

William Makepeace Thackeray

Vanity Fair

Abridged



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Introduction

William Makepiece Thackeray was born in Calcutta in 1811. His father was a Yorkshireman who worked for the East India Company; after his father's death, his mother sent him to England at the age of five, to live with elderly relatives.

He went to Charterhouse School and Cambridge University, but abandoned his degree and a legal career to become a journalist, first in Paris and then in London. Beset by money problems and by the mental illness of his wife Isabella, he wrote book reviews, humorous sketches and stories for *Fraser's Magazine*, *Punch* and other magazines. *Vanity Fair*, his first major novel, appeared in monthly parts in *Punch* from 1847 to 1848. This and his other books brought him increasing fame until he died suddenly in 1863.

Vanity Fair is nowadays Thackeray's most well-known and widely read book. It takes its title from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, a moral story written in 1678 which would have been familiar to Thackeray's readers. In that book, pilgrims pass through the town of Vanity on their way to the Eternal City, and are tempted by the worldly delights of the town's fair.

Thackeray's novel takes a satirical look at the society of England between about 1815 and 1830, during the battle of Waterloo and the years after. The battle plays a major part in his story, which follows the fortunes of several interconnected families. The main characters are the sweet and simple-natured Amelia and the sharp-witted, impoverished Becky, whose lives become entwined after they leave school together. Although Thackeray gave *Vanity Fair* the subtitle "a novel without a hero", many readers will by the end have chosen their own personal hero or heroine from amongst its lively and astutely drawn characters.

Despite its liveliness, the novel is exceedingly long. This abridgement is a little over half the length of the original. No scenes or characters have been left out; much of the omitted material consists of non-essential description and scene-setting, as well as generalised observations on society life. Some vocabulary has been modernised, though not so much as to jar with the setting; and a few obscure references have been clarified (eg the solutions to the charades in Chapter 51).

Those studying *Vanity Fair* should not rely on, or quote from, this version. The full novel is widely available online, at Project Gutenberg and other websites. However, it is hoped that this shortened version will give general readers the full, if concentrated, flavour of Thackeray's rich and complex book.

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Prologue

Before the Curtain

As the manager of the Performance sits before the theatre curtain and surveys the bustling Fair, a feeling of profound melancholy comes over him. There is a great deal of eating and drinking, making love and jilting, laughing, smoking, cheating, fighting, dancing and fiddling; there are bullies pushing about, bucks ogling the women, knaves picking pockets, policemen on the look-out, quacks bawling at booths, and yokels looking up at the tinselled dancers and tumblers, while the light-fingered folk are operating upon their pockets behind. Yes, this is VANITY FAIR; not a moral place, nor a merry one, though very noisy.

A thoughtful man, walking through the fair, will not see much hilarity. An episode of humour or kindness touches him here and there – a child looking at a gingerbread stall; a pretty girl blushing whilst her lover talks to her; but the general impression is more melancholy than mirthful.

I have no other moral than this to tag to the story of “Vanity Fair.” Some people consider Fairs immoral altogether, and very likely they are right. But persons who think otherwise may perhaps like to step in for half an hour, and look at the performances. There are scenes of all sorts; some dreadful combats, some grand horse-riding, some scenes of high life, and some of very middling; some love-making for the sentimental, and some light comic business; the whole accompanied by appropriate scenery and brilliantly illuminated with the Author’s own candles.

What more has the Manager to say? – To acknowledge the kindness with which the Show has been received in England. He is proud to think that his Puppets have given satisfaction to the best company in this empire. The famous little Becky Puppet has been pronounced to be uncommonly flexible and lively; the Amelia Doll, though it has a smaller circle of admirers, has been carved with the greatest care; the Dobbin Figure, though apparently clumsy, yet dances in a very amusing manner; and please remark the richly dressed figure of the Wicked Nobleman, on which no expense has been spared, and which Old Nick will fetch away at the end of the performance.

And with this, and a bow to his patrons, the Manager retires, and the curtain rises.

CHAPTER 1

Chiswick Mall

Early in this nineteenth century, on a sunshiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies on Chiswick Mall a large coach, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig. A black servant, who sat on the box beside the coachman, uncurled his legs as the coach drew up opposite Miss Pinkerton's, and when he rang the bell twenty young heads were seen peering out of the narrow windows of the stately old house. Amongst them was good-natured Miss Jemima Pinkerton, looking from the window of her drawing-room.

"It is Mrs. Sedley's coach, sister," said Miss Jemima. "Sambo has just rung the bell."

"Have you completed all the necessary preparations incident to Miss Sedley's departure, Miss Jemima?" asked Miss Pinkerton, that majestic lady; queen of Hammersmith, and friend of Doctor Johnson.

"The girls were up at four this morning, packing her trunks, sister," replied Miss Jemima. "We have made her a bunch of flowers."

"Say a bouquet, sister Jemima, 'tis more genteel."

"Well, a booky almost as big as a haystack."

"And I trust, Miss Jemima, you have made a copy of Miss Sedley's account? Is this it? Ninety-three pounds, four shillings. Please address it to John Sedley, Esquire, and seal this letter which I have written to his lady."

In Miss Jemima's eyes a signed letter from her sister, Miss Pinkerton, was an object of deep veneration. Only when her pupils left the school, or when they were about to be married, and once when poor Miss Birch died of the scarlet fever, was Miss Pinkerton known to write personally to the parents of her pupils. Jemima thought that if anything could console Mrs. Birch for her daughter's loss, it would be that pious and eloquent letter in which Miss Pinkerton announced her death.

In the present instance Miss Pinkerton's letter went thus:

The Mall, Chiswick, June 15

Madam, – After her six years' residence at the Mall, I have the honour and happiness of presenting Miss Amelia Sedley to her parents, as a young lady not unworthy to occupy a fitting position in their refined circle. Those virtues and accomplishments which characterize the young English gentlewoman will not be found lacking in the amiable Miss Sedley, whose INDUSTRY and OBEDIENCE have endeared her to her instructors, and whose delightful sweetness of temper has charmed her AGED and YOUTHFUL companions.

In music, in dancing, in writing, in every variety of needlework, she will realize her friends' fondest wishes. In geography there is still much to be desired; and an undeviating use of the backboard, for four hours daily during the next three years, is recommended for that dignified DEPARTMENT so requisite for every young lady of FASHION.

In the principles of religion and morality, Miss Sedley will be found worthy of an establishment which has been honoured by the presence of THE GREAT LEXICOGRAPHER Dr Johnson. In leaving us, Miss Amelia carries with her the

hearts of her companions, and the affectionate regards of her head-mistress, who has the honour to subscribe herself,

Your most obliged humble servant, BARBARA PINKERTON

P.S. Miss Sharp accompanies Miss Sedley. It is particularly requested that Miss Sharp's stay in Russell Square may not exceed ten days. The family with whom she is engaged wish to avail themselves of her services as soon as possible.

Next Miss Pinkerton wrote her own name, and Miss Sedley's, in the fly-leaf of a Johnson's Dictionary – the work which she always presented to her scholars on their departure. On the cover was a copy of "Lines addressed to a young lady on quitting Miss Pinkerton's school, by the late revered Doctor Samuel Johnson." In fact, the Lexicographer's name was always on Miss Pinkerton's lips, and a visit he had once paid to her was the cause of her reputation and her fortune.

Being commanded by her elder sister to get "the Dictionary" from the cupboard, Miss Jemima had taken out two copies of the book. When Miss Pinkerton had finished writing in the first, Jemima timidly handed her the second.

"For whom is this?" said Miss Pinkerton, with awful coldness.

"For Becky Sharp," answered Jemima, trembling and blushing. "She's going too."

"MISS JEMIMA!" exclaimed Miss Pinkerton, in the largest capitals. "Are you in your senses? Replace the Dictionary in the closet, and never take such a liberty again."

"Well, sister, it's only two-and-ninepence, and poor Becky will be miserable if she don't get one."

"Send Miss Amelia Sedley instantly to me," said Miss Pinkerton. Not daring to say another word, poor Jemima trotted off, exceedingly flurried and nervous.

Miss Sedley's papa was a wealthy merchant in London; whereas Miss Sharp was an articled pupil, working as an assistant teacher. For *her*, Miss Pinkerton thought she had done quite enough, without giving her the honour of the Dictionary.

Although schoolmistresses' letters are to be trusted no more than churchyard epitaphs, yet sometimes a person is really deserving of all the praises carved on his gravestone; and so in academies, every now and then a pupil is fully worthy of the praises bestowed by their teacher. Miss Amelia Sedley was a young lady of this sort. She deserved not only all that Miss Pinkerton said in her praise, but had many charming qualities which that pompous old woman could not see.

For she could not only sing like a lark, dance, embroider beautifully, and spell as well as a Dictionary; but she had such a kindly, smiling, tender, generous heart, as won the love of everybody who came near her, right down to the poor girl in the scullery. She had twelve intimate friends out of the twenty-four young ladies. Even envious Miss Briggs never spoke ill of her; high and mighty Miss Saltire allowed that she was genteel; and as for Miss Swartz, the rich mulatto from St. Kitt's, when Amelia went away, she was in a passion of tears.

Miss Jemima had already whimpered several times at the idea of Amelia's departure; and, but for fear of her sister, would have had downright hysterics. Such luxury of grief, however, is only allowed to parlour-boarders. Honest Jemima had all the bills, and the washing, and the mending, and the puddings, and the crockery, and the servants to superintend. But why speak about her? We shall probably not hear of her again from this moment to the end of time.

But as we are to see a great deal of Amelia, there is no harm in saying at the outset that she was a dear little creature; and a great mercy it is, both in life and in novels, to have so guileless and good-natured a companion.

As she is not a heroine, there is no need to describe her looks. Indeed I am afraid that her nose was rather short, and her cheeks a great deal too round and red for a heroine; but her face blushed with rosy health, and her lips with the freshest of smiles, and her eyes sparkled with bright good-humour, except when they filled with tears, and that was a great deal too often; for the silly thing would cry over a dead canary-bird, or the end of a novel, even a stupid one. If anybody were so hard-hearted as to say an unkind word to her, so much the worse for them. Even the austere Miss Pinkerton ceased scolding her after the first time, and gave all the teachers particular orders to treat Miss Sedley with the utmost gentleness.

When the day of departure came, Miss Sedley was glad to go home, and yet woefully sad at leaving school. For three days before, little Laura Martin, the orphan, followed her about like a dog. She had to make and receive fourteen presents – to make fourteen solemn promises of writing every week.

“Write every day, you dear darling,” said the impetuous but affectionate Miss Swartz; and Laura Martin took her hand and said wistfully, “Amelia, when I write to you I shall call you Mamma.” All of which details, no doubt Jones, who reads this book at his Club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish, trivial, twaddling, and ultra-sentimental. Well, he is a lofty man of genius, and admires the great and heroic; and so he had better take warning and go elsewhere.

Well, then. Miss Sedley’s flowers, presents, trunks, and bonnet-boxes were arranged by Mr. Sambo in the carriage, together with a very small and weather-beaten old trunk with Miss Sharp’s card nailed to it. The grief of parting was considerably lessened by the speech which Miss Pinkerton addressed to her pupil, and which was intolerably dull. A seed-cake and a bottle of wine were produced in the drawing-room; and after these refreshments, Miss Sedley was at liberty to depart.

“You’ll go in and say goodbye to Miss Pinkerton, Becky?” said Miss Jemima to a young lady of whom nobody took any notice, who was coming downstairs with her own bandbox.

“I suppose I must,” said Miss Sharp calmly, much to the wonder of Miss Jemima. Miss Sharp entered Miss Pinkerton’s room in a very unconcerned manner, and said in French, with a perfect accent, “Mademoiselle, je viens vous faire mes adieux.”

Miss Pinkerton did not understand French; but throwing up her turbaned head, she said, “Miss Sharp, I wish you a good morning.” She majestically waved one hand, both by way of adieu, and to allow Miss Sharp an opportunity of shaking it.

Miss Sharp only folded her own hands with a very frigid smile and bow, and Miss Pinkerton tossed up her turban more indignantly than ever. It was a little battle between the young lady and the old one, and the latter was worsted.

“Heaven bless you, my child,” said she, embracing Amelia, and scowling over the girl’s shoulder at Miss Sharp.

“Come away, Becky,” said Miss Jemima, pulling the young woman away in alarm, and the drawing-room door closed upon them.

Then came the parting with the young ladies. There was such a hugging, and kissing, and crying, as no pen can depict. The embracing was over; they parted – that is, Miss Sedley parted from her friends. Miss Sharp had demurely entered the carriage some minutes before. Nobody cried at leaving *her*.

Sambo slammed the carriage door on his young weeping mistress, and sprang up behind the carriage.

“Stop!” cried Miss Jemima, rushing to the gate with a parcel. “It’s some sandwiches, my dear,” said she to Amelia. “You may be hungry, you know; and Becky Sharp, here’s a book for you that my sister – that is, I – Johnson’s Dictionary, you know; you mustn’t leave us without that. Good-bye. God bless you!”

And the kind creature retreated.

But, lo! as the coach drove off, Miss Sharp put her pale face out of the window and flung the book back into the garden.

Jemima almost fainted with terror. “Well, I never,” said she; “what an audacious—” Emotion prevented her from finishing.

The carriage rolled away; the great gates were closed. The world is before the two young ladies; and so, farewell to Chiswick Mall.

CHAPTER 2

In Which Miss Sharp and Miss Sedley Prepare to Open the Campaign

When Miss Sharp performed the heroic act mentioned in the last chapter, and saw the Dictionary flying over the garden to fall at Miss Jemima's feet, the young lady's face, which had worn an almost livid look of hatred, assumed a smile that perhaps was scarcely more agreeable. She sank back in the carriage, saying, "So much for the Dictionary; and thank God I'm out of Chiswick."

Miss Sedley was almost as flurried at the defiant act as Miss Jemima had been; for, consider, it was only one minute since she had left school, and the impressions of six years are not got over in that period, or even in a lifetime. She was exceedingly alarmed.

"How could you do that, Rebecca?" she said.

"Why, do you think Miss Pinkerton will come out and order me back to the black hole?" said Rebecca, laughing.

"No: but—"

"I hate the house," continued Miss Sharp in a fury. "I hope I never set eyes on it again. I wish it were at the bottom of the Thames; and if Miss Pinkerton were there, I wouldn't pick her out. O, how I should like to see her floating in the water, turban and all."

"Hush!" cried Miss Sedley.

"Why, will the black footman tell tales?" cried Miss Rebecca. "He may go back and tell Miss Pinkerton that I hate her with all my soul. For two years I have only had insults from her. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen. I have never had a friend or a kind word, except from you. I have been made to tend the little girls, and to talk French until I grew sick of my mother tongue. But Miss Pinkerton doesn't know a word of French, and was too proud to confess it. I believe it was that which made her part with me; and so thank Heaven for French. Vive la France! Vive Bonaparte!"

"O Rebecca, Rebecca, for shame!" cried Miss Sedley; for this was the greatest blasphemy Rebecca had yet uttered. In those days, to say, *Long live Bonaparte* was as much as to say, *Long live Lucifer!* "How can you have such wicked, revengeful thoughts?"

"Revenge may be wicked, but it's natural," answered Miss Rebecca. "I'm no angel." And, to say the truth, she certainly was not.

For it may be remarked during this little conversation (which took place as the coach rolled along lazily by the riverside) that though Miss Rebecca Sharp has twice thanked Heaven, it has been, in the first place, for ridding her of somebody she hated, and secondly, for enabling her to perplex her enemies; neither of which are very kind or amiable motives. Miss Rebecca was not kind or amiable. All the world used her ill, said this young misanthropist, and we may be pretty certain that people whom all the world treats ill, deserve the treatment they get. The world is a looking-glass: frown at it, and it will frown back; laugh, and it is a jolly companion. If the world neglected Miss Sharp, she was never known to have done a good deed for anybody, Not everyone can have the humble and gentle temper of Miss Amelia Sedley.

Miss Sharp's father was an artist who had given drawing lessons at Miss Pinkerton's school. He was a clever man; a pleasant companion; a careless student; constantly running into debt, and partial to the tavern. When he was drunk, he used to beat his wife and daughter; and the next morning, with a headache, he would rail at the world for its neglect of his genius, and abuse his brother painters. As he owed money for a mile round Soho, he had thought to better his circumstances by marrying a young French opera-girl. Miss Sharp never alluded to her mother's humble calling, but stated that the Entrechats were a noble family of Gascony. And curiously, as she advanced in life, this young lady's ancestors increased in rank and splendour.

Rebecca's mother had had some education somewhere, and her daughter spoke French with purity and a Parisian accent: a rare accomplishment, which led to her engagement with Miss Pinkerton. For her mother being dead, her father, after his third attack of delirium tremens, wrote shortly before he died a manly and pathetic letter to Miss Pinkerton, recommending his child to her protection.

Rebecca was seventeen when she came to Chiswick as an articled pupil. Her duties were to talk French, and her privileges to live cost free, and, with a few guineas a year, to gather scraps of knowledge from the professors who taught at the school.

She was small and slight in person; pale, sandy-haired, and with eyes habitually cast down. When they looked up they were very large, odd, and attractive; so attractive that the curate Mr. Crisp, fresh from Oxford, fell in love with Miss Sharp, being shot dead by a glance of her eyes fired across Chiswick Church. This infatuated young man used sometimes to take tea with Miss Pinkerton, and actually proposed marriage to Miss Sharp in an intercepted note. His mother was summoned, and carried off her darling boy; but the very idea of such an eagle in the Chiswick dovecot alarmed Miss Pinkerton. She could not entirely believe the young lady's protestations that she had never exchanged a single word with Mr. Crisp, except twice at Miss Pinkerton's own tea-table.

By the side of many tall and bouncing young ladies in the school, Rebecca Sharp looked like a child. But she had the dismal precocity of poverty. Many a debt-collector had she talked into turning away from her father's door; many a tradesman had she coaxed into good-humour. She sat often with her father, and heard the talk of his wild companions – ill-suited for a girl to hear. But she never had been a girl, she said; she had been a woman since she was eight years old.

Oh, why did Miss Pinkerton let such a dangerous bird into her cage?

The fact is, the old lady believed Rebecca to be a meek creature, so admirably had she acted innocence when her father brought her to visit Chiswick. When Rebecca was sixteen, Miss Pinkerton majestically, with a little speech, made her a present of a doll (confiscated from a pupil). How father and daughter laughed as they trudged home together that evening, and how Miss Pinkerton would have raged had she seen the caricature of herself which the little mimic, Rebecca, managed to make out of her doll. Becky used to go through dialogues with it, delighting the artists' quarter: the young painters, when they came to take their gin-and-water with their lazy, clever senior, used to ask Rebecca if Miss Pinkerton was at home.

Once, after spending a few days at Chiswick, Rebecca set up another doll as Miss Jemima. For though that honest creature had given her jelly and cake, and seven shillings at parting, the girl's sense of ridicule was far stronger than her gratitude, and she sacrificed Miss Jemmy quite as pitilessly as her sister.

Her father died, and she was brought to the Mall as her home. The rigid formality of the place suffocated her. The prayers and the meals, the lessons and the walks, as

regular as in a convent, oppressed her almost beyond endurance. She looked back to the freedom and the beggary of the old studio in Soho with so much regret that everybody, herself included, fancied she was consumed with grief for her father. She had a little room in the garret, where the maids heard her walking and sobbing at night; but it was with rage, not grief.

She had never mingled in the society of women. The pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress, the foolish good-humour of her sister, the silly chat of the elder girls, and the frigid correctness of the governesses equally annoyed her. She had no soft maternal heart, or the prattle of the younger children, with whose care she was chiefly entrusted, might have interested her; but she lived among them two years, and not one was sorry that she went away. The gentle tender-hearted Amelia Sedley was the only person to whom she attached herself in the least; and who could help attaching herself to Amelia?

The advantages of the young women around her gave Rebecca pangs of envy.

“What airs that girl gives herself, because she is an Earl’s grand-daughter,” she thought. “How they bow to that Creole, because of her hundred thousand pounds! I am a thousand times cleverer and more charming than her. Everyone passes me by here. And yet, when I was at my father’s, did not the men give up their gayest parties in order to spend the evening with me?” She determined to get free from her prison, and began to make plans for the future.

She took advantage, therefore, of the learning the place offered her; and as she was already a musician and a good linguist, she speedily went through the little course of study which was considered necessary for ladies in those days. Her music she practised incessantly, and one day was overheard to play a piece so well that Miss Pinkerton thought she could spare herself the expense of a music-master for the juniors, and told Miss Sharp that she was to instruct them in music.

The girl refused. “I am here to speak French with the children,” Rebecca said abruptly, “not to teach them music, and save you money. Pay me, and I will teach them.”

“For five-and-thirty years,” said Miss Pinkerton, “nobody in this house has dared to question my authority. I have nourished a viper in my bosom.”

“A viper – a fiddlestick,” said Miss Sharp. “You took me because I was useful. There is no question of gratitude between us. I hate this place, and want to leave it. I will do nothing here but what I am obliged to do.”

The old lady asked her if she was aware she was speaking to Miss Pinkerton. Rebecca laughed in her face, with a horrid sarcastic laughter.

“Give me a sum of money,” said the girl, “and get rid of me – or, if you like, get me a good place as governess in a nobleman’s family.” And in their further disputes she always repeated, “Get me a situation – we hate each other, and I am ready to go.”

Worthy Miss Pinkerton, despite her intimidating appearance, had no will or strength like that of her little apprentice, and in vain did battle against her. When she scolded her once in public, Rebecca answered her in French, which quite routed the old woman. In order to maintain authority in her school, it became necessary to remove this rebel, this monster, this serpent; and hearing that Sir Pitt Crawley’s family needed a governess, she recommended Miss Sharp for the situation, serpent as she was.

“I cannot, certainly,” she said, “find fault with Miss Sharp’s conduct, except to myself. Her talents and accomplishments are of a high order, and in that respect, at least, she does credit to the school.”

And so the schoolmistress reconciled her conscience, and the apprentice was free. And as Miss Sedley, now sixteen, was about to leave school, and had a friendship for Miss Sharp, she invited Rebecca to pass a week with her at home, before starting her duties as governess.

Thus the world began for these two young ladies. For Amelia it was a new, fresh, brilliant world. It was not quite a new one for Rebecca – but even if she was not beginning the world, she was beginning it over again.

By the time the young ladies reached Kensington turnpike, Amelia had dried her tears, and blushed very much when a young soldier who was riding by said, “A dem fine gal, egad!” Before the carriage arrived in Russell Square, a great deal of conversation had taken place about the Drawing-room, and whether young ladies wore powder as well as hoops when presented at court.

When home was reached, Miss Amelia Sedley skipped out on Sambo’s arm, as happy and as handsome a girl as any in London. So all the servants thought, as they stood bobbing and smiling in the hall to welcome their young mistress.

Amelia showed Rebecca every room of the house, and all her books, her piano, her dresses, necklaces, brooches, and gimcracks. She insisted upon Rebecca accepting a white cornelian necklace and a turquoise ring, and a sweet sprigged muslin dress, which was too small for her now, though it would fit her friend perfectly; and she decided to present a white Cashmere shawl to her friend – for her brother Joseph had just brought her two from India.

When Rebecca saw the two magnificent Cashmere shawls, she said, with perfect truth, “that it must be delightful to have a brother,” and easily won the pity of the tender-hearted Amelia for being alone in the world, without family or friends.

“You know, Rebecca, I shall always be your friend,” said Amelia, “and love you as a sister.”

“Ah, but to have kind, rich, affectionate parents, who give you everything you ask for; and their love, which is more precious than all! My poor papa could give me nothing, and I had only two frocks in all the world! And then, to have a dear brother! How you must love him!”

Amelia laughed.

“What! don’t you love him?” said Rebecca, “you, who say you love everybody?”

“Yes, of course I do – only Joseph doesn’t seem to care much whether I love him or not. He gave me two fingers to shake when he arrived after ten years’ absence! He is very good, but he scarcely ever speaks to me; I think he loves his pipe a great deal better than—” But here Amelia checked herself. “He was very kind to me as a child,” she added. “I was only five when he went away.”

“Isn’t he very rich?” said Rebecca. “They say all Indian nabobs are enormously rich.”

“I believe he has a very large income.”

“And is your sister-in-law a nice, pretty woman?”

“La! Joseph is not married,” said Amelia, laughing again.

Rebecca protested that she had expected to see Amelia’s nephews and nieces, and was quite disappointed that Mr. Sedley was not married; she was sure Amelia had said he was, and she doted so on little children.

“I think you must have had enough of them at Chiswick,” said Amelia, rather wondering at this sudden tenderness on her friend’s part. Indeed later on Miss Sharp would never have advanced an opinion which could so easily be seen to be untrue.

But we must remember that she is but nineteen as yet, unused to the art of deceiving, poor innocent creature!

The meaning of her queries was simply this: "If Mr. Joseph Sedley is rich and unmarried, why should I not marry him? I have only a fortnight, to be sure, but there is no harm in trying." And she decided to make this laudable attempt.

She caressed Amelia; she kissed the cornelian necklace as she put it on, and vowed she would never part with it. When the dinner-bell rang she went downstairs with her arm round her friend's waist. She was so agitated at the drawing-room door, that she could hardly find courage to enter.

"Feel my heart, how it beats, dear!" said she to her friend.

"No, it doesn't," said Amelia. "Come in, don't be frightened. Papa won't hurt you."

CHAPTER 3

Rebecca Is in Presence of the Enemy

A very stout, puffy man, in buckskins and Hessian boots, with several immense neckcloths that rose almost to his nose, a red striped waistcoat and an apple green coat with huge steel buttons (the morning costume of a dandy of those days) was reading the paper by the fire when the two girls entered. He bounced off his arm-chair, blushing, and hid almost his entire face in his neckcloths.

"It's only your sister, Joseph," said Amelia, laughing and shaking the two fingers which he held out. "I've come home for good; and this is my friend, Miss Sharp, whom you have heard me mention."

"No, never, upon my word," said the head under the neckcloth, shaking, "that is, yes – what abominably cold weather, Miss" – and he began poking the fire with all his might, although it was the middle of June.

"He's very handsome," whispered Rebecca to Amelia, rather loud.

"Do you think so? I'll tell him."

"Darling! not for worlds," said Miss Sharp, starting back as timid as a fawn. She had previously made a respectful virgin-like curtsy to the gentleman, her modest eyes gazing so perseveringly on the carpet that it was a wonder how she should have seen him.

"Thank you for the beautiful shawls, brother," said Amelia. "Are they not beautiful, Rebecca?"

"O heavenly!" said Miss Sharp, and her eyes went from the carpet straight to the chandelier.

Joseph continued clattering at the poker and tongs, puffing and turning red.

"I can't make you such handsome presents, Joseph," continued his sister, "but while I was at school, I embroidered for you a beautiful pair of braces."

"Good Gad, Amelia!" he cried in alarm, "what do you mean?" and he plunged so mightily at the bell-rope that it came away in his hand, increasing his confusion. "For heaven's sake, see if my buggy's at the door. I can't wait. I must go."

At this minute their father walked in. "What's the matter, Emmy?" said he.

"Joseph wants me to see if his buggy is at the door. What is a buggy, Papa?"

"It is a one-horse litter," said the old gentleman.

Joseph burst out into a wild fit of laughter; meeting Miss Sharp's eye, he stopped suddenly, as if he had been shot.

"This young lady is your friend?" asked Mr. Sedley. "Miss Sharp, I am very happy to see you. Have you and Emmy been quarrelling already with Joseph, so that he wants to be off?"

"I promised to dine with Bonamy, sir," said Joseph. "I'm not dressed for dinner here."

"O fie! didn't you tell your mother you would dine here? Isn't he handsome enough to dine anywhere, Miss Sharp?"

Miss Sharp looked at her friend, and they both set off in a fit of laughter, highly agreeable to the old gentleman.

"Did you ever see a pair of buckskins like his at Miss Pinkerton's?" he continued.

"Gracious heavens! Father," cried Joseph.

“There now, I have hurt his feelings. Come, Joseph, be friends with Miss Sharp, and let us all go to dinner.”

“There’s a pilau, Joseph, just as you like it, and the best turbot in Billingsgate.”

“Come, sir, walk downstairs with Miss Sharp,” said the father, and he walked merrily off.

If Miss Rebecca Sharp had determined upon conquering this big beau, I don’t think we have any right to blame her. For though the task of husband-hunting is generally entrusted by young ladies to their mammas, recollect that Miss Sharp had no kind parent to arrange these delicate matters for her. If she did not get a husband for herself, no-one else would take the trouble. What causes respectable parents to take up their carpets, set their houses topsy-turvy, and spend a fifth of their year’s income in ball suppers and iced champagne? Is it a pure wish to see young people happy and dancing? Pshaw! they want to marry their daughters; and, just as honest Mrs. Sedley had already arranged little schemes for the settlement of her Amelia, so also had our unprotected Rebecca decided to do her very best to secure the husband who was even more necessary for her than for her friend.

She had a vivid imagination; and had read the Arabian Nights. She had already built herself a most magnificent castle in the air, of which she was mistress, with a husband somewhere in the background; she had arrayed herself in shawls, turbans, and diamond necklaces, and had mounted upon an elephant to pay a visit to the Grand Mogul. Charming visions! many a fanciful young creature besides Rebecca Sharp has indulged in these delightful day-dreams before now!

Joseph Sedley was twelve years older than his sister Amelia. He was in the East India Company’s Civil Service, in the Bengal division: the tax collector of Boggley Wollah, an honourable and lucrative post, as everybody knows.

Boggley Wollah is situated in a fine, lonely, marshy, jungly district, where you may flush out a tiger. Ramgunge, where there is a magistrate, is only forty miles off, and there is a cavalry station about thirty miles farther. Joseph had lived for eight years of his life quite alone at this charming place, seeing a Christian face only about twice a year.

Luckily, he had caught a liver complaint, for the cure of which he returned to Europe. He did not live with his family in London, but had lodgings of his own, like a gay young bachelor. Before he went to India he was too young to partake of the delightful pleasures of a man about town, but he plunged into them eagerly on his return. He drove his horses in the Park; he dined at the fashionable taverns; he went to the theatres, or the opera, laboriously clothed in tights and a cocked hat.

On returning to India, and ever after, he used to talk of this pleasant time with great enthusiasm, and give you to understand that he and Beau Brummel were the leading bucks of the day. But he was as lonely in London as in his jungle at Boggley Wollah. He scarcely knew a single soul in the city: and were it not for his doctor, he must have died of loneliness. He was lazy and peevish; the appearance of a lady frightened him beyond measure. Hence he seldom joined his family in Russell Square, where there was plenty of gaiety, and where his father’s jokes affronted him.

His bulk caused Joseph much anxious thought and alarm. Now and then he would make a desperate attempt to lose weight; but his indolence and love of good living speedily got the better of him. He never was well dressed, but he took huge pains to adorn his big person. His valet made a fortune out of his wardrobe: his dressing-table was covered with pomades and essences: he had tried, in order to give

himself a waist, every waistband then invented. Like most fat men, he had his clothes made too tight, and of the most brilliant colours and youthful cut.

When dressed at last, he would go out to take a drive with nobody in the Park; and then would come back to dress again and go and dine with nobody at the Piazza Coffee-House. He was as vain as a girl; and extremely shy. If Miss Rebecca can get the better of him, at her first entrance into life, she is a young person of no ordinary cleverness.

Her first move showed considerable skill. When she called Sedley a very handsome man, she knew that Amelia would tell her mother, who would probably tell Joseph, or who, at any rate, would be pleased by the compliment paid to her son.

Perhaps, too, Joseph Sedley would overhear the compliment – and he *did* hear. The praise thrilled through every fibre of his big body, and made it tingle with pleasure. Then, however, came a recoil.

“Is the girl making fun of me?” he thought; and straightway he bounced towards the bell, and was about to retreat, as we have seen, when he was persuaded to stay. He conducted the young lady down to dinner in a dubious and agitated frame of mind.

“Does she really think I am handsome?” thought he, “or is she making game of me?”

We have talked of Joseph Sedley being as vain as a girl. Yet girls might say with perfect reason, of one their own sex, “She is as vain as a man.” The bearded creatures are quite as eager for praise, quite as fussy and proud of their appearance, and quite as conscious of their powers of fascination, as any coquette.

Downstairs, then, they went, Joseph blushing, Rebecca very modest. She was dressed in white, with bare shoulders – the picture of unprotected innocence and humble virgin simplicity. “I must be very quiet,” thought she, “and very much interested about India.”

Now Mrs. Sedley had prepared a fine curry for her son, and in the course of dinner this dish was offered to Rebecca.

“What is it?” said she, turning an appealing look to Mr. Joseph.

“Capital,” said he. His mouth was full: his face quite red with gobbling. “Mother, it’s as good as my own curries in India.”

“Oh, I must try some, if it is an Indian dish,” said Miss Rebecca. “I am sure everything must be good that comes from there.” She had never tasted the dish before.

“Have some, Miss Sharp. Do you find it as good as everything else from India?” said Mr. Sedley.

“Oh, excellent!” said Rebecca, who was suffering tortures with the cayenne pepper.

“Try a chili with it, Miss Sharp,” said Joseph, really interested.

“A chili,” said Rebecca, gasping. “Oh yes!” She thought a chili was something cool, as its name suggested. “How fresh and green they look,” she said, and put one into her mouth. It was hotter than the curry; she could bear it no longer. She laid down her fork. “Water, for Heaven’s sake, water!” she cried.

Mr. Sedley senior burst out laughing (he was a coarse man, from the Stock Exchange, where they love practical jokes). “Sambo, give Miss Sharp some water.”

His laugh was echoed by Joseph. The ladies smiled a little, but thought poor Rebecca suffered too much. She would have liked to choke old Sedley, but she swallowed her mortification, and as soon as she could speak, said, with a comical air, “I ought to have remembered the pepper which the Princess of Persia puts in the

cream-tarts in the *Arabian Nights*. Do you put cayenne into your cream-tarts in India, sir?"

Old Sedley laughed, and thought Rebecca was a good-humoured girl.

Joseph said, "Cream-tarts? Our cream is very bad in Bengal. We generally use goats' milk; and 'gad, do you know, I've got to prefer it!"

"You won't like everything from India now, Miss Sharp," said the old gentleman. When the ladies had retired after dinner, the wily old fellow said to his son, "Have a care, Joe; that girl is setting her cap at you."

"Pooh! nonsense!" said Joe, highly flattered. "There was a girl at Dumdum, a daughter of Cutler of the Artillery, and afterwards married to the surgeon, who made a dead set at me in 1804 – at me and Mulligatawney – a devilish good fellow Mulligatawney – Well, sir, the Artillery gave a ball, and Quintin, of the King's 14th, said to me, 'Sedley,' said he, 'I bet you thirteen to ten that Sophy Cutler hooks either you or Mulligatawney before the rains.' 'Done,' says I; and egad, sir – this claret's very good. Adamson's?"

A slight snore was the only reply. The honest stockbroker was asleep, and so the rest of Joseph's story was lost. But he was always talkative in men's company, and had told this delightful tale many scores of times to Dr. Gollop when he came to inquire about his liver.

Being an invalid, Joseph Sedley contented himself with a bottle of claret besides his Madeira at dinner, and managed a couple of plates of strawberries and cream, and twenty-four little rout cakes that were lying neglected in a plate near him; and he thought a great deal about the girl upstairs.

"A nice, merry young creature," thought he. "How she looked at me when I picked up her handkerchief at dinner! She dropped it twice. Who's that singing in the drawing-room? Gad! shall I go up and see?"

But his modesty came rushing upon him. His father was asleep: his hat was in the hall: there was a hackney-coach standing nearby. "I'll go to the theatre," said he, and slipped away without waking his father.

"There goes Joseph," said Amelia, who was looking from the window of the drawing-room, while Rebecca was singing at the piano.

"Miss Sharp has frightened him away," said Mrs. Sedley. "Poor Joe, why will he be so shy?"

CHAPTER 4

The Green Silk Purse

Poor Joe's panic lasted for two or three days; during which he did not visit the house, nor did Miss Rebecca mention his name. She was all respectful gratitude to Mrs. Sedley; delighted at the Bazaars, and in a whirl of wonder at the theatre, where the good-natured lady took her. One day, when Amelia had a headache, and could not go on some outing, nothing could induce Becky to go without her.

"What! you who have shown the poor orphan what happiness and love are for the first time in her life – quit you? Never!" Rebecca's green eyes looked up to Heaven and filled with tears; and Mrs. Sedley thought that her daughter's friend had a charming kind heart.

As for Mr. Sedley's jokes, Rebecca laughed at them with a cordiality which pleased that good-natured gentleman. She found favour with Mrs. Blenkinsop the Housekeeper by showing deep sympathy in the raspberry-jam preserving; she persisted in calling Sambo "Sir" and "Mr. Sambo," to his delight; and she apologised to the lady's maid for ringing the bell, with such sweetness and humility that the Servants' Hall was almost as charmed with her as the Drawing Room.

Once, on the day when Joe Sedley made his second appearance, Rebecca was looking over some drawings of Amelia's from school; when she came upon one which caused her to burst into tears and leave the room.

Amelia hastened after her friend, and came back alone, rather affected. "Her father was our drawing-master at school, Mamma, and used to do the best parts of our drawings."

"The poor child is all heart," said Mrs. Sedley.

"I wish she could stay with us another week," said Amelia.

"She's devilish like Miss Cutler that I used to meet at Dumdum, only fairer. She's married now to the Artillery Surgeon. Do you know, Ma'am, that once Quintin, of the 14th, bet me—"

"O Joseph, we know that story," said Amelia, laughing. "Never mind about that; but persuade Mamma to write to Sir Something Crawley for leave of absence for poor dear Rebecca: here she comes."

"I'm better now," said the girl, with a sweet smile, taking Mrs. Sedley's hand and kissing it respectfully. "How kind you all are to me! All," she added, with a laugh, "except you, Mr. Joseph."

"Me!" said Joseph, meditating an instant departure. "Good Gad! Miss Sharp!"

"Yes; how could you be so cruel as to make me eat that horrid pepper-dish, the first day I saw you? You are not so good to me as dear Amelia."

"He doesn't know you so well," cried Amelia.

"The curry was capital; indeed it was," said Joe gravely.

"And the chilis?"

"By Jove, how they made you cry out!" said Joe, exploding in a fit of laughter.

"I shall take care how I let you choose for me another time," said Rebecca, as they went down again to dinner. "I didn't think men were fond of putting poor harmless girls in pain."

"By Gad, Miss Rebecca, I wouldn't hurt you for the world."

“No,” said she, “I know you wouldn’t.” She gave him ever so gentle a pressure with her little hand, and drew it back quite frightened, and looked first for one instant in his face, and then down at the carpet. Joe’s heart thumped at this little involuntary, timid motion of regard on the part of the simple girl.

Perhaps some ladies will condemn the action as immodest; but, you see, poor dear Rebecca had all this work to do for herself. If a person is too poor to keep a servant, he must sweep his own rooms: if a girl has no Mamma to settle matters with the young man, she must do it for herself.

And oh, what a mercy it is that these women do not exercise their powers oftener! We can’t resist them, if they do. A woman with fair opportunities, and without an absolute hump, may marry WHOM SHE LIKES. Only let us be thankful that the darlings don’t know their own power. They would overcome us entirely if they did.

“Egad!” thought Joseph, entering the dining-room, “I begin to feel as I did at Dumdum with Miss Cutler.” Miss Sharp made many sweet little appeals, half tender, half jocular, to him about the dishes at dinner. By this time she was on a familiar footing with the family; the girls loved each other like sisters.

As if bent upon advancing Rebecca’s plans, Amelia reminded her brother of a promise he had made that he would take her to Vauxhall. “Now,” she said, “that Rebecca is with us, is the very time.”

“O, delightful!” said Rebecca. About to clap her hands, she recollected herself, and paused modestly.

“Not tonight,” said Joe.

“Well, tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow your Papa and I dine out,” said Mrs. Sedley. “You must have someone with you.”

“Let Joe go,” said his father, smiling. “He’s big enough.” At which even Mr. Sambo at the sideboard burst out laughing, and poor Joe felt almost inclined to commit patricide.

“Undo his stays!” continued the pitiless old gentleman. “Fling some water in his face, Miss Sharp: the dear creature’s fainting. Poor victim! carry him up; he’s as light as a feather!”

“If I stand this, sir, I’m d_____!” roared Joseph.

“Order Mr. Jos’s elephant, Sambo!” cried the father; but seeing Jos ready to cry with vexation, he stopped, and held out his hand to his son. “Sambo, never mind the elephant, but give me and Mr. Jos a glass of Champagne. Boney himself hasn’t got such in his cellar, my boy!”

A goblet of Champagne restored Joseph’s temper, and before the bottle was emptied, he had agreed to take the young ladies to Vauxhall.

“The girls must have a gentleman each,” said the old gentleman. “Send to 96, and ask George Osborne if he’ll come.”

At this, Mrs. Sedley looked at her husband and laughed. Mr. Sedley’s eyes twinkled roguishly; and Amelia, hanging down her head, blushed as only young ladies of seventeen know how to blush, and as Miss Rebecca Sharp never had blushed since she was eight years old, when she was caught stealing jam by her godmother.

“Amelia had better write a note,” said her father, “and let George Osborne see what beautiful handwriting we have brought back from Miss Pinkerton’s. Do you remember when you wrote to him to come on Twelfth-night, Emmy, and spelt twelfth without the f?”

“That was years ago,” said Amelia.

“It seems like yesterday, don’t it, John?” said Mrs. Sedley.

That night, in their front room, Mrs. Sedley took her husband to task for his cruel conduct to poor Joseph.

“It was quite wicked of you,” said she, “to torment the poor boy so.”

“My dear,” said he, “Jos is a great deal vainer than you ever were; though thirty years ago you had a right to be vain. But I’ve no patience with Jos and his dandified modesty. The boy is only thinking of himself, and what a fine fellow he is. We shall have some trouble with him, Ma’am. Here is Emmy’s little friend making love to him as hard as she can; and if she does not catch him some other will. That man is destined to be a prey to women. Mark my words, the first woman who fishes for him, will hook him.”

“She shall go off tomorrow, the little artful creature,” said Mrs. Sedley.

“Why not she as well as another? I don’t care who marries him. Let Jos please himself.”

When morning came, the good-natured Mrs. Sedley no longer thought of sending away Miss Sharp; for she could not bring herself to suppose that the little, humble, grateful governess would dare to look up to such a magnificent personage as the Collector of Boggley Wollah. In any case, the letter asking for the young lady’s stay to be extended had already been sent, and it would be difficult to find an excuse for dismissing her.

The very elements conspired to favour Rebecca. For on the evening of the Vauxhall party, George Osborne having come to dinner, and the elders of the house having gone out to dine, there came on such a thunder-storm as obliged the young people to remain at home.

Mr. Osborne did not seem in the least disappointed. He and Joseph Sedley drank a quantity of port-wine together in the dining-room, while Sedley told a number of his best Indian stories. Afterwards Miss Amelia Sedley did the honours of the drawing-room; and the four young persons passed such a comfortable evening together that they declared they were glad of the thunder-storm.

Osborne was Mr. Sedley’s godson, and had been one of the family for three-and-twenty years. At six weeks old, he had received from John Sedley a present of a silver cup; from his youth he was “tipped” regularly by the old gentleman at Christmas: and he remembered being thrashed by Joseph Sedley, when the latter was a big, swaggering hobbadyhoy, and George an impudent urchin of ten years old.

“Do you remember, Sedley, what a fury you were in, when I cut off the tassels of your Hessian boots, and how Miss – how Amelia rescued me from a beating, by falling on her knees and crying out to her brother not to beat little George?”

Jos remembered this perfectly well, but vowed that he had forgotten it.

“Well, do you remember coming down in a gig to Dr. Swishtail’s to see me, before you went to India, and giving me half a guinea and a pat on the head? I always thought you were at least seven feet high, and was quite astonished at your return to find you no taller than myself.”

“How good of Mr. Sedley to go to your school and give you money!” exclaimed Rebecca.

“Yes, and after I had cut the tassels of his boots, too.”

“I delight in Hessian boots,” said Rebecca. Jos Sedley, who admired his own legs prodigiously, and always wore Hessians, was extremely pleased at this remark, though he drew his legs under his chair as it was made.

“Miss Sharp!” said George Osborne, “you who are so clever an artist, you must make a grand historical picture of the scene of the boots. Sedley shall be shown with an injured boot in one hand; the other shall be holding my shirt. Amelia shall be kneeling with her little hands up; and the picture shall have an allegorical title.”

“I shan’t have time to do it here,” said Rebecca. “I’ll do it when – when I’m gone.” And she dropped her voice, and looked so sad that everybody felt how cruel her lot was, and how sorry they would be to part with her.

“If only you could stay longer, dear Rebecca,” said Amelia.

“Why? So that I may be only the more unwilling to lose you?” And she turned away her head. Amelia began to weep. George Osborne looked on with a touched curiosity; and Joseph Sedley heaved something like a sigh, as he cast his eyes down towards his favourite boots.

“Let us have some music, Miss Sedley – Amelia,” said George, who felt at that moment an extraordinary impulse to seize her in his arms, and to kiss her. Amelia looked at him for a moment, and if I said they fell in love with each other at that instant, I should be telling an untruth, for these two young people had been bred up by their parents for this very purpose, and their marriage had been planned ten years before.

They went off to the piano, which was in the back drawing-room; and as it was rather dark, Miss Amelia, in the most unaffected way in the world, put her hand into Mr. Osborne’s, who, of course, could see a great deal better than she could. But this arrangement left Mr. Joseph Sedley alone with Rebecca, at the drawing-room table, where she was occupied in knitting a green silk purse.

“There is no need to ask family secrets,” said Miss Sharp. “Those two have told theirs.”

“I believe the affair is settled,” said Joseph. “George Osborne is a capital fellow.”

“And your sister is the dearest creature in the world,” said Rebecca. “Happy the man who wins her!” With this, she gave a great sigh.

When two unmarried persons get together, and talk upon such delicate subjects, a great deal of intimacy is established between them. There is no need to report the conversation which now took place between Mr. Sedley and the young lady; for it was not especially witty or eloquent. As there was music in the next room, the talk was carried on in a low tone, though the other couple would not have been disturbed by a loud conversation, so preoccupied were they.

Almost for the first time in his life, Mr. Sedley found himself talking without timidity to a person of the other sex. Miss Rebecca asked him a great many questions about India, which gave him an opportunity of narrating many interesting anecdotes. He described the balls at Government House, and how they kept themselves cool in hot weather, with punkahs and other contrivances; and he was very witty about the number of Scotchmen whom Lord Minto, the Governor-General, patronised; and then he described a tiger-hunt, and how the mahout of his elephant had been pulled off his seat by an infuriated tiger. How delighted Miss Rebecca was at the Government balls, and how she laughed at the stories of the Scotch aides-de-camp, and called Mr. Sedley a wicked satirical creature; and how frightened she was at the story of the elephant!

“For your mother’s sake, dear Mr. Sedley,” she said, “promise never to go on one of those horrid expeditions.”

“Pooh, pooh, Miss Sharp,” said he, “the danger makes the sport pleasanter.” He had been only once at a tiger-hunt, when the accident in question occurred, and when he was half killed – not by the tiger, but by fright.

As he talked on, he grew quite bold, and actually had the audacity to ask Miss Rebecca for whom she was knitting the green silk purse? He was quite surprised and delighted at his own graceful manner.

“For anyone who wants a purse,” replied Miss Rebecca, looking at him in the most gentle winning way. Sedley was about to make an eloquent speech, and had begun, “O Miss Sharp, how—” when a song in the other room paused, and made him hear his own voice so distinctly that he stopped, blushed, and blew his nose in great agitation.

“Did you ever hear anything like your brother’s eloquence?” whispered Mr. Osborne to Amelia at the piano. “Why, your friend has worked miracles.”

“The more the better,” said Miss Amelia, who was a match-maker in her heart, and would have been delighted for Joseph to carry back a wife to India. She had, too, warmed into a most tender friendship for Rebecca, and discovered a million amiable virtues in her which she had not seen when they were at school.

Having expended her little store of songs, Amelia asked her friend to sing. “You would not have listened to me,” she said to Mr. Osborne, “had you heard Rebecca first.”

“I give Miss Sharp warning, though,” said Osborne, “that, right or wrong, I consider Miss Amelia Sedley the best singer in the world.”

“You shall hear,” said Amelia; and Joseph Sedley was actually polite enough to carry the candles to the piano. Rebecca sang far better than her friend (though of course Osborne was free to keep his opinion), and exerted herself to the utmost. Amelia had never known her perform so well. She sang a French song, which Joseph did not understand, and then a number of those simple ballads which were the fashion forty years ago, and in which British tars, our King, blue-eyed Mary, and the like, were the principal themes. They are not very brilliant musically, but contain simple appeals to the affections. Sambo, who was bringing the tea, and Mrs. Blenkinsop the housekeeper stopped to listen on the landing.

The last of these ditties went thus:

*Ah! bleak and barren was the moor,
Ah! loud and piercing was the storm
The cottage roof was shelter’d sure,
The cottage hearth was bright and warm.
An orphan boy the lattice pass’d,
And, as he mark’d its cheerful glow,
Felt doubly keen the midnight blast
And doubly cold the fallen snow.*

*They mark’d him as he onward prest,
With fainting heart and weary limb;
Kind voices bade him turn and rest,
And gentle faces welcomed him.
The dawn is up—the guest is gone
The cottage hearth is blazing still;
Heaven pity all poor wanderers lone
Hark to the wind upon the hill!*

As she came to the last words, Miss Sharp's voice faltered. Everybody felt the allusion to her departure, and to her orphan state. Joseph Sedley, who was fond of music, and soft-hearted, was profoundly touched. If he had had the courage, and George and Miss Sedley had stayed in the other room, Joseph's bachelorhood would have been at an end, and this work would never have been written.

But at the close of the song, Rebecca quitted the piano, and walked away into the front drawing-room twilight. Mr. Sambo appeared with a tray containing sandwiches, jellies, and glittering glasses and decanters, on which Joseph's attention was immediately fixed.

When the parents of the house returned from their dinner-party, they found the young people busy talking. Mr. Joseph was just saying, "My dear Miss Sharp, one little teaspoonful of jelly to recruit you after your – your delightful exertions."

"Bravo, Jos!" said Mr. Sedley. Jos instantly relapsed into an alarmed silence, and soon departed. He did not lie awake all night thinking whether or not he was in love with Miss Sharp; the passion of love never interfered with his appetite or sleep; but he thought how delightful it would be to hear such songs as those after dinner – how well she could speak French – and what a sensation she would make at the Calcutta balls.

"It's evident the poor devil's in love with me," thought he. "She is just as rich as most of the girls who come out to India. I might go farther, and fare worse, egad!" And in these meditations he fell asleep.

How Miss Sharp lay awake, thinking, will he come tomorrow? need not be told here. Tomorrow came, and Mr. Joseph Sedley arrived before luncheon. George Osborne was there already, and Rebecca was knitting her purse.

While the ex-Collector of Boggley Wollah laboured upstairs from his carriage to the drawing-room, knowing glances were telegraphed between Osborne and Miss Sedley. They looked at Rebecca, who actually blushed as she bent her fair ringlets over her knitting. How her heart beat as Joseph appeared, puffing, in shining creaking boots – Joseph, in a new waistcoat, red with heat and nervousness, and blushing behind his wadded neckcloth. It was a nervous moment for all.

Sambo, who announced Mr. Joseph, followed him grinning and bearing two handsome nosegays of flowers, which Joe had actually had the gallantry to buy that morning. The young women were delighted as he presented one to each, with an exceedingly solemn bow.

"Bravo, Jos!" cried Osborne.

"Thank you, dear Joseph," said Amelia.

"O heavenly, heavenly flowers!" exclaimed Miss Sharp. She smelt them delicately, and held them to her bosom, and cast up her eyes in an ecstasy of admiration. Perhaps she just looked first into the bouquet, to see whether there was a note hidden among the flowers; but there was none.

"Do they talk the language of flowers at Boggley Wollah, Sedley?" asked Osborne, laughing.

