there are two of them. Do they only hunt in couples? You may have one, Lina; take your choice. Listen to Tartar!"

Her black-muzzled dog here gave tongue in the hall, where its deep bark echoed formidably. A growl as menacing as muttered thunder followed.

"Listen!" cried Shirley, laughing. "They will be frightened. They don't know old Tartar as I do. His uproars are all sound and fury, signifying nothing!"

Some bustle was heard. "Down, sir, down!" exclaimed a high-toned, imperious voice, and then came a crack of a cane. Immediately there was a yell – a scutter – a run – a positive tumult.

"O Malone, Malone!"

"Down! down!" cried the high voice.

"He really is worrying them!" exclaimed Shirley. "They have struck him. He is not used to being hit."

Out she ran. A gentleman was fleeing up the oak staircase, making for refuge upstairs; another was backing to the stairfoot, wildly flourishing a knotty stick, crying, "Down! down!" while the dog bayed and howled at him, and a group of servants came bundling from the kitchen. The dog made a spring; the second gentleman turned tail and rushed after his comrade. The first was

already safe in a bedroom; he held the door closed against his fellow – nothing so merciless as terror.

“Gentlemen,” said Miss Keeldar’s silvery but vibrating tones, “Calm yourselves! Come down! Look at Tartar; he won’t harm a cat.”

She was caressing Tartar. He lay crouched at her feet, his fore paws stretched out, snorting, his bulldog eyes holding a dull fire. His was an honest, phlegmatic, stubborn canine character. He loved his mistress and John – the man who fed him – but was indifferent to the rest of the world. He was quiet enough, unless struck or threatened, and that put a demon into him.

“Mr. Malone, how do you do?” continued Shirley, smiling. “That is Mrs. Pryor’s apartment. Request your friend Mr. Donne to come out. I shall have the greatest pleasure in receiving him in a lower room.”

“Ha! ha!” cried Malone, leaning over the balustrade. “Really, that animal alarmed Donne. He is a little timid. I thought it better to follow, in order to reassure him.”

“Well, come down, if you please. John” (turning to her manservant), “go upstairs and liberate Mr. Donne. Take care, Mr. Malone; the stairs are slippery.”

The caution came a little late for Malone. He had slipped already in his stately descent, and was only saved from falling by a clutch at the banisters, which made the whole structure creak.

Tartar growled once more. Malone, however, was no coward. The dog had taken him by surprise, but he passed him now in suppressed fury rather than fear. If a look could have strangled Tartar, he would have breathed no more. Forgetting politeness, Malone pushed into the parlour before Miss Keeldar. He glanced at Miss Helstone; he could scarcely bring himself to bow to her. He glared at both the ladies as if he would have liked to clutch one in each hand and throttle them.

However, Shirley took pity and ceased to laugh; and Caroline was too true a lady to smile. Tartar was dismissed; Peter Augustus was soothed by Shirley’s tones. He had the sense to feel that he had better be civil, and presently grew quite himself again. He had come, indeed, for the express purpose of making himself fascinating.

Perhaps to allow an easy exit, he took his seat on a chair close to the door. No longer sullen or furious, he grew constrained and embarrassed. He talked to the ladies by fits and starts, on the most commonplace topics. He sighed deeply, significantly, after every sentence; he sighed in each pause; he sighed before he spoke.

At last, aiming to add ease to his other charms, he drew forth an ample silk pocket-handkerchief. This was to be the graceful toy with which his unoccupied hands were to trifle. He went to work with energy. He folded the red-and-yellow square cornerwise; he whipped it open; again he folded it more narrowly; he made of it a handsome band. To what would he apply it? Would he wrap it about his throat – his head?

Neither. Peter Augustus had an original genius. He sat on the chair with his athletic Irish legs crossed, and these legs he circled with the bandana and bound firmly together. It was evident he felt this device to be worth an encore; he repeated it more than once.

The second performance sent Shirley to the window, to laugh silently and unseen; it turned Caroline’s head aside, that her long curls might screen her

smile. Miss Helstone, indeed, was amused by Peter's abrupt diversion of his homage from herself to the heiress. The £5,000 he supposed her likely one day to inherit had no weight against Miss Keeldar's estate and hall. He took no pains to conceal his tactics. He pretended to no gradual change of views; he wheeled about at once, to pursue the greater fortune of the two. On what grounds he expected to succeed in his chase, only he knew.

It appeared to be some time before Mr. Donne could be persuaded to descend the stairs. At length, however, he appeared, seeming not at all ashamed. Donne, indeed, was of that immovably complacent, densely self-satisfied nature which feels no shame. He had never blushed in his life; no humiliation could abash him; he had no modesty; he was arrogant, conceited and inane; and this gentleman had a notion of wooing Miss Keeldar! He knew no more, however, how to set about it than if he had been an image carved in wood. His notion was, after visiting her a few times, to write a letter proposing marriage. She would accept him for love of his position; they would be married, and he should be master of Fieldhead; he should live very comfortably, have servants at his command, eat and drink of the best, and be a great man.

You would not have suspected his intentions when he addressed his intended bride in an injured tone: "A very dangerous dog that, Miss Keeldar. I wonder you should keep such an animal."

"Do you, Mr. Donne? I am very fond of him."

"You cannot be serious. A lady fond of that ugly brute – a mere carter's dog! Pray hang him."

"Hang him!"

"And purchase instead some pug or poodle. Ladies generally like lap-dogs."

"Perhaps I am an exception."

"Oh, you can't be, you know. All ladies are alike in those matters."

"Tartar frightened you terribly, Mr. Donne. I hope you won't take any harm."

"That I shall, no doubt. He gave me a turn I shall not soon forget. When I saw him about to spring, I thought I should have fainted."

"Perhaps you did faint in the bedroom; you were a long time there."

"No; I was holding the door fast. Your man persuaded me to come out at last by saying the dog was chained up in his kennel. But what is that? I declare he told a falsehood! The dog is there!"

And indeed Tartar walked past the garden door. He still seemed in bad humour: he was growling again, and wheezing.

"There are other visitors coming," observed Shirley, with the provoking coolness which the owners of formidable-looking dogs tend to show while their animals are all bristle and bay. Tartar sprang towards the gate, bellowing. His mistress quietly opened the glass door, and stepped out to him. His bellow was already silenced, and he was lifting up his huge, blunt head to the new callers to be patted.

"What! Tartar!" said a cheery, rather boyish voice, "Good-morning, old boy!"

And little Mr. Sweeting, who was fearless of man, woman or brute, came through the gate, caressing the dog. His vicar, Mr. Hall, followed. He had no fear of Tartar either. Tartar snuffed both the gentlemen, and then, as if concluding that they were harmless, he withdrew to the sunny front of the hall.

Shirley advanced to greet Messrs. Hall and Sweeting cordially. They were come to tell her of successes they had achieved that morning in asking for subscriptions to the fund. Mr. Hall's eyes beamed, his plain face positively handsome with goodness; and when Caroline ran out to meet him, and put both her hands into his, he gazed on her with gentle affection.

Instead of re-entering the house, they strayed through the garden, the ladies walking one on each side of Mr. Hall. It was a breezy, sunny day; the air freshened the girls' cheeks and gracefully dishevelled their ringlets. Mr. Hall spoke oftenest to his brilliant companion, and looked most frequently at the quiet one. Miss Keeldar gathered handfuls of flowers and gave some to Caroline, telling her to choose a nosegay for Mr. Hall; and with her lap filled with delicate blossoms, Caroline sat down on the steps of the summer-house. The vicar stood near her, leaning on his cane.

Shirley now called out the neglected pair in the oak parlour. She led Donne past his dread enemy Tartar, who, with his nose on his paws, lay snoring under the noon sun. Donne was not grateful, but he was glad of the safeguard. Miss Keeldar, wishing to be impartial, offered the curates flowers. They accepted them awkwardly; Malone seemed specially at a loss, with a bouquet filling one hand, and his shillelagh in the other. Donne's fatuous "Thank you!" implied that he considered this offering a homage to his merits, and an attempt by the heiress to ingratiate herself into his priceless affections. Sweeting alone received the posy like the sensible little man he was, putting it gallantly into his buttonhole.

As a reward, Miss Keeldar gave him an errand which made his eyes sparkle with glee. Away he flew to the kitchen. Ere long he reappeared, carrying a round table, which he placed under the cedar; then he collected six garden-chairs from various nooks, and placed them in a circle. The parlour-maid came out with a tray, and Sweeting aided her in setting out plates, knives, and forks, and a neat luncheon of cold chicken, ham, and tarts.

David Sweeting and Shirley were on the best terms in the world; and his devotion to the heiress was quite disinterested, for it did not affect his faithful allegiance to the magnificent Dora Sykes.

The repast turned out a very merry one. Donne and Malone contributed little to its vivacity, being busy with fork and wine-glass; but with four such natures as Mr. Hall, David Sweeting, Shirley and Caroline assembled on a green lawn, under a sunny sky, amidst a wilderness of flowers, there could not be dullness.

Mr. Hall reminded the ladies that Whitsuntide was approaching, when the grand united Sunday-school tea-drinking and procession of the three parishes of Briarfield, Whinbury, and Nunnely were to take place. Caroline, he knew, would be at her post as teacher, and he hoped Miss Keeldar would make her first public appearance amongst them at that time.

Shirley was not the person to miss an occasion of this sort. She liked festive gatherings, a throng of glad faces, and told Mr. Hall they might count on her. She did not know what she would have to do, but they might order her as they pleased.

"And," said Caroline, "you will promise to sit at my table, Mr. Hall?"

"I shall not fail," said he. "I have sat at her right hand at these monster tea-drinkings for the last six years," he continued, turning to Miss Keeldar. "They made her a Sunday-school teacher when she was a little girl of twelve.

The first time she had to make tea in public, there was some piteous trembling and flushing. I observed the speechless panic, the cups shaking in the little hand, and the overflowing teapot. I came to her aid, managed the urn, and in fact made the tea for her like any old woman."

"I was very grateful to you," interposed Caroline.

"You told me so with an earnest sincerity that repaid me well, for it was not like the manner of most little ladies of twelve. She kept close to me, Miss Keeldar, the rest of the evening, walking with me over the grounds where the children were playing; she followed me into the vestry when all were summoned into church; she would, I believe, have mounted with me to the pulpit, had I not taken the precaution of conducting her to her pew."

"And he has been my friend ever since," said Caroline.

"And always sat at her table, and handed the cups. The next thing I do for her will be to marry her one day to some curate or mill-owner. – But mind, Caroline, I shall inquire about the bridegroom's character; and if he is not a gentleman likely to make you happy, I will not officiate. So take care."

"The warning is useless. I am not going to be married. I shall live single, like your sister Margaret, Mr. Hall."

"Very well. You might do worse. Margaret is not unhappy. She has her books for a pleasure, and her brother for a care, and is content. If ever you want a home, if the day should come when Briarfield rectory is yours no longer, come to Nunnely vicarage. We will make you tenderly welcome."

"There are your flowers. Now," said Caroline, "you don't care for a bouquet, but you must give it to Margaret; only, to be sentimental for a moment, keep that little wild forget-me-not, and to be still more sentimental – let me take two or three of the blue blossoms and put them in my souvenir book."

And she took out a small book with a silver clasp, wherein she inserted the flowers, writing round them in pencil, "To be kept for the sake of the Rev. Cyril Hall, my friend. May —, 18—."

The Rev. Cyril Hall, on his part, placed a sprig in safety between the leaves of a pocket Testament. He only wrote on the margin, "Caroline."

"Now," said he, smiling, "I trust we are romantic enough. Miss Keeldar, I hope you are laughing at this; but the fact is, I am so used to comply with the requests of this young friend, I don't know how to refuse her. When requested to be sentimental, I obey."

"Margaret told me he is naturally sentimental," remarked Caroline, "and I know what pleases him."

"That you should be good and happy? Yes; that is one of my greatest pleasures. May God long preserve to you the blessings of peace and innocence! I mean comparative innocence; for in His sight, I am well aware, none are pure. All have faults and frailty, needing the strength of His Spirit. Let us all cherish humility, when we look into our own hearts, and see there temptations which we blush to recognize. It is not youth, nor good looks, nor any outer charm which makes beauty or goodness in God's eyes. In the sight of her Maker, Mary Ann Ainley is fairer and better than either of you young things, wrapt up in yourselves and in earthly hopes. She, with meekness and reverence, treads close in her Redeemer's steps."

Here the harsh voice of Donne broke in. "Ahem!" he began, clearing his throat importantly. "Ahem! Miss Keeldar, your attention an instant, if you please."

"Well," said Shirley nonchalantly, "what is it? I am all ears."

"I hope part of you is hand also," returned Donne, "and part purse. It is to the hand and purse I appeal. I came here this morning to beg of you a subscription to a school. I and Dr. Boulby intend to erect one in the hamlet of Ecclefigg. The Baptists have a chapel there, and we want to dispute the ground."

"But I have nothing to do with Ecclefigg. I possess no property there."

"What does that signify? You're a churchwoman, ain't you?"

"Admirable creature!" muttered Shirley, under her breath. "Fine style!" Then aloud, "I am a churchwoman, certainly."

"Then you can't refuse to contribute. The population of Ecclefigg are a parcel of brutes; we want to civilize them."

"Who is to be the missionary?"

"Myself, probably."

"You won't fail through lack of sympathy with your flock."

"I expect success; but we must have money. There is the paper. Pray give a handsome sum."

When asked for money, Shirley rarely held back. She put down her name for £5. After the £300 she had lately given, and the many smaller sums she was giving constantly, it was as much as she could at present afford.

Donne looked at it, declared the amount "shabby," and loudly demanded more. Miss Keeldar flushed up with indignation and astonishment.

"At present I shall give no more," said she.

"Not give more! Why, with your property, I expected you to head the list with a cool hundred. In the south," went on Donne, "a lady with a thousand a year would be ashamed to give five pounds for a public object."

Shirley, rarely haughty, looked so now. Her slight frame tensed; her face quickened with scorn.

"Strange remarks," said she. "Reproach in return for bounty is misplaced."

"Bounty! Do you call five pounds bounty?"

"I do. If I had not given it to Dr. Boulby's intended school, the building of which I approve, and in no way to his ill-mannered curate – but for this, I should instantly reclaim it."

Donne was thick-skinned. "Wretched place, this Yorkshire," he went on. "The people – what a set! How coarse and uncultivated! They would be scouted in the south."

Shirley leaned forwards on the table, her fingers interlaced and compressing each other hard.

"The rich," pursued the unconscious Donne, "are a parcel of misers. You scarcely ever see a family where a proper carriage or butler is kept; and as to the poor – clattering in clogs; the men in their shirt-sleeves, the women in mob-caps and bed-gowns. They positively deserve that one should turn a mad cow amongst them to rout them. He-he! what fun it would be!"

"There! you have reached the climax," said Shirley quietly, turning her glowing glance towards him. "You cannot go beyond it, and," she added with emphasis, "you shall not, in my house."

Up she rose, walked to her garden gates, and flung them wide open.

“Walk through quickly,” she said austere, “and set foot on this pavement no more.”

Donne was astounded. He had thought he was showing himself off to high advantage, as a lofty-souled person of the first “ton”; he imagined he was producing a crushing impression. Had he not expressed disdain of everything in Yorkshire? What more conclusive proof could be given that he was better than anything there? And yet here was he about to be turned out like a dog out of a garden!

“Madam! turn out a clergyman!”

“Off! Were you an archbishop you have proved yourself no gentleman, and you must go. Quick!”

There was no trifling with her. Besides, Tartar was again rising; he perceived symptoms of a commotion. There was nothing for it but to go, and Donne made his exit, the heiress sweeping him a deep curtsy as she closed the gates on him.

“How dare the pompous priest abuse his flock! How dare the cockney revile Yorkshire!” was her sole observation, as she returned to the table.

Before long the little party broke up; Miss Keeldar’s ruffled and darkened brow, curled lip, and incensed eye gave no invitation to further social enjoyment.

Chapter 16

WHITSUNTIDE

The fund prospered. By dint of Miss Keeldar's example, the three rectors' exertions, and the efficient though quiet aid of Mary Ann Ainley and Margaret Hall, a handsome sum was raised, which greatly alleviated the distress of the unemployed poor. The neighbourhood seemed to grow calmer. For a fortnight past no cloth had been destroyed; no outrage on mill or mansion had been committed in the three parishes. Shirley believed that the evil she wished to avert was almost escaped, that the storm was passing over. With the approach of summer, trade would improve – it always did; and this weary war could not last for ever. With peace, what an impulse would be given to commerce!

Such was the usual tenor of her observations to her tenant, Gérard Moore, when they met; and Moore would listen very quietly – too quietly to satisfy her. She would impatiently demand his opinion. Smiling with that expression which gave a remarkable sweetness to his mouth, while his brow remained grave, he would answer that he too trusted that the war would end; on that ground his hopes were fixed.

“For you are aware,” he would continue, “that I now work Hollow's Mill entirely on speculation. I sell nothing; there is no market for my goods. I manufacture for the future, and am ready to take advantage of the first opening that shall occur. Three months ago this was impossible to me; I had no money. You well know who came to my rescue, from whom I received the loan which saved me. I am aware that gain is doubtful; but I am quite cheerful. So long as I can be active, it is impossible for me to be depressed. As you say, peace will give an impulse to commerce; but as to the permanent good effect of your charitable fund, I doubt. Relief never yet made the working-classes grateful; it is not in human nature that it should. They ought not to be in a position to need that humiliating relief; and this they feel. They hate us mill-owners worse than ever. They hear from the disaffected in Nottingham and Manchester and elsewhere. They receive orders from their chiefs. The danger is not gone – it is only delayed. The long-threatening storm is sure to break at last.”

“Well, Mr. Moore” (so these conferences always ended), “take care of yourself.”

“I do. I wish to live. The future opens like Eden before me; and still, when I look deep into the shades of my paradise, I see a vision glide across remote vistas.”

“Do you? Pray, what vision?”

“I see—”

The maid came bustling in with the tea-things.

In the last week of May, the weather cleared. A fresh wind swept off the deep-piled rain-clouds, bearing them, mass on mass, to the eastern horizon, leaving the vault behind all pure blue space, ready for the reign of the summer sun. That sun rose broad on Whitsuntide.

Whit-Tuesday was the great day of the gathering of the schools. In preparation, the two large schoolrooms of Briarfield were cleaned,

whitewashed, and decorated with flowers and evergreens – some from the rectory garden, and two cartloads from Fieldhead.

In these schoolrooms twenty tables, each calculated to seat twenty guests, were laid out, surrounded with benches, and covered with white cloths. Above them were suspended some twenty cages containing canaries, according to a fancy of the district. These tables were not spread for the twelve hundred scholars of the three parishes, but only for the patrons and teachers. The children's feast was to be spread in the open air. At one o'clock the troops were to come in; at two they were to be marshalled; till four they were to parade through the parish; then came the feast, and afterwards the meeting with music and speeches in the church.

Briarfield was chosen for the rendezvous, not because it was the largest or oldest parish, but simply because Mr. Helstone willed it, and Mr. Helstone's will was stronger than that of Boulton or Hall. They let him lead and rule.

This occasion had always been a trying day to Caroline, because it dragged her into public, compelling her to face the wealthy, respectable society of the neighbourhood. Obligated to be conspicuous; obliged to walk at the head of the first class; obliged to make tea at the first table for a mixed multitude of ladies and gentlemen, and to do all this without the presence of mother, aunt, or other chaperon – she being a nervous person, who mortally feared publicity – it will be comprehended that she trembled at the approach of Whitsuntide.

But this year Shirley was to be with her, and that utterly changed the aspect of the trial. It was a trial no longer – it was almost an enjoyment. Miss Keeldar was better than a host of ordinary friends. Self-possessed, always spirited and easy; conscious of her social importance, yet never presuming upon it – it gave Caroline courage to look at her. The only fear was lest the heiress should not be punctual. Caroline knew her uncle would not wait a second for anyone. The moment the church clock tolled two, the march would begin.

Whit-Tuesday saw Caroline rise almost with the sun. She, Fanny, and Eliza were busy the whole morning arranging the rectory parlours, and setting out refreshments – wine, fruit, cakes – on the dining-room sideboard. Then she had to dress in her freshest white muslin, as befitted the solemn occasion. Her new sash – a birthday present from Margaret Hall, which she had reason to believe Cyril himself had bought – was tied by Fanny, who took pleasure in arraying her fair young mistress for the occasion. Caroline's simple bonnet had been trimmed to match her sash.

When ready she formed a picture, not dazzling, but delicately pleasing. Her expression, like her dress, was modest, gentle, and, though pensive, harmonious. After all, she was an imperfect, faulty human being, fair enough of form, but, as Cyril Hall said, neither so good nor so great as the withered Miss Ainley, now putting on her best black gown and drab shawl and bonnet in her own narrow cottage.

Away Caroline went, across quiet fields and through hidden lanes, to Fieldhead. Underfoot, all was clean and dry under the glowing sun. She walked on daisy and turf to Fieldhead, and went to Miss Keeldar's dressing-room.

It was well she had come, or Shirley would have been late. Instead of making ready, she lay stretched on a couch, absorbed in reading. Mrs. Pryor stood near, vainly urging her to rise and dress.

Caroline wasted no words. She immediately took the book from Shirley, and with her own hands commenced to disrobe and robe her. Shirley, indolent

with the heat, and gay with her youth and nature, wanted to talk, laugh, and linger; but Caroline persevered in dressing her as fast as fingers could manage. At length, as she united a final row of hooks and eyes, she chided her, saying she was very naughty to be so unpunctual, that she looked the picture of carelessness; and so Shirley did, but a very lovely picture of that tiresome quality.

She presented quite a contrast to Caroline. There was style in every fold of her dress and every line of her figure. The rich silk suited her better than a simpler costume; the embroidered scarf became her. She wore it negligently but gracefully. There was a frank light in her eyes, a rallying smile about her lips, as Caroline took her hand and hurried her out of doors; and thus they sped through the fields, laughing as they went, and looking very much like a snow-white dove and gem-tinted bird of paradise joined in flight.

Thanks to Miss Helstone, they arrived in good time. They heard the bell tolling a summons for all to assemble. The trampling of many steps and murmuring of many voices were audible. Soon they saw the Whinbury school approaching, numbering five hundred souls. Boulton and Donne headed it – the former walking under the canopy of a shovel-hat, with the squarest and vastest of black coats, and the stoutest of gold-headed canes. Donne looked every inch a curate, from his turned-up nose and complacent, lifted chin to his clerical black gaiters, his somewhat short trousers, and his square-toed shoes.

Walk on, Mr. Donne! You have undergone scrutiny. You think you look well. Whether the white and purple figures watching you from yonder hill think so is another question.

These figures come running down when the regiment has marched by. The churchyard is full of children and teachers, all in their best holiday attire; and, bad as are the times, it is wonderful to see how respectably they have managed to clothe themselves. The lady of the manor – Shirley, gazing with pleasure on this happy-looking crowd – has really done them good. Her timely bounty has supplied many a child with a new frock or bonnet. She knows it, and is glad that her money has benefited those around her.

Caroline, too, is pleased, for she also has done good in her small way – robbed herself of more than one dress or ribbon she could ill spare, to aid in fitting out the scholars of her class; and as she could not give money, she has followed Miss Ainley's example in giving her time to sew for the children.

Not only is the churchyard full, but the rectory garden is thronged. Groups of ladies and gentlemen are walking amongst the lilacs and laburnums. The house also is occupied: at the wide-open parlour windows stand the patrons and teachers. In the parson's croft, behind the rectory, are the musicians of the three parish bands, with their instruments. Fanny and Eliza, in their smartest caps and gowns, move amongst them, serving out quarts of ale, specially brewed by the rector's orders. He could not endure "shabby doings". Miss Keeldar was like him in this respect, and they mutually approved each other's arrangements.

Caroline and Shirley were soon in the midst of the company. Caroline coped very easily for her. Instead of sitting down in a retired corner, or stealing away to her own room, she moved through the three parlours, conversed and smiled, even spoke once or twice before she was spoken to, and, in short, seemed a new creature. It was Shirley's presence which thus transformed her. Shirley had no fear of humanity, no tendency to shrink from it, and since she

thought well of all people until they might prove otherwise, she was a general favourite.

Donne happened to come into the drawing-room while Shirley, sitting on the sofa, formed the centre of a wide circle. She had already forgotten her exasperation against him, and she bowed and smiled good-humouredly. The man's disposition was then seen. He knew neither how to decline her greeting with dignity, as one whose just pride has been wounded, nor how to meet it with frankness, as one who is glad to forget and forgive. So he merely passed by sheepishly with a scowl.

"He was not worth a scene!" said Shirley to Caroline. "What a fool I was! To take revenge on poor Donne's silly spite about Yorkshire is like crushing a gnat for attacking the hide of a rhinoceros. Had I been a gentleman, I believe I should have forcibly helped him off the premises. But he must come near me no more. He irritates me. He is not even amusing. Malone is better sport."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when Peter Augustus Malone came up, gloved and scented, with his hair oiled, and bearing in one hand a huge bunch of cabbage-roses. These he presented to the heiress. Who, after this, could dare to say that Peter was not a lady's man? He had given flowers; he had offered a sentimental tribute at the shrine of Love. He must have thought this himself, for he seemed amazed at what he had done. Backing off without a word, he was going away with a husky chuckle of self-satisfaction; then he bethought himself to stop and look back. There were the six red cabbages on the purple satin lap, a white hand holding them; and over them, ringlets, half hiding a laughing face.

Only half hiding! Peter saw the laugh; it was unmistakable. He was made a joke of; his chivalry was the subject of a jest for a petticoat – for two petticoats: Miss Helstone too was smiling. Peter grew black as a thunder-cloud. When Shirley looked up, a fell eye was fastened on her. Malone, at least, had energy enough in hate.

"Peter is worth a scene, and shall have it, if he likes, one day," she whispered to her friend.

And now the three rectors appeared at the dining-room door. They had been busy in the church, and were coming to take some refreshment before the march began. The large easy-chair had been left vacant for Dr. Boulby. He was put into it, and Caroline hastened to hand him a glass of wine and a plate of macaroons. Boulby's churchwardens were already beside him, as were Mrs. Sykes and the other ladies of his congregation, expressing their hopes that he was not fatigued. Mrs. Boulby was bending over him, tenderly wiping some perspiration, real or imaginary, from his brow. Boulby, in short, was in his glory. Of Caroline he took no notice, save to accept what she offered. He did not see her – he never did see her; he hardly knew that such a person existed. He saw the macaroons, however.

Mr. Hall stood near an open window, talking like a brother to Miss Ainley. To him Caroline turned with pleasure. "What should she bring him?" She provided herself with a little plate, so that she might offer him variety. Margaret Hall joined them; so did Miss Keeldar. The four ladies stood round their favourite pastor. A throng, too, of twenty or more enclosed old Helstone. The curates, herding together, made a constellation of three lesser planets. Various young ladies watched them afar off, but ventured not nigh.

Mr. Helstone produced his watch. "Ten minutes to two," he announced. "Time to fall into line. Come." He seized his shovel-hat and marched away. All rose and followed en masse.

The twelve hundred children were drawn up in three bodies of four hundred souls each; in the rear of each regiment was a band; between every twenty there was a pair of teachers. To the front of the armies Mr. Helstone summoned—

"Grace Boulton and Mary Sykes lead out Whinbury.

"Margaret Hall and Mary Ann Ainley conduct Nunnely.

"Caroline Helstone and Shirley Keeldar head Briarfield."

Then again he gave command:

"Mr. Donne to Whinbury; Mr. Sweeting to Nunnely; Mr. Malone to Briarfield."

And these gentlemen stepped up. The rectors advanced to the very front; Helstone lifted his shovel-hat. Out clashed the bells in the tower, loud swelled the bands, deep rolled the drums, and away they marched.

The broad white road unrolled before the long procession; the twelve hundred children and one hundred and forty adults trod on, with gay faces and glad hearts. It was a joyous scene, a day of happiness for rich and poor. Let England's priests have their due. They are a faulty set in some respects, being only flesh and blood like us all; but the land would be badly off without them. Britain would miss her church, if that church fell. God save it! God also reform it!

Chapter 17

THE SCHOOL FEAST

The bands played martial tunes, and in some – Miss Keeldar, for instance – these sounds awoke, if not a martial, yet a longing spirit. Old Helstone, turning, looked at her; and they both laughed.

“There is no battle in prospect,” he said; “No foe is threatening our liberty. We are only taking a walk. Keep your hand on the reins, captain, and slack the fire of that spirit.”

“Take your own advice, doctor,” was Shirley’s response. To Caroline she murmured, “I’ll borrow of imagination what reality will not give me. We are not soldiers – or if we are, we are soldiers of the Cross, bound on a pilgrimage to Palestine. But no; that is too visionary. I need a sterner dream. We are Lowlanders of Scotland, following a Covenanting captain up into the hills to pray. We know that battle may follow; and we are ready and willing to redden the peat-moss with our blood. That music stirs my soul; it makes my heart beat with a new, thrilling vigour. I almost long for danger – for a faith, a land, or at least a lover to defend.”

“Look, Shirley!” interrupted Caroline. “What is that red speck above Stilbro’ Brow? You have keener sight than I.”

Miss Keeldar looked. “They are soldiers – cavalry soldiers,” she said. “They ride fast. There are six of them. They will pass us. No; they have turned off to the right to avoid our procession.”

“Perhaps they are only exercising their horses.”

Mr. Helstone here spoke. “We shall pass through Royd Lane, to reach Nunnely Common by a short cut.”

And into Royd Lane they accordingly filed. It was so narrow that only two could walk abreast. They had reached the middle of it, when excitement became obvious in the clerical commanders. The curates nudged each other; Mr. Hall turned to the ladies and smiled.

“What is the matter?” they asked.

He pointed to the end of the lane before them. Another procession was entering there, headed also by men in black, and followed also, as they could now hear, by music.

“Is it our double?” asked Shirley.

“If you wanted a battle, you are likely to get one – at least of looks,” whispered Caroline, laughing.

“They shall not pass us!” cried the curates; “we’ll not give way!”

“Give way!” retorted Helstone sternly; “who talks of giving way? You, boys, mind what you are about. The ladies, I know, will be firm. Every churchwoman here will stand her ground against these folks, for the honour of the Establishment.”

“Who is it?” asked Shirley.

“The Dissenting and Methodist schools, the Baptists, Independents, and Wesleyans, joined in unholy alliance, and turning purposely into this lane with the intention of obstructing our march and driving us back.”

“Bad manners!” said Shirley. “Of course, they must have a lesson.”

“A lesson in politeness,” suggested Mr. Hall; “not an example of rudeness.”

Old Helstone marched on ahead of his company, quickening his step. He had nearly reached the other group, when its leader – a large, greasy man, with black hair combed flat – called a halt. He drew forth a hymn book, gave out a verse, and his group struck up the most dolorous of songs.

Helstone signed to his bands. They clashed out with all the power of brass. He desired them to play “Rule, Britannia!” and ordered the children to join in, which they did enthusiastically. As far as noise went, the enemy was conquered.

“Now, follow me!” exclaimed Helstone; “not running, but at a firm, smart pace. Keep together.”

And he strode on with such a determined gait, and was so well obeyed by his scholars and teachers, who marched with cool, solid impetus – even the curates – that the Dissenters were pressed back, and were at last forced to turn tail and leave the exit from Royd Lane free. Boultyby suffered in the onslaught, but Helstone and Malone held him up, and brought him through the business, whole in limb, though breathless.

The fat Dissenter who had given out the hymn was left sitting in the ditch. He was a spirit merchant by trade, and, it was said, drank more water in that one afternoon than he had swallowed for a twelvemonth before. Mr. Hall had taken care of Caroline, and Caroline of him. Miss Keeldar and Mr. Helstone shook hands heartily when they had got the whole party through the lane. The curates began to exult, but Mr. Helstone curbed them, saying that they had better hold their tongues; and that the business was none of their managing.

About half-past three the procession turned back, and at four once more regained the starting-place. Long lines of benches were arranged in the fields round the school. There the children were seated, and huge baskets of food were brought out. A brief grace was pronounced by Mr. Hall. Large currant buns and hot, sweet tea were then handed out liberally; each child being allowed to have about twice as much as it could possibly eat, thus leaving some to be carried home. Afterwards the benches were removed, and they were left to play.

A bell summoned the teachers and patrons to the schoolroom. Miss Keeldar, Miss Helstone, and other ladies were already there, checking the arrangement of the tables. Most of the female servants of the neighbourhood were busy cutting bread and butter and bringing hot water from the rector’s kitchen. The profusion of flowers decorating the white walls, the show of silver teapots and bright porcelain on the tables, the blithe faces and gay dresses, formed altogether a refreshing and lively spectacle. Everybody talked merrily, and the canary birds sang shrill in their high-hung cages.

Caroline, as the rector’s niece, took her place at one of the three first tables; Mrs. Boultyby and Margaret Hall officiated at the others. Here the élite of the company were to be entertained. Miss Helstone removed her bonnet and scarf; her long curls fell on her neck, almost like a veil; and her muslin dress was as modest as a nun’s robe.

The room was filling. Mr. Hall took his post beside Caroline. He looked a little grave about what had taken place in Royd Lane, and she tried to smile him out of his seriousness.

Miss Keeldar sat very still, gazing round her vigilantly. She seemed afraid lest some intruder should take a seat she apparently wished to reserve next to her own, for she spread her satin dress over a portion of the bench, or laid her gloves or handkerchief upon it. When Caroline asked her who she expected, Shirley whispered softly:

“I expect Mr. Moore. I saw him last night, and I made him promise to come with his sister, and to sit at our table. He won’t fail me, I feel certain; but I fear he will come too late, and be separated from us. Here is a fresh batch arriving; every place will be taken. Provoking!”

Mr. Wynne the magistrate and his family now entered in high state. They were Briarfield gentry. Of course their place was at the first table; the magistrate’s son, Mr. Sam Wynne, sat in the very vacancy Shirley had kept for Moore, planting himself solidly on her gown, gloves, and handkerchief. She was averse to Mr. Sam, especially because he showed serious symptoms of aiming at her hand. His father, too, had publicly declared that the Fieldhead estate and the Wynne estate were delightfully contagious – a malapropism which rumour had not failed to repeat to Shirley.

Caroline’s ears still rung with that thrilling whisper, “I expect Mr. Moore,” her heart yet beat with it, when a note from the organ pealed out. The clergymen rose, so did everyone else, and grace was sung; then tea began. She was kept too busy to have leisure for looking round, but when the last cup was filled, she glanced over the room. There were some ladies and gentlemen standing about. She recognized her spinster friend, Miss Mann, who looked tired; a lady in a yellow bonnet brought her a chair.

Caroline knew well that yellow hat; she knew the black hair, and the kindly though rather opinionated face under it; she knew, in short, Hortense Moore, and she wanted to jump up and run to her and kiss her, for her own sake and her brother’s. She half rose, indeed, with a smothered exclamation; but a hand replaced her in her seat, and a voice behind her murmured, “Wait till after tea, Lina, and then I’ll bring her to you.”

There was Robert himself close behind, smiling at her eagerness, looking better than she had ever seen him look – looking, indeed, to her partial eyes, so very handsome that she dared not take a second glance; for his image struck on her vision with painful brightness.

He moved on, and spoke to Miss Keeldar. Shirley, irritated by Sam Wynne’s attentions, and by the fact of that gentleman being still seated on her gloves and handkerchief – and probably, also, by Moore’s lateness – was by no means in good humour. She shrugged her shoulders, and said a bitter word or two about his “insupportable tardiness.”

Moore neither apologized nor retorted. He stood near her quietly, as if waiting to see whether she would recover her temper; which she did in three minutes, and offered him her hand. Moore took it with a smile.

“You may sit where you can, Mr. Moore,” said Shirley, also smiling. “There is not an inch of room for you here; but I see plenty of space at Mrs. Boulby’s table, between Miss Armitage and Miss Birtwhistle. Go!”

Moore, however, preferred lingering where he was. He now and then took a turn down the long room, pausing to exchange greetings with other gentlemen; but he came back to the magnet, Shirley, bringing with him observations it was necessary to whisper in her ear.

Meantime poor Sam Wynne looked far from comfortable. His fair neighbour would not sit still for two seconds. She was hot; she fanned herself; she complained of lack of air and space. She remarked that, in her opinion, when people had finished their tea they ought to leave the tables, and announced distinctly that she expected to faint. Mr. Sam offered to accompany her into the open air; just the way to give her her death of cold, she alleged. In short, his place became untenable, and he judged it best to quit.

Moore was at the other end of the room. A large corn-factor, Timothy Ramsden, Esq., was nearer, and advanced to fill the vacant seat. Shirley's expedients did not fail her. A sweep of her scarf upset her teacup over the bench and her own satin dress. A waiter had to be called. Shirley, usually indifferent to accidents affecting dress, made a commotion befitting the most delicate and nervous of her sex. Mr. Ramsden, a large, puffy gentleman, opened his mouth, and withdrew, beating a heavy retreat.

Moore at last returned. Calmly surveying the bustle, and somewhat quizzically scanning Shirley's enigmatic face, he remarked that in truth this was the hottest end of the room, which would agree with none but cool temperaments like his own; and putting aside the waiters, the napkins, and the satin robe, he sat next to Shirley.

She subsided. The wilfulness and roguery left her face; but no gracious glance was cast on Moore. On the contrary, he was accused of giving her a world of trouble, and roundly charged with depriving her of the company of Mr. Ramsden and Mr. Samuel Wynne.

"I wouldn't have offended either gentleman for the world," she said. "Owing to you, how ill they have been used! I shall not be happy till I have made it up. I never am happy till I am friends with my neighbours."

"You know the surest path to the heart of each, I doubt not," said Moore quietly. He looked very content to have at last secured his place; but he offered no apology for the trouble he had given. His composure made him look handsomer. Now and then, from the way in which he addressed Miss Keeldar, you would have fancied his station towered above hers as much as his stature did. Stern lights sometimes gleamed in his eyes.

Their conversation had become animated, though it was in a low voice; she was urging him with questions which he evidently refused to answer. At her soft yet eager enquiry, Moore smiled, but his lips continued sealed. Then she was piqued, and turned away; but he recalled her attention. He seemed to be making promises which soothed her.

It appeared that the heat of the room did not suit Miss Helstone. She grew paler and paler during the process of tea-making. The moment she could, she left the table, and hastened to follow her cousin Hortense and Miss Mann, who had already sought the open air. Robert Moore rose when she did – perhaps he meant to speak to her; but there was still a word to exchange with Miss Keeldar, and while it was being uttered Caroline had vanished.

Hortense received her former pupil with more dignity than warmth. She had been seriously offended by Mr. Helstone's ban, and considered Caroline to blame in obeying her uncle too literally.

"You are a very great stranger," she said austere. The pupil did not remonstrate, sure that Hortense's natural good-nature would soon prevail. It did: when Hortense had examined her face, and observed the change in it, her manner softened. Kissing her on both cheeks, she asked anxiously after her

health. Caroline answered gaily; but was spared a long cross-examination when Miss Mann asked to be taken home. The poor invalid was already fatigued. Her weariness made her almost too cross to speak to Caroline; she gave her a cool nod, and departed with Hortense.

Caroline looked round for Shirley. She saw the rainbow scarf and purple dress in the centre of a throng of ladies, all ones whom she herself avoided whenever possible. She felt no courage at all to join this company. She could not stand alone, however; so she approached a group of her own scholars, great girls, or rather young women, who were standing watching the younger children playing blind-man's buff.

Miss Helstone knew these girls liked her, yet she was shy even with them. She drew near them rather to find protection in their company than to patronize them with her presence. By some instinct they knew her weakness, and with natural politeness they respected it. Her knowledge commanded their esteem when she taught them; her gentleness made them like her, and so they kindly overlooked her timidity when off duty. They did not take advantage of it, but were civil and friendly, receiving her hurried efforts to converse with a good feeling and good breeding, which soon set her at her ease.

On Mr. Sam Wynne hurrying over to insist on the elder girls joining in the game, Caroline was again left alone. She was meditating a quiet retreat to the house, when Shirley came to her side.

"Let us go to the top of the fields," she said. "I know you don't like crowds, Caroline."

"But it will be depriving you of a pleasure, Shirley, to take you away from all these fine people, who court your society, and to whom you can, without effort, make yourself so pleasant."

"Not quite without effort; I am already tired of the exertion. It is insipid work, talking and laughing with the good gentlefolks of Briarfield. I have been looking for your white dress for the last ten minutes. You resemble none of the rest, Lina. There are some prettier faces than yours here; Harriet Sykes, for instance; but you look agreeable, you look reflective, you look what I call interesting."

"Hush, Shirley! you flatter me."

"I don't wonder that your scholars like you."

"Nonsense, Shirley! Talk of something else."

"We will talk of Moore, then, and we will watch him. I see him even now."

"Where?"

"There is Moore," said Shirley, pointing right across the wide field where a thousand children were playing, and a thousand adult spectators walking about. "There – can you miss the tall stature and straight figure? He looks like Saul in a war-council; and a war-council it is, if I am not mistaken."

"Why so, Shirley?" asked Caroline, whose eye had at last found him. "Robert is shaking hands with my uncle. They are then reconciled."

"Not without good reason, depend on it – making common cause against some foe. And why, think you, are Messrs. Wynne and Sykes, and Armitage and Ramsden, gathered in such a close circle round them? And why is Malone beckoned to join them? Where he is summoned, be sure a strong arm is needed." Shirley grew restless; her eyes flashed.

“They won’t trust me,” she said. “That is always the way. There is some mystery afloat; some event is expected; some preparation is to be made, I am certain. I saw it in Mr. Moore’s manner this evening. He was excited, yet hard.”

“Hard to you, Shirley?”

“Yes. He often is hard to me. I am made to feel that the basis of his character is not of eiderdown.”

“Yet he seemed to talk to you softly.”

“Did he not? Very gentle tones and quiet manner. Yet the man is peremptory and secret: his secrecy vexes me. He scarcely has a right to be secret with me, as he commenced by giving me his confidence. It ought not to be withdrawn; but I suppose I am not considered iron-souled enough to be trusted in a crisis.”

“He fears, probably, to make you uneasy.”

“I am not soon crushed. He ought to know that. But the man is proud. He has his faults, say what you will, Lina. Observe how engaged that group appear. There will be some unusual movements before long. But my eyes and ears are open. Mr. Moore, you shall be watched.”

“Robert is going; I believe he noticed us. They are shaking hands.”

They saw Robert quit the group, pass through a gate, and disappear.

“And he has not bid us good-bye,” murmured Caroline. At once she tried to smile to hide her disappointment.

“Oh, that is soon remedied!” exclaimed Shirley: “we’ll make him bid us good-bye. I know a short cut. We will intercept him.”

“But, Shirley, I would rather not go.”

Miss Keeldar seized her arm and hurried her down the fields. It was vain to argue. Nothing was so wilful as Shirley when she took a whim into her head. Caroline found herself ushered into a narrow shady spot, embowered above with hawthorns, and enamelled underfoot with daisies. She heard the wicket-gate opening, and knew Robert was approaching. The long sprays of the hawthorns screened them. They saw him before he observed them.

At a glance Caroline perceived that his social gaiety was gone; he wore his dark, quiet, business face. As Shirley had said, there was a certain hardness in his air. So much the worse timed was the present freak of Shirley’s.

“I told you not to come,” said Caroline, somewhat bitterly, to her friend. To intrude on Robert thus, when he evidently would rather not be delayed, keenly annoyed her. It did not annoy Miss Keeldar in the least. She stepped forward and faced her tenant, barring his way.

“You omitted to bid us good-bye,” she said.

“Where did you come from? Are you fairies? I left two like you standing at the top of a bank, four fields off, only a minute ago.”

“You left us there and find us here. We have been watching you, and shall watch you still. You must be questioned one day, but not now. At present all you have to do is to say good-night, and then pass.”

“Must I say good-night to you, Miss Keeldar?”

“Yes, and to Caroline likewise.”

He took her hand, held it in one of his, and covered it with the other. He looked down at her gravely, kindly, yet commandingly. The heiress could not make this man her subject. In his gaze there was no servility; but there were interest and affection; and there was gratitude.

“Your debtor bids you good-night! May you rest safely and serenely till morning.”

“And you, Mr. Moore – what are you going to do? What were you saying to Mr. Helstone, with whom I saw you shake hands? Why did all those gentlemen gather round you? Be frank.”

“Who can resist you? I will be frank. Tomorrow, if there is anything to relate, you shall hear it. Right now I could only tell half a tale. And I have not a moment to spare.”

“You are going home?”

“Yes. Farewell to both of you.”

He would have taken Caroline’s hand and clasped it as he had Shirley’s, but somehow her hand was not ready for him. She had withdrawn, and gave him only a slight bend of the head and a gentle, serious smile. Again he said “Farewell,” and left them both.

“There!” said Shirley. “We have not lost ground in his esteem, I think, Cary.”

“I hope not,” was the brief reply.

“Why did you not give Moore your hand? He is your cousin; you like him. Are you ashamed to let him perceive your affection?”

“He perceives all of it that interests him. No need to make a display of feeling.”

“You are laconic. Is love, in your eyes, a crime, Caroline?”

“Love a crime! No, Shirley; love is a divine virtue. But why drag that word into the conversation? It is singularly irrelevant.”

“Good!”

The two girls paced the green lane in silence. Caroline first resumed.

“Forwardness is a crime; but love! No-one need blush to love. When I hear anyone couple shame with love, I know their minds are coarse and debased. Many who think themselves refined ladies and gentlemen cannot mention ‘love’ without betraying their own innate degradation. It is connected only with low ideas for them.”

“You describe three-fourths of the world, Caroline.”

“They are cold – they are stupid, Shirley! They never loved – they never were loved!”

“Thou art right, Lina.”

The sudden joyous clash of bells here stopped the dialogue by summoning all to the church.

Chapter 18

WHICH THE GENTEEL READER IS RECOMMENDED TO SKIP, LOW PERSONS BEING HERE INTRODUCED

The evening was still and warm; it promised to become sultry. Round the descending sun the clouds glowed purple; summer tints suffused the horizon, and cast rosy reflections on house and tree. The two girls came down from the fields slowly. By the time they reached the churchyard the bells were hushed; the multitudes were gathered into the church.

“How pleasant and calm it is!” said Caroline.

“And how hot it will be in the church!” responded Shirley. “And what a dreary long speech Dr. Boulby will make! And how the curates will hammer over their prepared orations! For my part, I would rather not enter.”

“But my uncle will be angry if we are absent.”

“I can bear his wrath; he will not devour me. I shall be sorry to miss his pungent speech. I shall be sorry also to deprive you of Mr. Hall’s friendly homily; but here I must stay. Nature is now at her evening prayers; she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of her altar, praying for a fair night for mariners at sea, for travellers in deserts, for lambs on moors, and unfledged birds in woods. Caroline, she is like what Eve was when she and Adam stood alone on earth.”