"Pooh, nonsense!" replied Joe. "Bought 'em at Nathan's; very glad you like 'em; and Amelia, my dear, I bought a pine-apple at the same time, which I gave to Sambo. Let's have it for tiffin; very cool and nice this hot weather." Rebecca said she had never tasted a pineapple, and longed beyond everything to taste one.

So the conversation went on. I don't know why first Osborne, and then Amelia went out of the room; but Jos was left alone with Rebecca, who had resumed her work; the green silk and the shining needles were quivering rapidly under her white slender fingers.

“What a beautiful song you sang last night, dear Miss Sharp,” said the Collector. “It made me cry almost, ’pon my honour.”

“Because you have a kind heart, Mr. Joseph.”

“It kept me awake last night, and I was trying to hum it this morning, upon my honour. Gollop, my doctor, came in at eleven (for I’m a sad invalid, you know, and see Gollop every day), and, gad! there I was, singing away like – a robin.”

“O you droll creature! Do let me hear you sing it.”

“No, you, Miss Sharp.”

“Not now, Mr. Sedley,” said Rebecca, with a sigh. “My spirits are not equal to it; besides, I must finish the purse. Will you help me, Mr. Sedley?” And before he had time to ask how, Mr. Joseph Sedley was actually seated *tete-a-tete* with a young lady, his arms stretched out in an imploring attitude, and his hands bound in a web of green silk, which she was unwinding.

In this romantic position Osborne and Amelia found them. The skein of silk was wound round the card; but Mr. Jos had not spoken.

“I am sure he will tonight, dear,” Amelia said, as she pressed Rebecca’s hand; and Sedley, too, said to himself, “Gad, I’ll pop the question at Vauxhall.”

CHAPTER 5

Dobbin of Ours

Cuff's fight with Dobbin, and the unexpected result, will long be remembered by every man who was educated at Dr. Swishtail's famous school.

Dobbin (who used to be called Heigh-ho Dobbin, Gee-up Dobbin, and other contemptuous names) was the quietest, clumsiest, and, it seemed, the dullest of Dr. Swishtail's pupils. His father was a grocer: and it was rumoured that his board and schooling were paid for in goods, not money. He stood there in his scraggy corduroys and jacket, with his great bones bursting through the seams, as the representative of so many pounds of tea, candles, sugar, soap and other commodities. A dreadful day it was for young Dobbin when one of the boys espied the cart of *Dobbin & Rudge, Grocers and Oilmen*, at the Doctor's door, unloading its wares.

Young Dobbin had no peace after that. The jokes were merciless. "Hullo, Dobbin," one wag would say, "here's good news in the paper. Sugar is ris', my boy." Another would ask: "If a pound of mutton-candles costs sevenpence-halfpenny, how much must Dobbin cost?" and a roar would follow from the circle of young knaves, who rightly considered that the selling of goods is a shameful practice, deserving the scorn of all real gentlemen.

"*Your* father's only a merchant, Osborne," Dobbin said in private to the little boy who had brought down the storm upon him.

At which the latter replied haughtily, "My father's a gentleman, and keeps his carriage"; and William Dobbin retreated to a remote outhouse in the playground, in the bitterest sadness and woe. Who does not recollect similar hours of childish grief? Who feels injustice so acutely as a generous boy? and how many of those gentle souls do you degrade and torture, for the sake of a little arithmetic and dog-latin?

Now, William Dobbin, from his inability to learn Latin, was compelled to remain in the lower form, with little pink-faced fellows; a giant amongst them, with his downcast, stupefied look, his dog-eared primer, and his corduroys. All made fun of him. They cut his bed-strings. They left buckets for him to break his shins over. They sent him parcels, which, when opened, were found to contain the paternal soap and candles. Dobbin bore everything patiently, and was entirely dumb and miserable.

Cuff, on the contrary, was the great chief and dandy of the Swishtail School. He smuggled wine in. He fought the town-boys. Ponies were brought for him to ride home on Saturdays. He had a gold repeater watch: and took snuff like the Doctor. He had been to the Opera, and could knock you off forty Latin verses in an hour. What couldn't he do? They said even the Doctor himself was afraid of him.

Cuff, the unquestioned king of the school, ruled over his subjects, and bullied them with splendid superiority. They blacked his shoes, toasted his bread, and gave him balls at cricket during whole summer afternoons. Dobbin, or "Figs," was the fellow whom he despised most, although he scarcely ever condescended to speak to him.

One day, Dobbin, alone in the schoolroom, was blundering over a letter home; when Cuff, entering, bade him go upon some errand.

"I can't," says Dobbin; "I want to finish my letter."

"You can't?" says Mr. Cuff, picking up the letter (in which many words were scratched out or mis-spelt, with much labour and tears; for the poor fellow was

writing to his mother, who was fond of him, although she was a grocer's wife.) "Can't you write to old Mother Figs tomorrow?"

"Don't call names," Dobbin said, getting off the bench very nervous.

"Well, sir, will you go?" crowed the cock of the school.

"Put down the letter," Dobbin replied; "no gentleman readth letterth."

"Well, NOW will you go?" says the other.

"No, I won't. Don't strike me, or I'll THMASH you," roars out Dobbin, looking so wicked that Mr. Cuff paused, put his hands into his pockets, and walked away with a sneer. But he never meddled with the grocer's boy after that; though he spoke of Dobbin with contempt behind his back.

Some time after this, it happened that Mr. Cuff, on a sunshiny afternoon, was near poor William Dobbin, who was lying under a tree in the playground, looking at a favourite copy of the Arabian Nights while the rest of the school were pursuing various sports. He was quite lonely, and almost happy. He had for once forgotten the world, and was away with Sinbad the Sailor, when the shrill cries of a little fellow weeping woke up his pleasant reverie. Looking up, he saw Cuff belabouring a little boy. It was the lad who had told about the grocer's cart; but Dobbin bore no malice towards the young and small.

"How dare you break the bottle, sir?" says Cuff to the urchin, swinging a cricket-stump at him. The boy had been instructed to get over the playground wall; to run a quarter of a mile; to purchase a pint of rum-shrub on credit; to brave all the Doctor's spies, and clamber back into the playground again. His foot had slipped, and the bottle was broken, and he stood guilty and trembling.

"How dare you?" says Cuff; "you blundering little thief. You drank it, and now you pretend to have broken the bottle. Hold out your hand, sir."

Down came the stump with a great thump on the child's hand. A moan followed. Dobbin looked up: the Roc whisked away Sinbad the Sailor out of sight, and there was everyday life; a big boy beating a little one without cause.

"Hold out your other hand, sir," roars Cuff to his little schoolfellow, whose face was distorted with pain. Dobbin quivered, and gathered himself up.

"Take that, you little devil!" cried Mr. Cuff. Down came the stump again; and Dobbin sprang up, and screamed out,

"Hold off, Cuff; don't bully that child any more; or I'll--"

"Or you'll what?" Cuff asked in amazement. "Hold out your hand, you little beast."

"I'll give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life," Dobbin said; and little Osborne, gasping and in tears, looked up with wonder at seeing this amazing champion put up suddenly to defend him. Cuff's astonishment was scarcely less.

"After school," said he, after a pause.

"As you please," Dobbin said. "You must be my bottle holder, Osborne."

"Well, if you like," little Osborne replied; for he was rather ashamed of his champion.

Yes, when the hour of battle came, he was almost ashamed to say, "Go it, Figs"; and not a single other boy uttered that cry for the first two or three rounds of the fight. At its start, Cuff, with a contemptuous smile on his face, planted blows upon his adversary and floored him three times running. At each fall there was a cheer.

"What a beating I shall get when it's over," young Osborne thought, picking up his man. "You'd best give in," he said to Dobbin; "it's only a thrashing, Figs, and you know I'm used to it."

But Figs, whose limbs were in a quiver, and whose nostrils were breathing rage, put his little bottle-holder aside, and went in for a fourth time.

As he did not know how to parry Cuff's blows, Figs now determined that he would start with a charge on his own part; and accordingly, being a left-handed man, hit out a couple of times with all his might – once at Mr. Cuff's left eye, and once on his beautiful Roman nose.

Cuff went down this time, to the astonishment of all.

“Well hit, by Jove,” says little Osborne, with the air of a connoisseur, clapping his man on the back. “Give it him with the left, Figs my boy.”

Figs's left made terrific play during all the rest of the fight. Cuff went down every time. At the sixth round, there were almost as many fellows shouting for Figs as for Cuff. At the twelfth round Cuff lost all presence of mind and power of attack. Figs, on the contrary, was calm and pale, his eyes shining open, and a great cut on his underlip bleeding profusely. He had a fierce and ghastly air, which struck terror into many spectators.

Nevertheless, Cuff prepared to close for the thirteenth time; coming up full of pluck, but reeling and groggy. The Fig-merchant put in his left on his adversary's nose, and sent him down for the last time.

“I think that will do,” Figs said, as his opponent dropped neatly on the green, and did not stand up again.

And now all the boys set up such a shout for Figs as brought Dr. Swishtail out of his study, curious to know the cause of the uproar. He threatened to flog Figs; but Cuff, who had come to himself by this time, stood up and said, “It's my fault, sir – not Dobbin's. I was bullying a little boy; and he served me right.” By this magnanimous speech he not only saved his conqueror a whipping, but got back all his ascendancy over the boys.

Young Osborne wrote home to his parents.

Dear Mama,

I hope you are quite well. I should be much obliged to you to send me a cake and five shillings. There has been a fight here between Cuff & Dobbin. Cuff, you know, was the Cock of the School. They fought thirteen rounds, and Dobbin Licked. The fight was about me. Cuff was licking me for breaking a bottle of milk, and Figs wouldn't stand it. We call him Figs because his father is a Grocer. I think as he fought for me you ought to buy your Tea & Sugar at his father's. Cuff goes home every Saturday, but can't this week, because he has 2 Black Eyes. He has a white Pony to come and fetch him, and a groom on a bay mare. I wish my Papa would let me have a Pony, and I am

Your dutiful Son, GEORGE SEDLEY OSBORNE

P.S. Give my love to little Emmy. I am cutting her out a Coach in cardboard. Please not a seed-cake, but a plum-cake.

After Dobbin's victory, his character rose greatly in the eyes of all his schoolfellows, and the name of Figs became as respectable a nickname as any other in the school.

“After all, it's not his fault that his father's a grocer,” George Osborne said, who, though a little chap, was popular.

And Dobbin's spirit rose with his altered circumstances. He made wonderful advances in learning. The superb Cuff himself helped him with his Latin verses, "coached" him in play-hours, and carried him triumphantly into the middle form.

It was discovered that although dull at classical learning, at mathematics he was uncommonly quick. He passed third in algebra, and got presented with a prize-book before the whole school. All the boys clapped, despite his blushes and stumbles; you should have seen his mother's face. Old Dobbin, his father, who now respected him for the first time, gave him two guineas, most of which he spent in tuck for the school: and he came back in a tail-coat after the holidays.

Dobbin modestly attributed all his good fortune to little George Osborne, to whom he vowed love and affection. He was his valet, his dog, his man Friday. He believed Osborne to be perfect in every way, the handsomest, the bravest, the cleverest, the most generous of boys. He shared his money with him: bought him presents of knives, pencil-cases, toffee, and books – gifts which George received very graciously, as became his superior merit.

So Lieutenant Osborne, arriving at Russell Square on the day of the Vauxhall party, said to the ladies, "Mrs. Sedley, Ma'am, I've asked Dobbin of ours to come and dine here, and go with us to Vauxhall. I met him at the Bedford, and told him that we were all going out; and that Mrs. Sedley had forgiven his breaking the punch-bowl at the child's party. Don't you remember the catastrophe, Ma'am, seven years ago?"

"Over Mrs. Flamingo's crimson silk gown," said good-natured Mrs. Sedley. "What a gawky! And his sisters are not much more graceful. Lady Dobbin was at Highbury last night with three of them. Such figures! my dears."

"His father the Alderman's very rich, isn't he?" Osborne said archly. "Don't you think one of the daughters would be a good match for me, Ma'am?"

"You foolish creature! Who would take you, I should like to know, with your yellow face?"

"Mine a yellow face? Wait till you see Dobbin. He had the yellow fever three times; twice at Nassau, and once at St. Kitts."

"Well, yours is quite yellow enough for us. Isn't it, Emmy?" Mrs. Sedley said. Amelia only smiled and blushed. Looking at George Osborne's pale, interesting face, and black, curling, shining whiskers, she thought that there never was such a face or such a hero.

"I don't care about Captain Dobbin's complexion," she said, "or his awkwardness. I shall always like him;" her reason being that he was the friend and champion of George.

"There's not a finer fellow in the army," Osborne said, "nor a better officer, though he is not an Adonis, certainly." And he looked towards the mirror; and caught Miss Sharp's eye fixed keenly upon him, at which he blushed a little.

Rebecca thought, "Ah, mon beau Monsieur! I think I have your measure."

That evening, when Amelia came tripping into the drawing-room in a white muslin frock, singing like a lark, and as fresh as a rose, a very tall ungainly gentleman, with large hands and feet, and large ears, set off by a closely cropped head of black hair, and wearing the hideous military frogged coat and cocked hat of those times, advanced to meet her, with a clumsy bow.

This was Captain William Dobbin, of His Majesty's ___th Regiment of Foot, returned from the West Indies, where his regiment had been ordered whilst many of his gallant comrades were reaping glory in the Peninsula.

He had arrived with a knock so timid that it was inaudible to the ladies upstairs: otherwise Amelia would never have come singing into the room. As it was, the sweet fresh little voice went right into the Captain's heart, and nestled there. When she held out her hand for him to shake, he paused, and thought, "Are you the little maid I remember in the pink frock, the night I upset the punch-bowl? The little girl that George Osborne said should marry him? What a prize the rogue has got!" All this he thought, before he took Amelia's hand.

His history since he left school, has, I think, been indicated sufficiently for an ingenious reader. His father, the despised grocer, became Alderman Dobbin, and was then knighted. The son had entered the army: and young Osborne followed in the same regiment. They had served in the West Indies and in Canada. Dobbin's attachment to George Osborne was as warm now as it had been at school.

So these worthy people sat down to dinner, and talked about war and glory, and Boney and Lord Wellington, and the last military Gazette. The two gallant young men longed to see their own names in that glorious list, and cursed their unlucky fate in belonging to a regiment which had been away from battle.

Miss Sharp kindled with this exciting talk, but Miss Sedley trembled and grew quite faint. Mr. Jos told several of his tiger-hunting stories, finished with the one about Miss Cutler and Lance the surgeon; helped Rebecca to everything on the table, and gobbled and drank a great deal.

He sprang to open the door for the ladies, when they retired; and returning to the table, filled bumper after bumper of claret, which he swallowed with nervous rapidity.

"He's priming himself," Osborne whispered to Dobbin, and at length the hour and the carriage arrived for Vauxhall.

CHAPTER 6

Vauxhall

I know that the tune I am piping is a very mild one (although there are some terrific chapters coming presently), and I must beg the good-natured reader to remember that we are only talking about a stockbroker's family in Russell Square, who are taking walks, or lunch, as people do in ordinary life, without a single wonderful incident to mark the progress of their loves. So far, Osborne, in love with Amelia, has asked an old friend to Vauxhall. Jos Sedley is in love with Rebecca. Will he marry her? That is the great subject now in hand.

Suppose we had laid the scene in Grosvenor Square, and had shown how Lord Joseph Sedley fell in love, and the Marquis of Osborne became attached to Lady Amelia, with the full consent of the Duke, her noble father: or instead, suppose we had resorted to the entirely low, and described what was going on in Mr. Sedley's kitchen – how black Sambo was in love with the cook (as indeed he was), and how he fought a battle with the coachman over her, and how the knife-boy was caught stealing a shoulder of mutton. Such incidents might provoke much delightful laughter, and be supposed to represent scenes of "life." Or if we had made a professional burglar burst into the house, slaughter black Sambo, and carry off Amelia in her night-dress, not to be rescued till the third volume, we would have our readers panting through the fiery chapters of such a thrilling tale.

But my readers must be content with a homely story, and a chapter about Vauxhall which is so short that it scarce deserves to be called a chapter at all. And yet it is a very important one. Are there not little chapters in everybody's life that seem to be nothing, and yet affect all the rest of their history?

Let us then step into the coach with the Russell Square party, and be off to Vauxhall Gardens. Jos and Miss Sharp are on the front seat, with Mr. Osborne sitting opposite, between Captain Dobbin and Amelia.

Every soul in the coach agreed that on that night Jos would propose to Rebecca Sharp. The parents at home had acquiesced, though old Mr. Sedley had a feeling close to contempt for his son. He said he was vain, selfish, lazy, and effeminate, and laughed at his pompous bragging stories.

"I shall leave the fellow half my property," he said; "but I am perfectly sure that if you, I and his sister were to die tomorrow, he would say 'Good Gad!' and eat his dinner just as usual. Let him marry whom he likes. It's no affair of mine."

Amelia, on the other hand, was quite enthusiastic for the match, and in a flutter of excitement. She did not speak with Rebecca on the subject, but had long conversations with Mrs. Blenkinsop the housekeeper, who dropped some hints to the lady's-maid, who may have mentioned the matter to the cook, who carried the news to all the tradesmen, so that Mr. Jos's marriage was now talked of by a large number of persons.

Everything seemed to smile upon Rebecca's fortunes. She took Jos's arm on going to dinner; she sat by him on the box of his open carriage; and though nobody said a word about marriage, everybody seemed to understand it. All she wanted was the proposal. Ah! how Rebecca now felt the lack of a mother! – who would have managed the business in ten minutes, and, with a little delicate conversation, would have extracted the avowal from the young man's bashful lips!

Such was the state of affairs as the carriage crossed Westminster bridge.

They arrived at the Royal Gardens. As the majestic Jos stepped out of the creaking vehicle, the crowd gave a cheer for the fat gentleman, who blushed as he walked away with Rebecca under his arm. George, of course, took charge of Amelia.

“I say, Dobbin,” said George, “just look after the shawls and things, there’s a good fellow.” And so while he paired off with Miss Sedley, and Jos squeezed through the gate into the gardens with Rebecca, honest Dobbin contented himself by carrying the shawls, and paying at the door for the whole party.

He walked modestly behind them, unwilling to be a spoil-sport. About Rebecca and Jos he did not care a fig. But he thought Amelia worthy even of the brilliant George Osborne, and as he saw the girl’s delight and wonder, he watched her artless happiness with a sort of fatherly pleasure. Perhaps he felt that he would have liked to have someone on his own arm rather than a shawl; but William Dobbin was not selfish; and so long as his friend was enjoying himself, how should he be discontented?

And the truth is, that of all the delights of the Gardens – of the hundred thousand lamps, the fiddlers, the singers, the country dances, with their jumping, thumping and laughter; the signal which announced that Madame Saqui was about to mount on a slack-rope ascending to the stars; the hermit that sat in the illuminated hermitage; the dark walks, so favourable to young lovers – Captain William Dobbin did not take the slightest notice.

He carried about Amelia’s white cashmere shawl, and having listened to Mrs. Salmon perform the Battle of Borodino (a savage cantata against Napoleon), Dobbin tried to hum it as he walked away, and found he was humming the tune which Amelia Sedley sang as she came down to dinner. He burst out laughing at himself; for he could sing no better than an owl.

Our two young couples made solemn promises to keep together during the evening, and separated ten minutes later. Parties at Vauxhall always did separate, to meet again at supper-time, when they could talk of their adventures.

What were the adventures of Mr. Osborne and Miss Amelia? That is a secret. But be sure that they were perfectly happy, and correct in their behaviour; and as they had been in the habit of being together any time these fifteen years, their tete-a-tete offered no particular novelty.

But when Miss Rebecca Sharp and her stout companion lost themselves in a solitary path, in which there were no more than a hundred other couples, they both felt that the situation was extremely critical. Now or never was the moment, Miss Sharp thought, for Mr Sedley’s declaration. They had previously been to the panorama of Moscow, where a fellow treading on Miss Sharp’s foot caused her to fall back with a little shriek into Mr. Sedley’s arms. This incident increased his confidence so much that he told her several of his favourite Indian stories all over again.

“How I should like to see India!” said Rebecca.

“Should you?” said Joseph tenderly; and was no doubt about to follow up this question with one still more tender – when, oh, provoking! the bell rang for the fireworks, and a great scuffling and running took place. The lovers were obliged to follow the stream of people.

Captain Dobbin had thought of joining the party at supper – but he walked twice in front of the box where the couples met, and nobody noticed him. Covers were laid for four. The mated pairs were prattling away quite happily, and Dobbin knew he was clean forgotten.

“I should only be *de trop*,” said the Captain rather wistfully. “I’d best go and talk to the hermit.” So he strolled out of the noise and clatter of the banquet, into the dark walk, at the end of which lived that pasteboard Solitary. It wasn’t very good fun for Dobbin – indeed, to be alone at Vauxhall is dismal sport for a bachelor.

The two couples were perfectly happy in their box. Jos was in his glory, ordering about the waiters with great majesty. He made the salad; uncorked the Champagne; carved the chickens; and ate and drank the greater part of the refreshments. Finally, he insisted upon having a bowl of rack punch; everybody had rack punch at Vauxhall.

That bowl of rack punch was the cause of all this history. And why not? Was not a bowl of wine the cause of the demise of Alexander the Great? So rack punch influenced the fates of all the chief characters in this “Novel without a Hero,” although most of them did not taste a drop of it.

The young ladies did not drink it; Osborne did not like it; and so Jos drank up the whole contents of the bowl. The consequence of this was a liveliness which at first was astonishing, and then became painful; for he talked and laughed so loud as to bring scores of listeners round the box, much to the confusion of the group within it. Volunteering to sing a song (which he did in that maudlin high key peculiar to inebriated gentlemen), he received from his hearers a great deal of applause.

“Brayvo, Fat un!” said one wag; “What a figure for the tight-rope!” exclaimed another, to the alarm of the ladies, and the anger of Mr. Osborne.

“For Heaven’s sake, Jos, let us go,” he cried, and the young women rose.

“Stop, my dearest diddle-diddle-darling,” shouted Jos, now as bold as a lion, clasping Miss Rebecca round the waist. Rebecca started, but she could not get away. The laughter redoubled. Jos continued to drink, to make love, and to sing; and, winking and waving his glass gracefully to his audience, challenged them to take a share of his punch.

Mr. Osborne was just on the point of knocking down a gentleman who proposed to accept this invitation, and a commotion seemed to be inevitable, when by the greatest good luck Dobbin stepped up to the box.

“Be off, you fools!” he said. The crowd vanished before his cocked hat and fierce appearance.

“Good Heavens! Dobbin, where have you been?” Osborne said, seizing the white shawl from his friend’s arm, and huddling Amelia in it. “Make yourself useful, and take charge of Jos here, whilst I take the ladies to the carriage.”

Jos was rising to interfere – but a push from Osborne’s finger sent him puffing back into his seat again, and the lieutenant was able to remove the ladies in safety. Jos kissed his hand to them as they retreated, hiccupping, “Bless you! Bless you!” Then, seizing Captain Dobbin’s hand, and weeping pitifully, he confided the secret of his love. He adored that girl who had just gone; he had broken her heart by his conduct; he would marry her next morning at St. George’s, Hanover Square; he’d knock up the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth, by Jove! for the purpose.

Captain Dobbin shrewdly persuaded him to leave the gardens in order to hasten to Lambeth Palace. Once out of the gates, he easily got Jos into a hackney-coach, which took him to his lodgings.

George Osborne took the girls home: and laughed after he had closed the door upon them. Amelia looked ruefully at her friend as they went upstairs. They kissed and went to bed without talking.

“He must propose tomorrow,” thought Rebecca. “He called me his soul’s darling four times; he squeezed my hand in Amelia’s presence. He must propose tomorrow.”

And so thought Amelia, too. And I dare say she thought of the dress she would wear as bridesmaid, and of a subsequent ceremony in which she herself might be the bride.

Oh, ignorant young creatures! How little do you know the effect of rack punch! There is no headache in the world like that caused by Vauxhall punch. Through the lapse of twenty years, I can remember the consequence of two glasses! and Joseph Sedley had swallowed at least a quart.

Next morning, which Rebecca thought was to dawn upon her fortune, George Osborne found the ex-Collector of Boggley Wollah in agonies, groaning on the sofa at his lodgings. Dobbin was already in the room, good-naturedly tending his patient. The two officers looked askance at each other, exchanging sympathetic grins. Even Sedley's solemn valet could hardly keep his face in order.

"Mr. Sedley was uncommon wild last night, sir," he whispered to Osborne. "He wanted to fight the 'ackney-coachman, sir. The Capting had to bring him upstairs in his arms like a babby."

"How are you, Sedley?" Osborne asked. "No bones broke? There's a hackney-coachman downstairs with a black eye, vowing he'll have the law on you."

"What do you mean?" Sedley faintly asked.

"For thrashing him last night – didn't he, Dobbin? The watchman says he never saw a fellow go down so straight. Ask Dobbin."

"You did have a round with the coachman," Captain Dobbin said, "and showed plenty of fight too."

"And that fellow at Vauxhall! How Jos drove at him! How the women screamed! By Jove, sir, it did my heart good to see you. I'll never get in your way when you are in your cups, Jos."

"I believe I'm very terrible when I'm roused," said Jos from the sofa, with a dreary grimace.

Osborne pursued his advantage pitilessly. He thought Jos a milksop. He had been revolving in his mind the question of marriage between Jos and Rebecca, and was not pleased that a member of a family into which he, George Osborne, was going to marry, should make a *mésalliance* with a little upstart governess.

"Why, man, you couldn't stand!" he said. "You made everybody laugh, though you were crying yourself. You were maudlin, Jos. Don't you remember singing a song, and calling Rosa, Rebecca, what's her name, your dearest diddle-diddle-darling?"

And this ruthless young fellow, seizing Dobbin's hand, acted out the scene, to Joseph's horror, and in spite of Dobbin's good-natured entreaties to have mercy.

"Why should I spare him?" Osborne said to his friend, when they quitted the invalid, leaving him under the hands of Doctor Gollop. "What the deuce right has he to give himself airs, and make fools of us at Vauxhall? Who's this schoolgirl that is ogling him? Hang it, the family's low enough already, without her. I'd rather have a lady for my sister-in-law. I know my own station: let her know hers. And I'll prevent that Nabob from being made a greater fool than he is. That's why I told him to look out, lest she brought an action against him."

"I suppose you know best," Dobbin said, though rather dubiously. "But—"

"Come and see the girls, and make love to Miss Sharp yourself," the lieutenant interrupted; but Captain Dobbin declined.

As George walked down Southampton Row to the Sedley mansion, he laughed as he saw two heads on the look-out.

Miss Amelia, in the drawing-room balcony, was looking very eagerly towards the other side of the Square, on the watch for him; and Miss Sharp was observing from the second floor until Mr. Joseph's great form should heave in sight.

"Sister Anne is on the watch-tower," said he to Amelia on entering, "but there's nobody coming." Enjoying the joke hugely, he described in ludicrous terms the dismal condition of her brother.

"I think it's very cruel of you to laugh, George," she said, looking unhappy; but George only laughed the more. When Miss Sharp came downstairs, he bantered with a great deal of liveliness upon the effect of her charms.

"O Miss Sharp! if you could but see him this morning, moaning in his flowered dressing-gown – writhing on his sofa; if you could but have seen him lolling out his tongue to the doctor."

"See whom?" said Miss Sharp.

"Whom? O Captain Dobbin, of course, to whom we were all so attentive, by the way, last night."

"We were very unkind to him," Emmy said, blushing. "I – I quite forgot him."

"Of course you did," cried Osborne, still laughing. "One can't be always thinking about Dobbin, you know, Amelia. Can one, Miss Sharp?"

"Except when he overturned the glass of wine at dinner," Miss Sharp said, with a haughty toss of the head, "I never gave Captain Dobbin one moment's consideration."

"Very good, Miss Sharp, I'll tell him," Osborne said; and Miss Sharp began to have a feeling of distrust and hatred towards this young officer.

"He is to make fun of me, is he?" thought Rebecca. "Has he frightened Joseph about me? Perhaps he won't come." A film passed over her eyes, and her heart beat quite quick.

"You're always joking," said she, smiling as innocently as she could. "Joke away, Mr. George; there's nobody to defend me." As she walked away, George felt some little manly compunction for being unkind to this helpless creature.

"My dearest Amelia," said he, "You don't know the world. I do. Your little friend must learn her station."

"Do you think Jos will—"

"I don't know. He may, or may not. I only know he is a very foolish vain fellow, and put my dear little girl into a very painful position last night. My dearest diddle-diddle-darling!" He was off laughing again, so drolly that Emmy laughed too.

All that day Jos never came. But Amelia had no fear about this; for she had sent a servant to Mr. Joseph's lodgings, to ask for some book he had promised, and see how he was; and the reply through Jos's man was, that his master was ill in bed, and had the doctor with him. He must come tomorrow, she thought, but she never had the courage to speak on the subject to Rebecca.

The next day, however, as the two young ladies sat on the sofa, pretending to work, Sambo came in with his usual engaging grin, a packet under his arm, and a note on a tray.

"From Mr. Jos, Miss," he said.

How Amelia trembled as she opened it! The note ran:

Dear Amelia,

I send you the "Orphan of the Forest." I was too ill to come yesterday. I leave town today for Cheltenham. Pray excuse me, if you can, to the amiable Miss Sharp, for my conduct at Vauxhall, and entreat her to forget every word I uttered when

excited by that fatal supper. As soon as I have recovered, for my health is very much shaken, I shall go to Scotland for some months, and am

Truly yours, Jos Sedley

It was the death-warrant. All was over. Amelia did not dare to look at Rebecca's pale face and burning eyes, but she dropped the letter into her friend's lap; got up and went upstairs, and cried her little heart out.

The housekeeper sought her with consolation. "Don't take on, Miss. I didn't like to tell you. But none of us in the house have liked her except at first. I saw her reading your Ma's letters. Pinner says she's always about your trinket-box and everybody's drawers, and she's sure she's put your white ribbon into her box."

"I gave it her," Amelia said.

But this did not alter Mrs. Blenkinsop's opinion of Miss Sharp. It now became clear to every soul in the house, except poor Amelia, that Rebecca should depart as speedily as possible. Our good child ransacked her drawers, cupboards, and bags – reviewed her gowns, bobbins, laces and silk stockings – selecting this thing and that for Rebecca. Going to her Papa, who had promised to give her as many guineas as she was years old, she begged him to give the money to dear Rebecca.

She even made George Osborne contribute, and since he was a free-handed young fellow, he went to Bond Street, and bought the best hat and coat that money could buy.

"That's George's present to you, Rebecca, dear," said Amelia, proud of the bandbox conveying these gifts. "What a taste he has! There's nobody like him."

"Nobody," Rebecca answered. "How thankful I am to him!" She was thinking, "It was George Osborne who prevented my marriage." And she loved George Osborne accordingly.

She accepted all Amelia's presents, after just the proper degree of hesitation. She vowed eternal gratitude to Mrs. Sedley, but did not intrude herself upon that good lady, who was embarrassed and wished to avoid her. She kissed Mr. Sedley's hand, when he presented her with the purse; and asked permission to consider him her kind, kind friend and protector. Her behaviour was so affecting that he was going to write her a cheque for twenty pounds more; but he restrained his feelings, and tripped away with a "God bless you, my dear, always come here when you come to town, you know."

Finally came the parting with Amelia, a scene in which one person was in earnest and the other a perfect performer. After the tenderest caresses and the most pathetic tears, Rebecca and Amelia parted, the former vowing to love her friend for ever and ever and ever.

CHAPTER 7

Crawley of Queen's Crawley

Among the most respected names beginning with C in the Court-Guide was that of Sir Pitt Crawley, Baronet, of Great Gaunt Street, and of Queen's Crawley, Hampshire. This honourable name had been in the Parliamentary list for many years.

It is related, regarding the borough of Queen's Crawley, that Queen Elizabeth in one of her progresses stopped at Crawley for breakfast. She was so delighted with some remarkably fine beer which was presented to her by the Crawley of the day (a handsome gentleman with a trim beard and a good leg), that she forthwith made Crawley into a borough eligible to send two members to Parliament. The place took the name of Queen's Crawley.

And though it was no longer so populous a place as it had been in Queen Bess's time – nay, had so few voters that it might even be called a rotten borough – yet, as Sir Pitt Crawley would say in his elegant way, “Rotten! be hanged – it gives me a good fifteen hundred pounds a year.”

Sir Pitt Crawley (named after the great politician) was the son of Walpole Crawley, first Baronet, of the Tape and Sealing-Wax Office in George II's reign, who was impeached for embezzlement, as were a great many other honest gentlemen of those days. The family tree mentions Charles Stuart “Barebones” Crawley, of James the First's time; and Queen Elizabeth's Crawley. Close by the name of Sir Pitt Crawley, Baronet, is written that of his brother, the Reverend Bute Crawley, rector of Crawley-cum-Snailby.

Sir Pitt was first married to Grizzel, sixth daughter of Mungo, Lord Binkie. She bore him two sons: Pitt junior, and Rawdon Crawley. Many years after her ladyship's death, Sir Pitt married Rosa Dawson of Mudbury, by whom he had two daughters. For their benefit Miss Rebecca Sharp was now engaged as governess. It will be seen that the young lady was come into a family of very genteel connexions, and a much more distinguished circle than that humble one she had just quitted in Russell Square.

She had received her orders in a note written upon an old envelope, which said:

Sir Pitt Crawley begs Miss Sharp and baggidge may be hear on Tuesday, as I leaf for Queen's Crawley tomorrow morning ERLY.

Rebecca had never seen a Baronet, and as soon as she had said goodbye to Amelia, and counted the money which Mr. Sedley had given her, and had finished wiping her eyes (just as the carriage turned the corner), she began to imagine what a Baronet must be.

“I wonder, does he wear a star?” thought she. “He will be very handsomely dressed in a court suit, with ruffles, and his hair powdered. I suppose he will be awfully proud, and that I shall be treated contemptuously. Still, at least I shall be amongst gentlefolks, and not vulgar city people.”

The carriage entered Great Gaunt Street and stopped at a tall gloomy house between two other tall gloomy houses. This was Sir Pitt's mansion. The shutters of the first-floor windows were closed; those of the dining-room were partially open, and the blinds neatly covered in old newspapers.

John, the groom who had driven the carriage, asked a passing milk-boy to ring the bell for him. The door was opened by a man in drab breeches and a dirty old coat, with a foul old neckcloth lashed round his bristly neck, a shining bald head, a leering red face, a pair of twinkling grey eyes, and a mouth perpetually grinning.

“This Sir Pitt Crawley’s?” said John.

“Ees,” said the man at the door, with a nod.

“Hand down these ’ere trunks then,” said John.

“Hand ’n down yourself,” said the porter.

“Don’t you see I can’t leave my hosses? Come, lend a hand, and Miss will give you some beer,” said John.

The bald man, taking his hands out of his pockets, threw Miss Sharp’s trunk over his shoulder, and carried it into the house.

“Take this basket and shawl, if you please, and open the door,” said Miss Sharp, descending from the carriage in indignation. “I shall write to Mr. Sedley and inform him of your conduct,” said she to the groom.

“Don’t,” he replied. “I hope you’ve got Miss ’Melia’s gowns, as the lady’s maid was to have ’ad? Shut the door, Jim, you’ll get no good out of ’ER,” he continued, pointing his thumb towards Miss Sharp: “a bad lot, I tell you.”

So saying, he drove away. The truth is, he was attached to the lady’s maid in question, who had been robbed of her dresses.

Rebecca entered the dining-room. The carpet was rolled up under the sideboard: the pictures were hidden behind old sheets of brown paper: the ceiling lamp was muffled in a sack. The marble bust of Sir Walpole Crawley was looking from its black corner at the bare boards: the chairs were turned up heads and tails along the wall.

Two kitchen chairs, a round table, and an old poker and tongs were, however, gathered round the fire-place, as was a saucepan over a feeble sputtering fire. There was a bit of cheese and bread and a tin candlestick on the table, and a little black beer in a pint-pot.

“Had your dinner, I suppose?” said the bald man. “Like a drop of beer?”

“Where is Sir Pitt Crawley?” said Miss Sharp majestically.

“He, he! I’m Sir Pitt Crawley. Relect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! Ask Tinker if I aynt. Mrs. Tinker, meet Miss Sharp; Miss Governess, meet Mrs. Charwoman. Ho, ho!”

The lady addressed as Mrs. Tinker now appeared with a pipe and tobacco, for which she had been sent a minute before Miss Sharp’s arrival. She handed these over to Sir Pitt, who took his seat by the fire.

“Where’s the farthing?” said he. “I gave you three halfpence. Where’s the change, old Tinker?”

“There!” replied Mrs. Tinker, flinging down the coin; “it’s only baronets as cares about farthings.”

“A farthing a day is seven shillings a year,” answered the Member of Parliament; “seven shillings a year is the interest of seven guineas. Take care of your farthings, old Tinker, and your guineas will come quite nat’ral.”

“You may be sure it’s Sir Pitt Crawley, young woman,” said Mrs. Tinker, surlily, “because he looks to his farthings. You’ll know him better afore long.”

“And like me none the worse, Miss Sharp,” said the old gentleman, almost politely. “Get another chair from the kitchen, Tinker; and then we’ll have supper.”

The baronet plunged a fork into the saucepan on the fire, and withdrew a piece of tripe and an onion, which he divided into equal portions.

“You see, Miss Sharp, when I’m in town Tinker dines with the family. Haw! haw! I’m glad Miss Sharp’s not hungry, ain’t you, Tink?” And they fell to upon their frugal supper.

After supper Sir Pitt Crawley began to smoke his pipe; and when it became quite dark, he lit the rushlight in the tin candlestick, and producing from his pocket a huge mass of papers, began reading them.

“I’m here in London on law business, my dear, and that’s why I shall have such a pretty travelling companion tomorrow.”

“He’s always at law business,” said Mrs. Tinker.

“Tinker is quite right,” said the Baronet. “I’ve lost and won more lawsuits than any man in England. Look here: *Crawley, Baronet v. Snaffle*. I’ll throw him over, or my name’s not Pitt Crawley. Overseers of Snaily parish against *Crawley, Baronet*. They can’t prove it’s common land: I’ll defy ’em; the land’s mine. I’ll beat ’em, if it costs me a thousand guineas. Look over the papers if you like, my dear. Do you write a good hand? I’ll make you useful when we’re at Queen’s Crawley. Now the dowager’s dead I need someone.”

“She was as bad as he,” said Tinker. “She took every one of her tradesmen to court; and turned away forty-eight footmen in four year.”

“She was very close,” said the Baronet, simply; “but she was a valyble woman to me, and saved me a steward.”

And in this strain, to Rebecca’s amusement, the conversation continued. Sir Pitt talked of himself incessantly, sometimes in the vulgarest Hampshire accent; sometimes adopting the tone of a man of the world.

At last he told Miss Sharp to be ready at five in the morning. “You’ll sleep with Tinker tonight,” he said; “it’s a big bed, and there’s room for two. Lady Crawley died in it. Good night.”

Sir Pitt went off, and the solemn Tinker led the way up the great bleak stone stairs, past great drawing-room doors, with the handles muffled up in paper, into the great front bedroom. It was so funereal and gloomy, you might have fancied that not only had Lady Crawley died in the room, but that her ghost inhabited it. Rebecca peeped into the huge wardrobes and cupboards, and tried the locked drawers, while the old charwoman was saying her prayers.

“I shouldn’t like to sleep in this bed without a good conscience, Miss,” said the old woman.

“There’s room for us and half a dozen ghosts in it,” says Rebecca. “Tell me all about Lady Crawley and Sir Pitt Crawley, my dear Mrs. Tinker.”

But old Tinker was not to be pumped, and soon set up a loud snore. Rebecca lay awake, thinking of the new world into which she was going, and of her chances of success there.

The rushlight flickered in the basin. The mantelpiece cast a great black shadow over two family pictures of young lads that hung there, one in a college gown, and the other in a red jacket like a soldier. When she went to sleep, Rebecca chose that one to dream about.

At four o’clock, Tinker wakened her, and bid her prepare for departure. Unbolting the great hall door with a clang, she summoned a coach to take them to the public carriage in the City. The driver was not happy when, on arriving there, Sir Pitt refused to tip him. He flung down Miss Sharp’s bandboxes in the gutter, and swore he would take him to law.

“You’d better not,” said one of the ostlers; “it’s Sir Pitt Crawley.”

“So it is, Joe,” cried the Baronet, and he climbed up onto the box of the public carriage.

Miss Sharp sat inside next to a young man from Cambridge; along with an asthmatic gentleman, a prim lady who declared she had never travelled in a public carriage before, and a fat widow with a brandy-bottle. How the carriage at length drove away – threading the dark lanes of Aldersgate, clattering by St. Paul’s and the White Bear at Piccadilly, until they saw the dew rising up from the market-gardens of Knightsbridge – need not be told.

But I cannot think of this journey without tender regret. Where is the road now? and those old honest pimple-nosed coachmen? and the waiters, and their inns, and the cold rounds of beef inside, and the stunted ostler, with his blue nose and clinking pail, where is he? To future generations, these things will be as much legend as Nineveh – stage-coaches will have become romances – a team of four bays as fabulous as Bucephalus. Alas! we shall never hear the horn sing at midnight, or see the pike-gates fly open any more.

Where is the coach carrying us? Let us be set down at Queen’s Crawley, and see how Miss Rebecca Sharp fares there.

CHAPTER 8

Private and Confidential

Miss Rebecca Sharp to Miss Amelia Sedley, Russell Square, London.

MY DEAREST, SWEETEST AMELIA,

With what mingled joy and sorrow do I take up the pen to write to my dearest friend! Oh, what a change between today and yesterday! Now I am friendless and alone; yesterday I was in the sweet company of a sister, whom I shall always cherish!

I will not tell you in what tears I passed the fatal night in which I separated from you. You went on Tuesday to joy and happiness, with your mother and YOUR DEVOTED YOUNG SOLDIER by your side; and I thought of you all night, the prettiest, I am sure, of all the young ladies at the Ball. I was brought by the groom to Sir Pitt Crawley's town house, where, after John the groom had behaved most insolently to me (alas! 'twas safe to insult poverty!), I was given over to Sir P.'s care, and made to pass the night in a gloomy old bed, beside a gloomy old charwoman. I did not sleep one wink the whole night.

Sir Pitt is not what we silly girls at school imagined a baronet to be. Imagine an old, stumpy, vulgar, very dirty man, in shabby gaiters, who smokes a horrid pipe, and cooks his own horrid supper in a saucepan. He speaks with a country accent, and swore a great deal at the old charwoman, and at the coachman who drove us to the inn where the coach went from, on which I made the journey OUTSIDE FOR MOST OF THE WAY.

I was at first placed inside the coach. But, when we got to a place called Leakington, where the rain began to fall heavily, I was forced to make way for another passenger, and go outside in the rain, where, however, a young gentleman from Cambridge College sheltered me very kindly in one of his great coats.

This gentleman and the guard seemed to know Sir Pitt very well, and laughed at him a great deal. They called him an old screw; which means a very stingy person. He never gives any money to anybody, they said, and pointed out that we drove very slow for the last two stages on the road, because Sir Pitt owns the horses for this part of the journey.

However, a carriage and four splendid horses awaited us at Mudbury, four miles from Queen's Crawley, and we entered the baronet's park in state. There is a fine avenue a mile long leading to the house.

"There's six thousand pound of timber in them there trees," said Sir Pitt. "Do you call that nothing?" He pronounced it NOTHINK, so droll; and he had a Mr. Hodson, his steward from Mudbury, in the carriage with him, and they talked about draining and subsoiling, and tenants and farming, and how Sam Miles had been caught poaching, and Peter Bailey had gone to the workhouse at last.

"Serve him right," said Sir Pitt; "him and his family has been cheating me on that farm these hundred and fifty years." He might have said "he and his family," to be sure; but rich baronets do not need to be careful about grammar, as poor governesses must be.

I noticed a beautiful church-spire rising above some old elms in the park; and nearby an old red house covered with ivy.

"Is that your church, sir?" I said.

“Yes, hang it,” said Sir Pitt, (only he used, dear, A MUCH WICKEDER WORD). “How’s Buty, Hodson? Buty’s my brother Bute, the parson, my dear. Buty and the Beast I call him, ha, ha!”

Hodson laughed too, and then said more gravely, “I’m afraid he’s better, Sir Pitt. He was out on his pony yesterday, looking at our corn.”

“Looking after his tithes, hang’un. Will brandy never kill him? He’s as tough as old Methusalem.” I gathered that the brothers do not get on.

Seeing two little boys gathering sticks in the wood, Mr. Hodson jumped out of the carriage, and rushed upon them with his whip.

“Pitch into ’em, Hodson,” roared the baronet; “flog their little souls out, and bring ’em up to the house, the vagabonds.” We heard Mr. Hodson’s whip cracking on the shoulders of the poor little blubbing wretches. Sir Pitt drove on to the hall.

All the servants were ready to meet us, and ...

Here, my dear, I was interrupted last night by a dreadful thumping at my door: and who do you think it was? Sir Pitt Crawley in his night-cap and dressing-gown, such a figure! As I shrank away, he came forward and seized my candle.

“No candles after eleven o’clock, Miss Becky,” said he. “Go to bed in the dark, you pretty little hussy” (that is what he called me), “and unless you wish me to come for the candle every night, be in bed at eleven.” And with this, he and Mr. Horrocks the butler went off laughing.

You may be sure I shall not encourage any more of their visits. They let loose two immense bloodhounds at night, which were howling at the moon. “He’s killed a man, that dog has,” said Sir Pitt. “Haw, haw!”

The house of Queen’s Crawley is an odious old-fashioned red brick mansion, with tall chimneys, and a terrace on which the great hall-door opens. And oh, my dear, the great hall is as big and glum as that in the castle of Udolpho. It has a large fireplace, in which we might fit half Miss Pinkerton’s school, and the grate is big enough to roast an ox. Round the room hang generations of Crawleys, some with beards and ruffs, some with huge wigs, some dressed in gowns as stiff as towers.

At one end of the hall is the great staircase in dismal black oak, and on either side are tall doors with stags’ heads over them, leading to the billiard-room and the library, and the yellow saloon and the morning-rooms. I think there are at least twenty bedrooms upstairs; one of them has the bed in which Queen Elizabeth slept. I have been taken by my new pupils through all these fine apartments this morning.

We have a schoolroom on the second floor, with my bedroom on one side of it, and that of the young ladies on the other. Then there are the rooms of the Baronet’s two sons: young Mr. Pitt’s apartments – Mr. Crawley, he is called, the eldest son, and Mr. Rawdon Crawley’s rooms – he is an officer like SOMEBODY, and away with his regiment.

Half an hour after our arrival, the dinner-bell was rung, and I came down in your dear muslin gown with my two pupils (they are insignificant little chits of ten and eight years old.) We assembled in the little drawing-room with my Lady Crawley, the girls’ mother. She was an ironmonger’s daughter, and looks as if she had been handsome once, but she is pale and meagre and has not a word to say for herself.

Her stepson Mr. Crawley was in the room, in full dress, as pompous as an undertaker. He is pale, ugly and silent; he has thin legs, no chest, hay-coloured whiskers, and straw-coloured hair. He is the very picture of his late sainted mother over the mantelpiece.

“This is the new governess, Mr. Crawley,” said Lady Crawley, coming forward and taking my hand. “Miss Sharp.”

“O!” said Mr. Crawley, and began to read a pamphlet.

“I hope you will be kind to my girls,” said Lady Crawley, with her pink eyes full of tears. I saw that I need not be afraid of her.

“My lady is served,” said the butler, in an immense white shirt-frill, like one of Queen Elizabeth’s ruffs; and so, taking Mr. Crawley’s arm, she led the way to the dining-room.

Sir Pitt was already there with a silver jug. He had just been to the cellar, and was in full dress too; that is, he had taken his gaiters off, and showed his little dumpy legs in black woollen stockings. The sideboard was covered with glistening old gold and silver cups and dishes. Everything on the table was silver, and two footmen stood by the sideboard.

Mr. Crawley said a long grace, and Sir Pitt said amen, and the great silver dish-covers were removed.

“What have we for dinner, Betsy?” said the Baronet.

“Mutton broth, I believe, Sir Pitt,” answered Lady Crawley.

“*Mouton aux navets*,” added Horrocks the butler gravely; “and the soup is *potage de mouton a l’Ecoissaise*. The side-dishes contain *pommes de terre au naturel*, and *choufleur a l’eau*.”

“Mutton’s mutton,” said the Baronet, “and a devilish good thing. What sheep was it, Horrocks?”

“One of the black-faced Scotch, Sir Pitt, killed on Thursday.”

“Will you take some potage, Miss ah – Miss Blunt?” said Mr. Crawley.

“Capital Scotch broth, my dear,” said Sir Pitt, “though they call it by a French name.”

While we were enjoying our repast, Sir Pitt asked what had become of the shoulders of the mutton.

“I believe they were eaten in the servants’ hall,” said my lady, humbly.

“They was, my lady,” said Horrocks, “and precious little else we get there.”

Sir Pitt burst into a laugh. “That little black pig of the Kent sow must be uncommon fat now.”

“It’s not quite busting, Sir Pitt,” said the butler gravely; at which the young ladies began to laugh.

“Miss Crawley, Miss Rose Crawley,” said Mr. Crawley, “your laughter is exceedingly out of place.”

“Never mind, my lord,” said the Baronet, “we’ll try the porker on Saturday. Kill un on Saturday morning, Horrocks. Miss Sharp adores pork, don’t you, Miss Sharp?”

This is all the conversation that I remember at dinner. When it was over, rum and hot water were placed before Sir Pitt, while Mr. Horrocks served myself and my pupils with three little glasses of wine, and a bumper was poured out for my lady. When we retired, she took out an enormous piece of knitting; the young ladies began to play cribbage with a dirty pack of cards. We had only one candle, but it was in a magnificent silver candlestick, and I had my choice of amusement between a volume of sermons, and a pamphlet on the corn-laws, which Mr. Crawley had been reading before dinner.

So we sat for an hour until steps were heard.

“Put away the cards, girls,” cried my lady, in a great tremor; and this order had been scarcely obeyed, when Mr. Crawley entered the room.

“We will resume yesterday’s discourse, young ladies,” said he, “and you shall each read a page by turns; so that Miss – Miss Short may have an opportunity of hearing you.” The poor girls began to read out a long dismal sermon delivered on behalf of the mission for the Chickasaw Indians. Was it not a charming evening?

At ten Sir Pitt and the household were called to prayers. Sir Pitt came in very flushed, and rather unsteady; and after him the butler, the footmen, Mr. Crawley’s man, three other men, smelling of the stable, and four women, one of whom was very much overdressed; this was Miss Horrocks, the butler’s daughter, who flung me a look of great scorn.

After Mr. Crawley had done haranguing, we received our candles, and went to bed; and then I was disturbed in my writing, as I have described to my dearest sweetest Amelia.

Good night. A thousand, thousand kisses!

Saturday. This morning, at five, I heard the shrieking of the little black pig. Rose and Violet introduced me to it yesterday; and to the stables, and the kennel, and the gardener, who was picking fruit, and from whom they begged for a bunch of hot-house grapes; but he said that Sir Pitt had counted them. The darling girls caught a colt in a paddock, and asked me if I would ride, when the groom, with horrid oaths, drove them away.

Lady Crawley is always knitting. Sir Pitt is tipsy every night; and, I believe, sits with Horrocks, the butler. Mr. Crawley always reads sermons in the evening, and in the morning is locked up in his study, or else rides to Mudbury on business, or to Squashmore, where he preaches on Wednesdays and Fridays.

A hundred thousand grateful loves to your dear papa and mamma. Is your poor brother recovered of his rack-punch? Oh, dear! Oh, dear! How men should beware of wicked punch!

Ever and ever thine own REBECCA

Everything considered, I think it is quite as well for our dear Amelia Sedley that Miss Sharp and she are parted. Rebecca is a droll funny creature, to be sure; and those descriptions are very smart, doubtless, and show a great knowledge of the world. That she might, when on her knees, have been thinking of something better than Miss Horrocks’s ribbons, has possibly struck both of us. But please remember that this history has “Vanity Fair” for a title, and that Vanity Fair is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of humbug and pretension.