“That is not Milton’s Eve, Shirley.”

“Milton’s Eve! No. Milton was great; but was he good? He saw heaven; he looked down on hell. He saw Satan, and Sin his daughter, and Death their horrible offspring. He saw the tarnished armies of devils. Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not.”

“You are bold to say so, Shirley.”

“I would remind him that the first men of the earth were Titans, and that Eve was their mother; from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus—”

“Pagan!”

“I say, there were giants on the earth in those days – giants that strove to scale heaven, with the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, the vitality and uncorrupted excellence which, after millennia of struggles, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born. Vast was the heart whence came the blood of nations, and grand the head where rested the crown of creation.”

“She coveted an apple, and was cheated by a snake; but you have got such a hash of Scripture and mythology into your head that there is no making any sense of you.”

“On those hills I see a woman-Titan,” announced Shirley. “Her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath; a veil white as an avalanche sweeps from her head to her feet, and arabesques of lightning flame on its borders. Her steady eyes are clear, as deep as lakes; they are lifted and full of worship, they tremble with the softness of love and prayer. Her forehead has the

expanse of a cloud, and is paler than the moon. She reclines her bosom on the ridge of Stilbro' Moor; her mighty hands are joined beneath it. So kneeling, face to face she speaks with God. That Eve is Jehovah's daughter, as Adam was His son."

"She is very vague and visionary. Come, Shirley, we ought to go into church."

"Caroline, I will not; I will stay out here with my mother Eve. I love her – undying, mighty being! Heaven may have faded from her brow when she fell in paradise, but all that is glorious on earth shines there still. She is showing me her heart. Hush, Caroline! You will see her and feel as I do, if we are both silent."

"I will humour your whim; but you will begin talking again within ten minutes."

Miss Keeldar leaned against a headstone; she fixed her eyes on the deep-burning west, and sank into a pleasurable trance. Caroline paced to and fro beneath the rectory wall, dreaming too in her way.

Shirley had mentioned the word "mother." That word suggested to Caroline's imagination not the mighty and mystical parent of Shirley's visions, but a gentle human form – her own mother, unknown, unloved, but longed for.

"Oh, that the day would come when she would remember her child! Oh that I might know her, and love her!"

The longing of her childhood filled her soul again. The desire which many a night had kept her awake in her crib, relit suddenly, and glowed in her heart: that her mother might come some happy day, and look upon her with loving eyes, and say to her tenderly, "Caroline, my child, I have a home for you. All the love you have needed, and not tasted, from infancy, I have saved for you carefully. Come; it shall cherish you now."

A noise on the road roused Caroline and Shirley from their visions. They heard the tramp of horses, and saw a glitter through the trees, glimpses of martial scarlet. Silent and orderly, six soldiers rode by.

"The same we saw this afternoon," whispered Shirley. "They wish to be as little noticed as possible, and are moving while the people are at church."

Scarcely were the soldiers out of sight, when a different disturbance broke the night-hush – a child's impatient scream. A man came out of the church, carrying in his arms a robust little boy of some two years old – roaring with all the power of his lungs; he had probably just awoken. Two small girls followed. The fresh air soon quieted the child. The man sat down, dandling him tenderly on his knee; the little girls sat on either side.

"Good-evening, William," said Shirley. He took off his hat, and grinned in pleasure. He was a rough-headed, hard-featured personage, not old, but very weather-beaten. His attire was decent and clean; that of his children singularly neat. It was our old friend Farren.

"You are not going into the church?" he inquired, a little bashfully. Before gentlemen, William was often dogged; with proud or insolent ladies, he was quite unmanageable, sometimes very resentful; but he responded to good-humour and civility. His stubborn nature was repelled by inflexibility in other natures; so he had never liked his former master, Moore. Unaware that Moore had recommended him as gardener to Mr. Yorke, he continued to harbour a grudge against him.

Latterly he had often worked at Fieldhead. Miss Keeldar's frank manners charmed him. Caroline he had known from her childhood; unconsciously she was his ideal of a lady. Her gentle manner and grace moved his heart. Both the ladies liked William; they delighted to lend him books and give him plants, and they preferred his conversation over that of many coarse, pretentious people much higher in station.

"Who was speaking, William, when you came out?" asked Shirley.

"A gentleman ye set much store on, Miss Shirley – Mr. Donne. You look raight down scornful when Mr. Donne is by."

"Do you like him, William?"

"Me? I'm stalled o' t' curates, and so is t' wife. They've no manners. They talk to poor folk as if they thought they were beneath them. They're allus magnifying their office. I fair hate pride."

"But you are proud in your own way yourself," interposed Caroline. "You are house-proud: you like to have everything handsome about you. Sometimes you look as if you were almost too proud to take your wages. When you were out of work, you were too proud to get anything on credit. When I wanted to give you something, what a difficulty I had in making you take it!"

"True, Miss Caroline. I'd rather give than take, especially from sich as ye. Ye're a little, slender lass, and I'm a great strong man, more than twice your age. It is not my part to take fro' ye. And that day ye came to our house, and offered me five shillings, which I doubt ye could spare – that day I war a rebel. I war ashamed to be i' such a condition that a young cratur the age o' my own eldest lass should think it needful to offer me her bit o' brass."

"I suppose you were angry with me, William?"

"In a way. But I forgave ye varry soon. Ye meant well. Ay, I am proud, and so are ye; but your pride and mine is clean pride – such as Mr. Malone and Mr. Donne knows nought about. Theirs is mucky pride. They can hardly speak a civil word to them they think beneath them."

"Now, William," said Shirley. "be humble enough to tell me truly how you are getting on. Are you well off?"

"Miss Shirley, I am varry well off. Since I got into t' gardening line, wi' Mr. Yorke's help, and since Mr. Hall helped my wife to set up a bit of a shop, I've nought to complain of. My family has plenty to eat. But t' neighbours is poor yet. I see a great deal of distress."

"And consequently, there is still discontent, I suppose?" inquired Miss Keeldar.

"Ye say right. Starving folk cannot be settled folk."

"But what can be done? What more can I do?"

"Do? Not much, poor young lass! Ye've given your brass; ye've done well. If ye could transport your tenant, Mr. Moore, to Botany Bay, ye'd do better. Folks hate him."

"William, for shame!" exclaimed Caroline warmly. "If folks do hate him, it is to their disgrace, not his. Mr. Moore himself hates nobody. He only wants to maintain his rights. You are wrong to talk so."

"I talk as I think. He has a cold, unfeeling heart."

"But," interposed Shirley, "supposing Moore was driven from the country, and his mill razed to the ground, would people have more work?"

"They'd have less. I know that, and they know that; and there is many an honest lad driven desperate by the certainty that whichever way he turns he

cannot better himself; and there is dishonest men aplenty to guide them to the devil, scoundrels that reckons to be the 'people's friends,' and that knows nought about the people, and is as insincere as Lucifer. Human natur' is nought but selfishness. It is but just an exception here and there, sich as ye two young uns and me, that, though in a different sphere, can understand t' one t' other, and be friends. Them that reckons to be friends to a lower class from political motives is never to be trusted; they always try to make their inferiors tools. For my own part, I will not be patronized. I've had overtures made to me lately that I saw were treacherous, and I flung 'em back i' the faces o' them that offered 'em."

"You won't tell us what overtures?"

"I will not. It would do no good. Them they concerned can look after theirseln."

"Ay, we'se look after werseln," said another voice. Joe Scott had sauntered forth from the church.

"I'll warrant ye, Joe," observed William, smiling.

"And I'll warrant my maister," was the answer. "Young ladies," continued Joe, assuming a lordly air, "ye'd better go into th' house."

"I wonder what for?" inquired Shirley, who was often at war with the overlooker; for Joe, holding supercilious theories about women in general, resented greatly, in his secret soul, the fact of his master and his master's mill being under petticoat government.

"Because politics is not fit for women to be consarned in."

"But I study politics, Joe. Do you know I see a newspaper every day, and two of a Sunday?"

"To read the marriages, probably, miss, and the murders, and sich like."

"I read the leading articles, Joe, and the foreign news, and I look over the market prices. In short, I read just what gentlemen read."

Joe looked as disdainful as if this talk was the chattering of a magpie.

"Joe," continued Miss Keeldar, "I cannot work out whether you are a Whig or a Tory. Pray, which are you?"

"It is rather difficult to explain where you won't be understood," was Joe's haughty response; "but as to being a Tory, I'd as soon be an old woman. It is the Tories that carries on the war and ruins trade; and if I be of any party – though political parties is all nonsense – I'm of that which is most favourable to peace, and, by consequence, to business."

"So am I, Joe," replied Shirley, who rather enjoyed talking to him on subjects with which he thought women had no right to meddle. "I have rather a leaning to the agricultural interest, too; if some of my income comes from Hollow's Mill, more comes from the landed estate around it. It would not do to take any measures injurious to the farmers, Joe, I think?"

"The dews at this hour is unwholesome for females," observed Joe.

"I am impervious to cold. I should not mind taking my turn to watch the mill one of these summer nights, armed with your musket, Joe."

At this speech, Joe poked out his chin some inches farther than usual.

"But I cannot get out of my head," she proceeded, "an idea that we manufacturers and people of business are sometimes a little selfish and short-sighted in our views, and too regardless of human suffering. Don't you agree, Joe?"

"I cannot argue where I cannot be comprehended," was again the answer.

“Man of mystery! Your master will argue with me sometimes, Joe. He is not so stiff as you are.”

“Maybe not. We’ve all our own ways.”

“Joe, do you seriously think all the wisdom in the world is lodged in male skulls?”

“I think that women are a kittle and a froward generation; and I’ve a great respect for the doctrines of St. Paul’s first Epistle to Timothy. ‘Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.’”

“What has that to do with it?” interjected Shirley. “That smacks of rights of primogeniture. I’ll bring it up with Mr. Yorke.”

“And,” continued Joe Scott, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”

“More shame to Adam to sin with his eyes open!” cried Miss Keeldar. “To confess the honest truth, Joe, I never was easy in my mind concerning that chapter. It puzzles me.”

“It is very plain, miss.”

Caroline now joined in the dialogue for the first time. “You allow the right of private judgment, I suppose, Joe?”

“My certy, that I do! I allow it for every line of the holy Book.”

“Women may exercise it as well as men?”

“Nay. Women is to take their husbands’ opinion. It’s wholesomest for them.”

“Oh! oh!” exclaimed both Shirley and Caroline. “Consider yourself groaned down, and cried shame over, for such a stupid observation,” said Miss Keeldar. “You might as well say men are to take the opinions of their priests without examination. Such a religion would be mere blind, besotted superstition.”

“And what is your reading, Miss Helstone, o’ these words o’ St. Paul’s?”

“I account for them in this way,” said Caroline. “He wrote that chapter for a particular congregation of Christians, under peculiar circumstances; and besides, I dare say, if I could read the original Greek, I should find that many of the words have been wrongly translated, perhaps misunderstood altogether. It would be possible, I doubt not, to give the passage quite a contrary turn.”

“That won’t wash, miss.”

“I dare say it will. Joe, you are a thoroughly dogmatical person. I like William better than you.”

“Joe is well enough in his own house,” said Shirley. “I have seen him as quiet as a lamb at home. There is not a kinder husband in Briarfield. He does not dogmatize to his wife.”

“My wife is a hard-working, plain woman; time and trouble has ta’en all the conceit out of her. But that is not the case with you, young misses. And then you reckon to have so much knowledge; and it’s only superficial. One day Miss Caroline came into our counting-house when I war behind t’ great desk, and she didn’t see me, and she brought a slate wi’ a sum on it to t’ maister. Uur Harry would have settled it i’ two minutes. She couldn’t do it. Mr. Moore had to show her how. And when he did show her, she couldn’t understand him.”

“Nonsense, Joe!”

“Nay, it’s no nonsense. And Miss Shirley there reckons to hearken to t’ maister when he’s talking ower trade, so attentive like, as if she followed him word for word; and all t’ while she’s peeping out o’ t’ window to see t’ mare; and then looking at a bit of a splash on her riding-skirt; and then glancing round at wer counting-house cobwebs, and thinking what mucky folk we are, and what a grand ride she’ll have ower Nunnely Common. She hears no more o’ Mr. Moore’s talk nor if he spake Hebrew.”

“Joe, you are a real slanderer. I would answer you, only the people are coming out of church. We must leave you. Man of prejudice, good-bye. William, good-bye. Children, come up to Fieldhead tomorrow, and you shall choose what you like best out of Mrs. Gill’s store-room.”

Chapter 19

A SUMMER NIGHT

It was now dusk; the stars were kindling.

“There will be just light enough to show me the way home,” said Miss Keeldar.

“You must not go alone, Shirley; Fanny shall accompany you.”

“That she shall not. Of what need I be afraid in my own parish? I would walk from Fieldhead to the church any fine midsummer night, for the mere pleasure of seeing the stars and the chance of meeting a fairy.”

“But just wait till the crowd is cleared away.”

“Agreed. I don’t wish to go through the ceremony of bidding them all good-bye, so we will step into the garden and take shelter.”

The rectors, their curates, and their churchwardens now issued from the church porch. There was a great shaking of hands, congratulation on speeches, recommendation to be careful of the night air, etc. By degrees the throng dispersed; the carriages drove off. Miss Keeldar was just emerging from her flowery refuge when Mr. Helstone entered the garden.

“Oh, I want you!” he said to Shirley. “I was afraid you were already gone. – Caroline, come here.”

Caroline came, expecting a lecture on not having been in church. Other subjects, however, occupied the rector’s mind.

“I shall not sleep at home tonight,” he continued. “I have just met with an old friend, and promised to accompany him. I shall return probably about noon tomorrow. Thomas, the clerk, is engaged, and cannot sleep in the house as usual when I am absent for a night. Now—”

“Now,” interrupted Shirley, “you want me, as the first gentleman in Briarfield, to supply your place, be master of the rectory and guardian of your niece and maids while you are away?”

“Exactly, captain. I thought the post would suit you. Will you be Caroline’s guest for one night, instead of going back to Fieldhead?”

“Mrs. Pryor expects me home.”

“I will send her word. Come, make up your mind to stay. You and Caroline will enjoy each other’s society.”

“I promise, then, to stay with Caroline,” replied Shirley. “We will not be separated tonight.”

“If there should chance to be any disturbance in the night, captain; if you should hear the picking of a lock, a stealthy tread of steps about the house (and I need not fear to tell you, who bear a mettlesome heart, that such incidents are very possible at present), what would you do?”

“Don’t know; faint, perhaps – fall down, and have to be picked up again. But, doctor, you must give me arms. What weapons are there in your stronghold?”

“You could not wield a sword?”

“No; I could manage the carving-knife better.”

“You will find a good one in the dining-room sideboard – light and sharp.”

“It will suit Caroline. But you must give me a brace of pistols. I know you have pistols.”

“You will find a pair hanging over the mantelpiece of my study.”

“Loaded?”

“Yes, but not on the cock. Cock them before you go to bed. It is paying you a great compliment, captain, to lend you these.”

“I will take care. You need delay no longer, Mr. Helstone. – He is gracious to me to lend me his pistols,” she remarked, as the rector departed. “But come, Lina, let us go in and have supper.”

Entering the house, they went to the darkened dining-room. Through the open windows stole the evening air, bearing the perfume of flowers, and a soft, vague murmur.

Caroline said, “I hear the beck in the Hollow.” She rang the bell, and asked for a candle, and bread and milk for supper. They ate their meal in silence. Caroline rose once, half opened a drawer, and took from it something that glittered clear and keen in her hand.

“You assigned this to me, then, Shirley, did you? It is dangerous-looking. I never yet felt the impulse to wound a fellow-creature.”

“I should hate to do it,” replied Shirley, “but I think I could, if goaded sufficiently.” And Miss Keeldar quietly sipped her glass of milk, looking somewhat thoughtful and a little pale; though, indeed, when did she not look pale?

The milk sipped and the bread eaten, Fanny was again summoned. She and Eliza were recommended to go to bed, which they were quite willing to do, being weary of the day’s exertions. Caroline took a candle and went quietly all over the house, seeing that every window was fast and every door barred.

“It is now near eleven o’clock,” she said on her return, “yet I would rather sit up a little longer, if you do not object, Shirley. I have brought the pistols from my uncle’s study.”

She placed them on the table before her friend.

“Why would you rather sit up longer?” asked Miss Keeldar, taking up the firearms, examining them, and laying them down.

“Because I have a strange, excited feeling in my heart.”

“So have I.”

“Is this restlessness caused by something electrical in the air, I wonder?”

“No; the sky is clear. It is a fine night.”

“But very still.”

“I am glad of that,” said Shirley, “because I want to listen towards the Hollow.”

They both sat near the window, and leaned their arms on the sill by the open lattice. They saw each other’s young faces by the starlight and that dim June twilight which does not wholly fade from the west till dawn begins to break in the east.

“Mr. Helstone thinks we have no idea where he is gone,” murmured Miss Keeldar, “nor on what errand. But I guess; do not you?”

“I guess something.”

“All those gentlemen – your cousin Moore included – think that we are now asleep in our beds.”

“Caring nothing about them,” added Caroline.

Both kept silent for full half an hour. The night was silent too; only the church clock measured its course by quarters. They wrapped their scarves closer round them in the chill air, and again watched.

Towards midnight the bark of the house-dog disturbed their vigil. Caroline rose, and made her way noiselessly through the dark passages to the kitchen to appease him with a piece of bread.

On returning to the dining-room she found it dark, Miss Keeldar having extinguished the candle. The outline of her shape was visible near the open window, leaning out. Miss Helstone stole to her side. The dog recommenced barking furiously. Suddenly he stopped, and seemed to listen. The occupants of the dining-room listened too. There was a muffled sound on the road below the churchyard – a measured, beating tramp of marching feet.

It drew near. It was not the tread of two, nor of a dozen men; it was the tread of hundreds. They could see nothing; the high shrubs of the garden formed a leafy screen between them and the road. The troop marched forwards, and seemed actually passing the rectory when a voice broke the hush of the night.

“Halt!”

The march stopped. Then came a low conference, of which no word was distinguishable from the dining-room.

“We must hear this,” said Shirley.

She took her pistols from the table, silently passed out through the full-length French window of the dining-room, stole down the walk to the garden wall, and stood listening under the lilacs. Where Shirley went, Caroline would go. She glanced at the knife, but left it behind her, and presently stood at her friend’s side. Crouching behind the wall, they heard these words:

“It looks a rambling old building. Who lives in it besides the damned parson?”

“Only three women – his niece and two servants.”

“Do you know where they sleep?”

“The lasses behind; the niece in a front room.”

“And Helstone?”

“Yonder is his chamber. I see no light.”

“Where would you get in?”

“I’d try t’ long window; it opens to the dining-room. I could grope my way upstairs, and I know his chamber.”

“How would you manage about the women folk?”

“Let ’em alone except they shrieked, and then I’d soon quieten ’em. If the old chap waked, he’d be dangerous.”

“Has he arms?”

“Firearms, and allus loaded.”

“Then you’re a fool to bring us here. A shot would give the alarm. Moore would be on us before we could turn round. We should miss our main object.”

“You can go on. I’d engage Helstone alone.”

A pause. One of the party dropped some weapon, which rang on the stone causeway. At this sound the rectory dog barked again, furiously.

“That spoils all!” said the voice. “He’ll awake. You did not say there was a dog. Damn you! Forward!”

Forward they went – tramp, tramp – until they were gone.

Shirley stood up and looked over the wall, along the road.

“Not a soul remains,” she said. “Thank God!”

Caroline repeated, “Thank God,” not in so steady a tone. She was trembling. Her heart was beating fast; her face was cold, her forehead damp. “But what will happen elsewhere?” she asked. “They have passed us so that they may make sure of others.”

“The others will defend themselves,” returned Shirley. “They are prepared for them. My finger was on the trigger; but I could not have protected us against three hundred men. Therefore I again earnestly thank God for insult and peril escaped.”

After a second pause she continued: “What is it my duty and wisdom to do next? Not to stay here inactive, but to walk over to the Hollow. Will you go with me?”

“Where those men are gone?”

“They have taken the highway; we should not meet them. The road over the fields is as safe and solitary as a path through the air. Will you go?”

“Yes,” was the answer, given mechanically, not because Caroline wished to go, but because she felt she could not abandon Shirley.

“Then we must fasten up these windows, and leave all secure behind us. Do you know why we are going, Cary?”

“Yes – no – because you wish it.”

“Is that all? What a docile wife you would make! The moon’s face is not whiter than yours at this moment; and so, terror-struck and devoted, you would follow me into the thick of danger! Cary, we are going for Moore’s sake – to try to warn him of what is coming.”

“To be sure! I am a fool, Shirley. I will gladly go with you!” Caroline rapidly closed shutter and window. “I can run as fast as you can, Shirley. Let us go straight across the fields.”

“But you cannot climb walls?”

“Tonight I can.”

They started; they ran. Many a wall checked but did not baffle them. Shirley was surefooted and agile. Caroline fell once or twice, and bruised herself; but she rose again directly, saying she was not hurt. A quickset hedge surrounded the last field; they lost time in seeking a gap, and worked their way through. The long hair, the tender skin, the silks and the muslins suffered; but what was chiefly regretted was the loss of speed.

On the other side they met the beck, flowing deep, a narrow plank the only bridge across it. Shirley had trodden the plank fearlessly many a time; Caroline had never yet dared.

“I will carry you across,” said Miss Keeldar. “You are light, and I am not weak.”

“If I fall in, you may fish me out,” was the answer. Caroline, without pausing, walked across the trembling plank as if it were firm ground. Shirley, who followed, did not cross it more resolutely. In their present mood, all Stilbro’ Moor alight with bonfires would not have stopped them, nor would the river Aire thundering in flood.

Yet one sound made them pause. A shot split the air from the north. One second elapsed; another shot burst further off in the south. Within three minutes, similar signals boomed in the east and west.

“Those are signals,” observed Shirley. “The attack must be near. We should have had wings. Our feet have not been swift enough.”

They now emerged from the copse; the mill lay just below them, with the road beyond. And the first glance told Shirley she was right. They were already too late to give warning.

The road, which should have been white, was dark with a moving mass. The rioters were assembled in front of the closed yard gates, and a single figure stood within, apparently addressing them. The mill itself was perfectly black and still.

“Surely that is not Moore meeting them alone?” whispered Shirley.

“It is. We must go to him. I will go to him.”

“That you will not.”

“Why did I come, then? I came only for him. I shall join him.”

“Fortunately you cannot. There is no entrance to the yard.”

“There is a small entrance at the back. I will try it.”

“Not with my leave.” Miss Keeldar clasped her round the waist with both arms and held her. “Not one step shall you stir. Moore would be both shocked and embarrassed if he saw either you or me. Men never want women near them in time of real danger.”

“I would help him,” was the reply.

“How? by inspiring him with heroism? Pooh! it is not a tilt at a tournament, but a struggle about money and food, and life.”

“It is natural that I should be at his side.”

“As queen of his heart? His mill is his lady-love, Cary! It is not for love or beauty, but for ledger and broadcloth that he is going to fight. Don’t be sentimental; Robert is not so.”

“I could help him.”

“Off you go then – seek Moore. You’ll not find him.”

She loosened her hold. Caroline sped away; but then she paused, gazing. The figure had retreated from the gate, and was running back to the mill.

She slowly returned. “It is not Robert,” she said.

“I saw that when I let you go. It is a soldier, posted as sentinel. He is safe in the mill now. My mind grows easier. Robert is prepared. Our warning would have been superfluous; and now I am thankful we came too late to give it. It has saved us the trouble of a scene. How fine to have entered the counting-house, and to have found oneself in the presence of Malone swaggering, your uncle sneering, Mr. Sykes sipping a cordial, and Moore himself in his cold man-of-business vein! I am glad we missed it.”

“I wonder if there are many in the mill, Shirley!”

“Plenty to defend it. The soldiers we have twice seen today were going there, no doubt. The crowd is trying to force the gates, using hatchets and crowbars. Are you afraid?”

“No; but my heart throbs fast. I have difficulty in standing. Do you feel unmoved?”

“Hardly that; but I am glad I came. We are here on the spot, and none know it.”

“Shirley, the gates are down! Now they are pouring through. They will break down the mill doors as they have broken the gate. What can Robert do against so many? Would to God I were nearer him – could speak to him! I long to serve him – surely I could be of some use.”

“How steadily they march in!” cried Shirley. “There is discipline in their ranks. I will not say there is courage, but there is desperation enough to urge them forwards.”

“Forwards against Robert; and they hate him.”

A crash stopped their whispers. A volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane lay in shattered fragments. A yell followed – a rioters’ yell.

Caroline rose; Shirley put her arm round her: they stood together like two straight trees. When the yell ceased, the night was yet full of the murmuring of a crowd. The mill remained mute as a mausoleum.

“He cannot be alone!” whispered Caroline.

“He is neither alone nor alarmed,” responded Shirley.

Shots were fired by the rioters. And now the mill awoke; fire flashed from its empty window-frames; a volley of musketry pealed through the Hollow.

“Moore speaks at last!” said Shirley.

“He has been forbearing. No-one can accuse him of rashness,” said Caroline. “They attacked first.”

What was going on now? It seemed difficult, in the darkness, to distinguish; but a tumult was obvious – fierce attacks, desperate repulses. The mill-yard was full of battle movement. There were frequent shots; there was struggling, rushing, trampling, and shouting. They heard the rebel leader cry, “To the back, lads!” They heard a voice retort, “Come round; we will meet you.”

“To the counting-house!”

“Welcome! we shall have you there!” was the response. And accordingly the fiercest blaze that had yet glowed, the loudest rattle that had yet been heard, burst from the counting-house when the mass of rioters rushed up to it.

The voice that had spoken was Moore’s, warm with the conflict; they could tell that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling.

The girls felt their faces glow and their pulses throb; but knew they would do no good by rushing down into the mêlée.

They could not take their eyes from the dim, terrible scene – from the mass of cloud, of smoke, the musket-lightning. They wondered both how it would end, and whether they could yet be useful; for Shirley would have given a farm of her best land for a chance of rendering good service.

The chance never came. Moore had expected this attack, and was prepared for it. He had fortified and garrisoned his mill, which in itself was a strong building. He was a cool, brave man; he stood to the defence with unflinching firmness. Those who were with him caught his spirit.

The rioters had never been so met before. At other mills they had attacked they had found no resistance. When their leaders saw the steady fire kept up from the mill, witnessed the composure and determination of its owner, heard themselves coolly invited on to death, and beheld their men falling wounded, they hastily mustered their forces and drew them away. They dispersed wide over the fields, leaving silence and ruin behind. The attack had not lasted an hour.

Day was by this time approaching; the east was beginning to gleam. The girls very cautiously approached the now battered mill. When soldiers suddenly

appeared at the great door opening into the yard, they quickly stepped aside into a shed, where they could see without being seen.

It was no cheering spectacle. The mill yawned ruinous with broken windows; the yard was thickly strewn with stones; and close under the mill, with the glittering fragments of glass, lay muskets and other weapons. More than one deep crimson stain was visible on the gravel, a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates, and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust.

Miss Keeldar's face changed.

"This is what I wished to prevent," she said, in a low voice.

"But you could not prevent it; you did your best," said Caroline. "Don't grieve, Shirley."

"I am sorry for those poor fellows," was the answer. "Are any within the mill hurt, I wonder? Is that your uncle?"

"It is, and there is Mr. Malone; and, O Shirley, there is Robert!"

"Well, there is nothing wonderful in that. We knew he, at least, was here."

"He is coming towards us, Shirley!"

"Towards the pump, rather, to wash his hands and his forehead, which has got a scratch, I perceive."

"He bleeds, Shirley. Don't hold me. I must go."

"Not a step."

"But I must go to him, to ask how he is, and see what I can do."

"To tease and annoy him; to make a spectacle of yourself before those soldiers, Mr. Malone, and your uncle. Would he like it? Would you like to remember it a week hence?"

"Am I always to be curbed and kept down?" demanded Caroline passionately.

"For his sake, yes; and still more for your own. I tell you, if you showed yourself now you would repent it an hour hence, and so would Robert."

"I only wish to go to him because he is my cousin – you understand?"

"I quite understand. But now, look: he has bathed his forehead, and the blood has ceased trickling. It is a mere graze. He is going to look after the wounded men."

Mr. Moore and Mr. Helstone went round the yard, examining each prostrate form. They gave directions to have the wounded taken up and carried into the mill. Horses were saddled, and Moore and Mr. Helstone rode away full gallop, in different directions, to seek surgical aid.

Caroline was not yet pacified.

"Shirley, Shirley, I should have liked to speak one word to him before he went," she murmured, while tears gathered glittering in her eyes.

"Why do you cry, Lina?" asked Miss Keeldar a little sternly. "You ought to be glad. Robert has escaped any serious harm; he is victorious; he has been brave in combat; he is now considerate in triumph. Are these causes for weeping?"

"You do not know what I have in my heart," pleaded the other. "I understand that you exult in Robert's greatness and goodness; so do I, in one sense, but in another I feel so miserable. I am too far removed from him. I used to be nearer. Let me alone, Shirley. Do let me cry a few minutes."

Miss Keeldar, feeling her tremble in every limb, went out of the shed, and left her to weep in peace. It was the best plan. In a few minutes Caroline rejoined her, much calmer. She said, with her natural, gentle manner, "Come, Shirley, we will go home now. I promise not to try to see Robert again till he asks for me. I never will try to push myself on him. I thank you for restraining me just now."

"Now, dear Lina," returned Shirley, "let us walk very quietly back to the rectory. We will steal in as we stole out. None shall know where we have been. Tomorrow we will see Robert, and be of good cheer; but I will say no more, lest I should begin to cry too. I seem hard towards you, but I am not so."

Chapter 20

TOMORROW

The two girls met nobody on their way back to the rectory. They let themselves in noiselessly, and stole upstairs by the early dawn light. Shirley sought her bed; and though the room was strange, and though the recent scene had been unparalleled for excitement and terror by any she had yet witnessed, yet scarce was her head laid on the pillow before deep sleep closed her eyes.

Shirley had perfect health. Though warm-hearted and sympathetic, she was not nervous; powerful emotions could sway without exhausting her spirit. The tempest troubled her while it lasted, but it left her freshness quite unblighted. Caroline now watched her serenely sleeping.

For herself, she could not sleep. The commonplace excitement of the school-gathering would alone have sufficed to make her restless; the effect of the terrible drama she had seen was not likely to quit her for days. It was vain even to lie down; she sat up by Shirley's side, watching the sun mount the heavens.

Life wastes fast in such vigils as Caroline had lately too often kept – vigils during which the mind, with no hope or joyous memories to feed on, tries to live on the meagre diet of wishes; and feeling itself ready to perish with craving, turns to philosophy, to resolution, to resignation; calls on all these for aid, calls vainly – is unheard, and unhelped.

Caroline was a Christian; therefore in trouble she prayed often, begging for patience, strength, relief. However, it seemed that her prayers were unheard and unaccepted. She believed, sometimes, that God had turned His face from her.

Most people have had a period in their lives when they have felt thus forsaken – when, having long hoped against hope, their hearts have truly sickened within them. This is a terrible hour, but it is often that darkest point which precedes the rise of day – that turn of the year when the icy January wind carries both the dirge of departing winter and the prophecy of coming spring. The perishing birds, however, cannot understand this as they shiver; and nor can the suffering soul recognize the dawn of its deliverance.

The household was astir at last; the servants were up; the shutters were opened below. Caroline, as she rose, felt that revival of spirits which the return of day gives to all but the wholly despairing or actually dying. She dressed carefully, so that none of the forlornness she felt should be visible externally. She looked as fresh as Shirley when both were dressed; only Miss Keeldar's eyes were lively, and Miss Helstone's languid.

“Today I shall have much to say to Moore,” were Shirley's first words; and you could see that life was full of interest and expectation for her. “He will have to undergo cross-examination,” she added. “I dare say he thinks he has outwitted me. This is the way men deal with women – concealing danger from them – thinking, I suppose, to spare them pain. Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children. Now, that is a mistake.”

This was said as she stood at the mirror, training her hair into curls by twining it round her fingers. As Caroline fastened her dress, she continued:

“If men could see us as we really are, they would be amazed; but the cleverest men are often under an illusion about women. They misapprehend them, both for good and evil. Their good woman is a queer thing, half doll, half angel; their bad woman almost always a fiend. Then to hear them fall into ecstasies with each other’s creations – worshipping the heroine of such a poem or novel – thinking it fine, divine! Fine and divine it may be, but often quite artificial – false as the rose in my bonnet.”

“Shirley, you chatter so, I can’t fasten you. Be still. And, after all, authors’ heroines are almost as good as authoresses’ heroes.”

“Not at all. Women read men more truly than men read women. I’ll prove that in a magazine article some day when I’ve time; only it will never be published. It will be ‘declined with thanks’.”

“To be sure. You don’t know enough. You are not learned, Shirley.”

“I can’t contradict you, Cary; I’m as ignorant as a stone. There’s one comfort, however: you are not much better.”

They descended to breakfast.

“I wonder how Mrs. Pryor and Hortense Moore have passed the night,” said Caroline, as she made the coffee. “Selfish being that I am, I never thought of either of them till just now. They will have heard all the tumult; and Hortense is timid.”

“Take my word for it, Lina, Moore will have contrived to get his sister out of the way. He will have quartered her with Miss Mann for the night. As to Mrs. Pryor, I confess I am uneasy about her; but in another half-hour we will be with her.”

By this time the news of what had happened at the Hollow was spread all over the neighbourhood. Fanny, who had been to Fieldhead to fetch the milk, returned in panting haste with news that there had been a battle in the night at Mr. Moore’s mill, and that some said twenty men were killed. Eliza had been informed by the butcher’s boy that the mill was burnt to the ground. Both women rushed into the parlour to announce these terrible facts to the ladies, saying that they were sure master must have been in it all; and Joe Scott’s wife and family were in the greatest distress, wondering what had become of their head.

A knock at the kitchen door announced the Fieldhead errand-boy, with a note from Mrs. Pryor. It was hurriedly written, and urged Miss Keeldar to return directly, as the neighbourhood was all in confusion, and orders would have to be given by the mistress of the hall. In a postscript it was entreated that Miss Helstone might not be left alone at the rectory, but had better accompany Miss Keeldar.

“I agree,” said Shirley, as she tied on her bonnet, and ran to fetch Caroline’s.

“But what will Fanny and Eliza do? And if my uncle returns?”

“Your uncle will not return yet; he will be galloping backwards and forwards from Briarfield to Stilbro’ all day, rousing the magistrates in the court-house and the officers at the barracks; and Fanny and Eliza can have Joe Scott’s and the clerk’s wives in to keep them company. There is no real danger now. Weeks will elapse before the rioters can again rally; and I expect Moore and Mr. Helstone will take advantage of last night’s outbreak to quell them

altogether. They will frighten the authorities of Stilbro' into energetic measures. I only hope they will not be too severe."

"Robert will not be cruel. We saw that last night," said Caroline.

"But he will be hard," retorted Shirley; "and so will your uncle."

As they hurried along the meadow path to Fieldhead, they saw the distant highway already alive with horsemen and pedestrians, heading towards the Hollow. On reaching the hall, they found the backyard gates open, and the court and kitchen crowded with excited milk-fetchers – waiting to receive their supplies from the dairy, as was the custom – whom Mrs. Gill, the housekeeper, was vainly trying to persuade to take their milk-cans and depart.

Seeing the state of matters, Shirley stepped in amongst the gossiping groups. She bade them good-morning with a frank, tranquil ease, and asked if they had all got their milk measured out; and understanding that they had, she observed that she "wondered what they were waiting for, then."

"We're just talking a bit over this battle at your mill, mistress," replied a man.

"Talking a bit!" said Shirley. "It is a queer thing all the world is so fond of talking over events. What good does your talking do? You working people should be models of industry, but you are just as gossip-loving as the idle. Fine, rich people that have nothing to do may be excused for trifling their time away; but not you."

"Should we never have a holiday because we work hard?" asked a man, smiling.

"Never," was the prompt answer; "unless you make a better use of it than to talk scandal at your neighbours' expense. Come, friends," she added, changing at once from bluntness to courtesy, "oblige me by taking your cans and going home. I expect several persons to call today, and it will be inconvenient to have the avenues to the house crowded."

The yard was clear in five minutes. "Thank you, and good-bye, friends," said Shirley, as she closed the gates.

Entering by the back way, the young ladies passed through the kitchen to the hall. Mrs. Pryor came running down the staircase to meet them. She was unnerved and pale, and looked alarmed. She felt, more than anything, dissatisfied with herself because she was not more equal to the demands of the occasion.

"You are aware," she began with a trembling voice, and yet anxious to avoid exaggeration, "that rioters have attacked Mr. Moore's mill. We heard the firing and confusion very plainly here; we none of us slept. It was a sad night. The house has been in great bustle all the morning. The servants have applied to me for directions, which I really did not feel warranted in giving. Mr. Moore has, I believe, sent up for refreshments for the soldiers and aid for the wounded. I could not undertake the responsibility of giving orders. I fear delay may have been harmful; but this is not my house. You were absent, my dear Miss Keeldar. What could I do?"

"Were no refreshments sent?" asked Shirley, while her countenance suddenly turned dark and warm.

"I think not, my dear."

"And nothing for the wounded – no linen, no wine, no bedding?"

"I think not. I cannot tell what Mrs. Gill did; but it seemed impossible to me to venture to dispose of your property by sending supplies to soldiers.

Provisions for a company of soldiers sounds formidable. How many there are I did not ask; I intended to do what was right, yet I did not see the case quite clearly, I admit.”

“These soldiers have risked their lives in defence of my property: they have a right to my gratitude. The wounded are our fellow-creatures: we should aid them. – Mrs. Gill!”

She called in a clear, penetrating voice. Mrs. Gill, who was deep in bread-making in the kitchen, came at once, not daring even to rub the dough from her hands or shake the flour from her apron. Her mistress had never called a servant in that voice save once before, when Tartar had been fighting with two large carriers’ dogs, encouraged by their masters. Then Miss Keeldar had summoned John as if the Day of Judgment were at hand. Without waiting for him, she had walked out into the lane, put her hands round the thick neck of the largest cur, and used all her strength to pull it from Tartar’s torn and bleeding head. She had not said a word to anybody during the rest of the day, but sat till evening tending Tartar. She wept furtively over him sometimes, and murmured the softest words of pity and endearment, which the old, scarred, canine warrior acknowledged by licking her hand. As to John, his lady turned a cold shoulder on him for a week afterwards.

Mrs. Gill, remembering this little episode, came promptly. That at such a time Fieldhead should have been inhospitable stung Shirley’s haughty spirit to the quick.

“How long is it since that message came from the mill?” she demanded.

“Not an hour yet, ma’am,” answered the housekeeper soothingly.

“Not an hour! You might as well have said not a day. They will have applied elsewhere by this time. Send a man instantly down to tell them that everything this house contains is at Mr. Moore’s, Mr. Helstone’s, and the soldiers’ service. Do that first.”

While the order was being executed, Shirley moved away and stood at the hall-window, silent, unapproachable. When Mrs. Gill came back, she turned, with a flushed cheek and a spark of displeasure firing her glance.

“Let the contents of the larder and the wine-cellar be brought up, put into the hay-carts, and driven down to the Hollow. If we have not much bread or meat in the house, go to the butcher and baker, and desire them to send what they have. But I will see for myself.”

“She will get over it in an hour,” whispered Caroline to Mrs. Pryor. “Go upstairs, dear madam,” she added affectionately, “and try to be as calm as you can. The truth is, Shirley will blame herself more than you before the day is over.”

With a few more gentle assurances, Miss Helstone managed to soothe the agitated lady. Having taken her to her apartment, Caroline left her to see if she could be useful.

She found that she could be very useful; for Fieldhead had not many servants, and just now their mistress found plenty of occupation for all the hands at her command, and for her own also. The good-natured help which Caroline gave the housekeeper and maids – all somewhat scared by their lady’s mood – did a world of good; and it appeased Shirley herself. She ran over to Caroline, who was carrying a heavy basket up the cellar stairs.

“It will strain your arm,” she cried; took it from her, and bore it out into the yard. The cloud of temper was dispelled; the flash in her eye was melted. She resumed her usual cheerful and cordial manner to those about her.

Shirley was still superintending the loading of the cart, when a gentleman entered the yard.

“I hope I see Miss Keeldar well this morning?” he said, examining her flushed face.

She gave him a look, and then again bent to her employment without reply, hiding a smile. The gentleman repeated his greeting.

“Well enough,” was the answer; “and so is Mr. Moore too, I dare say.” For the gentleman was he. “To speak truth, I am not anxious about him; some slight mischance would be only deserved. His conduct has been – let us say strange. May I ask what brings him here?”

“Mr. Helstone and I have just received your message that everything at Fieldhead was at our service. We judged that you would be giving yourself too much trouble; and I see we were correct. We are not a regiment, remember – only about half a dozen soldiers and as many civilians.”

Miss Keeldar blushed, while she laughed at her own over-eager generosity. Moore laughed too, though quietly; and ordered baskets to be removed from the cart, and vessels returned to the cellar.

“The rector must hear of this,” he said; “he will make a good story of it. What an excellent army contractor Miss Keeldar would have been!”

“You ought to be thankful,” said Shirley, “and not mock me. How could I gauge your appetites or number your band? For aught I knew, there might have been fifty of you. You told me nothing; and an application to provision soldiers naturally suggests large numbers.”

“It appears so,” remarked Moore, levelling another of his keen, quiet glances at the discomfited Shirley. – “Now,” he continued to the carter, “Your load is somewhat lighter. Take it to the Hollow.”

As the vehicle rumbled out of the yard, Shirley demanded what had become of the wounded.

“There was not a single man hurt on our side,” was the answer.

“You were hurt yourself, on the head,” interposed a quick, low voice – that of Caroline, in the doorway, who had till now escaped Moore’s notice. “Are you much hurt?”

“As you might scratch your finger with a needle in sewing.”

“Lift your hair and let us see.”

He took his hat off, disclosing a narrow slip of plaster. Caroline nodded slightly to show that she was satisfied, and disappeared inside.

“How did she know I was hurt?” asked Moore.

“By rumour, no doubt. But it is too good of her to trouble herself about you. For my part, it was your victims I was thinking of. What damage have your opponents sustained?”

“One of the rioters, or victims as you call them, was killed, and six were hurt. Medical aid was fetched immediately; and as soon as we can get a couple of covered wagons and some clean straw, they will be removed to Stilbro’.”

“Straw! You must have beds and bedding. I will send my wagon directly; and Mr. Yorke, I am sure, will send his.”

“He has volunteered already. And Mrs. Yorke – who, like you, seems to regard the rioters as martyrs, and me and Mr. Helstone as murderers – is at this

moment, I believe, fitting it up with feather-beds, pillows and blankets. The victims lack no attentions, I promise you. Mr. Hall, your favourite parson, has been with them since six o'clock, waiting on them like any nurse; and Caroline's good friend, Miss Ainley, sent in a vast stock of lint and linen."

"That will do. Where is your sister?"

"Well cared for. She is with Miss Mann. This morning the two set out for the resort of Wormwood Wells, and will stay there some weeks."

"Mighty clever you gentlemen think you are! Why are you not also omniscient? How is it that events occur, under your very noses, of which you have no suspicion? Ah, friend, you may search my countenance, but you cannot read it. You think me a dangerous specimen of my sex. Don't you?"

"A peculiar one, at least."

"But Caroline – is she peculiar?"

"In her way, yes."

"Her way! What is her way? She is neither eccentric nor difficult of control. She is not what they call a spirited woman."

"I have seen her flash out," said Moore.

"So have I, but not with manly fire. It was a short, vivid, trembling glow, that shot up, shone, vanished—"

"And left her scared at her own daring. You describe others besides Caroline."

"The point I wish to make is, that Miss Helstone, though gentle and tractable, is still perfectly capable of defying even Mr. Moore's penetration."

"What have you and she been doing?" asked Moore suddenly.

"Have you had any breakfast? Mrs. Gill will give you something to eat. Step into the oak parlour, and ring the bell."

"No, I must go back. Good-morning. The first leisure I have, I will see you again."

Chapter 21

MRS. PRYOR

While Shirley was talking with Moore, Caroline rejoined Mrs. Pryor upstairs. She found that lady deeply depressed. Miss Helstone tried to comfort her, knowing that although Mrs. Pryor looked unmoved by her quiet, tender attentions, she valued them.

“I am deficient in self-confidence and decision,” said Mrs. Pryor. “I always have been deficient in those qualities. Yet I think Miss Keeldar should have known that I always try to do right. The unusual nature of the demand on my judgment puzzled me, especially following the alarms of the night. I trust no serious harm will result from my lapse of firmness.”

A gentle knock was heard at the door. “Caroline, come here,” said a low voice.

Miss Helstone went out. There stood Shirley in the gallery, looking contrite as any repentant child.

“How is Mrs. Pryor?” she asked.

“Rather out of spirits,” said Caroline.

“I have behaved very shamefully, very ungenerously to her,” said Shirley. “How insolent in me to turn on her for what, after all, was only conscientiousness on her part. But I regret my error most sincerely. Tell her so, and ask if she will forgive me.”

Caroline did so with pleasure. Mrs. Pryor came to the door, and said falteringly, “Come in, my dear.”

Shirley came in, and threw her arms round her governess. While she kissed her heartily she said, “You must forgive me, Mrs. Pryor.”

“I have nothing to forgive,” was the reply. “We will pass it over, if you please. The incident proves plainly how unequal I am to certain crises.”

And that was the painful feeling which would remain on Mrs. Pryor’s mind. No effort of Shirley’s or Caroline’s could efface it. She could forgive her offending pupil, not her innocent self.

Miss Keeldar was presently summoned downstairs again. The rector had called, in high spirits. During his brief visit he quite forgot to ask after his niece; the riot, the mill, the magistrates, the heiress, absorbed all his thoughts. He alluded to the part he himself and his curate had taken in the defence of the Hollow.

“Wrath will fall on our heads for our share in this business,” he said; “but I defy every accuser. I was there to support the law, to play my part as a man. Your tenant Moore has won my approval. A cooler, more determined commander I could not wish to see. The man has shown sound judgment and good sense – first, in being thoroughly prepared; and then in knowing how to use without abusing his victory. Some of the magistrates are frightened, and, like all cowards, show a tendency to be cruel. Moore restrains them with admirable prudence. He has hitherto been very unpopular in the neighbourhood; but, mark my words, the tide of opinion will now turn in his favour.”

Mr. Helstone was about to add some half-jesting warning to Miss Keeldar about her rumoured partiality for her tenant, when a ring at the door checked him. As the second caller was the rector's old enemy, Mr. Yorke, Mr. Helstone seized his hat, and with a brief adieu took an abrupt leave.

Mr. Yorke was in no mild mood. Moore, the magistrates, the soldiers, the mob leaders, all came in for a share of invective; but he reserved his strongest terms – and real racy Yorkshire adjectives they were – for the fighting parsons, the rector and curate.