I warn my friends, then, that I am going to tell a story of harrowing villainy and complicated – but, I trust, intensely interesting – crime. My rascals are no milk-and-water rascals, I promise you. When we come to the proper places we won’t spare fine language – no, no! But in the quiet country we must be calm. A tempest in a slop-basin is absurd. The present Chapter is very mild. Others – but we will not anticipate *those*.

CHAPTER 9

Family Portraits

Sir Pitt Crawley had a taste for what is called low life. His first marriage with the daughter of the noble Binkie had been arranged by his parents; and he often told Lady Crawley that she was such a confounded quarrelsome high-bred jade that when she died he was hanged if he would ever take another of her sort.

So at her death he selected for a second wife Miss Rose Dawson, daughter of an ironmonger. What a happy woman was Rose to be my Lady Crawley!

Let us set down the items of her happiness. In the first place, she gave up another young man, who in his disappointment took to smuggling and poaching. Then she quarrelled with all the friends of her youth, who, of course, could not be received at Queen's Crawley – nor did she find any new friends, since the baronets of the county were indignant at their comrade's marriage.

Sir Pitt did not care. He had his pretty Rose, and he could please himself. So he used to get drunk every night: to beat his pretty Rose sometimes: to leave her in Hampshire when he went to London, without a single friend in the world. Even Mrs. Bute Crawley, the Rector's wife, refused to visit her, because she was a tradesman's daughter.

As Lady Crawley's only gifts were those of pink cheeks and white skin, and as she had no character, nor talents, nor opinions, nor occupations, her hold upon Sir Pitt's affections was not very great. The roses faded out of her cheeks, and the pretty freshness left her figure after the birth of a couple of children. She became a mere machine in her husband's house, of no more use than a grand piano. She worked at her knitting day and night. She had a small flower-garden, for which she had an affection; but no other like or dislike. When her husband was rude to her she was apathetic: when he struck her she cried. She moaned about, slipshod and in curl-papers all day.

O Vanity Fair – Vanity Fair! She might have lived on a snug farm – but a title and a coach and four are more precious than happiness in Vanity Fair.

The languid dullness of their mamma did not awaken much affection in her little daughters, but they were very happy in the servants' hall and in the stables; and the Scotch gardener having luckily a good wife and some good children, they got a little wholesome society and instruction in his house, which was their only education until Miss Sharp came.

Her engagement was owing to young Mr. Pitt Crawley, the only protector Lady Crawley had, and the only person, besides her children, for whom she felt any attachment. Mr. Pitt was a very polite and proper gentleman. When he came back from university, he began to reform the slackened discipline of the hall, in spite of his father, who stood in awe of him. He was a man of such rigid refinement that he would have starved rather than have dined without a white neckcloth. When he was at home, Sir Pitt's muddy gaiters disappeared; and the old man never fuddled himself with rum-and-water in his son's presence, and did not swear at Lady Crawley while his son was in the room.

Mr Crawley treated his stepmother with respect. He never let her quit the room without rising in the most stately manner to open the door, and making an elegant bow.

At Eton he was called Miss Crawley; and there, I am sorry to say, his younger brother Rawdon used to beat him violently. But he worked with industry, if not talent, and at college his career was highly creditable. He prepared for public life by studying the ancient and modern orators, and by speaking unceasingly at the debating societies. But though he delivered his little speeches with great pomposity, and never advanced any opinion which was not perfectly trite and stale, yet he failed somehow, in spite of a mediocrity which ought to have ensured success.

After leaving college he became Private Secretary to his grandfather Lord Binkie, and was then appointed Attaché to the Legation at Pumpnickel, which post he filled with perfect honour. After ten years, he gave up the diplomatic service in some disgust at his lack of advancement, and began to turn country gentleman.

On returning to England he wrote a pamphlet on Malt, and took a strong part in the Negro Emancipation question. He was a friend of Mr. Wilberforce's, and became a magistrate and an active speaker on religious instruction. He patronised an Independent meeting-house in Crawley parish, much to the indignation of his uncle the Rector, and to the consequent delight of Sir Pitt. Mr. Crawley was said to be paying his addresses to Lady Jane Sheepshanks, Lord Southdown's third daughter.

Mr. Crawley thought that his father should yield him up his place in Parliament; but this the elder refused to do. Both were of course too prudent to give up the fifteen hundred pounds a year which was brought in by selling the second seat (at this time filled by a Mr. Quadroon); for the family estate was in debt. Before the heavy fine imposed upon Walpole Crawley for embezzlement, the cellars at Queen's Crawley had been filled with burgundy, the kennels with hounds, and the stables with gallant hunters. Now, any horses went to plough, or ran in the public coach.

If Sir Pitt Crawley had been an attorney in a country town, it is possible that he would have done well. But he was unluckily endowed with a large though encumbered estate. He had a taste for law, which cost him many thousands yearly; and was such a sharp landlord, that he could hardly find any but bankrupt tenants; and such a close farmer, as to grudge almost the seed to the ground. He speculated in mines and canals and government contracts. But as he would not pay honest agents at his granite quarry, four overseers ran away, and took fortunes with them to America.

He was sociable, and not proud; he preferred the society of a farmer or a horse-dealer to that of a gentleman. He was fond of drink, of swearing, of joking with the farmers' daughters. He was never known to give away a shilling or to do a good action, but was of a pleasant, sly, laughing mood, and would joke and drink with a tenant and sell him up the next day. In a word, the whole baronetage did not contain a more cunning, mean, selfish, foolish, disreputable old man.

Mr. Crawley's hold over his father resulted from money arrangements. The Baronet owed his son money out of his mother's jointure, which he did not wish to pay; indeed he had a great repugnance to paying anybody, and could only be brought by force to discharge his debts.

Vanity Fair – Vanity Fair! Here was a boorish man who could not spell, and did not read; who never had an enjoyment but what was sordid and foul; and yet he had rank and power, and was a pillar of the state. He was high sheriff, and rode in a golden coach. Great ministers and statesmen courted him; and in Vanity Fair he had a higher place than the most brilliant genius or spotless virtue.

Sir Pitt had an unmarried half-sister who inherited her mother's large fortune, and though the Baronet proposed to borrow this money from her, Miss Crawley declined the offer. She said, however, that she intended to leave her inheritance

divided between Sir Pitt's second son Rawdon and the family at the Rectory, and had once or twice paid Rawdon Crawley's debts. Miss Crawley was, in consequence, an object of great respect when she came to Queen's Crawley.

What dignity it gives an old lady, a balance at the banker's! How tenderly we look at her faults; what a kind good-natured old creature we find her! Your wife is perpetually sending her affectionate gifts, your little girls work endless baskets, cushions, and footstools for her. The house during her stay assumes a festive, neat, jovial appearance not visible at other seasons. And what good dinners you have – game every day, and no end of fish from London.

Ah, gracious powers! I wish you would send me a maiden aunt with a carriage – how my Julia and I would make her comfortable! Sweet vision! Foolish dream!

CHAPTER 10

Miss Sharp Begins to Make Friends

It now became Rebecca's duty to make herself agreeable to the Crawleys, and to gain their confidence. If there was some selfishness in this, who can blame her?

"I am alone in the world," she thought. "While that little pink-faced chit Amelia, with not half my sense, has ten thousand pounds, poor Rebecca (and my figure is far better than hers) has only herself and her own wits to trust to. Well, let us see if my wits can provide me with an honourable maintenance, and some day I will show Miss Amelia my real superiority. Not that I dislike poor Amelia: who can dislike such a harmless creature? – only it will be a fine day when I can take my place above her in the world."

Thus our little romantic friend formed visions of the future. We should not be scandalised that, in all her castles in the air, a husband was the main inhabitant. Of what else have young ladies to think, but husbands? Of what else do their dear mammams think?

"I must be my own mamma," said Rebecca; with a tingling consciousness of defeat, as she thought of Jos Sedley.

So she wisely determined to make her position at Queen's Crawley comfortable and secure, and resolved to make friends of everyone who could affect her comfort.

As my Lady Crawley was not one of these people, and was, moreover, so indolent and void of character as to be of no consequence, Rebecca soon found that she need not cultivate her good will. She used to talk to her pupils about their "poor mamma"; and though she treated that lady with every show of respect, it was to the rest of the family that she wisely directed her attentions.

With the young people, her method was pretty simple. She did not pester their young brains with too much learning, but let them have their own way in educating themselves. The eldest was rather fond of books, and as there were in the old library at Queen's Crawley many works of light literature in French and English, which nobody else read, Rebecca could agreeably impart a great deal of instruction to Miss Rose Crawley.

She and Miss Rose thus read together many delightful French and English works; among them those of the learned Dr. Smollett, the ingenious Mr. Henry Fielding, and the universal Monsieur de Voltaire. Once, when Mr. Crawley asked what the young people were reading, the governess replied "Smollett."

"Oh, Smollett," said Mr. Crawley, quite satisfied. "His history is dull, but not so dangerous as that of Mr. Hume. It is history you are reading?"

"Yes," said Miss Rose; without adding that it was the history of Mr. Humphrey Clinker. On another occasion he was rather scandalised at finding her with a book of French plays; but when the governess said that it was for the purpose of learning French idiom, he was content. Mr. Crawley was exceedingly proud of his own skill in French, and pleased with the compliments which the governess continually paid him upon it.

Miss Violet's tastes were more boisterous than her sister's. She knew the hidden spots where the hens laid their eggs. She could climb a tree to rob nests; and loved to ride the young colts. She was the favourite of her father and the stablemen, and the darling and terror of the cook; for she discovered the haunts of the jam-pots. She and

her sister were engaged in constant battles. If Miss Sharp discovered any of her little crimes, she merely promised not to tell, if Miss Violet would be a good girl and love her governess.

With Mr. Crawley Miss Sharp was respectful and obedient. She used to consult him on passages of French which she could not understand, though her mother was a Frenchwoman; and she was often affected, even to tears, by his discourses of an evening, and would say, "Oh, thank you, sir," with a sigh, and look up to heaven.

"How Miss Sharp is awakened by my words," he would reflect, "when not one of the people here is touched. I am too delicate for them – but she understands my style. Her mother was a Montmorency."

Indeed it was from this famous family, it seemed, that Miss Sharp was descended. Of course she did not say that her mother had been on the stage. The French revolution had plunged many noble families into poverty. She had several stories about her ancestors before long; some of which Mr. Crawley happened to find in D'Hozier's dictionary, in the library, which strengthened his belief in their truth.

Are we to suppose from this that Mr. Crawley was interested in her? – no, only in a friendly way. Have we not stated that he was attached to Lady Jane Sheepshanks?

He reprimanded Rebecca once or twice about playing at backgammon with Sir Pitt, saying that it was a godless amusement; but Miss Sharp said her dear mother used often to play it with the old Count de Trictrac and the venerable Abbe du Cornet.

But it was not only by playing at backgammon with the Baronet that the little governess made herself agreeable to her employer. She found many ways of being useful to him. She patiently read over all his law papers. She volunteered to copy his letters, and adroitly corrected their spelling. She became interested in everything about the estate, the farm, the garden and the stables; and the Baronet began to take his after-breakfast walk with her (and the children of course), when she would give her advice about trees which were to be lopped, garden-beds to be dug, and crops to be cut.

Before she had been a year at Queen's Crawley she had quite won the Baronet's confidence; and the conversation at the dinner-table, which before used to be held between him and Mr. Horrocks the butler, was now between Sir Pitt and Miss Sharp. She was almost mistress of the house when Mr. Crawley was absent, but behaved so modestly as not to offend the servants. She was quite a different person from the haughty, dissatisfied little girl whom we have known previously, and this change of temper showed great prudence, a sincere desire of amendment, or at any rate great moral courage on her part. Our readers will recollect that though young in years, our heroine was old in experience, and a very clever woman.

The elder and younger son of the house were never at home together – they hated each other cordially. Indeed, Rawdon Crawley, the dragoon, had a great contempt for the house altogether, and seldom came there except when his aunt paid her annual visit.

This old lady possessed seventy thousand pounds, and had almost adopted Rawdon. She despised her elder nephew as a milksop, and in return he stated that her soul was irretrievably lost, and that his brother's was no better. "She is a vain and godless woman of the world," Mr. Crawley would say. When she came to stay, he had to give up his prayers. As his father said, "she wouldn't stand the preachifying."

Old Miss Crawley was certainly a reprobate. She had a snug little house in Park Lane; she ate and drank a great deal too much during the season in London, and went to Harrogate or Cheltenham for the summer. She had been a beauty in her day, she

said, and had been in France, and loved French novels, French cookery, and French wines. She read Voltaire and Rousseau; talked very lightly about divorce, and most energetically of the rights of women.

This worthy old lady took a fancy to Rawdon Crawley when a boy, sent him to Cambridge, and, when the young man was asked by the University to quit after two years, she bought him his commission in the Life Guards.

The young officer was a celebrated “blood,” or dandy about town. Boxing, rat-hunting, the fives court, and four-in-hand driving were then the fashion; and he was an adept in all these. And though he belonged to the household troops, who did not go to battle, Rawdon Crawley had already fought three bloody duels, in which he gave proof of his contempt for death.

Silly, romantic Miss Crawley, far from being horrified at the courage of her favourite, used to pay his debts after his duels; and would not listen to a word that was whispered against him.

“He will sow his wild oats,” she would say, “and is worth far more than that puling hypocrite of a brother of his.”

CHAPTER 11

Arcadian Simplicity

Besides these honest folks at the Hall, we must introduce the reader to their relatives at the Rectory, Bute Crawley and his wife.

The Reverend Bute Crawley was a tall, stately, jolly man, far more popular than the Baronet his brother. At college he rowed in the Christchurch boat, and had boxed, and he carried these tastes into private life. There was not a fight within twenty miles at which he was not present, nor a race, a regatta, a ball, or a dinner in the whole county, but he found means to attend it. He had a fine voice and sang well and heartily. He rode in the hunt, and was one of the best fishermen in the county.

Mrs. Crawley, the rector's wife, was a smart little body, who wrote his sermons. She ruled absolutely within the Rectory, wisely giving her husband full liberty without. He was welcome to come and go, and dine out as many days as he liked, for Mrs. Crawley was a saving woman. She was the daughter of the late Lieut.-Colonel Hector McTavish, and she and her mother won Bute at Harrogate; ever since marrying him, she had been a prudent and thrifty wife.

In spite of her care, however, he was always in debt. It took him ten years to pay off his college bills; then, when he was just clear of them, he gave odds of 100 to 1 against Kangaroo, who won the Derby. The Rector was obliged to take up the money at ruinous interest, and had been struggling ever since. His sister helped him with a hundred pounds now and then, but of course his great hope was in her death – when “hang it” (he would say), “Matilda must leave me half her money.”

So the Baronet and his brother had every reason for disagreement. Young Pitt not only did not hunt, but set up a Quaker meeting house under his uncle's nose. Rawdon, it was known, was to inherit the bulk of Miss Crawley's property. Speculations in life and death make brothers very loving towards each other in Vanity Fair.

Rebecca's establishment at Queen's Crawley did not go unnoticed by Mrs. Bute Crawley. Mrs. Bute, who knew how many days the sirloin of beef lasted at the Hall; how much linen was got ready at the great wash; how many peaches were on the south wall – Mrs. Bute could not pass over the governess without making every inquiry about her. There was always a good glass of ale in the Rectory kitchen for the Hall servants, whose usual drink was very weak; and through these channels each family was perfectly well acquainted with the doings of the other.

Very soon after her arrival, Rebecca began to take a regular place in the servants' bulletins from the Hall. To start with: “The black porker's killed – salted the sides – leg of pork for dinner. Mr. Cramp from Mudbury over with Sir Pitt – Mr. Pitt at meeting – my lady as usual – the young ladies with the governess.”

Then the report came – the new governess be a rare manager – Sir Pitt be very sweet on her – Mr. Crawley too – he be reading tracts to her.

“What an abandoned wretch!” said eager, active Mrs. Bute Crawley.

Finally, the reports were that the governess had “come round” everybody, wrote Sir Pitt's letters, did his business, and had the upper hand of the whole house, my lady, Mr. Crawley, and all. Thus Mrs. Bute spied out everything that took place in the enemy's camp, and a great deal besides.

Mrs. Bute Crawley to Miss Pinkerton, The Mall, Chiswick.

My Dear Madam,

Although it is many years since I profited by your delightful instructions, yet I have ever retained the FONDEST regard for Miss Pinkerton, and dear Chiswick. I hope your health is good. The world cannot afford to lose Miss Pinkerton for MANY MANY YEARS. When my friend, Lady Fuddleston, mentioned that her dear girls required an instructress – “Who,” I exclaimed, “can we consult but the excellent Miss Pinkerton?” Have you, dear madam, any ladies on your list, whose services might be available to my friend? I assure you she will take no governess BUT OF YOUR CHOOSING.

My dear husband is pleased to say that he likes everything which comes from Miss Pinkerton’s School. How I wish I could present him and my beloved girls to the friend of my youth, ADMIRER of the great lexicographer! If you ever travel into Hampshire, we hope you will adorn our rural rectory with your presence. 'Tis the humble but happy home of

Your affectionate Martha Crawley

P.S. Mr. Crawley’s brother, the baronet, with whom we are not, alas! upon terms of brotherly UNITY, has a governess for his little girls, Miss Sharp, who, I am told, had the good fortune to be educated at Chiswick. As I have the tenderest interest in my dearest little nieces – and as I long to be attentive to ANY PUPIL OF YOURS – do, my dear Miss Pinkerton, tell me the history of this young lady, whom, for YOUR SAKE, I am most anxious to befriend.—M. C.

*

Miss Pinkerton to Mrs. Bute Crawley.

Dear Madam,

I have the honour to acknowledge your letter. 'Tis most gratifying to recognize in the amiable Mrs. Bute Crawley my excellent pupil of former years, the accomplished Miss Martha MacTavish. What pleasure it would give me if your beloved young daughters had need of my superintendence!

Presenting my respectful compliments to Lady Fuddleston, I have the honour to introduce to her ladyship my two friends, Miss Tuffin and Miss Hawky.

Either of these young ladies is PERFECTLY QUALIFIED to instruct in Greek, Latin, and the rudiments of Hebrew; in mathematics and history; in Spanish, French, Italian, and geography; in music, dancing, the elements of natural sciences, and the use of the globes. Miss Tuffin, who is daughter of the late Reverend Thomas, can also instruct in the Syriac language, and elements of Constitutional law. But as she is only eighteen years of age, and of exceedingly pleasing appearance, perhaps this young lady may be objectionable in Sir Huddleston Fuddleston’s family.

Miss Letitia Hawky, on the other hand, is not personally well-favoured. She is twenty-nine; her face is much pitted with the small-pox, she has a halting gait and a trifling squint. Both ladies are endowed with EVERY MORAL AND RELIGIOUS VIRTUE. With my respects to the Reverend Bute Crawley, I have the honour to be,

Your most faithful and obedient servant, Barbara Pinkerton.

P.S. Miss Sharp, whom you mention as governess to Sir Pitt Crawley, was a pupil of mine, and I have nothing to say in her disfavour. Though her appearance is disagreeable, we cannot control the operations of nature: and though her parents were disreputable (her father being a painter, several times bankrupt, and her mother, as I have since learned, with horror, a dancer at the Opera); yet her talents are considerable, and I cannot regret that I received her OUT OF CHARITY. My dread is, lest the principles of the mother – whom I was told was a French Countess – should prove to be HEREDITARY in the unhappy young woman whom I took as AN OUTCAST. But her principles have hitherto been correct (I believe), and I am sure nothing will occur to injure them in the refined circle of Sir Pitt Crawley.

*

Miss Rebecca Sharp to Miss Amelia Sedley.

I have not written to my beloved Amelia for these many weeks, for what news was there to tell of Humdrum Hall, as I have christened it; and what do you care whether the turnip crop is good or bad, or whether the fat pig weighed thirteen stone or fourteen? Every day is like its neighbour. Before breakfast, a walk with Sir Pitt; after breakfast, studies in the schoolroom; after the schoolroom, reading and writing about lawyers, leases, coal-mines and canals with Sir Pitt (whose secretary I am become).

After dinner, there are Mr. Crawley's discourses on the baronet's backgammon, while my lady looks placidly on. She has become more interesting lately by being ill, which has brought a new visitor to the Hall: a young doctor. Dr. Glauber gave a certain friend of yours to understand that, if she chose to be Mrs. Glauber, she was welcome to ornament the surgery! I rebuffed him. As if I was born to be a country surgeon's wife! Sir Pitt applauded my resolution; he would be sorry to lose his little secretary, I think; and I believe the old wretch likes me as much as he can like any one. Marry a country doctor, after – no, no; I cannot so soon forget old associations, about which I will talk no more. Let us return to Humdrum Hall.

It is Humdrum Hall no longer. Miss Crawley has arrived with her fat horses, fat servants, and fat spaniel – the great rich Miss Crawley, with seventy thousand pounds, whom, or rather WHICH, her two brothers adore. She looks very apoplectic, the dear soul; no wonder her brothers are anxious about her. You should see them struggling to settle her cushions, or to hand her coffee!

When she comes to stay our hall is thrown open. We have dinner-parties, and drink claret and champagne as if we were accustomed to it every day. We have wax candles in the schoolroom, and fires to warm ourselves. My pupils leave off their thick shoes and tight old tartan pelisses, and wear silk stockings and muslin frocks, as fashionable baronets' daughters should.

Miss Crawley and her seventy thousand pounds have an admirable effect on the two brothers, the baronet and the rector, who hate each other all the year round, but become quite loving at Christmas. When Miss Crawley arrives there is no quarrelling – they talk in the most affable manner, and indeed Miss Crawley vows that she will leave her money elsewhere if they offend her.

Our sermon books are shut when Miss Crawley arrives, and young Mr. Pitt, whom she hates, has gone to town. On the other hand, Captain Rawdon Crawley has appeared, and I suppose you will like to know what sort of a person he is.

Well, he is a very large young dandy. He is six feet high, and speaks with a loud voice, and swears a great deal; and orders about the servants, who all adore him

nevertheless; for he is very generous with his money. Last week the gamekeepers almost killed a bailiff and his man who came down from London to arrest the Captain for debt, and who were found lurking about the Park wall.

The Captain has a hearty contempt for his father, and calls him an old SNOB, a CHAW-BACON, and other pretty names. He has a DREADFUL REPUTATION among the ladies. Shall I tell you a compliment the Captain paid me? One evening we actually had a dance; there was Sir Huddleston Fuddleston and his family, Sir Giles Wapshot and his young ladies, and many more. Well, I heard him say, "By Jove, she's a neat little filly!" meaning your humble servant; and he danced two country-dances with me. He says the country girls are BORES. Indeed, I don't think he is far wrong. You should see the contempt with which they look down on poor me! When they dance I sit and play the piano very demurely; but the other night, when he saw me playing, he swore that I was the best dancer in the room, and that he would have the fiddlers from Mudbury.

"I'll play a country-dance," said Mrs. Bute Crawley, very readily (she is a little old woman in a crooked turban); and after the Captain and your poor little Rebecca had performed a dance together, do you know she actually complimented me upon my steps! The proud Mrs. Bute Crawley, first cousin to the Earl of Tiptoff! She has taken a great fancy to me.

"My dear Miss Sharp," she says, "why not bring your girls to the Rectory? Their cousins will be so happy to see them." I see through her schemes: she hopes to get a piano teacher for her children – but I shall go, and make myself agreeable – is it not a poor governess's duty, who has not a friend in the world? The Rector's wife paid me a score of compliments about my pupils' progress, and thought, no doubt, to touch my heart – poor, simple, country soul! As if I cared a fig about my pupils!

Your India muslin and your pink silk, dearest Amelia, are said to become me very well. They are a good deal worn now; but, you know, we poor girls can't afford new things. Happy you! who have but to drive to St. James's Street, and whose mother will give you any thing you ask.

Farewell, dearest girl,
Your affectionate Rebecca.

When Mrs. Bute Crawley had got the promise of a visit from Miss Sharp, she induced the all-powerful Miss Crawley to ask for Sir Pitt's permission, and the good-natured old lady, who loved to be gay, and to see everyone happy around her, was quite charmed, and ready to establish a reconciliation between her two brothers. It was therefore agreed that the young people of both families should visit each other frequently, and the friendship lasted as long as the jovial old lady was there to keep the peace.

"Why did you ask that scoundrel, Rawdon Crawley, to dine?" said the Rector to his lady as they walked back across the park. "I don't want the fellow. He's a gambler – a drunkard – a profligate in every way. He shot a man in a duel, he's head over ears in debt, and he's robbed us of the best part of Miss Crawley's fortune. She has him down in her will for fifty thousand."

"I think she's going," said the Rector's wife. "She was very red in the face when we left dinner. I was obliged to unlace her stays."

"She drank seven glasses of champagne," said the reverend; "and filthy champagne it is, too, that my brother poisons us with – but you women never know what's what."

“We know nothing,” said Mrs. Bute Crawley.

“She drank cherry-brandy after dinner,” continued his Reverence, “and curacao with her coffee. Flesh and blood won’t bear it! I lay five to two, Matilda drops in a year.”

Thinking about his debts, and his son Jim at College, and Frank at Woolwich, and the four girls, who were no beauties, poor things, and would not have a penny but what they got from the aunt’s legacy, the Rector and his lady walked on for a while.

“Pitt can’t be such an infernal villain as to sell the reversion of the living,” continued Mr. Crawley, after a pause.

“Sir Pitt will do anything,” said the Rector’s wife. “We must get Miss Crawley to make him promise it to James.”

“Pitt will promise anything,” replied the brother. “He promised he’d pay my college bills; he promised he’d build the new wing to the Rectory; he promised he’d let me have the Six-acre Meadow – and much he kept his promises! And it’s to this man’s son – this scoundrel, gambler, swindler, murderer of a Rawdon Crawley, that Matilda leaves most of her money. By Jove, it’s un-Christian.”

“Hush, my dearest love! we’re in Sir Pitt’s grounds.”

“I say he has got every vice, Mrs. Crawley. Didn’t he shoot Captain Marker? Didn’t he rob young Lord Dovedale at the Cocoa-Tree? You know he did. And you ask this villain into your house!” continued the exasperated Rector.

“Bute Crawley, you are a fool,” said his wife scornfully.

“Well, Martha, fool or not – and I don’t say I’m as clever as you are – but I won’t meet Rawdon Crawley, that’s flat. I’ll go over to Huddleston, that I will, and see his black greyhound. But I won’t meet that beast Rawdon Crawley.”

“Mr. Crawley, you are intoxicated, as usual,” replied his wife. The next morning, when the Rector woke, she reminded him of his promise to visit Sir Huddleston Fuddlestone on Saturday, and it was agreed that he might gallop back in time for church on Sunday morning.

The heiress Miss Crawley had not been long at the Hall before Rebecca’s fascinations had won her good-natured heart. Taking her usual drive one day, she ordered “that little governess” to accompany her to Mudbury. Before they had returned Rebecca had made a conquest of her; having made her laugh four times, and amused her during the whole journey.

“Not let Miss Sharp dine at table!” said she to Sir Pitt, who had arranged a dinner for all the neighbouring baronets. “I insist upon Miss Sharp appearing. Why, she’s the only person fit to talk to in the county!”

Of course, after such an order as this, Miss Sharp received commands to dine with the illustrious company. And when Sir Huddleston had, with great pomp, handed Miss Crawley in to dinner, and was preparing to take his place by her side, the old lady cried out in a shrill voice, “Becky Sharp! Come and sit by me and amuse me; and let Sir Huddleston sit by Lady Wapshot.”

When the parties were over, and the carriages had rolled away, Miss Crawley would say, “Come to my dressing room, Becky, and let us abuse the company” – which, between them, they did perfectly. Old Sir Huddleston wheezed at dinner; Sir Giles Wapshot slurped his soup, and her ladyship had a wink of the left eye; all of which Becky caricatured admirably. As for the Misses Wapshot’s toilettes and Lady Fuddlestone’s famous yellow hat, Miss Sharp tore them to tatters, to the infinite amusement of her audience.

“My dear, you are a perfect find,” Miss Crawley would say. “I wish you could come to me in London, but I couldn’t make a butt of you as I do of poor Briggs my companion, you little sly creature; you are too clever. Isn’t she, Firkin?”

Her maid Firkin (who was dressing the very small remnant of hair on Miss Crawley’s pate), flung up her head and said, “I think Miss is very clever,” with the most killing sarcastic air.

After this, Miss Crawley ordered that Rawdon Crawley should lead her in to dinner every day, and that Becky should follow.

“We must sit together,” she said. “We’re the only three Christians in the county, my love” – in which case, it must be confessed that religion was at a very low ebb in Hampshire.

Miss Crawley was, as we have said, an Ultra-liberal in opinions, and always expressed these in the most candid manner.

“What is birth, my dear!” she would say to Rebecca. “Look at my brother Pitt; look at the Huddlestons; look at poor Bute – is any of them equal to you in intelligence or breeding? You, my love, are a little jewel – you have more brains than half the shire. I consider you, my love, as my equal in every respect; and – will you put some coals on the fire, my dear; and alter this dress of mine, you who can do it so well?” So this old philanthropist used to make Becky run errands, do her sewing, and read her to sleep with French novels, every night.

At this time, as some older readers may recollect, the genteel world had been thrown into excitement by two events: Ensign Shafton had run away with Lady Barbara Fitzurse; and poor Vere Vane, a gentleman who had a most respectable character and numerous children, suddenly and outrageously left his home, for the sake of Mrs. Rougemont, the actress, who was sixty-five.

“I adore impudent matches,” Miss Crawley said. “What I like best, is for a nobleman to marry a miller’s daughter, as Lord Flowerdale did – it makes all the women so angry. I wish some great man would run away with you, my dear; I’m sure you’re pretty enough.”

“Oh, it would be delightful!” Rebecca said.

“And what I like next best, is for a poor fellow to run away with a rich girl. I have set my heart on Rawdon running away with someone.”

“A rich someone, or a poor someone?”

“Why, you goose! Rawdon has not a shilling but what I give him. He must repair his fortunes, and succeed in the world.”

“Is he very clever?” Rebecca asked.

“Clever, my love? Not an idea in the world beyond his horses, and his regiment, and his hunting; but he must succeed – he’s so delightfully wicked. Don’t you know he has shot an injured father through the hat? He’s adored in his regiment; and all the young men at the Cocoa-Tree swear by him.”

When Miss Rebecca Sharp wrote to her beloved Amelia about the little ball at Queen’s Crawley, and how Captain Crawley had first distinguished her, she did not, strange to say, give an altogether accurate account. The Captain had distinguished her a great number of times before. He had met her in a dozen walks, and fifty corridors. He had hung over her piano twenty times of an evening (my Lady was now upstairs, being ill, and nobody heeded her) as Miss Sharp sang.

He had written her notes; but when he put the first note into the pages of the song she was singing, the little governess, rising and looking him steadily in the face, took

up the missive daintily, and popped it into the fire. Making him a low curtsy, she went back to her place, and began to sing away again more merrily than ever.

“What’s that?” said Miss Crawley, interrupted in her after-dinner doze by the stoppage of the music.

“It’s a false note,” Miss Sharp said with a laugh; and Rawdon Crawley fumed with rage and mortification.

Yet Mrs. Bute Crawley was not jealous, but welcomed the young lady to the Rectory – and not only her, but Rawdon Crawley, her husband’s rival for the old maid’s fortune! They became very fond of each other’s society, Mrs. Bute Crawley and Rawdon. He gave up hunting; his great pleasure was to stroll over to Crawley parsonage where Miss Crawley came too, and as their mamma was ill, the children with Miss Sharp. In the evening some of them would walk back together. Not Miss Crawley – she preferred her carriage – but the walk over the Rectory fields, and in at the little wicket gate, and up the checkered avenue in the moonlight, was charming to two such lovers of the picturesque as the Captain and Rebecca.

“O those stars!” Miss Rebecca would say, turning her green eyes up towards them. “I feel myself almost a spirit when I gaze upon them.”

“O – ah – Gad – yes, so do I, exactly, Miss Sharp,” the other replied. “You don’t mind my cigar, do you?”

Miss Sharp loved the smell of a cigar – and she just tasted one too, in the prettiest way possible, and gave a little puff, and a little scream, and a little giggle, and restored it to the Captain, who twirled his moustache, and puffed it into a red blaze, swearing – “Jove – aw – Gad – it’s the finest segaw I ever smoked,” for his intellect and conversation were alike as became a heavy young dragoon.

Old Sir Pitt, who was talking to John Horrocks, espied the pair from his study-window, and with dreadful oaths swore that if it wasn’t for Miss Crawley, he’d take Rawdon and bundle un out of doors, like the rogue he was.

“He be a bad’n, sure enough,” Mr. Horrocks remarked; “but I think Miss Sharp’s a match for’n, Sir Pitt.”

And so, in truth, she was – for father and son too.

CHAPTER 12

Quite a Sentimental Chapter

We must now travel back to London, to inquire what has become of Miss Amelia.

“We don’t care a fig for her,” writes some unknown correspondent; “she is insipid;” a kind remark which in truth is complimentary to the young lady.

Has the beloved reader never heard similar remarks by female friends; who always wonder what you can see in Miss Smith, or what could induce Major Jones to propose for that silly simpering Miss Thompson, who has nothing but her wax-doll face to recommend her? These dear Moralists hint wisely that the accomplishments of the mind, a ladylike knowledge of botany and geology, and the power of rattling out sonatas and so forth, are far more valuable than those fugitive charms which a few years will tarnish. It is quite edifying to hear women speculate upon the worthlessness of beauty.

But though virtue is a much finer thing, and though, very likely, the heroic female character which ladies admire is a more glorious object than the fresh, artless, tender little domestic goddess, yet men do admire the latter more. Though I have been repeatedly told that Miss Brown is an insignificant chit, yet I see all the young fellows battling to dance with her; and so I think that to be despised by her sex is a very great compliment to a woman.

The young ladies in Amelia’s society did this for her very satisfactorily. The Misses Osborne, George’s sisters, and the Misses Dobbin agreed about nothing so well as her very trifling merits, and their wonder that their brothers could find any charms in her.

“We are kind to her,” said the Misses Osborne, a pair of fine black-browed young ladies who had had the best governesses and milliners. They treated Amelia with such extreme kindness and condescension, and patronised her so insufferably, that the poor little thing was perfectly dumb and stupid in their presence. She tried to like them, and passed the most dreary mornings with them. She drove out in their great family coach; they took her to concerts, and to St. Paul’s to see the charity children. Their house was comfortable; their society solemn and genteel; their self-respect prodigious; all their habits were pompous and orderly, and all their amusements intolerably dull and decorous. After every visit Miss Osborne and Miss Maria Osborne, and Miss Wirt the governess, asked each other with increased wonder, “What could George find in that creature?”

How is this? some carping reader exclaims. How is it that Amelia, who had so many loving friends at school, comes out into the world and is spurned by her sex? My dear sir, there were no men at Miss Pinkerton’s establishment except the old dancing-master. When George, their handsome brother, ran off directly after breakfast, and dined away from home half-a-dozen times a week, his neglected sisters felt a little vexed. When young Bullock (of Bullock & Co., Bankers), who had been making up to Miss Maria Osborne the last two seasons, asked Amelia to dance, could you expect Maria to be pleased? And yet she said she was.

“I’m so delighted you like dear Amelia,” she said quite eagerly to Mr. Bullock. “She’s engaged to my brother George; there’s not much in her, but we’re all *so* fond

of her.” Dear girl! who can calculate the depth of affection expressed in that enthusiastic SO?

Miss Wirt and these two affectionate young women so frequently reminded George Osborne of the great sacrifice he was making in throwing himself away upon Amelia, that he really thought he was one of the most deserving characters in the British army.

Although he dined out six days a week, when his sisters believed him to be with Amelia, he was not always with her. On several occasions, when Captain Dobbin called for his friend, Miss Osborne (who was very attentive to the Captain) would laughingly point across the square, and say, “Oh, you must go to the Sedleys’ for George; *we* never see him.” At which the Captain would laugh in a rather constrained manner, and turn the conversation to some other topic.

“What an innocent it is,” Miss Maria would then say to Miss Jane, upon his departure. “Did you see how he blushed at the mention of poor George on duty?”

“It’s a pity Frederick Bullock hasn’t some of his modesty, Maria,” replied the elder sister, with a toss of her head.

The fact is, when Captain Dobbin blushed, and looked so awkward, it was because he had already called at Mr. Sedley’s house, and George wasn’t there, only poor little Amelia, with rather a sad wistful face, who asked, had Captain Dobbin seen Mr. Osborne that day?

Captain Dobbin had not. “He was with his sister, most likely,” the Captain said. So he crossed the square to fetch the truant; and Amelia waited and waited, but George never came.

Poor little tender heart! So it goes on hoping and trusting. You see it is not much of a life to describe. There is not much incident in it. Only one feeling all day – when will he come? I believe George was playing billiards with Captain Cannon when Amelia was asking Captain Dobbin about him; for George was a sociable fellow, and excellent in games of skill.

Once, after three days of absence, Miss Amelia put on her bonnet, and actually invaded the Osborne house.

“What! leave our brother to come to us?” said the young ladies. “Have you had a quarrel, Amelia?”

No, indeed. “Who could quarrel with him?” said she, with her eyes filled with tears. She only came over to see her dear friends; they had not met for so long. And this day she was so perfectly stupid and awkward, that the Misses Osborne wondered more than ever what George could see in her.

How was she to bare that timid little heart for the inspection of those bold young ladies? The Misses Osborne were excellent critics of a Cashmere shawl, or a pink satin slip; but there are things of a finer texture than satin. And there are sweet modest little souls blooming tenderly in quiet shady places.

The life of a good young girl who is still in the paternal nest can’t have many of those thrilling incidents which happen to the heroine of a romance. While Becky Sharp was on the wing in the country, hopping on all sorts of twigs, amid a multiplicity of traps, and pecking up her food quite successfully, Amelia lay snug in her nest at Russell Square; that cheery comfortable home in which she was affectionately sheltered. Mamma had her morning duties, and her daily drive, and the delightful round of visits and shopping which is the profession of the rich London lady. Papa conducted his mysterious operations in the City – a stirring place in those days, when war was raging all over Europe. Old Sedley once or twice came home

with a very grave face; and no wonder, when news of battles and retreats was agitating all the stock-markets.

Meanwhile matters went on in Russell Square just the same. The retreat from Leipsic made no difference to the meals in the servants' hall; the allies poured into France, and the dinner-bell rang at five o'clock just as usual. I don't think poor Amelia was interested in the war until Napoleon abdicated; when she clapped her hands and prayed – oh, how gratefully! and flung herself into George Osborne's arms, to everyone's astonishment. Peace was declared, Napoleon was overthrown, and Lieutenant Osborne's regiment would not need to fight. That was how Amelia reasoned. The fate of Europe was Lieutenant George Osborne to her. He was her Europe and her emperor: her sun and moon.

We have talked of poverty as Becky Sharp's dismal instructor. Now love was Miss Amelia Sedley's tutor, and it was amazing what progress our young lady made under that teacher. In the course of eighteen months, what a deal of secrets Amelia learned, which Miss Wirt and the young ladies over the way had no knowledge of! How should they? Miss Maria Osborne, it is true, was "attached" to Mr. Frederick Bullock, but hers was a most respectable attachment, and she would have taken the gouty old Bullock Senior if he had not been married. Her mind was fixed – as a well-bred young lady's should be – upon a house in Park Lane, a country home at Wimbledon, a handsome carriage, and a fourth of the annual profits of Hulker & Bullock.

This was not the sort of love that finished Amelia's education, and over the year turned a good young girl into a good young woman. She loved George Osborne with all her heart. She thought about him the first moment on waking; and his was the last name mentioned in her prayers. She never had seen a man so beautiful or so clever: such a figure on horseback: such a dancer: such a hero in general. He was good enough to be a fairy prince; and oh, what magnanimity to stoop to such a humble Cinderella! This blind devotion is in the nature of some women. Some are made to scheme, and some to love.

Meanwhile, Miss Amelia neglected her twelve dear friends at Chiswick most cruelly; although she had little Laura Martin for the holidays; and made a confidante of her, and promised that Laura should come and live with her when she was married, and gave Laura a great deal of information about love, which must have been singularly useful to that little person. Alas! I fear poor Emmy had not a well-regulated mind.

What were her parents doing to help her? Old Sedley did not seem to notice matters. He was graver of late, and his City affairs absorbed him. Mrs. Sedley was of an easy nature. Mr. Jos was away at Cheltenham. Amelia had the house to herself – ah! too much to herself sometimes – not that she ever doubted George; for, to be sure, he must be at the Horse Guards; and he must see his friends and sisters when he is in town; and when he is with the regiment, he is too tired to write long letters.

But if Osborne's letters were short and soldier-like, Miss Sedley in return not only filled large sheets of paper, but crossed and underlined her writing, and copied whole pages out of poetry-books. She wasn't a heroine. Her letters were full of repetition. She wrote rather doubtful grammar sometimes, and in her verses took all sorts of liberties with the metre. But if you are not allowed to touch the heart in spite of poor syntax, may all Poetry go to the deuce, and every schoolmaster perish miserably!

CHAPTER 13

Sentimental and Otherwise

I fear that so many notes followed Lieutenant Osborne about the country, that he became almost ashamed of the jokes of his mess-room companions about them, and ordered his servant to deliver them to his private room. He was seen lighting his cigar with one, to the horror of Captain Dobbin, who, it is my belief, would have given a bank-note for it.

For some time George strove to keep the liaison a secret. There was a woman in the case, he admitted.

“And not the first either,” said Ensign Spooney to Ensign Stubble. “That Osborne’s a devil of a fellow. There was a judge’s daughter at Demerara went almost mad about him; then there was that beautiful girl at St. Vincent’s; and since he’s been home, they say he’s a regular Don Giovanni, by Jove.”

Stubble and Spooney thought that to be a “regular Don Giovanni” was one of the finest qualities a man could possess, and Osborne’s reputation was prodigious amongst the young men of the regiment. He was famous in field-sports, free with his money, and his coats were better made than any. He was adored by the men. He could drink more than any officer of the mess, and box, and was the best batter and bowler of the regimental cricket club. He rode his own horse, Greased Lightning, and won the Garrison cup at Quebec races.

Well, Stubble and Spooney and the rest indulged in romantic conjectures about this female correspondent of Osborne’s – saying that it was a Duchess who was in love with him, or a General’s daughter, or some other victim of a passion delightfully exciting and disgraceful.

And the real state of the case would never have been known in the regiment but for Captain Dobbin’s indiscretion. The Captain was eating his breakfast one day in the mess-room, while the two ensigns and the surgeon were speculating upon Osborne’s intrigue – Stubble holding out that the lady was a Duchess, and Cackle vowing she was an opera-singer of the worst reputation.

At this Dobbin couldn’t help blurting out, “You’re talking nonsense. Osborne is not going to run off with a duchess or an opera-singer. Miss Sedley is one of the most charming young women that ever lived. He’s been engaged to her ever so long; and the man who calls her names had better not do so in my hearing.” And turning exceedingly red, Dobbin almost choked himself with a cup of tea. The story was over the regiment in half-an-hour; and Osborne was furious with Dobbin for betraying his secret.

“Who the deuce asked you to talk about my affairs?” Osborne shouted indignantly. “Why the devil is all the regiment to know that I am going to be married? What right have you to meddle in my business, Dobbin?”

“It seems to me,” Captain Dobbin began.

“Seems be hanged, Dobbin,” said George. “I am under obligations to you, I know, but I won’t be sermonised by you because you’re five years my senior. I’m hanged if I’ll stand your airs of superiority. I should like to know in what I’m your inferior?”

“Are you engaged?” Captain Dobbin asked.

“What the devil’s that to you or anyone here?”

“Are you ashamed of it?”

“What right have you to ask me that question, sir?” George said.

“Good God, you don’t mean to say you want to break off?” asked Dobbin, starting up.

“In other words, you ask me if I’m a man of honour,” said Osborne, fiercely; “is that what you mean? You’ve adopted such a tone to me lately that I’m d_____ if I’ll bear it any more.”

“Why? I’ve told you that you were neglecting a sweet girl, George. I’ve told you that when you go to town you ought to go to her, and not to the gambling-houses about St. James’s.”

“You want your money back, I suppose,” said George, with a sneer.

“Of course I do – I always did, didn’t I?” says Dobbin. “You speak like a generous fellow.”

“No, hang it, William, I beg your pardon,” George interposed with remorse; “you have been my friend in a hundred ways, Heaven knows. You’ve got me out of a score of scrapes. When Crawley of the Guards won that money off me I should have been done but for you. But you shouldn’t be always preaching at me. I am very fond of Amelia; I adore her, and that sort of thing. Don’t look angry. I know she’s faultless. But hang it: we’re just back from the West Indies. I must have a little fling, and when I’m married I’ll reform, upon my honour. Dob – don’t be angry, and I’ll give you a hundred next month, when I know my father will pay me something handsome; and I’ll ask for leave, and go to town, and see Amelia tomorrow. Will that satisfy you?”

“It is impossible to be long angry with you, George,” said the Captain; “and as for the money, old boy, I know you’d share your last shilling with me.”

“That I would, by Jove, Dobbin,” George said generously, though he never had any money to spare.

“Only I wish you had sown those wild oats of yours, George. If you could have seen poor little Miss Emmy’s face when she asked me about you the other day, you would have pitched those billiard-balls to the deuce. Go and comfort her, you rascal. Go and write her a long letter. Do something to make her happy; a very little will.”

“I believe she’s d_____d fond of me,” the Lieutenant said, with a self-satisfied air; and went off to join some fellows in the mess-room.

Amelia, meanwhile, was looking at the moon, and thinking of her hero. Perhaps he is visiting the sentries, thought she; perhaps he is bivouacking, or attending the bed of a wounded comrade, or studying the art of war up in his own desolate chamber.... All things considered, I think it was as well the poor little angel could not hear the songs those young fellows were roaring over the whisky-punch.

The next day young Osborne, to show Dobbin that he was as good as his word, prepared to go to town.

“I should have liked to give her a little present,” Osborne said, “only I am quite out of cash.” So Dobbin loaned Mr. Osborne a few pounds, which he took after a faint scruple.

And I dare say he would have bought something very handsome for Amelia; only, getting off the coach in Fleet Street, he was attracted by a handsome shirt-pin in a jeweller’s window, which he could not resist; and having paid for that, had very little money left.

Never mind: you may be sure it was not his presents Amelia wanted. When he came to Russell Square, her face lit up as if he had been sunshine. The fears, tears, and sleepless fancies were forgotten. Sambo saw the little girl start, and flush, and

jump up from her watching-place in the window, as he announced Lieutenant Osborne; and she went fluttering to Osborne's heart as if it was the only natural home for her to nestle in.

George kissed her kindly on her forehead, and was very gracious and good; and she thought his diamond shirt-pin (which she had not known him to wear before) the prettiest ornament ever seen.

The observant reader may possibly come to certain conclusions regarding the character of Mr. Osborne. Some cynical Frenchman has said that in matters of love, there is the one who loves and the other who condescends to be loved. Perhaps the love is occasionally on the man's side; perhaps on the lady's. But this is certain, that Amelia believed her lover to be one of the most gallant and brilliant men in the empire: and Lieutenant Osborne thought so too.

He was a little wild: but don't girls like a rake better than a milksop? He would soon have sown his wild oats, and would quit the army now that peace was proclaimed, and Napoleon locked up at Elba, The chance of promotion and valour was over: and his allowance, with Amelia's settlement, would enable them to take a snug house in the country, in a good sporting neighbourhood; and he would hunt a little, and farm a little; and they would be very happy.

As for remaining in the army as a married man, that was impossible. Fancy Mrs. George Osborne in the East or West Indies, with a society of officers, and patronized by Mrs. Major O'Dowd! Amelia died with laughing at Osborne's stories about Mrs. Major O'Dowd. He loved her much too fondly to subject her to that horrid vulgar woman and the rough treatment of a soldier's wife. His dear little girl should take her rightful place in society. You may be sure she agreed to all these proposals, as she would to any that he made.

Thus building castles in the air (which Amelia adorned with flower-gardens, rustic walks, Sunday schools, and the like; while George imagined the stables, the kennels, and the cellar), this young pair passed away a couple of hours very pleasantly. When he took her to his sisters while he attended to business, he left her talking and prattling in a way that astonished those ladies, who thought that George might after all make something of her.

He then went off to transact his business. He ate ices at a pastry-cook's shop in Charing Cross; tried a new coat in Pall Mall; dropped in at the Old Slaughters' and played eleven games at billiards with Captain Cannon, of which he won eight, and returned to Russell Square half an hour late for dinner, but in very good humour.

Not so old Mr. Osborne. When that gentleman came from the City, and was welcomed in the drawing-room by his daughters and Miss Wirt, they saw at once by his solemn face and by his scowl and twitching black eyebrows that he was disturbed and uneasy. When Amelia stepped timidly forward to salute him, he gave a surly grunt of recognition, and looked round gloomily at his eldest daughter; with a glance that meant, "Why the devil is she here?"

"George is in town, Papa," said Miss Osborne; "and will be back to dinner."

"I won't have the dinner kept waiting for him." This worthy man lapsed into his chair, in a silence only interrupted by the alarmed ticking of the great French clock.

When it tolled five in a heavy cathedral tone, Mr. Osborne pulled the bell at his right hand violently, and the butler rushed up.

"Dinner!" roared Mr. Osborne.

"Mr. George isn't come in, sir."

"Damn Mr. George, sir. Am I master of the house? DINNER!"

Amelia trembled. Glances passed between the other three ladies. The bell in the lower regions began ringing in announcement of the meal. Without waiting, the head of the family strode downstairs, scowling over his shoulder at the four females.

“What’s the matter?” asked one of the other, as they rose and tripped gingerly behind him.

“I suppose the funds are falling,” whispered Miss Wirt; and so, this hushed and trembling female company followed their dark leader and took their places at the table in silence. He growled out a blessing, which sounded as gruff as a curse. The great silver dish-covers were removed.

“Soup?” said Mr. Osborne; and having helped Amelia and the rest, did not speak for a while.

“Take Miss Sedley’s plate away,” he said at last. “She can’t eat the soup – no more can I. It’s beastly. Take it away, Hicks, and tomorrow turn the cook out of the house, Jane.”

Mr. Osborne made a few savage remarks about the fish, and then lapsed into silence, swallowing glasses of wine, and looking more and more terrible, till a brisk knock at the door told of George’s arrival; when everybody began to rally.

General Daguiet had kept him waiting at the Horse Guards. Never mind soup or fish. Give him anything – he didn’t care what. Capital mutton. His good humour contrasted with his father’s severity; and he rattled on during dinner, to the delight of all, and of one especially.

Eventually the ladies arose and departed to the drawing-room. Amelia hoped George would soon join them there. She began playing some of his favourite waltzes at the grand piano; but this did not bring him. The waltzes grew fainter and fainter; the performer left the piano; and though her three friends performed some of the loudest and most brilliant new pieces of their repertoire, she did not hear, but sat thinking, and boding evil. Old Osborne’s scowl had never before looked so deadly to her. His eyes had followed her out of the room, as if she was guilty of something. Oh, those women! They nurse their forebodings, and make darlings of their ugliest thoughts.

His father’s gloom had also made George Osborne anxious. How was he to extract that money he needed from the governor? He began praising his father’s wine. That was generally a successful means of cajoling the old gentleman.

“We never got such Madeira in the West Indies, sir, as yours. Colonel Heavytop took off three bottles of that you sent me down, the other day.”

“Did he?” said the old gentleman. “It is devilish fine wine,” and he looked more good-humoured. “Ring the bell for the claret, George, and we’ll see if that’s as good as the Madeira. And while we are drinking it, I’ll talk to you about a matter of importance.”

Amelia heard the bell ringing as she sat nervously upstairs. She thought, somehow, it was a mysterious and presentimental bell.