“The church,” he said, “is in a bonny pickle, when parsons take to swaggering among soldiers, blazing away wi’ bullet and gunpowder.”

“What would Moore have done if nobody had helped him?” asked Shirley. “He has plenty of courage, but even his gallantry alone could scarce avail against two hundred.”

“He had the soldiers, those poor slaves who hire out their own blood and spill other folks’ for money.”

“You abuse soldiers almost as much as you abuse clergymen. Your way of talking amounts to this: Mr. Moore should have abandoned his mill and his life to the rage of misguided madmen, and Mr. Helstone and every other gentleman should have looked on, and seen the building razed and its owner slaughtered, and never stirred a finger.”

“If Moore had behaved to his men from the beginning as a master ought to behave, they wouldn’t have their present feelings towards him.”

“Easy for you to talk,” exclaimed Miss Keeldar warmly, “you, whose family have lived at Briarmains for six generations, who knows all the people’s ways and prejudices – easy, indeed, for you to avoid offending them. But Mr. Moore came a stranger into the district, poor and friendless, with nothing but his own energies and talent to back him. A monstrous crime indeed that he could not become popular all at once; could not be jocular and free with strangers! Unpardonable that he did not introduce improvements as gradually as a rich capitalist might have done! For these errors is he to be the victim of mob outrage? Is he to be denied the privilege of defending himself? Are brave men to be reviled because they stand by him, and support the cause of one against two hundred?”

“Come now, be cool,” said Mr. Yorke, smiling at Shirley’s earnestness.

“Cool! Must I listen coolly to dangerous nonsense? No. I like you very well, Mr. Yorke, but I thoroughly dislike some of your principles. All that cant about soldiers and parsons is most offensive in my ears. All irrational crying up of one class, and howling down of another class, is really sickening to me; all arraying of ranks against ranks, all party hatreds, I reject. You think you are a philanthropist; you think you are an advocate of liberty; but I will tell you this – Mr. Hall is a better friend both of man and freedom than Hiram Yorke.”

From a man Mr. Yorke would not have borne this language patiently, nor would he have endured it from some women; but he thought Shirley both honest and pretty, and her plain-spoken ire amused him. Besides, he took a secret pleasure in hearing her defend her tenant, for he had Robert Moore’s interest at heart. If he wished to revenge himself for her severity, he knew how: a word, he believed, would tame and silence her, would cover her with the rosy shadow of shame, and make her drop her gaze.

“What more hast thou to say?” he inquired.

“Say, Mr. Yorke? I have a great deal to say, if I could get it out in lucid order, which I never can do. I believe your views, and those of most extreme politicians, are purely opposition views, meant only to be talked about, and never intended to be acted on. You abuse Moore for defending his mill. Had you been in Moore’s place you could not have acted otherwise than he acted. You abuse Mr. Helstone for everything he does. Mr. Helstone has his faults; he sometimes does wrong, but oftener right. If you were vicar of Briarfield, you would find it no easy task to sustain all the schemes for the benefit of the parish. I wonder people cannot judge more fairly of each other and themselves. When I hear Messrs. Malone and Donne chatter about the authority of the church and the deference due to them as clergymen; when I hear their spite against Dissenters; when I behold their insolent manner to the poor – I think the Establishment is indeed in a poor way, and needs reforming. I remember your strictures on all who differ from you, your sweeping condemnation of classes and individuals, without the slightest allowance made for circumstance; and then, Mr. Yorke, I doubt whether men exist who are reasonable and just enough to be entrusted with the task of reform. I don’t believe you are of the number.”

“You have an ill opinion of me, Miss Shirley. You never told me so much of your mind before.”

“I never had an opening. But I have sat in the back-parlour at Briarmains for evenings together, listening to your talk, half admiring what you said, and half rebelling against it. I think you a fine old Yorkshireman, sir. I am proud to have been born in the same county as yourself. Truthful, upright, independent you are; but also you are harsh, rude, narrow, and merciless.”

“Not to the poor, lass; only to the proud and high-minded.”

“And what right have you, sir, to make such distinctions? A prouder, a higher-minded man than yourself does not exist. But you are all alike. Helstone also is proud and prejudiced. Moore, though juster than either you or the rector, is still haughty and stern. It is well there are such men as Mr. Hall – men of large hearts, who can love their whole race, who can forgive others for being richer or more powerful than they are. Such men may have less force of character than you, but they are better friends to mankind.”

“And when is it to be?” said Mr. Yorke, now rising.

“When is what to be?”

“The wedding.”

“Whose wedding?”

“Only that of Robert Gérard Moore, Esq., of Hollow’s Cottage, with Miss Keeldar, heiress of Fieldhead Hall.”

Shirley gazed at the questioner with rising colour. But the light in her eye was not faltering; it shone steadily.

“That is your revenge,” she said slowly; then added, “Would it be a bad match, unworthy of my family?”

“My lass, Moore is a gentleman; his blood is pure and ancient as mine or thine.”

“And we two set store by ancient blood? We have family pride?”

Yorke bowed. Yes, he had family pride.

“Moore is a gentleman,” echoed Shirley, lifting her head with glad grace. She checked herself. Words seemed crowding to her tongue. She would not give them utterance; but her look spoke much. Yorke could not read it. It was not a plain story, however, no simple gush of feeling, no ordinary love-

confession – that was obvious. It was something deeper, more intricate than he guessed at. He felt his revenge had not struck home. He felt that Shirley triumphed, and he was baffled.

“And if Moore is a gentleman, you can be only a lady—”

“So there would be no inequality in our union.”

“None.”

“Thank you for your approval. Will you give me away when I relinquish the name of Keeldar for that of Moore?”

Mr. Yorke, instead of replying, gazed at her much puzzled. He could not tell whether she spoke in earnest or jest.

“I don’t understand thee,” he said, turning away.

She laughed. “Take courage, sir; you are not the only one.”

“Moore may settle his own matters; I’ll not meddle with them further.”

A new thought crossed her. Her countenance changed. With a sudden austere darkening of the eye she demanded, “Have you been asked to interfere? Are you questioning me as another’s proxy?”

“The Lord save us! Whoever weds thee must look about him! Keep all your questions for Robert; I’ll answer no more. Good-day, lassie!”

While Shirley was engaged with her callers, Caroline had persuaded Mrs. Pryor to put on her shawl, and take a walk with her up towards the end of the Hollow.

Here the opposing sides of the glen, clothed with brushwood and stunted oaks, formed a wooded ravine, at the bottom of which ran the mill-stream, struggling with many stones and tree-roots, foaming, gurgling, battling as it went. Half a mile from the mill, you found deep solitude. The wood flowers were fresh underfoot: wild roses bloomed abundantly. The sweet azure of bluebells and pearl-white blossoms spangled the grass.

Mrs. Pryor liked a quiet walk. She shunned high-roads, and sought lonely lanes. In solitude she was nervous; but she feared nothing with Caroline. When once she got away from human habitations, and entered the still demesne of nature with her young friend, a change seemed to come over her. When with Caroline, her heart, you would have said, shook off a burden, her brow put aside a veil. With her she was cheerful, even tender; to her she would reveal glimpses of her experience and learning, give her opportunities for guessing what life she had lived, and where her feelings were vulnerable.

Today, for instance, as they walked along, Mrs. Pryor talked about the various birds singing in the trees, and described their species and habits. English natural history seemed familiar to her. She recognised all the wild flowers, even tiny plants peeping out of chinks in old walls – plants such as Caroline had scarcely noticed before. At the head of the ravine, they sat down together on a ledge of mossy rock. Mrs. Pryor looked round, and spoke of the neighbourhood as she had once seen it long ago. She described its changes, comparing it to other parts of England with a sense of the picturesque, and an appreciation of the beautiful and commonplace, that gave her discourse a charm as pleasant as it was unpretending.

The sincere pleasure with which Caroline listened animated the elder lady. With her chill, diffident manner, and incommunicative habits, she had seldom known what it was to stir affection in another. It seemed that her heart was moved with a fond impulse towards Caroline, who looked up to her as an instructor, and clung to her as a friend. With more marked interest than usual,

she said, as she put aside from Caroline's forehead a straying curl, "I do hope this sweet breeze will do you good, my dear Caroline. I wish I could see more colour in these cheeks; but perhaps you were never florid?"

"I had red cheeks once," returned Miss Helstone, smiling. "A year – two years ago – when I used to look in the glass, I saw a rounder, rosier face. But when we are young," added the girl of eighteen, "our minds are careless and our lives easy."

"Do you," continued Mrs. Pryor, mastering her timidity with an effort, "do you fret over cares for the future? Believe me, you had better not. Let the morrow take care of itself."

"True, dear madam. It is not over the future I pine. The evil of the day is sometimes oppressive, and I long to escape it."

"The evil of the day – that is – your uncle perhaps is not – he does not appreciate—"

Mrs. Pryor could not complete her broken sentences; she could not ask whether Mr. Helstone was too harsh with his niece. But Caroline comprehended.

"Oh, my uncle and I get on very well," she replied. "We never quarrel – he never scolds me. Sometimes I wish somebody in the world loved me, but I cannot say that I particularly wish him to have more affection for me. As a child, I should perhaps have felt the lack of attention, only the servants were very kind to me; but when people are long indifferent to us, we grow indifferent to their indifference. My uncle does not care for women and girls, apart from ladies that he meets in company. I have no wish that he should alter. It would merely annoy and frighten me were he to be affectionate towards me now. But you know, Mrs. Pryor, it is scarcely living to measure time as I do at the rectory. The hours pass, and I get through them somehow, but I do not live. I endure existence, but I rarely enjoy it. Since Miss Keeldar and you came I have been – I was going to say happier, but that would be untrue." She paused.

"How untrue? You are fond of Miss Keeldar, are you not, my dear?"

"Very fond of Shirley. I both like and admire her. But I am painfully circumstanced. For a reason I cannot explain I want to go away from this place."

"You told me before, you wished to be a governess; but, my dear, if you remember, I did not encourage the idea. I have been a governess myself for much of my life. I am most fortunate that Miss Keeldar's talents and her sweet disposition have made my position easy; but when I was young, before I married, my trials were severe. I should not like you to endure similar trials. I worked for a family of good birth, whose members believed that they were unusually good Christians; that all their hearts were reborn, and their spirits perfectly disciplined. I was early given to understand that 'as I was not their equal,' so I could not expect to have their sympathy. The gentlemen, I found, regarded me as a 'tabooed woman,' who annoyed them by crossing their path. The ladies made it plain that they thought me 'a bore,' and the servants, I was told, 'detested me;' why, I could never clearly comprehend. My pupils, I was informed, 'however much they might love me, could not be my friends.' It was made clear that I must never cross the invisible but rigid line which separated me from my employers.' My life was solitary, joyless, toilsome. The sense of friendlessness and homelessness it caused began to affect my health. I sickened. The lady of the house told me coolly I was the victim of wounded vanity. She

hinted that if I did not make an effort to quell my ‘ungodly discontent,’ and to cultivate the humility befitting my station, I would very likely ‘go to pieces’, and die an inmate of a lunatic asylum.

“I said nothing to Mrs. Hardman – it would have been useless; but her eldest daughter, visiting my bedside, allowed that there were hardships in the position of a governess. However, these things, she said, were as they must be. ‘Governesses,’ she observed, ‘must ever be kept in isolation, to maintain that distance which decorum requires.’

“I remember I sighed. Miss Hardman said severely, ‘I fear, Miss Grey, you have inherited the sin of pride, and are ungrateful too. Mamma pays you a handsome salary, and if you had sense you would thankfully put up with much that is fatiguing and irksome, since it is made well worth your while.’

“Miss Hardman, my love, was a very strong-minded young lady, of most distinguished talents. The aristocracy are decidedly a very superior class, you know; as a high Tory I acknowledge that. She was most dignified as she addressed me thus; still, I fear she was a little selfish, my dear.

“I remember,” continued Mrs. Pryor, after a pause, “another of Miss H.’s observations, which she would utter with quite a grand air. She would say: ‘We need the imprudences, mistakes, and crimes of a certain number of fathers to sow the seed from which we reap the harvest of governesses. The daughters of trades-people, however well educated, must necessarily be underbred, and unfit to be guardians of our children. We shall ever prefer to place about our offspring those who have been born and bred with somewhat of the same refinement as ourselves.’”

“Miss Hardman must have thought herself something better than her fellow-creatures, ma’am,” said Caroline, “since she held that their calamities, and even crimes, were necessary to minister to her convenience. Her religion must have been that of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men are.”

“My dear, we will not discuss the point. I should be the last person to wish to make you dissatisfied with your lot in life. Submission to authorities, scrupulous deference to our betters are, in my opinion, indispensable to the well-being of every community. All I mean to say, my dear, is that you had better not attempt to be a governess, as the duties would be too severe for you. Not one word of disrespect would I breathe towards the Hardmans; only I feel that, were you to live with such a family, you would contend a while courageously, then you would pine and grow too weak for your work; you would come home – if you still had a home – broken down. Consumption or decline would close the chapter. Such is the history of many a life. I would not have it yours. My dear, we will now walk about a little, if you please.”

They both rose, and paced a green terrace bordering the chasm.

“My dear,” again began Mrs. Pryor, with a timid, embarrassed abruptness, “the young often – frequently – anticipate – look forward to – to marriage as the goal of their hopes.”

And she stopped. Caroline came promptly to her relief with self-possession and courage.

“They do, and naturally,” she replied with calmness. “They look forward to marriage with someone they love as the brightest destiny that can await them. Are they wrong?”

“Oh, my dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Pryor, clasping her hands; and again she paused. Caroline turned a searching eye on her agitated face. “My dear,” she murmured, “life is an illusion.”

“But not love!” exclaimed Caroline. “Love is the most real, the most lasting, the sweetest and yet the bitterest thing we know.”

“My dear, it is very bitter. It is said to be strong – strong as death! As to the sweetness, nothing is so fleeting; but its sting remains for ever. It tortures through time into its deepest night.”

“Yes, it tortures through time,” agreed Caroline, “except when it is mutual love.”

“Mutual love! My dear, romantic novels are pernicious. You do not read them, I hope?”

“Sometimes – whenever I can get them, indeed. But romance-writers might know nothing of love, judging by the way in which they treat of it.”

“Nothing whatever, my dear,” assented Mrs. Pryor eagerly, “nor of marriage; and the false pictures they give of those subjects cannot be too strongly condemned. They are not like reality. They show you only the green, tempting surface of the marsh, and give not one truthful hint of the slough underneath.”

“But it is not always slough,” objected Caroline. “There are happy marriages. Where affection is shared and sincere, and minds are harmonious, marriage must be happy.”

“It is never wholly happy. Two people can never literally be as one. There is, perhaps, a possibility of contentment under some rare circumstances; but it is as well not to risk it, my dear. Let the single be satisfied with their freedom.”

“You echo my uncle’s words!” exclaimed Caroline, in dismay. “You speak like Mrs. Yorke in her gloomy moments, like Miss Mann at her most sour. This is terrible!”

“No, it is only true. O child, you have only lived the pleasant morning of life; the hot, weary noon, the sad evening, the sunless night, are yet to come for you. Mr. Helstone, you say, talks as I talk; and I wonder how his wife would have talked had she been living!”

“And, alas! my own mother and father—” exclaimed Caroline.

“I have heard that they were separated.”

“They must have been very miserable.”

“You see all facts go to prove what I say.”

“In this case there ought to be no such thing as marriage.”

“There ought, my dear, if only to prove that in this life there is neither rest nor recompense.”

“But your own marriage, Mrs. Pryor?”

Mrs. Pryor shrank and shuddered as if she had pressed a naked nerve. “My marriage was unhappy,” said she, summoning courage at last; “but yet—” She hesitated.

“But yet,” suggested Caroline, “not entirely wretched?”

“Not in its results, at least. No,” she added, in a softer tone; “God mingles the balm of mercy with the most corrosive woe. I confess I am of a peculiar disposition – in some points eccentric. I ought never to have married. I was quite aware of it; and if I had not been so miserable as a governess, I never should have married; and then – and then, my dear, the gentleman I married was, perhaps, an exceptional character. I hope, at least, that few have had such

an experience as mine was, or have felt my sufferings. But, my dear, I do not wish to dishearten; I only wish to warn you that the single should not be too anxious to change their state, as they may change for the worse.”

“Thank you, my dear madam. I quite understand your kind intentions, but I have no thoughts of marriage, and for that reason I want to support myself by some other means.”

“My dear, listen to me. I have revolved this subject in my thoughts ever since you first mentioned your wish to obtain a situation. You know I reside with Miss Keeldar as her companion. Should she marry (and I believe that she will before long), I shall cease to be necessary to her in that capacity. I possess a small independency, arising partly from my own savings, and partly from a legacy left me some years since. When I leave Fieldhead I shall take a house of my own. I could not endure to live in solitude, but I have no relations whom I care to invite to close intimacy. As you must have observed, my habits and tastes have their peculiarities. But with you, my dear, I am happier than I have ever been with any living thing. I should esteem it a great privilege – a comfort, a blessing – if you would come to me then. Will you, Caroline? I hope you can love me?”

“Indeed, I do love you,” was the reply. “I should like to live with you. But you are too kind.”

“All I have,” went on Mrs. Pryor, “I would leave to you. You should be provided for. But never again say I am too kind. You pierce my heart, child!”

“But, my dear madam – this generosity – I have no claim—”

“Hush! you must not talk about it. There are some things we cannot bear to hear. Oh! it is late to begin, but I may yet live a few years. I can never wipe out the past, but perhaps a brief space in the future may yet be mine.”

Mrs. Pryor seemed deeply agitated. Large tears trembled in her eyes. Caroline kissed her gently, saying, “I love you dearly. Don’t cry.”

But the lady’s whole frame seemed shaken. She sat down, bent her head and wept, until at last the agony subsided.

“Poor lonely lamb!” she murmured, returning Caroline’s kiss. “But come; we must go home.”

At first Mrs. Pryor walked very fast. By degrees, however, she grew calm and fell into her normal pace; and by the time they reached Fieldhead she had re-entered into herself, and was, as usual, still and shy.

Chapter 22

TWO LIVES

Only half of Moore's activity and resolution had been seen in his defence of the mill; he showed the other half (and a terrible half it was) in the relentless way in which he pursued the leaders of the riot. The mob, the mere followers, he let alone, perhaps thinking that men misled and goaded by hunger are not fit objects of vengeance. At all events, though he had recognised many of the mob, he daily let them pass on the street without threat.

The leaders he did not know. They were strangers from the large towns. Most were not mill-workers; they were chiefly bankrupts, men in debt and often in drink, who had nothing to lose, and much to gain. These persons Moore hunted, and the occupation suited him. He liked it better than making cloth.

His horse must have hated these times, for it was ridden both hard and often. He almost lived on the road, welcoming the fresh air after the steam of dye-houses. The magistrates of the district dreaded him. They were slow, timid men, who faltered in resolve and recoiled through fear – the fear of assassination. This, indeed, was the dread which had hampered every manufacturer in the district.

Moore knew his danger, and scorned those who would endanger him. The knowledge that he hunted assassins was a spur to him. As for fear, many a night he rode over the moors feeling far more elated and refreshed than when safety and stagnation cocooned him in the counting-house.

Four leaders had to be accounted for. Two, within a fortnight, were caught near Stilbro'; the remaining two were thought to be near Birmingham.

Meantime Moore did not neglect his battered mill. Only the windows needed repairing; his grim metal darlings – the machines – had escaped damage.

Whether during this busy life he nurtured any gentler thoughts, it was not easy to discover. He seldom went near Fieldhead. If he called at the rectory, it was only to confer with the rector in his study. He maintained his rigid course very steadily. Meanwhile there was no lull in the tempest of war; her long hurricane still swept the Continent. Ruin was mining under Moore's feet, and whether he rode or walked, he was aware of a hollow echo, and felt the ground shake to his tread.

While the summer thus passed with Moore, how did it lapse with Shirley and Caroline? Let us first visit the heiress. How does she look? Like a love-lorn maiden, pale and pining?

By no means. Shirley is all right. If her wistful look is not gone, neither is her careless smile. She keeps her dark old manor-house bright with her cheery presence. The gallery has learned lively echoes from her voice; the dim entrance-hall has grown pleasantly accustomed to the frequent rustle of a silk dress, as its wearer sweeps from room to room, carrying flowers and opening windows.

She takes up her sewing occasionally; but never sits steadily at it for above five minutes at a time. Her needle is scarce threaded when a sudden

thought calls her upstairs. Perhaps she goes to seek some old ivory-backed needle-book; perhaps to arrange her hair, or tidy a drawer; perhaps only to take a peep from a window at the view of Briarfield church and rectory.

She has scarcely returned, and again taken up her sewing, when Tartar's scrape and strangled wheeze are heard at the porch door, and she runs to open it for him. It is a hot day; he comes in panting; she must take him to the kitchen for water. Through the open kitchen door the court is visible, sunny and gay, with turkeys, peahens and their chicks, pearl-flecked Guinea-fowls, and blue and cinnamon plumed pigeons. Irresistible spectacle! Shirley runs to the pantry for a roll, and stands on the doorstep scattering crumbs. John is in the stables, and he must be talked to, and her mare looked at.

Then the cows come in to be milked; Shirley must stay and take a review of them all. There are perhaps some little calves, some little new lambs – maybe twins, whose mothers have rejected them. Miss Keeldar must feed them with her own hand. Meantime John asks about the farming of certain “crofts” and “ings”, and his mistress has to fetch her straw garden-hat and accompany him over stile and along hedgerow, to decide the matter on the spot, with the said “crofts” and “ings” under her eye. She comes home to a late tea.

After tea Shirley reads. She is as tenacious of her book as she is lax of her needle. Her seat is a footstool, or perhaps the carpet at Mrs. Pryor's feet. The tawny bulk of Tartar is stretched beside her. One hand of his mistress reposes on his head, and if she takes it away he groans. Shirley's mind is on her book. She neither stirs nor speaks – unless to return a brief respectful answer to Mrs. Pryor, who addresses her now and then.

“My dear, that great dog is crushing the border of your dress.”

“Oh, it is only muslin. I can put a clean one on tomorrow.”

“My dear, I wish you could acquire the habit of sitting at a table when you read.”

“I will try, ma'am, some time; but it is so comfortable here.”

“My dear, you are tiring your eyes by the firelight.”

“Not at all, ma'am; my eyes are never tired.”

At last, however, she closes the volume, rises, and walks through the room. Her book has refilled and rewarmed her heart; it has set her brain astir. The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley. A deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins – the pure gift of God to His creature, the free dower of Nature to her child. Her eye seeks, and her soul possesses, the vision of life as she wishes it. The swift glory spreads, sweeping and kindling, and multiplies its splendours. Shirley says nothing while the trance is upon her; but if Mrs. Pryor speaks to her now, she goes out quietly, and continues her walk upstairs in the dim gallery.

If Shirley were not an indolent, reckless, ignorant being, she would take a pen at such moments. She would seize and fix the apparition, tell the vision revealed. She would write out, in her queer but legible hand, the story that has been narrated, the song that has been sung to her, and thus possess what she was enabled to create. But indolent she is, reckless, and most ignorant; for she does not know her dreams are rare. She does not know the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green.

Shirley takes life easily. Her nature is in her eye. So long as she is calm, a lazy softness, humour, and tenderness fill that grey sphere; anger her, and it quickens with fire.

By the end of July, Miss Keeldar would probably have started with Caroline on that northern tour they had planned; but just then an invasion befell Fieldhead. A genteel foraging party besieged Shirley in her castle, and compelled her to surrender.

An uncle, an aunt, and two cousins from the south – a Mr., Mrs., and two Misses Sympson, of Sympson Grove – arrived in state. The laws of hospitality obliged her to give in, which she did with a willingness which surprised Caroline. Miss Helstone asked her how it was she submitted so readily. Shirley answered that old feelings had their power; she had passed two years of her youth at Sympson Grove.

“How did she like her relatives?”

She had nothing in common with them, she replied, except little Harry Sympson, the sole son, who was very unlike his sisters. She had been fond of him; but he was not coming to Yorkshire yet.

The next Sunday the Fieldhead pew in Briarfield Church held a prim, trim, fidgety, elderly gentleman; a patient, placid-looking elderly lady in brown satin; and two model young ladies, in model attire, with model deportment. Shirley had the air of a black swan in the midst of this party, and looked very forlorn. Having brought her into respectable society, we will leave her there a while, and look for Miss Helstone.

Separated from Miss Keeldar by the presence of her fine relatives, Caroline was limited once more to the grey rectory, the solitary morning walk on remote paths, the long, lonely afternoon sitting in a quiet parlour, or in the garden alcove. There the sun shone on ripening red currants trained over the trellis, and on the fair roses entwined between, and fell chequered on Caroline, still as a garden statue. She read old books from her uncle’s library – some venerable Lady’s Magazines, some mad Methodist Magazines, and a few old English classics. From these faded flowers Caroline had in her childhood extracted the honey; they were tasteless to her now. By way of change, she would sew for the poor, according to good Miss Ainley’s direction. Sometimes, as she saw her tears fall on her work, she would wonder how that excellent woman managed to be so serene in her solitude.

“I never find Miss Ainley oppressed or lost in grief,” she thought; “yet her cottage is a dim little place, and she is without a close friend in the world. I remember she told me once she had tutored her thoughts to tend upwards to heaven, for there had been little enjoyment in this world for her, and she looks, I suppose, to the bliss of the world to come. So do nuns, with their close cell, their iron lamp, and their bed as narrow as a coffin. She says often she has no fear of death. Poor Miss Ainley would cling closer to life if life had more charms for her. God surely did not give us life with the sole end of wishing always to die. I believe we were intended to prize and enjoy life: it was never meant to be that useless, blank, slow-trailing thing it becomes to many, and is becoming to me too.

“Nobody,” she went on, “is to blame for this state of things; and I cannot tell how they are to be altered for the better; but I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do – more interesting and profitable occupations than they have now. I do not think these words

displease God, or that they are irreligious. Indeed, God hears many a groan which man stops his ears against, or frowns on with impotent contempt. I say impotent, for people hate to be reminded of ills they cannot remedy. It forces on them an awareness of their own incapacity, or a painful sense of an obligation to make some unpleasant effort. Old maids should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world; the demand disturbs the happy and rich.

“Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood – the Armitages, the Birtwhistles, the Sykeses. Their brothers are in business or in professions; they have something to do. Their sisters have no earthly employment but household work and sewing, no earthly pleasure but visiting, and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health. They are never well, and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The great wish, the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry; they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen ridicule them; they don’t want them; they hold them very cheap. I have heard them say with sneering laughs that the marriage market is overstocked. Fathers say so likewise, and order their daughters to stay at home. What do they expect them to do at home? They would answer, sew and cook, and this only, contentedly, uncomplainingly, all their lives long, as if they had no faculties for anything else. Could men live so themselves? Would they not be very weary? And when there came no relief to their weariness, but only reproaches, would not their weariness ferment in time to frenzy?

“Solomon’s virtuous woman in the Bible is often quoted as a pattern of what woman ought to be. But she had something more to do than spin. She was a manufacturer – she made fine linen and sold it; she was an agriculturist – she bought estates and planted vineyards. That woman was a manager, and I don’t believe either Mr. Armitage or Mr. Sykes could have got the advantage of her in a bargain. Yet I like her. ‘Strength and honour were her clothing; the heart of her husband safely trusted in her. She opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness; her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband also praised her.’ King of Israel! your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! can your daughters reach this royal standard? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading around you, because life is a desert to them; or reduced to strive, by coquetry and artifice, to gain a position by marriage.

“Fathers! Consider the matter well; do not dismiss it with an idle jest or an unmanly insult. You would wish to be proud of your daughters, and not to blush for them; then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep your girls’ minds narrow and fettered, and they will be a plague and a care to you. Cultivate them – give them scope and work; they will be your gayest companions in health, your tenderest nurses in sickness, your most faithful prop in age.”

Chapter 23

AN EVENING OUT

One fine summer day that Caroline had spent entirely alone (her uncle being at Whinbury), and whose long, bright, cloudless hours had been to her as desolate as if they had been spent in the shadowless wastes of the Sahara, she was sitting in the alcove, sewing, her brain working restlessly – when Fanny came to the door and called, “Miss Caroline!”

When she answered, Fanny hastened over, a note in her hand. Miss Helstone did not ask whence it came, and she did not even look at it; she let it drop amongst the folds of her work.

“Joe Scott’s son brought it from the Hollow,” said Fanny.

This had an almost magical effect on her young mistress. She lifted her head. The dropped note was snatched up eagerly, the seal was broken – it was read in two seconds.

It was an affectionate note from Hortense, informing her young cousin that she was returned from Wormwood Wells; that she was alone today, as Robert was gone to Whinbury market; that nothing would give her greater pleasure than to have Caroline’s company for tea. The good lady added, she was sure such a change would be most beneficial to Caroline, who must be sadly at a loss for improving society since the separation from her dear friend, Hortense Gérard Moore.

Glad was Caroline to lay aside her sewing, to cover her curls with her straw bonnet, and throw round her shoulders the black silk scarf; glad was she to escape for a few hours the solitude, the sadness, the nightmare of her life; glad to run down the fragrant green lane to the Hollow. True, she knew Robert was not there; but it was delight to go where he had lately been, to enter the room where he had that morning sat. And then, her thoughts whispered, “Robert may come home while you are there; you may give him your hand; perhaps, for a minute, you may sit beside him.”

“Silence!” was her austere response; but she loved the consolation.

Miss Moore advanced from the cottage to meet her, straight and unbending as usual. No haste or joy was ever permitted to disorder her dignity; but she smiled, pleased to see the delight of her pupil, to feel her kiss. She led her tenderly in, half deceived and wholly flattered. Half deceived! Had she known on whose account most of this joy was felt, Hortense would have been both shocked and incensed.

“You would expect to find me alone, from what I said in my note,” observed Miss Moore, as she led Caroline towards the parlour; “but since I wrote it, company has come in.”

And opening the door she made visible an ample spread of crimson skirts overflowing the chair at the fireside, and above them a cap more awful than a crown. The cap’s frill stood a quarter of a yard broad round the face of the wearer, with a great deal of ribbon. The wearer was Mrs. Yorke.

That great lady was come to take tea with Miss Moore. It was almost as great and rare a favour as if the queen were to go uninvited to share pot-luck

with one of her subjects. Mrs. Yorke in general scorned visiting and tea-drinking.

However, Miss Moore was a favourite with her. She had decided that Miss Moore was a woman of steady deportment, without the least levity; also that, being a foreigner, she must feel the want of a friend. She might have added that her plain appearance, homely dress, and phlegmatic manner were additional recommendations. Certainly ladies of beauty, elegance and lively bearing were not often favoured with her approval.

Caroline advanced diffidently to the mighty matron. She knew little of Mrs. Yorke, and, as a parson's niece, was doubtful what sort of a reception she might get. She got a very cool one, and was glad to hide her discomfiture by turning away to take off her bonnet. Upon sitting down, she was immediately accosted by a little personage in a blue frock, who started up from the side of the great dame's chair, where she had been sitting on a footstool, screened from view by the wide red gown. Running to Miss Helstone, she threw her arms round her neck and demanded a kiss.

"My mother is not civil to you," said this personage, "and Rose there takes no notice of you; it is their way. If a white angel crowned with stars had come into the room, mother would nod stiffly, and Rose never lift her head; but I will be your friend."

"Jessie, curb that tongue of yours!" said Mrs. Yorke.

"But, mother, you are so frozen!" cried Jessie. "Miss Helstone has never done you any harm; why can't you be kind to her? You sit so stiff, and look so cold, and speak so dry – that's how you treat every young lady who comes to our house. And Rose there is such an aut – aut – I have forgotten the word, but it means a machine in the shape of a human being."

"I am an automaton? Good! Let me alone, then," said Rose, from a corner where she was sitting with a book open on her knee. "Miss Helstone, how do you do?" she added, before again casting down her eyes to study the pages.

Caroline gazed at her young, absorbed countenance, full of character; with fine instinct, she felt that Rose Yorke was a unique child. Approaching quietly, she knelt on the carpet at her side, and looked over her shoulder at her book. It was a romance of Mrs. Radcliffe's: "The Italian."

Caroline read on with her, making no remark. Presently Rose asked, "Do you like it?"

"Long ago, when I was a child, I was wonderfully taken with it."

"Why?"

"It seemed to open with such promise – such foreboding of a strange tale to be unfolded."

"And in reading it you feel as if you were really in Italy – under another sort of sky. It makes me long to travel, Miss Helstone."

"When you are a woman, perhaps, you may be able to gratify your wish."

"I mean to do so. I cannot live always in Briarfield. I am resolved that my life shall be a life. Not a black trance like the toad's, buried in marble; nor a long, slow death like yours in Briarfield rectory."

"Like mine! what can you mean, child?"

"That house always reminds me of a windowed grave. I never see any movement there. I never hear a sound from it, or see any smoke coming from the chimneys. What do you do there?"

"I sew, I read, I learn lessons."

“Are you happy?” asked Rose.

“Should I be happy wandering alone in strange countries?”

“Much happier, even if you did nothing but wander. You would pass many a hill, wood, and river, each perpetually changing with the weather. Nothing changes in Briarfield rectory.”

“Is change necessary to happiness?” asked Caroline.

“Yes. I feel monotony and death to be almost the same thing.”

Here Jessie spoke. “Isn’t she mad?”

“But, Rose,” pursued Caroline, “I fear a wanderer’s life, for me at least, would end like that tale you are reading – in disappointment and vexation of spirit.”

“Better to try all things and find all empty, than to try nothing and leave your life a blank.”

“Rose,” observed Mrs. Yorke, “solid satisfaction is only to be realized by doing one’s duty.”

“Right, mother! And if my Master has given me ten talents, my duty is to trade with them, and make ten talents more. Not in the dust of household drawers shall the coin be buried. Not in a broken-spouted teapot, or in a china closet among tea-things. Not in the linen press among shrouds of sheets. And least of all, mother” (she got up from the floor) – “least of all will I hide it in a tureen of cold potatoes in the larder. Mother, the Lord who gave each of us our talents will some day demand from all an account. The teapot, the old stocking-foot, the tureen will yield up their barren deposit in many a house. Let your daughters, at least, increase their talents, so that they may pay the Master’s His own with interest.”

“Rose, did you bring your sampler, as I told you?”

“Yes, mother.”

“Sit down, and do a line.”

Rose sat down promptly, and sewed as ordered. After ten minutes, her mother asked, “Do you think yourself oppressed now – a victim?”

“No, mother.”

“Yet, as far as I understood your tirade, it was a protest against all womanly and domestic employment.”

“You misunderstood it, mother. I should be sorry not to learn to sew. You do right to teach me, and to make me work and mend.”

“Where is the use of ranting about it, then?”

“Am I to do nothing but that? I will do that, and then I will do more. Now, mother, I have said my say. I am twelve years old, and not till I am sixteen will I speak again about talents. For four years I bind myself an industrious apprentice to all you can teach me.”

“You see what my daughters are, Miss Helstone,” observed Mrs. Yorke; “how precociously wise in their own idea! ‘I would rather this, I prefer that’ – such is Jessie’s cuckoo song; while Rose utters the bolder cry, ‘I will, and I will not!’”

“I give a reason, mother; besides, my cry is only heard once a year.”

“I would advise all young ladies,” pursued Mrs. Yorke, “to study the characters of such children before they marry and have any of their own; to consider well how they would like the constant burden and task of training them.”

“But with love it need not be so very difficult,” said Caroline. “Mothers love their children almost better than they love themselves.”

“Fine talk! very sentimental! The practical part of life is yet to come for you, young miss.”

“But, Mrs. Yorke, if I take any woman’s baby into my arms, I feel that I love it, though I am not its mother. I could do almost anything for it willingly, if it were dependent on me.”

“You feel! Yes, I dare say. You are led a great deal by your feelings, and you think yourself a very sensitive person, no doubt. Are you aware that, with all these romantic ideas, you have managed to train your features into a lackadaisical expression, better suited to a novel-heroine than a woman who is to make her way in the real world by dint of common sense?”

“No; I am not aware of that, Mrs. Yorke.”

“Look in the mirror behind you. Compare the face you see there with that of any hard-working milkmaid.”

“My face is pale, but it is not sentimental; and most milkmaids, however red and robust they may be, are more stupid and less practically fitted to make their way in the world than I am. I think more, and more correctly, than milkmaids in general do. Where they would often act weakly, I should act judiciously.”

“Oh no! you would be influenced by your feelings.”

“Of course I should often be influenced by my feelings. They were given me to that end. I hope, if ever I have a husband and children, my feelings will induce me to love them.”

Caroline had a pleasure in saying this to Mrs. Yorke. She did not care what unjust sarcasm might be hurled at her in reply. She flushed, not with anger but excitement, when the matron answered coolly, “That was well said – it was quite fine; but it is lost on an old wife and an old maid. There should have been a gentleman present. – Is Mr. Robert nowhere hid behind the curtains, do you think, Miss Moore?”

Hortense, who during much of the conversation had been in the kitchen superintending the preparations for tea, did not understand. She answered, with a puzzled air, that Robert was at Whinbury. Mrs. Yorke laughed her short laugh.

“Straightforward Miss Moore!” said she patronizingly. “It is like you to understand my question so literally. You comprehend nothing of intrigue. You are not of the class the world calls sharp-witted.”

At this, Hortense drew herself up and puckered her black eyebrows, but still looked puzzled.

“I have been noted for sagacity and discernment from childhood,” she returned.

“You never plotted to win a husband, I’ll be bound,” pursued Mrs. Yorke; “and you have no experience to aid you in discovering when others plot.”

Caroline felt this language where the speaker intended she should feel it – in her very heart. She could not even parry the shafts; to answer would have been to avow that the cap fitted.

Mrs. Yorke, looking at her as she sat with troubled, downcast eyes, and cheek burning painfully, felt the sufferer was fair game. The woman had a natural antipathy to a shrinking, sensitive character; nor was a pretty face a passport to her affections. It was seldom she met with all these obnoxious

qualities combined in one individual; still more seldom she found that individual at her mercy, under circumstances in which she could crush her well. Lowering her large head she made a new charge.

“Your cousin Hortense is an excellent sister, Miss Helstone. Such ladies as come to try their life’s luck here at Hollow’s Cottage may, by a little clever artifice, cajole the mistress of the house, and have the game all in their own hands. You are fond of your cousin’s society, I dare say, miss?”

“Of which cousin’s?”

“Oh, of the lady’s, of course.”

“Hortense is, and always has been, most kind to me.”

“Every sister with an eligible single brother is considered most kind by her spinster friends.”

“Mrs. Yorke,” said Caroline, lifting her eyes slowly, while the glow of shame left her cheek, and its hue turned pale – “Mrs. Yorke, may I ask what you mean?”

“To give you a lesson on rectitude.”

“Do I need this lesson?”

“Most young ladies of the present day need it. You are quite a modern young lady – morbid, delicate, professing to like retirement; which implies, I suppose, that you find little worthy of your sympathies in the ordinary world. The ordinary world – everyday honest folks – are much better than any bookish, romancing chit of a girl who hardly ever puts her nose over her uncle’s garden wall.”

“Consequently of whom you know nothing. Excuse me – indeed, it does not matter whether you excuse me or not – you have attacked me without provocation; I shall defend myself without apology. Of my relations with my two cousins you are ignorant. In a fit of ill-humour you have attempted to poison them by insinuations which are far more crafty and false than anything with which you can justly charge me. That I happen to be pale, and sometimes to look diffident, is no business of yours; that I am fond of books, and dislike gossip, is still less your business; that I am a ‘romancing chit of a girl’ is a mere conjecture on your part. That I am the parson’s niece is not a crime, though you may be narrow-minded enough to think it so. You dislike me, but for no just reason; therefore keep the expression of your dislike to yourself. Otherwise I shall answer even less scrupulously than I have done now.”

She ceased, and sat in white and still excitement. She had spoken clearly, neither fast nor loud; but her silver accents thrilled the ear.

Mrs. Yorke was not irritated at the reproof. Turning coolly to Miss Moore, she said, nodding approvingly, “She has spirit, after all. – Always speak as honestly as you have done just now,” she continued, “and you’ll do.”

“I repel a recommendation so offensive,” was the answer, delivered with the same clear look. “I reject counsel poisoned by insinuation. I shall speak as I think proper; not as you dictate. So far from always speaking as I have done just now, I shall never address anyone in a tone so stern or in language so harsh, unless in answer to unprovoked insult.”

“Mother, you have found your match,” pronounced little Jessie.

Rose had heard the whole with an unmoved face. She now said, “No; Miss Helstone is not my mother’s match, for she allows herself to be vexed. My mother would wear her out in a few weeks. Shirley Keeldar manages better.

Mother, you have never hurt Miss Keeldar's feelings yet. She wears armour that you cannot penetrate."

Mrs. Yorke often complained that her children were mutinous. It was strange that with all her strictness and "strong-mindedness," she could gain no command over them. A look from their father had more influence than a lecture from her.

Miss Moore, now rallying her dignity, prepared to utter a speech which was to prove both parties in the wrong, and to make it clear to each that she should be ashamed of herself, and ought to submit humbly to the superior sense of her hostess. Fortunately Sarah's entrance with the tea-tray called her attention to the duty of making tea. After the meal Rose restored her to good-humour by bringing her guitar and asking for a song, and afterwards engaging her in an intelligent discussion about music.

Jessie, meantime, talked to Caroline, first about religion and then politics. Jessie was accustomed at home to drink in a great deal of what her father said on these subjects, and afterwards in company to repeat his opinions. She berated Caroline soundly for being a member of the Established Church, and for having an uncle who was a clergyman. She informed her that she ought to work for her living honestly, instead of passing a useless life, and eating the bread of idleness. Thence Jessie passed to a review of the ministry, and mentioned Lord Castlereagh and Mr. Perceval as if they were demons. She denounced the war as wholesale murder, and Lord Wellington as a "hired butcher."

It was comic to hear her repeating her sire's denunciations; as hearty a little mutineer as ever wore a muslin frock and sash. Her expressive little face gave a piquancy to every phrase.

Caroline chid her when she abused Lord Wellington; but she listened delighted to a subsequent tirade against the Prince Regent. Jessie quickly read, in the sparkle of her hearer's eye and the laughter hovering round her lips, that she had hit on a topic that pleased.

But, Jessie, I will write about you no more. This autumn evening, wet and wild, reminds me too forcibly of another howling, rainy evening some years ago, when certain people made a pilgrimage to a new grave in a heretic cemetery. The heavy rain was soaking into the wet earth which covered their lost darling, and the sad, sighing gale was mourning. Jessie lay cold, confined, solitary – only the earth screening her from the storm.

Mrs. Yorke folded up her knitting, cut short the lecture on politics, and concluded her visit before the path up the fields should have become thoroughly moist with evening dew.

The lady and her daughters being gone, Caroline felt that she also ought to go home. If she lingered much later, dusk would draw on, and Fanny would be put to the trouble of coming to fetch her. Still, she could not quit her seat at the little parlour window. Her eyes turned west towards the fire-tinged August sky.

Caroline looked at the wicket-gate, and the hedge fencing in the garden, longing to see a human figure, of a certain shape and height, pass the hedge and enter the gate. A human figure she at last saw – nay, two. Frederick Murgatroyd went by, carrying a pail of water; Joe Scott followed, carrying the keys of the mill. They were going to lock up for the night, and then go home.

“So must I,” thought Caroline, sighing. “This is heart-breaking folly. In the first place, even if I should stay till dark there will be no arrival; I feel in my heart that I am not fated to have the pleasure I long for. In the second place, if he stepped in at this moment, my presence here would annoy him, and that would turn my blood to ice. His eye would be clouded with darkness. I had better go home.”

She took up her bonnet, and was just fastening the ribbon, when Hortense, directing her attention to a splendid bouquet of flowers in a vase, mentioned that Miss Keeldar had sent them that morning from Fieldhead. She went on to comment on the guests that lady was at present entertaining, expressing her wonder that a person who was so fond of her own way did not find some means of getting rid of all these relatives.

“But they say she actually will not let Mr. Sympson and his family go,” she added. “They wanted to return south last week, to be ready to receive their only son, who is expected home from a tour. She insists that her cousin Henry shall come and join his friends here in Yorkshire. I dare say she partly does it to oblige Robert and myself.”

“How to oblige Robert and you?” inquired Caroline.

“Why, my child, you are dull. Don’t you know – you must often have heard—”

“Please, ma’am,” said Sarah, opening the door, “the preserves that you told me to boil in treacle – the congfiters, as you call them – is all burnt to the pan.”

“Les confitures! Elles sont brûlées? Ah, quelle négligence! Fille insupportable!”

And mademoiselle rushed into the kitchen, whence came a strong odour of charcoaled sweets.

The mistress and maid had been feuding the whole day on the subject of preserving sour black cherries. Sarah held that sugar should be used; mademoiselle maintained that treacle was far better. She had imprudently left Sarah in charge of the preserving-pan; and the maid’s lack of sympathy for its contents had induced a degree of carelessness, whose result was dark and cindery ruin. Hubbub followed; high upbraiding, and sobs more loud than real.

On the sudden opening of the back-door, there fell an abrupt calm in the kitchen. The tongues were checked. Was it Robert? wondered Caroline. He often entered by the kitchen.

No; it was only Joe Scott, who, having cleared his throat significantly. as a lofty rebuke to the squabbling womankind, said, “Now, I thowt I heerd a crack? As t’ maister’s comed, I considered it desirable to let ye know. A household o’ women is nivver fit to be comed on wi’out warning. Here he is. Walk forrard, sir. They war playing up, but I think I’ve quietened ’em.”

Another person was heard to enter. Joe Scott proceeded with his rebukes.

“What d’ye mean by being all i’ darkness? Sarah, canst t’ not light a candle?”

There followed a confused sort of pause, which Caroline, listening hard, could not understand. A cry of surprise broke it, followed by the sound of a kiss, and exclamations.

“Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Est-ce que je m’y attendais?”

“Et tu te portes toujours bien, bonne sœur?” inquired another voice – Robert’s, certainly.

Caroline was puzzled. She ran upstairs to leave the coast clear, and stopped at the head of the banisters, where she could watch without being seen. It was past sunset now; dusk filled the passage, yet she saw Robert and Hortense cross it.

“Caroline!” called Hortense, “come and see my brother!”

“Strange,” thought Caroline. “Why this excitement about such an everyday occurrence as a return from market? Surely the burnt treacle has not crazed her?”

She descended in a subdued flutter. She was still more fluttered when Hortense seized her hand at the parlour door, and leading her to Robert, who stood tall and dark against the window, presented her with a mixture of agitation and formality, as though they had been utter strangers.

Increasing puzzle! He bowed rather awkwardly, and as he turned from her with a stranger’s embarrassment, the dim light from the window fell on his face. The enigma of the dream was at its height. She saw a visage like and unlike – Robert, and no Robert.

“Is my sight wrong?” said Caroline. “Is it my cousin?”

“Certainly it is your cousin,” asserted Hortense.

Then who was this now coming through the passage – now entering the room? Caroline, looking round, met a new Robert – the real Robert, as she felt at once.

“Well,” said he, smiling at her astonished face, “which is which?”

“Ah, this is you!”

He laughed. “I believe it is me. And do you know who he is? You have heard of him.”

She had gathered her senses now. “It can only be your brother; my cousin Louis.”

“Now, see us together. – Change places, and again, Louis. Which is the old love now, Lina?”

“As if it were possible to make a mistake when you speak! But you are not so much alike. It is only your height, your figure, and complexion that are so similar.”

“And I am Robert, am I not?” asked the newcomer, making an effort to overcome what seemed his natural shyness.

Caroline shook her head gently. Her eye beamed softly on the real Robert, saying much.

She was not permitted to quit her cousins soon. Robert insisted she remain. Glad, simple, and in light, bright spirits for the time, she was too pleasant an addition to the cottage circle to be willingly parted with. Louis seemed naturally rather a grave, retiring man; but the Caroline of this evening, which was not the Caroline of every day, thawed his reserve. He sat near her and talked to her.

She already knew he was a tutor; she learned now that he had for some years been the tutor of Mr. Sympson’s son; that he had been travelling with him, and had accompanied him here. She inquired if he liked his post, but got a look in reply which did not invite further question. The look woke Caroline’s ready sympathy. She thought it a very sad expression to pass over so sensible a face; for Louis had a sensible face, though not so handsome as Robert’s. She turned to compare them.

“How could I think them alike?” she asked herself. “It is Hortense Louis resembles, not Robert.”

This was in part true. He had a shorter nose and less decisive mouth and chin than the young mill-owner. His air, though deliberate, could scarcely be called prompt. You felt that he had a slower and probably a more benignant nature than the elder Moore.

Robert – perhaps aware of Caroline’s glance – came over and took a seat at her side. She resumed her conversation with Louis, but her thoughts were elsewhere. Her heart beat on the side from which her face was half averted. She acknowledged a steady, manly, kindly air in Louis; but she bent before the secret power of Robert. To be so near him, though he was silent, affected her like a spell. Had she been obliged to speak to him only, it would have quelled her, but, at liberty to address another, it excited her. Her discourse flowed freely; it was gay, playful, eloquent. The sober pleasure expressed by her listener’s smile drew out all that was brilliant in her nature. She felt that this evening she appeared to advantage. But a cloud soon crossed her enjoyment.

Hortense, who was now clearing the little table to make room for the supper-tray, called Robert’s attention to the vase of flowers.

“They came from Fieldhead,” she said, “intended as a gift to you, no doubt. We know who is the favourite there; not I, I’m sure.”

It was a wonder to hear Hortense jest – a sign that her spirits were high indeed.

“We are to understand, then, that Robert is the favourite?” observed Louis.

“The most precious in the world,” replied Hortense; “beside him the rest of the human race is nothing. Am I not right, my child?” she added, appealing to Caroline.

Caroline was obliged to reply, “Yes,” and her star withdrew as she spoke.

“Et toi, Robert?” inquired Louis.

“When you have an opportunity, ask her,” was the quiet answer. Caroline discovered that it was late, and she must go home. Home she would go; not even Robert could detain her now.

Chapter 24

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

The future sometimes seems to sob a low warning of coming events, like some remote gathering storm. At other times this future bursts suddenly, as if a rock had rent, and in it a grave had opened. Before you are aware, you stand face to face with a shrouded and unthought-of calamity – a new Lazarus.

Caroline Helstone went home from Hollow's Cottage in good health, as she imagined. On waking the next morning she felt oppressed with unwonted languor. She had no appetite. Food was as ashes and sawdust to her.

"Am I ill?" she asked, and looked at herself in the glass. Her eyes were bright, their pupils dilated; her cheeks seemed rosier than usual. "I look well; why can I not eat?"

She felt a pulse beat fast in her temples; she felt, too, her brain in strange activity. Hundreds of busy and broken but brilliant thoughts engaged her mind.

Now followed a hot, parched, restless night. Towards morning a terrible dream seized her like a tiger; when she woke, she knew she was ill.

How she had caught the fever (fever it was) she could not tell. But her long languor and habitual sadness had fanned the spark to flame, and left a well-lit fire behind it.

It seemed, however, a gentle fire. After two hot days and worried nights, there was no violence in the symptoms, and neither her uncle, nor Fanny, nor the doctor, nor Miss Keeldar, when she called, had any fear for her. A few days would restore her, everyone believed.

The few days passed, and the revival had not begun. When she had been ill a fortnight, Mrs. Pryor, who had visited her daily, was present in her chamber one morning, watching her narrowly. She took her hand and placed her finger on her wrist; then, quietly leaving the chamber, she went to Mr. Helstone's study. With him she remained closeted a long time – half the morning. On returning to her sick young friend, she stood awhile at the bedside, gently rocking herself to and fro, with a movement habitual to her.

At last she said, "I have sent Fanny to Fieldhead to fetch a few things for me, for a short stay here. I wish to remain with you till you are better, and your uncle kindly permits it. Is that acceptable to you, Caroline?"

"I am sorry you should have such trouble. I do not feel very ill, but it will be such comfort to know you are in the house, to see you sometimes in the room; but don't confine yourself on my account, dear Mrs. Pryor."

Mrs. Pryor, bending over the pale little sufferer, was smoothing the hair under her cap, and gently raising her pillow. Caroline, smiling, lifted her face to kiss her.

"Are you free from pain? Are you at ease?" asked Mrs. Pryor earnestly.

"I think I am almost happy."

"You wish to drink? Your lips are parched." She held a glass to her mouth. "Have you eaten anything today, Caroline?"

"I cannot eat."

"But soon your appetite will return; I pray God it may."

In laying her down again, she encircled her in her arms; and with a movement which seemed scarcely voluntary, she drew her to her heart, and held her close an instant.

“I shall hardly wish to get well, so that I may keep you always,” said Caroline.

Mrs. Pryor did not smile. A tremor ran over her features.

“You are more used to Fanny than to me,” she remarked. “I should think my attendance must seem strange?”

“No; quite natural, and very soothing. You must be used to waiting on sick people, ma’am. You move so softly and gently.”

“I am dexterous in nothing, my dear. You will often find me awkward, but never negligent.”

Negligent, indeed, she was not. Mrs. Pryor made the sick-room her domain; she performed all its duties; she lived in it day and night. The patient remonstrated, but only faintly, and not for long. Loneliness and gloom were now banished from her bedside; protection and solace sat there instead. The patient was as willing to be cherished as the nurse was bent on cherishing.

With all this care it seemed strange the sick girl did not get well; yet such was the case. She faded like a flower in drought. Miss Keeldar, on whose thoughts danger or death seldom intruded, at first had no fears for her friend; but seeing her change and sink, alarm clutched her heart. She went to Mr. Helstone and expressed herself with so much energy that he was obliged, however unwillingly, to admit the idea that his niece was ill with something more than a migraine; and when Mrs. Pryor came and quietly demanded a doctor, he said she might send for two if she liked.

One came; he said darkly that the future would solve the mystery, wrote some prescriptions, gave some directions – all with an air of crushing authority – pocketed his fee, and went. Probably he knew well enough he could do no good, but did not like to say so.

Still, no rumour of serious illness travelled through the neighbourhood. At Hollow’s Cottage it was thought that Caroline had only a severe cold, she having written a note to Hortense to that effect. Mrs. Yorke, on being told that a doctor had been summoned, sneered at the hypochondriac fancies of the rich and idle, who, she said, having nothing but themselves to think about, must needs send for a doctor if their little finger ached.

The “rich and idle” Caroline, meantime, was falling fast into a condition of debility which puzzled all except Mrs. Pryor; for she alone reflected how liable is the undermined structure to sink in sudden ruin.

Sick people often have fancies, and Caroline had one which even her tender nurse could not at first explain. On a certain day in the week, at a certain hour, she would entreat to be taken up and dressed, and to sit in her chair near the window. Here she would stay till noon was past. No matter how exhausted she appeared, she would not lie down again until the church clock had tolled midday.

Then, back in bed, she usually buried her face deep in the pillow, and drew the coverlets close round her, as if to shut out the world. More than once, as she thus lay, Mrs. Pryor noted that a slight convulsion shook the sick-bed, and a faint sob broke the silence.

One Tuesday morning, as usual, Caroline had asked to rise, and now she sat wrapped in her white dressing-gown, leaning forward in the easy-chair,

gazing steadily through the window. Mrs. Pryor was seated behind, knitting and watching her. A change crossed her pale, mournful brow; she half rose and looked earnestly out.

Mrs. Pryor glanced over her shoulder. From here the churchyard was visible, beyond it the road; and there, riding sharply by, appeared a horseman. Mrs. Pryor recognised Mr. Moore. Just as the rising ground concealed him from view, the clock struck twelve.

“May I lie down again?” asked Caroline.

Her nurse assisted her to bed. Having laid her down and drawn the curtain round her, she stood listening near. The little couch trembled, the suppressed sob stirred the air. A contraction as of anguish altered Mrs. Pryor’s features; half a groan escaped her lips. She now remembered that Tuesday was Whinbury market day, when Mr. Moore must pass by just before noon.

Caroline always wore round her neck a slender braid of silk, attached to which was some trinket. When dressed it was hidden; as she lay in bed she held it in her hand. That Tuesday afternoon, as she dozed in feverish restlessness, she had pushed the coverlets a little aside. Mrs. Pryor bent to replace them. The small, wasted hand clasped as usual her jealously-guarded treasure; but its fingers were now relaxed in sleep.

Mrs. Pryor gently freed the braid, drawing out a tiny locket. Under its crystal face appeared a curl of short black hair.

With an agitated movement, the sleeper started and woke. Half rising, as if in terror, she exclaimed, “Don’t take it from me, Robert! It is my last comfort; let me keep it. I never tell anyone whose hair it is; I never show it.”

Mrs. Pryor had already disappeared behind the curtain. Caroline looked around the chamber; she thought it empty. Believing herself alone, she let words escape her lips unawares.

“Oh, I should see him once more before all is over!” she cried. “God grant me a little comfort before I die!

“But he will not know I am ill till I am gone, and he will come when they have laid me out, and I am cold and stiff.

“What can my departed soul feel then? Can it see or know what happens to the clay? Can the dead revisit those they leave? Can they come in the elements? Will wind, water, fire, lend me a path to Moore?

“Is it for nothing the wind sings at night – or sobs, as if for sorrow to come? Does nothing haunt it, nothing inspire it?

“Why, it suggested to me words one night; I would have written them down, only they appalled me.

“What are those influences in the atmosphere, that play over our nerves like fingers on stringed instruments, and call forth now a sweet, exultant note, and now the saddest wail?

“Where is the other world? In what will another life consist? Is not the hour hastening when the veil must be rent for me? Great Spirit, to whom, as my Father, I have prayed from my childhood, help me! Sustain me through the ordeal I dread and must undergo! Give me strength! Give me patience! Give me – oh, give me faith!”

She fell back on her pillow. Mrs. Pryor stole quietly from the room. She re-entered it soon after, as if she had overheard nothing.

The next day several callers came. It had become known that Miss Helstone was worse. Mr. Hall and his sister Margaret arrived; both left the

sickroom in tears, so altered had they found the patient. Hortense Moore came, and Caroline seemed stimulated by her presence. She assured her, smiling, that she was not dangerously ill; she talked to her cheerfully, and with her flushed complexion, she looked better.

“How is Mr. Robert?” asked Mrs. Pryor, as Hortense was preparing to take leave.

“He was very well when he left. News from the police about the rioters has taken him to Birmingham for a fortnight.”

“He is not aware that Miss Helstone is very ill?”

“Oh no! He thought, like me, that she had only a bad cold.”

As evening closed in, Mrs. Pryor brought her patient some tea. Caroline, opening her eyes from a moment’s slumber, viewed her nurse with an unrecognizing glance.

“I smelt the honeysuckles this summer morning,” she said, “as I stood at the counting-house window.”

Strange words like these pierce a loving listener’s heart more poignantly than steel. They sound romantic, perhaps, in books; in real life they are harrowing.

“My darling, do you know me?” said Mrs. Pryor.

“I went in to call Robert to breakfast. I have been with him in the garden. He asked me to go. The peaches are ripening.”

“My darling! my darling!” repeated the nurse.

“I thought it was daylight – long after sunrise. It looks dark. Is the moon set?” The moon, lately risen, was gazing full and mild upon her.

“Then it is not morning? I am not at the cottage? Who is this at my bedside?”

“It is myself – your friend – your nurse – your – lean your head on my shoulder.” In a lower tone – “O God, take pity! Give her life, and give me courage! Teach me words!”

Some minutes passed in silence. The patient lay mute and passive in the nurse’s trembling arms.

“I am better now,” whispered Caroline at last. “I feel where I am. This is Mrs. Pryor near me. I was dreaming. How fast your heart beats, ma’am! Do not be afraid.”

“It is only a little anxiety, which will pass. I have brought you some tea, Cary. Your uncle made it himself. You know he says he can make a better cup of tea than any housewife. Taste it. He is concerned to hear that you eat so little.”

“I am thirsty. Let me drink.” She drank eagerly.

“What o’clock is it?” she asked.

“Past nine.”

“Oh! I have yet a long night before me. But the tea has made me strong. I will sit up.”

Mrs. Pryor raised her, and arranged her pillows.

“The afternoon has been bad since Hortense went;” said Caroline. “Perhaps the evening may be better. It is a fine night, I think?”

“Very fine – a perfect summer night. The old church-tower gleams like silver.”

“Can you see many weeds and nettles amongst the graves? or do they look flowery?”

“I see closed daisy-heads gleaming like pearls. Thomas has mown down the dock-leaves and rank grass, and cleared all away.”

“I always like that to be done; it soothes one’s mind to see the place in order. I dare say the moonlight will fall through the east window of the church full on the Helstone monument. When I close my eyes I seem to see poor papa’s epitaph on the white marble. There is plenty of room for other inscriptions underneath.”

“William Farren came to look after your flowers this morning. He has taken two of your favourite plants home to nurse for you.”

“If I were to make a will, I would leave William all my plants; Shirley my trinkets – except one, which must not be taken off my neck; and you, ma’am, my books.” After a pause – “Mrs. Pryor, you know I always delight to hear you sing. Sing me a hymn. Sing ‘Our God, our help in ages past.’”

Mrs. Pryor at once complied. Her speaking voice was sweet and silver clear; in song it was almost divine, and trembled with tender expression.

The servants in the kitchen, hearing it, stole to the stair-foot to listen. Even old Helstone, as he walked in the garden, pondering over the feeble nature of women, stood still to catch the mournful melody. Why it reminded him of his forgotten dead wife, he could not tell. He was glad to recollect that he had promised to pay Wynne, the magistrate, a visit that evening. He was averse to gloomy thoughts, and usually found means to make them march in double-quick time. The hymn followed him faintly as he crossed the fields. He hastened his pace, that he might get beyond its reach.

*“Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last—
O Father, be our home!”*

“Now sing a Scottish song,” suggested Caroline. “‘Ye banks and braes o’ bonnie Doon.’”

Again Mrs. Pryor obeyed, but after the first stanza she stopped. She could get no further.

“You are weeping at the sadness of the song. Come here, and I will comfort you,” said Caroline, in a pitying accent. Mrs. Pryor sat on the edge of the bed, and allowed the wasted arms to encircle her.

“You often soothe me; let me soothe you,” murmured the young girl, kissing her cheek. “I hope it is not for me you weep? I do not feel very ill – only weak.”

“But your heart is almost broken, Caroline; you have been so neglected, so repulsed, left so desolate.”

“I believe grief has been my worst ailment. I sometimes think if happiness came to me I could revive yet.”

“Do you wish to live?”

“I have no object in life.”

“You love me, Caroline?”

“Very much – very truly.”

“I will return directly, dear,” remarked Mrs. Pryor.

Gliding to the door, she softly turned the key in the lock, and came back. She bent over Caroline and gazed intently on her face.

“Then, if you love me,” said she, “it will be neither shock nor pain for you to know that from my veins issued the blood which flows in yours; that you are mine – my daughter – my own child.”

“Mrs. Pryor—”

“My own child!”

“That means – you have adopted me?”

“It means that, if I have given you nothing else, I at least gave you life; that I bore you, nursed you; that I am your true mother.”

“But Mrs. James Helstone – my father’s wife, whom I do not remember, she is my mother?”

“She is your mother. James Helstone was my husband. I say you are mine. I thought perhaps you were all his, which would have been cruel. But God permitted me to be the parent of my child’s mind. These features are James’s; he had a fine face when he was young. Papa gave you your blue eyes and soft brown hair, my darling; he gave you your oval face and regular features; but the heart and brain are mine, in you developed to excellence. I esteem my child as highly as I do most fondly love her.”

“Is it true? Is it no dream? My own mother! Is she one I can be so fond of as I can of you? I have been told people generally did not like her.”

“They told you that? Well, your mother now tells you that, not having the gift to please people generally, for their approval she does not care. Her thoughts are centred in her child. Does that child welcome or reject her?”

“But if you are my mother, the world is all changed to me. Surely I can live. I should like to recover—”

“You must recover. Daughter! we have been long parted; I return now to cherish you again.”

She cradled her in her arms; she rocked her softly, as if lulling a young child to sleep.

“My mother – my own mother!”

The offspring nestled to the parent; that parent gathered her closer still. She covered her with noiseless kisses; she murmured love over her, like a dove nurturing its young.

There was silence for a long while.

“Does my uncle know?”

“I told him when I came to stay with you here.”

“Did you recognize me when we first met at Fieldhead?”

“How could it be otherwise? I was prepared to see my child.”

“I saw you were disturbed.”

“Caroline, you do not know what an age of strange sensation I lived, during the two minutes that elapsed between you being announced and your entrance. Your appearance shook me.”

“Why? Were you disappointed?”

“What will she be like? I had asked myself; and when I saw you, I could have dropped. I said, I will never own her; she shall never know me.”

“But I said and did nothing remarkable. I felt a little diffident at meeting strangers – that was all.”

“I soon saw you were diffident. That was the first thing which reassured me.”

“You puzzle me.”

“I had reason to dread beauty, to mistrust grace and courtesy. Beauty and affability had come in my way when I was young and desolate – a toil-worn governess breaking down before her time. These, Caroline, when they smiled on me, I mistook for angels. I followed them home; and when I had given my chance of future happiness into their hands, I witnessed a transfiguration – saw the white mask lifted, the bright disguise put away, and opposite me sat down – O God, I have suffered!”

She sank on the pillow.

“I have suffered! None saw – none knew. There was no sympathy, no redress!”

“Take comfort, mother. It is over now.”

“It is over. God kept me in the days of my anguish. Through great tribulation He brought me through to this salvation. He has cast away my fear, and given me in its stead perfect love. But, Caroline—”

“Mother!”

“When you next look on your father’s monument, respect the name chiselled there. To you he did only good. On you he conferred all his beauties, and none of his defects. You owe him gratitude. Leave, between him and me, the settlement of our mutual account. God is the arbiter. This world’s laws were powerless to protect me, or to restrain him! As you said, it is all over now; he sleeps in that church. To his dust I say this night, what I have never said before, ‘James, slumber peacefully! Your terrible debt is cancelled! Look! I wipe out the long, black account with my own hand! James, your child atones. This one good gift you gave me has nestled to my heart, and tenderly called me “mother.” Husband, rest forgiven!’”

“Dearest mother, that is right! Can papa’s spirit hear us? Is he comforted to know that we still love him?”

“I said nothing of love. I spoke of forgiveness.”

“O mother, you must have suffered!”

“O child, the human heart can suffer! We never know how deep, how wide it is, till misery fills it with rushing blackness.”

“Mother, forget.”

“Forget!” she said, with the strangest laugh. “The world will change before I forget.”

“Hush, mother! Rest! Be at peace!”

And the child lulled the parent, as the parent had lulled the child. At last Mrs. Pryor wept. She grew calmer, and resumed her tender attentions. Replacing her daughter on the bed, she smoothed the pillow, rearranged the soft hair, and refreshed the damp brow.

“Mamma, let them bring a candle, so that I may see you; and tell my uncle to come in. I want to hear him say that I am your daughter. And, mamma, take your supper here. Don’t leave me for one minute tonight.”

“O Caroline, it is well you are gentle! You will say to me, Go, and I shall go; Do this, and I shall do it. You inherit a certain manner as well as certain features – softly spoken, though, thank God! Well,” she added, under her breath, “he spoke softly too, once; and then, when the world was not listening, sounds to curdle the blood.”

“It seems so natural, mamma, to ask you for this and that. But do not let me be troublesome. Stop me if I encroach.”

“You must not depend on me to stop you; I have little moral courage. The want of it is my bane. It is that which kept me apart from my child during the ten years since my husband’s death. It was that which first permitted the infant I might have kept a while longer to be snatched from my embrace.”

“How, mamma?”

“I let you go as a babe, because you were pretty, and I feared your loveliness, deeming it the stamp of perversity. They sent me your portrait, taken at eight years old; it confirmed my fears. Had it shown me a heavy, blunt-featured, commonplace child, I should have hastened to claim you; but I saw the delicacy of an aristocratic flower – a ‘little lady’. I had too recently crawled from under the yoke of the fine gentleman – escaped crushed and paralysed – to dare to meet his still finer representative. My sweet little lady overwhelmed me with dismay; her air of elegance froze my marrow. In my experience, truth had not gone along with beauty. A form so straight and fine, I argued, must conceal a mind warped and cruel. I resolved to leave you in your uncle’s hands. Matthewson Helstone, I knew, was an upright if austere man. He and all the world thought badly of me for my strange, unmotherly resolve, and I deserved to be misjudged.”

“Mamma, why did you call yourself Mrs. Pryor?”

“It was a name in my mother’s family. I could not bear my married name. My new name sheltered me. Under it, I resumed my old occupation of teaching. At first I scarcely earned a living; but how safe seemed the hunger and chill of a cold hearth when free from terror! How serene was solitude, when I feared no violence and vice!”

“But, mamma, you have been in this neighbourhood before. How was it that when you reappeared here with Miss Keeldar you were not recognized?”

“I only paid a short visit, as a bride, twenty years ago, and then I was very different. My figure, my features, my hair – everything is altered. You cannot imagine me slim and dressed in scanty white muslin, with hair in Grecian curls above my forehead?”

“You must, indeed, have been different. Mamma, I heard my uncle coming into the house. Ask him to step upstairs, and let me hear his assurance that I am truly awake and not dreaming.”

Mrs. Pryor duly summoned the rector.

“She’s not worse, I hope?” he inquired hastily.

“I think her better. She seems stronger.”

“Good!” said he, brushing quickly into the room. “Ha, Cary! how do? Did you drink my cup of tea? I made it for you just as I like it myself.”

“I drank it every drop, uncle. It did me good. I wished for company, so I begged Mrs. Pryor to call you in.”

The rector looked pleased, and yet embarrassed. He was willing enough to bestow his company on his sick niece for ten minutes; but how to entertain her he knew not. He hemmed and fidgeted.

“You’ll be up in a trice,” he observed. “The little weakness will soon pass off; and then you must drink port wine and eat game and oysters. I’ll get them for you, if they are to be had anywhere. Bless me! we’ll make you as strong as Samson before we’re done.”

“Who is that lady, uncle, standing beside you?”

“Good God!” he ejaculated. “She’s not wandering, is she, ma’am?”

Mrs. Pryor smiled.

“I am wandering in a pleasant world,” said Caroline, in a soft, happy voice, “and I want you to tell me whether it is real or visionary. What is the name of that lady, uncle?”

“We must have the doctor again, ma’am. Thomas must go for him.”

“No; I don’t want a doctor. Mamma shall be my only physician. Now, do you understand, uncle?”

Mr. Helstone pushed up his spectacles to his forehead, and took a pinch of snuff from his snuff-box. Thus fortified, he answered briefly, “I see daylight. You’ve told her then, ma’am?”

“And is it true?” demanded Caroline. “Is she really my mother?”

“You won’t cry, or make any scene, or turn hysterical, if I answer Yes?”

“Cry! I’d cry if you said No. It would be terrible to be disappointed now. But how do you call her?”

“I call her Agnes Helstone. She married my brother James, and is his widow. She had the trouble of bringing you into the world. Mind you show your duty to her by quickly getting well!”

“If wishing to get well will help me, I shall not be long sick. This morning I had no reason and no strength to wish it.”

Fanny here tapped at the door, and said that supper was ready.

“Uncle, if you please, send me a little bit of supper – anything you like, from your own plate. That is wiser than going into hysterics, is it not?”

“It is spoken like a sage, Cary. When women are sensible and intelligible, I can get on with them. It is only the superfine sensations and extreme notions that put me out. If a woman asks me for something edible or wearable, I can understand the demand; but when they pine for sympathy, sentiment, and whatnot – I can’t do it; I don’t know it; I haven’t got it.”

Mr. Helstone then departed, but soon returned, bringing a plate.

“This is chicken,” he said, “but we’ll have partridge tomorrow. – Lift her up, and put a shawl over her. Now, here is the very same little silver fork you used when you first came to the rectory. That strikes me as being what you may call a happy thought – a delicate attention. Take it, Cary, and munch away.”

Caroline did her best. Her uncle frowned to see her so weakened. He prophesied, however, great things for the future; and as she smiled gratefully, he stooped over her pillow, kissed her, and said, with a broken, rugged accent, “Good-night, bairnie! God bless thee!”

Caroline enjoyed peaceful rest that night, encircled by her mother’s arms, and pillowed on her breast; and though more than one feverish dream came to her in slumber, yet, when she woke, returning consciousness brought so happy a feeling that her agitation was swiftly soothed.

As for the mother, she spent the night like Jacob, wrestling with God in earnest prayer.

Chapter 25

THE WEST WIND BLOWS

Not always do those who dare such divine conflict prevail. Night after night the supplicant may cry in agonised, soundless voice: "Spare my beloved. Heal my life's life. God of heaven, be merciful!" And after this cry and strife the sun may rise and see him worsted. At morn the dear, pale lips may murmur of a night of yet worse suffering.

Then the watcher approaches the patient's pillow, and sees a new and strange moulding of the familiar features, feels that the unbearable moment draws nigh, that it is God's will his idol shall be broken. He bends his head, and subdues his soul to the sentence he cannot avert and scarce can bear.

Happy Mrs. Pryor! She was still praying when her child softly woke in her arms. There was no piteous moaning, no deaf apathy. Caroline's first words showed no fever or delirium.

"Mamma, I have slept so well. I only dreamed and woke twice."

Mrs. Pryor rose with a start, joyful tears called into her eyes by that affectionate word "mamma."

For many days the mother dared rejoice only with trembling. That first revival seemed like the flicker of a dying lamp. If the flame streamed up bright one moment, the next it sank dim. Exhaustion followed close on excitement.

Caroline made a touching endeavour to appear better, but too often failed. The effort to eat, to talk, to look cheerful, was unsuccessful. Many an hour passed when Mrs. Pryor feared that she would never grow stronger.

During this time the mother and daughter seemed left almost alone in the neighbourhood. It was the close of August; the weather was very dry and dusty, very cloudless, too, though a pale haze seemed to rob the heaven of blue, and the earth of freshness. Almost every family in Briarfield was away. Miss Keeldar and her friends were at the seaside; so were the Yorkes. Mr. Hall and Louis Moore, between whom a friendship had arisen, had gone to walk in the Lakes. Even Hortense, who would fain have stayed at home, had been so earnestly entreated by Miss Mann to accompany her again to Wormwood Wells that she felt obliged to comply. As for Robert, from Birmingham he had gone to London, where he still stayed.

However, there came a day when the dry east wind dropped. A cloud arose in the west, and spread wide: rain and tempest followed. When that was over the sun broke out, heaven regained its azure, and earth its green; the hills rose clear, freed from that pale sickly haze.

Her mother's care and the pure, fresh wind, blowing soft through the window, rekindled Caroline's energies. At last Mrs. Pryor began to hope. It was not merely Caroline's smile which was brighter, but a certain look had passed from her face – a dread, glassy look, familiar to those who have watched by sickbeds. Mrs. Pryor saw laid on the pillow a face pale and wasted, but not white and rigid.

Now, too, Caroline was not always saying she was thirsty; food was not so distasteful to her. With what anxious care her nurse prepared what she preferred! How she watched her as she ate!

Nourishment brought strength. Caroline could sit up. Then she longed to breathe the fresh air, to revisit her flowers, to see how the fruit had ripened. Her uncle had bought a garden-chair for her use. He carried her down in his arms, and placed her in it, and William Farren wheeled her round the walks, to show her what he had done amongst her plants.

William and she found plenty to talk about. They had a common interest in animals, birds and plants; they held similar views about humane treatment of the lower creation, and had a similar turn for observing natural history. The nest of some ground-bees, which had burrowed in the turf under a cherry-tree, was one subject of interest; the haunts of hedge-sparrows, and the welfare of certain fledglings, was another.

Mrs. Pryor wondered how her daughter could be so at ease with a workman. She found it impossible to speak to him otherwise than stiffly. She felt as if a great gulf lay between her caste and his, and that to cross it or meet him half-way would be to degrade herself. She gently asked Caroline, "Are you not afraid, my dear, to converse with that person so unreservedly? He may presume, and become troublesomely garrulous."

"You don't know William, mamma. He never presumes. He is too proud and sensitive to do so. William has very fine feelings."

Mrs. Pryor smiled sceptically at the naïve notion of that rough-handed clown having "fine feelings." Farren, for his part, was sulky towards Mrs. Pryor. He knew when he was misjudged.

Mrs. Pryor liked the evening; for then she was alone with her daughter. During the day she would have her cool moments, as was her wont. Relations between her and Mr. Helstone were very respectful but rigidly ceremonious. By dint of strict civility and well-maintained distance they got on smoothly.

Towards the servants Mrs. Pryor was shy; but her diffidence made her appear haughty to Fanny and Eliza, and she was unpopular with them. She knew it, and felt dissatisfied with herself.

This dejected mood changed under Caroline's influence. The affection of her child thawed her frost; she grew smiling and pliant. Caroline hung on her with easy dependence; she confided in her, and contented the mother's heart.

She liked to hear her daughter say, "Mamma, do this;" "Please, mamma, fetch me that;" "Mamma, read to me;" "Sing a little, mamma." Nobody else had ever so looked for help at her hand. Other people were always reserved with her, as she was reserved and stiff with them. Caroline showed no such reproachful sensitivity.

Yet Caroline could find fault. She had her eyes wide open to habits that could be remedied. On certain points she would artlessly lecture her parent; and that parent, instead of being hurt, felt pleasure in discovering that the girl was so much at home with her.

"Mamma, I am determined you shall not wear that old gown any more. Its fashion is not becoming. You shall put on your black silk every afternoon. In that you look nice; it suits you. And you shall have a black satin dress for Sundays. My uncle gives me cash to get what I want. You know he is generous; and I have set my heart on seeing you in black satin. Let me choose the pattern. You always want to disguise yourself like a grandmother. You would persuade

one that you are old and ugly. Not at all! On the contrary, when well dressed and cheerful you are very comely indeed. And then you speak like a young lady, with such a clear, fine tone, and you sing better than any young lady I ever heard. Why do you wear such dresses and bonnets, mamma, such as nobody else ever wears?"

"Does it annoy you, Caroline?"

"Very much. People say you are miserly; and you are not, for you give liberally to the poor, though in secret. But I will be your lady's-maid myself. When I get a little stronger I will set to work, and you must be good, mamma, and do as I bid you. My own mamma," she went on, "who belongs to me, and to whom I belong! I am a rich girl now. I have something I can love, and not be afraid of loving. Mamma, who gave you this little brooch? Was it papa?"

"My only sister gave it me, Cary. Would that your Aunt Caroline had lived to see her niece!"

"Have you nothing of papa's – no gift of his?"

"I have one thing that I prize, invaluable and sweet to me."

"Show it, mamma. Is it here or at Fieldhead?"

"It is talking to me now. Its arms are round me."

"Ah, mamma, you mean your teasing daughter, who never lets you alone; who follows you upstairs and down, like a dog."

"Whose features still give me such a strange thrill sometimes. I half fear your fair looks yet, child."

"I am sorry papa was not good. I do so wish he had been. Wickedness kills love. If you and I thought each other wicked, how miserable we should be! Mother, before I knew you, I had a fear that you were not good. And now I am delighted to find you perfect – almost; kind, clever, nice. Your sole fault is that you are old-fashioned, and of that I shall cure you. Mamma, put your work down; read to me. I like your southern accent; it is so pure. When you first met me, mamma, did I seem to speak roughly?"

"No. I almost wished you had. Your father spoke well, and you inherit the gift."

"Poor papa! When he was so agreeable, why was he not good?"

"Why he was as he was, I cannot tell. It is a deep mystery. The key is in the hands of his Maker. There I leave it."

"Mamma, put down your sewing; here is a book – your favourite – Cowper."

These commands were the mother's pleasure. If ever she delayed compliance, it was only to hear them repeated, and to enjoy her child's soft, half-playful urgency. And then, when she yielded, Caroline would say archly, "You will spoil me, mamma. I always thought I should like to be spoiled, and I find it very sweet." So did Mrs. Pryor.

Chapter 26

OLD COPY-BOOKS

By the time the Fieldhead party returned to Briarfield, Caroline was nearly well. As soon as Miss Keeldar arrived home she called at the rectory.

A shower of rain was falling on the late flowers when the garden wicket was heard to swing open, and Shirley passed the window. On her entrance she showed her feelings in her own peculiar fashion. When deeply moved, she was not garrulous. She took Caroline in her arms, gave her one look, one kiss, then said, "You are better. God keep you in good health!"

She began to talk about the journey; but her eye still wandered to Caroline with some trouble and amazement. Suddenly her piercing glance turned to Mrs. Pryor.

"When will my governess return to me?" she asked.

"May I tell her all?" demanded Caroline of her mother. Shirley was soon enlightened.

"Very good," was the cool comment. "But it is no news to me."

"What! did you know?"

"I guessed long since. I have heard somewhat of Mrs. Pryor's history and of Mr. James Helstone's career and character, from talking to Miss Mann; also he is one of Mrs. Yorke's warning examples, that she hangs out to scare young ladies away from matrimony. I was sceptical, but when I asked Mr. Yorke about it, he said, 'James Helstone was a man-tiger. He was handsome, dissolute, soft, treacherous, courteous, cruel—' Don't cry, Cary; we'll say no more about it."

"I am not crying, Shirley; go on."

"Fortunately I have said all that I have to say."

"But papa is dead; they should let him alone now."

"They should; and we will let him alone. Cry away, Cary; it will do you good. Beside, maybe every drop blots out a sin. — Madam," she continued, addressing Mrs. Pryor, "did you think I could see you and your daughter together without noticing your similarity in many points, and observing your emotions in the presence of your child? I made guesses, and they are correct. But I said nothing; it was not my business."

"That is not like you," said Caroline; "you are not reserved; you talk frankly."

"I may be frank, yet know where to stop. In showing my treasure I may withhold a gem or two."

Caroline thus got a new view of Shirley. Before long, the prospect was renewed.

As soon as she had sufficient strength, Miss Keeldar invited her daily to Fieldhead. Perhaps Shirley had become weary of her honoured relatives the Sympsons. She did not say so; but she claimed Caroline eagerly.

The Sympsons were church people, so they received the rector's niece with courtesy. Mr. Sympson proved to be a man of spotless respectability, pious principles, and worldly views; his lady was a very good woman — patient, kind,

well-bred. She had been brought up on a narrow system of views, starved on a few prejudices – a mere handful of bitter herbs; a few preferences, soaked till they had no flavour; and some excellent principles, made up in a stiff raised crust of bigotry difficult to digest. Far too submissive was she to complain of this diet.

The daughters were an example to their sex. They were tall, with Roman noses. and had been educated faultlessly. All they did was well done. History and the most solid books had cultivated their minds. They knew by heart a certain young ladies' schoolroom code of behaviour, and never deviated from it; they regarded with whispered horror all deviations in others. Originality – whether in a book, speech, or person – was to them an evil, and they were quick to recognize its signs, and to shudder and recoil.

Henry Sympson, the only son and youngest child, was a boy of fifteen, who generally stayed with his tutor. When he left him, he sought out Shirley. This boy differed from his sisters. He was little, lame, and pale; but emotion could give colour to his cheek and decision to his crippled movements. He was to be a clergyman. His mother loved him, but Mr. and the Misses Sympson, not understanding him, let him much alone. Shirley made him her pet, and he made Shirley his playmate.

In the midst of this family circle, or rather outside it, moved the tutor – the satellite.

Yes, Louis Moore was a satellite of the house of Sympson, connected, yet apart. They treated him with dignity. The father was austere civil, sometimes irritable; the mother was attentive, but formal; the daughters saw in him an abstraction, not a man. It seemed, by their manner, that their brother's tutor did not live for them. They were learned; so was he – but not for them. They were accomplished; he had talents too, imperceptible to their senses. The most original observation from his lips fell unheard on their ears. Nothing could exceed the propriety of their behaviour.

One fact strangely astonished Caroline. It was to discover that her cousin Louis had absolutely no sympathizing friend at Fieldhead; that to Miss Keeldar he was as much a mere teacher, as little a man, as to the Misses Sympson.

Why was the kind-hearted Shirley so indifferent to the dreary position of a fellow-creature isolated under her roof? She was not, perhaps, haughty to him, but she never noticed him – she let him alone. He came and went, spoke or was silent, and she rarely recognized his existence.

As to Louis Moore himself, he had the air of a man used to this life. His faculties seemed walled up in him. He never laughed; he seldom smiled; he was uncomplaining. His pupil Henry loved him; he asked nothing more than civility from the rest of the world. It even appeared that he would accept nothing more; for when Caroline made gentle overtures of friendship, he did not encourage them.

In the house one living thing alone was his friend, besides Henry: and that was the ruffianly Tartar, who had a singular partiality for him – a partiality so marked that sometimes, when Moore entered the room, Tartar would rise from Shirley's feet and take himself to the taciturn tutor. Once she noticed this desertion, and softly tried to coax him back. Tartar looked, slavered, and sighed, but remained at Louis Moore's side. That gentleman patted him, and smiled to himself.

An acute observer might have remarked, that same evening, that after Tartar had returned to Shirley, and was once more lying near her footstool, the audacious tutor by one word and gesture fascinated him again. Tartar pricked up his ears and came to receive the expected caress. As it was given, the significant smile again rippled across Moore's quiet face.

"Shirley," said Caroline one day, as they two were sitting alone in the summer-house, "did you know that my cousin Louis was tutor in your uncle's family before the Symptons came down here?"

Shirley's reply was not so prompt as usual, but at last she answered, "Yes, of course."

"It puzzles me that you never spoke of it, although you talk a great deal. How was it never mentioned?"

"Because it never was," and Shirley laughed.

"You are a singular being! You were silent as the grave about Mrs. Pryor, and now here is another secret. But why you made it a secret is the mystery."

"I never made it a secret. If you had asked me who Henry's tutor was, I would have told you. Besides, I thought you knew."

"I am puzzled about something else. You don't like poor Louis. Why? Is it his position? Do you wish that Robert's brother were more highly placed?"

"Robert's brother, indeed!" was the exclamation, uttered in a tone close to scorn; and with an impatient movement Shirley snatched a rose peeping through the open window.

"Yes," repeated Caroline, "Robert's brother. Louis is not so handsome as Robert; but he is as much a gentleman."

"Wise, humble, pious Caroline!" exclaimed Shirley ironically. "We should not despise plain features, nor an honest occupation, should we? There is your subject in the garden," she continued, pointing through the clustering creepers; Louis Moore was visible, coming slowly down the walk.

"He is not ugly, Shirley," pleaded Caroline; "he is not ignoble. He is sad; silence seals his mind. But I believe him to be intelligent; and if he had not something good about him, Mr. Hall would never seek his society."

Shirley laughed sarcastically. "Well, well. Since he's Cyril Hall's friend and Robert Moore's brother, we'll just tolerate his existence, eh, Cary? You believe him to be not quite an idiot, do you? Something good about him – not an absolute ruffian! Your opinion has weight with me; and I will speak to him."

He approached the summer-house. Unaware that it was occupied, he sat down on the step; Tartar, who had followed him, lay across his feet.

"Old boy!" said Louis, pulling his ear, which had been torn and chewed in a hundred battles, "This garden is not ours, but we enjoy its greenness and perfume, don't we?"

He sat silent, caressing Tartar, who slobbered affectionately. A faint twittering commenced among the trees; little birds fluttered down, as light as leaves, and hopped expectantly on the grass.

"The small brown elves actually remember that I fed them the other day," said Louis. "They want some more biscuit. Today I have none – not a crumb, little sprites."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew it out empty.

"A want easily supplied," whispered Miss Keeldar.

She took from her reticule some sweet-cake; for she always carried something to throw to the chickens or sparrows. She crumbled it, and bending over his shoulder, put the crumbs into his hand.

"There," said she; "there is a providence for the improvident."

"This September afternoon is pleasant," observed Louis Moore, as, not at all discomposed, he calmly cast the crumbs on to the grass.

"You take a sort of harsh solitary triumph in drawing pleasure from the lower creation."

"Solitary, but not harsh. With animals I feel I am Adam's son, the heir of him to whom dominion was given over every living thing. Your dog likes and follows me. The pigeons from your dovecot flutter at my feet. Your mare in the stable knows me as well as it knows you, and obeys me better."

"And my roses smell sweet to you, and my trees give you shade."

"And," continued Louis, "no caprice can withdraw these pleasures from me; they are mine."

He walked off. Tartar followed him, and Shirley remained standing on the summer-house step. Caroline saw that her face was pale, as if her pride bled inwardly.

"You see," remarked Caroline apologetically, "his feelings are so often hurt it makes him morose."

"You see," retorted Shirley, with ire, "he is a topic on which you and I shall quarrel; so drop it."

"I suppose he has more than once behaved in this way," thought Caroline to herself, "and that makes Shirley distant to him. Yet I wonder she cannot make allowances. She is not often so inconsiderate, so irritable."

Two friends of Caroline increased her favourable opinion of Louis Moore. William Farren, whose cottage he had visited with Mr. Hall, pronounced him a "real gentleman; to see how t' bairns liked him, and how t' wife took to him first minute she saw him. Them childer ha' a keen sense i' finding out folk's natures." And Mr. Hall stated that Louis Moore was the best fellow he had met with since he left Cambridge.

"But he is so grave," objected Caroline.

"Grave! the finest company in the world!" said Mr. Hall. "Full of odd, quiet, out-of-the-way humour. Never enjoyed an excursion so much in my life as the one I took with him to the Lakes. His understanding and tastes are so superior, it does a man good to be with him; and his temper and nature are fine."

"At Fieldhead he looks gloomy."

"Oh! I fancy he is rather out of place there. The Symptons are good people, but not the folks to comprehend him."

"I don't think Miss Keeldar likes him."

"She doesn't know him. She has sense enough to do justice to his merits."

"Well, I suppose she doesn't know him," mused Caroline; but before long she had to refuse Miss Keeldar even this excuse for her prejudice.

One day she chanced to be in the schoolroom with Henry Sympton, an amiable and affectionate boy whom she liked. The boy was busied about some mechanical contrivance, and began to ransack his tutor's desk for a piece of twine he needed for his work. Moore was absent, out walking with Mr. Hall. Henry could not find what he wanted, though he rummaged in every

compartment; and at last, opening an inner drawer, he came upon a little bundle of exercise-books, tied with tape. Henry looked at them.

“What rubbish Mr. Moore stores in his desk!” he said. “I hope he won’t keep my old exercises so carefully.”

“What is it?”

“Old copy-books.” He threw the bundle to Caroline.

“If they are only copy-books, I suppose I may open them?”

“Oh, yes. Mr. Moore’s desk is half mine – he lets me keep all sorts of things in it – and I give you leave.”

On scrutiny they proved to be French compositions, written in a peculiar but exquisitely clear hand. Caroline recognized the writing without needing to see the name signed at the end of every essay. Yet that name astonished her – “Shirley Keeldar, Sympton Grove”, and a date four years back.

She tied up the packet, and held it, meditating. She half felt as if, in opening it, she had violated a confidence.

“They are Shirley’s, you see,” said Henry carelessly.

“Did you give them to Mr. Moore? She wrote them with Mrs. Pryor, I suppose?”

“She wrote them in my schoolroom at Sympton Grove, when she lived with us there. Mr. Moore taught her French; it is his native language.”

“I know. Was she a good pupil, Henry?”

“She was a wild, laughing thing; she made lesson-time charming. She learned fast. French was nothing to her. She spoke it as quick as Mr. Moore himself.”

“Was she obedient? Did she give trouble?”

“She gave plenty of trouble, in a way. She was giddy, but I liked her. I’m desperately fond of Shirley. She is the light of my eyes. I said so to Mr. Moore last night.”

Caroline laughed. “He would reprove you for exaggerating.”

“He didn’t. He only smiled, and said that if Miss Keeldar was no more than that, she was less than he took her to be; for I was but a short-sighted little chap. I’m afraid I am a poor cripple, Miss Helstone, you know.”

“Never mind, Henry, you are a very nice little fellow; and God has given you a good disposition and an excellent heart and brain.”

“I shall be despised. I sometimes think both Shirley and you despise me.”

“Listen, Henry. Generally, I don’t like schoolboys. They seem to me little ruffians, who take an unnatural delight in killing and tormenting birds, and whatever is weaker than themselves. But I like you. You have almost as much sense as a man; you are fond of reading, and you can talk sensibly about what you read.”

Miss Keeldar here entered.

“Henry,” she said, “I have brought your lunch. I shall prepare it myself.”

She placed on the table a glass of milk, a plate of something which looked not unlike leather, and a toasting-fork.

“What are you two doing, ransacking Mr. Moore’s desk?” she asked.

“Looking at your old French copy-books,” returned Caroline. “Look here! They must be considered precious; they are kept carefully.”

She showed the bundle. Shirley snatched it up. “Did not know one was in existence,” she said. “I thought the whole lot had long since lit the kitchen fire. What made you keep them, Henry?”

“I didn’t. It never entered my head. Mr. Moore put them in the inner drawer of his desk. Perhaps he forgot them.”

“He forgot them, no doubt,” echoed Shirley. “They are extremely well written,” she added complacently.

“What a giddy girl you were, Shirley, in those days! A slim, light creature whom, though you were so tall, I could lift off the floor. I see you with your long curls on your shoulders, and your streaming sash. You used to make Mr. Moore lively – that is, at first. I believe you grieved him after a while.”

Shirley turned the closely-written pages and said nothing. Presently she observed, “That was written one winter afternoon. It was a description of a snow scene.”

“I remember,” said Henry. “Mr. Moore said it was well done. Afterwards you made him draw the landscape you described. I can remember him sitting at his easel, and you standing behind him, watching him draw the snowy cliff, the pine, the deer lying under it, and the half-moon hung above.”