“What I want to know, George,” the old gentleman said, “is, how you and – ah – that little thing upstairs, are carrying on?”

“I think, sir, it is not hard to see,” George said with a self-satisfied grin. “Pretty clear, sir. What capital wine!”

“What d’you mean, pretty clear, sir?”

“Why, hang it, sir, I’m a modest man, but I do own that she’s devilish fond of me.”

“And you yourself?”

“Why, sir, didn’t you order me to marry her, and ain’t I a good boy?”

“A pretty boy, indeed. I’ve heard of your doings, sir, with Lord Tarquin, Captain Crawley of the Guards, and that set. Have a care sir, have a care.”

George was alarmed when he heard these names, fearing his father might have been informed of certain transactions at play. But the old man went on serenely:

“Well, well, young men will be young men. And the comfort to me is, George, that living in the best society in England, as my means allow you to do—”

“Thank you, sir,” said George, making his point at once. “One can’t live with these great folks for nothing; and my purse, sir, look at it.” He held up a little purse which had been netted by Amelia, and contained the very last of Dobbin’s pound notes.

“You shan’t want, sir. Call on Mr. Chopper as you go through the City tomorrow; he’ll have something for you. I don’t grudge money when I know you’re in good society, because I know that good society can never go wrong. I was a humbly born man – but you have had advantages. Make good use of ’em. Mix with the young nobility. And as for the pink bonnets” (here there was a knowing and not very pleasant leer) “why, boys will be boys. Only there’s one thing I order you to avoid, or I’ll cut you off with a shilling, by Jove; and that’s gambling.”

“Oh, of course, sir,” said George.

“But to return to the other business about Amelia: why shouldn’t you marry higher than a stockbroker’s daughter, George?”

“It’s a family business, sir. You and Mr. Sedley made the match a hundred years ago.”

“I don’t deny it; but people’s positions alter, sir. I don’t deny that Sedley made my fortune, or rather put me in the way of acquiring, by my own talents, my high position in the tallow trade and the City of London. But George! I tell you in confidence I don’t like the looks of Mr. Sedley’s affairs. My chief clerk, Mr. Chopper, does not like the looks of ’em, and he knows the Exchange as well as any man in London. Unless I see Amelia’s ten thousand down you don’t marry her. I’ll have no lame duck’s daughter in my family. Pass the wine, sir – or ring for coffee.”

Mr. Osborne spread out the evening paper, and George knew that the conversation was ended.

He hurried upstairs to Amelia in the highest spirits. What was it that made him more attentive and tender than he had been for a long time? Was it that his generous heart warmed to her at the prospect of misfortune; or that the idea of losing the dear little prize made him value it more?

She lived upon the recollections of that happy evening for many days afterwards, remembering his words and looks. It seemed to her no night ever passed so quickly at Mr. Osborne’s house before.

George took a tender leave of her the next morning; and then hurried off to the City, where he visited Mr. Chopper, his father’s head clerk, and received a document which he exchanged at the bank for a pocketful of money. As George entered the bank, old John Sedley was leaving, looking very dismal. But his godson was much too elated to notice the worthy stockbroker’s depression.

As the swinging doors of Hulker, Bullock & Co. closed upon Mr. Sedley, Mr. Quill the cashier winked at Mr. Driver, the clerk at the next desk. Mr. Driver winked back.

“No go,” Mr. D. whispered.

“Not at no price,” Mr. Q. said. “Mr. George Osborne, sir, how will you take it?” George eagerly crammed notes into his pockets, and later paid Dobbin fifty pounds at mess.

That evening Amelia wrote him the tenderest of long letters. Her heart was overflowing, but it still foreboded evil. What was the cause of Mr. Osborne’s dark looks? she asked. Had any difference arisen between him and her papa? Her poor papa returned so melancholy from the City, that all were alarmed about him at home. In all, there were four pages of loves and fears and hopes and forebodings.

“Poor dear little Emmy. How fond she is of me,” George said, as he read the letter; “and Gad, what a headache that punch has given me!” Poor little Emmy, indeed.

CHAPTER 14

Miss Crawley at Home

About this time, there drove up to a well-appointed house in Park Lane a carriage with a discontented female in a green veil on the outside seat, and a large confidential man on the box. The carriage belonged to Miss Crawley, returning from Hampshire. Its windows were shut; the fat spaniel sat on the lap of the discontented female.

When the vehicle stopped, a large round bundle of shawls was removed from it by servants and a young lady. That bundle contained Miss Crawley, who was taken upstairs, and put into a bed warmed for the reception of an invalid. Messengers went off for her medical men. They came, consulted, prescribed, vanished. Miss Crawley's young companion came in to receive their instructions, and gave her medicines for fever which the doctors ordered.

Captain Crawley of the Life Guards rode up from Knightsbridge Barracks the next day on his black charger. He was most affectionate in his inquiries about his aunt. He found Miss Crawley's maid (the discontented female) unusually sulky; he found Miss Briggs, her paid companion, in tears because she was denied admission to Miss Crawley's room. A stranger was giving her medicines – an odious Miss – tears choked her words, and she buried her red nose in her handkerchief.

Rawdon Crawley sent up his name. Miss Crawley's new companion, tripping down from the sick-room, put a little hand into his as he stepped forward eagerly to meet her. With a scornful glance at Briggs, she led the young guardsman into the empty dining-parlour.

Here these two talked for ten minutes, discussing, no doubt, the symptoms of the old invalid above stairs. Then the Captain came out, curling his mustachios, and mounted the black charger, to the admiration of the little boys in the street. He looked in at the dining-room window: for one instant the young person was seen, before she went upstairs again to resume her caring duties.

Who could this young woman be, I wonder? That evening a dinner for two was laid in the dining-room; and after Mrs. Firkin, the lady's maid, pushed into her mistress's room, the new nurse and Miss Briggs sat down to their meal.

Briggs was so choked by emotion that she could hardly eat. The young person delicately carved a fowl, and asked so distinctly for egg-sauce, that poor Briggs started, made a great clattering with the ladle, and fell back in a hysterical state.

"Had you not better give Miss Briggs a glass of wine?" said the person to Mr. Bowls, the large confidential man, who was the butler. Briggs seized the glass, gulped it down convulsively, moaned, and began to play with the chicken on her plate.

"I think we have no further need of Mr. Bowls's kind services," said the person suavely. "Mr. Bowls, we will ring when we want you."

Once he had left, she added with a cool, slightly sarcastic air, "It is a pity you take on so, Miss Briggs."

"My dearest friend is so ill, and wo-o-on't see me," gurgled Briggs in an agony of grief.

"She's not very ill any more. Console yourself, dear Miss Briggs. She has only overeaten. She will soon be better. Pray console yourself, and take a little more wine."

"But why won't she see me?" Miss Briggs bleated. "Oh, Matilda, after three-and-twenty years' tenderness! is this the return to your poor Arabella?"

“Don’t cry too much, poor Arabella,” the other said; “she only won’t see you, because she says you don’t nurse her as well as I do. It’s no pleasure to *me* to sit up all night. I wish you might do it instead.”

“Have I not tended that dear couch for years?” Arabella said, “and now—”

“Now she prefers somebody else. Well, sick people must be humoured. When she’s well I shall go.”

“Never, never,” Arabella exclaimed, madly inhaling her smelling-salts.

“Never be well or never go, Miss Briggs? Pooh – she will be well in a fortnight, and I shall go back to my pupils at Queen’s Crawley, and to their mother, who is a great deal more sick than our friend. You need not be jealous, my dear Miss Briggs. I am a poor little harmless girl without any friends. I don’t want to replace you. Miss Crawley will forget me a week after I am gone: and her affection for you has been the work of years. Give me a little wine, please, my dear Miss Briggs, and let us be friends. I’m sure I need friends.”

The soft-hearted Briggs speechlessly pushed out her hand at this appeal; but she felt the desertion keenly for all that, and bitterly moaned the fickleness of her Matilda. At the end of the meal, Miss Rebecca Sharp (for such, astonishingly, is the name of the nurse) went upstairs again to her patient’s rooms, from which she politely eliminated poor Firkin.

“Thank you, that will do; I will ring when anything is wanted.”

Firkin came downstairs in a tempest of jealousy. As she passed the first floor landing, Briggs, who had been on the watch for her, opened the door.

“Well, Firkin?” said she.

“Wuss and wuss, Miss B.,” Firkin said, wagging her head.

“Is she not better then?”

“She only spoke once, when she told me to hold my stupid tongue. Oh, Miss B., I never thought to have seen this day!”

“What sort of a person is this Miss Sharp, Firkin? I little thought to find a stranger had taken my place in the affections of my dearest, my still dearest Matilda!” Miss Briggs was of a literary and sentimental turn, and had once published a volume of poems – “Trills of the Nightingale.”

“They are all infatuated about that young woman,” Firkin replied. “Sir Pitt wouldn’t have let her go, but he daredn’t refuse Miss Crawley. Mrs. Bute at the Rectory jist as bad. The Capting quite wild about her. Mr. Crawley mortal jealous. Since Miss C. was took ill, she won’t have nobody near her but Miss Sharp, I can’t tell for why. I think somethink has bewidged everybody.”

Rebecca passed that night watching over Miss Crawley. The next night the old lady slept comfortably, so that Rebecca had several hours’ rest on the sofa at the foot of the bed. Very soon, Miss Crawley was so well that she sat up and laughed at Rebecca’s imitation of Miss Briggs and her weeping snuffle. Miss Crawley became quite cheerful, to the admiration of her doctors, who usually found her depressed by the least sickness, and in the most abject terror of death.

Captain Crawley came every day, and received bulletins from Miss Rebecca about his aunt’s health. Poor Briggs was allowed to see her patroness; and soon Miss Crawley liked to have Briggs in a good deal, for Rebecca used to mimic her with the most admirable gravity.

The causes of Miss Crawley’s illness were of such an unromantic nature that they are hardly fit to be explained in this genteel novel. For how is it possible to hint that a delicate female ate and drank too much, and that a hot supper of lobsters at the

Rectory was the reason for her sickness? The attack was so sharp that all the family were in a fever of expectation about the will, and Rawdon Crawley felt sure of forty thousand pounds before long. Mr. Crawley sent over a parcel of tracts, to prepare her for the change from Vanity Fair for another world; but a doctor vanquished the lobster, and gave her sufficient strength to return to London.

While everybody was attending on Miss Crawley, there was a lady in another part of the house at Queen's Crawley, being exceedingly ill, of whom no one took any notice; and this was Lady Crawley herself. The good doctor shook his head after seeing her; and she was left fading away in her lonely chamber, with no more heed paid to her than to a weed in the park.

The young ladies lost their governess. Miss Sharp was so affectionate a nurse that Miss Crawley would take her medicines from no other hand. Captain Rawdon got leave, and remained dutifully at home. He was always in her antechamber; if he came down the corridor ever so quietly, his father's door was sure to open, and the hyena face of the old gentleman glared out. Why should one watch the other so? A generous rivalry, no doubt, as to which should be most attentive to the dear sufferer. Rebecca used to come out and bring them news of the invalid.

At dinner she kept the peace between them: after which she disappeared for the night. She passed a weary fortnight in Miss Crawley's sick-room; but her little nerves seemed to be of iron, as she was quite unshaken by the duty of the sick-chamber.

She never told until long afterwards how painful that duty was, and how peevish her patient; how angry and sleepless; in what horrors of death, so that she lay moaning in agonies about that future world which she ignored when she was in good health.

Miss Sharp watched this graceless bedside patiently. She was never out of temper; always alert; she slept light, and could do so at a minute's warning. So you saw very few traces of fatigue in her appearance. Her face might be a trifle paler, and the circles round her eyes a little darker than usual; but whenever she came out from the sick-room she was always smiling, fresh, and neat.

The Captain raved about her. The barbed shaft of love had penetrated his dull hide. Six weeks had victimised him completely. He told his aunt at the Rectory, of all people; and she admitted that little Sharp was the most clever, droll, odd, kind creature in England. Rawdon must not trifle with her affections, though, she said – dear Miss Crawley would never pardon him for that; for she loved Sharp like a daughter. Rawdon must go away, back to his regiment and naughty London, and not play with a poor artless girl's feelings.

Many a time this good-natured lady, pitying the forlorn life-guardsmen, gave him an opportunity of seeing Miss Sharp at the Rectory, and of walking home with her. Rawdon saw there was a clear intention on Mrs. Bute's part to captivate him with Rebecca. He was not very wise; but he was a man about town. A light dawned upon his dusky soul, as he thought, during a speech of Mrs. Bute's.

"Mark my words, Rawdon," she said. "You will have Miss Sharp one day for your relation."

"Not Pitt? He shan't have her. He's booked to Lady Jane Sheepshanks."

"You men perceive nothing. You silly, blind creature – if anything happens to Lady Crawley, Miss Sharp will be your stepmother; that's what will happen."

Rawdon Crawley gave vent to a prodigious whistle of astonishment. His father's liking for Miss Sharp had not escaped him. He knew the unscrupulous old gentleman's character well; and he walked home, curling his mustachios, and convinced he had discovered Mrs. Bute's intentions.

“By Jove, it’s too bad,” thought Rawdon. “I do believe the woman wants the poor girl to be ruined, so that she shouldn’t come into the family as Lady Crawley.”

When he saw Rebecca alone, he rallied her about his father’s attachment. She flung up her head scornfully, looked him full in the face, and said,

“Well, suppose he is fond of me. Don’t you suppose I can defend my own honour, Captain Crawley?”

“Oh, ah – give you fair warning, that’s all,” said the mustachio-twiddler.

“You hint at something not honourable, then?” said she, flashing out.

“O Gad – really – Miss Rebecca!”

“Do you suppose I have no self-respect, because I am poor and friendless, and because rich people have none? Do you think, because I am a governess, I have not as much sense and good breeding as you gentlefolks in Hampshire? I’m a Montmorency. Do you suppose a Montmorency is not as good as a Crawley?”

Miss Sharp spoke with ever so slight a foreign accent, which gave a great charm to her clear ringing voice. “No,” she continued; “I can endure poverty, but not shame – neglect, but not insult; and insult from – from you.”

She burst into tears.

“Hang it, Miss Sharp – Rebecca – by Jove – upon my soul, I wouldn’t for a thousand pounds!”

But she was gone. At dinner she was unusually brilliant and lively; but she would take no notice of the hints of the infatuated guardsman. Skirmishes of this sort happened perpetually. The Crawley heavy cavalry was maddened by defeat, and routed every day.

When they went to London, the old Baronet missed Rebecca. Queen’s Crawley seemed a desert without her, so useful and pleasant had she made herself there. Sir Pitt’s letters were not copied and corrected; his accounts were not made up; his household business was neglected, now that his little secretary was away. And it was easy to see how necessary such a secretary was to him, by the spelling of the numerous letters which he sent to her and Miss Crawley, begging for her return. Miss Crawley took very little heed of these letters.

Though the old lady would not hear of Rebecca’s departure, she did not give her a regular position. Like many wealthy people, Miss Crawley would accept as much service as she could get from her inferiors, and take leave of them when she no longer found them useful. Gratitude among certain rich folks is scarcely to be thought of. They take people’s services as their due.

And I am not sure that, in spite of Rebecca’s simplicity and untiring good humour, the shrewd old London lady had not a lurking suspicion of her nurse. It must have crossed Miss Crawley’s mind that nobody does anything for nothing.

Well, meanwhile Becky was the greatest comfort and convenience, and Miss Crawley gave her a couple of new gowns, and an old necklace and shawl, and meditated vaguely some great future benefit – to marry her perhaps to Clump, the apothecary, or to settle her in some way; or at any rate, to send her back to Queen’s Crawley when she had done with her, and the London season had begun.

When Miss Crawley was convalescent and had descended to the drawing-room, Becky sang to her, and amused her; and accompanied her when she drove out.

One day, where of all places in the world did Miss Crawley decide to drive to, but Russell Square, and the house of John Sedley, Esquire.

Many notes had passed between the two dear friends; but during Rebecca’s stay in Hampshire, the eternal friendship had grown feeble. Both girls had their own

affairs to think of. When they now met, and flew into each other's arms, Rebecca performed her embrace with the most perfect briskness. Poor little Amelia blushed as she kissed her friend, and thought she had been guilty of coldness towards her.

Their first meeting was very short. Amelia was just ready to go out for a walk. Miss Crawley was waiting in her carriage below, her people wondering at the locality in which they found themselves, and gazing upon honest Sambo, the black footman, as one of the queer natives of the place. But when Amelia came down so that Rebecca could introduce her, Miss Crawley was captivated by her sweet blushing face as she timidly paid her respects.

"What a complexion, my dear! What a sweet voice!" Miss Crawley said, as they drove away afterwards. "My dear Sharp, your young friend is charming. Send for her to Park Lane, do you hear?" Miss Crawley had good taste. She liked natural manners and pretty faces, as she liked pretty pictures and nice china. She talked of Amelia with rapture, and mentioned her to Rawdon Crawley, who came to dine.

Of course, at this Rebecca instantly stated that Amelia was engaged to be married to a Lieutenant Osborne – a very old flame.

"Is he in a line-regiment – the __th?" Captain Crawley asked.

Rebecca thought that was the regiment. "The Captain's name is Dobbin," she said.

"A lanky gawky fellow," said Crawley, "tumbles over everybody. I know him; and Osborne's a goodish-looking fellow, with large black whiskers?"

"Enormous," said Rebecca, "and enormously proud of them, I assure you."

Captain Rawdon Crawley burst into a laugh. "Osborne fancies he can play billiards," said he. "I won two hundred from him at the Cocoa-Tree, before Captain Dobbin carried him off, hang him!"

"Rawdon, don't be so wicked," Miss Crawley remarked, highly pleased.

"Why, ma'am, of all the young fellows I've seen, I think this fellow's the greenest. Tarquin and Deuceace get what money they like out of him. He'd go to the deuce to be seen with a lord. He pays their dinners at Greenwich, and they invite the company."

"And very pretty company too, I dare say."

"Quite right, Miss Sharp, as usual. Uncommon pretty company – haw, haw!" laughed the Captain.

"Rawdon, don't be naughty!" his aunt exclaimed.

"Well, his father's a City man, immensely rich, they say. Hang those City fellows, they must bleed; and I've not done with him yet, I can tell you. Haw, haw!"

"Fie, Captain Crawley; I shall warn Amelia. A gambling husband!"

"Horrid, ain't it, hey?" the Captain said; and then added as a sudden thought struck him: "Gad, ma'am, we'll have him here."

"Is he presentable?" the aunt asked.

"Well enough," Captain Crawley answered. "Do let's have him, when Miss Sedley comes. I'll write him a note, and see if he can play piquet as well as billiards."

A few days later, Lieutenant Osborne received a letter, in Captain Rawdon's schoolboy hand, enclosing an invitation from Miss Crawley. Rebecca sent an invitation to her darling Amelia, who was ready to accept it when she heard that George was to be there.

Amelia spent the morning with the ladies of Park Lane, who were very kind to her. Rebecca patronised her with calm superiority; Amelia yielded to her orders with perfect meekness.

Miss Crawley continued her raptures about little Amelia, talked about her as if she were a doll, and admired her with benevolent wonder. There is no more agreeable sight than to see Mayfair folks condescending. Miss Crawley's benevolence rather fatigued poor Amelia, and I am not sure that of the three ladies in Park Lane she did not find honest Miss Briggs the most agreeable. She sympathised with Briggs as with all neglected or gentle people.

George came to dinner with Captain Crawley. Rawdon praised his play at billiards and asked when he would have his revenge: was interested about Osborne's regiment: and would have proposed piquet that very evening, but Miss Crawley forbade gambling in her house; so the young Lieutenant's purse was not lightened by his gallant patron, that day at least. However, they made an engagement for the next, to look at a horse that Crawley had to sell, and to try him in the Park; and to dine together, and to pass the evening with some jolly fellows.

"That is, if you're not on duty to that pretty Miss Sedley," Crawley said, with a knowing wink. "Monstrous nice girl, though, Osborne. Lots of tin, I suppose, eh?"

Osborne wasn't on duty; he would join Crawley with pleasure.

"How's little Miss Sharp, by-the-bye?" Osborne inquired of his friend over their wine. "Good-natured little girl that. Does she suit you well at Queen's Crawley? Miss Sedley liked her a good deal last year."

Captain Crawley looked savagely at the Lieutenant, and watched him when he went up to greet Rebecca. Her conduct must have relieved Crawley of any jealousy. Osborne walked up to her with a patronising, easy swagger. Saying, "Ah, Miss Sharp! how-dy-doo?" he held out his hand towards her, expecting that she would be quite confounded at this honour.

Miss Sharp put out her right forefinger, and gave him a little nod, so cool and killing that Rawdon, watching from the other room, could hardly restrain his laughter as he saw the Lieutenant's discomfiture; the start he gave, and the clumsiness with which he at length took the offered finger, and asked her how she liked her new place.

"My place?" said Miss Sharp coolly. "How kind of you to remind me of it! It's a tolerably good place: the wages are pretty good. How are your sisters? – not that I ought to ask."

"Why not?" Mr. Osborne said.

"Why, they never condescended to speak to me, whilst I was staying with Amelia; but we poor governesses, you know, are used to slights of this sort."

"My dear Miss Sharp!" Osborne exclaimed.

"At least in some families," Rebecca continued. "It is different in Hampshire. We are not so wealthy in Hampshire as you lucky folks of the City. But I am in a gentleman's family – good old English stock. I suppose you know Sir Pitt's father refused a peerage. And you see how I am treated: I am pretty comfortable. But how very good of you to inquire!"

Osborne was quite savage. The little governess patronised him until he felt most uneasy; nor could he find a pretext for backing out of this conversation.

"I thought you liked the City families pretty well," he said, haughtily.

"Last year you mean, when I was fresh from that horrid vulgar school? Of course I did. How was I to know any better? But oh, Mr. Osborne, what a difference eighteen months' experience makes! Eighteen months spent, pardon me for saying so, with gentlemen. As for dear Amelia, she is a pearl, and would be charming anywhere. There now, I see you are beginning to be in a good humour. And Mr. Jos – how is that wonderful Mr. Joseph?"

“It seems to me you didn’t dislike that wonderful Mr. Joseph last year,” Osborne said.

“Well, I didn’t break my heart about him; yet if he had asked me, I wouldn’t have said no.”

Mr. Osborne gave her a look as if to say, “Indeed, how very obliging!”

“What an honour to have had you for a brother-in-law, you are thinking? To be sister-in-law to George Osborne, Esquire, son of John Osborne, Esquire, son of – what was your grandpapa, Mr. Osborne? Don’t be angry. You can’t help your pedigree, and I quite agree with you that I would have married Mr. Joe Sedley; for could a penniless girl do better? Now you know the whole secret. I’m frank and open; it was very kind of you to allude it – very kind and polite. Amelia dear, Mr. Osborne and I were talking about your brother Joseph. How is he?”

Thus was George utterly routed. Not that Rebecca was in the right; but she had managed most successfully to put him in the wrong. And he shamefully fled.

George could not help cleverly confiding to Captain Crawley, next day, that Miss Rebecca was a sharp, dangerous one, a desperate flirt; with which Crawley agreed laughingly, and passed on to Rebecca before twenty-four hours were over. This added to her original regard for Mr. Osborne. She guessed that it was George who had interrupted the success of her first love-passage, and she esteemed him accordingly.

George told Amelia of how he had counselled Rawdon Crawley – a devilish good, straightforward fellow – to be on his guard against that little sly, scheming Rebecca.

“Against whom?” Amelia cried.

“Your friend the governess. Don’t look so astonished.”

“O George, what have you done?” Amelia said. For she had instantly discovered a secret which was invisible to Miss Crawley, to Briggs, and above all, to that young whiskered prig, Lieutenant Osborne.

When the two girls had an opportunity for a little private talk, Amelia, taking her friend’s hands, said, “Rebecca, I see it all.”

Rebecca kissed her. And regarding this delightful secret, not one syllable more was said by either. But it was destined to come out before long.

A short time after these events, while Miss Rebecca Sharp was still staying at Park Lane, a funerary coat of arms appeared over Sir Pitt Crawley’s house. Sir Pitt was a widower again.

Mr. Crawley had tended that otherwise friendless bedside. His step-mother went out of the world strengthened by such words and comfort as he could give her. For many years his was the only kindness Lady Crawley ever knew; the only friendship that solaced that feeble, lonely soul. Her heart was dead long before her body. She had sold it to become Sir Pitt Crawley’s wife. Mothers and daughters are making the same bargain every day in Vanity Fair.

When she died, her husband was in London attending to his schemes, busy with his endless lawyers. He had found time, nevertheless, to call often in Park Lane, and to send many notes to Rebecca, entreating her to return to her young pupils in the country. But Miss Crawley would not hear of her departure; for she was not yet tired of Rebecca, and she clung to her with the greatest energy.

The news of Lady Crawley’s death provoked no more grief or comment than might have been expected in Miss Crawley’s family circle.

“I suppose I must put off my party for the 3rd,” Miss Crawley said; and added, after a pause, “I hope my brother will have the decency not to marry again.”

“What a confounded rage Pitt will be in if he does,” Rawdon remarked, with his usual regard for his brother.

Rebecca said nothing. She seemed by far the gravest and most impressed of the family. She left the room; but had a talk with Rawdon before he went away.

The next day, as Rebecca was gazing from the window, she startled Miss Crawley by crying out in an alarmed tone, “Here’s Sir Pitt, Ma’am!” The Baronet’s knock followed this announcement.

“My dear, I can’t see him. Say I’m too ill to receive any one,” cried out Miss Crawley, resuming her French novel.

“She’s too ill to see you, sir,” Rebecca said, tripping down to Sir Pitt.

“So much the better,” Sir Pitt answered. “I want to see *you*, Miss Becky. Come along a me into the parlour.” They entered that room together.

“I want you back at Queen’s Crawley, Miss,” the baronet said, fixing his gaze upon her, and taking off his black gloves and his hat with its black hat-band. His eyes had such a strange, fixed look, that Rebecca Sharp began almost to tremble.

“I hope to come soon,” she said in a low voice, “and return to the dear children.”

“You’ve said so these three months, Becky,” replied Sir Pitt, “and still you go hanging on to my sister, who’ll fling you off like an old shoe, when she’s wore you out. I tell you I want you. I’m going back to the Vuneral. Will you come back? Yes or no?”

“I daren’t – I don’t think it would be right – to be alone with you, sir,” Becky said, seemingly in great agitation.

“I say agin, I want you,” Sir Pitt said, thumping the table. “I can’t git on without you. I didn’t realise till you went away. The house all goes wrong. It’s not the same place. All my accounts has got muddled. You *must* come back. Do come back. Dear Becky, do come.”

“Come – as what, sir?” Rebecca gasped out.

“Come as Lady Crawley, if you like,” the Baronet said. “There! will that zatisfy you? Come back and be my wife. Birth be hanged. You’re as good a lady as ever I see. You’ve got more brains in your little vinger than any baronet’s wife in the county. Will you come? Yes or no?”

“Oh, Sir Pitt!” Rebecca said, very much moved.

“Say yes, Becky,” Sir Pitt continued. “I’m an old man, but I’m good for twenty years. I’ll make you happy, zee if I don’t. You shall do what you like; spend what you like; and ’ave it all your own way. I’ll make you a zettlement. I’ll do everything reglar,” and the old man fell down on his knees and leered at her like a satyr.

Rebecca started back, a picture of consternation. During this history we have never seen her lose her presence of mind; but she did now, and wept some of the most genuine tears that ever fell from her eyes.

“Oh, Sir Pitt!” she said. “Oh, sir – I – I’m *married already*.”

CHAPTER 15

In Which Rebecca's Husband Appears for a Short Time

Every reader of a sentimental turn must have been pleased with the scene just described; for what can be prettier than an image of Love on his knees before Beauty?

But when Love heard that awful confession from Beauty – that she was married already – he bounced up from the carpet with fearful exclamations.

“Married! you’re joking,” the Baronet cried in rage and wonder. “You’re making fun of me, Becky. Who’d ever marry you without a shilling to your fortune?”

“Married! married!” Rebecca said, in an agony of tears – her voice choking with emotion, her handkerchief up to her eyes, a figure of woe to melt the hardest heart. “O dear Sir Pitt, do not think me ungrateful. It is only your generosity that has extorted my secret.”

“Generosity be hanged!” Sir Pitt roared out. “Who is it?”

“Let me come back with you to the country, sir! Let me watch over you as faithfully as ever! Don’t separate me from dear Queen’s Crawley!”

“The feller has left you, has he?” the Baronet said, beginning, as he fancied, to comprehend. “Well, Becky – come back if you like. Come back as governess – you shall have it all your own way.” She held out one hand, and cried fit to break her heart.

“So the rascal ran off, eh?” Sir Pitt said. “Never mind, Becky, I’ll take care of ‘ee.”

“Oh, sir! I would be proud to go back to Queen’s Crawley, and care for the children and you, as formerly. When I think of what you have just offered me, my heart fills with gratitude. I can’t be your wife, sir; let me – let me be your daughter.” Saying which, Rebecca went down on *her* knees, and, taking Sir Pitt’s horny hand between her own soft ones, looked up in his face with exquisite pathos – when the door opened, and Miss Crawley sailed in.

Mrs. Firkin and Miss Briggs, who happened by chance to be at the parlour door soon after the Baronet and Rebecca entered the room, had seen accidentally, through the keyhole, the old gentleman kneeling before the governess, and had heard his proposal. At once Mrs. Firkin and Miss Briggs had streamed up the stairs, rushed into the drawing-room where Miss Crawley was reading, and had given her the astounding news that Sir Pitt was proposing to Miss Sharp. Hence Miss Crawley appeared just at this instant.

“It is the lady kneeling, and not the gentleman,” Miss Crawley said scornfully. “They told me that *you* were on your knees, Sir Pitt: do kneel again, and let me see this pretty couple!”

“I have thanked Sir Pitt Crawley, Ma’am,” Rebecca said, rising, “and have told him that I can never become Lady Crawley.”

“Refused him!” Miss Crawley said, more bewildered than ever. Briggs and Firkin at the door were wide-eyed with astonishment.

“Yes – refused,” Rebecca answered tearfully.

“And am I to understand that you actually proposed to her, Sir Pitt?” the old lady asked.

“Ees,” said the Baronet, “I did.”

“And she refused you?”

“Ees,” Sir Pitt said, grinning broadly.

“It does not seem to break your heart,” Miss Crawley remarked.

“Nawt a bit,” answered Sir Pitt, with a cool good-humour which sent Miss Crawley almost mad with bewilderment. That an old gentleman should fall on his knees to a penniless governess, and burst out laughing because she refused to marry him – that a penniless governess should refuse a Baronet with four thousand a year – these were mysteries which Miss Crawley could not comprehend.

“I’m glad you think it good sport, brother,” she continued, groping wildly through this amazement.

“Vamous,” said Sir Pitt. “Who’d ha’ thought it! what a sly little devil!” he muttered, chuckling with pleasure.

“Who’d have thought what?” cried Miss Crawley, stamping her foot. “Pray, Miss Sharp, don’t you think our family good enough for you?”

“When you came in, ma’am,” Rebecca said, “did I look as if I despised the honour offered to me? Do you think I have no heart? Have you not all loved me, and been kind to the poor orphan? O my friends! My benefactors! Do you grudge me even gratitude, Miss Crawley? It is too much – my heart is too full”; and she sank down in a chair so pathetically that her audience were melted.

“Whether you marry me or not, you’re a good little girl, Becky, and I’m your friend, mind,” said Sir Pitt. He walked away – greatly to Rebecca’s relief; for her secret was not revealed to Miss Crawley.

Putting her handkerchief to her eyes, she went up to her room. While Briggs and Miss Crawley, in high excitement, remained to discuss the strange event, Firkin dived down into the kitchen and talked of it there. And so impressed was Mrs. Firkin with the news, that she wrote that very night to Mrs. Bute Crawley that “Sir Pitt has been and proposed for to marry Miss Sharp, wherein she has refused him, to the wonder of all.”

The two ladies in the dining-room wondered long at Sir Pitt’s offer, and Rebecca’s refusal; Briggs very acutely suggesting that Rebecca must have some previous attachment, otherwise no young woman in her senses would ever have turned him down.

“Well, Becky would have made a good Lady Crawley, after all,” Miss Crawley remarked, mollified by the girl’s refusal. “She has brains in plenty, and her manners are excellent, now I have formed her. She is a Montmorency, Briggs, and blood is something, though I despise it for my part.”

Briggs agreed as usual.

“As for an attachment – you poor friendless creatures are always having some foolish *tendre*,” Miss Crawley said. “You yourself were in love with a writing-master (don’t cry, Briggs – it won’t bring him to life again). I suppose Becky has been silly and sentimental too – some apothecary, or young curate, or something of that sort.”

“Poor thing!” said Briggs (who was thinking of twenty-four years back, and that young writing-master whose lock of yellow hair, and letters, beautifully illegible, she cherished in her old desk upstairs). “Poor thing!” she said.

“After Rebecca’s conduct,” Miss Crawley said enthusiastically, “we should do something for her. Find out who it is, Briggs. I’ll set him up in a shop, or speak to my cousin the Bishop; and we’ll have a wedding, Briggs, and you shall be a bridesmaid.”

Briggs declared that it would be delightful, and went up to Rebecca’s bedroom to console her and prattle about the offer, and the refusal, and its cause; and to find out who was the gentleman that ruled Miss Sharp’s heart.

Rebecca was very kind and affectionate – responded to Briggs gratefully – confessed there was a secret attachment – a delicious mystery. She might, perhaps, have told Briggs; but five minutes later, Miss Crawley appeared. Her impatience had overcome her; she could not wait for Briggs, but came and ordered her out of the room, before asking Rebecca what had brought about Sir Pitt’s astonishing offer.

Rebecca said she had long had an idea of his liking for her, but, not to mention certain private reasons, Sir Pitt’s age, station, and habits were such as to make a marriage quite impossible. Could a woman decently listen to proposals when the funeral of the lover’s dead wife had not actually taken place?

“Nonsense, my dear, you would never have refused him had there not been someone else,” Miss Crawley said. “Tell me the private reasons; what are the private reasons? Who is it that has touched your heart?”

Rebecca cast down her eyes. “You have guessed right, dear lady,” she said, with a sweet faltering voice. “You wonder at one so poor and friendless having an attachment, don’t you? I wish poverty were a safeguard against it.”

“My poor dear child,” cried Miss Crawley, who was always ready to be sentimental, “is our passion unrequited, then? Are we pining in secret? Tell me all, and let me console you.”

“I wish you could, dear Madam,” Rebecca said in the same tearful tone. “Indeed, I need it.” And she laid her head upon Miss Crawley’s shoulder and wept so naturally that the old lady embraced her with almost maternal kindness, vowing that she would do everything in her power to help her. “And now, who is it, my dear? Is it that pretty Miss Sedley’s brother?”

“Don’t ask me now,” Rebecca said. “You shall know all soon. Dear kind Miss Crawley – dear friend, may I say so?”

“That you may, my child,” the old lady replied, kissing her.

“I can’t tell you now,” sobbed Rebecca. “I am very miserable. But O! love me always – promise you will love me always.” And this promise was solemnly given by Miss Crawley, who left her, blessing and admiring her as a dear, artless, tender-hearted creature.

And now Rebecca was left alone to think over the sudden and wonderful events of the day, and of what might have been. She felt some very sincere and touching regrets that a piece of marvellous good fortune should have been so near her, and that she was obliged to decline it. In this natural emotion every properly regulated mind will certainly share. What good mother would not commiserate with her, a penniless girl who might have had four thousand a year? What well-bred young person is there in all Vanity Fair who will not feel for her, getting such an honourable offer, just when she could not accept it?

But who would have dreamed of Lady Crawley dying so soon? She was one of those sickly women that might have lasted ten years, Rebecca thought, in the woes of repentance – and I might have been *my lady*! I would have had the town-house newly furnished and decorated. I would have had the handsomest carriage in London, and a box at the opera; and I would have been presented at court. All this might have been; and now – now all was doubt and mystery.

But Rebecca had too much resolution and energy of character to permit herself much useless sorrow for the past; so she wisely turned her attention towards the future, which was now vastly more important to her. And she surveyed her position, and its hopes and chances.

In the first place, she was married – that was a great fact. She was not so much surprised into revealing it to Sir Pitt, as induced by a sudden calculation. It must have been revealed some day: and why not now? How Miss Crawley would bear the news was the great question. Rebecca had misgivings; but she remembered all Miss Crawley had said: her avowed contempt for high birth; her daring liberal opinions; her general romantic nature; her doting attachment to her nephew, and her affection for Rebecca herself.

She is so fond of her nephew, Rebecca thought, that she will forgive him anything: she is so used to me that I don't think she could be comfortable without me. When the revelation comes there will be a scene, and hysterics, and a great quarrel, and then a reconciliation. At all events, the die was cast.

And so Rebecca debated in her mind the best means of giving the news to Miss Crawley; and whether she should face the storm, or fly and avoid it until its first fury was blown over. In this state of meditation she wrote the following letter:

Dearest Friend,

The great crisis which we have debated about so often is come. Half of my secret is known, and now is the time to reveal the whole mystery. Sir Pitt came to me this morning, and made – what do you think? A DECLARATION. Think of that! Poor little me. I might have been Lady Crawley, instead of – O, I tremble, when I think how soon we must tell all!

Sir Pitt knows I am married, but not to whom, and is not displeased as yet. Your aunt is ACTUALLY ANGRY that I should have refused him. But she is all kindness and graciousness, and says I would have made him a good wife. She will be shaken when she first hears the news. But need we fear anything beyond a momentary anger? I think not. She dotes upon you so (you naughty, good-for-nothing man), that she would pardon you ANYTHING: and I believe that she would be miserable without me. Dearest! we shall conquer. You shall leave that odious regiment: quit gaming, racing, and BE A GOOD BOY; and we shall all live in Park Lane, and *ma tante* shall leave us all her money.

I shall try and walk tomorrow at 3 in the usual place. If Miss B. is with me, you must come to dinner, and bring an answer, and put it in the third volume of Porteus's Sermons. But, at all events, come to your own

R.

She addressed this to Miss Eliza Styles, at Mr. Barnet's, Saddler, Knightsbridge.

And I trust my reader perceives that Miss Eliza Styles wore brass spurs, and large curling mustachios, and was indeed no other than Captain Rawdon Crawley.

CHAPTER 16

The Letter on the Pincushion

How they were married is of no consequence. What is to stop a Captain and a young lady over twenty-one from purchasing a licence, and marrying at any church? My belief is that one day, when Miss Sharp had gone to pass the morning with her dear friend Miss Amelia Sedley, a lady very like her might have been seen entering a church in the City, along with a gentleman with dyed mustachios, who, after a quarter of an hour, escorted her to the hackney-coach in waiting.

And who can question the probability of a gentleman marrying anybody? How many of the wise and learned have married their cooks? Were not Achilles and Ajax both in love with their servant maids? And are we to expect a heavy dragoon with strong desires and small brains, who had never controlled a passion in his life, to become prudent all of a sudden? If people only made prudent marriages, what a stop to population there would be!

It seems to me that Mr. Rawdon's marriage was one of the most honest actions which we shall record about him in this history. No one will say it is unmanly to be captivated by a woman, or to marry her; and the admiration, the delight, the passion, the wonder, the unbounded confidence, and frantic adoration with which, by degrees, this big warrior came to regard little Rebecca, were feelings which ladies at least will say did him credit. When she sang, every note thrilled in his dull soul, and tingled through his huge frame. When she spoke, he brought all the force of his brains to listen. If she made jokes, he used to revolve them in his mind, and explode over them half an hour afterwards in the street, to the surprise of his comrades.

"How she sings, how she paints," thought he. "How she rode that kicking mare at Queen's Crawley!" And he would say to her, "By Jove, Beck, you're fit to be Commander-in-Chief, or Archbishop of Canterbury, by Jove."

So when Becky told him that the crisis was near, and the time for action had arrived, Rawdon was ready to follow her orders. Rebecca easily found a means to get rid of Briggs, her companion, and met her faithful friend in "the usual place" on the next day.

She had thought over matters, and told Rawdon what she had decided. He agreed to everything; was quite sure that what she proposed was best; that Miss Crawley would certainly relent after a time. Had Rebecca's resolutions been entirely different, he would have followed them as implicitly.

"You have head enough for both of us, Beck," said he. "You're sure to get us out of the scrape. I never saw your equal." And the love-stricken dragoon left her, to carry out his part of her plan.

This consisted simply in the hiring of quiet lodgings at Brompton for Captain and Mrs. Crawley. For Rebecca had prudently determined to fly. Rawdon was only too happy; he had been entreating her to do this for weeks. He pranced off to engage the lodgings, and ordered in a piano, and half a nursery-house full of flowers: and a heap of shawls, kid gloves, silk stockings, bracelets and perfumery, bought with the profusion of blind love and unbounded credit. Then he went and dined nervously at the club, waiting until the great moment of his life should come.

Rebecca's admirable refusal of Sir Pitt's offer, and her secret unhappiness, made Miss Crawley much more tender to her than usual. A marriage, or a refusal, or a

proposal, thrills through a whole household of women. Miss Crawley and Briggs indulged in the luxury of sentiment, and Rebecca became an object of interest to them. Little Sharp, with her secret griefs, was the heroine of the day.

That night Rebecca sang more sweetly and talked more pleasantly than ever before. She twined herself round Miss Crawley's heart. She spoke lightly of Sir Pitt's proposal, as the foolish fancy of an old man; and her eyes filled with tears, and Briggs's heart filled with unutterable pangs of defeat, as she said she desired nothing more than to remain for ever with her dear mistress.

"My dear little creature," the old lady said, "You may depend on that. As for going back to that odious brother of mine, it is out of the question. Here you must stay, with me and Briggs."

If Rawdon Crawley had been present, instead of at the club nervously drinking claret, the pair might have gone down on their knees before the old spinster, revealed all, and been forgiven in a twinkling. But that chance was denied to them, doubtless in order that this story of their consequent wonderful adventures might be written.

There was a young maid-servant at the Park Lane house, whose duty it was to knock at Miss Sharp's door with a jug of hot water every morning. This girl had a brother in Captain Crawley's troop, and I daresay she was aware of certain arrangements. At any rate she bought a yellow shawl, a pair of green boots, and a blue hat with three guineas which Rebecca gave her; and no doubt it was for services rendered that Betty Martin was so bribed.

On the second morning after Sir Pitt Crawley's offer, this maid knocked at the door of Rebecca's bedchamber.

No answer came, and she knocked again. Then she opened the door and entered.

The little white bed was as smooth as on the day before. On the table before the window lay a letter.

Betty advanced towards it on tiptoe – looked around the room, with an air of great wonder and satisfaction; took up the letter, and grinned intensely as she turned it over, and finally carried it to Miss Briggs.

"La, Miss Briggs," the girl exclaimed, "Something must have happened – there's nobody in Miss Sharp's room; the bed ain't been slept in, and she've run away, and left this letter for you, Miss."

"What!" cried Briggs, dropping her comb; "an elopement! What is this?" and she eagerly broke the seal, and read.

Dear Miss Briggs,

Your kind heart will pity and excuse me. With tears and prayers, I leave the home where the poor orphan has always met with kindness. I go to my duty – to my HUSBAND. Yes, I am married. My husband commands me to seek the humble home which we call ours. Dearest Miss Briggs, break the news as your delicate sympathy will know how, to my beloved benefactress. Tell her I shed tears on her dear pillow that I have so often soothed in sickness – Oh, with what joy shall I return to dear Park Lane! How I tremble for the answer which is to SEAL MY FATE!

When Sir Pitt deigned to offer me his hand, I told him that I was already A WIFE. Even he forgave me. But my courage failed me, when I should have told him all – that I could not be his wife, for I WAS HIS DAUGHTER! I am wedded to the best of men – to Rawdon Crawley. I follow him to our humble home, as I would THROUGH THE WORLD.

O, my excellent friend, ask Miss Crawley to receive HER CHILDREN with her previous affection. I can say no more.

Your grateful Rebecca Crawley.

Just as Briggs had finished reading this interesting document, Mrs. Firkin entered the room.

“Here’s Mrs. Bute Crawley just arrived by the mail coach from Hampshire, and wants some tea; will you come down, Miss?”

And to Firkin’s surprise, Briggs, in her dressing-gown, with curl-papers sticking out around her head, sailed down to Mrs. Bute with the letter in her hand.

When Mrs. Bute Crawley, warming herself at the parlour fire, heard the news of the secret marriage, she declared it was lucky that she should have arrived in time to assist poor dear Miss Crawley in bearing the shock. She said that Rebecca was an artful little hussy of whom she had always been suspicious; and that as for Rawdon Crawley, she never could understand his aunt’s infatuation over that profligate, abandoned man.

Then Mrs. Bute had a comfortable tea and toast; and as there was a vacant room in the house now, she ordered the footman to bring in her trunks.

Miss Crawley took chocolate in bed, and did not leave her room until nearly noon. The conspirators below agreed that they would spare the dear lady’s feelings until she came downstairs. Meanwhile it was announced to her that Mrs. Bute Crawley had come from Hampshire and sent her love. Her arrival, which would not have caused any delight at another time, was hailed with pleasure now; Miss Crawley being pleased at the idea of a gossip with her sister-in-law about the late Lady Crawley, the funeral arrangements, and Sir Pitt’s abrupt proposal to Rebecca.

It was not until the old lady was ensconced in her usual arm-chair in the drawing-room that the conspirators prepared to break the news, with such an apparatus of mystery that they worked her up to a high degree of doubt and alarm.

“And she refused Sir Pitt, my dear Miss Crawley, prepare yourself for it,” Mrs. Bute said, “because she couldn’t help herself.”

“Of course,” Miss Crawley answered. “She liked somebody else. I told Briggs so yesterday.”

“O my dear friend,” Briggs gasped, “she is married already!”

“Married already,” Mrs. Bute chimed in.

“Send her to me! The little sly wretch: how dared she not tell me?” cried Miss Crawley.

“She won’t come. Prepare yourself, dear friend – she’s gone.”

“Gracious goodness, and who’s to make my chocolate? Send for her and make her come,” the old lady said.

“She decamped last night, Ma’am,” cried Mrs. Bute.

“She left a letter for me,” Briggs exclaimed. “She’s married to—”

“To whom?” cried the spinster in nervous fury.

“To – to a relation—”

“Speak at once. Don’t drive me mad.”

“O Ma’am – she’s married to Rawdon Crawley.”

“Rawdon married Rebecca! – governess – Get out of my house, you fool, you stupid Briggs – how dare you? You’re in the plot – you made him marry, so I wouldn’t leave him my money – you did, Martha Bute,” the poor old lady screamed.

“Would I ask him to marry a drawing-master’s daughter?”

“Her mother was a Montmorency,” cried the old lady, pulling at the bell.

“Her mother was an opera girl,” said Mrs. Bute.

Miss Crawley shrieked, and fainted. They were forced to take her back to her bedroom, where she had hysterics. The doctor was sent for; Mrs. Bute took up the post of nurse by her bedside. “Her relations ought to be around her,” that amiable woman said.

At this point Sir Pitt arrived.

“Where’s Becky?” he said. “She’s coming with me to Queen’s Crawley.”

“Have you not heard the astonishing news about her marriage?” Briggs asked.

“What’s that to me?” said Sir Pitt. “I know she’s married. Tell her to come down.”

“Are you not aware, sir,” Miss Briggs said, “that she has left our roof, to the dismay of Miss Crawley, who is nearly killed by the news of Captain Rawdon’s union with her?”

When Sir Pitt Crawley heard that Rebecca was married to his son, he broke out in a fury, with language which I shall not repeat, as indeed it sent poor Briggs shuddering out of the room; and with her we will shut the door upon his frenzied figure.

“Suppose the old lady doesn’t come round,” Rawdon said to his little wife, as they sat together in the snug Brompton lodgings. She had been trying the new piano. The new gloves fitted her perfectly; the new shawls became her wonderfully; the new rings glittered on her little hands. “Suppose she don’t come round, eh, Becky?”

“I’ll make your fortune,” she said, and patted his cheek.

“You can do anything,” he said, kissing the little hand. “By Jove you can; and we’ll drive down to the Star and Garter, and dine, by Jove.”

CHAPTER 17

How Captain Dobbin Bought a Piano

If there is any place in Vanity Fair where Satire and Sentiment go arm in arm together, it is at one of those public gatherings which are advertised every day on the last page of the Times newspaper, when Mr. Hammerdown auctions off the library, furniture, silver plate, wardrobe, and choice wines of the deceased or bankrupt.

Even the most selfish Vanity Fairian must feel some sympathy at these events. My Lord Dives's remains are in the family vault: his gravestone is being inscribed. What guest at Dives's table can pass the familiar house without a sigh? What a number of friends jolly old Dives had; and how nobly he entertained them. He was rather pompous and dull, perhaps, but would not such wine and food make any conversation pleasant? We must get some of his Burgundy at any price, the mourners cry.

How changed the house is, though! The front is patched over with notices describing the furniture for sale in staring capitals. They have hung a shred of carpet out of an upstairs window – porters are lounging on the dirty steps – the hall swarms with dingy guests. Old women have invaded the upper floors, pinching the bed-curtains, poking into the feathers, and clapping the wardrobe drawers to and fro. Enterprising young housekeepers are measuring the looking-glasses and hangings, and Mr. Hammerdown is sitting on the great mahogany dining-table, waving the ivory hammer, and using all his eloquence; imploring, commanding, bellowing, until down comes the hammer like fate, and we pass to the next lot.

It was rather late in this sale. The excellent furniture, the rare and famous wines, the rich and complete set of family plate had been sold on the previous days. Some of the best had been purchased for his master, by the butler of our friend John Osborne, of Russell Square. A small portion of the plate had been bought by some young stockbrokers from the City. And now, at the sale of minor objects, the auctioneer was expounding the merits of a picture to an audience that was not so select as on the previous days of the auction.

“No. 369,” roared Mr. Hammerdown. “Portrait of a gentleman on an elephant. Who'll bid for the gentleman on the elephant? Lift up the picture, Blowman.”

A long, pale, military-looking gentleman, seated at the mahogany table, could not help grinning as this valuable lot was shown by Mr. Blowman.

“Turn the elephant to the Captain, Blowman. What shall we say, sir, for the elephant?”

The Captain, blushing awkwardly, turned away his head.

“Shall we say twenty guineas?” cried the auctioneer. “Fifteen, five, name your price. The gentleman without the elephant is worth five pound.”

“He's a precious big one,” said a professional wag; at which there was a general giggle in the room.

“How much for this lot? Come, gentlemen, don't keep me here all day.”

Someone bid five shillings. Near the bidder was an officer with a young lady on his arm, who were both highly amused, and to whom, finally, this lot was knocked down for half a guinea. The Captain at the table looked discomposed when he spied this pair, and he turned his back upon them.

Of all the other articles which Mr. Hammerdown auctioned that day, we will mention only one, a little square piano (the grand piano had been disposed of previously.) The young lady tried this with a skilful hand, and when its turn came, her agent began to bid.

But there was an opposition here: the officer at the table. A brisk battle ensued over this little piano, encouraged by Mr. Hammerdown.

At last the elephant purchaser and his lady abandoned the race; and the military captain became the owner of the little square piano. He sat up as if he was relieved, and the unsuccessful competitors caught a glimpse of him. The lady said to her friend, "Why, Rawdon, it's Captain Dobbin."

Maybe Becky was discontented with the new piano her husband had hired for her, or perhaps its owners had fetched it away as it was not paid for: or perhaps she had a particular attachment for the one which she had just tried to buy, recollecting old days when she used to play upon it in the sitting-room of our dear Amelia Sedley.

For the sale was at the Sedleys' house in Russell Square. Good old John Sedley was a ruined man. His name had been proclaimed as a defaulter on the Stock Exchange, and his bankruptcy had followed.

Mr. Osborne's butler came to buy some of the famous port wine to transfer to the cellars over the way. As for one dozen silver spoons and forks, three young stockbrokers (Messrs. Dale, Spiggot, and Dale, of Threadneedle Street,) who had received kindnesses from the old man in better days, sent this little spar out of the wreck with their love to good Mrs. Sedley. Respecting the piano, as it had been Amelia's, and as Captain William Dobbin could no more play it than he could dance on the tight rope, it seems that he did not buy it for his own use.