“Where are his drawings, Harry? Caroline should see them.”

“In his portfolio. But it is padlocked; he has the key.”

“Ask him for it when he comes in.”

“You should ask him, Shirley. You are shy of him now. You are grown a proud lady to him; I notice that.”

“Shirley, you are a real enigma,” whispered Caroline in her ear. “What queer discoveries I make day by day now! Even this boy reproves you.”

“I have forgotten old times, you see, Harry,” said Miss Keeldar, answering young Sympson, and not heeding Caroline.

“Which you never should have done. You don’t deserve to be a man’s morning star if you have so short a memory.”

“A man’s morning star, indeed! and by ‘a man’ is meant your worshipful self, I suppose? Come, drink your milk.”

He rose and limped towards the fire.

“My poor lame darling!” murmured Shirley, in her softest voice.

“Do you like me or Mr. Sam Wynne best, Shirley?” inquired the boy, as she settled him in an arm-chair.

“O Harry, Sam Wynne is my aversion; you are my pet.”

“Me or Mr. Malone?”

“You again, a thousand times.”

“Yet they are great whiskered fellows, six feet tall.”

“Have I not often told you who was almost as little, as pale, as suffering as you, and yet as powerful as a giant and brave as a lion?”

“Admiral Horatio?”

“Admiral Horatio, Viscount Nelson; great at heart as a Titan; gallant and heroic; commander of England’s navy, and hurler of her thunder over the flood.”

“A great man. But I am not warlike, Shirley; and yet my mind is so restless.”

“Harry, your mind is a captive. It is stronger and older than your frame. But be patient. Study carefully not only books but the world. You love nature; love her without fear. You will not be a soldier or a sailor, Henry; but – listen to my prophecy – you will be an author, perhaps a poet.”

“An author! It is a flash of light to me! I will! I’ll write a book so that I may dedicate it to you.”

“You will write it so that you may give your soul its natural release. Bless me! what am I saying? more than I understand. Here is your toasted oatcake, Hal; eat and live!”

“Willingly!” here cried a voice outside the open window. “Miss Keeldar, may I come in and partake?”

It was Mr. Hall, and with him was Louis Moore, returned from their walk.

“There is a proper luncheon laid out in the dining-room,” said Shirley, “with proper people seated round it. You may join them if you please; but if your ill-regulated tastes lead you to prefer ill-regulated proceedings, step in here.”

“I shall allow myself to be led by the nose,” returned Mr. Hall, who entered along with Louis Moore. The latter’s eye fell on his desk.

“Burglars!” said he. “Henry, you deserve the cane.”

“Shirley and Caroline did it.”

“False!” cried both the girls. “We never laid hands on a thing, except in the spirit of laudable inquiry!”

“Exactly so,” said Moore, with his rare smile. “And what have you ferreted out?”

He perceived the inner drawer was open. “This is empty,” said he. “Who has taken—”

“Here!” Caroline hastened to say, and she restored the little packet to its place. He shut it up and locked it with a small key; he put the other papers in order, closed the desk, and sat down without further remark.

“I thought you would have scolded much more, sir,” said Henry. “The girls deserve reprimand.”

“I leave them to their own consciences.”

“If I had not been here, they would have ransacked your portfolio too; but I told them it was padlocked.”

“And will you have lunch with us?” here interposed Shirley, wishing, it seemed, to turn the conversation.

“Certainly, if I may.”

“You will be restricted to milk and Yorkshire oatcake.”

“Your oatcake!” He made a grimace.

“He cannot eat it,” said Henry. “He thinks it is like bran.”

“Come, then; we will allow him a few crackers.”

The hostess measured out the milk, and distributed the bread round the cosy circle. She then took the post of toaster-general, kneeling on the rug, fork in hand. Mr. Hall seemed in his best spirits: he talked and laughed gleefully. Louis met him in congenial spirit. He did not laugh much, but he uttered in a quiet tone the wittiest things. He proved to be excellent company. Caroline marvelled at his self-possession, when the cool and lofty Miss Keeldar was kneeling before the fire, almost at his feet.

But Shirley was not cool and lofty at this moment. She appeared not to mind that she was waiting on her cousin’s tutor. When she offered him his portion, Moore took it from her hand as calmly as if he had been her equal.

“You are overheated now,” he said; “let me relieve you.”

And he took the toasting-fork from her with a quiet authority, to which she submitted passively.

“I should like to see your pictures, Louis,” said Caroline. “Would not you, Mr. Hall?”

“To please you, I should; but, for my own part, I had enough of him painting in Cumberland and Westmoreland. Many a wetting we got amongst the mountains because he would persist in sitting on a camp-stool, catching effects of rain-clouds, gathering mists, and what not.”

“Here is the portfolio,” said Henry.

Louis took it, and gave Shirley the key. “You spoiled the lock for me once; try now.”

She opened it, and had the first view of every sketch herself. She enjoyed the treat – if treat it were – in silence, without comment. Moore stood behind her chair and looked over her shoulder, and when she had done and the others were still gazing, he left his post and paced through the room.

A carriage was heard in the lane – the gate-bell rang. Shirley started.

“There are callers,” she said, “and I shall be summoned. A pretty figure to receive company! Henry and I have been gathering fruit half the morning. Oh for rest under my own vine and my own fig-tree! Happy is the slave-wife of the Indian chief, who has no drawing-room duty to perform, but can sit at ease weaving mats, and stringing beads, and peacefully flattening her pickaninny’s head in an unmolested corner of her wigwam. I’ll emigrate.”

Louis Moore laughed. “To marry a White Cloud or a Big Buffalo, and to devote yourself to the tender task of digging your lord’s maize-field while he smokes his pipe.”

Shirley seemed about to reply, but here the schoolroom door opened to admit Mr. Sympson. He looked aghast when he saw the group around the fire.

“I thought you were alone, Miss Keeldar,” he said, with a scandalized air. “I find quite a party. The family from De Walden Hall are in the drawing-room.” And he bowed and withdrew.

“The Wynnes! Couldn’t be a worse set,” murmured Shirley. She sat still, looking unwilling to stir, and flushed with the fire. Her dark hair was dishevelled; wilful she looked, and singularly pretty – prettier than usual, as if some soft inward emotion had given new bloom to her features.

“Shirley, Shirley, you ought to go,” whispered Caroline.

“If most of those present tell me to go, I will do my duty. Let those who think I ought to go hold up their hands.”

The vote against her was unanimous.

“You must go,” said Mr. Hall, “and behave courteously too.”

Louis Moore added a low “Hear, hear!”

Caroline smoothed Shirley’s curls and tidied her clothing; she was sent out of the room, pouting at her dismissal.

“There is a curious charm about her. And now I must away,” said Mr. Hall. Caroline left too.

“Henry, get your books; it is lesson-time,” said Moore, sitting down to his desk.

“A curious charm!” repeated the pupil. “True. Is Shirley not a kind of white witch?”

“No irrelevant questions; study in silence.”

Mr. Moore looked and spoke sternly – sourly. Henry knew this mood. It was rare; but when it came he was in awe of it. He obeyed.

Chapter 27

THE FIRST BLUESTOCKING

Miss Keeldar and her uncle had characters that would not harmonize. He was irritable, and she was spirited. He was despotic, and she liked freedom. He was worldly, and she, perhaps, romantic.

He had come down to Yorkshire with a purpose. He anxiously desired to have his niece married, to match her with a suitable husband, and wash his hands of her for ever.

Unfortunately, Shirley and he had always disagreed on the meaning of the word "suitable." She had never yet accepted his definition; and it was doubtful whether she would now.

The trial soon came. Mr. Wynne proposed on behalf of his son, Samuel Wynne.

"Decidedly suitable!" pronounced Mr. Sympson. "A fine estate, real substance, good connections. It must be done!"

He sent for his niece to the oak parlour; he communicated the offer; he gave his opinion; he claimed her consent.

It was withheld.

"No; I shall not marry Samuel Wynne."

"I ask why. I must have a reason. He is more than worthy of you."

She stood on the hearth, pale as the white marble slab behind her; her eyes flashed large, unsmiling.

"May I ask in what sense that young man is worthy of me?"

"He has twice your money, twice your common sense, and equal respectability."

"Had he a hundred times my money I would take no vow to love him."

"Please state your objections."

"He has been despicably profligate. Accept that as the first reason why I spurn him."

"Miss Keeldar, you shock me!"

"That conduct alone sinks him in a gulf of immeasurable inferiority. I cannot esteem his intellect: there is a second stumbling-block. His views are narrow, his feelings are blunt, his tastes are coarse, his manners vulgar."

"He is a respectable, wealthy man! To refuse him is presumptuous."

"I refuse point-blank! Cease to annoy me with the subject; I forbid it!"

"Is it your intention ever to marry; or do you prefer celibacy?"

"I deny your right to claim an answer to that question."

"May I ask if you expect some peer of the realm to demand your hand?"

"I doubt if the peer breathes to whom I would give it."

"I almost believe you are mad. Frantic and impractical girl! Take warning! I dare you to sully our name by a *mésalliance*!"

"Our name! Am I called Sympson?"

"God be thanked that you are not! But be on your guard; I will not be trifled with! Take care!"

“Why? What shadow of power have you over me? Why should I fear you?”

“Take care, madam!” His voice and hand trembled alike.

“Scrupulous care I will take, Mr. Sympson. Before I marry I am resolved to esteem – to admire – to love.”

“Preposterous stuff! Unwomanly!”

“To love with my whole heart. I know I speak in an unknown tongue; but I feel indifferent whether you understand or not.”

“And if this love of yours should fall on a beggar?”

“I do not esteem begging.”

“On a low clerk, a play-actor, a play-writer, or – or a shabby, whining artist?”

“For the shabby and whining I have no taste; for literature and the arts I have. And Samuel Wynne cannot write a note without errors; he reads only a sporting paper; he was the booby of Stilbro’ grammar school!”

“Unladylike language! Great God! to what will she come?” He lifted his hands and eyes. “Why are not the laws more stringent, that I might compel her to hear reason?”

“Console yourself, uncle. Were you the Czar, you could not compel me to this step. I will write to Mr. Wynne. Give yourself no further trouble on the subject.”

However, Mr. Wynne was not the only suitor. Miss Keeldar – or her fortune – had by this time made a sensation in the district. No less than three offers followed Mr. Wynne’s, all more or less eligible. All were in turn pressed on her by her uncle, and all were refused. Yet amongst them was more than one gentleman of respectable character as well as wealth. Many besides her uncle asked whom she expected to entrap, so make her so insolently fastidious.

At last the gossips thought they had found the key to her conduct, and her uncle was sure of it. The discovery altered his whole behaviour to his niece.

They had lately been at loggerheads. The aunt could not reconcile them; the daughters froze at their quarrels, and became chilled with decorous dread if they chanced to be alone with their audacious cousin. But then a change came. Mr. Sympson was appeased and his family tranquillized.

The village of Nunnely had a hall, called the priory – an older, more lordly house than any in Briarfield or Whinbury; and what is more, it had a baronet, which neither Briarfield nor Whinbury could boast. The present baronet, a young man who had hitherto lived in a distant province, was unknown on his Yorkshire estate.

During Miss Keeldar’s stay at the fashionable watering-place of Cliffbridge, she and her friends had been introduced to Sir Philip Nunnely. They met him again on the sands, the cliffs, on walks, and sometimes at public balls. He seemed unpretending; rather timid than proud, and glad of their society.

With any unaffected person Shirley could easily make friends. She walked and talked with Sir Philip; she and her aunt and cousins sometimes took a sail in his yacht. She liked him because she found him kind and modest, and was charmed that she had the power to amuse him.

One slight drawback there was: Sir Philip had a literary turn. He wrote poetry – sonnets and ballads. Perhaps Miss Keeldar thought him a little too fond of reciting these works; perhaps she wished them a little better written, a little

more original. At any rate, she always winced when he referred to his poems, and tried to divert the conversation into another channel.

He would beguile her to take moonlight walks with him for the sole purpose, it seemed, of pouring into her ear his longest ballads. He would lead her away to lonely spots by the sea, and in the scented shade of gardens, with tall cliffs rising behind them, he would pull out his latest batch of sonnets, and read them in a voice tremulous with emotion. He did not seem to know that though they might be rhyme, they were not poetry. It appeared, by Shirley's face, that she knew it, and felt heartily mortified by the single foible of this good and amiable gentleman.

Often she tried gently to wean him from his fanatical worship of the Muses. On all ordinary subjects he was sensible enough. He questioned her sometimes about his place at Nunnely; she was happy to describe the area, and advised him to visit his ancestral halls. Somewhat to her surprise, Sir Philip followed her advice, and in late September, arrived at the priory.

He soon called at Fieldhead, and his first visit was not his last. He said that under no roof had he found such pleasant shelter as beneath Fieldhead's massive oak beams; a cramped, modest dwelling compared with his own, but he liked it.

Presently it was not enough to sit with Shirley in her panelled parlour; he made parties for her to his own grounds, his glorious forest; and to remoter scenes by the rivers Wharfe and Aire.

Shirley's uncle foresaw the splendid time when he should be able to allude nonchalantly to his "nephew the baronet." Now his niece appeared to him no longer "a mad girl," but a "most sensible woman: peculiar, but very clever." He treated her with deference; he made mysterious jokes about the superiority of woman's wit over man's wisdom; and remarked on the generalship, the tactics, of "a person not a hundred miles from Fieldhead." In short, he was elated.

His niece received his innuendoes with composure, apparently not understanding them. When charged with being preferred by the baronet, she said she believed he did like her, and for her part she liked him. She had never thought a man of rank could have so much goodness, and, on the whole, so much sense.

Time proved, indeed, that Sir Philip liked her. He sought her presence more and more. About this time strange feelings hovered round Fieldhead; restless hopes and haggard anxieties haunted its rooms. There was a sense of expectancy that kept the nerves strained.

One thing seemed clear: Sir Philip was not a man to be despised. If not highly intellectual, he was intelligent. He was no Sam Wynne. As to his lineage and wealth, both were, of course, far beyond Shirley's.

His appearance, it is true, was boyish. His features were plain and slight, his stature insignificant. But Shirley soon checked her merriment on this point; she would even fire up if anyone was uncomplimentary about him. He had "a pleasing countenance," she affirmed; "and a good heart." She still reserved a rare shaft of sarcasm for his unfortunate poetry; but even here she would tolerate no irony except her own.

In short, matters had reached a point which seemed fully to warrant an observation made by Mr. Yorke to the tutor, Louis.

“That brother Robert of yours seems to me to be either a fool or a madman. Two months ago I could have sworn he had the game all in his own hands; and then he leaves the area and stays in London for weeks together, and by the time he comes back he’ll find himself checkmated. Louis, I’d write to Robert, if I were you, and tell him not to let his chances slip.”

“Robert had views on Miss Keeldar?” inquired Louis, as if the idea was new to him.

“Views I suggested to him myself, for she liked him.”

“As a neighbour?”

“As more than that. I have seen her change colour at the mere mention of his name. Write to the lad, I say, and tell him to come home. He is a finer gentleman than this bit of a baronet.”

“Does it not strike you, Mr. Yorke, that for a penniless adventurer to aspire to a rich woman’s hand is presumptuous – contemptible?”

“Oh, if you are for high notions, I’ve naught to say. I’m a plain, practical man myself, and if Robert is willing to give up that royal prize to a puling slip of aristocracy, I am quite agreeable. In his place I would have acted differently. But you tutors are such solemn chaps; it is almost like speaking to a parson.”

Rumour had indeed ceased to couple Shirley’s name with that of Moore; but it appeared that she had not forgotten him. That seemed proved by the attention which a sudden attack of illness led her to show Robert’s tutor-brother, to whom she habitually behaved with strange alternations of cool reserve and docile respect – now sweeping past him in all the dignity of the moneyed heiress, and then accosting him as abashed school-girls accost their stern professors.

Louis Moore had perhaps caught the fever in one of the poor cottages of the district, which he and Mr. Hall had visited together. At any rate he sickened, and was obliged to keep to his chamber.

He lay tossing on his bed one evening, with Henry by him, when there was a light tap on the door.

“How is Mr. Moore tonight?” asked a low voice.

“Come in and see him yourself,” said Henry.

“Is he asleep?”

“I wish he could sleep. Come and speak to him, Shirley.”

“He would not like it.” But she stepped in, and Henry led her to the couch.

The shaded light showed Miss Keeldar elegantly dressed. There was a party assembled below, including Sir Philip Nunnely; the ladies were now in the drawing-room, and their hostess had stolen from them to visit Henry’s tutor. Her white dress glistened strangely amid the obscurity of the sickroom. She looked chastened and pensive, and spoke gently.

“Mr. Moore, how are you tonight?”

“I have not been very ill, and am now better.”

“I heard that you complained of thirst. I have brought you some grapes; can you taste one?”

“No; but I thank you for remembering me.”

“Just one.”

She offered a grape to his lips. He shook his head, and turned aside his flushed face.

“But what can I bring you instead? What do you like to drink?”

“Mrs. Gill supplies me with toast-and-water.”

“I wonder what caused this fever? I hear you often visit the sick with Mr. Hall. You should be on your guard.”

“That reminds me, Miss Keeldar, that perhaps you had better not enter this chamber or come near this bed. I do not believe my illness is infectious, but you should not run the risk. Leave me.”

“I will go soon; but I should like to do something for you before I depart – any little service–”

“They will miss you below.”

“No; the gentlemen are still at table.”

“They will not linger long. Sir Philip Nunnely is no wine-drinker, and I hear him walking to the drawing-room.”

“Your hearing is acute.”

“It seems sharpened at present. Sir Philip was here to tea last night. I heard you sing to him. When he left, I heard him call you outside, to look at the evening star. I heard him kiss your hand.”

“Impossible!”

“No: my chamber is just above the front door; the window was open. You stood ten minutes with him on the steps. I heard your discourse, every word. Henry, give me some water.”

“Can I do nothing?” asked Shirley.

“Nothing; for you cannot guarantee me a night’s peaceful rest, and it is all I want. Sleep has left me.”

“Yet you said you were not very ill?”

“I am often sleepless when well.”

“If I could, I would give you the most placid slumber – quite deep and dreamless.”

“Blank annihilation! I do not ask that.”

“With dreams of all you most desire,” she added.

“Monstrous delusions! The sleep would be delirium, the waking death.”

“Your wishes are not so delusional.”

“Miss Keeldar, my character is not, perhaps, quite as legible to you as you think.”

“Possibly. But I should like to help you sleep. If I took a book and read to you? I can well spare half an hour. I would read softly.”

“It would not do. I am too feverish and excitable to bear a soft voice close at my ear. You had better leave me.”

“Well, I will go.”

“And no good-night?”

“Yes, sir, yes. Mr. Moore, good-night.” (Exit Shirley.)

“Henry, my boy, go to bed now.”

“Give me your blessing, sir.”

“God bless you, my best pupil!”

“You never call me your dearest pupil!”

“No, nor ever shall.”

Miss Keeldar did not repeat the visit, nor again disturb the sickroom. A sickroom, indeed, it soon ceased to be. In a few days Mr. Moore shook off his illness, and resumed his duties as tutor. He still had his old teacher’s authority over Shirley, as proved by the manner in which he sometimes put down her high reserve with a firm, quiet hand.

One afternoon the Sympson family were gone out to take a carriage airing. Shirley, never sorry to snatch a reprieve from their society, had remained behind, detained by business, as she said. The business – a little letter-writing – was soon done; and Miss Keeldar betook herself to the garden.

It was a peaceful autumn day; the russet woods were still full of leaf. The purple heath-bloom, faded but not withered, tinged the hills. Fieldhead's gardens bore the seal of gentle decay. Yellow leaves had fluttered down on to the walks; a few apples still enriched the trees. A blossom here and there expanded pale and delicate amidst a knot of faded leaves.

These single flowers – the last of their race – Shirley culled as she wandered thoughtfully amongst the beds. Henry Sympson called to her as he came limping from the house.

"Shirley, Mr. Moore would be glad to see you in the schoolroom and to hear you read a little French, if you have no more urgent occupation."

"Did Mr. Moore tell you to say that?"

"Certainly; why not? Do come, and let us once more be as we were at Sympson Grove. We used to have pleasant school-hours."

Miss Keeldar perhaps thought that circumstances were changed since then; however, she made no remark, but quietly followed Henry.

Entering the schoolroom, she inclined her head, as in former times, and hung her bonnet beside Henry's cap. Louis Moore sat at his desk, turning the leaves of a book and marking passages with his pencil.

"You proposed to read to me a few nights ago," said he. "I could not hear you then, but I can now. A little renewed practice in French may profit you. Your accent, I have observed, begins to rust."

"What book shall I take?"

"Here are the posthumous works of St. Pierre. Read a few pages of the 'Fragments de l' Amazone.'"

She accepted the chair which he had placed near his own; the volume lay on his desk between them, but her sweeping curls dropped and hid the page from him.

"Put back your hair," he said.

For one moment Shirley looked not quite certain whether she would obey. She glanced at the professor's face. Perhaps if he had been looking at her harshly or undecidedly she would have rebelled, and the lesson have ended; but he was as calm and cool as marble. She threw the veil of hair behind her ear, and began to read.

The language had become strange to her tongue; it faltered and stopped.

"I can't do it. Read me a paragraph, if you please, Mr. Moore."

What he read she repeated. She caught his accent in three minutes.

"Très bien," was the approving comment. "You could not write French as you once could, I dare say?"

"Oh no! I should make strange work of it now."

"You could not compose the essay 'La Première Femme Savante'?"

"Do you still remember that rubbish?"

"Every line."

"I doubt you."

"I will engage to repeat it word for word," said he.

"You would stop short at the first line."

"Challenge me."

“I challenge you.”

He proceeded to recite the following. He gave it in French, but we must translate, and also shorten it a little.

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of them.

This was in the dawn of time, an epoch so remote, so veiled in obscurity that it evades perception and baffles research. It must suffice to know that the world then existed; that men peopled it; that man's nature, with its passions, sympathies, pains, and pleasures, informed the planet and gave it soul.

A certain tribe colonized a certain spot on the globe; no sandy plain, nor scant oasis, but a forest valley, with rocky sides and deep shade, formed by tree crowding on tree. Here dwell human beings, but so few, and so hidden that they are neither heard nor seen. Are they savage? Doubtless. They live by the crook and the bow; half shepherds, half hunters. Are they happy? No, not more happy than we are. Are they good? No, not better than ourselves. Their nature is our nature.

There is one in this tribe too often miserable – an orphaned child. No-one cares for her. She is fed sometimes, but oftener forgotten. The hollow tree and chill cavern are her home. Forsaken and wandering, she lives more with the wild beast and bird than with her own kind. Hunger and cold are her comrades, and solitude besets her. Unheeded and unvalued, she should die; but she both lives and grows. The gentle charm vouchsafed to flower and tree, bestowed on deer and dove, nurtures the human child.

All solitary, she has sprung up straight and graceful. Nature cast her features finely, in pure lines. Her form gleams ivory-white through the trees; her hair flows long, and glossy; her eyes are full and dewy. Her forehead is a clear, candid page, whereon knowledge might write a golden record. You see in the desolate young savage nothing vicious or vacant. She haunts the wood harmless and thoughtful, though of what one so untaught can think it is not easy to guess.

On the evening of one summer day, before the Flood, being utterly alone, she went up from the vale to watch Day take leave and Night arrive. A crag overspread by a tree was her station. The oak roots, turfed and mossed, gave a seat; the oak boughs, thick-leaved, wove a canopy.

Slow and grand the Day withdrew, passing in purple fire. Then Night entered, quiet as death. The wind fell, the birds ceased singing. Now every nest held happy mates, and hart and hind slumbered blissfully safe in their lair.

The girl sat, her body still, her soul astir; she felt the world, the sky, the night, boundlessly mighty. Of all things herself seemed the centre – a small, forgotten atom of life, a spark of soul, burning unmarked to waste in the heart of a black hollow. She asked, was she thus to burn out and perish, her living light doing no good, never seen, never needed? How could this be, she demanded, when her life beat so true, and real, and potent; when something within her stirred and restlessly asserted a God-given strength?

She gazed abroad on Heaven and Evening. Heaven and Evening gazed back on her. She bent down, searching bank, hill, river, spread dim below. Above her head she raised her hands.

“Guidance – help – comfort – come!” was her cry.

There was no answer.

She waited, kneeling, steadfastly looking up. Yonder sky was sealed; the solemn stars shone alien and remote.

At last she thought Something above relented; she felt as if Something far round drew nigher; she heard as if Silence spoke. There was no language, no word, only a tone. A deep, soft sound, like a storm whispering, made twilight undulate.

Once more, profounder, nearer, clearer, it rolled harmonious. A voice passed between Heaven and Earth.

“Eva!”

“Here am I.”

“Eva!”

“O Night, I am here!”

The voice, descending, reached Earth.

“Eva!”

“Lord,” she cried, “behold thine handmaid!”

“I come – a Comforter!”

“Lord, come quickly!”

The Evening flushed full of hope; the Moon ascended large, but her light showed no shape.

“Lean towards me, Eva. Enter my arms.”

“Thus I lean, O Invisible but felt! And what art thou?”

“Eva, I have brought a living draught from heaven. Daughter of Man, drink of my cup!”

“I drink: it is as if sweetest dew visited my lips. My arid heart revives; my affliction is lightened. And the night changes! the wood, the hill, the moon, the wide sky – all change!”

“All change, and for ever. I take from thy vision darkness; I loosen thy fetters! I take to myself the spark of soul until now forgotten!”

“O take me! O claim me! This is a god.”

“This is a son of God – one who feels himself in the life that stirs you. He is suffered to reclaim his own and to aid it.”

“A son of God! Am I indeed chosen?”

“Thou only in this land. To me it is given to rescue, to sustain, to cherish mine own. Acknowledge in me that Seraph on earth named Genius.”

“My glorious Bridegroom! All I would have at last I possess. I receive a revelation. The dark hint, the obscure whisper, which have haunted me from childhood, are interpreted. Thou art He I sought. Godborn, take me, thy bride!”

“Come again into the heaven whence thou wert sent.”

That Presence, invisible but mighty, gathered her in like a lamb to the fold; that voice, soft but all-pervading, vibrated through her heart like music. Her eye received no image; and yet she saw a vision of the majesty of marching stars, the energy of colliding elements, the rooted endurance of hills; the lustre of heroic beauty rushing victorious on the Night, vanquishing its shadows.

Such was the bridal hour of Genius and Humanity. Who shall rehearse the tale of their after-union? Who shall depict its bliss and bale? Who shall record the long strife between Serpent and Seraph: how the Father of Lies insinuated evil into good, pride into wisdom, poison into passion? How the “dreadless Angel” defied him, and refined the polluted cup, exalted the debased emotion – purified, justified, watched, and withstood? How, by his patience, by his

strength, this faithful Seraph fought for Humanity a good fight through time; and, when Time's course closed, and Death was encountered at the end, how Genius still held close his dying bride, sustained her through the agony of the passage, bore her triumphant into his own home, Heaven; restored her to Jehovah, her Maker; and at last crowned her with the crown of Immortality?
Who shall of these things write the chronicle?

"I never could correct that composition," observed Shirley, as Moore concluded. "Your censor-pencil scored it with condemnatory lines, which I could not understand."

She had taken a crayon from the tutor's desk, and was drawing little leaves on the margin of the book.

"French may be half forgotten, but the habits of your French lesson are retained, I see," said Louis. "Miss Keeldar, her mark on every page."

Shirley dropped her crayon as if it burned her fingers.

"Tell me, what were the faults of that essay?" she asked. "Were they grammatical errors, or did you object to the substance?"

"I never said that the lines I drew were indications of faults at all. You assumed it."

"What else did they mean?"

"No matter now."

"Mr. Moore," cried Henry, "make Shirley repeat some of the pieces she used to say so well by heart."

"If I ask for any, it will be 'Le Cheval Dompté,'" said Moore.

She turned aside her head; the neck and cheek flushed warm.

"Ah! she has not forgotten, you see, sir," said Henry, exultant. "She knows how naughty she was."

A smile made Shirley's lip tremble; she bent her face, and hid it half in her curls, which fell loose again. "Certainly I was a rebel," she answered.

"A rebel!" repeated Henry. "Yes; you and papa had quarrelled terribly, and you defied both him and mamma. You said he had insulted you—"

"He had insulted me," interposed Shirley.

"And you wanted to leave Sympson Grove directly. You packed your things, and papa threw them out of your trunk; mamma and Mrs. Pryor cried, and begged you to be patient; and you knelt on the floor with your things in one of your passions. Your features, in such passions, are quite beautiful. You scarcely look angry, only resolute, and in haste; yet one feels that at such times an obstacle cast across your path would be split with lightning. Papa lost heart, and called Mr. Moore."

"Enough, Henry."

"No, it is not enough. I hardly know how Mr. Moore managed, except that I recollect he spoke quietly to papa and the ladies, and got them away; and afterwards he said to you, Miss Shirley, that it was of no use lecturing now, but that the tea-things were just brought into the schoolroom, and he was very thirsty, and he would be glad if you would leave your packing for the present and come and make a cup of tea for him and me. You came; you would not talk at first, but soon you softened. Mr. Moore began to tell us about the Continent, the war, and Bonaparte – subjects we were both fond of listening to. After tea he said we should neither of us leave him that evening, lest we should again get into mischief. I never passed so pleasant an evening. The next day he gave you,

missy, a lecture of an hour, and wound it up by telling you to learn 'Le Cheval Dompté.' You learned it instead of packing, Shirley. We heard no more of your running away."

"She never said a lesson with greater spirit," added Moore. "She for the first time gave me the treat of hearing my native tongue spoken without accent by an English girl."

"She was as sweet as summer cherries for a month afterwards," struck in Henry: "a good hearty quarrel always improved Shirley's temper."

"You talk of me as if I were not present," observed Miss Keeldar.

"Are you sure you are present?" asked Moore. "At times since my arrival here, I have been tempted to ask the lady of Fieldhead if she knew what had become of my former pupil."

"She is here now."

"I see her, and humble enough; but I would advise neither Harry nor others to believe too much in the humility which one moment can hide its blushing face like a modest little child, and the next lift it pale and lofty as a marble Juno."

"One man in times of old, it is said, gave life to the statue he had chiselled," answered Shirley; "others may have the contrary gift of turning flesh to marble."

Moore paused to turn this observation over in his mind.

"You mean," he said at last, "that some men inspire repugnance, and so chill the kind heart."

"Ingenious!" responded Shirley. "If the interpretation pleases you, you are welcome to hold it valid. I don't care."

And with that she raised her head, lofty and statue-like, as Louis had described it.

"Behold the metamorphosis!" he said. "But Henry must not be disappointed of his recitation. Let us begin."

"I have forgotten the first line."

"I have not. My memory, if slow, is retentive. I acquire only gradually both knowledge and liking, but both prove lasting. Attention, Henry! Miss Keeldar consents to favour you. It begins, 'Voyez ce cheval ardent et impétueux.'"

Miss Keeldar began; but she soon stopped.

"Unless I hear it I cannot continue it," she said.

"Yet it was quickly learned – soon gained, soon gone," said the tutor. He recited the passage with slow, impressive emphasis.

Shirley listened. When he ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips; she took his very tone; she reproduced his manner, his pronunciation, his expression.

"Now say 'Le Songe d'Athalie,'" she entreated.

He said it for her. She took it from him, finding lively excitement in making his language her own. She asked for more; the old school pieces were revived.

He went through some of the best passages of Racine and Corneille, and heard the echo of his own deep tones in the girl's voice, that modulated itself faithfully on his. Their enthusiasm had kindled to a glow, which the slight fuel of French poetry no longer sufficed to feed; perhaps they longed for a trunk of English oak to be thrown on the flame.

Moore observed, "And these are our best pieces! We have nothing more dramatic or natural." And then he smiled and was silent. He stood on the hearth, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, serenely alight.

Twilight was closing on the autumn day. The schoolroom windows admitted scarce a gleam of sky; but the fire gave light enough to talk by.

And now Louis Moore addressed his pupil in French, and she answered at first with laughing hesitation and in broken phrase. Moore encouraged and corrected her. Henry joined in the lesson, his arm round Shirley's waist. The group was happy, until the dull, rumbling sound of wheels was heard outside in the yard.

"It is the carriage," said Shirley; "and I am not dressed for dinner."

A servant came in with Mr. Moore's candle and tea. "Mr. Sympson and the ladies are returned," she said, "and Sir Philip Nunnely is with them."

"How you did start, Shirley!" said Henry, when the maid had gone. "But I know why – don't you, Mr. Moore? I know what papa intends. He is a little ugly man, that Sir Philip. I wish he had not come. Shirley should have made tea for you and me, Mr. Moore, and we would have had a happy evening."

Moore was locking up his desk. "That was your plan, was it, my boy?"

"Don't you approve it, sir?"

"I approve nothing utopian. Look Life in its iron face; stare Reality out of its brassy countenance. Make the tea, Henry; I shall be back in a minute."

He left the room; so did Shirley, by another door.

Chapter 28

PHOEBE

Shirley probably got on pleasantly with Sir Philip that evening, for the next morning she came down in one of her best moods.

“Isabella and Gertrude, will you take a walk with me?” she asked after breakfast. So rare was such an invitation from Miss Keeldar that the cousins hesitated before they fetched their bonnets.

It did not suit these three young persons to be thrown much together. Miss Keeldar liked the society of few ladies, apart from Mrs. Pryor and Caroline. She was civil and kind to her cousins; but she usually had little to say to them. In her sunny mood this morning, she contrived to entertain even the Misses Sympson with the sparkle of her spirit.

What made her so joyous? The day was dim and waning. The walks through the woods were damp; the sky was overcast; and yet Shirley’s heart seemed light and sunny.

As they neared Fieldhead on their return, she delayed behind her cousins to give some directions to her foreman, John. She re-entered the house perhaps twenty minutes after them. She excused herself from luncheon, and went upstairs.

“Is not Shirley coming to luncheon?” asked Isabella. “She said she was hungry.”

An hour after, one of her cousins went to seek her in her chamber. She was sitting at the foot of the bed, her head resting on her hand; she looked quite pale, very thoughtful, almost sad.

“You are not ill?”

“A little sick,” replied Miss Keeldar. Certainly she was changed from what she had been two hours before.

But this change soon seemed to pass like a light summer cloud. When she joined her friends at dinner, she talked as usual. She remained with them during the evening, and declared herself perfectly recovered. It had been a mere passing faintness, not worth a thought; yet it was felt there was a difference in Shirley.

The next day – the day, the week, the fortnight after – this new peculiar shadow lingered on her face. A strange quietude settled over her look and voice. The alteration was not marked; yet it was there, and it would not pass away. It hung over her like a cloud – but to mention it annoyed her. She declared with hauteur that she was not ill.

“Had anything happened to affect her spirits?”

She scornfully ridiculed the idea. “What did they mean? She had no spirits to affect.”

“Something must be the matter – she was so altered.”

“She supposed she had a right to alter.” And she peremptorily requested to be let alone.

Then she would make every effort to appear gay, and she seemed indignant at herself if she could not perfectly succeed. Brief self-spurning

epithets burst from her lips when alone. "Fool! Coward!" she would say, "if you must tremble, tremble in secret! How dare you betray your imbecile anxieties? Shake them off; rise above them – or else hide them."

And to hide them she did her best. She became resolutely lively in company. When weary of effort, she sought the wild solitude on Zoë, her mare. She took long rides of half a day. Her uncle disapproved, but he dared not remonstrate, for her anger alarmed him.

Yet she still maintained, "I am perfectly well; I have no ailment."

And health, indeed, she must have had, to withstand the weather she now encountered. Wet or fair, calm or storm, she took her daily ride over Stilbro' Moor, Tartar untiring at her side.

The eyes of gossips – those eyes which are everywhere – noticed two or three times that instead of turning back from the top of Stilbro' Moor, she rode forwards all the way to the town. She was seen to alight at the door of a solicitor. Some people affirmed that Miss Keeldar was involved in business speculations connected with Hollow's Mill – that she had lost money, and was forced to mortgage her land. Others guessed that she was going to be married, and that settlements were being prepared.

Mr. Moore and Henry Sympson were together in the schoolroom.

"Henry, make haste. Are you nearly ready with that lesson?"

"No. I have not construed a line."

Mr. Moore looked up. The boy's tone was rather peculiar.

"If the task presents difficulties, Henry, bring them to me. We will work together."

"Mr. Moore, I can do no work."

"My boy, you are ill."

"No, sir, but my heart is full."

"Shut the book. Come here, Harry, to the fireside."

Harry limped forward. His tutor placed him in a chair; his lips were quivering, his eyes brimming. He bent down his head, and wept.

"Harry? You have a grief; tell it me."

"Sir, I have such a grief as I never had before: I can hardly bear it."

"Well, let us talk it over. What is the cause?"

"The cause, sir, is Shirley. Everyone thinks her changed – you too, Mr. Moore."

"Not seriously, no. Besides, she says she is well."

"There it is, sir. As long as she said she was well, I believed her. But now—"

"Has she said anything to you? You and she were together in the garden for two hours this morning. My dear Harry, if Miss Keeldar has said she is ill, and enjoined you to keep her secret, do not obey her. For her life's sake, speak, my boy. What have you learned?"

"I have learned that she has just made her will."

"Made her will?"

The tutor and pupil were silent.

"She told you that?" asked Moore, after some minutes.

"She told me quite cheerfully. She said I was the only person besides her solicitor, and Mr. Helstone and Mr. Yorke, who knew anything about it; and she wished specially to explain its provisions to me."

"Go on, Harry."

“‘Because,’ she said, looking down on me with her beautiful eyes – oh! they are beautiful, Mr. Moore! I love them! I love her! She is my star! Heaven must not claim her!”

“Henry Sympson, go on when I tell you.”

“‘Because,’ she said, ‘if I made no will, and died before you, Harry, all my property would go to you; and I do not intend that it should be so. You,’ she said, ‘will have your father’s whole estate, which is larger than Fieldhead. Your sisters will have nothing; so I have left them some money, though I do not love them half so much as I love one lock of your fair hair.’ She called me her ‘darling,’ and let me kiss her. She went on to tell me that she had left Caroline Helstone some money too; that this manor house she had bequeathed to me; and that all the rest of her property, amounting to about twelve thousand pounds, she had willed to a good man, who would make the best use of it – a man, she said, that was both gentle and brave, strong and merciful – a man that might not claim to be pious, but who had the spirit of love and peace with him. He visited the fatherless and widows, and kept himself unspotted from the world. Then she asked, ‘Do you approve, Harry?’ I could not answer. My tears choked me, as they do now.”

Mr. Moore allowed his pupil a moment to master his emotion. He then demanded, “What else did she say?”

“When I approved her will, she told me I was a generous boy, and she was proud of me. ‘And now,’ she added, ‘in case anything should happen, you will know what to say to Malice when it insinuates that Shirley has wronged you, that she did not love you. You will know that I did love you, Harry; no sister could have loved you better.’ Mr. Moore, sir, when I remember her voice, my heart beats as if it would break. She may go to heaven before me; but the rest of my life – and my life will not be long, I am glad of that now – shall be a straight journey in her footsteps. I thought to enter the vault of the Keeldars before her. Otherwise, lay my coffin by her side.”

Moore answered him with a weighty calm. “You are wrong, both of you – you harm each other in imagining calamity.”

“But, Mr. Moore, you smile.”

“My boy, I am neither nervous, nor poetic, nor inexperienced. I see things as they are. Come, you are neither of you going to heaven yet. I have the best hopes of you both – a pair of half-fledged eaglets. Now, what is your inference from all you have told me?”

“That Shirley thinks she is going to die.”

“She referred to her health?”

“Not once; she never complains to anyone; but she is grown quite thin.”

“Do you know where she is now, Henry? Is she riding out?”

“Surely not, sir. It rains fast.”

“That is no guarantee that she is not cantering over Rushedge. Lately she has never permitted the weather to stop her rides.”

“You remember, Mr. Moore, how wet and stormy it was last Wednesday – so wild, indeed, that she would not permit Zoë to be saddled? Yet she herself faced the blast on foot; that afternoon she walked nearly as far as Nunnely. I asked her, when she came in, if she was not afraid of taking cold. ‘Not I,’ she said. ‘It would be too much good luck for me. The best thing that could happen to me would be to take a good cold and fever, and so pass away like other Christians.’ She is reckless, you see, sir.”

“Reckless indeed! Go and find out where she is, and request her to come here.”

“Yes, sir.” He started up.

“Harry! Do not deliver the message formally. Make it sound like an ordinary summons to the schoolroom. And, Harry—”

“Sir?”

“Till I call you, you are excused from lessons.”

Henry departed. Mr. Moore, left alone, rose from his desk.

“I can be very cool with Henry,” he said. “I can seem to make light of his apprehensions, and speak as if, in my eyes, they were both children. Let me see if I can keep up the same role with her. At times I have seemed about to forget it, when my tongue faltered, and I stood in her presence, not master – no – but something else. I trust I shall never so play the fool. A Philip Nunnely may redden when he meets her eye, and let his hand tremble when it touches hers; but I will not. So far I have done very well. She has sat near me, and I have not shaken. I have encountered her looks and smiles like a tutor. I am poor, and must not compromise an inch of my self-respect. What did she mean by that allusion to cold people who turn flesh to marble? It pleased me – I hardly know why. A strange, secret ecstasy steals through my veins at moments, but I’ll not encourage it. I shall stay sober.”

He paused, listening.

“Will she come, or not? If she comes, what shall I say to her? How shall I explain the request? Shall I apologize to her? I must keep up the role of professor, otherwise – I hear a door.”

He waited. Many minutes passed.

“Henry is entreating her to come; she declines. My request is presumptuous in her eyes. I would prefer her proud; it will steel me. Her scorn startles me from my dreams; her sarcastic look puts strength into every nerve I have. A step approaches.”

The door unclosed; Miss Keeldar came in. She carried her needlework and wore her neat indoor dress and silk apron, a quiet domestic character from the fireside.

Mr. Moore had the advantage. He should have addressed her at once in solemn accents. Perhaps he would have, had she been saucy; but she looked down with youthful shyness. The tutor stood silent.

“Did you want me, sir?” she asked.

“I ventured, Miss Keeldar, to ask an interview of a few minutes.”

“Well, sir” (not lifting her eyes), “what about?”

“Be seated. The subject I would broach is one of some moment. Perhaps I have hardly a right to approach it. The liberty I have taken arises from a conversation with Henry. The boy is unhappy about your health. It is of your health I would speak.”

“I am quite well,” she said briefly.

“Yet changed.”

“That matters to none but myself. We all change.”

“Will you sit down? Formerly, Miss Keeldar, I had some influence with you: have I any now?”

“Let me read some French, Mr. Moore, and proclaim a truce to all discussions of health.”

“No, no. It is time there were discussions.”

“Discuss away, then, but do not choose me for your text. I am healthy. I have neither cough, pain, nor fever.”

“Is that the truth?” Louis Moore looked at her earnestly. “Why, then, are you altered?”

“Am I altered?”

“Let us see. In the first place, do you sleep as you used to?”

“I do not; but not because I am ill.”

“Have you the appetite you once had?”

“No; but not because I am ill.”

“You remember this little ring fastened to my watch-chain? It was my mother’s, and you have many a time playfully tried it on. It fitted your fore-finger. Try now.”

She tried. The ring dropped from the wasted little hand. Louis picked it up; an uneasy flush coloured his brow.

Shirley again said, “It is not because I am ill.”

“Not only have you lost sleep, appetite, and flesh,” proceeded Moore, “but your spirits are low. There is a nervous disquiet in your manner, which was not there before.”

“Mr. Moore, you have exactly hit it. I am nervous. Now, talk of something else. What wet weather we have!”

“If you are nervous, it is not without a cause. But the ailment is not physical. It came in one moment. I noticed the change. Your pain is mental. I wish you would speak willingly. I believe confession would be half a cure.”

“No,” said Shirley abruptly. “I am afraid it would not.”

She was now seated. Resting her elbow on the table, she leaned her head on her hand. Mr. Moore felt he had at last gained some footing in this difficult path. She was serious, and could no longer affirm that nothing ailed her.

He allowed her some minutes for reflection. Once his lips moved to speak, but he thought better of it. Shirley lifted her eye to his; he looked calm, strong, trustworthy.

“I had better tell you than my aunt,” she said, “or my cousins, or my uncle. They would all make such a bustle, and I dread that. You can bear a little shock?”

“A great one, if necessary.”

Not a muscle of the man’s frame moved, and yet his large heart beat fast in his deep chest. What was she going to tell him?

“Had I thought it right to go to you,” she said, “I would have told you at once, and asked advice.”

“Why was it not right to come to me?”

“It might be right; but I could not do it. The mishap concerned me only. I wanted to keep it to myself. I tell you, I hate to be an object of worrying attention. Besides, it may pass away without result – God knows!”

Moore, though tortured with suspense, betrayed no impatience. His tranquillity tranquillized Shirley; his confidence reassured her.

“Great effects may spring from trivial causes,” she remarked, as she loosened a bracelet from her wrist, unfastened her sleeve, and turned it up.

“Look here, Mr. Moore.”

She showed a mark in her white arm – a deep though healed indentation – something between a burn and a cut.

“Small as that mark is, it has taken my sleep away, and made me nervous, thin, and foolish; because of it, I am obliged to look forward to a terrifying possibility.”

The sleeve was readjusted, the bracelet replaced.

“I am a patient man,” he said, smiling, “but my pulse is quickening. Tell me the tale.”

“It is a very short tale. I took a walk with Isabella and Gertrude, about three weeks ago. They reached home before me; I stayed behind to speak to John. Then I lingered in the lane, for I was in no hurry to rejoin the girls. As I stood leaning against the gate-pillar, thinking some very happy thoughts about my future – for that morning I imagined that events were beginning to turn as I had long wished them to turn—”

“Ah! Nunnely had been with her the evening before!” thought Moore.

“I heard a panting sound; a dog came running up the lane. It was Phœbe, one of Mr. Sam Wynne’s pointers. The poor creature ran with her head down, her tongue hanging out; she looked as if bruised and beaten. Mr. Sam often flogs his pointers cruelly. I called her. I meant to coax her into the house and give her some dinner. But when I attempted to pat her head, she turned and snatched at my arm, and bit it so as to draw blood, then ran panting on. Directly after, Mr. Wynne’s keeper came up, carrying a gun. He asked if I had seen a dog. I told him I had seen Phœbe.

“‘You had better chain up Tartar, ma’am,’ he said, ‘and keep within the house. I am after Phœbe to shoot her. She is raging mad with rabies.’”

Mr. Moore leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. “And you told no one, sought no help? You would not come to me?”

“I got as far as the schoolroom door; there my courage failed.”

“Why? What can I demand better in this world than to be of use to you?”

“I had no claim.”

“Monstrous! And you did nothing?”