The piano arrived that evening at a small cottage in a street off the Fulham Road, with the romantic name of St. Adelaide Villas. The houses there look like baby-houses; the people looking out of the first-floor windows, must, you would think, have their feet in the parlours below. The shrubs in the little gardens bloom with a perennial display of children's clothing, and little beer pots hang on the railings sunning themselves.

Here, in the evenings, you see City clerks padding wearily home: here it was that Mr. Clapp, Mr. Sedley's clerk, lived, and here the good old gentleman hid with his wife and daughter when the crash came.

Jos Sedley, when news of the family misfortune reached him, did not come to London, but he wrote and told his mother to ask his agents for any money they needed, so his broken-spirited parents had no present poverty to fear. This done, Jos went on at the boarding-house at Cheltenham pretty much as before. He drove his curricule; he drank his claret; he told his Indian stories. His present of money, needful as it was, made little impression on his parents; yet on receiving the packet of forks and spoons with the young stockbrokers' love, old Mr Sedley burst out crying like a child.

Rebecca had been entirely surprised at the sight of the comfortable old house ransacked by bargainers, its quiet family treasures given up to public plunder. A month after her flight, she had thought of Amelia, and Rawdon had been willing to see George Osborne again.

"He's a very agreeable acquaintance, Beck. I'd like to sell him another horse, and play a few more games at billiards with him. He'd be useful just now – ha, ha!" It is not to be supposed that Rawdon Crawley wished to cheat Mr. Osborne at play, but

only to take that fair advantage of him which almost every sporting gentleman in Vanity Fair considers to be his due from his neighbour.

The old aunt had not yet come round, although a month had elapsed. Rawdon's letters were sent back unopened. Miss Crawley never stirred out – she was unwell – and Mrs. Bute never left her. Crawley and his wife both augured evil from the continued presence of Mrs. Bute.

“Gad, I begin to see now why she was always bringing us together at Queen's Crawley,” Rawdon said. “But I don't regret it, if you don't.” The Captain was still in an amorous rapture with his wife, who rewarded him with a kiss, and was indeed gratified by the generous confidence of her husband.

“If he had but a little more brains,” she thought to herself, “I might make something of him;” but she never let him perceive her opinion. She listened tirelessly to his stories of the stable and the mess; laughed at all his jokes, and showed the greatest interest in his raffish friends. When he came home she was alert and happy: when he went out she pressed him to go: when he stayed at home, she played and sang for him, made him good drinks, supervised his dinner, warmed his slippers, and steeped his soul in comfort.

The best of women (I have heard my grandmother say) are hypocrites. We don't know how much they hide from us: how watchful they are: how often those frank smiles are traps to cajole or disarm us, even in paragons of female virtue. Who has not seen a woman hide the dullness of a stupid husband, or coax the fury of a savage one? We accept this amiable slavishness, and praise a woman for it. A good housewife is of necessity a humbug.

Thus Rawdon Crawley found himself a very happy and submissive married man. His former haunts knew him not. They asked about him once or twice at his clubs, but did not miss him much. His cheerful wife, his little comfortable lodgings, snug meals and homely evenings had all the charms of novelty and secrecy. The marriage was not yet declared to the world; his creditors would have come rushing on him, if they had known that he was united to a woman without fortune.

Becky saw only a few of her husband's male companions, who were all charmed with her. The little dinners, the laughing and chatter and music, delighted the soldiers; but her modesty never forsook her for a moment, and Crawley's reputation as a fire-eating warrior was a further defence to his little wife.

Rawdon Crawley lived comfortably on credit. He had a large capital of debts, which laid out judiciously, will carry a man along for many years. Everything was plentiful in his house but ready money, of which they pretty soon felt the lack.

Reading the Gazette one day, and seeing the announcement of “Lieutenant G. Osborne to be Captain by purchase,” Rawdon expressed that willingness to see him again, which ended in the visit to Russell Square and the sale. But when Rawdon and his wife wanted to ask Captain Dobbin about the catastrophe which had befallen the Sedleys, the Captain had vanished; and such information as they got was from a stray porter.

“They're like vultures after a battle,” said Becky.

“Don't know. Never was in action, my dear,” said Rawdon.

“He was a very kind old man, Mr. Sedley,” Rebecca said; “I'm really sorry he's gone wrong.”

“O stockbrokers – bankrupts – used to it, you know,” Rawdon replied.

“I wish we could have afforded some of the plate,” the wife continued sentimentally. “Five-and-twenty guineas was monstrously dear for that little piano. It only cost five-and-thirty when Amelia chose it at Broadwoods.”

“Osborne will cry off now, I suppose. How cut up your pretty little friend will be, hey, Becky?”

“I daresay she’ll recover,” Becky said with a smile – and they drove on and talked about something else.

CHAPTER 18

Who Played on the Piano Captain Dobbin Bought

Our surprised story now finds itself for a moment among very famous events, and hanging on to the skirts of history. When the eagles of Napoleon Bonaparte, the Corsican upstart, were flying from Provence to the towers of Notre Dame, I wonder whether the Imperial birds had any eye for a little corner of Bloomsbury, London, which you might have thought so quiet that even the whirring of those mighty wings would pass unobserved there?

“Napoleon has landed at Cannes.” Such news might create a panic at Vienna, and cause Russia to drop his cards, and take Prussia into a corner; but how was this news to affect a young lady in Russell Square: who, if she walked even a short distance to buy a ribbon, was followed by Sambo with an enormous cane: who was always cared for and watched over by so many guardian angels? Yet the great roaring war tempest was coming to sweep her family down.

Her father’s fortune was swept away with that fatal news. All his speculations had gone wrong. Ventures had failed; merchants had gone broke; funds had risen when he had calculated they would fall. If success is rare and slow, everybody knows how quick and easy ruin is.

Old Sedley had kept silent. Everything seemed to go on as usual in the quiet, opulent house; the good-natured mistress pursuing, quite unsuspectingly, her bustling idleness; the daughter absorbed still in one selfish, tender thought, and quite regardless of all the world besides, when the final crash came.

One night Mrs. Sedley was writing cards for a party; the Osbornes had given one, and she must not be behindhand. John Sedley, who had come home very late from the City, sat silent while his wife was prattling to him. Emmy had gone up to her room ailing and low-spirited.

“She’s not happy,” said the mother. “George Osborne neglects her. I’ve no patience with the airs of those people. George has been twice in town without coming here. Edward Dale saw him at the Opera. Edward would marry her, I’m sure: and so would Captain Dobbin, I think – only I hate all army men. Such a dandy George has become! We must show some folks that we’re as good as they. We must have a party, Mr. S. Shall I say Tuesday fortnight? Why don’t you speak, John? Good God, John, what has happened?”

John Sedley sprang up out of his chair, seized her in his arms, and said, “We’re ruined, Mary. It’s best that you should know all, and at once.” As he spoke, he trembled in every limb. He thought the news would have overpowered his wife; but it was he that was the most moved.

When he sank back into his seat, she held his trembling hand, and kissed it: she called him her dear John – her kind old man; she poured out a hundred words of incoherent love and tenderness. Her faithful voice and caresses caused this sad heart delight and anguish, and cheered his over-burdened soul.

Only once in the course of the long night as they sat together, and poor Sedley told the story of his losses – the treason of some of his oldest friends, the kindness of others – only once did the faithful wife give way to emotion.

“My God, my God, it will break Emmy’s heart,” she said.

The father had forgotten the poor girl. She was lying awake and unhappy overhead. In the midst of friends, she was alone. Our gentle Amelia had no confidante; she could not tell her old mother her doubts and cares; the would-be sisters seemed strange to her. And she had misgivings and fears which she dared not acknowledge to herself, though she was always secretly brooding over them.

Her heart tried to persist in asserting that George Osborne was worthy and faithful, though she knew otherwise. How many suspicions of selfishness and indifference had she obstinately overcome! To whom could the poor girl tell these daily struggles? Her hero himself only half understood her. She did not dare to admit that the man she loved was her inferior; or to feel that she had given her heart away too soon. She was too modest, too trustful, too weak, too much woman to recall it.

Thus imprisoned and tortured was this gentle little heart, when in March 1815 Napoleon landed in France, and Louis XVIII fled, and all Europe was in alarm, and the funds fell, and old John Sedley was ruined.

His bankruptcy was made formal. The house and furniture of Russell Square were seized and sold up, and he and his family were thrust away, as we have seen.

The servants were discharged – they were sorry to leave good places, but they did not break their hearts. Black Sambo determined on setting up a public-house. Honest old Mrs. Blenkinsop, indeed, would have stayed without wages, having amassed a considerable sum in their service: and she accompanied the fallen people into their new and humble place of refuge, where she tended them and grumbled against them.

Of all Sedley's opponents in his debates with his creditors, which now aged him more in six weeks than the fifteen years before – the most obstinate opponent was John Osborne, his old friend and neighbour. John Osborne, whom he had set up in life – who was under a hundred obligations to him – and whose son was to marry Amelia.

But when one man has been under obligations to another, with whom he quarrels, he becomes a much severer enemy than a mere stranger would be. To account for your own ingratitude in such a case, you are bound to prove the other party's crime. It is not that you are selfish, brutal, and angry – no, no – it is that your partner has made you so by the basest treachery.

Then Osborne had the intolerable sense of former benefits to irritate him. Finally, he had to break off the match between Sedley's daughter and his son; and as it had gone very far indeed, and as the poor girl's happiness and perhaps character were compromised, it was necessary to show the strongest reasons for the rupture, and for John Osborne to prove John Sedley to be a very bad character indeed.

At the meetings of creditors, then, he showed a savageness and scorn towards Sedley which almost broke the other man's heart. He forbade George to meet Amelia, vilifying the poor girl as the most artful of vixens.

When the great crash came, a brutal letter from John Osborne told her in a few curt lines that all engagements between the families were at an end. Amelia took the news very palely and calmly. It was only the confirmation of her previous dark fears. It was the sentence for her crime of loving too violently, against reason. She seemed scarcely more unhappy now, when convinced all hope was over, than before when she felt but dared not confess that it was gone.

So she changed from the large house to the small one without remark; remained in her little room and pined silently; and died away day by day.

Whenever old John Sedley thought of the affair between George and Amelia, it was with bitterness almost as great as Mr. Osborne's. He cursed Osborne and his

family as heartless and wicked. No power on earth, he swore, would induce him to marry his daughter to the son of such a villain, and he ordered Emmy to banish George from her mind, and to return all the presents and letters which she had ever had from him.

She tried to obey. But when she drew out the letters and read them over – as if she did not know them by heart already – she could not part with them. She placed them back in her bosom again – as you have seen a woman nurse a child that is dead. How she used to blush when those letters came! How she used to trip away so that she might read unseen! If they were short or selfish, what excuses she found for the writer!

It was over these few worthless papers that she brooded; these relics of dead affection were all that were left her in the world. To death she looked with inexpressible longing. Then, she thought, I shall always be able to follow him.

I am not praising her conduct or setting her up as a model to imitate. A strong-minded girl knows how to regulate her feelings better than this poor little creature, and would never pledge her heart away for nothing but a brittle promise.

Be cautious, young ladies; be wary how you engage. Be shy of loving frankly; never tell all you feel; or (better still) feel very little. See the consequences of being too confiding, and mistrust yourselves and everybody. That is the way to get on in Vanity Fair.

If Amelia could have heard the comments about her which were made in the circle which they had left, she would have seen what her crimes were. “Captain Osborne, of course, could not marry a bankrupt’s daughter,” the Misses Dobbin said. “It was quite enough to have been swindled by the father. As for Amelia, her folly had really passed all—”

“All what?” Captain Dobbin roared out. “Haven’t they been engaged ever since they were children? Dare any soul on earth breathe a word against the sweetest, the purest, the most angelical of young women?”

“La, William, don’t be so highy-tighty,” Miss Jane said. “We’ve said nothing against Miss Sedley, except that her conduct was *most imprudent*, and her parents certainly deserve their misfortunes.”

“Hadn’t you better, now that Miss Sedley is free, propose for her yourself, William?” Miss Ann asked sarcastically. “It would be a most eligible connection. He! he!”

“I, marry her!” Dobbin said, blushing. “If you are so ready, young ladies, to chop and change, do you suppose that she is? Laugh and sneer at that angel. She can’t hear it; and she’s miserable and unfortunate, and deserves to be laughed at. Go on joking, Ann. You’re the wit of the family.”

“We’re not in a barrack, William,” Miss Ann remarked.

“Nobody in a barrack would say what you do,” cried out this roused British lion. “I should like to hear a man breathe a word against her, by Jupiter. But men don’t talk in this way, Ann: it’s only women who get together and hiss, and shriek, and cackle. There, don’t cry. I only said you were a couple of geese. Well, you’re not geese, you’re swans – anything you like, only leave Miss Sedley alone.”

The sisters agreed that William was infatuated with the silly little thing; and they trembled lest, her engagement being off with Osborne, she should take up her other admirer, the Captain.

“It is a mercy, Mamma, that the regiment is ordered abroad,” the girls said. “This danger, at any rate, is spared our brother.”

So it is that the French Emperor comes in to perform a part in this domestic comedy of Vanity Fair. It was he that ruined Mr. John Sedley. It was he whose arrival in Paris called up all France in arms to defend him; and all Europe to oust him. While the French nation was swearing fidelity, four mighty European armies were getting in motion; and one of these was a British army, of which our two heroes, Captain Dobbin and Captain Osborne, formed a part.

The news of Napoleon's escape and landing was received by their gallant regiment with a fiery delight and enthusiasm. From the colonel to the smallest drummer, all were filled with hope and ambition and patriotic fury. Now was the time they had panted for, to show their comrades that they could fight as well as the Peninsular veterans.

Stubble and Spooney looked to get promotion. Before the end of the campaign, Mrs. Major O'Dowd hoped to write herself Mrs. Colonel O'Dowd, C.B. Our two friends were just as excited as the rest: Mr. Dobbin very quietly, Mr. Osborne very loudly and energetically – each bent upon doing his duty, and gaining his share of honour.

At this thrilling time, private matters were little heeded. Hence George Osborne, busy with preparations for the coming march, was not so much affected by other incidents as he might otherwise have been. He was not, it must be confessed, very much cast down by old Mr. Sedley's catastrophe. He tried his new uniform, which became him very handsomely, on the day when the first meeting of the creditors took place. His father told him of the wicked, shameful conduct of the bankrupt, reminded him that his connection with Amelia was broken off for ever; and gave him a good sum of money to pay for the new clothes in which he looked so well.

The bills of sale went up in the Sedley house, where he had passed so many happy hours. He could see them as he walked away from home that evening, shining white in the moon. He was very melancholy that night in the coffee-room; and drank a good deal, as his comrades remarked.

Dobbin came in presently, cautioned him about the drink, and began to make clumsy inquiries. Osborne declined answering, saying that he was devilish disturbed and unhappy.

Three days afterwards, Dobbin found Osborne in his room at the barracks – his head on the table, a number of papers about, and the young Captain greatly despondent.

“She sent me back some trinkets I gave her. Look here!” There was a little packet with a letter. “It's all over,” said he, with a groan. “You may read it if you like.”

The letter said:

My papa has ordered me to return to you these presents, which you gave me in happier days; and I am to write to you for the last time. I know you feel as I do the blow which has come upon us. I absolve you from an engagement which is impossible in our present misery. I am sure you had no share in the cruel suspicions of Mr. Osborne, which are the hardest of our griefs to bear. Farewell. I pray God to strengthen me to bear this and other calamities, and to bless you always. A.

I shall often play upon the piano – your piano. It was like you to send it.

Dobbin was very soft-hearted. The sight of women and children in pain always used to melt him. The idea of Amelia broken-hearted and lonely tore that good-

natured soul with anguish. He swore that Amelia was an angel, and Osborne agreed with all his heart.

Osborne, too, had been thinking of Amelia from her childhood, so sweet, so innocent, so charmingly simple, and artlessly fond. What a pang it was to lose all that: to have had it and not prized it! He blushed with remorse, as the memory of his selfishness and indifference contrasted with her perfect purity. For a while, glory, war, everything was forgotten, and the pair of friends talked about her only.

“Where are they?” Osborne asked – in truth, ashamed that he had taken no steps to follow her. “There’s no address to the note.”

Dobbin knew. He had not merely sent the piano, but had written a note to Mrs. Sedley, and had seen her, and Amelia too, yesterday. He had found Mrs. Sedley only too willing to receive him, and greatly agitated by the arrival of the piano, which, she guessed, MUST have come from George. Captain Dobbin did not correct her error, but listened to all her misfortunes with great sympathy. Then he asked to see Amelia, who was in her room, and whom her mother led trembling downstairs.

Her appearance was so ghastly, and her look of despair so pathetic, that William Dobbin was frightened; he read the most fatal forebodings in that pale fixed face. After sitting in his company a minute, she put the packet of trinkets into his hand, and said, “Take this to Captain Osborne, if you please, and – and I hope he’s quite well. It was very kind of you to come and see us. We like our new house very much. And I – I think I’ll go upstairs, Mamma, for I’m not very strong.”

And with a curtsy and a smile, the poor child left. Inexpressible grief, pity and terror pursued Dobbin when he came away.

Osborne made anxious inquiries about her. How was she? What did she say? His comrade took his hand, and looked him in the face.

“George, she’s dying,” William Dobbin said – and could speak no more.

There was a buxom Irish servant-girl, who performed all the duties of the little house where the Sedley family had found refuge: and this girl had often tried to give Amelia aid or consolation. Emmy was much too sad to be aware of her attempts.

Four hours after the talk between Dobbin and Osborne, this servant-maid came smiling into Amelia’s room, where she sat brooding over her letters – her little treasures.

“Miss Emmy,” said the girl.

“I’m coming,” Emmy said, not looking round.

“There’s a message,” the maid went on. “There’s something – somebody – sure, here’s a new letter for you – don’t be reading them old ones any more.” And she gave her a letter, which Emmy took, and read.

“I must see you,” the letter said. “Dearest Emmy – dearest love – dearest wife, come to me.”

George and her mother were outside, waiting for her.

CHAPTER 19

Miss Crawley at Nurse

We have mentioned how kind and attentive Mrs Bute Crawley was to Firkin, Miss Crawley's confidential servant. She was a gracious friend to Miss Briggs, the companion, also; and had gained her good-will with those promises which cost so little in the making, and are yet so agreeable to the recipient. Indeed every good economist must know how cheap yet amiable these attentions are, and what a flavour they give to the most homely dish in life. Mrs. Bute had told Briggs and Firkin so often of her affection for them, and of what she would do for them, if she had Miss Crawley's fortune, that the two ladies had the deepest regard for her; and felt as grateful as if Mrs. Bute had loaded them with expensive favours.

Rawdon Crawley, on the other hand, like the selfish heavy dragoon he was, never took the least trouble to conciliate his aunt's companions. As his aunt made a butt of Briggs, the Captain followed her example, and levelled his jokes at her. Whereas Mrs. Bute consulted her in matters of taste, admired her poetry, and showed her appreciation of Briggs in a thousand ways; and if she made Firkin a twopenny present, accompanied it with so many compliments that the twopence was changed to gold in the maid's grateful heart.

Praise everybody, I say: never be squeamish, but speak out your compliment both to a man's face, and behind his back, when you know he may get to hear of it. Never lose a chance of saying a kind word. Plant your compliments like acorns: an acorn costs nothing, but it may sprout into a prodigious bit of timber.

During Rawdon Crawley's prosperity, he was only obeyed sulkily; when his disgrace came, nobody pitied him. But the garrison at Miss Crawley's house were charmed to act under such a leader as Mrs Bute, expecting all sorts of promotion from her promises and her kind words.

Mrs. Bute Crawley never allowed herself to suppose that Rawdon would be beaten by one defeat. She knew Rebecca to be too clever and spirited a woman to submit without a struggle; and felt that she must prepare for that combat, and be incessantly watchful.

In the first place, would Miss Crawley herself hold out? Had she not a secret longing to welcome back Rawdon and Rebecca? The old lady liked them; they amused her. Mrs. Bute could not disguise from herself the fact that none of her own family could contribute much to Miss Crawley's pleasures.

"My girls' singing, after that odious governess's, is unbearable," she admitted to herself. "Jim's college manners and poor dear Bute's talk about his dogs and horses always annoyed her. If I took her to the Rectory, she would grow angry with us all, and fly; and might fall into the clutches of that horrid Rawdon and that little viper of a Sharp. Meanwhile, she is exceedingly ill, and cannot move for weeks; during which we must protect her from those unprincipled people."

Miss Crawley was always ready to send for her doctor, and I daresay she was very unwell after the sudden family event. At least, Mrs. Bute thought it was her duty to inform the physician, and the apothecary, and the household, that Miss Crawley was in a most critical state. She had the street laid knee-deep with straw to muffle sounds; she insisted that the Doctor should call twice a day; and deluged her patient with medicinal draughts every two hours. The poor old lady could not look up from

her bed without seeing Mrs. Bute's beady eyes eagerly fixed on her. They seemed to shine in the dark as she moved about the room on velvet paws like a cat.

There Miss Crawley lay for many days – Mrs. Bute reading books of devotion to her: for long nights, during which she had to hear the watchman sing. When she was in health and good spirits, this old inhabitant of Vanity Fair had free notions about religion and morals, but when illness overtook her, it brought the most dreadful terrors of death. For the bustle, and triumph, and laughter which Vanity Fair exhibits in public, do not always pursue the performer into private life. Are there not moments when one grows sick of grinning and tumbling, and the jingling of cap and bells? This, dear friends, is my amiable object – to walk with you through the Fair, so that we should all come home after the noise and gaiety, and be perfectly miserable in private.

“If that poor man of mine had a head on his shoulders,” Mrs. Bute Crawley thought, “how useful he might be! He might make this old lady repent of her shocking ways; he might urge her to do her duty, and cast off her odious nephew, and do justice to my dear children, who deserve every assistance which their relatives can give them.”

Mrs. Bute Crawley tried to instil in her sister-in-law a proper abhorrence for all Rawdon Crawley's many sins: producing a list of them long enough for a whole regiment of young officers. She showed a perfect knowledge of Rawdon's history. She had all the details of that ugly quarrel with Captain Marker, when Rawdon shot him. She knew how young Lord Dovedale, who had never touched a card in his life, was perverted by Rawdon at the Cocoa-Tree, made helplessly tipsy, and fleeced of four thousand pounds. She described the agonies of the families whom he had ruined – the sons whom he had plunged into poverty – the daughters whom he had lured into perdition. She knew the astounding falsehoods by which he had imposed upon his generous aunt, and the ridicule with which he had repaid her.

She told these stories to Miss Crawley, feeling it to be her Christian duty. She had not the smallest remorse for her victim. If a man's character is to be abused, there's nobody like a relation to do the business. And one is bound to own that the mere truth about the unfortunate Rawdon was enough to condemn him, without any invention of scandal.

Rebecca, too, came in for the fullest share of Mrs. Bute's kind inquiries. Mrs. Bute visited her old friend Miss Pinkerton, at Chiswick Mall, from whom she got various strange facts about Rebecca's early history. Miss Jemima was made to fetch the drawing-master's receipts and begging-letters. There were juvenile letters from Rebecca, too, imploring aid for her father or declaring her gratitude. Perhaps in Vanity Fair there are no better satires than letters. Vows, promises, gratitude, how queerly they read after a while! There ought to be a law in Vanity Fair ordering the destruction of every written document after a certain interval – and indelible ink should be abolished. The best ink for Vanity Fair use would be one that faded utterly in a couple of days, and left the paper blank.

From Miss Pinkerton's, the indefatigable Mrs. Bute followed the track of Sharp and his daughter back to their former lodgings in Greek Street. Mrs. Stokes the landlady told all she knew about Mr. Sharp; how dissolute and poor he was; how he was always hunted by bailiffs; how, to the landlady's horror, he did not marry his wife till a short time before her death; and what a queer little wild vixen his daughter was; how she kept them all laughing with her mimicry, and used to fetch the gin from the public-house.

So, in Mrs. Bute's tale, Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was the daughter of an opera-girl. She had danced herself. She had been a model to the painters. She drank gin with her father, etc. etc. She was a lost woman who was married to a lost man; and the moral was that the pair were beyond redemption.

These were the provisions and ammunition with which Mrs. Bute fortified the Park Lane house against the siege which she knew that Rawdon and his wife would lay to Miss Crawley. But she was too eager. She managed rather too well; she made Miss Crawley more ill than was necessary, and was so harassing and severe that the old lady might have been inclined to escape by dying. Women who order everything for everybody don't always speculate about the consequences of their overstrained authority.

Thus Mrs. Bute, with the best intentions no doubt, carried her conviction of the old lady's illness so far that she almost managed her into her coffin. She pointed out her sacrifices one day to the apothecary, Mr. Clump.

"I am sure, my dear Mr. Clump," she said, "no efforts of mine have been lacking to restore our dear invalid. I never shrink: I never refuse to sacrifice myself."

"Your devotion is admirable," Mr. Clump said, with a low bow; "but —"

"I give up sleep, health, every comfort, to my sense of duty. When my poor James had the smallpox, did I allow any hireling to nurse him? No."

"You did what became an excellent mother, my dear Madam; but —"

"As the wife of an English clergyman, I humbly trust that my principles are good," Mrs. Bute said with happy conviction; "and, as long as Nature supports me, never will I desert my duty. Ah, Mr. Clump! I fear that the invalid needs spiritual as well as medical consolation."

"What I was going to observe, my dear Madam," the resolute Clump interposed, "was that I think you alarm yourself needlessly about our kind friend, and sacrifice your own health too much."

"I would lay down my life for my duty."

"Yes, Madam; but we don't want you to be a martyr," Clump said gallantly. "Dr. Squills and both considered Miss Crawley to be low-spirited and nervous; family events have agitated her."

"Her nephew will go to perdition," Mrs. Crawley cried.

"And you arrived like a guardian angel, my dear Madam, to soothe her. But Dr. Squills and I think that confinement to her bed is not necessary. She is depressed, but she should have change, fresh air, gaiety," Mr. Clump said, grinning. "Persuade her to rise, dear Madam; insist upon her taking little drives. They will restore the roses to your cheeks too."

"The sight of her horrid nephew in the Park," Mrs. Bute said, "would cause her such a shock, that we should have to bring her back to bed again. She must not go out, Mr. Clump. As for my health, I sacrifice it cheerfully at the altar of my duty."

"Upon my word, Madam," Mr. Clump now said bluntly, "I won't answer for her life if she remains locked up in that dark room. She is so nervous that we may lose her any day; and if you wish Captain Crawley to be her heir, I warn you frankly, Madam, that you are doing your very best to aid him."

"Gracious mercy! is her life in danger?" Mrs. Bute cried. "Why did you not inform me sooner?"

The night before this, Mr. Clump and Dr. Squills had had a consultation about Miss Crawley and her case.

“What a harpy that woman from Hampshire is, Clump,” Squills remarked, “that has seized upon old Tilly Crawley.”

“What a fool Rawdon Crawley has been,” Clump replied, “to go and marry a governess! There was something about the girl, too.”

“Green eyes, fair skin, pretty figure. The old girl will fling him over. But that Hampshire woman will kill her in two months, Clump, if she stays there. Old woman; nervous palpitations; apoplexy; off she goes. Get her up, Clump; get her out.”

And thus it was that the worthy apothecary spoke so candidly to Mrs. Bute Crawley.

When nobody was near, Mrs. Bute had made more than one attack upon Miss Crawley to induce her to alter her will. But Miss Crawley’s terror of death increased greatly when such dismal suggestions were made to her, and Mrs. Bute saw that she must get her patient into cheerful spirits before she could succeed.

Where to take her was the next puzzle, if she was not to meet Rawdon Crawley.

“We must visit our beautiful suburbs of London,” Mrs. Bute thought. “I hear they are the most picturesque in the world.” Getting her victim into her carriage, she drove her to the rustic spots of Hampstead and Dulwich, beguiling the journeys with conversations about Rawdon and his wife, and telling every story to the old lady which could add to her indignation.

Perhaps Mrs. Bute pulled the string unnecessarily tight. For the invalid had a hatred and secret terror of her victimizer, and panted to escape from her. After a brief time, she rebelled: she would go to the Park. Mrs. Bute knew they would meet the abominable Rawdon there, and she was right.

One day in the Park, Rawdon’s carriage came in sight; Rebecca was seated by him. In the enemy’s carriage Miss Crawley occupied her usual place, with Mrs. Bute on her left, and Miss Briggs on the back seat. It was a nervous moment, and Rebecca’s heart beat quick when she recognized them. As the two vehicles crossed each other, she clasped her hands, and looked towards the spinster with a face of agonized attachment and devotion. Rawdon trembled, and his face grew purple behind his dyed mustachios.

In the other carriage, old Briggs cast her great eyes nervously towards her old friends. Miss Crawley’s bonnet was resolutely turned towards the Serpentine. Mrs. Bute was busy playing with the poodle; and the carriages moved on.

“Try once more, Rawdon,” Rebecca urged. “Could not you lock your wheels into theirs, dearest?”

Rawdon had not the heart for that manoeuvre. When the carriages met again, he stood up, and raised his hand ready to doff his hat. But this time Miss Crawley did not turn away; she and Mrs. Bute looked him full in the face, and cut their nephew pitilessly. He sank back in his seat with an oath, and dashed desperately homewards.

It was a decided triumph for Mrs. Bute. But she felt the danger of many such meetings, and decided that for the sake of her dear friend’s health, they should leave town for a while; and she recommended Brighton very strongly.

CHAPTER 20

In Which Captain Dobbin Acts as the Messenger of Hymen

Without knowing how, Captain William Dobbin found himself the manager of the match between George Osborne and Amelia. Without him it never would have taken place: he smiled rather bitterly as he thought that he, of all men in the world, should be the one to whom this task had fallen. But though it was painful to him, Captain Dobbin was used to doing his duty without hesitation: and, having made up his mind that Miss Sedley was in danger of dying of disappointment, he was determined to keep her alive.

I will not enter into the details of the meeting between George and Amelia. A much harder heart than George's would have melted at the sight of that sweet face so ravaged by despair. When her mother brought Osborne to her, she laid her head on her lover's shoulder and there wept the most tender and refreshing tears. After crying over George's hand, she kissed it humbly, as if he were her supreme chief and master, and she quite unworthy.

This sweet obedience touched and flattered George Osborne. He saw a slave before him in that simple yielding faithful creature, and thrilled secretly at the knowledge of his power. He would be a generous-minded Sultan, and make a queen of her: so he raised her up and forgave her, so to speak.

All her dying hopes bloomed again. You would scarcely have recognised her beaming little face upon her pillow that night compared to the one that was laid there the night before. The honest Irish maid-servant, delighted with the change, asked to kiss her, and Amelia put her arms round the girl's neck and kissed her like a child. She was little more. She had a sweet refreshing sleep – and what a spring of happiness as she woke in the morning sunshine!

“He will be here again today,” Amelia thought. “He is the greatest and best of men.” And George thought he was one of the gentlest creatures alive, and was making a tremendous sacrifice in marrying her.

While she and Osborne were meeting, old Mrs. Sedley and Captain Dobbin were talking downstairs about the future of the young people. Mrs. Sedley thought that nothing would induce Mr. Sedley to consent to the match between his daughter and the son of a man who had so shamefully treated him. And she told a long story about happier days, when Osborne lived in a very humble way, and his wife was glad to receive Jos's little baby things, which Mrs. Sedley passed on to her. The fiendish ingratitude of that man, she was sure, had broken Mr. S.'s heart: and as for a marriage, he would never consent.

“They must run away together, Ma'am,” Dobbin said, laughing, “like Captain Rawdon Crawley, and Miss Emmy's friend the governess.”

Was it possible? Well she never! Mrs. Sedley was all excitement about this news. What an escape Jos had had!

It was not, however, Mr. Sedley's wrath which Dobbin feared so much as that of George's father. He had considerable anxiety about the behaviour of the black-browed old tyrant in Russell Square. He knew what a savage, determined man Osborne was, and how he stuck by his word.

“The only chance George has of reconciliation,” thought Dobbin, “is by distinguishing himself in the coming campaign. If he dies they both go together. If he

fails to distinguish himself, he has some money from his mother – or he must sell out and go to Canada, or rough it in a cottage in the country.” With such a partner Dobbin thought he would not mind Siberia.

He thought too that the marriage should take place as quickly as possible. Was he anxious, I wonder, to have it over? – as people, after a death, like to press forward the funeral. Dobbin urged George to marry before the regiment departed from England: if necessary he would go himself and see both the fathers.

With Mrs. Sedley’s consent, Mr. Dobbin went to seek John Sedley in the City, at the Tapioca Coffee-house, where the poor broken-down old gentleman used to go daily, and write and receive letters tied up in mysterious bundles. I don’t know anything more dismal than the bustle of a ruined man as he shows you letters from the wealthy: worn, greasy documents promising support, on which he builds his hopes. Such a man takes you into the corner; he has his bundle of papers out, and the favourite letters laid before you; and who does not know the sad eager half-crazy look which he fixes on you with his hopeless eyes?

Dobbin found the once jovial and prosperous John Sedley changed into a man of this sort. His coat, that used to be so glossy, was white at the seams. His face had fallen in, and was unshaved; his neckcloth hung limp under his sagging waistcoat. It was quite painful to see how humble and civil he was to the blar-eyed old waiter. As for William Dobbin, who had been the butt of the old man’s humour on a thousand occasions, Sedley gave his hand to him in a very hesitating manner, and called him “Sir.” A feeling of shame overcame Dobbin as the broken old man so received him, as if he himself had been somehow guilty of bringing Sedley low.

“I am very glad to see you, Captain Dobbin, sir,” said he. “How is the worthy alderman, and my lady your mother, sir?” He looked round at the waiter as he said, “My lady,” as if to say, *Hark ye, John, I have friends of rank still*. “My young friends Dale and Spiggot do my business for me now, until my new offices are ready; for I’m only here temporarily, you know, Captain. What can we do for you, sir? Will you take anything?”

Dobbin protested that he was not hungry or thirsty, and that he only came to ask if Mr. Sedley was well, and to shake hands with an old friend. He added, “My mother is only waiting for the first fine day to go and call upon Mrs. Sedley.”

“My wife will be very happy to see her ladyship,” Sedley replied, pulling out his papers. “I’ve a very kind letter here from your father, sir. Lady D. will find us in rather a smaller house than we were accustomed to; but it’s snug, and the change of air does my daughter good – you remember little Emmy, sir? – she was suffering a good deal.” The old gentleman’s eyes were wandering, as he fumbled at the worn red tape around his papers.

“You’re a military man,” he went on; “I ask you, could any man ever have predicted the return of that Corsican scoundrel from Elba? The Emperor of Austria was a damned traitor. I don’t mince words. Boney’s escape from Elba was a damned plot, sir, in which half the powers of Europe were concerned, to bring the funds down, and to ruin this country. That’s why I’m here, William – because I trusted the Emperor of Russia and the Prince Regent. Look at my papers. Look what the funds were on the first of March – and what they’re at now. There was collusion, or that villain never would have escaped. He ought to be brought to a court-martial and shot, by Jove.”

“We’re going to hunt Boney out, sir,” Dobbin said, rather alarmed at the old man’s fury and the swelling veins on his forehead. “The Duke’s in Belgium already, and we expect marching orders every day.”

“Bring back the villain’s head, sir. Shoot the coward down,” Sedley roared. “I’d enlist myself – but I’m a broken old man – ruined by that damned scoundrel and by thieves in this country whom I made, sir!”

Dobbin was affected by the sight of this once kind old friend, almost crazed with misfortune and raving with senile anger.

“Yes,” Sedley continued, “there are beggars that you put on horseback, William Dobbin, and they’re the first to ride you down. I mean a purse-proud villain in Russell Square, whom I knew without a shilling, and whom I hope to see a beggar as he was when I befriended him.”

“I have heard something of this, sir, from my friend George,” Dobbin said, anxious to come to his point. “The quarrel between you and his father has cut him up a great deal, sir. Indeed, I have a message from him.”

“O, *that’s* your errand, is it?” cried the old man, jumping up. “What! he condoles with me, does he? Very kind of him, the prig with his West-end swagger. He’s still hankering about my house, is he? He’s as big a villain as his father. I curse the day that ever I let him into my house; and I’d rather see my daughter dead than married to him.”

“His father’s harshness is not George’s fault, sir. Your daughter’s love for him is as much your doing as his. Who are you, to play with two young people’s affections and break their hearts at your will?”

“I forbid the match,” old Sedley cried. “That family and mine are separated for ever. I’m fallen low, but not so low as that.”

“You have not the power or the right to separate those two,” Dobbin answered in a low voice; “and if you don’t give your daughter your consent it will be her duty to marry without it. To my thinking, she’s just as much married as if the banns had been read in all the churches in London. And what better answer can there be to Osborne’s charges against you, than that his son claims to enter your family and marry your daughter?”

A light of something like satisfaction seemed to break over old Sedley as this point was put: but he still persisted that the marriage between Amelia and George should never take place with his consent.

“We must do it without,” Dobbin said, smiling, and told Mr. Sedley the story of Rebecca’s elopement with Captain Crawley. It amused the old gentleman.

“You’re terrible fellows, you Captains,” said he, tying up his papers; and his face wore something like a smile.

Perhaps the idea of hitting his enemy Osborne such a blow soothed the old gentleman: and he and Dobbin parted good friends.

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“My sisters say she has diamonds as big as pigeons’ eggs,” George said, laughing. “How they must set off her complexion! Her jet-black hair is as curly as Sambo’s. I dare say she wore a nose ring when she went to court; and looked a perfect *Belle Sauvage*.”

George, talking with Amelia, was describing a young lady, a West Indian heiress whom his sisters had lately met, and who was an object of vast respect to the Russell Square family. She was reported to have numerous plantations in the West Indies; a deal of money; a mansion in Surrey, and a house in Portland Place. Mrs. Haggistoun

“chaperoned” her, and kept her house. She had just left school, and George and his sisters had met her at an evening party, where she had received them with great good humour.

An orphan – with her money – so interesting! the Misses Osborne said. They drove in their carriage to see their new friend the very next day. Mrs. Haggistoun struck the girls as rather haughty, but Rhoda was the frankest, kindest, most agreeable creature, they said – wanting a little polish, but so good-natured.

“You should have seen her court dress, Emmy,” Osborne cried, laughing. “She came to my sisters to show it off. Her diamonds blazed out like Vauxhall on the night we were there. (Do you remember Vauxhall, Emmy, and Jos singing to his dearest diddle diddle darling?) Diamonds and mahogany, my dear! and the white feathers in her hair – I mean in her wool. She had earrings like chandeliers; and a yellow satin train that streamed after her like the tail of a cornet.”

“How old is she?” asked Emmy.

“Why, the Black Princess must be two or three and twenty, though she has only just left school. And you should see her hand-writing!”

“Why, surely it must be Miss Swartz, the parlour boarder,” Emmy said, remembering that good-natured mulatto girl, who had been so affected when Amelia left Miss Pinkerton’s academy.

“The very name,” George said. “Her father was a German Jew – a slave-owner who died last year, and Miss Pinkerton has finished her education. She can play two pieces on the piano; she knows three songs; she can write when Mrs. Haggistoun is there to spell for her; and Jane and Maria already love her as a sister.”

“I wish they had loved me,” said Emmy, wistfully. “They were always very cold to me.”

“My dear child, they would have loved you if you had had two hundred thousand pounds,” George replied. “That is the way they have been brought up. We live among bankers and City big-wigs, who are always jingling their guineas in their pockets, like that jackass Fred Bullock who is going to marry Maria. Curse the whole money-grubbing pack of them! I fall asleep at their great heavy dinners. Dear little woman, you are the only person of our set who ever looked or spoke like a lady. Don’t remonstrate. You are the only lady. Didn’t Miss Crawley remark it, who has lived in the best company in Europe? And as for Crawley, of the Life Guards, hang it, he’s a fine fellow: and I like him for marrying the girl he had chosen.”

Amelia admired Mr. Crawley too, for this; and trusted Rebecca would be happy, and hoped Jos would be consoled. And so the pair went on prattling, as in early days. Amelia’s confidence was perfectly restored, though she professed to be dreadfully frightened lest George should forget her for the heiress Miss Swartz and her estates in Saint Kitt’s. But the fact is, she was a great deal too happy to have any doubts: and with George at her side again, was not afraid of any heiress, or indeed of any sort of danger.

When Captain Dobbin came back to them in the afternoon, it did his heart good to see how Amelia had grown young again – how she laughed, and sang at the piano.

Beyond the first smile of recognition – and even that was an hypocrisy, for she thought his arrival rather provoking – Miss Sedley did not once notice Dobbin during his visit. But he was content to see her happy; and thankful to have been the means of making her so.

CHAPTER 21

A Quarrel About an Heiress

Old Mr. Osborne had a great ambition, and encouraged his daughters' friendship with Miss Swartz enthusiastically.

"You won't find that splendour to which you are accustomed," he would say to Miss Rhoda Swartz, "at our humble mansion in Russell Square. My daughters are plain, disinterested girls, but their hearts are in the right place, and their affection for you does them honour. I'm a plain, humble British merchant; but you'll find us a united, simple, happy, and I think I may say respected family – a plain table, a plain people, but a warm welcome, my dear Miss Rhoda. A glass of Champagne! Hicks, Champagne for Miss Swartz."

There is little doubt that old Osborne believed all he said, and that the girls were quite earnest in protesting their love for Miss Swartz. People in Vanity Fair fasten on to rich folks quite naturally. Their affections rush out to meet and welcome money. The Osborne family, who had not, in fifteen years, been able to get up a regard for Amelia Sedley, became as fond of Miss Swartz during a single evening as the most romantic reader could desire.

What a match for George she'd be (the sisters and Miss Wirt agreed), and how much better than that insignificant little Amelia! He would make her such a dashing husband. Visions of balls in Portland Place, presentations at Court, and introductions to half the peerage, filled the minds of the young ladies.

Old Osborne thought she would be a great match for his son. He should leave the army; he should go into Parliament. With honest British exultation, he saw the name of Osborne ennobled in his son's person, and thought that he might be the first of a glorious line of baronets. Through working in the City, he knew everything about the heiress's fortune and where her estates lay. Young Fred Bullock, one of his informants, would have liked to make a bid for her himself, only he was booked to Maria Osborne. But not being able to secure her as a wife, Fred quite approved of her as a sister-in-law.

"Let George cut in directly and win her," was his advice. "Strike while the iron's hot, you know – while she's fresh to the town: in a few weeks some fellow from the West End will come in with a title and cut us City men out. The sooner the better, Mr. Osborne," Mr. Bullock said; though later, he remembered Amelia, and how pretty she was, and how attached to George Osborne; and he gave up at least ten seconds of his valuable time to regretting her misfortune.

So while George Osborne's good feelings, and his good friend Dobbin, were carrying back the truant to Amelia, his father and sisters were arranging this splendid match for him, which they never dreamed he would resist.

When the elder Osborne gave what he called "a hint," there was no possibility of mistaking his meaning. He called kicking a footman downstairs a hint to leave his service. With his usual frankness and delicacy he told Mrs. Haggistoun that he would give her five thousand pounds on the day his son was married to her ward; and considered that proposal a great piece of diplomacy. He gave George another hint about the heiress; and ordered him to marry her, as he would have ordered his butler to draw a cork, or his clerk to write a letter.

This order disturbed George a good deal. He was in his second courtship of Amelia, which was inexpressibly sweet to him. The contrast of her manners and appearance with those of the heiress made the idea of a union with the latter appear ludicrous. Fancy being seen by the side of such a mahogany charmer as that! he thought. And he was quite as obstinate as his father, and quite as violent when angered.

When his father first gave him the hint about Miss Swartz, George put him off.

“You should have thought of the matter sooner, sir,” he said. “It can’t be done now, when we’re expecting every day to go on foreign service. Wait till my return, if I do return.” He argued that the time for marriage was when he came home with his promotion; “for, I promise you,” said he, with a satisfied air, “that one way or other you shall read the name of George Osborne in the Gazette.”

The father replied that the West End chaps would catch the heiress if any delay took place: that if he didn’t marry Miss S., he might at least have an engagement in writing; and that a man who could get ten thousand a year by staying at home, was a fool to risk his life abroad.

“So you would have me shown up as a coward, sir, and our name dishonoured for the sake of Miss Swartz’s money,” George interposed.

This remark staggered the old gentleman; but his mind was made up. He said, “You will dine here tomorrow, sir, and every day Miss Swartz comes, you will be here to pay your respects to her. If you need money, call upon Mr. Chopper.” Thus a new obstacle was in George’s way: but it only made him the more resolute.

Miss Swartz herself was quite ignorant of all these plans for her (which, strange to say, her chaperone did not divulge). She took the Misses Osbornes’ flattery for genuine feeling, and being of a very warm and impetuous nature, responded to their affection ardently.

And I dare say that she thought George Osborne a very nice young man. His whiskers had made an impression upon her, on the first night she beheld them at the ball. George had an air at once swaggering and melancholy, languid and fierce. He looked like a man with passions, secrets, and private harrowing griefs and adventures. His voice was rich and deep. He would say it was a warm evening with a tone as sad and confidential as a declaration of love. He trampled over all the young bucks of his father’s circle. A few sneered at him; some, like Dobbin, fanatically admired him. And his whiskers had begun to curl themselves round the affections of Miss Swartz.

Whenever there was a chance of meeting him, that good-natured young woman was quite in a flurry to see her dear Misses Osborne. She went to great expense in new gowns, bracelets, bonnets and feathers, adorning herself with her utmost skill to please him. The girls would ask her for a little music, and she would sing her three songs and play her two pieces, while Miss Wirt and the chaperone sat by.

The day after George had his hint from his father, he was lolling upon a sofa before dinner in a very becoming attitude of melancholy. He had been, at his father’s request, to Mr. Chopper in the City. He had then passed three hours with his dear little Amelia, at Fulham; and he came home to find his sisters in starched muslin in the drawing-room, the dowagers cackling in the background, and honest Swartz in her favourite amber-coloured satin, with turquoise bracelets, countless rings, flowers and feathers, about as elegantly decorated as a chimney-sweep on May-day.

The girls talked about fashions until he was perfectly sick of their chatter. He contrasted their behaviour with little Emmy’s – their shrill voices with her tender tones; their attitudes and starch with her soft movements and modest graces. Poor

Swartz was seated where Emmy used to sit. Her bejewelled hands lay sprawling in her amber satin lap. Her ear-rings twinkled, and her big eyes rolled about. She was doing nothing with perfect contentment, and thinking herself charming.

“Damme,” George said to a confidential friend, “she looked like a China doll, which has nothing to do all day but to grin and wag its head. It was all I could do to prevent myself from throwing the sofa-cushion at her.” He restrained himself, however.

The sisters began to play the Battle of Prague at the piano.

“Stop that d___d thing,” George howled from the sofa. “It makes me mad. You play us something, Miss Swartz. Sing anything but the Battle of Prague.”

“Shall I sing ‘Blue Eyed Mary’ or the air from the Cabinet?” Miss Swartz asked.

“That sweet thing from the Cabinet,” the sisters said.

“We’ve had that,” replied George.

“I can sing *Fluvy du Tajy*,” Miss Swartz said meekly, “if I had the words.” It was the last of her collection.

“O, ‘Fleuve du Tage,’” Miss Maria cried; “we have the song,” and she went off to fetch the book it was in.

Now it happened that this song had been given to the young ladies by a friend of theirs, whose name was on the title page, and Miss Swartz saw “Amelia Sedley” written in the corner.

“Lor!” cried Miss Swartz, spinning swiftly round on the music-stool, “is it my Amelia? Amelia that was at Miss P.’s? Tell me about her – where is she?”

“Don’t mention her,” Miss Maria Osborne said hastily. “Her family has disgraced itself. Her father cheated Papa, and as for her, she is never to be mentioned here.” This was Miss Maria’s return for George’s rudeness about the Battle of Prague.

“Are you a friend of Amelia’s?” George said, bouncing up. “God bless you for it, Miss Swartz. Don’t believe what the girls say. She’s not to blame at any rate. She’s the best—”

“You know you’re not to speak about her, George,” cried Jane. “Papa forbids it.”

“Who’s to prevent me?” George cried. “I say she’s the best, the kindest, gentlest, sweetest girl in England; and that, bankrupt or no, my sisters are not fit to hold candles to her. Go and see her, Miss Swartz; she needs friends now; and I say, God bless everybody who befriends her. Anybody who speaks kindly of her is my friend. Thank you, Miss Swartz;” and he went up and wrung her hand.

“George! George!” the sisters cried imploringly.

“I say,” George said fiercely, “I thank everybody who loves Amelia Sed—” He stopped. Old Osborne was in the room with a face livid with rage, and eyes like hot coals.

Though George had stopped, yet his blood was up. He was not to be cowed; rallying instantly, he replied to the bullying frown of his father with a look so resolute and defiant that the elder man quailed and turned away.

“Mrs. Haggistoun, let me take you down to dinner,” he said. “Give your arm to Miss Swartz, George,” and they marched.

“Miss Swartz, I love Amelia, and we’ve been engaged almost all our lives,” Osborne said to his partner; and during the dinner, he rattled on with a volubility which made his father nervous about the fight which was to take place once the ladies were gone.

The difference between the pair was that while the father was a violent bully, the son had three times his courage. He could not merely make an attack, but resist it; and he took his dinner with perfect coolness.

Old Osborne, on the contrary, was nervous, and drank much. He floundered in his conversation with the ladies, George's coolness only making him more angry. It made him half mad to see the calm way in which George, with a swaggering bow, opened the door for the ladies to leave the room; and filling himself a glass of wine, looked his father full in the face, as if to say, "Fire first." The old man also took a supply of ammunition, but his decanter clinked against the glass as he tried to fill it.

With a purple choking face, he then began. "How dare you, sir, mention that person's name before Miss Swartz, in my drawing-room? How dare you do it?"

"Stop, sir," says George, "don't say dare, sir. Dare isn't a word to be used to a Captain in the British Army."

"I shall say what I like to my son, sir. I can cut him off with a shilling if I like. I can make him a beggar if I like," the elder said.

"I'm a gentleman though I am your son, sir," George answered haughtily. "Any communications which you have to make to me, or any orders which you may please to give, I beg may be couched in that kind of language which I am accustomed to hear."

Whenever the lad assumed his haughty manner, it always created either great awe or great irritation in the parent. Old Osborne stood in secret terror of his son as a better gentleman than himself; and in *Vanity Fair*, there is no character which a low-minded man so much mistrusts as that of a gentleman.

"My father didn't give me the education you have had, nor your advantages or money. If I had kept the company some folks have had through *my means*, perhaps my son wouldn't have any reason to brag, sir, of his superiority. But it wasn't considered gentlemanly, in my time, for a man to insult his father. If I'd done any such thing, mine would have kicked me downstairs, sir."

"I never insulted you, sir. I said I begged you to remember your son was a gentleman as well as yourself. I know very well that you give me plenty of money," said George. "You tell me often enough, sir. There's no fear of my forgetting it."

"I wish you'd remember other things as well, sir," his father answered. "I wish you'd remember that in this house – so long as you choose to honour it with your company – I'm the master, and that name – that you – that—"

"That what, sir?" George asked, filling another glass of claret.

"——!" burst out his father with a screaming oath. "That the name of those Sedleys never be mentioned here, sir – not one of the whole damned lot of 'em."

"It wasn't I, sir, that introduced Miss Sedley's name. It was my sisters who spoke ill of her to Miss Swartz; and by Jove, I'll defend her wherever I go. Nobody shall speak lightly of her in my presence. Our family has done her quite enough injury already, I think, and may stop reviling her. I'll shoot any man but you who says a word against her."

"Go on, sir, go on," the old gentleman said, his eyes starting out of his head.