“Yes. I walked straight into the laundry, where they were ironing. While the maid was busy, I took an iron from the fire, and applied the glowing tip to my arm. I bored it well in. It cauterized the little wound. Then I went upstairs.”

“I dare say you never once groaned?”

“I am sure I don’t know. I was very miserable. There was no calm in my mind.”

“There was calm in your person. I remember listening the whole time we sat at luncheon, to hear if you moved in the room above. All was quiet.”

“I was sitting at the foot of the bed, wishing Phœbe had not bitten me.”

“And alone. You like solitude, and disdain sympathy. You must feel independent of help, of advice.”

“So be it, since it pleases you.” She smiled and bent to her embroidery, but her eyelash glittered, and a drop fell.

Mr. Moore leaned forward on his desk.

“If it is not so,” he asked, with a peculiar, mellow change in his voice, “how is it, then?”

“I don’t know.”

“You do know, but you won’t speak. All must be locked up in yourself, because nobody can give the high price you require for your confidence. Nobody has the honour, the intellect, the power you demand in your adviser.

There is not a shoulder in England on which you would rest your hand for support. Of course you must live alone.”

“I can live alone, if need be. But the question is not how to live, but how to die alone. That strikes me in a more grisly light.”

“You fear the effects of the virus? You anticipate a dreadful doom? You are very nervous and womanish.”

“You complimented me two minutes since on my powerful mind.”

“If the affair were coolly examined, I feel sure it would turn out that there is no danger at all. Do you truly expect that you will be seized with hydrophobia, and die raving mad?”

“I expect it, and have feared it. Just now I fear nothing.”

“Nor do I. I doubt whether the smallest particle of virus mingled with your blood; and if it did, let me assure you that, young and healthy as you are, no harm will ensue. For the rest, I shall inquire whether the dog was really mad. I expect she was not.”

“Tell nobody that she bit me,” Shirley begged.

“Make yourself easy. I am easy, though I value your life as much as I do my own soul. Look up – I wish to see if you are cheered. Put your work down; raise your head. Thank you. Is the cloud broken?”

“I fear nothing.”

“Is your mind restored to its natural sunniness?”

“Yes; but I want your promise,” she said. “If the worst should happen, my uncle will be full of horror and weakness. Nobody in the house will be self-possessed but you. Now promise to befriend me – to keep Mr. Sympson away from me, not to let Henry come near, lest I should hurt him. Mind – mind that you take care of yourself too. But I shall not injure you; I know I shall not. Lock the chamber door against the surgeons; let them not lay a finger on me; and lastly, if I give trouble, with your own hand administer to me such a sure dose of laudanum as shall leave no mistake. Promise to do this.”

Moore left his desk, and walked around the room. Stopping behind Shirley’s chair, he bent over her, and said, in a low, emphatic voice, “I promise all you ask, without reservation.”

“If female help is needed, call in my housekeeper, Mrs. Gill. Let her lay me out if I die. She is attached to me, and I can trust her integrity and courage. But keep my good aunt and my timid cousins away. Once more, promise.”

“I promise.”

“That is good in you,” she said, looking up at him, and smiling.

“Does it comfort you?”

“Very much. Do you think me childish?”

“I do.”

“Ah! I am not so strong as people think, Mr. Moore; nor am I so regardless of sympathy. But when I have any grief, I fear to impart it to those I love. You should not taunt me with being childish, for if you were as unhappy as I have been for the last three weeks, you too would want some friend.”

“We all want a friend, do we not? You have Caroline Helstone.”

“And you have Mr. Hall.”

“Yes. Mrs. Pryor is a wise, good woman. She can counsel you when you need counsel.”

“For your part, you have your brother Robert, and your sister Hortense.”

“It appears we are both well provided.”

“It appears so.”

“How thankful and contented we ought to be!” commented Moore.

“Yes.”

“For my part, I am almost contented just now, and very thankful.”

Still leaning on the back of Miss Keeldar’s chair, Moore watched her sewing. After a pause, he asked, “Is the shadow quite gone?”

“Wholly. I believe, Mr. Moore, griefs and fears nursed in silence grow like Titan infants.”

“You will cherish such feelings no more in silence?”

“Not if I dare speak to you. But you are austere and shy, because you are proud. Why are you proud?”

“Perhaps because I am poor, for one reason,” said he. “Poverty and pride often go together.”

“That is such a nice reason. I should be charmed to discover another that would pair with it.”

“What do you think of marrying sober Poverty to Caprice?”

“Are you capricious?”

“*You are.*”

“A libel,” responded she. “I am steady as a rock, fixed as the polar star.”

“In the morning I look out and see a fine, perfect rainbow, bright with promise. Yet it is broken and faded within an hour. Later still, the stern sky denies that it ever wore so benign a symbol of hope.”

“Well, Mr. Moore, you should contend against these changeful moods. They are your besetting sin.”

“Miss Keeldar, I had once, for two years, a pupil who grew very dear to me. Henry is dear, but she was dearer, although she vexed me twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four—”

“She was never with you more than three hours at a time.”

“She sometimes stole the food from my plate; and when she had kept me unfed for a day, she robbed these dishes of flavour, and made a fool of me besides. I used to sleep well. She changed all this.”

“Mr. Moore—”

“And having taken from me peace of mind, she took from me herself – quite coolly, just as if the world would be all the same to me without her. After two years, we met again under her own roof. How do you think she behaved towards me, Miss Keeldar?”

“Like one who had learned well from you.”

“She received me haughtily. She kept me aloof by the reserved gesture, the rare and alienated glance, the word calmly civil.”

“She was an excellent pupil! Having seen you distant, she at once learned to withdraw.”

“Conscience and honour dragged me apart from her with ponderous fetters. She was free: she might have been merciful.”

“Never free to seek where she had been shunned.”

“Then she was inconsistent; she tantalized. She would suddenly show me such a glimpse of loving simplicity – she would speak so gently, so kindly – that I could not shut her image out of my heart. Explain why she distressed me so.”

“She could not bear to be quite outcast,” said Shirley; “and on a cold day she would sometimes feel she ought to go and see if you and Henry had a good fire in the schoolroom; and once there, she liked to stay.”

“Tomorrow you will not be as you are today. We may give one day to dreaming, but the next we must awake; and I shall awake to purpose the morning you are married to Sir Philip Nunnely. I see us very clearly in the mirror, Miss Keeldar; and I have been gazing on the picture all the time I have been talking. What a difference between your head and mine! I look old for thirty!”

“You are so grave, I never regard you as a young man, nor as Robert’s junior.”

“I thought not.” He started as the dinner-bell rang; and Shirley rose.

“Mr. Moore,” she said, as she gathered up her silks, “have you heard from your brother lately? Do you know why he stays in town so long? Does he talk of returning?”

“He talks of returning; but what has caused his long absence I cannot tell. To speak the truth, I thought none knew better than yourself why he was reluctant to come home.”

A crimson shadow passed across Miss Keeldar’s cheek.

“Write to him and urge him to come,” she said. “He must not abandon the county.”

“I am aware,” said Louis, “that he had an interview with you the evening before he left. He turned from me afterwards, and I guessed that he would be long away. I suppose Robert put too much trust in his manly beauty and gentlemanhood. But I will write, and say you advise his return.”

“Do not say I advise his return, but that his return is advisable.”

The bell rang again, and Miss Keeldar obeyed its call.

Chapter 29

LOUIS MOORE

Louis Moore was used to a quiet life. Having a large world in his own head and heart, he tolerated confinement to a small, still corner of the real world very patiently.

How hushed is Fieldhead this evening! All but Moore are gone to Nunnely. Sir Philip wished them to meet his mother and sisters, who are now at the priory. The kind baronet asked the tutor too; but the tutor would rather have arranged to meet a ghost in the middle of Nunnely forest.

This night is not calm, although the wild rains have abated. The sky is tossed by a high-rushing moonlight tempest. The moon reigns glorious, glad of the gale, as if she gave herself to his fierce caress with love.

Moore, sitting in the schoolroom, hears the storm roar along the hall-front. He wants no shelter; he desires no subdued sounds.

“I am sick at heart of this cell,” says he.

He leaves it, and goes where the windows, larger than those in his apartment, admit the sweeping vision of the autumn night-sky. He carries no candle; moonbeams shine on every floor and wall.

Moore wanders through all the rooms. He seems following a phantom from parlour to parlour. In the oak room he stops. This is not chill and fireless like the salon. The hearth is hot and ruddy; the cinders tinkle in the intense heat; near the rug is a little work-table, a desk and a chair.

Does the vision Moore has tracked occupy that chair? You would think so, if you could see him standing before it with interest in his eye.

He makes discoveries. A small satin bag hangs on the chair-back. The desk is open, the keys are in the lock. A pretty seal, a silver pen, a crimson berry or two on a green leaf, a small, clean glove – these trifles at once decorate and disarrange the picture.

Moore spoke.

“Her mark,” he said. “Here she has been – careless, attractive thing! – called away in haste, and forgetting to put all to rights. Why does she leave fascination in her footprints? She is heedless – there is always something to chide in her, but she never offends. Any reprimand from her lover or her husband would naturally melt from his lips in a kiss. Better pass half an hour in remonstrating with her than a day in praising any other woman alive. Am I muttering? Stop that.”

He did stop it. He stood thinking, and then he closed the curtains. He added fuel to the fire; he lit a candle, and placed another chair at the desk; and he sat down.

Taking from his pocket a small notebook and a pencil, he began to write in a cramped, compact hand. Come near, reader. Stoop over his shoulder, and read as he scribbles.

“It is nine o’clock; the carriage will not return before eleven. Freedom is mine till then; I may occupy her room, with her little mementoes about me.

“I used rather to like Solitude. I once could court Solitude serenely, and imagine my heart easier when I found her – mute, but majestic.

“Since that day I called S. to me in the schoolroom, and she came and sat so near my side; since she opened the trouble of her mind to me, asked my protection, appealed to my strength – since that hour I abhor Solitude. Cold mate of Death!

“It is pleasant to write about her. Through this pencil I can say what I will – say what I dare not even think aloud.

“We have scarcely encountered each other since that evening. Once, when I was alone in the drawing-room, she entered, dressed for a concert at Stilbro’. Her shyness drew a silver veil between us. Much triteness have I heard and read about ‘maiden modesty,’ but used properly, the words are good. A delicate splendour robed her, and the modesty of girlhood was her halo. I may be the most fatuous of men, but in truth that shyness of hers touched me exquisitely. I looked a stupid block, I dare say. I was alive to Paradise, as she turned her glance from my glance, and softly averted her head to hide the blush on her cheek.

“I know this is the talk of a dreamer – of a rapt, romantic lunatic. I do dream now and then; how can I help it?

“What a child she is sometimes! What an unsophisticated, untaught thing! She said I thought her childish, and I did. She imagined I despised her. Despised her! It was unutterably sweet to feel myself at once near her and above her – to be conscious of a natural right and power to sustain her, as a husband should sustain his wife.

“I worship her perfections; but it is her faults, her foibles, that bring her near to me, that nestle her to my heart, for a selfish but deeply-natural reason. These faults are the steps by which I can have ascendancy over her.

“It delights my eye to look on her. If I were a king and she the housemaid that swept my palace-stairs, across all that space between us my eye would recognize her qualities; a pulse would beat for her in my heart. Take away her education, her ornaments, her sumptuous dress; place her at a cottage door, in a drab gown; let her offer me there a drink of water, with that smile – I should like her; I should linger to talk with her.

“How careless in her to leave her desk open, where I know she has money! In the lock hang all her keys. There is a purse in that little satin bag; I see the beaded tassel hanging out. All her little failings would, I know, irritate my brother Robert. If they vex me it is a most pleasurable vexation. I delight to find her at fault. I never lecture Henry, never feel disposed to do so. If he does wrong – and that is very seldom, dear, excellent lad! – a word suffices. But the moment her mischievous face meets my eye, expostulatory words crowd to my lips, transforming me into a talker. It puzzles me sometimes. The more teasing her mood, the more I seek her, the better I like her.

“She is never wilder, never less manageable than when she comes in fiery from a ride on the hills; and I confess I have waited an hour in the courtyard for the chance of seeing her return, and for the dearer chance of lifting her from the saddle. I have noticed that she will never permit any man but myself to do that; not even Sir Philip Nunnely. She is always mighty gentle with her young baronet. But I know that she resigns herself to me willingly. Is she conscious how my strength rejoices to serve her? I myself am not her slave; but all my

knowledge, all my prudence, all my calm, and all my power stand in her presence humbly waiting a task. Does she know it?

“I have called her careless. Yet her carelessness never compromises her refinement. Her possessions are frequently astray, but amongst them I never saw anything that did not proclaim the lady – nothing sordid, nothing soiled. Look at the pure kid of this little glove, at the fresh, unsullied satin of the bag.

“What a difference there is between her and Caroline Helstone! Caroline, I fancy, is the soul of conscientious punctuality. She would precisely suit the domestic habits of a certain kinsman of mine – so dexterous, quick and quiet. But what could I do with anything so nearly faultless? She is certainly pretty: but where is there anything to alter, anything to endure, anything to reprimand, to be anxious about? She is a lily of the valley, needing no tint. What pencil dare to paint her? My sweetheart, if I ever have one, must bear affinity to the rose – a sweet, lively delight guarded with prickly peril. I was not made to be mated with a lamb; I should find a young lioness or leopardess more congenial. I should tire of the lamb’s mute, monotonous innocence; I should feel as burdensome the nestling dove which never stirred in my bosom; but my patience would exult in stilling the flutterings and training the energies of the restless falcon.

“O my pupil! Never shall I do more than see, and worship, and wish for thee. Alas! knowing I could make thee happy, will it be my doom to see thee possessed by those who have not that power?

“However kind the hand, if it is feeble, it cannot bend Shirley; and she must be bent. It cannot curb her; and she must be curbed.

“Beware, Sir Philip Nunnely! I never see her at your side without observing her lips compressed, or her brow knit, in resolute endurance of some trait of your character which she does not like, but believes atoned for by a virtue. I observe her slight recoil when you draw a little too near, and gaze a little too expressively, and whisper a little too warmly.

“I see a priest of Juno: he stands before me, watching late and lone at a shrine in an Argive temple. For years of solitary ministry he has lived on dreams. He loves the idol he serves, and prays day and night that his frenzy may be fed. She has heard; she will favour him. He waits at the altar.

“A shock of heaven and earth is felt by that brave, lonely watcher. He is wrapped in sudden light. Through the roof, through the wide-yawning, vast blue of heaven, pours a wondrous descent, dread as the downrushing of stars. He has what he asked. I see an insufferable glory burning terribly between the pillars. Gods be merciful and quench it!

“In the morning, a pious Argive enters to make an early offering. There was thunder in the night; the bolt fell here. The shrine is shivered, the marble pavement split and blackened. Saturnia’s statue rises chaste, grand, untouched; at her feet piled ashes lie pale. No priest remains; he who watched will be seen no more.

“There is the carriage! Let me lock up the desk and pocket the keys. She will be seeking them tomorrow; she will have to come to me asking if I have seen them, looking ashamed, conscious that this is the twentieth time of asking. I will tantalize her, before restoring them with a lecture. Here is the bag, too, and the purse; the glove – pen – seal. She shall wring them all out of me slowly and separately – only by confession, penitence, entreaty. Every feature of her face, her bright eyes, her lips, shall go through each change they know, for my

pleasure – display each exquisite variety of glance and curve, to delight, thrill, perhaps more hopelessly to enchain me. If I must be her slave, I will not lose my freedom for nothing.”

He locked the desk, pocketed all the property, and went.

Chapter 30

RUSHEDGE – A CONFESSIONAL

Everybody said it was high time for Mr. Robert Moore to return home. The gossips agreed that it was not business that kept him away. He had finished that long ago. He had soon run down his four ringleaders; he had attended their trial, heard their conviction and sentence, and seen them safely shipped prior to transportation.

The newspapers had reported this. None hailed his success, though the mill-owners were glad of it, trusting that the terrors of the law would from now on paralyse the disaffected. Disaffection, however, was still heard muttering to himself in alehouses.

One report affirmed that Moore dared not come to Yorkshire; he knew his life was forfeit if he did.

“I’ll tell him that,” said Mr. Yorke, when his foreman mentioned the rumour; “and if that does not bring him home full gallop, nothing will.”

Either that or some other motive at last recalled him. He wrote to Joe Scott naming the day he should arrive at Stilbro’, and Joe Scott having informed Mr. Yorke, that gentleman went to meet him.

It was market-day. Moore arrived in time to take his usual place at the market dinner, where the assembled manufacturers received him with distinction, daring in private to do what they would not do in public – hailing him as their champion. Moore’s unshaken nonchalance dampened their enthusiasm and held it in a low, smouldering state.

Mr. Yorke, the president of these dinners, witnessed his young friend’s bearing complacently. He despised men who were fooled by flattery or popularity. Indifference appeased his rough spirit.

Robert, leaning back in his chair, quiet and almost surly, while the clothiers and blanket-makers praised him, was a delectable sight for Mr. Yorke. Moore drooped his head, and shrank before the tradesmen’s congratulations. He soon forsook the wine and took to the road. Mr. Yorke followed him, and they rode out of Stilbro’ together.

It was late in the day. The sun’s last ray had already faded from the cloud-edges, and the October night was casting her shadow over the moorlands.

Mr. Yorke, moderately exhilarated with drink, and pleased to have young Moore as a comrade, did much of the talking. He touched briefly on the trials and conviction; he passed thence to the gossip of the neighbourhood, and before long he attacked Moore on his personal concerns.

“Bob, I believe you are worsted, and you deserve it. Fortune offered you twenty thousand pounds; you only had to hold out your hand and take it. And what did you do? You called for a horse and rode to Warwickshire. Yet Fortune waited for you. You might still have had the prize.

“Then, instead of thundering home in a breakneck gallop and laying your laurels at her feet, you coolly went to London. What you have done there Satan knows; nothing, I believe, but sat and sulked.”

“And who is to have this prize you talk so much about?”

“Only a baronet; that is all. She will be Lady Nunnely before Christmas. Fool of a lad! I swear you might have had her.”

“By what sign, Mr. Yorke?”

“By every sign – by the light of her eyes; her cheeks grew red when your name was mentioned.”

“My chance is quite over, I suppose?”

“It ought to be. But it is worth trying. I call this Sir Philip milk and water. And then he writes verses. You are above that, at all events.”

“Would you advise me to propose, late as it is, Mr. Yorke?”

“You can but try, Robert. If she has a fancy for you, she will forgive much. But, my lad, you are laughing.”

“I have quarrelled with myself, Yorke. I have battered my head by driving it against a wall.”

“Why, what has gone wrong?”

“The machinery of all my nature; the whole engine of this human mill; the boiler, which I take to be the heart, is fit to burst.”

“Ye’ll be jingling into poetry, Robert.”

“Hideous, base blunder! You may commit in a moment what you will rue for years. Yorke, if I got off horseback and laid myself down in the road, would you have the goodness to gallop over me, backwards and forwards, about twenty times?”

“Wi’ all the pleasure in life, if there were no such thing as a coroner’s inquest.”

“I certainly believed she loved me. I have seen her eyes sparkle radiantly when she saw me in a crowd; she has flushed up crimson when she has offered me her hand, and said, ‘How do you do, Mr. Moore?’

“My name had a magical influence over her,” continued Moore. “She blushed when others said it. She pronounced it in her most musical tone. She took an interest in me; she was anxious about me; she wished me well; she sought to benefit me. I could come to but one conclusion – this is love.

“Yorke, in her I saw youth and beauty; and power. Her wealth offered me the redemption of my honour. She had aided me substantially by a loan of five thousand pounds. Could I believe she loved me? Indeed I smiled at her naïveté and simplicity in showing her love. That whip of yours seems to have a good heavy handle, Yorke; swing it about your head and knock me out of the saddle, if you please.”

“Patience, Robert, till the moon rises and I can see you. Did you love her or not?”

“She is very pretty, in her own style. She has a look of a thing made out of fire and air, at which I stand and marvel, without a thought of clasping it. She attracted my interest and vanity. I never felt as if nature meant her to be my other and better self. When that question came to me, I flung it off, saying brutally that I should be rich with her and ruined without her – vowing I would be practical, and not romantic.”

“A very sensible resolve,” said Mr. Yorke.

“With this sensible resolve I walked up to Fieldhead one night last August, the eve of my departure. I had sent a note, and I found her at home, and alone.

“She received me without embarrassment, for she thought I came on business. I was embarrassed enough, but determined. I hardly know how I got

the operation over. I sternly offered myself – my fine person – with my debts, of course, as a settlement.

“It vexed me to find that she neither blushed, trembled, nor looked down. She responded, ‘I doubt whether I have understood you, Mr. Moore.’

“And I had to go over the whole proposal twice, before she would fully take it in. And then, what did she do? Instead of faltering a sweet Yes, or maintaining a soft, confused silence, she started up, walked twice fast through the room, and exclaimed, ‘God bless me!’

“Yorke, I stood on the hearth, and I knew my doom. There was no misunderstanding her aspect and voice. She stopped and looked at me.

“‘God bless me!’ she repeated, in that shocked, indignant, yet saddened tone. ‘You have made a strange proposal; and if you knew how strangely you worded it and looked it, you would be startled at yourself. You spoke like a brigand who demanded my purse rather than like a lover who asked my heart.’

“I knew, as she uttered it, it was true. I looked at her, dumb and wolfish. She at once enraged and shamed me.

“‘Gérard Moore, you know you don’t love Shirley Keeldar,’ she said. I might have broken out into false swearing – vowed that I did love her; but I could not lie in her face. Besides, she would not have believed me. She would never have mistaken my half-coarse, half-cold admiration for true manly love.

“Next, she sat down in the window-seat and cried passionately. Her eyes were haughty, pained; saying, you have outraged me. She added words.

“‘I did respect – I did like you,’ she said, ‘Yes, as much as if you were my brother; and you – you want to make a speculation of me, for that mill!’

“And what do you think I said? ‘Whatever my own feelings were, I was persuaded you loved me, Miss Keeldar.’

“Beautiful, was it not? She sat quite confounded. ‘Is it Robert Moore that speaks?’ I heard her mutter. ‘Do you mean,’ she asked aloud, ‘you thought I loved as we love those we wish to marry? You insinuate that all the frank kindness I have shown you has been a complicated, bold, and immodest manœuvre to ensnare a husband. You imply that at last you come here out of pity to offer me your hand, because I have courted you. Let me say this: you have seen wrong. Your mind is warped; you have judged wrong. Your tongue betrays you; you now speak wrong. I never loved you. Be at rest there. My heart is as pure of passion for you as yours is barren of affection for me.’

“I hope I was answered, Yorke?

“‘I seem to be blind and besotted,’ was my remark.

“‘Loved you!’ she cried. ‘Why, I have been as frank with you as a sister – never shunned you, never feared you. Your presence cannot make me tremble, nor quicken my pulse.’

“I alleged that the sound of my name moved her; it made her blush.

“‘Not for your sake!’ she declared briefly. I urged explanation, but could get none.

“‘When I sat beside you at the school feast, did you think I loved you then? When I called on you in the counting-house, when I walked with you on the pavement, did you think I loved you then?’

“I said I did. Yorke, she rose, she grew tall, she expanded almost to flame.

“‘Then you say that I have acted as no woman can act without degrading herself. You were once high in my esteem, but are now hurled down; you, once intimate in my friendship, are cast out. Go!’

“I went not. I had seen her lip quiver. I knew another storm of tears would fall, and then I believed some calm must follow, and I would wait for it.

“This time she wept more softly. Her eyes lifted to me a gaze more reproachful than haughty, more mournful than incensed.

“‘O Moore!’ said she. I groaned.

“‘I have done wrong,’ I said, ‘and I will go.’

“I took my hat. Yet I believed she would not let me depart. But she was silent. I was obliged to turn back of my own accord when I reached the door, and to say, ‘Forgive me.’

“‘I could, if there was not myself to forgive too,’ was her reply; ‘but to mislead an intelligent man I must have done wrong.’

“I broke out suddenly with some declamation I do not remember. I know that I sincerely wished to absolve her. She had done no wrong.

“At last she extended her hand. For the first time I wished to take her in my arms and kiss her. I did kiss her hand many times.

“‘Some day we shall be friends again,’ she said, ‘when you have had time to read my actions in a true light, and not so horribly to misinterpret them. Time may give you the right key to all.’

“Drops rolled slow down her cheeks. She wiped them away.

“‘I am deeply sorry for what has happened,’ she sobbed. So was I, God knows! Thus were we parted.”

“A queer tale!” commented Mr. Yorke.

“I’ll do it no more,” vowed his companion; “never more will I mention marriage to a woman unless I feel love. Credit and commerce may take care of themselves. I mean to work diligently, and wait patiently. If the worst comes, I will take an emigrant’s berth, and go out with Louis to America. No woman shall ever again feel towards me as Miss Keeldar felt. In no woman’s presence will I ever again stand such a fool and a knave, such a brute and a puppy.”

“Tut!” said the imperturbable Yorke, “you make too much of it. Still, I am surprised that she did not love you; and that you did not love her. You are both young; you are both handsome, and have wit enough. What ailed you that you could not agree?”

“We never could be at home with each other, Yorke. We jarred when we came very near. I have sat at one side of a room and observed her when she was most natural and lively. I have drawn a little nearer, have joined the circle round her seat, and been left alone with her. Were we happy thus? For myself, I must say No. Always a feeling of constraint came over me; I became stern and strange. We talked politics and business. If we had confidences, they were confidences of the counting-house, not of the heart. She never crept into my heart.”

“Well, lad, it is a queer thing. I don’t mind telling thee that thy talk brings back a glimpse of my own past life. Twenty-five years ago I tried to persuade a beautiful woman to love me, and she would not. I had not the key to her nature; she was a stone wall to me, doorless and windowless.”

“But you loved her, Yorke; you worshipped Mary Cave. You were never a fortune-hunter.”

“Ay, I did love her; but then she was beautiful as the moon. There is naught like her in these days. Miss Helstone, maybe, has a look of her, but nobody else.”

“Who has a look of her?”

“That quiet, delicate Miss Helstone. Many a time I have looked at the lassie in church, when she sits in shadow, and is very still and very pale, like a marble statue.”

“Was Mary Cave in that style?”

“Far grander! You wondered why she hadn’t wings and a crown. She was a stately, peaceful angel, was my Mary.”

“Mary Cave was not what you think her, Yorke. I have seen her picture at the rectory. She is no angel, but a fair, regular-featured woman – rather too lifeless for my taste. But supposing—”

“Robert,” interrupted Yorke, “I could fell you off your horse this moment. However, I won’t. I know well enough that the passion I still have is only the remnant of an illusion. If Miss Cave had possessed either feeling or sense, she would have preferred me to that copper-faced despot.”

“Supposing, Yorke, she had been educated (no women were educated in those days); supposing she had possessed a thoughtful, original mind, a love of knowledge, which she took an artless delight in receiving from your lips; supposing her conversation was varied and graceful; supposing that when you were near her, you were at once comforted and contented; supposing that whenever you looked at her or thought of her, you ceased to be hard and calculating, and felt an unselfish longing to protect and cherish; supposing that when you took your Mary’s little hand, you felt it tremble just as a warm little bird trembles when you take it from its nest; supposing you had noticed her shrink into the background on your entrance into a room, yet if you sought her out she welcomed you with the sweetest smile, and only turned her eyes away lest they should reveal too much; supposing, in short, your Mary had been modest, sensitive and pure – would you have left her, to court another woman for her wealth?”

Mr. Yorke raised his hat, and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

“The moon is up,” was his only remark.

“Yorke, if Mary had loved you silently yet faithfully, chastely yet fervently, would you have left her?”

“Robert!” He lifted his arm, and paused. “Robert! I might swear thunderous oaths that, in the case you put, death only should have parted me from Mary. But I have lived in the world fifty-five years; I have been forced to study human nature; and, to speak a dark truth, if Mary had loved me, if I had been secure of her affection, the odds are” (he let his hand fall heavy on the saddle) – “the odds are I should have left her!”

They rode side by side in silence. Before either spoke again they were on the other side of Rushedge. Briarfield’s lights starred the purple skirt of the moor. Robert recommenced first.

“I believe that we can get nothing in this world worth keeping, except through struggle or peril. We err, we fall, we are humbled; then we walk more carefully. If the soul has strength, it conquers and rules thereafter.”

“What art thou going to do now, Robert? What are thy plans?”

“For my private plans, I’ll keep them to myself – which is very easy, as at present I have none. As for my public plans, my views are a little altered. While I was in Birmingham and London I looked a little into reality, considered closely and at their source the causes of the troubles of this country. I went where there was want of food, of fuel, of clothing; where there was no work and no hope. I saw what taught me a new lesson, and filled me with fresh

feelings. I have no more softness or sentiment than previously; mutiny and ambition I regard as I have always regarded them. I should resist a riotous mob just as before; I should hunt a ringleader as eagerly as ever; but I should do it now chiefly for the sake of those he misled. Something there is to look to, Yorke, beyond a man's personal interest. To respect himself, a man must believe he is just to his fellow-men. Unless I am more considerate to ignorance, more forbearing to suffering, than I have been, I shall scorn myself as grossly unjust. – What now?" he said, addressing his horse, which had turned to a wayside trough. "Yorke, ride on; I must let him drink."

Yorke accordingly rode slowly forwards. Stilbro' Moor was left behind; plantations rose shadowy on either hand; they were descending the hill; they were almost home.

This close to the village, Mr. Yorke was not startled to hear a voice speak behind the wall. The words, however, were peculiar.

"When the wicked perisheth there is shouting," it said; "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more" (with a deeper growl): "Terrors take hold of him as waters; hell is naked before him. He shall die without knowledge."

A fierce flash and sharp gunshot violated the calm of night. Yorke, even before he turned, knew the four convicts of Birmingham were avenged.

Chapter 31

UNCLE AND NIECE

The die was cast. Sir Philip Nunnely knew it; Shirley knew it; Mr. Sympson knew it. That evening, when the Fieldhead family dined at Nunnely Priory, decided the business.

Two or three things combined to bring the baronet to a point. He had observed that Miss Keeldar looked pensive and delicate. This struck him on his poetic side. A spontaneous sonnet brewed in his brain; and while it was working there, one of his sisters persuaded his lady-love to sit down to the piano and sing one of his own ballads.

It chanced that Shirley, the moment before, had been gazing from a window. She had seen that stormy moonlight which Louis Moore was at the same instant contemplating from her own oak-parlour window; she had seen the trees wrestling with the gale, and heard the roar of the forest. She turned back touched, and wakened.

She sang, as requested. There was much about love in the ballad – faithful love that disaster could not shake; that in poverty clung closer. The words were set to a fine old air, and Shirley sang them well, with feeling and passion.

On leaving the instrument she sat down by the fire. The ladies were round her; none of them spoke. They looked upon her as quiet poultry might look on an egret, or an ibis. What made her sing so? They never sang so, with such expression. It was decidedly improper. Shirley was judged.

Moreover, old Lady Nunnely eyed her stonily from her great chair. Her gaze said, “This woman is not of my kind. I object to her as my son’s wife.”

Her son, catching the look, read its meaning. He grew alarmed: he must make haste.

The room they were in had once been a picture-gallery, and still had a shadowy, long-withdrawing look. A deep recess with a couch, a cabinet and a window formed a room within a room. Two persons standing there might talk quietly, and no-one be the wiser.

Sir Philip persuaded two of his sisters to sing a duet; the elder ladies were conversing together. He was pleased to notice that Shirley rose to look at the pictures. He had a tale to tell about one beautiful ancestress; so he joined her, and began to tell it.

There were mementoes of the same lady in the cabinet within the recess, and while Shirley was stooping to examine the missal and the rosary, and while the Misses Nunnely indulged in a prolonged screech, guiltless of expression, Sir Philip stooped too, and whispered a few hurried sentences. At first Miss Keeldar was so still you might have fancied her changed to a statue; but she presently looked up and answered. They parted. Miss Keeldar returned to the fire, and resumed her seat. The baronet gazed after her, then went and stood behind his sisters. Only Mr. Sympson had noticed the pantomime.

That gentleman drew his own conclusions. Had he been as acute as he was meddling, he might have seen something in Sir Philip’s face which corrected his ideas. Ever shallow and hasty, he went home quite cock-a-hoop.

He was not a man that kept secrets well. The next morning, while employing his son's tutor as his secretary, he must needs announce to him, with much flimsy pomp of manner, that he had better prepare himself for an early return south, as Mr. Sympson's important business in Yorkshire was now on the brink of fortunate completion. His anxious efforts were likely, at last, to be crowned with success. A truly eligible addition was about to be made to the family.

"Sir Philip Nunnely?" Louis Moore guessed.

Mr. Sympson treated himself to a pinch of snuff and a chuckling laugh, before ordering the tutor to proceed with business.

For a day or two Mr. Sympson continued as bland as oil, but also he seemed to sit on pins. He was for ever looking out of the window and listening for carriage-wheels. He waited to be consulted, for lawyers to be summoned, for settlement discussions to begin.

At last there came a letter for Miss Keeldar. He knew the handwriting; he knew the crest on the seal. He handed it to her, but he did not see it read, for Shirley took it to her own room; nor did he see it answered, for she wrote her reply shut up, and it took her the best part of a day. He questioned her whether it was answered; she responded, "Yes."

Again he waited, not daring to speak, kept mute by something in Shirley's face – a very awful and inscrutable something. He thought of calling Louis Moore to ask him for an interpretation of that look; but his dignity forbade it. Moore himself, perhaps, had his own private difficulties connected with that baffling bit of translation; he looked like a student for whom grammars are blank and dictionaries dumb.

Mr. Sympson went to visit the Wynnes. He returned sooner than expected, and requested Miss Keeldar's presence for a "strictly private interview."

She rose, showing no surprise, and followed her uncle into the drawing room like a person about to undergo an extraction at the dentist.

"I have been to De Walden Hall," said Mr. Sympson. He paused. Miss Keeldar studied the carpet and gave no response.

"I have learned," he went on, "a circumstance which surprises me. It seems that Nunnely Priory is shut up – that the family have left the county. It seems that Sir Philip himself has accompanied his mother and sisters."

"Indeed!" said Shirley.

"May I ask if you share the amazement with which I received this news?"

"No, sir."

"Is it news to you?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Sympson fidgeted in his chair. "I mean to have a thorough explanation. I will not be put off. My questions must be answered. I will have clear, satisfactory replies. I am not to be trifled with. (Silence.)

"It is an extraordinary thing – very singular – most odd!" he expostulated.

"I suppose, sir, the family had a right to go."

"Sir Philip is gone!" (with emphasis).

Shirley raised her brows. "Bon voyage!" said she.

"This will not do; this must be altered, ma'am."

He drew his chair forward; he pushed it back; he looked perfectly incensed, and perfectly helpless.

“Come now, uncle,” said Shirley, “do not fret and fume. Ask me what you want to know. I promise you truthful replies.”

“I demand to know, Miss Keeldar, whether Sir Philip has made you an offer?”

“He has.”

“He made you an offer that night we dined at the priory? He proposed in the recess? I saw it all. Subsequently you received a letter from him. On what subject?”

“No matter.”

“Ma’am, is that the way in which you speak to me?”

Shirley’s foot tapped quick on the carpet.

“There you sit, silent and sullen – you promised truthful replies.”

“Sir, I have answered you thus far. Proceed.”

“I should like to see that letter.”

“You cannot see it.”

“I must and shall, ma’am; I am your guardian.”

“Having ceased to be a ward, I have no guardian.”

“Ungrateful being! Reared by me as my own daughter—”

“Once more, uncle, have the kindness to keep to the point. Let us both remain cool. Listen! You have asked me whether Sir Philip made me an offer. That question is answered. What do you wish to know next?”

“I desire to know whether you accepted or refused him, and know it I will.”

“Certainly, you ought to know it. I refused him.”

“Refused him! You – you, Shirley Keeldar, refused Sir Philip Nunnely?”

“I did.”

The poor gentleman bounced from his chair. “There it is! There it is!”

“I am sincerely sorry, uncle, that you are so disappointed.”

Concession and contrition never do any good with some people. They merely harden them. One such was Mr. Sympson.

“I disappointed? What is it to me? You would insinuate, perhaps, that I have motives?”

“Most people have motives for their actions.”

“She accuses me to my face! She charges me with bad motives!”

“I did not say bad motives. Uncle, you tire me. I want to go away.”

“No! I will be answered. What are your intentions, Miss Keeldar, in respect of matrimony?”

“To be quiet, and to do just as I please.”

“Just as you please! Wholly indecorous.”

“Mr. Sympson, I advise you not to become insulting. You know I will not bear that.”

“You read French. Your mind is poisoned with French novels. You have imbibed French principles.”

“You are now treading on dangerous ground, sir. Beware!”

“It will end in infamy. I have foreseen it all along.”

“Do you assert, sir, that something in which I am concerned will end in infamy?”

“That it will – that it will. You said just now you would act as you please. You acknowledge no rules – no limitations.”

“Silly stuff! You tire me, uncle.”

“What, madam, could be your reasons for refusing Sir Philip?”

“At last there is a sensible question; I shall be glad to reply. Sir Philip is too young for me. I regard him as a boy. All his relations would be annoyed if he married me. I am not his equal in the world’s view.”

“Is that all?”

“Our dispositions are not compatible. He is very amiable; but not my master in any point. I could not trust myself with his happiness. I will accept no hand which cannot hold me in check.”

“I thought you liked to do as you please. You are vastly inconsistent.”

“When I promise to obey, it shall be in the belief that I can keep that promise. I could not obey a youth like Sir Philip. Besides, he would never command me. He would expect me always to rule, and I have no taste for that.”

“You no taste for swaggering, and ordering, and ruling?”

“Not my husband; only my uncle. Any man who wishes to live in decent comfort with me as a husband must be able to control me.”

“I wish you had a real tyrant.”

“A tyrant would not hold me for a day. I would rebel.”

“You bewilder one’s brain with your self-contradiction!”

“That is evident.”

“You had better find some doting fool,” said Mr. Sympson; “you might pin him to your apron.”

“I might do that with a boy; did I not say I prefer a master? One who can control my impatient temper; a man whose approval can reward, whose displeasure can punish me; a man I shall feel it impossible not to love, and very possible to fear.”

“What is there to hinder you from doing all this with Sir Philip? He is a man of rank; he is a poet. You and Henry rave about poetry! Marry a poet, then, in God’s name! Marry Sir Philip.”

“*You* are almost as good a poet as he.”

“Madam, you are wandering from the point.”

“Indeed, uncle, I wanted to do so. Do not let us get out of temper with each other; it is not worth while.”

“Out of temper, Miss Keeldar! I should be glad to know who is out of temper.”

“I am not, yet.”

“If you mean that I am, you are guilty of impertinence.”

“You will be soon, if you go on at that rate.”

“There it is! You would try the patience of Job. This is not a laughing matter, miss. I am convinced that there is mischief here. You described just now, with far too much freedom for your years and sex, the sort of individual you would prefer as a husband. Pray, did you paint from the life?”

Shirley opened her lips, but instead of speaking she only glowed rose-red.

“I shall have an answer!”

“It was an historical picture, uncle, from several originals. I have been in love several times, with heroes of many nations.”

“What next—”

“And philosophers.”

“She is mad!”

“Once I loved Socrates; and I admired Themistocles.”

“Miss Keeldar—”

“To pass over a few centuries, Washington was a plain man, but I liked him; but to speak of the present—”

“Ah! the present.”

“To quit crude schoolgirl fancies, and come to realities—”

“Realities indeed, ma’am!”

“To reveal the present idol of my soul—”

“You will make haste, if you please. Confess.”

“Confess I must. My heart is full of the secret. It must be spoken. I only wish you were Mr. Helstone; you would sympathize with me better.”

“I will know the name!”

“My hero is rather like Mr. Helstone. Their very faces are similar – a pair of hawks – dry, direct, decided. But my hero is the mightier of the two. His mind has the clearness of the deep sea, the patience of its rocks, the force of its billows.”

“Rant and fustian! Miss Keeldar, does the person reside in Briarfield? Speak, girl!”

“That was well said, uncle. ‘Speak, girl!’ It is quite tragic. England has howled savagely against this man, uncle, and she will one day roar exultingly over him. This country will change in her demeanour to him; he will never change in his duty to her. Come, uncle, I’ll tell you his name. Arthur Wellesley, Lord Wellington.”

Mr. Simpson rose up furious. He bounced out of the room, but immediately bounced back again, shut the door, and resumed his seat.

“Ma’am, you shall tell me this. Will your principles permit you to marry a man without money – a man below you?”

“Never a man below me.”

“Will you, Miss Keeldar, marry a poor man? I insist upon knowing. My family respectability shall not be compromised.”

“A good resolution; keep it.”

“Madam, it is you who shall keep it.”

“Impossible, sir, since I form no part of your family.”

“Whom will you marry, Miss Keeldar?”

“Not Mr. Sam Wynne, because I scorn him; not Sir Philip Nunnely, because I only esteem him.”

“Such obstinacy could not be unless you were under improper influence.”

“What do you mean? Improper influence! What old woman’s cackle is that?”

“Are you a young lady?”

“I am a thousand times better: I am an honest woman, and as such I will be treated.”

“Do you know” (leaning mysteriously forward, and speaking with ghastly solemnity) – “do you know the whole neighbourhood teems with rumours respecting you and a bankrupt tenant of yours, the foreigner Moore?”

“Does it?”

“It does. Is it he you will marry?”

“He is handsome, and manly, and commanding.”

“You declare it to my face! The knave!”

“He is talented and resolute. He is a ruler in his bearing.”

“She glories in it! No shame, no fear!”

“When we speak the name of Moore, shame should be forgotten and fear discarded. The Moores know only honour and courage.”

“She is mad. That Moore is the brother of my son’s tutor. Would you let *him* call you sister?”

Bright shone Shirley’s eye now. “No, no; not for a century of life.”

“But Mr. Louis Moore’s sister you will be.”

“Mr. Sympson, I am sick at heart with all this weak trash; I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your gods are not my gods. We do not view things in the same light; we do not measure them by the same standard; we hardly speak in the same tongue. It is not that I hate you; you are a good sort of man. Perhaps you mean well in your way. But we are ever at variance. You annoy me with small meddling, with petty tyranny; you exasperate my temper. As to your narrow rules, your little prejudices, bundle them off, Mr. Sympson; I’ll none of them. I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed and faith than you.”

“Another creed! I believe she is an infidel.”

“An infidel to your religion, an atheist to your god.”

“An *atheist!!!*”

“Your god, sir, is the world. In my eyes you are an idolater. Sir, your god, your fish-tailed Dagon, rises before me as a demon. You have raised him to a throne and given him a sceptre. Behold how hideously he governs! See him busied at the work he likes best – making marriages. He binds the young to the old, the strong to the imbecile. He fetters the dead to the living. In his realm there is secret hatred; there is unspoken disgust; there is treachery and vice. In his dominions children grow unloving between parents who have never loved; infants are nursed on deception from their very birth; they are reared amongst lies. Your god is a masked Death.”

“This language is terrible! My daughters and you must associate no longer, Miss Keeldar. I could not have believed—”

“Now, sir, do you begin to be aware that it is useless to scheme for me; that in doing so you but sow the wind to reap the whirlwind? I am anchored on a resolve you cannot shake.”

Mr. Sympson was bewildered. “Never heard such language!” he muttered; “Never was so addressed in my life!”

“You are quite confused, sir. You had better withdraw, or I will.”

He rose hastily. “We must leave this place; they must pack up at once. She’s not fit for them to be with.”

He made his way to the door; dropped his snuff-box, leaving the contents scattered on the carpet; and stumbled out, almost falling over Tartar. In his exasperation he hurled an oath at the dog and a coarse epithet at his mistress.

“Poor Mr. Sympson! he is both feeble and vulgar,” said Shirley to herself. “My head aches, and I am tired,” she added; and leant her head upon a cushion.

An intruder entering the room a quarter of an hour afterwards found her asleep. He paused, and said, “Miss Keeldar.”

Perhaps his voice harmonized with her dream. Without opening her eyes, she turned her head a little, so that her face became visible: rosy, happy, half smiling, but her eyelashes were wet. Shirley looked like a child that had been naughty and punished, but was now forgiven and at rest.

“Miss Keeldar,” again said the voice. This time it woke her. She looked up, and saw Louis Moore standing two or three yards away.

“O, Mr. Moore!” she said. “I was afraid it was my uncle again: he and I have quarrelled.”

“Mr. Sympson should let you alone,” was the reply. “Can he not see that you are still far from strong?”

“I assure you he did not find me weak. I did not cry when he was here.”

“He is about to leave Fieldhead – so he says. He is now giving orders to his family.”

“Are you and Henry to go?”

“I believe, as far as Henry is concerned, that was the gist of his scarcely intelligible orders; but he may change tomorrow. I doubt whether he will leave you for weeks yet. To myself he addressed some words which will require a little attention and comment by-and-by, when I have time to think about them. At the moment he came in I was busied with a note I had got from Mr. Yorke – I cut short the interview with Mr. Sympson somewhat abruptly. I left him raving. Here is the note. It refers to my brother Robert.”

“I shall be glad to hear news of him. Is he coming home?”

“He is come. He is at Briarmains. Mr. Yorke went yesterday to Stilbro’ to meet him.”

“Mr. Moore, something is wrong – what has happened?”

“If you turn so pale I shall be sorry I have spoken. It might have been worse. Robert is not dead, but much hurt.”

“O sir, it is you who are pale. Sit down.”

“Read the note.”

Miss Keeldar read that last night Robert Moore had been shot at from behind the wall of Milldean plantation; that he was wounded severely, but it was hoped not fatally. Of the assassin, or assassins, nothing was known; they had escaped. “No doubt,” Mr. Yorke wrote, “it was done in revenge.”

“He is my only brother,” said Louis. “Shot like some wild beast from behind a wall.”

“Be hopeful. He will get better – I know he will.” Shirley held her hand over Mr. Moore’s, touching it lightly.

“Well, give me your hand,” he said. Awaiting neither consent nor refusal, he took it. “I am going to Briarmains now,” he went on. “Will you step over to the rectory and tell Caroline Helstone what has happened? She will hear it best from you.”

“Immediately,” said Shirley. “Ought I to say that there is no danger?”

“Say so.”

“You will come back soon, and let me know more?”

“I will either come or write. Good-morning now.”

“You will bear up, come what may.”

“We shall see.”

Shirley’s fingers were obliged to withdraw from the tutor’s. Louis was obliged to relinquish the hand folded in his own.

“I thought I should have had to support her,” he said, as he walked towards Briarmains, “and it is she who has made me strong. That look of pity, that gentle touch! It lay like a snowflake; it thrilled like lightning. A thousand times I have longed to possess that hand – to have it in mine. I have possessed it; her fingers and mine can never be strangers more. Having met once they must meet again.”