"Go on about what, sir? about the way in which we've treated that angel of a girl? Who told me to love her? It was you. I might have chosen elsewhere, and looked higher: but I obeyed you. And now that her heart's mine you give me orders to fling it away, and punish her, kill her perhaps – for other people's faults. It's a shame, by Heavens," said George, working himself up into a passion, "to play fast and loose

with a young girl's affections – and with such an angel as that – so superior, so good and gentle. If I desert her, sir, do you suppose she forgets me?"

"I ain't going to have any of this dam sentimental nonsense and humbug here, sir," the father cried out. "There shall be no beggar-marriages in my family. If you choose to fling away the chance of eight thousand a year, you may do it: but you will walk out of this house, sir. Will you do as I tell you, or will you not?"

"Marry that mulatto woman?" George said. "I don't like the colour, sir. I'm not going to marry a Hottentot Venus."

Mr. Osborne pulled frantically at the bell-cord, and almost black in the face, ordered the butler to call a coach for Captain Osborne.

"I've done it," said George, coming into the Slaughters' Coffee-house an hour afterwards, looking very pale.

"What, my boy?" said Dobbin. George told what had passed between his father and himself.

"I'll marry her tomorrow," he said with an oath. "I love her more every day, Dobbin."

CHAPTER 22

A Marriage and Part of a Honeymoon

The most obstinate enemies can't hold out against starvation; so the elder Osborne felt pretty confident that as soon as George's supplies fell short, he would submit. It was unlucky, to be sure, that he had collected some money on the very day of the encounter; but old Osborne thought this would merely delay George's surrender.

No communication passed between father and son for some days. The former was sulky at this silence, but not disquieted. He told the sisters the upshot of the dispute, but ordered them to take no notice of the matter, and to welcome George on his return as if nothing had happened. The old gentleman rather anxiously expected him every day; but he never came. Someone inquired about him at the Slaughters', where it was said that he and his friend Captain Dobbin had left town.

One gusty, raw day at the end of April – the rain whipping the pavement of the ancient street outside the Slaughters' Coffee-house – George Osborne entered, looking haggard and pale; although dressed rather smartly in a blue coat and brass buttons, and a neat buff waistcoat. His friend Captain Dobbin was there, in blue and brass too.

Dobbin had been in the coffee-room for an hour, trying to read the papers. He had looked at the clock scores of times; he drummed at the table: he bit his nails; and showed all the signs of anxiety.

Some of his comrades there joked about the splendour of his costume and his agitation. One asked him if he was going to be married? Dobbin laughed, and said he would send his acquaintance a piece of cake when that happened.

At length Captain Osborne appeared. He wiped his pale face with a pocket-handkerchief; shook hands with Dobbin, looked at the clock, and told John, the waiter, to bring him some curacao. He swallowed a couple of glasses with nervous eagerness.

"Couldn't get a wink of sleep till daylight, Dob," said he. "Infernal headache and fever. I say, Dob, I feel just as I did on the morning I went out with Rocket at Quebec."

"So do I," William responded. "I was a deuced deal more nervous than you were that morning. You made a famous breakfast, I remember. Eat something now."

"You're a good fellow, Will. I'll drink your health, old boy, and farewell to—"

"No, no; two glasses are enough," Dobbin interrupted. "Have some of the fowl. Make haste though, for it is time we were there."

A coach was waiting for them; and into this the two gentlemen hurried under an umbrella, and the valet mounted the box, cursing the rain. "At least we'll have a better coach outside the church," he said.

The carriage drove down Piccadilly, where Apsley House and St. George's Hospital wore red jackets still; where there were oil-lamps, and the Pimlico arch was not yet built; and so down by Brompton to a certain chapel near the Fulham Road.

A chariot was in waiting with four horses; also a large-windowed coach of the kind called glass coaches.

"Hang it!" said George, "I said only a pair."

“My master would have four,” said Mr. Joseph Sedley’s servant, who was there waiting. He and Mr. Osborne’s servant agreed, as they followed George and William into the church, that it was a “shabby turnout, with scarce so much as a wedding breakfast.”

“Here you are,” said our old friend, Jos Sedley, coming forward. “You’re five minutes late, George, my boy. What a day, eh? It’s like the rainy season in Bengal. But you’ll find my carriage is watertight. Come along; my mother and Emmy are in the vestry.”

Jos Sedley was splendid. He was fatter than ever. His shirt collars were higher; his face was redder; his shirt-frill flaunted gorgeously out of his variegated waistcoat. The Hessians on his beautiful legs shone like mirrors; and on his light green coat there bloomed a fine wedding favour, like a great white spreading magnolia.

In a word, George was going to be married. Hence his nervousness and his sleepless night. I have heard several people confess to the same emotion. After three or four ceremonies, you get used to it, no doubt; but the first dip, everybody allows, is awful.

The bride was dressed in a brown silk pelisse, and wore a straw bonnet with a pink ribbon; over the bonnet she had a veil of white Chantilly lace, a gift from her brother. Captain Dobbin had asked permission to present her with a gold chain and watch, which she wore; and her mother gave her a diamond brooch – almost the only trinket left to the old lady. As the service went on, Mrs. Sedley whimpered a great deal, consoled by the Irish maid-servant and Mrs. Clapp from the lodgings. Old Sedley was not present. Jos gave away the bride, whilst Captain Dobbin was groomsman to his friend George.

The rain came rattling down on the windows, while the parson’s tones echoed sadly through the empty walls. Osborne’s “I will” was sounded in very deep bass. Emmy’s fluttering response was scarcely heard by anybody except Captain Dobbin.

When the service was completed, Jos Sedley kissed his sister, the bride, for the first time in many months. George’s look of gloom had gone, and he seemed quite proud and radiant.

“It’s your turn, William,” said he. Dobbin went up and touched Amelia on the cheek.

Then they went into the vestry and signed the register.

“God bless you, Old Dobbin,” George said, grasping him by the hand, with tears in his eyes. William replied only by nodding. His heart was too full to say much.

After Mrs. Sedley had taken an hysterical adieu of her daughter, the pair went off to the carriage.

“Get out of the way, you little devils,” George cried to a small crowd of damp urchins. The rain drove into the bride and bridegroom’s faces as they walked to the chariot. The children made a dismal cheer as the carriage, splashing mud, drove away.

William Dobbin stood in the church-porch, looking at it. The small crew of spectators jeered him. He was not thinking about them or their laughter.

“Come home and have some tiffin, Dobbin,” a voice cried behind him, as a pudgy hand was laid on his shoulder. But the Captain had no heart to go a-feasting with Jos Sedley. He put the weeping old lady and her attendants into the carriage along with Jos, and they too, drove away. The urchins gave another sarcastical cheer.

“Here, you little beggars,” Dobbin said, giving them some sixpences, and then he went off by himself through the rain. It was all over. They were married, and happy, he prayed God. Never since he was a boy had he felt so miserable and so lonely. He

longed with a heart-sick yearning for the first few days to be over, so that he might see her again.

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Some ten days after this ceremony, three young men of our acquaintance were enjoying that beautiful Brighton prospect of bow windows on the one side and blue sea on the other. Sometimes it is towards the smiling ocean, speckled with white sails, that the Londoner looks, enraptured: sometimes it is towards the bow windows and that swarm of human life which they exhibit. From one come the notes of a piano, which a young lady in ringlets practises six hours daily, to the delight of the fellow-lodgers: at another, a nurse-maid is dandling a baby in her arms, whilst his papa is devouring the Times for breakfast at the window below. Yonder are the Misses Leery, looking out for young men pacing the cliff; or there is a City man with a telescope pointed seawards, so as to see every boat or bathing-machine along the shore.

“What a monstrous fine girl that is over the milliner’s,” one of these three promenaders remarked. “Gad, Crawley, did you see what a wink she gave me?”

“Don’t break her heart, Jos, you rascal,” said another.

“Get away,” said Jos Sedley, quite pleased, and leering up at the maid-servant. He was even more splendid at Brighton than he had been at his sister’s marriage. Any one of his brilliant under-waistcoats would have set up a moderate dandy. He wore a military frock-coat, ornamented with frogs, knobs, black buttons, and meandering embroidery, for he had affected a military appearance of late; and he walked with his two military friends, clinking his boot-spurs, swaggering, and shooting death-glances at all the servant girls.

“What shall we do, boys, till the ladies return?” he asked. The ladies were out at Rottingdean in his carriage on a drive.

“Let’s have a game at billiards,” one of his friends said – the tall one, with lacquered mustachios.

“No, damme,” Jos replied, rather alarmed. “No billiards today, Crawley, my boy; yesterday was enough.”

“You play very well,” said Crawley, laughing. “Don’t he, Osborne?”

“Famous,” Osborne said. “Jos is a devil of a fellow at billiards, and everything else, too. I wish there were tiger-hunting about here! we might kill a few before dinner. (There goes a fine girl! what an ankle, eh, Jos?) Tell us that story about the tiger-hunt – it’s a wonderful story that, Crawley.” Here George Osborne yawned. “It’s rather slow here; what shall we do?”

“Shall we go and look at Snaffler’s horses?” Crawley said.

“Suppose we go and have some jellies at Dutton’s,” said Jos. “Devilish fine gal at Dutton’s.”

“Suppose we go and see the Lightning come in – it’s just about time,” George said. This advice prevailing, they turned towards the coach-office to witness the Lightning’s arrival.

As they walked, they met Jos Sedley’s magnificent open carriage. Two ladies were in it: one a little person dressed in the height of fashion; the other in a brown silk pelisse, and a straw bonnet with pink ribbons, with a rosy, happy face, that did you good to behold. She halted the carriage as it neared the three gentlemen, and then began to blush absurdly.

“We have had a delightful drive, George,” she said, “and – and we’re so glad to come back; Joseph, don’t let him be late.”

“Don’t lead our husbands into mischief, Mr. Sedley, you wicked man you,” Rebecca said, shaking a pretty finger at Jos. “No billiards, no smoking, no naughtiness!”

“My dear Mrs. Crawley – upon my honour!” was all Jos could say, grinning at his victim. As the carriage drove off he kissed his hand to the fair ladies. He wished all Cheltenham, all Calcutta, could see him waving to such a beauty, alongside such a famous buck as Rawdon Crawley of the Guards.

Our young bride and bridegroom had chosen Brighton to pass the first few days after their marriage; and having engaged apartments at the Ship Inn, enjoyed themselves there quietly, until Jos joined them. Nor was he the only companion they found. As they were coming into the hotel one day, whom should they see but Rebecca and her husband.

Rebecca flew into the arms of her dearest friend. Crawley and Osborne shook hands cordially enough: and Becky very soon found a way to make George forget that unpleasant passage of words which had happened between them.

“Do you remember the last time we met at Miss Crawley’s, when I was so rude to you, dear Captain Osborne? I thought you seemed careless about dear Amelia. It was that made me angry: and so pert and ungrateful. Do forgive me!” Rebecca said, and she held out her hand so frankly that Osborne could not but take it.

By humbly acknowledging yourself to be in the wrong, there is no knowing what good you may do. I once knew a gentleman in Vanity Fair, who used to do little wrongs to his neighbours on purpose, in order to apologise for them in an open and manly way afterwards – and he was thought to be the honestest fellow. Becky’s humility passed for sincerity with George Osborne.

These two young couples had plenty to tell each other. Their marriages were discussed; and their prospects in life canvassed with the greatest interest on both sides. George’s marriage was to be made known to his father by Captain Dobbin; and young Osborne trembled rather for the result of that news. Miss Crawley, on whom Rawdon’s hopes depended, still held out. Unable to enter her house in Park Lane, her affectionate nephew and niece had followed her to Brighton, where they had messengers planted at her door.

“I wish you could see some of Rawdon’s friends who are always about *our* door,” Rebecca said, laughing. “Did you ever see a bailiff, my dear? Two of the wretches watched all last week at the greengrocer’s opposite, and we could not get away until Sunday. If Aunty does not relent, what shall we do?”

Rawdon, with roars of laughter, related a dozen amusing anecdotes of his debts, and Rebecca’s adroit treatment of them. He swore that there was no woman in Europe who could talk a creditor over as she could. They had credit in plenty, but also bills in abundance.

Did these difficulties affect Rawdon’s good spirits? No. Everybody in Vanity Fair must have remarked how well those live who are comfortably in debt: how they deny themselves nothing. Rawdon and his wife had the very best apartments at the inn; the landlord bowed before them: and Rawdon abused the dinners and wine with the audacity of a grandee. A manly appearance, faultless boots and clothes, and a happy fierceness of manner, will often help a man as much as a large bank balance.

The two couples met constantly. In the evening the gentlemen played a little piquet, as their wives sat and chatted. This pastime, and the arrival of Jos Sedley, who played a few games at billiards with Captain Crawley, replenished Rawdon’s purse somewhat.

So these three gentlemen walked down to see the Lightning coach come in. Punctual to the minute, it came tearing down the street, and pulled up at the coach-office.

“Hullo! there’s old Dobbin,” George cried, delighted to see his friend. “How are you, old fellow? Glad you’re come down.” Osborne shook his comrade’s hand warmly – and then added, in a lower and agitated voice, “What’s the news? Have you been in Russell Square? What does the governor say?”

Dobbin looked very grave. “I’ve seen your father,” said he. “How’s Amelia? I’ll tell you all the news presently: but the greatest news of all is – we’re ordered to Belgium. All the army. O’Dowd goes in command, and we embark from Chatham next week.”

This news of war came with a shock upon our lovers, and caused these gentlemen to look very serious.

CHAPTER 23

Captain Dobbin Proceeds on His Canvass

Under the magnetism of friendships, the modest man becomes bold, the shy confident, the lazy active, and the impetuous prudent. We can be firm for others, though diffident about ourselves; and so William Dobbin – who was so complying that if his parents had pressed him to, he would have married the cook – found himself as busy and eager in George Osborne’s affairs as the most selfish man could be in pursuit of his own.

Whilst George and his young wife were enjoying the first blushing days of the honeymoon at Brighton, honest William was left in London, to transact the business part of the marriage. He had to call upon old Sedley and his wife: to draw Jos and his new brother-in-law nearer together, so that Jos’s position as collector of Boggley Wollah might compensate for his father’s loss of status, and help to reconcile old Osborne to the alliance: and finally, he had to tell the news of the marriage to George’s father.

Now, before he faced the head of the Osborne house, Dobbin thought it would be wise to make friends of the rest of the family, and, if possible, have the ladies on his side. They can’t be angry, thought he: no woman ever was really angry at a romantic marriage. They must come round; and the three of us will lay siege to old Mr. Osborne. So this Machiavellian captain of infantry cast about him for some means by which he could gently bring the Misses Osborne to a knowledge of the secret.

He learnt at which parties he would be likely to meet Osborne’s sisters; and though he abhorred evening parties, he made his appearance at a ball where they were present. Here he danced a couple of sets with them, and asked Miss Jane Osborne for a few minutes’ conversation early next day, in order, he said, to give her news of the very greatest interest.

Why did she start back, and gaze upon him, and then at the ground, and act as if she would faint on his arm? Why was she so agitated? This can never be known.

But when he came the next day, Miss Maria was not in the drawing-room with her sister, and Miss Wirt went off. The Captain and Miss Osborne were left together in silence.

“What a nice party it was last night,” Miss Osborne at length began, encouragingly; “and – and how you’re improved in your dancing, Captain Dobbin. Surely somebody has taught you,” she added archly.

“You should see me dance a reel with Mrs. Major O’Dowd. But I think anybody could dance with you, Miss Osborne, who dance so well.”

“Is the Major’s lady young and beautiful, Captain?” she continued. “Ah, how terrible to be a soldier’s wife! I wonder they can dance in these dreadful times of war! O Captain Dobbin, I tremble sometimes when I think of our dearest George, and the dangers of the poor soldier. Are there many married officers in your regiment?”

“Upon my word, she’s playing her hand rather too openly,” Miss Wirt thought, from the crevice of the doorway.

“One of our young men is just married,” Dobbin said. “It was a very old attachment, and the young couple are as poor as church mice.”

“O, how delightful! How romantic!” Miss Osborne cried.

“The finest young fellow in the regiment,” he continued, encouraged. “Not a braver or handsomer officer in the army; and such a charming wife! How you would like her! You will when you know her, Miss Osborne.”

The young lady thought the actual moment had arrived, and prepared eagerly to listen.

“But it’s not about marriage that I came to speak – that is – no, I mean – my dear Miss Osborne, it’s about our dear friend George,” Dobbin said.

“About George?” she said in a tone so discomfited that Maria and Miss Wirt laughed at the other side of the door, and even Dobbin felt inclined to smile; for he was aware of the state of affairs.

“Yes, about George,” he continued. “There has been a difference between him and Mr. Osborne. I regard him so highly that I hope the quarrel may be settled. We may be ordered abroad at a day’s warning. Who knows what may happen in the campaign? Don’t be agitated, dear Miss Osborne; but those two at least should part friends.”

“There has been no quarrel, Captain Dobbin, except a little scene with Papa,” the lady said. “We are expecting George back daily. What Papa wanted was only for his good. He has only to come back, and all will be well; and dear Miss Swartz, who went away from here in sad anger, I know will forgive him. Woman forgives but too readily, Captain.”

“Such an angel as *you* I am sure would,” Mr. Dobbin said, with atrocious astuteness. “What would you feel, if a man were faithless to you?”

“I should perish – I should take poison – I should pine and die,” Miss cried, who had nevertheless gone through one or two affairs of the heart without any idea of suicide.

“And there are others,” Dobbin continued, “as true as yourself. I’m talking about a poor girl whom George once loved, and who was bred from her childhood to think of nobody but him. I’ve seen her in her poverty uncomplaining, broken-hearted, without a fault. It is of Miss Sedley I speak. Dear Miss Osborne, can your generous heart quarrel with your brother for being faithful to her? Could his own conscience ever forgive him if he deserted her? Be her friend. I am come here charged by George to tell you that he holds his engagement to her as sacred; and to entreat you to be on his side.”

When any strong emotion possessed Mr. Dobbin, he could speak with eloquence, and this made some impression upon the lady.

“Well,” said she, “this is most surprising – most painful – what will Papa say? But at any rate George has found a very brave champion in you, Captain Dobbin. It is of no use, however,” she continued, after a pause; “I feel for poor Miss Sedley. We were always very kind to her here. But Papa will never consent, I am sure. George must give her up, dear Captain Dobbin, indeed he must.”

“Ought a man to give up the woman he loved, just when misfortune befell her?” Dobbin said, holding out his hand. “Dear Miss Osborne, is this the counsel I hear from you? My dear young lady! He must not give her up. Would a man, think you, give *you* up if you were poor?”

This adroit question touched the heart of Miss Jane Osborne. “I don’t know whether we poor girls ought to believe what you men say, Captain,” she said. “I’m afraid you are cruel, cruel deceivers.” Dobbin thought he felt a pressure of her hand, and dropped it in some alarm.

“Deceivers!” said he. “No, dear Miss Osborne, not all men are; your brother is not. George has loved Amelia ever since they were children. Ought he to forsake her? Would you tell him to do so?”

How could Miss Jane answer such a question? She parried it by saying, “Well, if you are not a deceiver, at least you are very romantic,” and Captain William let that pass without challenge.

When he judged that Miss Osborne was sufficiently prepared to hear the whole news, he poured it out. “George was married to Amelia” – and then he related the circumstances of the marriage; how they had gone to Brighton in Jos’s chariot for the honeymoon: and how George counted on his dear kind sisters to befriend him with their father, as true and tender women would do. And so, asking permission (readily granted) to see her again, and rightly guessing that the news would be told in the next five minutes to the other ladies, Captain Dobbin bowed and took his leave.

He was scarcely out of the house, when Miss Maria and Miss Wirt rushed in to Miss Osborne, and learnt the whole wonderful secret from her. To do them justice, neither of the sisters was very much displeased. There is something about a runaway match with which few ladies can be seriously angry, and Amelia rather rose in their estimation. As they prattled about the story, and wondered what Papa would say, there was a loud knock, which made them start. But it was only Mr. Frederick Bullock, who had come to conduct the ladies to a flower-show.

This gentleman was soon told the secret. His amazement was very different to the sentimental wonder of the sisters. Mr. Bullock was a man of the world, and a junior partner of a wealthy firm. He knew what money was: and a delightful throb of expectation lit up his little eyes, and caused him to smile on his Maria, as he thought that by Mr. George’s folly she might be worth thirty thousand pounds more than he had hoped.

“Gad! Jane,” said he, surveying even the elder sister with some interest, “you may be a fifty thousand pounder yet.”

The sisters had never thought of the money up to that moment, but Fred Bullock bantered them with graceful gaiety during their outing; and they had risen in their own esteem by the time they drove back to dinner.

This was only natural. Why, only this morning, when the omnibus I rode on stopped to change horses, I noticed three little children playing in a puddle, very dirty and friendly. Another little one came along. “POLLY,” says she, “YOUR SISTER’S GOT A PENNY.” At which the children got up from the puddle instantly, and ran off to pay their court to Peggy. And as the omnibus drove off I saw Peggy with the infant procession at her tail, marching with great dignity towards a lollipop stall.

CHAPTER 24

In Which Mr. Osborne Takes Down the Family Bible

Dobbin now hastened away to the City to perform the more difficult part of his task. He was nervous at the idea of facing old Osborne, and considered leaving the young ladies to tell the secret. But he had promised to report to George on how the elder Osborne bore the news; so, going to the counting-house in Thames Street, he sent a note to Mr. Osborne begging for a half-hour's conversation about his son's affairs. This was accordingly arranged.

The Captain, expecting a painful and stormy interview, entered Mr. Osborne's offices with a dismal face. As he passed through the outer room, Mr. Chopper winked and nodded from his desk, saying, "You'll find the governor all right," with provoking good humour.

Inside, Osborne rose, shook him heartily by the hand, and said, "How do, my dear boy?" with a cordiality that made poor Dobbin feel doubly guilty. It was he who had brought back George to Amelia: it was he who had encouraged their marriage; and meanwhile George's father was patting him on the shoulder, and calling him "Dobbin, my dear boy."

Osborne believed that Dobbin had come to announce his son's surrender. He had been talking over the likelihood of this with Mr. Chopper just before Dobbin arrived. Both had been expecting George's submission for some days.

"Lord! Chopper, what a marriage we'll have!" Mr. Osborne said to his clerk, jingling the guineas in his great pockets with triumph.

With a knowing air, Osborne regarded Dobbin seated blank and silent opposite him. "What a bumpkin he is for an army Captain," old Osborne thought. "I wonder George hasn't taught him better manners."

At last Dobbin summoned courage to begin. "Sir, I've brought you some very grave news. I have been at the Horse Guards this morning, and there's no doubt that our regiment will be ordered abroad before the week is over. And you know, sir, that we shan't be home again before a tussle which may be fatal to many of us.

"The regiment will do its duty, sir, I daresay," said Osborne.

"The French are very strong, sir," Dobbin went on. "The Russians and Austrians will be a long time bringing their troops down. We shall have the first of the fight, sir; and Boney will take care that it shall be a hard one."

"What are you driving at, Dobbin?" Osborne said, with an uneasy scowl. "I suppose no Briton's afraid of any d___d Frenchman, hey?"

"I only mean that before we go, if there are any differences between you and George – it would be as well, sir, that you should shake hands. Should anything happen to him, I think you would never forgive yourself if you hadn't parted in charity."

As he said this, poor Dobbin blushed, and felt himself a traitor. But for him, perhaps, this severance need never have taken place. He had brought about the marriage – and why? Because he loved Amelia so much that he could not bear to see her unhappy.

"You are a good fellow, William," said Mr. Osborne in a softened voice; "and me and George shouldn't part in anger, that is true. Look here. I've done as much for him as any father ever did. How I've toiled for him, I won't say. Well, I propose to

him such a marriage as a nobleman might be proud of – the only thing in life I ever asked him – and he refuses me. Is the quarrel of *my* making? What do I seek but his good? Nobody can say there's anything selfish in me. I say, here's my hand, and we'll forget and forgive. As for marrying now, it's out of the question. Let him and Miss S. make it up when he comes back a Colonel; for he shall be a Colonel, by G ____, if money can do it. Come and dine in Russell Square today: both of you. You'll find a neck of venison, and no questions asked."

Every moment Osborne continued, Dobbin felt more and more guilty. "Sir," said he, "I fear you deceive yourself. George is much too high-minded a man ever to marry for money. A threat on your part to disinherit him would only be followed by resistance on his."

"Why, hang it, man, you don't call offering him ten thousand a year threatening him?" Mr. Osborne said, still with good humour. "'Gad, if Miss S. will have *me*, I'm her man. I ain't particular about a shade of tawny.'" And the old gentleman gave his coarse laugh.

"You forget, sir, previous engagements into which Captain Osborne had entered."

"What engagements? What the devil do you mean?" Mr. Osborne continued, with gathering wrath. "You don't mean that he's still hankering after that swindling old bankrupt's daughter? You've not come here to make me suppose that he wants to marry *her*. My son and heir marry a beggar's girl out of a gutter! D __ him – if he does, let him buy a broom and sweep a crossing. She was always dangling after him; and I've no doubt she was put on by her old sharper of a father."

"Mr. Sedley was your very good friend, sir," Dobbin interposed, almost pleased at finding himself growing angry. "Time was you called him better names than rogue and swindler. The match was of your making. George had no right to play fast and loose—"

"Fast and loose!" howled out old Osborne. "Fast and loose! Why, hang me, those are the very words he used himself. What, it's you who have been setting him up – is it, Captain? It's you who want to introduce beggars into my family. Thank you for nothing. Marry *her* indeed – why should he? I warrant you she'd go to him fast enough without marriage."

"Sir," said Dobbin, starting up in undisguised anger; "no man shall abuse that lady in my hearing."

"O, you're a-going to call me out, are you? Stop, let me ring the bell for pistols. Mr. George sent you here to insult his father, did he?" Osborne said, pulling at the bell-cord.

"Mr. Osborne," said Dobbin, with a faltering voice, "it's you who are insulting the best creature in the world. You had best spare her, sir, for she's your son's wife."

And with this, feeling that he could say no more, Dobbin went away, Osborne sinking back in his chair with a wild look.

The Captain was scarcely out of the court when Mr. Chopper the chief clerk came rushing hatless after him.

"For God's sake," Mr. Chopper said, "the governor's in a fit. What has Mr. George been doing?"

"He married Miss Sedley five days ago," Dobbin replied. "I was his groomsman, Mr. Chopper, and you must be his friend."

The old clerk shook his head. "The governor will never forgive him."

Dobbin begged Chopper to report any progress to him at his hotel, and walked off moodily westwards, greatly perturbed.

When the Russell Square family came to dinner that evening, they found the father of the house seated in his usual place, but with an air of gloom which kept the whole circle silent. The ladies, and Mr. Bullock who dined with them, felt that Mr. Osborne had heard the news. Mr. Bullock was unusually bland and attentive to Miss Maria and her sister.

Miss Wirt was alone on her side of the table, next to George's empty place. Nothing except Mr. Frederick's whispers, and the clinking of plate and china, interrupted the silence of the meal. The servants went about stealthily doing their duty. Mr. Osborne's share of the venison went away almost untasted, though he drank much, and the butler assiduously filled his glass.

At last, at the end of dinner, his eyes fixed themselves upon the plate laid for George. He pointed to it with his left hand. His daughters looked at him and did not choose to comprehend the signal; nor did the servants at first understand it.

"Take that plate away," he said at last, getting up with an oath, and walking into his own room.

Behind Mr. Osborne's dining-room was his study, which was sacred to the master of the house. Here he would pass a Sunday morning in his crimson leather chair, reading the paper. A couple of glazed book-cases were here, containing standard works in stout gilt bindings. No member of the family dared to touch the books, except upon those rare Sunday evenings when there was no dinner-party. Then the great scarlet Bible and Prayer-book were taken out; and the servants being summoned, Osborne would read the evening service to his family in a loud grating pompous voice.

No member of the household ever entered that room without a certain terror. Here Osborne checked the housekeeper's accounts, and overhauled the butler's cellar-book. Four times a year Miss Wirt entered this apartment to get her salary; and his daughters to receive their quarterly allowance. George as a boy had been horsewhipped in this room many times, his mother sitting sick on the stair listening to the whip. The boy scarcely ever cried under the punishment; the poor woman used to kiss him secretly, and give him money to soothe him when he came out.

There was a picture of the family over the mantelpiece. George was on a pony, the elder sister holding a bunch of flowers, the younger led by her mother's hand; all with red cheeks and red mouths, simpering in the approved family-portrait manner. The mother lay underground now, forgotten – the sisters and brother had a hundred interests of their own, and though familiar, were utterly estranged from each other.

To this study old Osborne retired, greatly to the relief of the party whom he left. When the servants had withdrawn, they began to talk volubly but very low; then they went upstairs, Mr. Bullock accompanying them stealthily on his creaking shoes. He had no heart to sit alone so close to the terrible old gentleman in the study.

An hour after dark, the butler ventured to tap at his door and take him in candles and tea. The master sat in his chair, pretending to read the paper, and when the servant left, Mr. Osborne got up and locked the door after him.

In the large shining mahogany writing-desk Mr. Osborne had a drawer devoted to his son's affairs. Here he kept George's prize copy-books and drawing-books: his first letters in large round-hand sending his love to papa and mamma, and asking for a cake. His dear godpapa Sedley was more than once mentioned in them. Curses

quivered on old Osborne's livid lips, and horrid disappointment writhed in his heart when he came upon that name.

The letters were all labelled and tied with red tape. "From Georgy, requesting 5s., April 23, 18__"; or "Georgy about a pony, October 13" – and so forth. In another packet were "G.'s tailor's bills," his letters from the West Indies, and the newspapers listing his commissions: and a locket containing his hair, which his mother used to wear.

Turning one over after another, the unhappy man passed many hours. His dearest vanities, ambitious hopes, had all been here. What pride he had in his boy! He was the handsomest child ever seen. A royal princess had noticed him, and kissed him, and asked his name in Kew Gardens. Anything that money could buy had been his son's. Had he ever refused a bill of George's? There they were – paid without a word. Many a general in the army couldn't ride the horses he had!

He remembered George on a hundred different days – when he used to come in after dinner as bold as a lord and drink from his father's glass – or on the pony at Brighton, when he cleared the hedge and kept up with the huntsman – the day when he was presented to the Prince Regent. And this, this was the end of all! to marry a bankrupt and fly in the face of duty and fortune! What humiliation and fury: what sickening rage, balked ambition and love; what outraged vanity, tenderness even, had this old man now to suffer!

George's father took all of the documents out of the drawer in which he had kept them so long, and locked them into a writing-box, which he tied, and sealed with his seal. Then he opened the book-case, and took down the great red Bible, shining all over with gold. It had a frontispiece representing Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Here, Osborne had recorded on the fly-leaf the dates of his marriage and his wife's death, and the births and names of his children. Jane came first, then George Sedley Osborne, then Maria Frances. Taking a pen, he carefully obliterated George's name from the page.

Then he took a document out of another drawer, where his own private papers were kept; and having read it, crumpled it up and lit it at one of the candles, and saw it burn away in the grate. It was his will. He sat down and wrote a letter, and rang for his servant, whom he ordered to deliver it in the morning. It was morning already: as he went up to bed, the whole house was alight with the sunshine; and the birds were singing among the fresh green leaves in Russell Square.

Anxious to keep Mr. Osborne's family and dependants in good humour, and to make as many friends as possible for George, on returning to his inn William Dobbin immediately wrote a hospitable invitation to Mr. Chopper, begging him to dine at the Slaughters' the next day.

The invitation, and Mr. Chopper's draft of his acceptance, were shown to Mrs. Chopper that evening. They talked about it with great exultation, and discussed the strange events in the Osborne family. Never had the clerk seen his employer so moved. After Captain Dobbin's departure, he had found his chief black in the face, and all but in a fit. Chopper had been instructed to list all sums paid to Captain Osborne within the last three years.

"And a precious lot of money he has had too," the chief clerk said. The dispute was something about Miss Sedley. Mr. Chopper had no great regard for Miss Sedley. He respected the house of Osborne before all others: and hoped that Captain George would marry a nobleman's daughter.

The clerk slept a great deal sounder than his employer that night; and, cuddling his children after breakfast, he set off in his best suit, promising his admiring wife not to drink too much of Captain Dobbin's port that evening.

Mr. Osborne's face, when he arrived in the City, struck his clerks as peculiarly ghastly and worn. At twelve o'clock Mr. Higgs, his solicitor, called and was closeted with him for more than an hour. At about one Mr. Chopper received a note brought by Captain Dobbin's man, and containing an enclosure for Mr. Osborne, which the clerk went in and delivered. A short time afterwards Mr. Chopper and another clerk were summoned, and requested to witness a paper.

"I've been making a new will," Mr. Osborne said. No conversation passed. Mr. Higgs looked exceedingly grave as he came out; but there were no explanations. It was remarked that Mr. Osborne was surprisingly quiet and gentle all day. He called no man names, and was not heard to swear once. He left work early; and before going away, asked his chief clerk, with some hesitation, if he knew whether Captain Dobbin was in town?

Chopper said he believed he was. Indeed both of them knew it perfectly.

Osborne gave the clerk a letter, and requested him to deliver it into Dobbin's own hands immediately.

"And now, Chopper," said he with a strange look, "my mind will be easy." Then Mr. Frederick Bullock came in, and he and Mr. Osborne walked away together.

The Colonel of the regiment in which Dobbin and Osborne served was an old General who had made his first campaign under Wolfe at Quebec. He was too old and feeble for command; but he took some interest in the regiment of which he was the nominal head, and made certain young officers welcome at his table. Captain Dobbin was an especial favourite of this old General. Dobbin knew his military literature, and could talk about past wars almost as well as the General himself.

On this day, the General summoned Dobbin to breakfast with him, and informed him that a marching order to go to Belgium would come in a day or two, and they would leave before the week was over. The old General hoped that the regiment would prove itself worthy of its reputation on the battle-grounds of the Low Countries.

"And so, my good friend," said the General, taking a pinch of snuff with his trembling old hand, "if you have any Phillis to console, or to bid farewell to papa and mamma, or any will to make, I recommend you to do it without delay." He gave a good-natured nod of his powdered and pigtailed head.

This news made Dobbin grave, and he thought of our friends at Brighton, and then felt ashamed that Amelia was always first in his thoughts before anybody – always at waking and sleeping, and indeed all day long. Returning to his hotel, he sent a brief note to old Mr. Osborne with this information, which might, he hoped, bring about a reconciliation with George.

Dobbin was permitted to repeat the General's information to any officers of the regiment: so he told Ensign Stubble, whom he met at the outfitters', and who went off instantly to purchase a new sword. This young fellow, though only seventeen years of age, and about sixty-five inches high, with a rickety constitution, had undoubted courage; and shouting "Ha, ha!" and stamping his little feet with tremendous energy, he thrust the point at Captain Dobbin, who parried it laughingly with his walking-stick.

Mr. Stubble, as may be supposed from his size, was of the Light Bobs. Ensign Spooney, on the contrary, was a tall youth, and belonged to Captain Dobbin's

Grenadier Company. He tried on a new bearskin cap, under which he looked savage beyond his years. Then these two lads went off to the Slaughters', and sat down and wrote letters to the anxious parents at home – letters full of love and heartiness, and pluck and bad spelling. Ah! there were many anxious hearts beating through England at that time; and tears flowing in many homesteads.

Seeing young Stubble writing at one of the coffee-room tables at the Slaughters', and the tears trickling down his nose (for the youngster was thinking that he might never see his mamma again), Dobbin, who was going to write to George Osborne, relented. "Why should I?" said he. "Let her have this night happy. I'll go and see my parents in the morning, and go down to Brighton myself tomorrow."

So he went up and laid his big hand on young Stubble's shoulder, and told him if he would leave off brandy and water he would be a good soldier, as he was a gentlemanly good-hearted fellow. Young Stubble's eyes brightened up at this, for Dobbin was greatly respected in the regiment, as the best officer and the cleverest man in it.

"Thank you, Dobbin," he said, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles, "I was just – just telling her I would. And, O Sir, she's so dam kind to me."

The two ensigns, the Captain, and Mr. Chopper dined together. Chopper brought the letter from Mr. Osborne, in which the latter presented his compliments to Captain Dobbin, and requested him to forward the enclosed to Captain George Osborne.

Chopper knew nothing further. He described Mr. Osborne's appearance, and his interview with his lawyer, and – especially as the wine circled round – abounded in speculations. But as these grew more vague with every glass, and at length became perfectly unintelligible, Captain Dobbin put his guest into a hackney coach, in a hiccupping state, and swearing that he would be the Captain's friend for ever.

When Captain Dobbin left Miss Osborne, we have said that he asked permission to pay her another visit, and the spinster expected him the next day. Perhaps, had he come, and asked her that question which she was prepared to answer, she would have declared herself as her brother's friend, and a reconciliation might have taken place between George and his angry father. But the Captain never came. He had his own affairs to pursue; his parents to visit and console; and early in the day took his place on the Lightning coach, to go down to his friends at Brighton.

Meanwhile Miss Osborne heard her father give orders that that meddling scoundrel, Captain Dobbin, should never be admitted again; and any private hopes she may have indulged were abruptly brought to an end. As for her father, although he said his mind would be easy, it did not seem to be so yet, and the events of the past two days had visibly shattered him.

CHAPTER 25

In Which All the Principal Personages Think Fit to Leave Brighton

At the Ship Inn, Dobbin assumed a jovial manner. He was trying to hide his private feelings, first upon seeing Mrs. George Osborne a wife, and secondly to mask his apprehension about the effect his dismal news would certainly have upon her.

“It is my opinion, George,” he said, “that Napoleon will be upon us before three weeks are over, and will give the Duke such a dance as shall make the Peninsular War appear mere child’s play. But you need not say that to Mrs. Osborne. Our business in Belgium may turn out to be a mere military occupation with no fighting. Many people think so; and Brussels is full of fine people of fashion.” So it was agreed to represent matters in this harmless light to Amelia.

The hypocritical Dobbin saluted Mrs. George Osborne quite gaily, tried to pay her one or two clumsy compliments on her new position as a bride, and then began talking about Brighton, and the sea-air, and the beauties of the road and the merits of the Lightning coach, all in a manner quite incomprehensible to Amelia, and very amusing to Rebecca, who was watching the Captain, as indeed she watched everyone.

Little Amelia, it must be owned, had rather a low opinion of Captain Dobbin. He lisped; he was very plain, and exceedingly awkward and ungainly. She liked him for his attachment to her husband, and she thought George was most generous in making friends with his brother officer. George had mimicked Dobbin’s lisp many times to her, though to do him justice, he always spoke highly of his friend’s good qualities. In her little day of triumph, and not knowing him intimately yet, she made light of honest William – and he knew her opinion of him quite well, and acquiesced very humbly. A time came when she knew him better, and changed her notions; but that was still distant.

As for Rebecca, within two hours she understood his secret perfectly. She did not like him, and feared him privately; nor did he have much liking for her. He was so honest that her arts did not affect him, and he shrank from her with instinctive repulsion. And, as she was not above jealousy, she disliked him the more for his adoration of Amelia.

Nevertheless, she was outwardly very respectful and cordial towards him. She vowed she should always love him: she remembered him quite well on the Vauxhall night, as she told Amelia archly, and she made a little fun of him when the two ladies went to dress for dinner. Rawdon Crawley paid scarcely any attention to Dobbin. Jos patronised him with much dignity.

When George and Dobbin were alone, Dobbin gave him the letter which he had been charged by Mr. Osborne to deliver to his son.

“It’s not in my father’s handwriting,” said George, looking rather alarmed. Nor was it: the letter was from Mr. Osborne’s lawyer, and went thus:

Bedford Row, May 7, 1815.

Sir,

I am commissioned by Mr. Osborne to inform you that he abides by his determination that in consequence of the marriage which you have been pleased to contract, he ceases to consider you henceforth as a member of his family. This determination is final and irrevocable.

Although the monies expended upon you, and the bills which you have drawn upon him, far exceed the sum to which you are entitled (being the third part of the fortune of your mother, the late Mrs. Osborne); yet I am instructed by Mr. Osborne to say that the sum of 2,000 pounds (being your one-third share of the sum of 6,000 pounds,) shall be paid over to yourself or your agents, by

Your obedient Servt.,

S. Higgs.

P.S.—Mr. Osborne desires me to say that he declines to receive any communications from you on this or any other subject.

“A pretty way you have managed the affair,” said George, looking savagely at Dobbin. “Look there. A beggar because of my d—d sentimentality. Why couldn’t we have waited? A cannonball might have done for me in the war, and may still, and how will Emmy be bettered by being left a beggar’s widow? It was all your doing. You were never easy until you had got me married and ruined. What the deuce am I to do with two thousand pounds? I’ve lost a hundred and forty to Crawley since I’ve been here. A pretty manager of a man’s matters YOU are.”

“There’s no denying that the position is a hard one,” Dobbin replied, after reading the letter. “As you say, it is partly of my making. There are some men who wouldn’t mind changing with you,” he added, with a bitter smile. “How many captains have two thousand pounds, think you? You must live on your pay till your father relents, and if you die, you leave your wife a hundred a year.”

“Do you suppose a man of my habits can live on his pay and a hundred a year?” George cried out in great anger. “You’re a fool to talk so, Dobbin. How the deuce am I to keep up my position in the world upon such a pitiful amount? I wasn’t brought up on porridge, or on potatoes, like old O’Dowd. Do you expect my wife to take in soldiers’ washing, or ride after the regiment in a baggage waggon?”

“Well, well,” said Dobbin, still good-naturedly, “we’ll get her a better conveyance. Be quiet whilst the tempest lasts, George. It won’t be for long. Let your name be mentioned in the Gazette, and the old father will relent.”

“Mentioned in the Gazette!” George answered. “And in what part of it? Among the killed and wounded, very likely.”

“Psha! It will be time enough to cry out when we are hurt,” Dobbin said. “And if anything happens, you know, George, I have got a little, and I am not a marrying man, and I shall not forget my godson in my will,” he added, with a smile. The dispute ended – as did many such conversations between Osborne and his friend – with the former declaring he could not be angry with Dobbin long, and forgiving him very generously after abusing him without cause.

“I say, Becky,” cried Rawdon Crawley, when they were dressing for dinner.

“What?” said Becky, looking over her shoulder in the mirror. She had put on a neat white frock, and with bare shoulders and a little necklace, she looked the image of youthful innocence.

“I say, what’ll Mrs. O. do, when George goes out with the regiment?” Crawley said, performing a duet on his head with two huge hair-brushes, and looking with admiration on his pretty little wife.

“I suppose she’ll cry her eyes out,” Becky answered. “She has been whimpering already at the very notion.”

“YOU don’t care, I suppose?” Rawdon said, half angry at his wife’s lack of feeling.

“You wretch! don’t you know that I intend to go with you?” Becky replied. “Besides, you’re different. You go as General Tufto’s aide-de-camp. We don’t belong to the line.” Her husband, enchanted, stooped down and kissed her.

“Rawdon dear – don’t you think you’d better get that money from Cupid, before he goes?” Becky continued. She called George Osborne Cupid. She had flattered him about his good looks a score of times, watching him play cards in the evenings. She had called him a horrid dissipated wretch, and threatened to tell Emmy of his naughty extravagant habits. She brought his cigar and lit it for him, having practised the manoeuvre in former days upon Rawdon Crawley.

George thought her gay, arch, and delightful. In their drives and dinners, Becky quite outshone poor Emmy, who remained very mute and timid while Mrs. Crawley and her husband rattled away together.

Emmy’s mind somehow misgave her about her friend. Rebecca’s wit, spirits and accomplishments troubled her. They were only a week married, and here was George already bored, and eager for others’ society! She trembled for the future.

How shall I be a companion for him, she thought – so clever and so brilliant, and I so foolish? How noble it was of him to give up everything and marry me! I ought to have refused him. I ought to have stayed at home and taken care of poor Papa.

And her neglect of her parents made her blush with humiliation. Oh! thought she, I have been very wicked and selfish in forcing George to marry me. I’m not worthy of him – he would have been happy without me – and yet – I tried, I tried to give him up.

It is hard when, before seven days of marriage are over, such thoughts as these force themselves on a little bride’s mind. But so it was, and the night before Dobbin arrived – on a fine moonlit night of May, so warm and balmy that the windows were flung open to the balcony, from which George and Mrs. Crawley were gazing upon the calm ocean spread shining before them, while Rawdon and Jos were playing backgammon within – Amelia, couched in a great chair quite neglected, and watching both these parties, felt a bitter despair and remorse.

“Gad, what a fine night, and how bright the moon is!” George said, with a puff of his cigar.

“How delicious cigars smell in the open air! I adore them. Who’d think the moon was two hundred and thirty-six thousand eight hundred and forty-seven miles off?” Becky added, gazing at that orb with a smile. “Isn’t it clever of me to remember that? We learned it at Miss Pinkerton’s! How calm the sea is, and how clear everything. I declare I can almost see the coast of France!

“Do you know what I intend to do one morning?” she went on. “I find I can swim beautifully, and some day, when my Aunt Crawley’s companion – old Briggs, you know, goes out to bathe in her bathing-machine, I shall dive under her awning, and insist on a reconciliation in the water. Isn’t that a stratagem?”

George burst out laughing.

“What’s the row there, you two?” Rawdon shouted out. Amelia retired to her room to whimper in private.

Our history is destined in this chapter to go backwards and forwards in a very irresolute manner, and having conducted our story to tomorrow presently, we shall immediately again step back to yesterday. Although all the little incidents must be heard, yet they will be put off when the great events make their appearance; and surely the ordering of the Guards to Belgium, and the mustering of the allied armies there under the Duke of Wellington – such a dignified circumstance excuses any little

trifling disorder. We have now got our various characters up into their dressing-rooms before dinner, on the day of Dobbin's arrival.

George was too humane or too much occupied with the tie of his neckcloth to tell Amelia all the news which his comrade had brought from London. He came into her room, however, with the attorney's letter, and so solemn an air that his wife, running up to him, besought her dearest George to tell her everything – he was ordered abroad; there would be a battle next week – she knew there would.

Dearest George, with a melancholy shake of the head, said, "No, Emmy; I have had bad news from my father. He refuses any communication with me; he has flung us off; and leaves us to poverty. I can rough it well enough; but you, my dear, how will you bear it?" He handed her the letter.

Amelia listened with tender alarm, and read the letter which George gave her with such a pompous martyr-like air. Her face cleared as she read, however. The idea of sharing poverty with a beloved is far from disagreeable to a warm-hearted woman. The notion was actually pleasant to little Amelia. Then, ashamed of feeling happy, she said, "O, George, how your poor heart must bleed at the idea of being separated from your papa!"

"It does," said George, with an agonised face.

"But he can't be angry with you long," she continued. "Nobody could. He must forgive you, my dearest husband. O, I shall never forgive myself if he does not."

"What vexes me, my poor Emmy, is not my misfortune, but yours," George said. "I don't care for a little poverty; and I think, without vanity, I've talents enough to make my own way."

"That you have," said his wife, who thought that her husband should be made a general instantly.

"But you, my dear girl, how can I bear your being deprived of the comforts you had a right to expect? My dearest girl, in barracks; the wife of a soldier, subject to all sorts of annoyance! It makes me miserable."

Emmy took his hand, and with a radiant smile began to warble that stanza from the favourite song *Wapping Old Stairs* in which the heroine promises her Tom "his trousers to mend, and his grog too to make." "Besides," she said, "isn't two thousand pounds an immense deal of money, George?"

George laughed at her naiveté; and when they went down to dinner, Amelia still singing, she was lighter of mind than she had been for some days.

Thus the meal was an exceedingly brisk and merry one. The excitement of the campaign counteracted in George's mind the depression caused by the letter. Dobbin amused the company with accounts of the army in Belgium, where nothing but fetes and gaiety were going on. He described Mrs. Major O'Dowd packing her own and her Major's wardrobe, and how his best epaulets had been stowed into a tea canister, whilst her famous yellow turban was locked up in the Major's tin hat-case; and he wondered what effect it would have at the military balls at Brussels.

"Brussels!" cried Amelia with a sudden shock. "Is the regiment ordered away, George?" A look of terror came over her face, and she clung to him.

"Don't be afraid, dear," George said good-naturedly; "it is only a twelve hours' passage. You shall go, too, Emmy."

"I intend to go," said Becky. "I'm on the staff. General Tufto is a great flirt of mine. Isn't he, Rawdon?" Rawdon laughed out with his usual roar. William Dobbin flushed quite red.

“She can’t go,” he said; “think of the—” “Of the danger,” he was going to add; but had he not been trying to prove there was none? He became confused and silent.

“I must and will go,” Amelia cried with spirit; and George patted her under the chin, and asked if they ever saw such a termagant of a wife, and agreed that she should bear him company.

“We’ll have Mrs. O’Dowd to chaperone you,” he said. Thus the bitterness of a parting was juggled away. War and danger might not happen for months; and the respite made timid little Amelia happy, which Dobbin owned was very welcome. To be permitted to see her was now the greatest privilege and hope of his life, and he thought secretly how he would watch and protect her. I wouldn’t have let her go if I had been married to her, he thought. But George was the master.

Rebecca at length carried Amelia off from the dinner-table, and left the gentlemen in a highly exhilarated state, drinking and talking very gaily. During the evening Rawdon got a little note from his wife, which, although he burnt it instantly in the candle, we had the good luck to read first.

“Great news,” Rebecca wrote. “Mrs. Bute is gone. Get the money from Cupid tonight, as he’ll be off tomorrow. R.”

So when the men were adjourning to coffee, Rawdon touched Osborne on the elbow, and said gracefully, “I say, Osborne, if quite convenient, I’ll trouble you for that small trifle.” It was not quite convenient, but nevertheless George gave him an instalment in bank-notes, and a bill on his agents for the remaining sum.

George, Jos and Dobbin held a council of war over their cigars, and agreed that they should move back to London in Jos’s carriage. So they set off in state the next day. Amelia had risen very early, and packed her little trunks with alacrity. A dim uneasy jealous feeling about Rebecca filled her mind, although they kissed each other tenderly at parting.

Besides these characters coming and going, we must remember that there were other old friends of ours at Brighton; Miss Crawley and her attendants.

Although Rebecca and her husband were a stone’s throw from her lodgings, the old lady’s door remained pitilessly closed to them. Mrs. Bute Crawley took care that her beloved Matilda should not be agitated by meeting her nephew. When the spinster took her drive, the faithful Mrs. Bute sat beside her in the carriage. When Miss Crawley took the air in a sedan-chair, Mrs. Bute marched on one side, with honest Briggs on the other. And if they met Rawdon and his wife, they passed him by with such a frigid indifference that Rawdon began to despair.

“We might as well be in London as here,” he said, downcast.

“A comfortable inn in Brighton is better than a spunging-house in Chancery Lane,” his wife answered cheerfully. “Think of those two sheriff’s men who watched our lodging for a week. Mr. Jos and Captain Cupid are very stupid companions, but better ones than *those* men, my love.” And she pointed out to her husband the great advantage of meeting Jos and Osborne, who had brought a most timely supply of ready money.

“It will hardly be enough to pay the inn bill,” grumbled the Guardsman.

“Why need we pay it?” said the lady.

Through Rawdon’s valet, who was instructed to treat Miss Crawley’s coachman to drink whenever they met, old Miss Crawley’s movements were well known by our young couple; and Rebecca luckily thought of being unwell, and of calling the same doctor who treated the spinster, so that their information was complete. Nor was kind Miss Briggs their enemy, although forced to adopt a hostile attitude. Indeed, Briggs

and Mrs. Firkin, and the whole of Miss Crawley's household, groaned under the tyranny of the triumphant Mrs. Bute.

That good but imperious woman pushed her advantages too far. She had brought the invalid to such a helpless state that the poor soul yielded entirely to her sister-in-law, and did not dare to complain. Mrs. Bute measured out the wine which Miss Crawley was allowed to take, greatly to the annoyance of Firkin and the butler, who were deprived of control over even the sherry-bottle.

Night, noon and morning Mrs. Bute made her patient swallow abominable medicines. She prescribed the drive in the carriage or the ride in the chair, and ground down the old lady as only a managing, moral woman can. If ever the patient faintly resisted, and pleaded for a bit more dinner or a drop less medicine, her nurse threatened her with instant death, and Miss Crawley gave in.