Chapter 32

THE SCHOOLBOY AND THE WOOD-NYMPH

His own house, Briarmains, being nearer than the Hollow, Mr. Yorke had conveyed Robert Moore there. He had seen him laid in the best bed, as carefully as if he had been one of his own sons. The sight of Moore's welling blood, the spectacle of the fine head suddenly laid low in the dust, made him indeed the son of the Yorkshire gentleman's heart.

There was nobody else to help him; he had to do it all himself. This utter dependence of the speechless, bleeding young man brought out his benevolence. Mr. Yorke liked to have power; and he now had power over a fellow-creature's life. It suited him.

No less did it suit his wife. Some women would have been terror-struck to see a gory man brought in over their threshold. You would have supposed it a cause for hysterics. No. Mrs. Yorke went into hysterics when Jessie would not leave the garden to come to her knitting; but an attempted murder nearby – a half-murdered man in her best bed – cheered her spirits.

Mrs. Yorke was a woman who, while making her maid-servant miserable, would nurse a hospital full of plague patients like a heroine. She almost loved Moore with her tough heart. She chased Jessie and Rose from his room, and forbade the housemaids to enter it. Moore became the apple of her eye.

Strange! Louis Moore was permitted to sit on the edge of the bed and hold his brother's hand; and Mrs. Yorke bore it well. She allowed him to stay half the day there; she once allowed him to sit up all night in the chamber; she herself rose at five o'clock of a wet November morning, and with her own hands lit the kitchen fire, and made the brothers' breakfast, and served it to them. Majestically arrayed in a boundless flannel wrapper, a shawl and nightcap, she sat and watched them eat, as complacently as a hen beholds her chickens feed. Yet she would not let the cook or the housemaid so much as carry up a basin of gruel.

Two ladies called one day, pale and anxious, and begged earnestly, humbly, to be allowed to see Mr. Moore one instant. Mrs. Yorke hardened her heart, and sent them packing.

But when Hortense Moore came, it was not so bad. Hortense and Mrs. Yorke possessed an exhaustless mutual theme of conversation, in the corrupt tendencies of servants. Their views of this class were similar; they were both suspicious and severe. Hortense, too, showed no jealousy of Mrs. Yorke's attentions to Robert; she did not interfere, but fidgeted about the house and kitchen, making herself generally useful. They both agreed in excluding visitors from the sickroom, and held the young mill-owner captive.

Mr. MacTurk, the surgeon, pronounced his wound to be dangerous, but not hopeless. Mrs. Yorke and Hortense promised to observe his directions faithfully, so Moore was left in their hands.

Doubtless they nursed him to the best of their ability; but something went wrong. The bandages were displaced; great loss of blood followed. MacTurk, being summoned, came in haste. He was one of those surgeons whom it is

dangerous to vex – abrupt in his best moods, in his worst savage. On seeing Moore’s state he relieved his feelings by a little flowery language about meddling womankind.

For the best part of one winter night he and two male assistants were busied about Moore. Shut up alone with him in his chamber, they wrangled with Death over his exhausted frame. The conflict was sharp; it lasted till dawn.

Then the two assistants were left with the patient, while the senior went himself in search of additional strength, in the person of Mrs. Horsfall, the best nurse on his staff. To this woman he gave Moore in charge. She took the responsibility stolidly, as she did also the easy-chair by the bed. That moment she began her reign.

Mrs. Horsfall had one virtue – she obeyed MacTurk’s orders to the letter. In other respects she was no woman, but a dragon. Hortense Moore fell before her; Mrs. Yorke withdrew, crushed; yet both these women were personages of some dignity. Cowed by the breadth, the height, and the brawn of Mrs. Horsfall, they retreated to the back parlour. She, for her part, sat upstairs when she liked, and downstairs when she preferred it. She took her dram of gin three times a day, and her pipe of tobacco.

Morning and evening MacTurk came to see Moore. His case became interesting in the surgeon’s eyes. MacTurk regarded him as a damaged piece of clockwork, which it would be a credit to his skill to set going again. Robert Moore had a pleasant time of it – in pain, in danger, too weak to move, almost too weak to speak, a sort of giantess as his keeper, the three surgeons his sole society. Thus he lay through the whole drear month of November.

At first Moore used feebly to resist Mrs. Horsfall. He hated the sight of her rough bulk, and dreaded the contact of her hard hands; but she taught him docility. She turned him in his bed as another woman would have turned a babe in its cradle. When he was good she addressed him as “my dear”, and when he was bad she sometimes shook him. If he tried to speak when MacTurk was there, she lifted her hand and bade him “Hush!” like a nurse checking a forward child. If she had not smoked and taken gin, it would have been better, he thought; and once, in her absence, he hinted to MacTurk that “that woman was a dram-drinker.”

“Pooh! my dear sir, they are all so,” was the reply. “But drunk or sober, she always remembers to obey me.”

At length the fogs and rains withdrew. Behind November came deep winter – clearness, stillness, frost.

A calm day had settled into a crystalline evening. The world wore a North Pole colouring; the hills were lilac blue; the sky was ice; when the stars rose, they were of white crystal; faint emerald hues tinged the landscape.

What is this, moving in a wood no longer green, no longer even russet, this dark blue object? Why, it is a schoolboy who is trudging home alone, and seeking a certain tree where he can sit. Why is he lingering here? The air is cold and the time grows late. He sits down. What is he thinking about?

Impossible to say; for he is silent, and his face shows nothing. This boy is a stripling of fifteen – slight, and tall for his years. His eye seems prepared to note any attempt to control him; he looks as if he is alert for resistance. Wise teachers avoid unnecessary interference with that lad. He is best let alone. Time will educate and experience train him.

Martin Yorke (for it is a young Yorke) tramples on the name of poetry. Talk sentiment to him, and you would be answered by sarcasm. Yet here he is, wandering alone, waiting on Nature, while she unfolds a page of stern and solemn poetry beneath his attentive gaze.

Being seated, he takes from his satchel a book – a volume of fairy tales. There will be light enough to read by for an hour.

He reads. He is led into a solitary mountain region; he hears bells tinkle on the wind. From the formless folds of the mist there rides a bright vision – a green-robed lady, on a snow-white palfrey. She asks him some mysterious question. He is spell-bound, and must follow her into fairyland.

A second legend bears him to the sea-shore. There tumbles in a strong tide, boiling at the base of dizzy cliffs. Black rocks stretch far into the sea, wreathed in spray. Some lone wanderer is out on these rocks, treading cautiously. He hears a cry. Looking up he sees, at the point of the reef, a tall, pale thing – human-shaped but made of spray – transparent, tremulous, awful.

Hush! Shut the book; hide it in the satchel. Martin hears a tread. The dead leaves rustle on the wood path. Martin watches; the trees part, and a woman emerges.

She is dressed in dark silk, a veil covering her face. Martin never met a lady in this wood before. He observes that she is young; and, if not for the fact that he now recognizes her as one whom he has often pronounced ugly, he would think her beautiful behind the thin gauze of that veil.

She passes him and says nothing. He knew she would. All women are proud monkeys, and he knows no more conceited doll than that Caroline Helstone. The thought is hardly hatched in his mind when the lady retraces her steps to him, raises her veil, and softly asks, “Are you one of Mr. Yorke’s sons?”

No evidence would ever have persuaded Martin Yorke that he blushed when thus addressed; yet blush he did, to the ears.

“I am,” he said bluntly, and encouraged himself to wonder, superciliously, what would come next.

“You are Martin, I think?” It was a simple sentence, a little timid; but it stilled him like a note of music.

Martin had a keen sense of his personality; he felt it right that the girl should know him from his brothers. It was acceptable to hear a lady address him as “Martin,” and not Mr. Martin or Master Martin, which would have lost her his good graces for ever. But so would slipshod familiarity. The slight tone of bashfulness was considered perfectly in place.

“I am Martin,” he said.

“Are your father and mother well?” (it was lucky she did not say papa and mamma; that would have undone all); “and Rose and Jessie?”

“I suppose so.”

“My cousin Hortense is still at Briarmains?”

“Oh yes.” Martin gave a comic half-smile and groan, which the lady responded to. She could guess what the young Yorkes thought of Hortense.

“Does your mother like her?”

“They agree so well about the servants that they can’t help liking each other.”

“It is cold tonight.”

“Why are you out so late?”

“I lost my way in this wood.”

Martin allowed himself a refreshing laugh of scorn. “Lost your way in the mighty forest of Briarmains!”

“I never was here before, and I believe I am trespassing now. You might inform against me if you chose, Martin, and have me fined. It is your father’s wood.”

“I should think I knew that. But I will guide you out.”

“You need not. I have found the track now. Martin,” (a little quickly), “how is Mr. Moore?”

Martin had heard certain rumours; it struck him that it might be amusing to make an experiment.

“Going to die. Nothing can save him. All hope flung overboard!”

She put her veil aside, looked into his eyes, and said, “To die!”

“The women did something about his bandages that finished everything. He would have got better otherwise. I am sure they should be arrested, tried, and brought in for Botany Bay, at the very least.”

The questioner, perhaps, did not hear this judgment. She stood motionless. In two minutes, without another word, she moved forwards; no good-night, no further inquiry. This was not amusing, nor what Martin had calculated on. He expected something dramatic. It was hardly worth while to frighten the girl if she would not entertain him in return. He called, “Miss Helstone!”

She did not turn. He hastened after and overtook her.

“Come; are you uneasy about what I said?”

“You know nothing about death, Martin; you are too young for me to talk to about it.”

“Did you believe me? It’s all flummery! Moore eats like three men. They are always making something tasty for him – cooking some dainty in the kitchen. I think I will play the old soldier, and be fed on the fat of the land like him.”

“Martin!” Her voice trembled. “It is exceedingly wrong of you, Martin. You have almost killed me.”

She stopped and leaned against a tree, shuddering, and as pale as death.

Martin contemplated her with curiosity. In one sense it was intensely interesting; he was beginning to have a relish for discovering secrets. In another sense, it reminded him of what he had once felt when he had heard a blackbird lamenting for her nestlings, which Matthew had crushed with a stone, and that was not a pleasant feeling. He began to cast about in his mind what he could do. He smiled.

“Eureka!” he cried. “I’ll set all straight. You are better now, Miss Caroline. Walk forward.”

Not reflecting that it would be difficult for Miss Helstone to climb a wall or penetrate a hedge, he led her out by a short cut, which meant helping her over some formidable obstacles. While he railed at her for helplessness, he liked to feel himself of use.

“Martin, before we separate, assure me seriously, on your word of honour, that Mr. Moore is better.”

“How much you think of that Moore!”

“No – but – his friends may ask me.”

“You may tell them he is well enough, only idle. You may tell them that he takes mutton chops for dinner, and the best arrowroot for supper.”

“Who nurses him, Martin?”

“Why, a woman as round and big as our water-butt – a rough old girl. It is my belief she knocks him about terribly in that room. I listen at the wall sometimes, and I think I hear her thumping him. You should see her fist. I would not be in his shoes. In fact, it is my private opinion that she eats most of what goes up on the tray to Mr. Moore.”

Profound silence and meditation on Caroline’s part, and a sly watchfulness on Martin’s.

“You never see him, I suppose, Martin?”

“No. I don’t care to. Did not you come to our house with Mrs. Pryor, about five weeks ago, to ask after him?” inquired Martin.

“Yes.”

“I dare say you wished to be shown upstairs?”

“We did wish it; but your mother declined.”

“Ay! I heard it all. She behaved rudely and harshly.”

“She was not kind; for you know, Martin, we are relations, and it is natural we should take an interest in Mr. Moore. But here we must part; we are at your father’s gate.”

“I shall walk home with you.”

“They will miss you, and wonder where you are.”

“Let them. I can take care of myself.”

Martin knew that he had already incurred the penalty of a lecture, and dry bread for his tea. No matter; the evening had provided him with an adventure.

As he walked home with Caroline, he promised to see Mr. Moore, in spite of the dragon who guarded his chamber, and fixed an hour on the next day when Caroline was to come to Briarmains Wood for news. He would meet her at a certain tree.

Having reached home, the dry bread and the lecture were duly administered to him, and he was sent to bed early. He accepted his punishment stoically.

Before going to his chamber he paid a secret visit to the dining-room: a still, cold apartment, seldom used. He stood before the mantelpiece, and lifted his candle to two pictures hung above – two female heads: one, a type of serene beauty, happy and innocent; the other, more lovely, but forlorn and desperate.

“She looked like that,” he said, gazing on the latter sketch, “when she turned white, and leaned against the tree.”

“I suppose,” he pursued, when he was sitting on his bed – “I suppose she is what they call ‘in love’ with that long thing in the next room. Whisht! is that Horsfall clattering him? I wonder he does not yell out; but I suppose she is making the bed. It is queer. Zillah Horsfall is a woman, and Caroline Helstone is a woman; they are not much alike though. Is she a pretty girl, that Caroline? I suspect she is. Very nice to look at – something so clear in her face, so soft in her eyes. I approve of her looking at me. She has long eyelashes. If she behaves well, and continues to suit me, I may do her a good turn. I rather like the idea of dodging my mother and old Horsfall. And I know what reward I will claim – one displeasing to Moore, and agreeable to myself.”

He turned into bed.

Chapter 33

MARTIN'S TACTICS

It was necessary to Martin's plan that he should stay at home that day. Accordingly, he found no appetite for breakfast, and at school-time took a severe pain about his heart, which made it advisable that, instead of setting out to the grammar school with Mark, he should stay in his father's arm-chair by the fireside. With Mark gone to school, and Matthew and Mr. Yorke withdrawn to the counting-house, four other things remained to be done.

The first of these was to obtain some breakfast, which he could not do without; the second, third and fourth were to get his mother, Miss Hortense, and Mrs. Horsfall successfully out of the way before four o'clock that afternoon.

Martin set off to the larder. The servants were in the kitchen, breakfasting behind closed doors; his mother and Miss Moore were airing themselves on the lawn, and discussing the servants. Martin made a fastidious selection of food. There were apples laid upon a shelf; he picked out three. There was pastry on a dish; he selected an apricot puff and a damson tart. On the plain household bread his eye did not dwell; but he surveyed with favour some currant tea-cakes, and chose one. With his clasp-knife, he cut a wing of fowl and a slice of ham; he thought a cold custard-pudding would go with these; and with his booty, he sallied forth into the hall.

He was half-way across when the front door opened, and there stood Matthew. Better far had it been the Devil, horns, hoofs, and all.

Matthew, sceptic and scoffer, had already expressed disbelief in Martin's pain about the heart, and had muttered something about "shamming." The sight now before him – the apples, the tarts, the tea-cakes, and the rest – gave him proof of his own sagacity.

Martin paused one instant; then he saw how this untoward event might be turned to excellent account. It might be handled so as to accomplish his second task – the disposal of his mother. He knew that a collision between him and Matthew always gave Mrs. Yorke a fit of hysterics; after which his mother was sure to indulge in an afternoon in bed. This would suit him perfectly.

The collision duly took place in the hall. A dry laugh, an insulting sneer, met by a cutting reply, were the signals. They rushed at it. Martin made a great deal of noise. In flew the servants, Mrs. Yorke, and Miss Moore; Mr. Yorke was summoned.

"Sons," said he, "one of you must leave my roof if this occurs again."

Martin now allowed himself to be taken off. He had been hurt; he was the younger and slighter; but he was quite cool. He even smiled.

Once during that morning, he seemed to flag. "It is not worth while to bother myself for that Caroline," he remarked. But a quarter of an hour afterwards he was again in the dining-room, looking at the portrait of despair.

"Yes," he said, "I made her sob and shudder. I'll see her smile before I've done with her; besides, I want to outwit all these womenites."

After dinner Mrs. Yorke duly withdrew to her chamber. Now for Hortense.

That lady was just comfortably settled to stocking-mending in the back parlour, when Martin, stretched on the sofa, lazily began to chat about Sarah, the maid at the Hollow. In the course of much verbal meandering he hinted that this damsel was said to have three suitors; and that Miss Mann had said she knew for a fact that now the girl was left in sole charge of the cottage, she often had them to meals, and fed them with the best food in the house.

It needed no more. Hortense could not have lived another hour without going to the Hollow and inspecting the state of matters in person. Only Mrs. Horsfall remained.

Martin, master of the field now, extracted from his mother's work-basket a bunch of keys; with these he opened the sideboard cupboard, produced a black bottle and a small glass, placed them on the table, nimbly mounted the stairs and tapped on Mr. Moore's door. The nurse opened it.

"If you please, ma'am, you are invited to step into the back parlour and take some refreshment. You will not be disturbed; the family are out."

He watched her down; he shut the door. He knew she was safe.

The hard work was done; now for the pleasure. He snatched his cap, and set off for the wood.

It was half-past three. It had been a fine morning, but the sky looked dark now. It was beginning to snow; the wind blew cold; the wood looked dismal, the old tree grim. Martin had to wait, walking to and fro, while the flakes fell faster, and the wind howled pitifully.

"She is long in coming," he muttered. "I wonder why I wish so much to see her? She is not coming for *me*. But I have power over her, and I want to use that power."

He continued his walk.

"Now," he resumed after a while, "if she fails to come, I shall hate and scorn her."

The church clock struck four. He heard a step so quick, so light, that it scarcely sounded on the wood-walk. The wind blew fiercely now, and the snow-storm increased; but on she came.

"Well, Martin," she said eagerly, "how is he?"

"It is queer how much she thinks of him," reflected Martin. "The blinding snow and bitter cold are nothing to her, I believe; I almost wish I had a cloak to wrap her in."

"You have seen him?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh! you promised you would. Now it will be so long before I know anything certain about him, and I am sick of waiting. Martin, do see him, and give him Caroline Helstone's regards, and say she wished to know how he was, and if anything could be done for his comfort."

"I won't."

"You are changed. You were so friendly last night."

"Come, we must not stand in this wood; it is too cold. I am delicate: if you knew what a pain I had in my chest this morning, and how I went without breakfast, you wouldn't bring me here in the snow. Come, I say."

"Are you really delicate, Martin? You have rosy cheeks."

"That's hectic. Will you come, or not?"

"Where?"

“Home with me. I was a fool not to bring a cloak. Put your arm through mine; I’ll take care of you. Will you trust me?”

She looked into his face. “I think I will. Anything rather than return as anxious as I came.”

“I can’t answer for that. However, I promise you shall see Moore yourself.”

“Dear Martin, does he know?”

“Ah! I’m dear now. No, he doesn’t know.”

“And your mother and the others?”

“All is right.”

Caroline mused silently, but she walked on with her guide to Briarmains.

“Will you see him? I won’t, except to announce your arrival.”

“Martin, you are a strange boy, and this is a strange step; but all is strange now. I will see him.”

“Here we are, then. Don’t worry; my father and Matthew are at the mill, Mark is at school, the servants are in the back kitchen, Miss Moore is at the cottage, my mother in her bed, and Mrs. Horsfall in paradise. Observe – the hall is empty, the staircase quiet. The whole house and all its inhabitants are under a spell, which I will not break till you are gone.”

“Martin, I trust you.”

“You never said a better word. Let me take your shawl. I will dry it for you. You are cold and wet. Never mind; there is a fire upstairs. Follow me.”

He left his shoes on the mat, and mounted the stair unshod. Caroline stole after, with noiseless step. At the end of a passage Martin paused before a door and tapped twice – thrice. At last a voice said, “Come in.”

He entered briskly.

“Mr. Moore, a lady called to inquire after you. None of the women were about. It is washing-day, and the maids are up to their ears in soap-suds, so I brought her up here.”

“Is this a place to bring a lady to, you absurd lad?”

“No; so I’ll take her off.”

“Martin, stay here. Who is she?”

“Your grandmother.”

“Martin,” said the softest whisper at the door, “don’t be foolish.”

“Is she there?” inquired Moore hastily.

“She is there, fit to faint. She is standing on the mat.”

“Martin, you are an imp. Show her in.”

“Come, Miss Caroline.”

“Miss Caroline!” repeated Moore.

And when Miss Caroline entered she was met by a standing, thin, wasted figure, who took both her hands.

“I give you a quarter of an hour,” said Martin, as he withdrew. “I will wait in the gallery; nothing shall approach. But if you stay longer, I leave you to your fate.”

He shut the door. In the gallery he was as elated as a king. No adventure had ever made him feel so important or so interested.

“You are come at last,” said Moore, gazing on his visitress with hollow eyes.

“Did you expect me before?”

“For a month, near two months, I have been in sad pain, and danger, and misery, Cary.”

“I could not come.”

“Couldn’t you? But the rectory and Briarmains are not two miles apart.”

There was pain and there was pleasure in the girl’s face as she defended herself.

“I came with mamma the very day we heard what had happened. Mr. MacTurk then told us it was impossible to admit any stranger.”

“But afterwards – for many weeks past I have waited and listened. My heart told me you must think of me, Cary. Not that I deserve thought; but we are old friends – we are cousins.”

“I came again, Robert; mamma and I came again. And Mrs. Yorke turned us away, saying, ‘I am responsible for his life; it shall not be forfeited for half an hour’s idle gossip.’ But I must not tell you all she said; it was very disagreeable. However, we came yet again – mamma, Miss Keeldar, and I. This time we thought we should conquer, as we were three against one. But Mrs. Yorke opened such a battery.”

Moore smiled. “What did she say?”

“Things that astonished us. Shirley laughed; I cried; mamma was seriously annoyed. We were all three driven away. Since then I have walked past the house every day, just for the satisfaction of looking up at your window.”

“I have wished for you, Caroline.”

“I did not know that; I never dreamt one instant that you thought of me. If I had imagined—”

“Mrs. Yorke would still have beaten you.”

“She would not. I would have come to the kitchen door; the servants should have let me in, and I would have walked straight upstairs. In fact, it was far more the fear of intruding on you that baffled me than the fear of Mrs. Yorke.”

“Only last night I despaired of ever seeing you again. Weakness has wrought terrible depression in me.”

“And you sit alone?”

“Worse than alone.”

“But you must be getting better, since you can leave your bed?”

“I doubt whether I shall live, after such exhaustion.”

“You shall go home to the Hollow. I will alter this. This shall be altered, were there ten Mrs. Yorkes to do battle with.”

“Cary, you make me smile.”

“Do smile; smile again. Shall I tell you what I should like? I should like you to be brought to the rectory, and given to me and mamma.”

“A precious gift! I have not laughed since they shot me till now.”

“Do you suffer pain, Robert?”

“Not so much now; but I am hopelessly weak, and my mind is inexpressibly dark.”

“I understand your feelings,” she said; “I experienced something like it. Since we met, I too have been very ill.”

“Very ill?”

“I thought I should die. The tale of my life seemed told. Every night, just at midnight, I used to wake from awful dreams; and I felt I was close to the end.”

“You speak my experience,” said Moore.

“I believed I should never see you again; and I grew so thin. I could do nothing, and I could not eat. Yet you see I am better.”

“I am too feeble to say what I feel; but while you speak I do feel.”

“Here I am at your side, where I thought never more to be. You look at me kindly. I despaired of that.”

Moore sighed – a sigh so deep it was nearly a groan. “May I be spared to make atonement.”

“For what?”

“We will not touch on it now, Cary. Was Mrs. Pryor with you during your illness?”

“Yes.” Caroline smiled brightly. “You know she is my mamma?”

“I have heard – Hortense told me. Does she make you happy?”

“What! mamma? She is dear to me; how dear I cannot say. I was altogether weary, and she held me up.”

“That is a coal of fire heaped on my head; and so is every word you address to me. Come nearer, Lina; give me your hand – if my thin fingers do not scare you.”

She took those thin fingers; she bent her head and touched them to her lips. Moore was much moved. A tear coursed down his hollow cheek.

“I’ll keep these things in my heart, Cary; that kiss I will put by, and you shall hear of it again one day.”

“Come out!” cried Martin, opening the door – “come away; you have had twenty minutes.”

“She will not stir yet, you hempseed.”

“I dare not stay longer, Robert.”

“Can you promise to return?”

“No, she can’t,” responded Martin. “The thing mustn’t become customary; I’ll not have it repeated.”

“You’ll not have it repeated?”

“Hush! don’t vex him,” urged Caroline; “we could not have met today but for him. But I will come again, if you wish.”

“It is my one wish.”

“Come away this minute. My mother has coughed, and got up. Let her only catch you on the stairs, Miss Caroline! You’re not to bid him good-bye, you are to march.”

Martin made them part. He half carried Caroline down the stairs, and wrapped her shawl round her, and if his mother’s tread had not then creaked in the gallery, and diffidence held him back, he would have claimed his reward. He would have said, “Now, Miss Caroline, for all this give me one kiss.” But she was already across the snowy road.

“She is my debtor, and I will be paid.” He flattered himself that it was opportunity, not boldness, which had failed him. He misjudged the quality of his own nature, and held it for something lower than it was.

Chapter 34

CASE OF DOMESTIC PERSECUTION – REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF PIOUS PERSEVERANCE IN THE DISCHARGE OF RELIGIOUS DUTIES

Martin, having tasted excitement and power, wanted more. Miss Helstone – that girl he had always called ugly, and whose face was now perpetually before him – had come within his sphere. It fretted him to think the visit might never be repeated.

Martin was no ordinary schoolboy; he was destined to grow up an original. A few years later he took great pains to pare and polish himself down to the pattern of the rest of the world, but he never succeeded. He now cast about in his mind for the means of adding another chapter to his romance. He did not yet know how many life-romances are doomed never to get beyond the first or second chapter.

He had an irreligious dislike of Sunday. His father and mother never failed to fill their large pew in Briarfield Church with their whole family. The morning service was long, and the sermon usually little to Martin's taste. This Saturday afternoon, however, his woodland musings disclosed to him a new-found charm in the coming day.

It proved a day of deep snow – so deep that during breakfast Mrs. Yorke announced that the children, instead of going to church, should sit silent for two hours in the parlour, while Rose and Martin read John Wesley's "Sermons".

"Rose will do as she pleases," said Martin, not looking up from his book.

"Rose will do as she is told, and Martin too," said the mother.

"I am going to church." So her son replied quietly, like a true Yorke, who knows his will and means to have it.

"It is not fit weather," said the father.

No answer. The youth read studiously; he slowly broke his bread and sipped his milk.

"Martin hates to go to church, but he hates still more to obey," said Mrs. Yorke.

"I am not influenced by pure perverseness, but by a complication of motives, the intricacies of which I should as soon think of explaining to you as I should of turning myself inside out to exhibit the internal machinery of my frame."

"Hear Martin! hear him!" cried Mr. Yorke. "I must have this lad of mine brought up to be a lawyer. He has the self-conceit, and words – words – words."

"Some bread, Rose, if you please," requested Martin with intense gravity. He rang the bell, and gently asked for his walking-shoes.

"But, Martin," urged his father, "there are snowdrifts all the way; a man could hardly wade through. However, lad, go to church by all means. There is a pitiless wind, and a sharp, frozen sleet. Go out into it, since thou prefers it to a warm fireside."

Martin quietly put on his cloak, scarf and cap, and went out.

“My father has more sense than my mother,” he pronounced. “How women miss their aim!”

He reached church early.

“Now, if the weather frightens her, or if that Mrs. Pryor objects to her going out, it will vex me; but, hail or ice, she ought to come. She will be here for the chance of seeing me, as I am here for the chance of seeing her. She will want to get a word about her confounded sweetheart, as I want to get another taste of adventure.”

He looked round at the cold, empty church. As the bell tolled slowly, elderly parishioners came in, and took the humblest seats. It is always the frailest, the oldest, and poorest that brave the worst weather to attend church. This wild morning not one affluent family appeared: all the cushioned pews were empty; only on the bare oak seats sat the grey-haired elders and paupers.

“I’ll scorn her if she doesn’t come,” muttered Martin savagely to himself. The rector’s shovel-hat had passed the porch. Mr. Helstone and his clerk were in the vestry.

The bells ceased – the doors were closed – the service began. She was not there. Martin scorned her.

“Worthless, vapid thing! Like all girls – weakly, selfish, shallow! She is not like our picture at all. Her eyes are not large and expressive; her mouth has not that charm I thought it had. What is she? A thread-paper, a doll, a toy; a girl, in short.”

So absorbed was the young cynic he forgot to rise from his knees at the proper place. He started up red (for he was sensitive to ridicule). To make the matter worse, the church door had reopened, and the aisles were filling: patter, patter, a hundred little feet trotted in. It was the Sunday scholars. According to Briarfield winter custom, these children had till now been kept where there was a warm stove, and only led into church just before the communion and sermon.

The little ones were settled first, and at last a tall class of young women came quietly in, closing the procession. Their teacher, having seen them seated, passed into the rectory pew. The French-grey cloak was known to Martin. Miss Helstone had come to church in the storm after all. Martin probably whispered his satisfaction to his hymn book; at any rate, he hid his face there for two minutes.

Satisfied or not, he had time to get angry with her again before the sermon was over. She had never once looked his way.

“If she takes no notice of me, I shall have a worse opinion of her than ever. It would be despicable of her just to come for the sake of those sheep-faced Sunday scholars.”

The sermon ended; the congregation dispersed. She had not been near him.

Now, indeed, as Martin set his face homeward, he felt that the sleet was sharp and the east wind cold.

His nearest way lay through some untrodden fields. Near the second stile rose a clump of trees. Was that an umbrella waiting there? Yes, an umbrella, held with difficulty against the blast; behind it fluttered a French-grey cloak. Martin grinned as he toiled up the steep field. He seated himself coolly upon the stile, and said:

“I think you had better strike a bargain. Exchange me for Mrs. Pryor.”

“I hoped you would come this way, Martin. There is no chance of getting a quiet word spoken in the church or churchyard.”

“Will you agree? Exchange me for Mrs. Pryor?”

“As if I could understand you! What puts Mrs. Pryor into your head?”

“You call her ‘mamma,’ don’t you? She is so careless a mamma, I should be five times better. You may laugh. You have pretty teeth, as pretty as a pearl necklace.”

“Martin, what now? I thought the Yorkes never paid compliments?”

“They have not done till now; but I feel I should start a new variety of the Yorke species. I am rather tired of my own ancestors.”

“You are a very strange, unaccountable boy, Martin.”

“But Mrs. Pryor must be the most unnatural mamma in existence, to let her daughter come out in this weather.”

“Mamma was very much concerned about me; but I was obstinate. I would go. I thought of nothing else but seeing you. I thought the snow would stop you. You don’t know how pleased I was to see you by yourself in the pew.”

“I came to set the parish a good example. And so you were obstinate, were you? I should like to see you obstinate. Let me take the umbrella.”

“I can’t stay two minutes; our dinner will be ready.”

“And so will ours; and we have always a hot dinner on Sundays. Roast goose today, with apple-pie and rice-pudding; but I’ll make the sacrifice, if you will.”

“We have a cold dinner on the Sabbath. But I must return; the house would be in commotion if I failed to appear. Martin, how is Mr. Moore? Come, tell me quickly.”

“Hang him! he is no worse; but as ill-used as ever – kept in solitary confinement. Horsfall starves him; you saw how thin he was.”

“You were very good the other day, Martin. When will you be so good again?”

“I see what you are after; but you’ll not wheedle me. The business gave me far too much trouble.”

“But Mr. Moore wishes to see me, Martin, and I wish to see him.”

“I dare say” (coolly).

“Well, if you won’t help me, I’ll manage without help.”

“Do; there is nothing like self-reliance.”

“I have no time to reason with you now; but I consider you provoking. Good-morning.”

Away she went, the umbrella shut, for she could not carry it against the wind.

“She is not vapid; she is not shallow,” said Martin. “I shall like to see how she will work her way without help. I have had a pleasant morning. She expected to coax me at once, but she’ll not manage it. She shall come again, and yet again. It would please me to put her in a passion – to make her cry. I want to discover how far she will go – what she will dare to get her will. It seems strange and new to find one human being thinking so much about another as she thinks about Moore. But it is time to go home; I am hungry. We’ll see whether Matthew or I shall get the largest slice of apple-pie today.”

Chapter 35

WHEREIN MATTERS MAKE SOME PROGRESS, BUT NOT MUCH

Martin had planned well. But older and wiser schemers than he are often doomed to see their finest-spun projects swept to annihilation by the sudden broom of Fate. In this instance, the broom was made out of the tough fibres of Moore's own stubborn purpose. Moore was now resuming his strength, and making strange headway against Mrs. Horsfall. Each morning he amazed that matron with fresh astonishment. First he told her he would dress himself. Then he refused the coffee she brought him; he would breakfast with the family. Lastly, he forbade her his chamber.

The morning after, he followed Mr. Yorke to his counting-house, and requested a chaise be fetched from the Red House Inn. He was resolved, he said, to return home to the Hollow that very afternoon. Mr. Yorke, instead of opposing, aided him. The chaise was sent for, though Mrs. Yorke declared the step would be his death. Moore, little disposed to speak, expressed his gratitude to the servants and to Mrs. Horsfall by the chink of his coin. At this, the latter and her patient parted the best friends in the world.

Next Moore betook himself to the parlour. He had Mrs. Yorke to appease; she sat plunged in sullen dudgeon, speculating gloomily on the depths of man's ingratitude. He bent over her; she was obliged to look up. There was beauty still in his pale, wasted features; there was earnestness and a sort of sweetness in his hollow eyes.

"Good-bye!" he said, smiling. "You have been a mother to me; give your wilful son one embrace."

She kissed him. "Who is to nurse you at Hollow's Cottage? Your sister Hortense knows no more about such matters than a child."

"Thank God! I have had nursing enough to last me my life."

Here the little girls came in – Jessie crying, Rose quiet but grave. Moore took them into the hall, out of their mother's sight, to soothe them; for their mother could not bear to see any living thing caressed but herself.

The boys were standing about the chaise as Moore entered it; but for them he had no farewell. To Mr. Yorke he only said, "That was an unlucky shot for you, Yorke; it turned Briarmains into a hospital. Come and see me at the cottage soon."

The chaise rolled away. In half an hour he alighted at his own garden gate. Having dismissed the vehicle, he leaned on that gate an instant, to rest and muse.

"Six months ago I left here," said he, "a proud, angry, disappointed man. I come back sadder and wiser. A cold, grey world lies round – a world where, if I hope little, I fear nothing. If the worst comes, I can work, as Joe Scott does, for an honourable living. Formerly, financial ruin was dishonour in my eyes. It is not so now. Ruin is an evil, but one for which I am prepared. I have calculated that I can put it off six months – not an hour longer. If things by that time alter,

I might conquer yet. But that thought is madness; let me see matters with sane eyes. Ruin will come, lay her axe to my fortune's roots, and hew them down. I shall snatch a sapling, cross the sea, and plant it in American woods. Louis will go with me. None but Louis? I cannot tell – I have no right to ask."

He entered the house.

It was twilight out of doors; indoors it was already dark. Sarah had lit a good fire in the parlour, and was preparing tea in the kitchen.

"Hortense," said Moore, as his sister bustled over to help him off with his cloak, "I am pleased to come home."

Although he had never before called the cottage his home, Hortense did not feel the novelty of this. Still, she was pleased that he was pleased.

He sat down, but soon rose again. He went to the window; he came back to the fire.

"Hortense! This little parlour looks very clean and pleasant."

"I have had the whole house thoroughly cleaned in your absence, brother."

"Sister, I think you ought to have a friend or so to tea, if only to see how fresh and spruce you have made the little place."

"True, brother. If it were not late I might send for Miss Mann."

"So you might; but it is too late to disturb that good lady, and too cold for her to come out. I want some quiet guest today, who would tire neither of us."

"Miss Ainley?"

"An excellent person; but she lives too far off. Tell Harry Scott to step up to the rectory with a request from you that Caroline Helstone should come and spend the evening."

"Would it not be better tomorrow, dear brother?"

"I should like her to see the place as it is just now; its brilliant cleanliness and perfect neatness are so much to your credit."

"It might benefit her in the way of example."

The note was duly written and addressed to Miss Helstone. Very soon the messenger returned, and with him the guest.

She entered through the kitchen, quietly tripped upstairs to take off her bonnet and furs, and came down as quietly, with her beautiful curls smoothed, her graceful merino dress trim and spotless, her gay little work-bag in her hand. She lingered to exchange a few kindly words with Sarah, and to look at the new kitten basking on the kitchen hearth, and then she went into the parlour.

The friendly welcome was of the tranquil sort that befitted cousins meeting; a quiet pleasure diffused itself through the room; the tray and the singing urn were brought in.

"I am pleased to come home," repeated Mr. Moore.

They assembled round the table. Hortense chiefly talked. She congratulated Caroline on the improvement in her health. Her colour and her plump cheeks were returning, she remarked. It was true. There was an obvious change in Miss Helstone: no longer crushed and saddened, she looked like one who had been lifted on the wing of hope.

After tea Hortense went upstairs. She had not rummaged her drawers for a month, and the impulse to perform that operation was now irresistible. During her absence Caroline took up the conversation with ease; her elegance of language gave fresh charm to familiar topics; a new music in the soft voice gently surprised the listener; her face was kindled with animation.

“Caroline, you look as if you had heard good tidings,” said Moore, after gazing at her for some minutes.

“Do I?”

“I sent for you this evening that I might be cheered; but you cheer me more than I had calculated.”

“I am glad of that. It is pleasant to be here again.”

“Truly it is. And to see health on your cheek and hope in your eye is pleasant, Cary; but what is the source of this sunshine I perceive about you?”

“For one thing, I am happy in mamma. I love her so much, and she loves me. Long and tenderly she nursed me. Now I say it is my turn to attend to her. You would laugh if you knew what pleasure I have in making dresses and sewing for her. She looks so nice now, Robert; I will not let her be old-fashioned. And she is charming to talk to – full of wisdom, observant, rich in information. Every day I like her better, I love her more tenderly.”

“You talk in such a way about ‘mamma’ it is enough to make one jealous of the old lady.”

“She is not old, Robert.”

“Well, of the matron. But you said mamma’s affection was one thing that made you happy; now for the other thing.”

“I am glad you are better.”

“What besides?”

“I am glad we are friends. I once thought we never should be.”

“Cary, some day I mean to tell you a thing about myself that is not to my credit.”

“Ah, don’t! I cannot bear to think ill of you.”

“And I cannot bear that you should think better of me than I deserve.”

“Well, I half know your ‘thing;’ indeed, I believe I know all about it.”

“Whom does it concern besides me?”

She coloured; she hesitated.

“Speak, Cary! There is none present but ourselves. Whisper, Cary.”

Still she would not speak. Seeing that Moore waited, she at last said, “Miss Keeldar spent a day at the rectory about a week ago. The evening came on very wintry, and we persuaded her to stay all night.”

“And you and she curled your hair together?”

“How do you know that?”

“And then you chattered, and she told you—”

“It was not at curling-hair time, so you are not as wise as you think; and, besides, she didn’t tell me. We slept in the same bed, although we did not sleep much; we talked the whole night through.”

“I’ll be sworn you did! And then it all came out.”

“You are quite wrong. She did not tell me; but I inferred something, and I gathered more from rumour, and I made out the rest by instinct.”

“But if she did not tell you that I wanted to marry her for the sake of her money, and that she refused me indignantly and scornfully (you need not blush; that is the plain truth) – if such was not the subject of her confidences, what was? You say you talked the whole night through; what about?”

“About things we never thoroughly discussed before; but you hardly expect I should tell you?”

“Yes, Cary; you said we were friends, and friends should always confide in each other.”

“But you are sure you won’t repeat it? Not even to Louis?”

“Not even to Louis. What does Louis care for young ladies’ secrets?”

“Robert, Shirley is a curious being. She does not often show her feelings; but when they rush out, river-like, full and powerful, you gaze, you wonder; you admire, and – I think – love her. At dead of night, when all the house was silent, and starlight and the cold reflection from the snow glimmered in our chamber, then I saw Shirley’s heart – her heart’s core. It was like a shrine, for it was holy and pure; like flame, for it was warm, and strong.”

“Can she love? She has loved none that have loved her yet.” And Moore named a list of gentlemen, closing with Sir Philip Nunnely.

“She has loved none of these.”

“Yet some of them were worthy of a woman’s affection,” argued Moore.

“Of some women’s, but not of Shirley’s.”

“Is she better than others of her sex?”

“She is peculiar, and more dangerous to take rashly as a wife.”

“I can imagine that.”

“She spoke of you – not in the way you imagined; but I made her tell me what she felt towards you. I wanted to know.”

“She thinks of me contemptuously, no doubt?”

“She thinks of you almost as highly as a woman can think of a man. Till you shocked her (she said you had shocked her, but she would not tell me how) she felt as a sister fondly feels towards a brother.”

“That is nonsense. She is too rich and proud to see me as a brother.”

“You don’t know her, Robert; and, somehow, I fancy that you cannot know her. You and she will never thoroughly understand each other.”

“Maybe. I admire her; but I believe she is incapable of love—”

“Shirley incapable of love!”

“And that she will never marry. She will not relinquish her power or her pride.”

“She hurt your feelings.”

“She did; though I had not a spark of tenderness or passion for her.”

“Then, Robert, it was very wicked in you to want to marry her.”

“She is very pretty. I acknowledge all her charms and feel none of them, or only in a way she would disdain. I suppose I was tempted by the gilding of the bait. Caroline, what a noble fellow your Robert is!”

“He made a great blunder once, and we will hear no more about it. We will remember that we too shall be judged, and so we will give no scorn, only affection.”

“Which won’t satisfy me, I warn you. Something besides affection – something far stronger, sweeter, warmer – will be demanded one day. Is it there to give?”

Caroline was much moved.

“Be calm, Lina,” said Moore soothingly. “I have no right or intention to perturb your mind for months to come. Do not tremble; look me in the face. See what a poor, pale, grim phantom I am – more pitiable than formidable.”

She looked shyly. “There is something formidable still, pale as you are,” she said.

“To return to Shirley,” pursued Moore: “is it your opinion that she is ever likely to marry?”

“She loves.”

“Platonically – theoretically – all humbug!”

“She loves sincerely. No confession of love passed her lips; but the feeling showed itself in spite of her. She spoke of one man in a way that could not be misunderstood. Having asked her opinion of you, I demanded a second opinion of – another person about whom I had made puzzled conjectures. I was determined to make her speak, and at last out it came, in a whisper, and yet with such soft vehemence. I am sure that man’s happiness is as dear to her as her own life.”

“Who is it?”

“I charged her with being in love. She just looked at me. It was quite enough. The lioness has found her captor.”

“And who, pray, is the hero who has achieved such a conquest?”

“You still speak cynically; but I will make you change your note before I have done.”

“We will see. What is his name, Cary?”

“Guess it.”

“Is it any one in this neighbourhood?”

“Yes, in Briarfield parish.”

“I don’t know a soul in Briarfield parish her equal. I suppose she is under a delusion, and will plunge into some absurdity, after all.”

Caroline smiled.

“Do you approve the choice?” asked Moore.

“Quite.”

“Then I am puzzled; for you have a correct, steady judgment, inherited from ‘mamma,’ I suppose.”

“I quite approve, and mamma was charmed.”

“Mrs. Pryor charmed! It can’t be romantic, then?”

“It is romantic, but it is also right.”

“Tell me, Cary; I am too weak to be tantalized.”

“You shall be tantalized – it will do you no harm; you are not so weak as you pretend.”

“I have twice this evening had some thoughts of falling on the floor at your feet and worshipping you downright. My mother was a Roman Catholic. You look like the loveliest of her pictures of the Virgin. I think I will embrace her faith and kneel and adore.”

“Robert, sit still; don’t be absurd, or I will go to Hortense.”

“You have stolen my senses. Heavenly rose, queen of angels!”

“Sit quietly, and guess your riddle. I’ll tell you what mamma said: ‘Depend upon it, my dear, such a choice will make the happiness of Miss Keeldar’s life.’”

“I’ll guess once, and no more. It is old Helstone. Shirley is going to be your aunt.”

“I’ll tell my uncle!” cried Caroline, laughing gleefully. “Guess again, Robert.”

“It is the parson – Hall.”

“Indeed, no; he is mine, if you please.”

“Yours! Ay, all the women in Briarfield seem to idolise that priest. I wonder why; he is bald and grey-haired. I’ll guess no more – I am tired. Miss Keeldar may marry the Grand Turk for all I care.”

“Must I whisper?”

“Quickly. Here comes Hortense.”

She whispered. Robert gave a start, and a brief laugh. Miss Moore entered, and Sarah followed behind. The hour of converse was over.

Robert found a moment to exchange a few more whispered sentences as Caroline put on her shawl before departing.

“Must I forgive Shirley now?” he asked.

“Forgive her? Naughty Robert! Was she in the wrong, or were you?”

“Must I at length love her, Cary?”

Caroline looked up keenly. “Indeed, you must not; the idea is perverse.”

“But she is handsome. Hers is a beauty that grows on you. You think her but graceful when you first see her; you discover her to be beautiful when you have known her for a year.”

“Now, Robert, be good.”

“O Cary, I have no love to give. Were the goddess of beauty to woo me, I could not meet her advances. I have no heart which I can call mine.”

“So much the better; you are a great deal safer without. Good-night.”

“Why must you always go, Lina, at the very instant when I most want you to stay? One more word. Take care of your own heart – do you hear me?”

“There is no danger.”

“I am not convinced of that. The parson, for one: Cyril Hall.”

“As to you, you have been flirting with Miss Mann. She showed me the other day a plant you had given her. Goodbye, Robert.”

Chapter 36

WRITTEN IN THE SCHOOLROOM

Louis Moore's doubts whether Mr. Sympson would leave immediately turned out to be well founded. The day after the grand quarrel about Sir Philip Nunnely, a sort of reconciliation was patched up between uncle and niece. Shirley, who could never find it in her heart to be inhospitable (except to Mr. Donne), earnestly begged the family to stay a little longer. Indeed, the uncle could not bring himself to leave her unwatched – at full liberty to marry Robert Moore as soon as that gentleman should be able to resume his courtship. So they all stayed.

In his first rage against the house of Moore, Mr. Sympson had behaved towards Mr. Louis so insolently that the tutor had promptly resigned his post, and could be induced to resume it only until the family should quit Yorkshire. Louis was persuaded by Mrs. Sympson's entreaties and his own attachment to his pupil; and probably he had a third motive. He would have found it very hard indeed to leave Fieldhead just now.

Things went on pretty smoothly. Miss Keeldar's health and spirits were re-established. Moore had relieved her from every nervous apprehension; and her fear seemed to have taken wing. Her heart became as light as a child's, that trusts all responsibility to its parents. Louis and William Farren, on making inquiries, had concluded that the dog Phœbe was not mad – that it was only ill-usage which had driven her from home. Right or wrong, it is certain that in her case the bite proved innocuous.

November passed; December came. The Sympsons were now really departing, to be at home for Christmas. They were to leave in a few days. One winter evening, during the last week of their stay, Louis Moore again took out his notebook, and wrote in it as follows:

“She is lovelier than ever. Since that little cloud was dispelled all the wanness has vanished, and with the magical energy of youth she blooms again.

“After breakfast this morning, when I had seen her, and listened to her, and felt her in every atom of my frame, I went into the chill drawing-room. There I read a poem or two; whether the spell was in me or in the verse I know not, but my heart filled, my pulse rose, I glowed. I, too, am young as yet. I am barely thirty, and there are moments when life beams sweetly upon me.