"She's no spirit left in her," Firkin remarked to Briggs; "she ain't called me a fool these three weeks."

Finally, Mrs. Bute decided to dismiss Firkin, Mr. Bows the butler, and Briggs herself, and to send for her daughters from the Rectory, in readiness to remove the dear invalid to Queen's Crawley – when an accident happened which called her away from these duties.

The Reverend Bute Crawley, her husband, riding home one night, fell and broke his collar-bone. Fever set in, and Mrs. Bute was forced to leave for Hampshire. She promised to return as soon as Bute was better, and departed, leaving the strongest commands with the household.

As soon as she got into the Southampton coach, there was such a jubilee and sense of relief in all Miss Crawley's house, as had not been felt for many a week. Miss Crawley left off her afternoon dose of medicine: Bows opened a bottle of sherry for himself and Mrs. Firkin: that night Miss Crawley and Miss Briggs indulged in a game of piquet instead of a sermon.

Very early in the morning, twice or thrice a week, Miss Briggs used to hire a bathing-machine, and disport in the water in a flannel gown. Rebecca, as we have seen, knew this; and though she did not actually dive under her as she had threatened, she determined to attack Briggs as she came away from her bath.

So getting up early the next morning, Becky was there just as Briggs stepped out of the little caravan on to the shingles. Rebecca wore a kind, tender smile on her face, and was holding out her pretty white hand as Briggs emerged from the box. What could Briggs do but accept the greeting?

"Miss Sh—Mrs. Crawley," she said.

Mrs. Crawley seized her hand, pressed it to her heart, and with a sudden impulse, flung her arms round Briggs, kissing her affectionately.

"Dear, dear friend!" she said; and Miss Briggs began to melt. Rebecca found no difficulty in engaging her in a long conversation.

Everything that had passed since Becky's sudden departure was discussed and described. All Miss Crawley's symptoms, and the details of her treatment, were narrated with that fullness which women delight in. Do ladies ever tire of talking about their illnesses and doctors? Briggs did not; nor did Rebecca tire of listening. She was thankful that the dear kind Briggs had been permitted to remain with her benefactress through her illness. Though she, Rebecca, had seemed to act undutifully by leaving Miss Crawley, yet was not her fault a natural one? Could she help giving her hand to the man who had won her heart?

The sentimental Briggs turned her eyes up to heaven at this appeal, and heaved a sympathetic sigh.

“Can I ever forget her who so befriended me? No, though she has cast me off,” said Becky, “I would devote my life to Miss Crawley. I love and admire her beyond any woman in the world, and I love all those who are faithful to her. I would never have treated Miss Crawley’s faithful friends as that odious designing Mrs. Bute has done. Rawdon has said a hundred times, with tears in his eyes, that he blessed Heaven for sending his dearest Aunty two such admirable nurses as Firkin and Miss Briggs.”

Should the horrible Mrs. Bute succeed as Becky feared (she went on) in banishing everybody, and leaving poor Miss Crawley a victim to the harpies at the Rectory, Briggs should remember that Becky’s humble home was always open to receive her.

“Dear friend,” Becky exclaimed, “not all women are Bute Crawleys! Though I should not complain of her – for do I not owe my dearest Rawdon to her?” And she told Briggs all Mrs. Bute’s conduct at Queen’s Crawley: how she encouraged her attachment by a thousand artifices – so that two innocent people had fallen into her snares, and had loved and married and been ruined through her schemes.

It was all very true. Briggs saw it clearly. Mrs. Bute had made the match between Rawdon and Rebecca. Yet Miss Briggs feared that Miss Crawley’s affections were hopelessly estranged from them, and that the old lady would never forgive her nephew.

Rebecca privately felt that Miss Crawley might still relent in future. Even now, there was only that sickly Pitt Crawley between Rawdon and a baronetcy. After an hour’s chat with Miss Briggs, Rebecca left, quite sure that the conversation would be reported to Miss Crawley.

She returned to her inn, where a farewell breakfast was taking place. Rebecca took a tender, sisterly leave of Amelia; and having hung on her friend’s neck as if they were parting for ever, and waved her handkerchief (which was quite dry) as the carriage drove off, she came back to the breakfast table with a good appetite.

While she was munching prawns, she explained to Rawdon what had occurred between herself and Briggs. Her hopes were high: she made her husband share them. She generally succeeded in making her husband share her opinions.

“Now, sit down at the writing-table and pen a pretty little letter to Miss Crawley, in which you say that you are a good boy, and that sort of thing.”

So Rawdon sat down, and wrote “My dear Aunt;” and then chewed the end of his pen, and looked at his wife. She could not help laughing at his rueful face, and began to dictate a letter.

“Before quitting the country and commencing a campaign which very possibly may be fatal...”

“What?” said Rawdon, rather surprised.

“Which very possibly may be fatal, I have come hither –”

“Why not say come here, Becky?”

“I have come hither,” Rebecca insisted, “to say farewell to my dearest and earliest friend. I beseech you before I go, once more to let me press the hand from which I have received nothing but kindnesses all my life.”

“Kindnesses all my life,” echoed Rawdon, scratching down the words.

“I ask only that we should not part in anger. I have the pride of my family on some points, though not all. I married a painter’s daughter, and am not ashamed of the union.”

“No, run me through if I am!” Rawdon cried.

“You old booby,” Rebecca said, pinching his ear and looking over his work. “Beseech is not spelt with an *a*, and earliest is.” So he altered these words, bowing to her superior knowledge.

“I thought that you were aware of my attachment,” Rebecca continued. “I knew that Mrs. Bute Crawley encouraged it. But I make no reproaches. I am content to abide by what I have done. Leave your property, dear Aunt, as you wish, and I shall never complain. I love you for yourself, and not for money’s sake. I want to be reconciled to you ere I leave England. Let me, let me see you before I go. A few weeks hence it may be too late, and I cannot bear to quit the country without a kind word of farewell from you.

“She won’t recognise my style in that,” said Becky. And this authentic missive was sent to Miss Briggs.

Old Miss Crawley laughed when Briggs handed it over. “We may read it now Mrs. Bute is away,” she said. “Read it to me, Briggs.”

When Briggs had read the letter out, much affected, her patroness laughed more.

“Don’t you see, you goose,” she said, “that Rawdon never wrote a word of it. All his letters are full of bad spelling and bad grammar. It is that little serpent of a governess who rules him.” Miss Crawley thought: they all want me dead, and are hankering for my money.

“I don’t mind seeing Rawdon,” she added, after a pause. “I had just as soon shake hands with him as not. But I decline to receive Mrs. Rawdon.”

Miss Briggs had to be content with this; and thought that the best method of bringing the old lady and her nephew together, was for Rawdon to be waiting on the Cliff when Miss Crawley went out in her sedan-chair.

There they met. Miss Crawley held out a couple of fingers to him, smiling. Rawdon turned scarlet, and wrung Briggs’s hand, so great was his rapture. Perhaps he was touched by the change which the illness of the last weeks had wrought in his aunt.

“The old girl has always been good to me,” he said to his wife afterwards, “and I felt, you know, rather queer, and that sort of thing. I walked beside her chair to her door, and I wanted to go in, only—”

“You *didn’t go in*, Rawdon!” screamed his wife.

“No, my dear; I was afraid to.”

“You fool! you ought to have gone in, and never come out again,” Rebecca said.

“Don’t call me names,” said the big Guardsman sulkily. “Perhaps I *was* a fool, Becky, but you shouldn’t say so.”

“Well, dearest, tomorrow you must go and see her, whether she asks you or no,” Rebecca said, trying to soothe him. He replied that he would do as he liked, and would thank her to keep a civil tongue in her head. Then the wounded husband went away sulkily, and passed the morning at the billiard-room. But soon he was compelled to give in and admit, as usual, to his wife’s superior foresight, when a letter arrived.

Miss Crawley had mused upon the meeting a considerable time.

“Rawdon is getting very fat and old, Briggs,” she said to her companion. “His nose has become red, and he is exceedingly coarse in appearance. His marriage to that woman has hopelessly vulgarised him. Mrs. Bute always said they drank together. He smelt of gin abominably. I noticed it. Didn’t you?”

In vain Briggs said that Mrs. Bute spoke ill of everybody: and was a—

“An artful designing woman? Yes, so she is – but I am certain that his wife has made Rawdon drink.”

“He was very much affected at seeing you, ma’am,” the companion said; “and when you remember that he is going to the field of danger—”

“How much money has he promised you, Briggs?” the old spinster cried out in a nervous rage. “There, now of course you begin to cry. I hate scenes. Stop, sit down and blow your nose, and write a letter to Captain Crawley.”

Poor Briggs went obediently to the writing-desk.

“Begin ‘Dear sir,’ and say you are desired by Miss Crawley – no, by Miss Crawley’s medical man, by Mr. Creamer, to state that my health is so delicate that all strong emotions would be dangerous – and that I must decline any family interviews whatever. And thank him for coming to Brighton, and so forth, and beg him not to stay any longer on my account. You may add that I wish him a bon voyage, and that if he calls upon my lawyer’s in Gray’s Inn Square, he will find there something for him. That will do; that will make him leave Brighton.” Briggs penned this with satisfaction.

“To seize upon me the very day after Mrs. Bute was gone,” the old lady went on; “it was indecent. Briggs, my dear, write to Mrs. Bute Crawley, and say she needn’t come back. No – she shan’t – I won’t be a slave in my own house – and I won’t be starved and choked with poison. They all want to kill me – all!” – and the lonely old woman burst into hysterical tears.

The last scene of her dismal Vanity Fair comedy was fast approaching; the tawdry lamps were going out one by one; and the dark curtain was almost ready to descend.

This letter referring Rawdon to Miss Crawley’s lawyer consoled the dragoon and his wife somewhat. And it had the desired effect, by making Rawdon very eager to get to London.

Out of Jos’s and George Osborne’s losings, he paid his bill at the inn. The landlord does not know to this day how doubtfully his account once stood.

“I should have liked to see the old girl before we went,” Rawdon said. “She looks so altered that I’m sure she can’t last long. I wonder what sort of a cheque I shall have. It can’t be less than two hundred – hey, Becky?”

Because of the repeated visits of the Sheriff’s men, Rawdon and his wife did not go back to their former lodgings in London, but stayed at an inn. Early the next morning, Rebecca went to old Mrs. Sedley’s house at Fulham to look for her dear Amelia and her Brighton friends, who were going off to Chatham to travel to Belgium with the regiment – but kind old Mrs. Sedley was alone and tearful.

Returning from this visit, Rebecca found her husband, who had been off to Gray’s Inn, and had come back furious.

“By Jove, Becky,” said he, “she’s only given me twenty pound!”

Becky burst out laughing.

CHAPTER 26

Between London and Chatham

On arriving in London, George drove to a fine hotel in Cavendish Square, where a suite of splendid rooms, and a magnificently furnished table surrounded by half-a-dozen silent waiters, were ready to receive them. He welcomed Jos and Dobbin in; and Amelia, for the first time, exceedingly shyly, presided at what George called her own table.

George pooh-poohed the wine and bullied the waiters royally, and Jos gobbled the turtle with satisfaction. The splendour and expense of the rooms alarmed Mr. Dobbin, who remonstrated after dinner; but in vain.

“I’ve been accustomed to travel like a gentleman,” George said, “and, damme, my wife shall travel like a lady. She shall want for nothing.” Dobbin did not try and convince him that Amelia’s happiness was not centred in turtle-soup.

After dinner, Amelia timidly expressed a wish to go and see her mamma at Fulham: which permission George granted with some grumbling. And she tripped away to her enormous bedroom, with its funereal bed, and put on her bonnet and shawl, while George stayed drinking claret in the dining-room.

“Aren’t you coming with me, dearest?” she asked him. No; the “dearest” had “business” that night. So Amelia made George a little disappointed curtsy, and went sadly down the great staircase. Captain Dobbin went after her, handed her into the coach, and saw it drive away.

Then Dobbin walked home, thinking that it would be delightful to be in that hackney-coach with Mrs. Osborne. But George went off to the play, to see Mr. Kean perform in *Shylock*.

Mrs. Sedley, you may be sure, clasped her daughter with eager affection, running out of the door to welcome the weeping young bride. The Irish servant-lass rushed up from the kitchen and smiled a “God bless you.” Amelia could hardly walk up the steps into the parlour.

How the floodgates were opened, and mother and daughter wept, embracing each other, may readily be imagined. When don’t ladies weep? Let us leave Amelia and her mamma whispering and laughing and crying in the parlour. Old Mr. Sedley did. He had not flown out to meet his daughter, though he kissed her very warmly when she entered; and after sitting with the mother and daughter for a short time, he wisely left them alone.

Only nine days had passed since Amelia had left that little cottage – yet how far off that time seemed. She could look back to that past life, and contemplate the unmarried girl absorbed in love, receiving parental affection indifferently, as if it were her due.

The thought touched her with shame. Was her prize gained – and the winner still doubtful and unsatisfied? When his hero and heroine marry, the novelist generally drops the curtain, as if the doubts and struggles of life ended: as if wife and husband had nothing to do but to link each other’s arms and wander happily down towards old age. But our little Amelia was just on the bank of her new country, and was already looking anxiously back towards the sad friendly figures waving farewell from the other distant shore.

In honour of her arrival, her mother had planned all sorts of festive entertainment, and after the first joyful talk, left her daughter for a while, and dived down to the kitchen-parlour (occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Clapp, and in the evening, by the Irish servant), to prepare a magnificent tea. All people have their ways of expressing kindness, and Mrs. Sedley thought that a muffin and orange marmalade in a little cut-glass saucer would be peculiarly agreeable to Amelia.

Meanwhile Amelia walked upstairs and found herself in her bedroom, and in that very chair in which she had passed so many bitter hours. She sank back in its arms as if it were an old friend; and fell to thinking over the past. Already to be looking sadly back: always to be pining and in doubt; this was the lot of our poor little creature wandering in the great struggling crowds of Vanity Fair.

She recalled her image of George before marriage. Did she admit to herself how different the real man was from that superb young hero whom she had worshipped? It requires many, many years – and a man must be very bad indeed – before a woman's vanity will allow such a confession. Then Rebecca's twinkling green eyes and baleful smile lighted upon her, and filled her with dismay. So she sat indulging in her usual selfish, listless brooding, just as she had before George renewed his offer of marriage.

She looked at the little white bed, thinking she would like to sleep in it that night, and wake with her mother smiling over her; then she thought with terror of the great funereal pavilion in the vast and dingy bedroom at Cavendish Square. Dear little white bed! how many a night had she wept on its pillow! Were not all her wishes now fulfilled? Kind mother! how patiently she had watched round that bed!

Amelia knelt down by the bedside; and this timorous but loving soul sought for consolation, where as yet, it must be owned, she had seldom looked for it. Love had been her faith until now.

Have we a right to overhear her prayers? These are secrets, and out of the domain of Vanity Fair.

But this may be said, that when tea was announced, Amelia came downstairs a great deal more cheerful; she did not think about George's coldness, or Rebecca's eyes. She kissed her father and mother, and talked to the old gentleman, and made him more merry than he had been for many a day. She sat down at the piano which Dobbin had bought, and sang her father's favourite songs. She pronounced the tea to be excellent, and praised the exquisite taste in which the marmalade was arranged. And in determining to make everybody else happy, she found herself so; and was sound asleep in the great funereal pavilion, and woke up with a smile when George arrived from the theatre.

George had written to his father's lawyers, signifying his royal pleasure that he should visit them the next day. His hotel bill and losses at billiards and cards to Captain Crawley had almost drained his purse, and he needed to infringe upon the two thousand pounds which the attorneys held for him.

He had a perfect belief that his father would soon relent. How could any parent hold out long against such a paragon as he was? If his personal merits did not succeed in mollifying his father, George determined that he would distinguish himself so prodigiously in the coming campaign that the old gentleman must give in. And if not? Bah! the world was before him. His luck might change at cards, and there was a deal of spending in two thousand pounds.

So he sent off Amelia once more in a carriage to her mamma, with orders to the two ladies to purchase everything needful for a lady of fashion who was going on a foreign tour. Bustling about from milliner to linen-draper, Mrs. Sedley was happy for

the first time since their misfortunes. Nor was Amelia above the pleasure of shopping for pretty things; and obedient to her husband's orders, she purchased a quantity of lady's gear with taste and discernment.

She was not much alarmed about the coming war; Bonaparte was to be crushed almost without a struggle. Boats sailed every day to Brussels and Ghent, filled with men and ladies of fashion, as if they were going on a tour. The newspapers laughed at the Corsican upstart. Such a wretch withstand the armies of Europe and the genius of Wellington! Amelia held him in utter contempt; for she took her opinions from the people who surrounded her, being too humble-minded to think for herself.

George meanwhile, with his swaggering martial air, made for Bedford Row, and stalked into the attorney's offices like a lord. He ordered a clerk to inform Mr. Higgs that Captain Osborne was waiting, in a fierce and patronizing way, as if the attorney, who had thrice his brains, fifty times his money, and a thousand times his experience, was a wretched underling who should instantly leave his business to attend on the Captain's pleasure.

He did not see the sneer of contempt which passed around the room as he sat there tapping his boot with his cane, and thinking what miserable poor devils these were. The miserable poor devils knew all about his affairs. They talked about them over their pints of beer at night. What do attorneys' clerks not know in London! Nothing is hidden from them.

Perhaps George expected, when he entered Mr. Higgs's office, to find that gentleman bore some message of conciliation from his father; but he was met by a chilling coolness and indifference on the attorney's part.

"Pray, sit down, sir," said Mr. Higgs, "and I will attend to your little affair in a moment. Mr. Poe, get the release papers, if you please"; and he kept writing.

Poe having produced the papers, his chief calculated the amount of two thousand pounds stock at the rate of the day; and asked Captain Osborne whether he would take the sum in a cheque.

"Give me a cheque, sir," said the Captain surlily. "Damn the shillings and halfpence, sir," he added, as the lawyer was making it out; and, flattering himself that by this magnanimous stroke he had put the old man to the blush, he stalked out of the office with the paper in his pocket.

"That chap will be in gaol in two years," Mr. Higgs said to Mr. Poe.

"He's going it pretty fast," said the clerk. "He's only married a week, and I saw him and some other military chaps handing Mrs. Highflyer to her carriage after the play." And then another case was called, and Mr. George Osborne was dismissed from their memory.

George went next to the bank, Hulker and Bullock, to draw out the two thousand pounds. Frederick Bullock happened to be in the banking-room when George entered. He went pale when he saw the Captain, and slunk back guiltily into the inmost parlour. George was too busy gloating over the money (for he had never had such a sum before) to mark the flight of his sister's suitor.

Fred Bullock later told old Osborne of his son's appearance. "He came in as bold as brass. He has drawn out every shilling. How long will it last such a chap as that?" Old Osborne swore with a great oath that he did not care how soon he spent it. Fred dined every day in Russell Square now.

But George was highly pleased with his day's business. He paid for Amelia's purchases with the splendour of a lord.

CHAPTER 27

In Which Amelia Joins Her Regiment

When Jos's carriage drove Amelia to the inn at Chatham, the first face she recognized was Captain Dobbin's. He had been pacing the street for an hour waiting for his friends' arrival. The Captain, with a crimson sash and sabre, had such a military appearance that Jos was quite proud to claim acquaintance with him, and he hailed him much more cordially than he had in London.

With the Captain was Ensign Stubble; who, as the barouche approached, exclaimed "By Jove! what a pretty girl!"

Indeed, Amelia, dressed in her wedding-pelisse, flushed with travel and the open air, looked so fresh and pretty as fully to justify the Ensign's compliment. Dobbin liked him for making it. As he helped her out of the carriage, Stubble saw what a pretty little hand she gave him, and what a sweet little foot came tripping down the step. He blushed profusely, and made his very best bow; to which Amelia replied with a smile and a curtsy which finished the young Ensign on the spot.

Dobbin took most kindly to Mr. Stubble from that day, and encouraged him to talk about Amelia. It became the fashion, indeed, among all the honest young fellows of the Regiment to admire Mrs. Osborne. Her artless behaviour and modest kindness won their unsophisticated hearts. George, always the champion of his regiment, rose immensely in their opinion by his gallantry in marrying this portionless, pretty young creature.

On her arrival, Amelia, to her surprise, found a letter addressed to her. It was on pink paper, and sealed with a dove and an olive branch, and a profusion of light blue sealing wax, and it was written in a very large female hand.

"It's Peggy O'Dowd's writing," said George, laughing. And indeed it was a note from Mrs. Major O'Dowd, requesting the pleasure of Mrs. Osborne's company that evening at a small party. "You must go," George said. "O'Dowd goes in command of the regiment, and Peggy just goes in command."

But minutes later the door was flung open, and a stout jolly lady in a riding-habit, followed by a couple of officers, entered the room.

"Sure, I couldn't stop till tay-time. Present me, Garge, my dear fellow, to your lady. Madam, I'm deloighted to see ye; and to present to you me husband, Meejor O'Dowd." The jolly lady grasped Amelia's hand very warmly. "You've often heard of me from that husband of yours," she said with vivacity.

"You've often heard of her," echoed her husband, the Major.

Amelia answered, smiling, that she had.

"And small good he's told you of me," Mrs. O'Dowd replied; adding that "George was a wicked divvle."

"This, my dear," said George, "is my very good excellent friend Auralia, otherwise called Peggy."

"Faith, you're right," interposed the Major.

"Lady of Major Michael O'Dowd, of our regiment, and daughter of Fitzjurld Ber'sford de Burgo Malony of Glenmalony, County Kildare."

"And Muryan Squeer, Doblin," said the lady with calm superiority.

"And Muryan Square, sure enough," the Major whispered.

“’Twas there ye coorted me, Meejor dear,” the lady said; and the Major assented to this as to every other thing she said.

Major O’Dowd, who had served his sovereign gallantly in every quarter of the world, was the most modest and meek of little men, totally obedient to his wife. At the mess-table he sat silently, and drank a great deal. When full of liquor, he reeled silently home. When he spoke, it was to agree with everybody; and he passed through life in perfect good-humour. He had an old mother whom he had never disobeyed except when he ran away and enlisted, and when he married that odious Peggy Malony.

Peggy was one of eleven children of the noble house of Glenmalony; her husband was her cousin on her mother’s side. Having tried nine seasons at Dublin and two at Bath without finding a husband, Miss Malony ordered her cousin Mick to marry her when she was about thirty-three; and the honest fellow obeyed.

Before Mrs. O’Dowd was half an hour in Amelia’s (or indeed in anybody’s) company, this amiable lady told all her pedigree to her new friend.

“My dear,” said she, good-naturedly, “I meant for Garge to marry my sister Glorvina; she would have suited him entirely. But as he was engaged to yourself, I’m determined to love you as a sister. Faith, I’m sure you’ll be an addition to our family.”

“Deed and she will,” said O’Dowd, and Amelia felt amused and grateful to be thus suddenly introduced to so many relations.

“We’re all good fellows in this regiment,” the Major’s lady continued. “There’s no quarrelling, bickering, nor slandthering amongst us. We all love each other.”

“Especially Mrs. Magenis,” said George, laughing.

“Mrs. Captain Magenis and me has made up, though her treatment of me would bring me grey hairs.”

“And you with such beautiful black locks, Peggy, my dear,” the Major cried.

“Hould your tongue, Mick, you booby. Them husbands are always in the way, Mrs. Osborne, my dear; and I often tell my Mick he should never open his mouth but to give the word of command, or to put meat and drink into it. Introduce me to your brother now; sure he’s a mighty fine man. Mr. Sedley, sir, I’m deloighted to be made known te ye. I suppose you’ll dine at the mess today.”

“It’s a farewell dinner, my love,” interposed the Major, “but we’ll easy get a card for Mr. Sedley.”

“Ensign Simple, run with Mrs. Major O’Dowd’s compliments to Colonel Tavish, and Captain Osborne has brought his brothernlaw down, and will bring him to the mess at five o’clock.” Before Mrs. O’Dowd’s speech was concluded, the young Ensign was trotting downstairs.

“Obedience is the soul of the army. We will go to our duty while Mrs. O’Dowd will stay and enlighten you, Emmy,” Captain Osborne said; and the two gentlemen walked out with the Major, grinning at each other.

And, now having her new friend to herself, Mrs. O’Dowd poured out such a quantity of information as no poor little woman’s memory could bear. She told Amelia a thousand details of the regimental family.

“Mrs. Heavytop, the Colonel’s wife, died in Jamaica of the yellow fever and a broken heart, for the horrud old Colonel was making sheep’s eyes at a half-caste girl there. Mrs. Magenis, though without education, was a good woman, but she had the divvle’s tongue, and would cheat her own mother at whist. Mrs. Captain Kirk turns up her lobster eyes at the idea of an honest game (although me father and me cousin the Bishop played whist every night of their lives). Mrs. Bunny’s in an interesting

situation – faith, she always is – and has given the Lieutenant seven already. And Ensign Posky’s wife, who joined two months before you, my dear, has quarl’d with Tom Posky a score of times, till you can hear’m all over the barrack; and Tom’s never accounted for his black oi, and she’ll go back to her mother at Richmond.”

Of this incongruous family our astonished Amelia found herself suddenly a member: with Mrs. O’Dowd as an elder sister. She was presented to her other female relations at tea-time; and being quiet, good-natured, and not too handsome, she made an agreeable impression until the arrival of the gentlemen, who all admired her; so that her sisters began, of course, to find fault with her.

“I hope Osborne has sown his wild oats,” said Mrs. Magenis to Mrs. Bunny.

“If a reformed rake makes a good husband, sure she’ll have a fine chance with Garge,” said Mrs. O’Dowd.

But the men rallied round their comrade’s pretty wife, and paid her their court with soldierly gallantry, making her eyes sparkle. George was proud of her popularity, and pleased with the graceful, gay manner with which she received the gentlemen’s attentions. And he – so handsome in his uniform! She felt him watching her, and glowed with pleasure at his kindness.

“I will make all his friends welcome,” she resolved. “I will always try and be gay and good-humoured and make his home happy.”

The regiment indeed adopted her with acclaim. Young Stubble kept whispering, “Jove, isn’t she a pretty gal?” and never took his eyes off her.

As for Captain Dobbin, he never spoke to her the whole evening. But he and Captain Porter took Jos, who was in a very maudlin state, back to the hotel. Having put him into the hands of his servant, Dobbin loitered about, smoking his cigar before the inn door. George had meanwhile brought his wife away from Mrs. O’Dowd’s. Amelia gave Dobbin her hand as she got out of the carriage, and rebuked him smilingly for not having taken any notice of her all night.

The Captain kept smoking, long after everyone had gone to bed. He watched the lights vanish from George’s sitting-room windows, and shine out in the bedroom. It was almost morning when he returned to his own quarters. He could hear the cheering from the ships in the river, where the transports were taking in their cargoes before moving down the Thames.

CHAPTER 28

In Which Amelia Invades the Low Countries

Two days later, to cheering from all the East India ships in the river, and the military on shore, the transports carried the regiment down the Medway and proceeded under convoy to Ostend. Meanwhile Jos had agreed to escort his sister and the Major's wife to Ramsgate, where there were plenty of packet-boats. In one of these, they had a speedy passage to Belgium.

The period of Jos's life which followed was so full of incident that it served him for conversation for many years after, and even the tiger-hunt story was put aside for his stirring narratives about the great campaign of Waterloo. At Chatham he followed the parades and drills assiduously. He listened with attention to the conversation of his brother officers (as he called them in after days), and learned as many military names as he could. He ceased shaving, and began to grow mustachios like a soldier. When they embarked on board the *Lovely Rose*, which was to carry them to Ostend, he wore a braided frock-coat and a foraging cap with a smart gold band. Since he informed everybody on board confidentially that he was going to join the Duke of Wellington's army, folks mistook him for a government courier at the very least.

He suffered hugely on the voyage, as did the ladies; but Amelia was brought to life again at Ostend by the sight of the transports conveying her regiment, which entered the harbour almost at the same time. Jos went in a collapsed state to an inn, while Captain Dobbin escorted the ladies, and then busied himself in finding Jos's carriage and luggage. Mr. Jos's and Osborne's servants had both refused point-blank to cross the water. In their place, Dobbin found a swarthy little Belgian servant called Isidor, who, by his bustling behaviour, and by addressing Mr. Sedley as "My lord," speedily acquired Jos's favour.

This flat, flourishing, easy country never could have looked more prosperous than in that summer of 1815, when its green fields and quiet cities were enlivened by multiple red-coats: when its avenues swarmed with brilliant English carriages: when its great canal-boats, gliding by rich pastures and quaint villages and old chateaux, were crowded with well-to-do English travellers: when the soldier who drank at the village inn, paid his score; and Donald the Highlander, billeted in the Flemish farmhouse, rocked the baby's cradle while Jean and Jeannette were getting in the hay. Meanwhile, Napoleon was preparing for the outbreak which was to drive all these orderly people into fury and bloodshed.

Everybody had such perfect confidence in their leader, the Duke of Wellington, the country seemed in so perfect a state of orderly defence, and the help at hand so near, that alarm was unknown, and our travellers, like all the other English tourists, were entirely at ease. The regiment was taken in canal boats to Bruges and Ghent, from there to march to Brussels. Jos accompanied the ladies in luxurious public boats, whose food and drink was legendary.

Jos was exceedingly comfortable, and Mrs. O'Dowd insisted that he only wanted her sister Glorvina to make his happiness complete. He sat on the cabin roof all day drinking Flemish beer, shouting for Isidor, his servant, and talking gallantly to the ladies.

His courage was prodigious. "Boney attack us!" he cried. "My dear Emmy, don't be frightened. There's no danger. The allies will be in Paris in two months, and I'll

take you to dine in the Palais Royal, by Jove! There are three hundred thousand Rooshians, I tell you, now entering France under Wittgenstein. You don't know military affairs, my dear. I do, and there's no infantry in France can stand against Rooshian infantry, and no French general that can hold a candle to Wittgenstein. Then there are five hundred thousand Austrians within ten marches of the frontier; and the Prooshians. Hey, Mrs. O'Dowd? Do you think our little girl here need be afraid? Isidor, get some more beer."

Having frequently been in the presence of the enemy, or, in other words, faced the ladies at Cheltenham and Bath, Jos had lost a great deal of his timidity, and was now, especially when fortified with liquor, as talkative as might be. He was rather a favourite with the regiment, treating the young officers generously, and amusing them with his military airs. And as there is one well-known regiment which travels with a goat heading the column, whilst another is led by a deer, George said, regarding his brother-in-law, that his regiment marched with an elephant.

But George began to be rather ashamed of some of the company to which he had presented Amelia; and resolved, as he told Dobbin, to exchange into some better regiment soon, and to get his wife away from those damned vulgar women. This idea of being ashamed of one's society is much more common among men than women (except very great ladies of fashion); and Mrs. Amelia had none of her husband's shamefacedness, which he called delicacy. Thus Mrs. O'Dowd's feathers and ornaments gave excruciating agonies to Captain Osborne; whereas Amelia was only amused by the honest lady's eccentricities, and not in the least ashamed of her company.

During their journey, there might have been more instructive, but few more entertaining companions than Mrs. Major O'Dowd.

"Talk about kenal boats; my dear! Ye should see the kenal boats between Dublin and Ballinasloe. It's there the rapid travelling is; and the beautiful cattle. Sure me fawther got a goold medal for a four-year-old heifer, the like of which ye never saw in this country." And Jos owned with a sigh, "that for good streaky beef, there was no country like England."

"Except Ireland, where all your best mate comes from," said the Major's lady. The market at Bruges, compared to Dublin, called down her scorn. "What do they mean by that old gazabo on the top of the market-place?"

The town was full of English soldiery. English bugles woke them in the morning; they went to bed to the note of the British fife and drum: all the country was in arms, with the greatest event of history pending. Yet honest Peggy O'Dowd went on prattling about the horses in the stables at Glenmalony; and Jos Sedley interposed about curry and rice at Dumdum; and Amelia thought about her husband, and how best she should show her love for him; as if these were the great topics of the world.

In general the business of life and living, and the pursuits of pleasure, went on as if there were no enemy ahead. When our travellers arrived at Brussels, they found themselves in one of the gayest and most brilliant little capitals in Europe, with all the Vanity Fair booths laid out in tempting splendour. There was gambling, dancing, feasting, a theatre, beautiful rides; and a rare old city, with wonderful architecture to delight the eyes of little Amelia, who had never before seen a foreign country. For about a fortnight, she was as pleased and happy as any bride.

Every day there was novelty and amusement. There was a church to see, or a picture-gallery – a ride, or an opera. The regimental bands made music at all hours. George, taking his wife to a new jaunt or junket every night, was pleased with himself

as usual, and swore he was becoming quite domesticated. And a jaunt or a junket with *him!* Her little heart beat with joy. Her letters home to her mother were filled with delight and gratitude. Her husband bade her buy laces, millinery, jewels, and gimcracks of all sorts. Oh, he was the best and most generous of men!

The sight of the great company of lords and ladies who thronged the town filled George with intense delight. In public places, they condescended to mingle with the rest of the company. One night George had the honour of dancing with Lady Blanche Thistlewood, Lord Bareacres' daughter; he bustled for ices and refreshments for the two noble ladies; and bragged about the Countess when he got home in a way which his own father could not have surpassed. He called upon the ladies the next day, and rode by their side in the Park. He asked them to a great dinner at a restaurant, and was quite wild with exultation when they agreed to come. Old Bareacres would go for a dinner anywhere.

"I hope there will be no women besides our own party," Lady Bareacres said to her daughter.

"Gracious Heaven, Mamma – you don't suppose the man would bring his wife," shrieked Lady Blanche, who had been languishing in George's arms in the waltz the night before. "The men are bearable, but their women—"

"Just married, dev'lish pretty woman, I hear," the old Earl said.

"Well, my dear Blanche," said the mother, "I suppose, as Papa wants to go, we must; but we needn't know them in England." And so, determined to cut their new friend in Bond Street, these great folks went to eat his dinner at Brussels, condescending to make him pay for their pleasure, and showed their dignity by carefully excluding his wife from the conversation.

This festival, on which George spent a great deal of money, was the dimmest of entertainments to Amelia. She wrote a piteous account to her mamma: how the Countess of Bareacres would not answer when spoken to; how Lady Blanche stared at her with an eye-glass; and what a rage Captain Dobbin was in at their behaviour. Old Mrs. Sedley was mightily pleased nevertheless, and talked about Emmy's friend, the Countess of Bareacres.

Those who know the present Lieutenant-General Sir George Tufto, K.C.B., and have seen him strutting down Pall Mall with a rickety swagger in his high-heeled boots, leering at the bonnets of passers-by – those who know the present Sir George Tufto would hardly recognise the daring Waterloo officer. In 1815 he was stout, light-haired and bald. When he was about seventy his scarce white hair suddenly grew thick and brown and curly, and his whiskers turned purple.

But one day back then, as some of our friends were sauntering in the flower-market of Brussels, an officer rode up; and descending from his horse, selected the very finest bouquet which money could buy. He remounted, giving the nosegay into the charge of his groom, and rode away in great state and self-satisfaction.

"You should see the flowers at Glenmalony," Mrs. O'Dowd was remarking. "We have an acre of hot-houses. Our greeps weighs six pounds a bunch, and upon me honour I think our magnolias is as big as taykettles."

Dobbin fell back in the crowd, crowing and spluttering until he reached a safe distance, when he exploded amongst the astonished market-people with shrieks of yelling laughter.

"Hwhat's that gawky guggling about?" said Mrs. O'Dowd. "Ain't the magnolias at Glenmalony as big as taykettles, O'Dowd?"

“Deed they are, and bigger, Peggy,” the Major said; when the conversation was interrupted in the manner stated by the officer who bought the bouquet.

“Devlsh fine horse – who is it?” George asked.

“It’s General Tufto, who commands a cavalry division,” said the Major.

“General Tufto! Then, my dear, the Crawleys are come.”

Amelia’s heart fell – she knew not why. The sun did not seem to shine so bright, though it was a brilliant sunset, and one of the most beautiful days at the end of May.

CHAPTER 29

Brussels

Mr. Jos had hired a pair of horses for his open carriage, which he drove around Brussels. George and Captain Dobbin would often accompany the carriage on horseback.

When they went to the park, George's remark proved to be correct. In the midst of a troop of horsemen, Rebecca, in the prettiest and tightest of riding-habits, was mounted on a beautiful little Arab, which she rode perfectly (having acquired the art at Queen's Crawley) by the side of the gallant General Tufto.

"Sure it's the Juke himself," cried Mrs. Major O'Dowd; "and that's Lord Uxbridge on the bay. How elegant he looks! Me brother, Molloy Malony, is as like him as two pays."

When Rebecca saw them, she gave Amelia a gracious nod and smile, kissing and shaking her fingers playfully towards the vehicle. Then she resumed her conversation with General Tufto. But Rawdon Crawley came up and shook hands heartily with Amelia, and said to Jos, "Well, old boy, how are you?" and stared at Mrs. O'Dowd until she began to think she had made a conquest of him.

George rode up almost immediately with Dobbin, and met Rawdon's greeting with warmth. The nods between Rawdon and Dobbin were the very faintest specimens of politeness. Crawley told George they were staying with General Tufto at the Hotel du Parc.

"Sorry I hadn't seen you three days ago," George said. "Had a dinner at the Restaurateur's – Lord Bareacres, and the Countess and Lady Blanche were good enough to dine with us – wish we'd had you." They then parted, as Rawdon followed the august squadron away, while George and Dobbin resumed their places beside Amelia's carriage.

"How well the Juke looked," Mrs. O'Dowd remarked. "The Wellesleys and Malonys are related; but, of course, I would never dream of introjuicing myself unless his Grace thought proper to remember our family-tie."

"He's a great soldier," Jos said. "Was there ever a battle like Salamanca? Hey, Dobbin? But he learnt his art in India, my boy! The jungle's the school for a general."

They talked about these great people during the drive and at dinner, until it was time to go to the Opera.

The opera-house was filled with familiar British faces. Mrs. O'Dowd's was not the least splendid outfit, and she had a set of Irish diamonds and Cairngorms which outshone all the decorations in the house, to her thinking. Her presence excruciated Osborne; but she assumed that her young friends were charmed with her company.

"What a comfort it is that Rebecca's come," George said to his wife. "You will have her now for a friend, and we may get rid of this damn'd Irishwoman." Amelia did not answer.

Mrs. O'Dowd did not consider the opera-house to be so fine as the theatre in Fishamble Street, Dublin, nor was French music at all equal, in her opinion, to the Irish melodies. She gave these opinions in a very loud voice, and tossed about a great clattering fan with the most splendid complacency.

"Who is that wonderful woman with Amelia, Rawdon love?" said a lady in a box opposite.

“Near the pretty little woman in white?” asked a middle-aged gentleman seated by her side.

“That pretty woman in white is Amelia, General: you are noticing all the pretty women, you naughty man.”

“Only one, begad, in the world!” said the General, delighted, and the lady gave him a tap with her large bouquet.

“Bedad it’s him,” said Mrs. O’Dowd; “and that’s the very bokay he bought!” When Rebecca kissed her hand to Amelia, Mrs. Major O’D., taking the compliment to herself, returned the salute with a gracious smile, which sent Dobbin shrieking out of the box again.

At the end of the act, George went to pay his respects to Rebecca. He met Crawley in the lobby with two brilliant young gentlemen of fashion, like himself on the staff of a general officer.

“You found my cheque all right at the agent’s?” George said.

“All right, my boy,” Rawdon answered. “Happy to give you your revenge. Governor come round?”

“Not yet,” said George, “but he will; and you know I’ve some private fortune through my mother. Has Aunty relented?”

“Sent me twenty pound, damned old screw. When shall we have a meet? Can you come Tuesday?”

“I will go and pay my respects to your wife,” said George; at which Rawdon said, “Hm, as you please,” looking very glum, and the two young officers exchanged knowing glances. George strutted down to the General’s box.

“Entrez,” said a clear little voice. As he entered Rebecca jumped up, clapped her hands and held them out to him. The General stared at the newcomer with a sulky, inquiring scowl.

“My dear Captain George!” cried little Rebecca in an ecstasy. “General, this is my Captain George of whom you’ve heard me talk.”

“Indeed,” said the General, with a very small bow; “of which regiment?”

George told him; he wished he could have said a crack cavalry corps.

“Come home from the West Indies, I believe. Not seen much service lately. Quartered here, Captain George?” the General went on haughtily.

“Not Captain George, you stupid man; Captain Osborne,” Rebecca said. The General looked savage.

“Captain Osborne, indeed! Any relation to the L ____ Osbornes?”

“We bear the same coat of arms,” George said, as indeed they did; Mr. Osborne having picked the L ____ arms out of the peerage, when he set up his carriage fifteen years before.

The General made no reply. He took up his opera-glass and pretended to look around; but Rebecca saw him shooting bloodshot glances at her and George.

She redoubled in cordiality. “How is dearest Amelia? But I needn’t ask: how pretty she looks! And who is that good-natured looking creature with her – a flame of yours? O, you wicked men! And there is Mr. Sedley eating ice! General, why have we not had any ices?”

“Shall I go and fetch you some?” said the General, bursting with wrath.

“Let me go, I entreat you,” George said.

“No, I will go to Amelia’s box. Give me your arm, Captain George,” and with a nod to the General, she tripped into the lobby. She gave George the queerest, knowingest look, which might have been interpreted as, “Don’t you see what a fool

I'm making of him?" But George did not perceive it. He was thinking of his own plans, and lost in pompous admiration of his own irresistible powers of pleasing.

As soon as they left him, the General uttered curses that I am sure no compositor would venture to print. Amelia's eyes, too, had been fixed anxiously on the pair who had so enraged the jealous General; but when Rebecca entered her box, she flew to her friend with affectionate rapture, and embraced her in full view of the house. Then Mrs. Rawdon saluted Jos kindly: she admired Mrs. O'Dowd's diamonds; she bustled, she chattered, she smiled and smirked, all in full view of the General's jealous opera-glass.

And when the time came for the ballet, she skipped back to her own box, leaning on Captain Dobbin's arm this time.

"What a humbug that woman is!" Dobbin muttered to George on his return. "She writhes and twists about like a snake. All the time she was here, didn't you see, George, how she was acting at the General over the way?"

"Humbug – acting! Hang it, she's the nicest little woman in England," George replied, giving his whiskers a twirl. "You ain't a man of the world, Dobbin. Damme, she's talked over Tufto already. Look how he's laughing now! Gad, what a shoulder she has! Emmy, why didn't you have a bouquet? Everybody has a bouquet."

"Faith, then, why didn't you BOY one?" Mrs. O'Dowd said; and both Amelia and William Dobbin thanked her for this observation. But beyond this neither of the ladies rallied. Amelia was overpowered by the dazzle of her worldly rival. Even the O'Dowd was subdued after Becky's brilliant apparition.

"When do you intend to give up gambling, George, as you have promised many times?" Dobbin said to his friend a few days after this.

"When do you intend to give up sermonising?" was George's reply. "What the deuce are you alarmed about? We play low; I won last night. You don't suppose Crawley cheats?"

"I don't think he could pay if he lost," Dobbin said; but his advice was ignored. Osborne and Crawley were repeatedly together now.

When Amelia and George visited Crawley and his wife at their quarters, which were shared with General Tufto, they nearly had their first quarrel. That is, George scolded his wife violently for her unwillingness to go, and for the high and mighty manner in which she behaved towards Mrs. Crawley; and Amelia did not say one word in reply. With her husband's eye upon her, and Rebecca scanning her, she was, if possible, more awkward on the second visit than the first.

Rebecca was doubly affectionate, of course, and would not take notice of her friend's coolness.

"I think Emmy has become prouder," she said to George. "Upon my word, I thought when we were at Brighton she was jealous of me; and now I suppose she is scandalised because Rawdon and I and the General live together. Why, how could we, with our means, live at all, but for a friend to share expenses? And do you suppose that Rawdon is not big enough to take care of my honour? But I'm very much obliged to Emmy, very," Mrs. Rawdon said.

"Pooh!" answered George, "all women are jealous."

"And all men too. Weren't you jealous of General Tufto, and the General of you, at the Opera? Why, he was ready to eat me for going with you to visit that foolish little wife of yours; as if I care a pin for either of you," Crawley's wife said, with a pert toss of her head. "Will you dine here? The dragon dines with the Commander-in-

Chief. Great news is stirring. They say the French have crossed the frontier. We shall have a quiet dinner.”

George accepted the invitation, although his wife was a little ailing. They were now not quite six weeks married. Another woman was laughing or sneering at her expense, and he was not angry. He was not even angry with himself. Hang it, if a pretty woman *will* throw herself in your way, what can a fellow do? I *am* rather free about women, he had often said, smiling, to Stubble and Spooney at the mess-table.

So Mr. Osborne, convinced that he was a lady-killer, yielded himself up to it complacently. And as Emmy did not plague him with her jealousy, but merely pined over it miserably in secret, he chose to imagine that she did not suspect what all his acquaintance knew – namely, that he was carrying on a desperate flirtation with Mrs. Crawley.

He rode with her whenever she was free. He pretended regimental business to Amelia (who was not in the least deceived), and leaving her to solitude or her brother’s society, passed his evenings in the Crawleys’ company; losing money to the husband and flattering himself that the wife was dying of love for him. This worthy couple never actually conspired – the one to cajole the young gentleman, whilst the other won his money at cards – but they understood each other perfectly, and Rawdon let Osborne come and go with entire good humour.

George and William Dobbin were not so much together as formerly. George avoided him; he did not like those sermons which William inflicted upon him. If his conduct made Captain Dobbin exceedingly grave, of what use was it to tell George that he was as green as a schoolboy? that Rawdon was making a victim of him as he had done of many before? He would not listen. In any case, Dobbin seldom met his old friend. George was in the full career of the pleasures of Vanity Fair.

There never was such a brilliant train of camp-followers as hung round the Duke of Wellington’s army in 1815, and led it dancing and feasting up to the very brink of battle. A certain ball which a noble Duchess gave at Brussels on the 15th of June is historical. All Brussels was excited about it, talking more about the ball than about the nearness of the enemy, and desperate to gain admission.

Jos and Mrs. O’Dowd tried in vain to get tickets; but others were more lucky. Lord Bareacres, in return for the dinner, arranged an invitation card for Captain and Mrs. Osborne; which greatly elated George. Dobbin, who was a friend of the General commanding their division, came laughing to Mrs. Osborne and displayed a similar invitation, which made Jos envious, and made George wonder how the deuce he was getting into society. Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon were invited as friends of General Tufto.

On the night, George, having commanded new ornaments for Amelia, drove to the famous ball, where his wife did not know a soul. After looking about for Lady Bareacres – who cut him, thinking the card was quite enough – and after placing Amelia on a bench, he left her there, thinking he had behaved very handsomely in getting her new clothes, and bringing her to the ball, where she was free to amuse herself as she liked. Her thoughts were not pleasant, and nobody except honest Dobbin came to disturb them.

Whilst her appearance was a failure (as her husband felt with a sort of rage), Mrs. Rawdon Crawley’s was very brilliant. She arrived late. Her face was radiant; her dress perfection. In the midst of the great persons and eye-glasses directed to her, Rebecca was cool and collected. Many of the men she knew already, and the dandies thronged around her. The ladies whispered that Rawdon had run away with her from a convent, and that she was a relation of the Montmorency family. She spoke French so perfectly

that there might be some truth in this report, and it was agreed that her manners were fine.

Fifty would-be partners pressed to have the honour to dance with her. But she said she was engaged, and was going to dance very little; and went at once to the place where Emmy sat quite unnoticed and unhappy.

And so, to finish the poor child, Mrs. Rawdon affectionately greeted her dearest Amelia, and began to patronise her. She found fault with her friend's dress, and her hairdresser, and her shoes. She vowed that it was a delightful ball, with only a very few nobodies in the room, and generally acted like a woman of fashion.

George soon found his way back to Emmy when Rebecca was by her dear friend's side. Becky was just lecturing Mrs. Osborne upon her husband's follies.

"For God's sake, stop him from gambling, my dear," she said, "or he will ruin himself. He and Rawdon are playing at cards every night, and you know he is very poor, and Rawdon will win every shilling from him if he does not take care. Why don't you prevent him, you little careless creature? Why don't you come to us of an evening, instead of moping at home with that Captain Dobbin? I dare say he is *tres aimable*; but how could one love a man with such big feet? Your husband's feet are darlings – here he comes. Where have you been, wretch? Here is Emmy crying her eyes out for you. Are you coming to fetch me for the quadrille?"

And she left her bouquet and shawl by Amelia's side, and tripped off with George to dance. Only women know how to wound so. Our poor Emmy, who had never sneered in her life, was powerless in the hands of her remorseless little enemy.

George danced with Rebecca, while Amelia sat quite unnoticed in her corner; except when Rawdon came up with some words of clumsy conversation: and later, when Captain Dobbin brought her refreshments and sat beside her. He did not like to ask her why she was so sad; but to account for her tears, she told him that Mrs. Crawley had alarmed her by telling her that George was still playing cards.

At last George came back for Rebecca's shawl and flowers. Amelia let her husband come and go without a word, and her head drooped. George went off with the bouquet; but when he gave it to Rebecca, there lay a note coiled like a snake among the flowers.

Rebecca's eye caught it at once. She put out her hand and took the nosegay, and he saw that she was aware of his note. With one of her quick knowing glances, she curtseyed and walked away with her husband. George said nothing in reply to a remark of Crawley's, did not hear it even, his brain was so throbbing with triumph and excitement.

His wife saw only part of the bouquet-scene. It was quite natural that George should come to get Rebecca's scarf and flowers: it was no more than he had done twenty times before; but now it was too much for her.

"William," she said, suddenly clinging to Dobbin, who was near her, "you've always been very kind to me – I'm – I'm not well. Take me home." She did not know she called him by his Christian name. He went away with her quickly, threading through the restless crowd outside, and took her to her lodgings nearby.

George had been angry previously at finding his wife up when he returned from his parties: so she went straight to bed now. She did not sleep; although the din and clatter and galloping of horsemen were incessant, she never heard these noises, having other disturbances to keep her awake.

Meanwhile Osborne, wild with elation, went off to a card-table, and began to bet frantically. He won.

“Everything succeeds with me to-night,” he said. But he got up after a while, pocketing his winnings, and went to a buffet where he drank a good deal of wine.

Here, as he was chatting and laughing loudly with high spirits, Dobbin found him. Dobbin looked as pale and grave as his comrade was flushed and jovial.

“Hullo, Dob! Come and drink, old Dob! The Duke’s wine is famous. Give me some more, sir,” and he held out a trembling glass.

“Come out, George,” said Dobbin gravely; “don’t drink.”

“Drink yourself, and light up your lantern jaws, old boy! Here’s to you.”

Dobbin whispered something, at which George, giving a start and a wild hurra, drained his glass and walked away speedily on his friend’s arm.

“The enemy has passed the Sambre,” William said, “and our left is already engaged. We are to march in three hours.”

Away went George, his nerves quivering with excitement. What were love and intrigue now? He thought about a thousand things in his rapid walk to his quarters – his past life and future chances – the fate which might be before him – the wife, the child perhaps, from whom he might be about to part. Oh, how he wished that night’s work undone! so that with a clear conscience he might say farewell to the tender being by whose love he had set such little store!

He thought over his brief married life. In those few weeks he had frightfully dissipated his little money. How reckless he had been! If anything should happen to him, what was left for her? How unworthy he was of her. Why had he married her? He was not fit for marriage. Why had he disobeyed his father? Hope, remorse, ambition, tenderness, and selfish regret filled his heart.

He sat down and wrote to his father. Dawn faintly streaked the sky as he closed this farewell letter. He sealed it, and kissed it, thinking how he had deserted that generous father, and of the thousand kindnesses of the stern old man.

He had looked into Amelia’s bedroom when he entered; she lay quiet, and seemed asleep. His regimental servant was already making silent preparations for his departure. Should he wake Amelia, he thought, or leave a note for her brother to break the news to her? He went in to look at her once again.

She had been awake when he first entered her room, but had kept her eyes closed. But then this timid little heart had felt more at ease, and she had fallen into a light sleep.