“It was time to go to the schoolroom. It is rather pleasant of a morning, when the sun shines through the low lattice; the books are in order, and the fireplace is clean. There I found Henry and Miss Keeldar together.

“I said she was lovelier than ever. She is. A delicate rose opens on her cheek. Her eye, always dark and clear, speaks now as angels must have communed when there was ‘silence in heaven.’ Her hair is soft as shadow; the shoulders they fall on wear a goddess grace. Once I only saw her beauty, but now I feel it.

“Henry was repeating his lesson to her before bringing it to me. He held her hand as he recited. That boy gets more than his share of privileges. What

indulgence she shows him! If this went on, Henry in a few years would offer his soul on her altar, as I have offered mine.

“I saw her eyelid flutter when I came in, but she did not look up; now she hardly ever gives me a glance. She rarely speaks to me either, and when I am present, she says little to others. In my gloomy moments I attribute this change to indifference and aversion. In my sunny intervals I give it another meaning. I say, were I her equal, I could find in this shyness love. Dare I look for it? What could I do with it if found?

“This morning I dared at least contrive an hour’s communion with her. I called Henry to the door, and said, ‘Go where you will, my boy; but, till I call you, return not here.’

“Henry, I could see, did not like his dismissal. That boy is young, but a thinker; his meditative eye shines on me strangely sometimes. He half feels what links me to Shirley; the young, lame, half-grown lion would growl at me now and then, because I have tamed his lioness, if the habit of discipline and his affection did not subdue him. Go, Henry; be grateful that your love is overlooked thus early, before it becomes passion. An hour’s fret will suffice to express what you feel.

“I took my usual seat at the desk, with my usual outward calm. No one who looks at my slow face can guess the vortex sometimes whirling in my heart, engulfing thought and wrecking prudence. But I would not alarm her by one eccentric movement; at present I would not utter one word of love, or reveal one glimpse of the fire that burns me. Presumptuous I will never be. I would rather part and leave her, and seek, on the other side of the globe, a new life, cold and barren as the wave-washed rock. My plan this morning was to scrutinise her – to read a line in the page of her heart. Before I left I was determined to know what I was leaving.

“I had some quills to make into pens. My hands went to work steadily, and my voice, when I spoke, was firm.

““This day week you will be alone at Fieldhead, Miss Keeldar.’

““Yes: I rather think my uncle will go this time. He is not pleased with me.’

““In his way Mr. Sympson honestly wished you well. All he has done he believed to be for the best.’

““You are kind to defend a man who has treated you with so much insolence.’

““I never feel shocked at what is spoken in character; and most perfectly in character was that vulgar and violent onset against me, when he had quitted you.’

““You cease now to be Henry’s tutor?”

““I shall be parted from Henry for a while (though we shall meet again somehow, for we love each other) and leave the Sympson family for ever. Happily this change does not leave me stranded; it merely hurries on plans long formed.’

““Nothing finds you off your guard. I was sure you would be calmly prepared for sudden change. I always think you are like a solitary but watchful, thoughtful archer in a wood. Such too is your brother. You two might be homeless hunters in the loneliest western wilds; all would be well with you. The hewn tree would make you a hut, the cleared forest would yield you fields, the buffalo would feel your rifle-shot.’

““And an Indian tribe would afford us brides, perhaps?”

““No” (hesitating), ‘I think not. I hope you would neither of you share your hearth with that to which you could not give your heart.’

““What suggested the wild West to your mind, Miss Keeldar? Have you entered my day-dreams, and beheld my brain at work?”

“She had torn a slip of paper into fragments, and threw morsel by morsel into the fire, pensively watching them burn. She did not speak.

““How did you learn my intentions?”

““I am only discovering them now. I spoke at hazard.’

““Your hazard sounds like divination. A tutor I will never be again. I am now a man of thirty; I have never been free since I was a boy of ten. I have such a thirst for freedom, such a deep passion and longing to win her, I will not refuse to cross the Atlantic for her sake; her I will follow deep into virgin woods. I know no woman whom I love that would accompany me; but I am certain Liberty will await me, sitting under a pine; and when I call her, she shall fill my arms.’

“She was moved. I meant to move her. She could not answer me, nor look at me. Her cheek glowed. On the dark lashes of her downcast eye trembled all that is graceful in half-painful, half-pleasing shame.

“Soon she took her feelings under command, and sat down. I could read her face. It said, I see the line which is my limit; nothing shall make me cross it. I know how far I may reveal my feelings. I have advanced as far as my nature permits; now here I stand rooted. My heart may break if it is baffled; let it break. It shall never dishonour me!

“I, for my part, said to myself, ‘If she were poor, I would be at her feet; if she were lowly, I would take her in my arms. But her gold and her lofty station are two griffins that guard her on each side. Love looks and longs, and dares not; Passion hovers, and is kept at bay; Truth and Devotion are scared. There is no sacrifice to make in winning her. It is all clear gain, and therefore unimaginably difficult.’

“Difficult or not, I had to say something. I could not sit silent with all that beauty modestly mute in my presence. I spoke with quiet calm.

““Still, I know I shall be strangely placed with that mountain nymph Liberty. She is, I suspect, akin to that Solitude which I once wooed, and from which I now seek a divorce. These nymphs have an unearthly charm, like some starlight evening; they inspire a wild but not warm delight; their beauty is the beauty of spirits, of nature. Theirs is the dewy bloom of morning, the languid flush of evening, the peace of the moon, the changefulness of clouds. I want something different. This elfish splendour looks chill to my vision, and feels frozen to my touch. I am not a poet; I cannot live with abstractions. Glorious as Nature is, and deeply as I worship her, I would rather behold her through the soft human eyes of a loved and lovely wife than through the wild orbs of the highest goddess of Olympus.’

““Juno could not cook a buffalo steak as you like it,’ said she.

““She could not; but I will tell you who could – some young, penniless, friendless orphan girl. I wish I could find such a one – pretty enough for me to love, honest and modest. I care nothing for attainments, but I would fain have the germ of those sweet natural powers which nothing acquired can rival; I can manage the hottest temper that Fate wills. To such a creature I should like to be

first tutor and then husband. I would teach her my language, my habits and my principles, and then I would reward her with my love.’

“Reward her, lord of the creation – reward her!” exclaimed she, with a curled lip.

“And be repaid a thousandfold.’

“If she willed it, monseigneur.’

“And she should will it.’

“You have stipulated for any temper Fate wills. Compulsion is flint and a blow to the metal of some souls.’

“And love is the spark it elicits.’

“Who cares for the love that is only a spark?’

“I must find my orphan girl. Tell me how, Miss Keeldar.’

“Advertise; and be sure you add that she must be a good plain cook.’

“I must find her; and when I find her I shall marry her.’

“Not you!’ and her voice took a sudden accent of peculiar scorn.

“I liked this. I had roused her from her pensive mood.

“Why doubt it?’ I said. ‘Of course I shall marry. Nothing is more evident.’

“The contrary is evident, Mr. Moore.’

“She charmed me in this mood – disdainful pride lit her large fine eye, that had just now the look of a falcon’s.

“How will you manage to marry, I wonder?’ she went on. “Accept celibacy as your doom!’

“You cannot give what I already have. Celibacy has been mine for thirty years. If you wish to offer me a parting gift, it must be something else.’

“Take worse, then!’

“How – what?’

“I now felt and spoke eagerly. I was unwise to lose my calm even for an instant; it deprived me of an advantage. The little spark of temper dissolved in a mocking smile.

“Look for any stout widow that has had a few husbands already.’

“She must not be rich. Oh, these riches!’

“Yours is the monstrous pride which counterfeits humility.’

“I am a dependant; I know my place.’

“I am a woman; I know mine.’

“I am poor; I must be proud.’

“I have obligations as stringent as yours.’

“We had reached a critical point now, and we halted and looked at each other. She would not give in, I felt. A few moments yet were mine, before the end came. I would dally, wait, talk, and when impulse urged I would act. I am never in a hurry; I never was in a hurry in my whole life. I proceeded:

“Apparently, Miss Keeldar, you are as little likely to marry as myself. I know you have refused four advantageous offers, and, I believe, a fifth. Have you rejected Sir Philip Nunnely?’

“Did you think I should take him?’

“I thought you might.’

“On what grounds, may I ask?’

“Conformity of rank, age, pleasing contrast of temper – for he is mild and amiable – harmony of intellectual tastes.’

“A beautiful sentence! Let us take it to pieces. “Conformity of rank.” He is quite above me. I am disdained by his family. “Suitability of age.” We were born in the same year; consequently he is still a boy, while I am a woman – ten years his senior to all intents and purposes. “Contrast of temper.” Mild and amiable, is he; what am I? Tell me.’

“Sister of the bright, quick, fiery leopard.’

“And you would mate me with a lamb? Unjust! “Harmony of intellectual tastes.” He is fond of poetry, and I hate it–’

“Do you? That is news.’

“I absolutely shudder at the sound of rhyme from Sir Philip. Harmony, indeed! When did I whip up syllabub sonnets or string together penny-bead stanzas in the belief that they were genuine jewels?’

“You might have the satisfaction of improving his tastes.’

“Pah! my husband is not to be my baby. I am not to set him his daily lesson, and give him a sugar-plum if he is good, and a patient, pathetic lecture if he is bad. Being a tutor, I suppose you think it the finest employment in the world. I don’t. I reject it. Improving a husband! No. I shall insist upon my husband improving me, or else we part.’

“God knows it is needed!’

“What do you mean by that, Mr. Moore?’

“What I say. Improvement is imperatively needed.’

“If you were a woman you would improve your husband charmingly. It would suit you; schooling is your vocation.’

“May I ask whether, in your present just and gentle mood, you mean to taunt me with being a tutor?’

“Yes, bitterly; and with anything else you please – any defect of which you are painfully conscious.’

“With being poor, for instance?’ I asked.

“Of course. You are sore about your poverty.’

“About having nothing but a plain face to offer the woman who may master my heart?’

“Exactly. You are sensitive about your features because they are not quite on an Apollo pattern. You abase them in the faint hope that others may say a word in their behalf – which won’t happen. Your face is nothing to boast of, certainly. It looks like a god of Egypt – a great sand-buried stone head. No, I will compare it to nothing so lofty. It looks like Tartar. You are my mastiff’s cousin.’

“Tartar is your dear companion. In summer, when you rise early, and run out into the fields, you always call him to follow you, sometimes with a whistle that you learned from me. In the solitude of your wood, when you think nobody but Tartar is listening, you whistle the very tunes you learnt from my lips, or sing the very songs you have caught up from my voice. In the winter evenings Tartar lies at your feet. You allow him to rest his head on your lap; you let him lie on the edge of your gown. His rough hide is familiar with the feel of your hand. I once saw you kiss him on his forehead. It is dangerous to say I am like Tartar; I may claim to be treated like Tartar.’

“Perhaps, sir, you can extort as much from your penniless young orphan girl, when you find her.’

“Oh, could I find her as I imagine her! Something to tame first, and teach afterwards; to break in, and then to fondle. To lift the destitute proud thing out

of poverty; to influence and then to be indulgent to the capricious moods that were never influenced and indulged; to see her alternately irritated and subdued twelve times in a day; and perhaps, eventually, to behold her the exemplary mother of a dozen children, only now and then giving little Louis a cordial cuff by way of paying the interest of the vast debt she owes his father. Oh, my orphan girl would give me many a kiss; she would watch on the threshold for my coming home, and run into my arms; she would keep my hearth bright and warm. God bless the sweet idea! Find her I must.'

"Her eyes flashed eagerly, her lips opened; but she re-closed them, and turned away.

"Tell me where she is, Miss Keeldar! I must know. You can tell me.'

"I never will.' All haughtiness. She turned to leave me.

"Could I now let her part as she had always parted from me? No. I had gone too far; I had come too near the end not to drive home to it. All the doubt, all the indecision, must be removed, and the plain truth seen.

"A minute, madam,' I said, keeping my hand on the door-handle. 'The last word has not been spoken yet.'

"May I pass?'

"No; I guard the door. I would almost rather die than let you leave me just now, without speaking the word I demand.'

"What dare you expect me to say?'

"What I must and will hear; what you dare not now suppress.'

"Mr. Moore, I hardly know what you mean. You are not like yourself.'

"I suppose I hardly was like my usual self, for I scared her – that I could see. It was right: she must be scared to be won.

"You do know what I mean, and for the first time I stand before you myself. I have flung off the tutor, and beg to introduce you to the man.'

"She trembled. She put her hand to mine as if to remove it from the lock. She was powerless, and receded; and again she trembled.

"What change I underwent I cannot explain. A new spirit passed into me. I was not crushed by her riches; I thought not of them. I saw only herself – her young beautiful form, the grace, the majesty, the modesty of her girlhood.

"My pupil,' I said.

"My master,' was the low answer.

"I have a thing to tell you.'

"She waited with bent head.

"I have to tell you that for four years you have been growing into your tutor's heart, and that you are rooted there now. I have to declare that you have bewitched me, in spite of sense, and experience, and difference of estate. You have so shown me your faults and your virtues – beauties rather, they are hardly so stern as virtues – that I love you – love you with my life and strength.'

"She sought what to say, but could not find a word. I passionately repeated that I loved her.

"Well, Mr. Moore, what then?' was the answer in a tone that would have been petulant if it had not faltered.

"Have you nothing to say to me? Have you no love for me?'

"A little bit. I want to go.'

"Go! What! with my heart in your hand, to lay it on your dressing-table and pierce it with your pins? From my presence you do not stir, out of my reach you do not stray, till I receive a hostage – your heart for mine.'

“The thing you want is mislaid – lost some time since. Let me go and seek it.’

“Declare that it is where your keys often are – in my possession.’

“Where are my keys, Mr. Moore? Indeed I have lost them again; and Mrs. Gill wants some money, and I have none, except this sixpence.’

“She took the coin out of her pocket, and showed it. I could have trifled with her, but it would not do; life and death were at stake. Mastering at once the sixpence and the hand that held it, I demanded, ‘Am I to die without you, or am I to live for you?’

“Do as you please.’

“You shall tell me with your own lips whether you doom me to exile or call me to hope.’

“Go; I can bear to be left.’

“Perhaps I too can bear to leave you. But reply, Shirley, my pupil, my sovereign.’

“Die without me if you will; live for me if you dare.’

“I am not afraid of you, my leopardess. I dare live for and with you, from this hour till my death. Now, then, I have you. You are mine. I will never let you go. Wherever my home be, I have chosen my wife. If I stay in England, in England you will stay; if I cross the Atlantic, you will cross it also. Our lives are riveted.’

“And are we equal, then, sir, at last?’

“You are younger, frailer, feebler, more ignorant than I.’

“Will you be good to me, and never tyrannize?’

“Will you let me breathe, and not bewilder me? You must not smile. The world swims and changes round me. The sun is a dizzying scarlet blaze, the sky a vortex whirling over me.’

“I am a strong man, but I staggered as I spoke. All creation was exaggerated. Colour grew more vivid, motion more rapid, life itself more vital. I hardly saw her for a moment, but I heard her voice – pitilessly sweet.

“You name me leopardess. Remember, the leopardess is tameless,’ said she.

“Tame or fierce, wild or subdued, you are mine.’

“I am glad I know my keeper and am used to him. His voice only will I follow; his hand only shall manage me; only at his feet will I repose.’

“I wanted to hear her speak again. I could never have enough of her voice and her words. “How much do you love me?’ I asked.

“Ah! you know. I will not gratify you. Poor Tartar!’ said she, patting my hand; ‘poor fellow, stalwart friend, Shirley’s favourite, lie down!’

“I will not lie down till I am fed with one sweet word.’

“And at last she gave it.

“Dear Louis, be faithful to me; never leave me. I don’t care for life unless I may pass it at your side.’

“Something more.’

“She gave me a change. ‘Sir,’ she said, ‘never again name such sordid things as money, or poverty, or inequality. It will be absolutely dangerous to torment me with these maddening scruples.’

“My face grew hot. I did once more wish I were not so poor or she were not so rich. She saw the misery; and then, indeed, she caressed me. Along with torment, I experienced rapture.

“‘Mr. Moore,’ said she, looking up with a sweet, open face, ‘teach me and help me to be good. I do not ask you to take off my shoulders all the cares and duties of property, but I ask you to share the burden, and to show me how to do it well. Your judgment is good, your heart is kind, your principles are sound. Be my companion through life; be my guide where I am ignorant; be my master where I am faulty; be my friend always!’

“‘So help me God, I will!’”

Yet again a passage from the notebook, reader; if you don’t like it, pass it over.

“The Symptons are gone, but not before discovery. My manner must have betrayed something, or my looks. I was quiet, but I forgot to be guarded sometimes. I stayed longer with her than usual; I could not bear to be out of her presence. If she left the parlour, instinctively I rose and left it too, with a vague idea of getting a word with her in the hall. Yesterday towards dusk I had her to myself for five minutes by the hall fire. We stood side by side, talking. The young ladies passed, and looked at us; we did not separate. Before long they repassed, and again looked. Mrs. Sympton came; we did not move. Mr. Sympton opened the dining-room door. Shirley curled her lip and tossed her tresses at him: the glance she gave was at once explanatory and defiant. It said: ‘I like Mr. Moore’s society, and I dare you to find fault with my taste.’

“I asked, ‘Do you mean him to understand how matters are?’

“‘I do,’ said she. ‘There will be a scene. I neither invite it nor fear it; only, you must be present, for I am inexpressibly tired of facing him alone. I don’t like to see him in a rage. He then puts off all his fine proprieties and shows the crudity below. His ideas are not clean, Mr. Moore; I think, if he could put his imagination in Mrs. Gill’s laundry-basket, for boiling and bleaching, it would do him incalculable good.’

“This morning I was down early, and found her sewing in the breakfast-parlour, busy finishing some little keepsake for Henry. I got only a cool reception, which I accepted till the maid was gone, taking my book to the window-seat. To sit with her in sight was happiness. Had I been obtrusive, I knew she would have rebuffed me. Therefore I read on, stole now and then a look at her, watched her countenance soften as she felt I respected her mood, and enjoyed the gentle content of the moment.

“The distance between us shrank. Soon I was at her side, watching her sew, listening to her merry words. We sat side by side; my arm rested on her chair. The door suddenly opened.

“I believe, if I had started from her, she would have despised me. Thanks to the steadiness of my nature, I did not move a muscle. I hardly looked towards the door.

“‘Good-morning, uncle,’ said she, addressing the person who paused on the threshold in a state of petrification.

“‘Have you been long downstairs, Miss Keeldar, and alone with Mr. Moore?’

“‘Yes, a very long time. We both came down early.’

“‘The proceeding is improper—’

“‘I was rather cross at first, and not civil; but you will perceive that we are now friends.’

“‘I perceive more than you would wish me to perceive.’

“‘Hardly, sir,’ said I; ‘we have no disguises. If you have any further observations to make, they may as well be addressed to me. Henceforward I stand between Miss Keeldar and all annoyance.’

“‘You! What have you to do with Miss Keeldar?’

“‘To protect, watch over, serve her.’

“‘You, sir – you, the tutor?’

“‘Not one word of insult, sir,’ interposed she; ‘not one syllable of disrespect to Mr. Moore in this house.’

“‘Do you take his part?’

“‘His part? oh yes!’

“She turned to me with a sudden fond movement, which I met by circling her with my arm. She and I both rose.

“‘Good God!’ was the quivering cry from the door.

“‘Come, uncle; you shall hear all. – Tell him, Louis.’

“‘I dare him to speak – the beggar! the knave! the vile, insinuating servant! Stand apart from my niece, sir. Let her go!’

“‘She clung to me. ‘I am near my future husband,’ she said.

“‘Her husband! But’ (savagely) ‘you shall not have him; he shall not have you.’

“‘I would die before I would have another.’

“Mr. Sympson uttered words with which this page shall never be polluted.

“She turned white as death; she shook all over; she lost her strength. I laid her down on the sofa; just looked to make sure that she had not fainted – kissed her – and then – I cannot give a clear account of what happened in the course of the next five minutes. She has since, through tears and laughter, told me that I turned terrible, and gave myself to the demon. She says I made one bound across the room; that Mr. Sympson vanished through the door as if shot from a cannon. I also vanished, and she heard Mrs. Gill scream.

“Mrs. Gill was still screaming when I came to my senses. I was then in the oak parlour, I think. I held Sympson before me crushed into a chair, and my hand was on his cravat. His eyes rolled in his head; the housekeeper stood wringing her hands, begging me to stop. I did stop, feeling at once as cool as stone. I told Mrs. Gill to fetch the chaise instantly, and informed Mr. Sympson he must depart from Fieldhead forthwith.

“He threatened prosecution; but I cared for nothing. I remained with him till the chaise came. I marshalled him to it, he scolding all the way. He was terribly bewildered, as well as enraged. He would have resisted me, but knew not how. I said his wife and daughters should follow him as soon as they could prepare. He fumed and fretted, but he could do nothing. That man is forever impotent. His wife, over whom he tyrannizes in trifles, guides him in matters of importance; and I have long since earned her undying gratitude by my devotion to her boy. In Henry’s ailments I have nursed him better, she said, than any woman could nurse. She will never forget that.

“She and her daughters quitted me today, in mute consternation; but she respects me. When Henry clung to my neck as I lifted him into the carriage, when I arranged Mrs. Sympson’s wrappings to make her warm, though she turned her head from me, I saw the tears start to her eyes. She will advocate my cause. I am glad of this – not for my own sake, but for that of my life and idol – my Shirley.”

Once again he writes, a week after:

“I am now at Stilbro’. I have taken up my temporary abode with a friend – a professional man, in whose business I can be useful. Every day I ride over to Fieldhead. How long will it be before I can call that place my home, and its mistress mine? I am not tranquil; I am tantalized, sometimes tortured. To see her now, one would think she had never pressed her cheek to my shoulder, or clung to me with tenderness or trust. I feel unsafe; she renders me miserable. I am shunned when I visit her; she withdraws from my reach.

“Today I lifted her face, resolved to get a full look into her deep, dark eyes. Difficult to describe what I read there! Pantheress! beautiful forest-born! tameless, peerless nature! She gnaws her chain; she dreams of her wild woods and pines after virgin freedom. I wish Sympson would come again, and oblige her again to entwine her arms about me. I fear any long delay...

“It is now midnight. I have spent the afternoon and evening at Fieldhead. As she came down the oak staircase to the hall, how shyly shone her large eyes upon me! How fugitive she looked – slim and swift as a northern aurora!

“I followed her into the drawing-room. Mrs. Pryor and Caroline Helstone were there. In her white evening dress, with her long hair flowing full, with her noiseless step, her eye full of night and lightning, Shirley looked, I thought, spirit-like – the child of a breeze and a flame, the daughter of ray and raindrop – a thing never to be arrested, fixed. I could not stop looking at her. I talked with the other ladies as well as I could, but still I looked at her. She was very silent; she never spoke to me.

“When she was called out for a minute by Mrs. Gill, I went into the moonlit hall, with the aim of getting a word as she returned.

“‘Miss Keeldar, stay one instant,’ said I.

“‘Why? the hall is too cold.’

“‘It is not cold for me; at my side it should not be cold for you.’

“‘But I shiver.’

“‘With fear, I believe. What makes you fear me? You are quiet and distant. Why?’

“‘I may well fear what looks like a great dark goblin meeting me in the moonlight.’

“‘Do not pass! Stay with me awhile. It is three days since I spoke to you alone. Such changes are cruel.’

“‘I have no wish to be cruel,’ she responded, softly enough; but there was also reserve in her manner.

“‘You certainly give me pain,’ said I. ‘It is hardly a week since you called me your future husband. Now I am once more the tutor, addressed as Mr. Moore and sir. Your lips have forgotten Louis.’

“‘No, Louis, no.’

“‘Be cordial to Louis, then; let him approach.’

“‘I am cordial,’ said she, hovering aloof like a white shadow.

“‘You seem subdued, but still startled.’

“‘No – quite calm, and afraid of nothing,’ she assured me.

“‘Of nothing but your votary.’ I knelt on the flagstones at her feet.

“‘You see I am in a new world, Mr. Moore. I don’t know myself; I don’t know you. But rise. When you do that, I feel troubled.’

“I obeyed, and put on serenity and confidence for her. She clung to me again.

“Now, Shirley,’ I said, ‘you can conceive I am far from happy in my present uncertain state.’

“You are happy!’ she cried hastily. ‘You don’t know how happy you are. Any change will be for the worse. Louis; be patient! I like you because you are patient.’

“Like me no longer, then; love me instead. Fix our marriage day; think of it tonight, and decide.’

“She breathed an inarticulate murmur; darted, or melted, from my arms – and I lost her.”

Chapter 37

THE WINDING-UP

Yes, reader, we must settle accounts now. I have only briefly to narrate the final fates of some of the people we have met, and then you and I must shake hands, and for the present separate.

Let us turn to the curates – much-loved, though long-neglected. Come forward, modest merit! Malone, I see, promptly answers.

No, Peter Augustus; we can have nothing to say to you. It won't do. Are you not aware, Peter, that a discriminating public does not care for the unvarnished truth? Do you not know that the squeak of the real pig is no more relished now than it was in days of yore? Were I to give the catastrophe of your life and conversation, the public would sweep off in shrieking hysterics, and there would be wild cries of "Impossible!" "Untrue!" Note well. Whenever you present the actual truth, it is, somehow, always denounced as a lie; whereas the product of your own imagination, the fiction, is adopted, petted, called sweetly natural. Such is the way of the world, Peter; and as you are the legitimate urchin, you must stand down.

Make way for Mr. Sweeting.

Here he comes, with his lady on his arm – the splendid Mrs. Sweeting, formerly Miss Dora Sykes. They were married under the happiest auspices, Mr. Sweeting having been just offered a comfortable living. They lived long and happily together, beloved by their parishioners and by a numerous circle of friends.

There! I think the varnish has been put on very nicely.

Advance, Mr. Donne.

This gentleman turned out admirably – far better than either you or I could possibly have expected, reader. He, too, married a most sensible, quiet, lady-like woman. The match was the making of him. He became an exemplary domestic character, and a truly active parish priest. His little school, his little church, his little parsonage, all owed their erection to him; and they did him credit. Each was a model of uniformity and taste. By his own unassisted efforts he begged all the money for these. He begged from high and low – the shoeless cottage brat and the coroneted duke. He sent out begging-letters far and wide – to old Queen Charlotte, her sons and daughters, the Prince Regent, Lord Castlereagh, and every minister then in office; and, what is more remarkable, he got something out of every one of them. Even the Prince Regent donated him two guineas. People gave to get rid of him. After all, he did some good. He was useful in his day.

Perhaps I ought to remark that on the premature and sudden vanishing of Mr. Malone from the stage of Briarfield parish (you cannot know how it happened, reader, because of your love of the pretty and pleasing), there came as his successor another Irish curate, Mr. Macarthey. I am happy to inform you that this gentleman did as much credit to his country as Malone had done it discredit. He proved himself as decent, decorous, and conscientious as Peter was rampant, boisterous, and – This last epithet I suppress, because it would let

the cat out of the bag. Mr. Macarthey laboured faithfully in the parish. The schools flourished under his sway. His faults were proper, steady-going, clerical faults: an invitation to tea with a Dissenter would unhinge him for a week; the sight of a Quaker wearing his hat in church played havoc with his mental wellbeing. Otherwise he was rational and diligent.

The justice-loving public will have remarked that I have been remiss in pursuing, catching, and bringing to punishment the would-be assassin of Mr. Robert Moore. Here was a fine opening to lead my willing readers a dance of law and gospel, of the dungeon and the dock. You might have liked it, reader, but I should not. I was happy to find that facts exonerated me from the attempt. The murderer was never punished, because he was never caught. The magistrates made a shuffling, as if they were going to do valiant things; but since Moore did not urge them on, they prudently resolved to let the matter quietly drop.

Mr. Moore knew who had shot him, and all Briarfield knew. It was no other than Michael Hartley, the half-crazed weaver. The poor soul died of delirium tremens a year after the attempt on Moore, and Robert gave his wretched widow a guinea to bury him.

*

The winter is over and gone; spring has followed, with flowery and showery flight. We are now in the heart of summer – the June of 1812.

It is burning weather. The air is deep azure and red gold. It fits the time; it fits the age; it fits the present spirit of the nations. This summer Bonaparte is in the saddle, with his army behind him, six hundred thousand strong. He marches on old Moscow, where the Cossack awaits him. Barbarian stoic! he waits without fear of the boundless ruin rolling on. It is the day of vengeance. The earth is scorched with fire; the sea becomes “as the blood of a dead man.”

In this year, Lord Wellington assumed the reins in Spain. He took Badajos, he fought the field of Vittoria, he captured Pampeluna, he stormed San Sebastian; he won Salamanca.

Men of Manchester, I beg your pardon for this slight résumé of warlike facts. Lord Wellington is, for you, only a decayed old gentleman now. I think some of you have called him a “dotard;” you have taunted him with his age and loss of vigour. What fine heroes you are yourselves! Scoff at your ease; your scorn can never break his grand old heart.

But come, friends, whether Quakers or cotton-printers, let us hold a peace-congress. We arrive now at a triumph. On the 18th of June 1812 the Orders in Council were repealed, and the blockaded ports thrown open. Yorkshire and Lancashire shook with your shouts on that occasion. The ringers cracked a bell in Briarfield belfry; the Association of Merchants and Manufacturers dined together at Stilbro’, and all went home in such a plight as their wives would never wish to witness more.

Stocks which had been accumulating for years now went off in the twinkling of an eye. Warehouses were lightened, ships were laden; work abounded, wages rose; the good time seemed come. These prospects might be delusive, but they were brilliant. In that single month of June, many a solid fortune was realized.

When a whole province rejoices, the humblest and most secluded of its inhabitants feels festive. So Caroline Helstone thought, when she dressed

herself more carefully than usual on the day of this trading triumph, and went, attired in her neatest muslin, to spend the afternoon at Fieldhead, to superintend certain preparations for a great event. She decided on the wreath, the veil, and the dress to be worn at the altar. She chose various robes and fashions for more ordinary occasions, without much reference to the bride's opinion – Shirley, indeed, being in a somewhat impracticable mood.

Louis had foreseen difficulties, and he had found them. In fact, his mistress had shown herself exquisitely provoking, putting off her marriage day by day, week by week, month by month, rousing his whole deliberate but determined nature to revolt against her tyranny, at once so sweet and so intolerable.

It had needed a sort of tempest-shock to bring her to the point; but at last she was fettered to a fixed day. There she lay, conquered by love, and bound with a vow.

Thus vanquished and chained, she pined. Her captor alone could cheer her; in his absence she sat or wandered alone, spoke little, and ate less.

She furthered no preparations for her nuptials; Louis was himself obliged to direct all arrangements. He was virtually master of Fieldhead weeks before he actually became so – the least presumptuous master that ever was, but with his lady absolute. She abdicated without a struggle. "Go to Mr. Moore, ask Mr. Moore," was her answer when applied to for orders.

In all this Miss Keeldar partly yielded to her disposition; but a remark she made a year afterwards showed another motive. "Louis," she said, "would never have learned to rule if she had not ceased to govern."

It had been intended that Miss Helstone should be bridesmaid, but Fortune had destined her another part.

She came home in time to water her plants. The last flower attended to was a rose-tree, which bloomed in a quiet green nook at the back of the house. She gazed over the wall, the watering pot still in one hand, surveying the dusky moors, where bonfires were kindling. The summer evening was warm; the bell-music was joyous; the blue smoke of the fires looked soft, their red flame bright. Above them, in the sky, twinkled a silver point – Venus.

Caroline was not unhappy that evening; but as she gazed she sighed, and as she sighed a hand circled her, and rested quietly on her waist. Caroline thought she knew who had drawn near, and was not startled.

"I am looking at Venus, mamma. See, she is beautiful. How white her lustre is!"

The answer was a closer caress; and Caroline turned, and looked, not into Mrs. Pryor's matron face, but up at a dark manly visage. She dropped her watering-pot.

"I have been sitting talking with 'mamma' an hour," said the intruder. "Where, meantime, have you been?"

"To Fieldhead. Shirley is as naughty as ever, Robert. She will neither say Yes nor No to any question. She sits alone. I cannot tell whether she is melancholy or nonchalant. If you rouse her or scold her, she gives you a look, half wistful, half reckless, which sends you away as queer and crazed as herself. What Louis will make of her, I cannot tell. For my part, if I were a gentleman, I think I would not dare undertake her."

"Never mind them. They were cut out for each other. Louis, strange to say, likes her all the better for these freaks. He will manage her, if anyone can.

He has had a stormy courtship for such a calm character; but it ends in victory for him. Caroline, I have sought you to ask an audience. Why are those bells ringing?"

"For the repeal of your terrible law – the Orders you hate so much. You are pleased, are you not?"

"Yesterday evening at this time I was packing some books for a sea-voyage; along with clothes, seeds and tools, to take with me to Canada. I was going to leave you."

"To leave me?"

Her fingers fastened on his arm; she looked frightened.

"Not now. Look at me. Do you see the despair of parting?"

She looked into a bright face, beaming down on her with hope, fondness and delight.

"Will the repeal do you much good?" she inquired.

"The repeal of the Orders in Council saves me. Now I shall not turn bankrupt; I shall not give up business; I shall not leave England. Now I shall be no longer poor; I can pay my debts; all the cloth I have in my warehouses will be taken off my hands. This day lays for my fortunes a broad, firm foundation, on which, for the first time in my life, I can securely build."

Caroline held his hand, and drew a long breath. "You are saved? Your difficulties are lifted?"

"They are lifted. I can act."

"At last! Oh, Providence is kind! Thank Him, Robert."

"I do thank Providence. Now I can take more workmen, give better wages, lay wiser plans, do some good, be less selfish. Now, Caroline, I can have a house – a home – and now—"

He paused.

"And now I can think of marriage; now I can seek a wife."

She did not speak.

"Will Caroline pardon all I have made her suffer, all that long pain I have wickedly caused her, all that sickness she owed to me? Will she forget what she knows of my poor ambition, my sordid schemes? Will she let me prove that, as I once deserted cruelly, trifled wantonly, I can now love faithfully, cherish tenderly?"

His hand was in Caroline's still; a gentle pressure answered him.

"Is Caroline mine?"

"Caroline is yours. I love you too, Robert, and will take faithful care of you."

"Faithful care! As if that rose should promise to shelter from tempest this hard grey stone! But she will care for me, in her way. These hands will gently offer every comfort I can taste. I know she will bring me a solace, a charity, a purity, to which, of myself, I am a stranger."

Suddenly Caroline was troubled; her lip quivered. "Poor mamma! I am all she has. Must I leave her?"

"Do you know, I thought of that difficulty, and have discussed it with 'mamma'."

"I cannot desert her, even for you. I cannot break her heart, even for your sake."

"She was faithful when I was false – was she not? I never came near your sick-bed, and she watched it ceaselessly. You shall never leave her."

“She may live very near us?”

“With us – only she will have her own rooms and servant. This she stipulates herself.”

“You know she has an income, that makes her quite independent?”

“She told me that, with a gentle pride that reminded me of somebody else.”

“She is not at all interfering, and incapable of gossip.”

“I know, Cary. But in any case, Louis and I are not the type of men who fear their mothers-in-law. I suppose she will make much of me.”

“That she will – in her quiet way, you know. She is not demonstrative; and when you see her silent, or even cool, you must not fancy her displeased; it is only her manner.”

“I feel that she and I will suit. Hortense, you know, is exquisitely sensitive, and not, perhaps, always reasonable; yet, dear, honest girl, I never had a serious quarrel with her in my life.”

“No; you are most tenderly indulgent to her; and you will be considerate with mamma. You are a gentleman all through, Robert, and nowhere so perfect a gentleman as at your own fireside. And Mamma thinks of you as I do.”

“Not quite, I hope?”

“She does not want to marry you – don’t be vain; but she said to me the other day, ‘My dear, Mr. Moore has pleasing manners; he is one of the few gentlemen I have seen who combine politeness with sincerity.’”

“‘Mamma’ is rather a misanthropist, is she not? Not the best opinion of the sterner sex?”

“There are exceptions whom she admires – Louis and Mr. Hall, and, lately, yourself. But, Robert – have you seen my uncle yet?”

“I have. ‘Mamma’ called him into the room. He consents if I can prove that I can keep a wife; and I can keep her better than he thinks.”

“If you get rich will you do good with your money, Robert?”

“I will; and you shall tell me how. Indeed, I have some schemes of my own. I have learned the folly of being selfish. Caroline, this war must soon draw to a close. Trade is likely to prosper for some years to come. What would you think if, one day – perhaps ten years hence – Louis and I divide Briarfield parish between us? Louis is certain of power and property. His mind is slow but strong. He will be made magistrate of the district. Shirley would obtain this dignity for him prematurely, if he would let her, but he will not. However, once he has been master of Fieldhead a year, the district will feel his quiet influence, acknowledge his superiority, and make him magistrate voluntarily. Everybody admires his future wife, and everybody will, in time, like him. He will be esteemed, consulted and depended on. His advice will be always judicious, his help always good-natured. As for me, if I succeed as I intend to do, my success will add to his and Shirley’s income. I can double the value of their mill property. I can line yonder barren Hollow with lines of cottages and rows of cottage-gardens—”

“Robert! And root up the copse?”

“The copse shall be firewood within five years. The beautiful wild ravine shall be a smooth descent; the green natural terrace shall be a paved street. There shall be cottages in the dark ravine, and on the lonely slopes. The rough pebbled track shall be a firm, broad road, bedded with the cinders from my mill; and my mill, Caroline, shall fill its present yard.”

“Horrible! You will change our blue hill-country air into Stilbro’ smoke.”

“I will get an Act for enclosing Nunnely Common, and parcelling it out into farms.”

“Stilbro’ Moor, however, defies you, thank Heaven! What can you grow in Bilberry Moss? What will flourish on Rushedge?”

“Caroline, the houseless, the starving, the unemployed shall come to Hollow’s Mill from far and near; and Joe Scott shall give them work, and Louis Moore, Esq., shall let them a house, and Mrs. Gill shall feed them till the first pay-day.”

She smiled.

“Such a Sunday school as you will have, Cary! such a day school as you and Shirley and Miss Ainley will have to manage between you! The mill shall find salaries for a master and mistress, and the squire shall give a treat once a quarter.”

She mutely offered a kiss – an offer taken unfair advantage of.

“Extravagant day-dreams,” said Moore, with a sigh and smile, “yet perhaps we may realize some of them. Meantime, the dew is falling. Mrs. Moore, I shall take you in.”

*

It is August. The bells clash out again, not only through Yorkshire, but through England. From Spain the voice of a trumpet has sounded long; it proclaims Salamanca is won. This night is Briarfield to be illuminated. On this day the Fieldhead tenantry dine together; the Hollow’s Mill workpeople will be assembled; the schools have a grand treat. This morning there were two marriages solemnized in Briarfield church – Louis Gérard Moore, Esq., to Shirley, daughter of the late Charles Keeldar, Esq., of Fieldhead; and Robert Gérard Moore, Esq., to Caroline, niece of the Rev. Helstone, rector of Briarfield.

The first ceremony was performed by Mr. Helstone, with Mr. Yorke giving the bride away. In the second ceremony, Mr. Hall officiated. Amongst the bridal train were two youthful bridesmen, Henry Sympson and Martin Yorke.

I suppose Robert Moore’s prophecies were, partially at least, fulfilled. The other day I passed up the Hollow, which tradition says was once green, and lone, and wild; and there I saw the manufacturer’s day-dreams embodied in substantial stone and brick – the cinder highway, the cottages, and the cottage gardens; there I saw a mighty mill, and a chimney ambitious as the tower of Babel. When I came home I told my old housekeeper where I had been.

“Ay,” said she, “I can remember the old mill being built – the very first in all the district; and I can remember it being pulled down, and going to see the foundation-stone of the new one laid. The two Mr. Moores made a great stir about it. They were there, and both their ladies; very bonny and grand they looked. But Mrs. Louis was the grandest; she always wore such handsome dresses. Mrs. Robert was quieter like. Mrs. Louis smiled when she talked. She had a real, happy, glad, good-natured look; but she had eyes that pierced a body through.”

“What was the Hollow like then, Martha?”

“Different to now; but I could tell of when there was neither mill, nor cottage, nor hall, except Fieldhead, within two miles of it. I can tell, one

summer evening, fifty years since, of my mother coming running in just at the edge of dark, almost fleyed out of her wits, saying she had seen a fairy in Fieldhead Hollow; and that was the last fairy that ever was seen in this area. A lonesome spot it was, and a bonny spot, full of oaks and nut trees. It is altered now.”

The story is told. I think I now see the judicious reader putting on his spectacles to look for the moral. It would be an insult to his wisdom to offer directions. I only say, God speed him in the quest!

THE END

**Extracts from Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857)
Vol. II, Ch. IV.**

The tale of “Shirley” had been begun soon after the publication of “Jane Eyre.” If the reader will refer to the account I have given of Miss Brontë's schooldays at Roe Head, he will there see how every place surrounding that house was connected with the Luddite riots, and will learn how stories and anecdotes of that time were rife among the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages; how Miss Wooler herself, and the elder relations of most of her schoolfellows, must have known the actors in those grim disturbances. What Charlotte had heard there as a girl came up in her mind when, as a woman, she sought a subject for her next work; and she sent to Leeds for a file of the *Mercuries* of 1812, '13, and '14; in order to understand the spirit of those eventful times. She was anxious to write of things she had known and seen; and among the number was the West Yorkshire character, for which any tale laid among the Luddites would afford full scope. In “Shirley” she took the idea of most of her characters from life, although the incidents and situations were, of course, fictitious. She thought that if these last were purely imaginary, she might draw from the real without detection, but in this she was mistaken; her studies were too closely accurate. This occasionally led her into difficulties. People recognised themselves, or were recognised by others, in her graphic descriptions of their personal appearance, and modes of action and turns of thought; though they were placed in new positions, and figured away in scenes far different to those in which their actual life had been passed. Miss Brontë was struck by the force or peculiarity of the character of some one whom she knew; she studied it, and analysed it with subtle power; and having traced it to its germ, she took that germ as the nucleus of an imaginary character, and worked outwards;—thus reversing the process of analysis, and unconsciously reproducing the same external development. The “three curates” were real living men, haunting Haworth and the neighbouring district; and so obtuse in perception that, after the first burst of anger at having their ways and habits chronicled was over, they rather enjoyed the joke of calling each other by the names she had given them. “Mrs. Pryor” was well known to many who loved the original dearly. The whole family of the Yorkes were, I have been assured, almost daguerreotypes. Indeed Miss Brontë told me that, before publication, she had sent those parts of the novel in which these remarkable persons are introduced, to one of the sons; and his reply, after reading it, was simply that “she had not drawn them strong enough.” From those many-sided sons, I suspect, she drew all that there was of truth in the characters of the heroes in her first two works. They, indeed, were almost the only young men she knew intimately, besides her brother. There was much friendship, and still more confidence between the Brontë family and them,—although their intercourse was often broken and irregular. There was never any warmer feeling on either side.

The character of Shirley herself, is Charlotte's representation of Emily. I mention this, because all that I, a stranger, have been able to learn about her has not tended to give either me, or my readers, a pleasant impression of her. But

we must remember how little we are acquainted with her, compared to that sister, who, out of her more intimate knowledge, says that she “was genuinely good, and truly great,” and who tried to depict her character in Shirley Keeldar, as what Emily Brontë would have been, had she been placed in health and prosperity.

Miss Brontë took extreme pains with “Shirley.” She felt that the fame she had acquired imposed upon her a double responsibility. She tried to make her novel like a piece of actual life,—feeling sure that, if she but represented the product of personal experience and observation truly, good would come out of it in the long run. She carefully studied the different reviews and criticisms that had appeared on “Jane Eyre,” in hopes of extracting precepts and advice from which to profit.

Down into the very midst of her writing came the bolts of death. She had nearly finished the second volume of her tale when Branwell died,—after him Emily,—after her Anne;—the pen, laid down when there were three sisters living and loving, was taken up when one alone remained. Well might she call the first chapter that she wrote after this, “The Valley of the Shadow of Death.”...

*

She went on with her work steadily. But it was dreary to write without any one to listen to the progress of her tale,—to find fault or to sympathise,—while pacing the length of the parlour in the evenings, as in the days that were no more. Three sisters had done this,—then two, the other sister dropping off from the walk,—and now one was left desolate, to listen for echoing steps that never came,—and to hear the wind sobbing at the windows, with an almost articulate sound.

But she wrote on, struggling against her own feelings of illness; “continually recurring feelings of slight cold; slight soreness in the throat and chest, of which, do what I will,” she writes, “I cannot get rid.”...

*

To W. S. WILLIAMS, ESQ.

“Sept. 21st, 1849.

“My dear Sir,—I am obliged to you for preserving my secret, being at least as anxious as ever (MORE anxious I cannot well be) to keep quiet. You asked me in one of your letters lately, whether I thought I should escape identification in Yorkshire. I am so little known, that I think I shall. Besides, the book is far less founded on the Real, than perhaps appears. It would be difficult to explain to you how little actual experience I have had of life, how few persons I have known, and how very few have known me.

“As an instance how the characters have been managed, take that of Mr. Helstone. If this character had an original, it was in the person of a clergyman who died some years since at the advanced age of eighty. I never saw him except once—at the consecration of a church—when I was a child of ten years old. I was then struck with his appearance, and stern, martial air. At a subsequent period, I heard him talked about in the neighbourhood where he had resided: some mention him with enthusiasm—others with detestation. I listened

to various anecdotes, balanced evidence against evidence, and drew an inference. The original of Mr. Hall I have seen; he knows me slightly; but he would as soon think I had closely observed him or taken him for a character—he would as soon, indeed, suspect me of writing a hook—a novel—as he would his dog, Prince. Margaret Hall called “Jane Eyre” a ‘wicked book,’ on the authority of the Quarterly; an expression which, coming from her, I will here confess, struck somewhat deep. It opened my eyes to the harm the Quarterly had done. Margaret would not have called it ‘wicked,’ if she had not been told so.

“No matter,—whether known or unknown—misjudged, or the contrary,—I am resolved not to write otherwise. I shall bend as my powers tend. The two human beings who understood me, and whom I understood, are gone: I have some that love me yet, and whom I love, without expecting, or having a right to expect, that they shall perfectly understand me. I am satisfied; but I must have my own way in the matter of writing. The loss of what we possess nearest and dearest to us in this world, produces an effect upon the character we search out what we have yet left that can support, and, when found, we cling to it with a hold of new-strung tenacity. The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking, three months ago; its active exercise has kept my head above water since; its results cheer me now, for I feel they have enabled me to give pleasure to others. I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift, and to profit by its possession.—Yours sincerely,

“CHARLOTTE BRONTË.”

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Abridgements are by Emma Laybourn MA PGCE.

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