George came in again, entering softly. By the night-lamp he could see her sweet, pale face – the purple eyelids closed; one round arm, smooth and white, lay outside the coverlet. Good God! how pure she was; how gentle, and how friendless! and he, how selfish, brutal, and black with crime! Shame-stricken, he stood at the bed’s foot, and looked at the sleeping girl. God bless her! God bless her! He came to the bedside, and looked at the little soft hand; and he bent over the pillow noiselessly towards the gentle pale face.

Two fair arms closed tenderly round his neck as he stooped down.

“I am awake, George,” the poor child said, with a sob fit to break her little heart. At that moment a bugle began sounding clearly, and was taken up through the town; and amidst the drums of the infantry, and the shrill pipes of the Scotch, the whole city awoke.

CHAPTER 30

“The Girl I Left Behind Me”

We do not claim to rank among the military novelists. Our place is with the non-combatants. When the decks are cleared for action we go below and wait meekly. We shall go no farther with the regiment than to the city gate: and leaving Major O’Dowd there, come back to the Major’s wife.

The Major and his lady, who had not been invited to the ball, had more time to rest.

“It’s my belief, Peggy, my dear,” said he, as he placidly pulled on his nightcap, “that there will be such a ball danced in a day or two as some of ’em has never seen. Call me at half-past one, Peggy dear, and see me things is ready.” With which words, the Major fell asleep.

Mrs. O’Dowd, the good housewife, arrayed in curl papers and a camisole, did not sleep. She packed his travelling bag ready for the march, brushed his cloak and other uniform, and set them out in order; and stowed away in the cloak pockets a package of refreshments, and a flask containing a pint of good Cognac brandy. At half past one she woke up her Major, and had a comfortable cup of coffee prepared for him.

And who will deny that this worthy lady’s preparations showed just as much affection as the tears and hysterics of more sensitive females – and that drinking coffee together while the bugles were sounding and the drums beating, was more useful than any outpouring of sentiment could be? In consequence, the Major appeared on parade quite trim, fresh, and alert, his rosy face giving confidence to the troops. When the regiment marched by the balcony on which this brave woman stood to wave, the officers saluted her; and I daresay she would have liked to lead them personally into action.

On Sundays, and at solemn times, Mrs. O’Dowd used to read with great gravity out of a large volume of her uncle the Dean’s sermons. She now opened this volume; perhaps she did not understand much of what she was reading, but any effort to sleep was in vain. Thus Jack or Donald marches away to glory, stepping out briskly to the tune of “The Girl I Left Behind Me.” It is she who remains and suffers – and has leisure to brood, and remember.

Knowing how useless regrets are, Mrs. Rebecca wisely determined not to give way to sorrow, and bore the parting from her husband with equanimity. Indeed Captain Rawdon was much more affected than she was. She had mastered this rude coarse nature; and he loved and worshipped her. In all his life he had never been so happy as during the past few months. All former delights of turf, mess, hunting-field, and gambling-table – all previous loves and courtships were quite insipid when compared to the matrimonial pleasures he had lately enjoyed. She had known how to divert him; and he had found his house a thousand times more pleasant than any other place. And he cursed his past extravagances and vast debts, which must stand in the way of his wife’s advancement. He had often groaned over these in midnight conversations with Rebecca, although as a bachelor they had never bothered him.

Rebecca always knew how to conjure away these moods of melancholy. “Why, my stupid love,” she would say, “we have not done with your aunt yet. Or when your uncle Bute dies, I have another scheme. The living has always belonged to the younger brother, and why shouldn’t you sell out and go into the Church?”

This idea set Rawdon into roars of laughter, which General Tufto could hear on the first floor above them; and at breakfast Rebecca acted the scene, and preached Rawdon's first sermon, to the General's immense delight.

But these were bygone days. When the news arrived that the troops were to march, Becky rallied Rawdon about his gravity in a manner which rather hurt his feelings.

"It's not that I'm afraid, Becky," he said, with a tremor in his voice. "But if I fall, I leave one and perhaps two behind me whom I should wish to provide for, as I brought 'em into the scrape."

Rebecca tried to soothe his wounded feelings. "Dearest love, do you suppose I feel nothing?" Hastily dashing something from her eyes, she smiled up at her husband.

"Look here," said he. "If I drop, let us see what there is for you. I've had a pretty good run of luck, and here's two hundred and thirty pounds. I have ten Napoleons in my pocket. That is as much as I shall want; for the General pays everything; and if I'm hit, I cost nothing. Don't cry, little woman; I may live to vex you yet. Well, I shan't take either of my horses, but shall ride the General's grey charger: those two ought to fetch you something. Grigg offered ninety for the mare yesterday, and like a fool I wouldn't sell. And there's the little mare the General gave you," Rawdon added. "That dressing-case cost me two hundred – that is, I owe two hundred for it; and the gold tops must be worth forty. My pins, and rings, and watch cost a precious lot of money. Miss Crawley paid a hundred for the ticker. We must make the best of what we've got, Becky, you know."

And so Captain Crawley, who had seldom thought about anything but himself, until Love had mastered him, went through his effects, striving to see how they might be turned into money for his wife, if any accident should befall him. He wrote them down, in his big schoolboy handwriting:

"My double-barril by Manton, 40 guineas; my driving cloak, lined with sable fur, 50 pounds; my duelling pistols in rosewood case (same which I shot Captain Marker), 20 pounds;" and so forth.

Faithful to his plan, the Captain dressed in his oldest uniform, leaving the newest behind. And this famous dandy went off on his campaign with a kit as modest as a sergeant's, and with something like a prayer on his lips for the woman he was leaving. He took her up, and held her in his arms for a minute, tight pressed against his strong-beating heart. His eyes were dim as he put her down and left her. He rode by his General's side, and was silent for some miles.

And Rebecca wisely determined not to give way to sentimentality on her husband's departure. She waved to him from the window, and stood for a moment looking out after he was gone. The cathedral towers were just beginning to blush in the sunrise. There had been no rest for her that night. She was still in her pretty ball-dress, with dark circles round her eyes.

"What a fright I look!" she said, examining herself in the glass. So she took off her pink dress; in doing which a note fell out from her corsage. She picked it up with a smile, and locked it into her dressing-box. Then she went to bed, and slept very comfortably.

The town was quiet when she woke up at ten o'clock. She resumed Rawdon's calculations of the night before; should the worst happen, she was pretty well to do. There were her own trinkets, as well as her husband's things. Rawdon had been

generous to her; and the General, her slave and worshipper, had made her many handsome presents of cashmere shawls and jewellery.

As for “tickers,” as poor Rawdon called watches, her apartments were alive with their clicking. For when she happened to mention one night that hers was not working, next morning there came to her a little watch charmingly set with turquoises, and another covered with pearls. General Tufto had bought one, and Captain Osborne had gallantly presented the other.

So Mrs. Rebecca found she might reckon on six or seven hundred pounds at the very least; and she passed an agreeable morning ordering and locking up her property. In Rawdon’s pocket-book was a draft for twenty pounds on Osborne’s banker. This made her think about Mrs. Osborne.

“I will go and get this cashed,” she said, “and pay a visit afterwards to poor little Emmy.” If this is a novel without a hero, at least let us lay claim to a heroine. No man in the British army, not the great Duke himself, could be more cool or collected in the presence of doubts and difficulties, than this indomitable little woman.

And there was another non-combatant, whose emotions we have a right to know. This was our friend the ex-collector of Boggley Wollah, who was woken by the sounding of the bugles in the early morning, and by Captain Dobbin, who insisted on shaking hands with him before his departure.

“Very kind of you,” said Jos, yawning, and wishing the Captain at the deuce.

“I – I didn’t like to go off without saying good-bye,” Dobbin said in an incoherent manner; “because you know some of us mayn’t come back again, and – that sort of thing, you know.”

“What do you mean?” Jos asked, rubbing his eyes. The Captain did not hear him, for he was looking in the direction of George’s apartments, biting his nails, and showing signs of great inward emotion.

Jos had always had rather a mean opinion of the Captain, and now began to think his courage was failing.

“What can I do for you, Dobbin?” he said, in a sarcastic tone.

“We march in a quarter of an hour,” the Captain replied; “and neither George nor I may ever come back. Mind, do not stir from this town until you see how things go. Stay here and make sure no harm comes to your sister. If anything happens to George, remember she has no-one but you in the world to look to. If it goes wrong with the army, see her safe back to England; and promise me that you will never desert her. I know you won’t. Have you enough gold to return to England in case of a misfortune?”

“Sir,” said Jos, majestically, “when I want money, I know where to ask for it. And as for my sister, you needn’t tell me how I ought to behave to her.”

“You speak like a man of spirit, Jos,” the other answered good-naturedly, “and I am glad that George can leave her in such good hands. So I may give him your word that you will stand by her?”

“Of course, of course,” answered Mr. Jos.

“And you’ll see her safe out of Brussels in the event of a defeat?”

“A defeat! D___ it, sir, it’s impossible. Don’t try and frighten *me*,” the hero cried.

Dobbin’s mind was thus set at ease. But if he expected to get any personal comfort from having one more view of Amelia before marching away, his selfishness was punished. Opposite Jos’s door was that of Amelia’s chamber. The bugles had

wakened everybody: Osborne was coming in and out of the bedroom, with articles for packing.

And then Dobbin got a sight of Amelia's face once more. But what a face! So white, so wild and despair-stricken, that the remembrance of it haunted him afterwards like a crime, and the sight smote him with inexpressible pity.

She was wrapped in a white morning dress, her hair falling on her shoulders, and her large eyes fixed and without light. The poor soul had taken up a sash of George's, and followed him to and fro with it in her hand, looking on mutely as his packing proceeded. She leant on the wall, holding this sash against her bosom, from which the heavy net of crimson dropped like blood. Our gentle-hearted Captain felt a guilty shock as he looked at her.

"Good God," thought he, "and is it this grief I dared to pry into?" And there was no way to soothe her helpless misery. He stood for a moment and looked at her, powerless and torn with pity, as a parent regards an infant in pain.

At last George took Emmy's hand, and led her back into the bedroom. They parted in that moment, and he was gone.

"Thank Heaven that is over," George thought, bounding down the stairs, his sword under his arm, as he ran swiftly to where the regiment was mustering. His pulse was throbbing and his cheeks flushed: the great game of war was going to be played. What a fierce excitement of doubt, hope, and pleasure! What were all the games of chance he had ever played compared to this?

The young man had flung himself into all athletic contests from his boyhood. From the boys' cricket-match to the garrison-races, he had won a hundred triumphs. Strength and courage have always been the theme of bards; and from the story of Troy down to today, poetry has chosen a soldier for a hero. I wonder is it because men are cowards in heart that they admire bravery so much, and place military valour so far beyond every other quality?

So, at the sound of that stirring call to battle, George jumped away from his wife's gentle arms with a feeling of shame that he had stayed there so long. The same eagerness and excitement was felt by his friends, from the stout Major to little Ensign Stubble.

The sun was just rising as the march began. It was a gallant sight – the band led the column, then came the Major in command, riding upon Pyramus; then marched the grenadiers, their Captain at their head. In the centre were the colours, borne by Stubble and the senior Ensigns – then George came marching at the head of his company. He looked up and smiled at Amelia, and passed on; and the sound of the music died away.

CHAPTER 31

In Which Jos Sedley Takes Care of His Sister

Thus Jos Sedley was left in command of the little colony at Brussels, with Amelia, his Belgian servant Isidor, and the maid-of-all-work as a garrison under him. Despite the morning's events, Jos remained for many hours in bed. The sun was high before he appeared in his flowered dressing-gown at breakfast.

Jos was very easy in mind about Osborne's absence. Osborne had openly shown his contempt for him. But Emmy had always been good to him. It was she who ministered to Jos's comforts, who walked or rode with him (as she had too many opportunities of doing, for where was George?) and who interposed her sweet face between his anger and her husband's scorn. She had timidly remonstrated to George on her brother's behalf; but George had said, "I'm an honest man, my dear, so how can I behave respectfully to such a fool as your brother?"

So Jos was pleased George was gone. "He won't be troubling me this morning," he thought, "with his dandified airs and his impudence."

"Put the Captain's hat away," he said to Isidor, the servant.

"Perhaps he won't want it again," replied Isidor. He too hated George, who had treated him with insolence.

"Ask if Madame is coming to breakfast," Mr. Sedley said.

Alas! Madame could not come to breakfast. She was too ill, and in a frightful state, so her maid said. Jos showed his sympathy by pouring Amelia a large cup of tea, and sending her breakfast in.

Isidor had looked on sulkily while Osborne's servant was packing his master's baggage the previous night. He was angry that so many valuables should be removed from under his hands, to fall into other people's possession when the English should be defeated.

Of this defeat he and many others in Brussels had no doubt. They believed that the Emperor would annihilate the Prussian and English armies and march into Brussels within three days. His present masters would be killed, or would fly, and their possessions would lawfully become the property of Monsieur Isidor.

As he helped Jos through his complicated daily toilette, this faithful servant calculated what he should do with the belongings around him. He would give the silver perfume-bottles to a young lady of whom he was fond; and keep the cutlery and the large ruby pin for himself. It would look very smart upon one of the fine frilled shirts, which, along with the gold-laced cap and the frock coat, the Captain's gold-headed cane, and the great double ring with the rubies, would make him a perfect Adonis.

"How those sleeve-buttons will suit me!" thought he, as he fixed a pair on Mr. Sedley's podgy wrists. "And the Captain's boots with brass spurs, *corbleu!* what an effect they will have!" So while Monsieur Isidor was shaving Jos, his imagination was rambling along the Green Avenue, dressed in a frock coat and lace.

Luckily Mr. Joseph Sedley knew nothing of what was passing in his domestic's mind. If we knew what our servants thought of us, it would be unbearable.

Amelia's attendant was less selfish. Few people could come near Amelia without feeling loyalty and affection. When Pauline, the cook and maid, found her silent and haggard by the window, the honest girl took her hand, and said, "See, Madam, is my

man not also in the army?" Then she burst into tears, and Amelia, falling into her arms, did likewise, and so each soothed the other.

That morning Isidor went into the town, to the hotels and lodging-houses around the Parc, and there mingled with other servants, gathering news to bring back to his master. Almost all these servants supported the Emperor, and agreed with him that the English would find their graves in France.

These opinions were brought back to Mr. Sedley. He was told that the Duke of Wellington had gone to try and rally his army, whose advance had been utterly crushed the night before.

"Crushed, pshaw!" said Jos, whose heart was pretty stout at breakfast-time. "The Duke has gone to beat the Emperor as he has beaten all his generals."

"His papers are burned, his things are removed, and his quarters are being got ready for the Duke of Dalmatia," Isidor replied. "I had it from his own *maitre d'hotel*. Milor Duc de Richemont's people are packing up everything. His Grace has fled already, and the Duchess is only waiting to see the plate packed to join the King of France at Ostend."

"The King of France is at Ghent, fellow," replied Jos, pretending incredulity.

"He fled last night to Bruges, and embarks today from Ostend. The Duc de Berri is taken prisoner. Those who wish to be safe had better go soon, for the dykes will be opened tomorrow, and who can fly when the whole country is under water?"

"Nonsense, sir, we are three to one against Boney's force," Mr. Sedley objected; "and the Austrians and the Russians are on the march. He shall be crushed."

"The Prussians were three to one at Jena, and he took their kingdom in a week. They were six to one at Montmirail, and he scattered them like sheep. No mercy will be shown to the English."

Jos, if not seriously alarmed, was at least considerably disturbed.

"Give me my coat, sir," said he, "and follow me. I will go myself and learn the truth of these reports."

Isidor was furious as Jos put on the braided frock.

"Milor had better not wear that military coat," said he; "the Frenchmen have sworn not to show mercy to a single British soldier."

"Silence, sirrah!" said Jos resolutely, just as Mrs. Rawdon Crawley entered without ringing. She had come to visit Amelia.

Rebecca was dressed very neatly, as usual: and her pink smiling cheeks were pleasant to look at on a day when everybody else's face wore anxiety and gloom. She laughed at Jos's struggles to thrust himself into the coat.

"Are you preparing to join the army, Mr. Joseph?" she said. "Is there to be nobody left in Brussels to protect us poor women?"

Jos succeeded in plunging into the coat, and stuttered excuses to his fair visitor. "How was she after the events of the morning?" Monsieur Isidor disappeared.

"How good of you to ask," said she, pressing one of his hands in her own. "How cool and collected you look when everybody else is frightened! How is dear little Emmy? It must have been an awful parting."

"Tremendous," Jos said.

"You men can bear anything," she replied. "Danger is nothing to you. Admit that you were going to join the army and leave us to our fate. I know you were – I was so frightened, when I thought of it (for I do sometimes think of you when I am alone, Mr. Joseph), that I ran here immediately to beg you not to fly from us."

This speech meant, "My dear sir, should a retreat be necessary, you have a very comfortable carriage, in which I propose to take a seat." I don't know whether Jos understood this. But he was deeply mortified by her having ignored him at Brussels. He had scarcely ever been invited to Rebecca's parties.

"Ah!" he thought, "now that she wants me she comes to me. When there is nobody else in the way she can think about Joseph Sedley!" But he also felt flattered at Rebecca's talk of his courage.

Blushing, he put on an air of importance. "I should like to see the action," he said. "Every man of spirit would, you know. I've seen a little service in India, but nothing on this grand scale."

"You men would sacrifice anything for a pleasure," Rebecca answered. "Captain Crawley left me this morning as gay as if he were going to a hunting party. What do any of you care for the agonies of a poor forsaken woman? Oh! dear Mr. Sedley, I have come to you for comfort. I have been praying all morning. I tremble at the frightful danger into which our brave troops are rushing. And I come here for shelter, and find my last remaining friends bent upon plunging into the dreadful scene!"

"My dear madam," Jos replied, now quite soothed, "don't be alarmed. I only said I should like to go – but my duty keeps me here: I can't leave poor Amelia."

"Good noble brother!" Rebecca said, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "You have got a heart. I thought you had not."

"Upon my honour!" Jos said. "You do me injustice, my dear Mrs. Crawley."

"Your heart is true to your sister. But I remember two years ago – when it was false to me!" Rebecca said, turning away to the window.

Jos blushed violently. His heart began to thump. He recalled the days when he had fled from her, and the passion which had once inflamed him.

"I know you think me ungrateful," Rebecca continued, in a low tremulous voice. "Your coldness, your averted looks, proved it to me. But there were reasons why I should avoid you. Do you think my husband was inclined to welcome you? The only unkind words I have ever had from him have been about you – and most cruel words they were."

"Good gracious! but I have done nothing," said Jos in a flurry of pleasure and perplexity.

"Is jealousy nothing?" said Rebecca. "He makes me miserable about you. And whatever it might have been once – my heart is all his. I am innocent now. Am I not, Mr. Sedley?"

Jos's blood tingled with delight. One or two knowing tender glances of her eyes, and his heart was inflamed again and his doubts forgotten. Have not wiser men been fooled by women? "If the worst comes to the worst," Becky thought, "I have a seat in his barouche."

There is no knowing what declarations of love Mr. Joseph might have begun, if Isidor the valet had not reappeared. Jos almost choked with the emotion that he had to restrain.

Rebecca thought that it was time for her to comfort her dearest Amelia.

"Au revoir," she said, kissing her hand to Jos, and tapped gently at Amelia's door. As she entered and closed the door on herself, he sank down in a chair, and sighed.

"That coat is very tight for Milor," Isidor said; but his master heard him not. His thoughts were glowing in contemplation of the enchanting Rebecca: then shrinking

guiltily before the vision of the jealous Rawdon Crawley, with his fierce mustachios, and his terrible duelling pistols.

Rebecca's appearance struck Amelia with terror. It recalled her to the memory of yesterday. In her fears she had forgotten Rebecca and her jealousy. How long had that poor girl been on her knees! what hours of speechless prayer had she passed!

After the first terror in Amelia's mind – when Rebecca came rustling in her silks and brilliant ornaments to embrace her – a feeling of anger followed, and from being deadly pale, she flushed red, and returned Rebecca's look with a steadiness which surprised and somewhat abashed her rival.

"Dearest Amelia, you are very unwell," the visitor said, putting forth her hand. "What is it?"

Amelia drew back her hand, and trembled all over.

"Why are you here, Rebecca?" she said. Her solemn glances troubled her visitor.

"She must have seen him give me the letter at the ball," Rebecca thought. "Don't be agitated, dear Amelia," she said. "I came only to see if you were well."

"Are you well?" said Amelia. "I dare say you are. You don't love your husband. You would not be here if you did. Tell me, Rebecca, did I ever do you anything but kindness?"

"Indeed, Amelia, no."

"When you were poor, who befriended you? Was I not a sister to you? You saw us all in happier days before he married me. I was all in all then to him; or would he have given up his fortune and his family as he nobly did to make me happy? Why did you come between my love and me? Why did you take my darling's heart from me – my own husband? Do you think you could love him as I did? His love was everything to me. You knew it, and wanted to rob me of it. For shame, Rebecca – false friend and false wife."

"Amelia, I protest before God, I have done my husband no wrong," Rebecca said.

"Have you done me no wrong, Rebecca? You did not succeed, but you tried."

She knows nothing, Rebecca thought.

"He came back to me," said Amelia. "I knew he would. I knew that no flattery could keep him from me long. I knew he would come. I prayed that he should." The poor girl spoke with a spirit which Rebecca had never before seen in her.

"But what have I done to you," Amelia continued, "that you should try and take him from me? I had him for only six weeks. From the very first day of our marriage, you blighted it. Now he is gone, are you come to see how unhappy I am? You might have spared me today."

"I – I never came here," interposed Rebecca.

"No. You didn't come. You took him away. Are you come to fetch him from me?" she continued in a wilder tone. "He was here, but he is gone now. There on that very sofa he sat. Don't touch it. I was on his knee, and my arms were round his neck, and we prayed. Yes, he was here: and they took him away, but he promised to come back."

"He will come back, my dear," said Rebecca, touched in spite of herself.

"Look," said Amelia, "this is his sash – isn't it a pretty colour?" and she took up the fringe and kissed it. She had tied it round her waist earlier. She had forgotten her anger, her jealousy, the very presence of her rival seemingly. For she walked silently and almost smiling towards the bed, and began to smooth down George's pillow.

Rebecca too walked silently away.

“How is Amelia?” asked Jos.

“There should be somebody with her,” said Rebecca. “I think she is very unwell.” She went away gravely, refusing Mr. Sedley’s entreaties to stay to dinner.

Rebecca was of a good-natured and obliging disposition; and she liked Amelia rather than otherwise. Meeting Mrs. O’Dowd in the Parc, Rebecca accosted her, to her surprise; and telling her that poor little Mrs. Osborne was almost mad with grief, she sent off the Irishwoman to see if she could console her. Becky watched her go with a smile.

“I’m glad to see ye so cheerful,” thought Peggy. “It’s not *you* that will cry your eyes out.” And with this she hastened to Mrs. Osborne’s lodgings, where she found Amelia almost crazy with grief.

“You must bear up, Amelia, dear,” the Major’s wife said kindly, “for he mustn’t find you ill when he sends for you after the victory. You’re not the only woman in the hands of God this day.”

“I know that. I am very wicked, very weak,” Amelia said. However, she was the better for this company.

Their hearts were with the column as it marched farther and farther away. Dreadful anguish – fears and griefs unspeakable – followed the regiment. War taxes both alike, and takes the blood of the men, and the tears of the women.

At half-past two, the dinner-hour arrived. Warriors may fight and perish, but Jos must dine. He came into Amelia’s room to coax her to eat.

“The soup is very good. Do try, Emmy,” he said, and kissed her hand. Except at her wedding, he had not done that for years.

“You are very kind, Joseph,” she said, “but, if you please, I will stay in my room today.”

However, Mrs. O’Dowd thought she would keep Mr. Jos company; so the two sat down to their meal. Jos’s spirits rose with his food.

“We’ll drink to O’Dowd and the brave soldiers,” said he, bowing gallantly. “Fill Mrs. O’Dowd’s glass, Isidor.”

But Isidor started, and the Major’s wife laid down her knife and fork. The windows were open, and a dull distant sound came from the south.

“What is it?” said Jos. “Why don’t you pour, you rascal?”

“Cest le feu!” said Isidor, running to the balcony.

“God defend us; it’s cannon!” Mrs. O’Dowd cried, following him to the window. A thousand anxious faces might have been seen looking from other casements. And presently it seemed as if the whole population of the city rushed into the streets.

CHAPTER 32

In Which Jos Takes Flight, and the War Is Brought to a Close

Crowds hurried to the Namur gate in alarm. Each man asked his neighbour for news; and even great English lords and ladies condescended to speak to strangers. The friends of the French were wild with excitement, prophesying the Emperor's triumph. Women rushed to the churches, and knelt and prayed on the steps.

The dull sound of the cannon went on rolling, rolling. Presently carriages with travellers began to leave the town. The prophecies of the French partisans began to pass for facts.

"He has cut the armies in two," it was said. "He is marching on Brussels. He will overpower the English, and be here tonight."

"He will overpower the English," shrieked Isidor to his master, "and will be here tonight."

Jos's face grew pale; all his champagne brought no courage. Before sunset he was worked up to such a pitch of nervousness that Isidor now felt sure of winning the spoils of his possessions.

After hearing the firing, the stout Major's wife ran in to console Amelia, and passed five hours by her friend's side; sometimes talking cheerfully, oftener in silence and terrified mental supplication.

"I never let go her hand once," said she afterwards, "until after sunset, when the firing was over."

When the noise stopped, Mrs. O'Dowd came into the parlour, where Jos sat with two emptied flasks and courage entirely gone. Once or twice he had ventured into his sister's bedroom, and went away without saying anything. He was ashamed to tell her that he wanted to fly.

But when Mrs. O'Dowd appeared in the dining-room, where he sat in the twilight, he began to open his mind to her.

"Mrs. O'Dowd," he said, "hadn't you better get Amelia ready?"

"Are you going to take her out for a walk?" said the Major's lady; "sure she's too weak."

"I've ordered the carriage," he said, "and – and post-horses; Isidor is gone for them."

"What do you want with driving tonight?" answered the lady. "I've just got her to lie down."

"Get her up," said Jos; "she must get up, I say!" He stamped his foot. "The horses are ordered. It's all over, and—"

"And what?" asked Mrs. O'Dowd.

"I'm off for Ghent. Everybody is going; there's a place for you! We shall start in half-an-hour."

The Major's wife looked at him with infinite scorn. "I don't move till O'Dowd gives me the route," said she. "You may go if you like, Mr. Sedley; but, faith, Amelia and I stop here."

"She *shall* go," said Jos, with another stamp of his foot. Mrs. O'Dowd put herself with arms akimbo before the bedroom door.

“Is it her mother you’re going to take her to?” she said; “or do you want to go to Mamma yourself, Mr. Sedley? A pleasant journey to ye, sir; and take my advice, and shave off them mustachios, or they’ll bring you into mischief.”

“D__n!” yelled out Jos in fear, rage, and mortification; and Isidor came in, swearing too. All the horses were already gone. Jos was not the only man in Brussels seized with panic that day.

But Jos’s fears were destined to increase to an almost frantic pitch before the night was over. It has been mentioned how Pauline, the cook, had a lover in the ranks of the army that had gone to meet Napoleon. This man, Regulus, was a Belgian hussar. As far as his regiment was concerned, this campaign was over now. They had marched under the Prince of Orange, looking as gallant a body of men as ever trumpet sounded for.

When Ney dashed upon the allied troops, before the arrival of the British army, the Belgian squadrons retreated before the French, and were dislodged from their posts. Their movements were only checked by the advance of the British in their rear. Thus forced to halt, the enemy’s cavalry came to close quarters with these brave Belgians; who, preferring to meet the British rather than the French, turned tail and rode through the English regiments behind them, and scattered in all directions.

The Belgian regiment did not exist any more. It was nowhere. Regulus found himself galloping many miles from the battlefield, entirely alone; and naturally he flew to that kitchen where Pauline had so often welcomed him.

At ten o’clock the clinking of a sabre might have been heard, and a knock at the kitchen door; and poor Pauline, come back from church, almost fainted with terror as she saw her haggard hussar. She stifled her scream, and leading her hero into the kitchen, gave him beer, and choice leftovers from dinner. Between mouthfuls, he told his tale of disaster.

His regiment had performed prodigies of courage, he said, and had withstood for a while the whole French army. But they were overwhelmed at last, as was the British army. Ney destroyed each English regiment, and the Belgians interposed in vain. It was a debacle. He sought to drown his sorrow in floods of beer.

Isidor came in, heard the conversation and rushed out to inform his master.

“It is all over,” he shrieked. “The British army is in full flight; there is only one man escaped, and he is in the kitchen now – come and hear him.”

So Jos tottered into that room where Regulus sat clinging to his flagon of beer, and in ungrammatical French begged the hussar to tell his tale. The disasters deepened as Regulus spoke. He was the only man of his regiment not slain. He had seen the Duke of Brunswick fall, the black hussars fly, the Scots pounded down by the cannon.

“And the ___th regiment?” gasped Jos.

“Cut in pieces,” said the hussar.

Pauline cried out, “O my poor mistress,” went off into hysterics, and filled the house with her screams.

Wild with terror, Mr. Sedley knew not where to seek for safety. He rushed back to the sitting-room, and resolved to go into the street. So, seizing a candle, he put on his gold-laced cap: such is the force of habit, that even in his terror he began mechanically to twiddle with his hair, and arrange his hat. Then he looked amazed at the pale face in the mirror, and his freshly-grown mustachios.

They will mistake me for a military man, thought he, remembering Isidor’s warning that the British army would be massacred; and staggering back to his bedchamber, he began wildly pulling at the bell.

Isidor answered. Jos had sunk in a chair – he had torn off his neckcloths, and turned down his collars.

“Coupez-moi, Isidor,” shouted he; “vite! Coupez-moi!”

Isidor thought for a moment he had gone mad, and wished his throat to be cut.

“Les moustaches,” gasped Joe; “les moustaches – coupy, rasy, vite!”

Isidor swept off the mustachios in no time with the razor, and heard with delight his master’s orders that he should fetch a plain coat and hat.

“Ne porty ploo – habit militair – bonny a voo,” were Jos’s words; and the military coat and cap were at last Isidor’s property.

Jos donned a plain black coat and waistcoat, a large white neckcloth, and a beaver hat. You would have fancied he was a parson as he plunged into the street.

Although Regulus had vowed that he was the only man of his regiment left alive, it appeared that this was incorrect; many scores of his comrades had found their way back to Brussels, and filled the whole town with the idea of the allies’ defeat. The arrival of the French was expected hourly; preparations for flight went on everywhere.

No horses! thought Jos, in terror. He made Isidor inquire, and his heart sank when none were found. Should he take the journey on foot? Even fear could not make that ponderous body so active.

Jos wandered irresolutely through the Parc, with crowds of other people. Some were happier than himself, having discovered a team of horses, and rattling through the streets; others, like him, could not leave. Amongst these, Jos noticed Lady Bareacres and her daughter, who sat in their carriage ready, but with no horses to drive them away.

Rebecca Crawley occupied rooms in their hotel; and had previously had hostile meetings with the Bareacres family. My Lady Bareacres cut her on the stairs, shocked at her familiarity with General Tufto. The Lady Blanche avoided her as if she were an infectious disease. Only the Earl himself kept up a sly occasional acquaintance with her, out of hearing of his ladies.

Rebecca had her revenge now upon these enemies. It became known in the hotel that Captain Crawley’s horses had been left behind; and when the panic began, Lady Bareacres condescended to send her maid to the Captain’s wife with her Ladyship’s compliments, and a desire to know the price of Mrs. Crawley’s horses. Mrs. Crawley returned a note saying that it was not her custom to bargain with ladies’ maids.

This curt reply brought the Earl in person to Becky’s apartment; but he had no more success. So the Countess herself actually came to see Mrs. Crawley. She begged her to name her own price; she even offered to invite Becky to Bareacres House. Mrs. Crawley sneered at her.

“I don’t want to be waited on by bailiffs in livery,” she said, “and you will probably never get back – at least not you and your diamonds together. The French will have those. They will be here in two hours, and I shall be half way to Ghent by then. I would not sell you my horses, no, not for the largest diamonds that your Ladyship wore at the ball.”

Lady Bareacres trembled with rage and terror. The diamonds were sewed into her clothing, and my Lord’s padding and boots. “Woman, I *will* have the horses,” she said. Rebecca laughed in her face. The infuriated Countess went and sat in her carriage; her servants and husband were sent once more through the town to look for horses.

Rebecca had the pleasure of seeing her Ladyship in the horseless carriage, and loudly bewailed the Countess’s perplexities to all around.

“Not to be able to get horses!” she said loudly, “and to have all those diamonds sewed in the carriage cushions! What a prize it will be for the French when they come! – the diamonds, I mean, not the lady.” Lady Bareacres could have shot her from the carriage window.

It was while enjoying her enemy’s humiliation that Rebecca caught sight of Jos coming towards her. That frightened, fat face told his secret. He too was looking for horses.

“*He* shall buy them,” thought Rebecca, “and I’ll ride the mare.”

Jos walked up and put the question for the hundredth time, “Did she know where horses were to be had?”

“What, *you* fly?” laughed Rebecca. “I thought you were the champion of all the ladies, Mr. Sedley.”

“I – I’m not a military man.”

“And who is to protect poor little Amelia?” asked Rebecca. “You surely would not desert her?”

“What good can I do her, if the enemy arrive?” Jos answered. “They’ll spare the women; but my man tells me that they’ll give no mercy to the men – the dastardly cowards. Besides, she shan’t be deserted. There is a seat for her in my carriage, and one for you, dear Mrs. Crawley, if you will come; and if we can get horses—”

“I have two to sell,” she said.

Jos could have flung himself into her arms. “Get the carriage, Isidor,” he cried.

“My horses never were in harness,” she added. “Bullfinch would kick the carriage to pieces, but he is quiet to ride, and as fast as a hare.”

“Do you think he is up to my weight?”

Rebecca asked him to come into her room to conclude the bargain. He had seldom spent a half-hour which cost him so much money. Rebecca put upon her horses a price so prodigious as to make even Jos draw back. She said Lord Bareacres below would give her the same money – and though she loved the Sedley family, her dear Mr. Joseph knew that poor people must live. Nobody could be more affectionate, but more firm about the business.

Jos ended by agreeing. The sum was so large that he was obliged to ask for time. It was a small fortune to Rebecca, who rapidly calculated that with this sum, and the sale of Rawdon’s effects, and her widow’s pension should he fall, she would now be absolutely independent.

Once or twice that day she had herself thought about flying. But she reasoned, “Suppose the French do come, what can they do to a poor officer’s widow? We shall be allowed to go home quietly, or I may live pleasantly abroad with a snug little income.”

Meanwhile Jos and Isidor went off to the stables. Jos bade his man saddle the horses at once; he would ride away that very night. He left the valet getting the horses ready, and went home to prepare for his departure. It must be secret. He would go by the back door. He did not care to face Mrs. O’Dowd and Amelia, and confess that he was about to run.

By this time, it was almost morning. But there was no rest for the city; the people were up, the lights in the houses flamed, and the streets were busy. Rumours went still from mouth to mouth. One report said that the Prussians had been utterly defeated; another that the English had been conquered: a third that they had held their ground.

This last rumour gradually got strength. No Frenchmen had appeared. Stragglers had come in from the army bringing reports more and more favourable: and at last an

aide-de-camp reached Brussels with despatches for the Commandant, who announced the success of the allies at Quatre Bras, and the entire repulse of the French after a six hours' battle.

The aide-de-camp must have arrived while Jos and Rebecca were making their bargain together. When he reached his hotel, he found a score of inhabitants discussing the news; there was no doubt as to its truth. He went up to tell it to the ladies under his charge. He did not think it was necessary to inform them how he had intended to leave them, how he had bought horses, or the price he had paid.

But success or defeat was a minor matter to them, who only thought of the safety of those they loved. Amelia, at the news of the victory, became even more agitated. She begged her brother in tears to take her to the army; and the poor girl raved and ran hither and thither in hysteric insanity. No man writhing in pain on the battlefield fifteen miles off suffered more keenly than this poor harmless victim of the war.

Jos could not bear the sight of her pain. He left his sister in the care of her female companion, and descended once more to the hotel doorway, where everybody still lingered, waiting for more news.

It grew to be broad daylight. Wagons and country carts laden with wounded came rolling into the town; ghastly groans came from them, and haggard faces looked up sadly from out of the straw. Jos watched one pass: the moans within were frightful – the wearied horses could hardly pull the cart.

“Stop! stop!” a feeble voice cried from the straw, and the carriage stopped opposite the hotel.

“It is George, I know it is!” cried Amelia, rushing to the balcony, with a pale face. It was not George, but it was the next best thing: it was news of him.

It was poor Tom Stubble, who had marched out of Brussels so gallantly twenty-four hours before, bearing the regimental colours, which he had defended very bravely. A French lancer had speared him: he fell, still holding his flag. After the battle, a place had been found for the poor boy in a cart, and he was brought back to Brussels.

“Mr. Sedley, Mr. Sedley!” cried the boy faintly, and Jos came up almost frightened.

Little Tom Stubble held out his hot and feeble hand. “I’m to be taken in here,” he said. “Osborne – and – and Dobbin said I was; and you are to give the man two napoleons: my mother will pay you.” The young fellow was delirious.

The hotel was large, and the people kind, and all the inmates of the cart were taken in and placed on various couches. The young ensign was carried upstairs to Osborne’s quarters. You may imagine the feelings of Amelia and the Major’s wife when they were told that both their husbands were safe; in what mute rapture Amelia embraced her friend; in what a grateful passion of prayer she fell on her knees, and thanked the Power which had saved her husband.

She and Mrs. O’Dowd watched incessantly by the wounded lad, whose pains were very severe; and in this duty, Amelia had not time to brood over her anxieties. The young patient told in his simple fashion the events of the day, and the actions of our gallant friends.

The regiment had suffered severely, losing many officers and men. The Major’s horse had been shot under him as the regiment charged, and they all thought that O’Dowd was gone, until returning from the charge, the Major was discovered seated on his horse’s carcase, refreshing himself from a bottle. It was Captain Osborne that cut down the French lancer who had speared the ensign. Amelia turned pale at the

notion. And it was Captain Dobbin who, though wounded himself, took up the lad in his arms and carried him to the surgeon, and then to the cart which was to bring him back to Brussels. And it was he who promised the driver two louis if he would go to Mr. Sedley's hotel; and tell Mrs. Osborne that the action was over, and that her husband was unhurt.

"Indeed, he has a good heart, that William Dobbin," Mrs. O'Dowd said, "though he is always laughing at me."

Young Stubble vowed there was not such another officer in the army, and praised the senior captain's modesty, his kindness, and his admirable coolness in the field. To these parts of the conversation, Amelia paid little attention: it was only when George was spoken of that she listened, and when he was not mentioned, she thought about him.

In tending her patient, a second day passed. There was only one man in the army for her: and as long as he was well, its movements interested her little. The reports which Jos brought from the streets fell vaguely on her ears; though they gave that timorous gentleman, and many other people, much disquiet. The French had been repulsed, certainly, but only after a severe struggle, and with only one division of the French army. The Emperor, with the main body, was away at Ligny, where he annihilated the Prussians, and was now free to bring his whole force to bear upon the allies.

The Duke of Wellington was retreating to the capital, and a great battle must be fought under its walls probably, of which the result was doubtful. Wellington had only twenty thousand British troops on whom he could rely, for the German troops were raw and the Belgians disaffected. With this handful he had to resist a hundred and fifty thousand men under Napoleon. Under Napoleon! What warrior was there, however famous and skilful, that could fight him at those odds?

Jos thought of this, and trembled. So did the rest of Brussels. The English would perish at their posts, and the conqueror would pass over their bodies into the city. Woe to those whom he found there! Tricoloured banners and triumphal emblems were made to welcome the arrival of His Majesty the Emperor Napoleon.

The emigration continued, and wherever families could find means of departure, they fled. When Jos, on the afternoon of the 17th of June, went to Rebecca's hotel, he found that the great Bareacres' carriage had at length rolled away: the Earl had somehow found a pair of horses.

Jos felt that yesterday's delay had been only a respite, and that his dearly bought horses must surely soon be needed. His agonies were very severe all day. As long as there was an English army between Brussels and Napoleon, there was no need of immediate flight; but he had his horses brought to his hotel, so that they might be under his own eyes, and beyond the risk of abduction. Isidor watched the stable-door constantly, and had the horses saddled and ready.

After her previous reception, Rebecca did not care to come near her dear Amelia. She clipped the bouquet which George had brought her, and gave fresh water to the flowers, and read over the letter which he had sent her.

"Poor wretch," she said, twirling the bit of paper in her fingers, "how I could crush her with this! – and she must break her heart for a stupid coxcomb who does not care for her. My poor good Rawdon is worth ten of him." And then she began thinking what she should do if anything happened to poor good Rawdon, and what a great piece of luck it was that he had left his horses behind.

During this day too, Rebecca thought of the precaution which the Countess Bareacres had taken, and did a little needlework herself; she stitched away trinkets and bank-notes about her person, and so was ready either to fly or to stay and welcome the conqueror, whether English or French. And I am not sure that she did not dream that night of becoming a duchess, while Rawdon, wrapped in his cloak, and lying in the rain, was thinking with all his heart about the little wife he had left behind.

The next day was a Sunday. Mrs. Major O'Dowd had the satisfaction of seeing both her patients refreshed in health and spirits. She herself had slept on a great chair in Amelia's room. When morning came, this robust woman went back to her own house, and here performed a splendid toilette, befitting the day. Whilst alone there, one prayer at least was sent up to Heaven for the welfare of the brave soldier, Michael O'Dowd.

When she returned she brought her prayer-book, and her uncle the Dean's famous book of sermons. She proposed to read them to Amelia and the wounded ensign. Prayers were read on that day in twenty thousand British churches; and millions of British men and women implored protection of the Father of all.

They did not hear the noise which disturbed our little congregation at Brussels. As Mrs. O'Dowd was reading the service in her best voice, the cannon of Waterloo began to roar.

When Jos heard that dreadful sound, he decided that he would bear this perpetual terror no longer, and would fly at once. He rushed into the sick man's room, where our three friends had paused in their prayers, and made a passionate appeal to Amelia.

"I can't stand it any more, Emmy," he said; "and you must come with me. I have bought a horse for you, and you must dress and come with me, and ride behind Isidor."

"God forgive me, Mr. Sedley, but you are no better than a coward," Mrs. O'Dowd said, laying down the book.

"I say come, Amelia," Jos went on; "never mind her; why should we stay here and be butchered by Frenchmen?"

"You forget our regiment," said little Stubble from his bed. "And you won't leave me, will you, Mrs. O'Dowd?"

"No, my dear fellow," said she, going and kissing the boy. "No harm shall come to you while I stand by. I don't budge till I get the word from Mick. A pretty figure I'd be, wouldn't I, stuck behind that chap on a pillion?"

The young patient burst out laughing in his bed, and even Amelia smiled.

"I don't ask her," Jos shouted – "I don't ask that Irishwoman, but you, Amelia; will you come?"

"Without my husband, Joseph?" Amelia said, with a look of wonder. Jos's patience was exhausted.

"Good-bye, then," he said, shaking his fist in a rage, and slamming the door behind him. Mrs. O'Dowd heard the clattering hooves as the horses left; and looking through the window, made scornful remarks about poor Joseph as he rode down the street with Isidor after him. The horses were lively, and sprang about. Jos was a clumsy and timid horseman.

"Look at him, Amelia dear, driving into the parlour window. Such a bull in a china-shop!" Presently the pair of riders disappeared down the street in the direction of the Ghent road.

All that day until past sunset, the cannon roared. It was dark when the cannonading suddenly stopped.

All of us have read of what occurred during that interval. The tale is in every Englishman's mouth; and you and I, who were children when the great battle was fought, are never tired of hearing the history of that famous action. Its memory rankles still amongst millions of the countrymen of those brave men who lost. They pant for an opportunity of revenging that humiliation. Centuries from now, we Frenchmen and Englishmen might be boasting and killing each other still, carrying out bravely the Devil's code of honour.

All our friends fought like men. All day long, whilst the women were praying ten miles away, the lines of the dauntless English infantry were receiving and repelling the furious charges of the French horsemen. Guns were ploughing up their ranks, and comrades falling, and the resolute survivors closing in. Towards evening, the French attack slackened in its fury. They had other foes besides the British to engage, or were preparing for a final onset.

It came at last: the columns of the Imperial Guard marched up the hill of Saint Jean, to sweep the English from the height which they had maintained all day. The dark rolling column pressed on and up the hill. It seemed almost to crest the top, when it began to wave and falter. Then it stopped, still facing the shot. The English troops rushed from the post from which no enemy had been able to dislodge them, and the Guard turned and fled.

No more firing was heard at Brussels – the pursuit rolled away. Darkness came down on the field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart.

CHAPTER 33

In Which Miss Crawley's Relations Are Very Anxious About Her

The kind reader must please to remember – while the army is marching from Flanders – that there are a number of persons living peaceably in England who must come in for their share of this story. During the time of battle, old Miss Crawley was living at Brighton, very moderately moved by the great events; although Briggs read out the Gazette, in which Rawdon Crawley's gallantry was mentioned with honour, and his promotion was recorded.

“What a pity that young man has taken such an irretrievable step!” his aunt said. “He might have married a brewer's daughter with a quarter of a million, or have married a lady. He would have had my money some day or other; or his children would – for I'm not in a hurry to go, Miss Briggs; and instead, he is a doomed pauper, with a dancing-girl for a wife.”

“Will my dear Miss Crawley not cast a compassionate eye upon the heroic soldier, whose name is inscribed in the annals of glory?” said Miss Briggs, who was greatly excited by the events of Waterloo. “Has not the Captain – or the Colonel as I may now call him – done deeds which make the name of Crawley illustrious?”

“Briggs, you are a fool,” said Miss Crawley. “He has dragged the name of Crawley through the mud. Marry a drawing-master's daughter, indeed! She was no better than you are, Briggs; only younger, and a great deal prettier and cleverer. I daresay you were her accomplice. But you will find yourself disappointed in my will, I can tell you. Write to Mr. Waxy, and say that I desire to see him immediately.” Miss Crawley was now in the habit of writing to Mr. Waxy, her solicitor, almost every day, for she was greatly perplexed about how to leave her money.

She had, however, rallied considerably; as was proved by the increased vigour of her sarcasms upon poor Miss Briggs, who bore her attacks with slavish submission. Who has not seen how women bully women? With what shafts of scorn and cruelty poor women are riddled by the tyrants of their sex! Miss Crawley was always particularly savage when she was rallying from illness – as they say wounds tingle most when they are about to heal.

Miss Briggs was the only victim admitted into the invalid's presence; yet Miss Crawley's relatives did not forget their beloved kinswoman, and by presents and affectionate messages strove to keep themselves alive in her memory.

Rawdon Crawley, a few weeks after Waterloo and his promotion, sent Miss Crawley a dutiful letter, and several presents: a pair of French epaulets, a Cross of the Legion of Honour, and a sword hilt – relics from the battlefield. The letter described with humour how the sword had belonged to a French officer who had sworn never to surrender, only to be taken prisoner the next minute. The cross and epaulets came from a Colonel of French cavalry, who had fallen under Rawdon's arm in the battle: and Rawdon thus sent the spoils to his kindest old friend. Should he continue to write to her from Paris, where the army was marching? He might be able to give her interesting news from that capital.

Miss Crawley made Briggs write back a gracious letter, encouraging him to continue writing. His first letter was so lively and amusing that she looked forward with pleasure to more.

“Of course, I know,” she explained to Miss Briggs, “that Rawdon could not write such a good letter, and that it is that clever little wretch of a Rebecca who dictates every word; but that is no reason why he should not amuse me.”

Becky not only wrote the letters, but also bought the trophies for a few francs from the pedlars who began to deal in relics of the war. Miss Crawley’s gracious reply greatly encouraged Rawdon and his lady: and they took care to entertain her with many delightful letters from Paris.

To the rector’s lady, who went off to tend her husband’s broken collar-bone at Queen’s Crawley, the spinster’s letters were not so gracious. Mrs. Bute, that brisk, imperious woman, had committed a fatal error. She had not merely oppressed Miss Crawley – she had bored her; and Miss Briggs was ordered to write to Mrs. Bute, saying that Miss Crawley’s health was greatly improved, and begging Mrs. Bute on no account to quit her family for Miss Crawley’s sake.

“How silly I was,” Mrs. Bute thought, “to hint that I was coming, in that last foolish letter. I ought to have gone without a word to the poor old creature, and taken her out of the hands of that ninny Briggs, and that harpy of a maid. Oh! Bute, why did you break your collar-bone?”

Why, indeed? Mrs. Bute had played her cards too well. She had ruled over Miss Crawley’s household utterly and completely – to be utterly and completely routed when an opportunity for rebellion came. She considered that she had been the victim of horrible treason and savage ingratitude.

Rawdon’s promotion filled this good Christian lady with alarm. Would his aunt relent towards him now that he was a Lieutenant-Colonel? Would that odious Rebecca once more get into favour? The Rector’s wife wrote a sermon for her husband about the vanity of military glory, which the worthy parson read in his best voice and without understanding one syllable of it. He had Mr. Pitt Crawley in the congregation, but the old Baronet would not come to church.

Since the departure of Becky Sharp, that old wretch Sir Pitt had given himself up entirely to bad courses, to the great scandal of the county and the mute horror of his son. The ribbons in Miss Horrocks’s cap became more splendid than ever. Polite families fled the hall in terror. Sir Pitt drank rum-and-water with the farmers at Mudbury on market-days. He drove the family coach to Southampton with Miss Horrocks inside: and the county people expected, every week, as his son did in speechless agony, that his marriage with her would soon be announced.

It was indeed a hard burden for Mr. Crawley to bear. When he rose to speak at religious assemblies, he felt that the audience said, “That is the son of the old reprobate Sir Pitt, who is very likely drinking at the public house at this very moment.”

Meanwhile Miss Crawley’s dear nephews and nieces were unanimous in loving her and sending her tokens of affection. Mrs. Bute sent guinea-fowls, and some fine cauliflowers, and a pretty purse or pincushion worked by her darling girls, while Mr. Pitt sent peaches and grapes and venison from the Hall. The Southampton coach used to carry these tokens of affection to Miss Crawley at Brighton. It used sometimes to carry Mr. Pitt there too, for he had an attraction at Brighton in the person of Lady Jane Sheepshanks. Her Ladyship and her sisters lived at Brighton with their mamma, the Countess Southdown, a strong-minded woman.

A few words ought to be said about this noble family. Their chief, Clement, fourth Earl of Southdown, was for a time was a serious young man. But his admirable mother learned, very shortly after her noble husband’s death, that her son was a

member of several clubs, had lost greatly at play at Wattier's and the Cocoa Tree, and had encumbered the family estate; that he drove four-in-hand, and patronised the boxing; and had an opera-box, where he entertained the most dangerous bachelor company. His name was now only mentioned with groans in the dowager's circle.

The Lady Emily was her brother's senior by many years: the author of some delightful spiritual tracts and hymns, and a mature spinster. Having few ideas of marriage, her love for the anti-slavery cause occupied almost all her feelings. It is to her that we owe that beautiful poem:

Lead us to some sunny isle,
Yonder in the western deep;
Where the skies for ever smile,
And the blacks for ever weep, etc.

As for the Lady Jane, on whom Mr. Pitt Crawley's affection had been placed, she was gentle, blushing, silent, and timid. She wept for her profligate brother, and was quite ashamed of loving him still. She used to send him little smuggled notes in private. The dreadful secret which weighed upon her life was that she and the old housekeeper had been to pay Southdown a furtive visit at his chambers; and found him – O the naughty dear abandoned wretch! – smoking a cigar with a bottle of Curacao before him. She admired her sister, adored her mother, and thought Mr. Crawley the most delightful and accomplished of men. Her mamma and sister managed everything for her, and regarded her with the amiable pity of superior women.

It was to these ladies that Mr. Crawley paid his visits in Brighton, rather than to his aunt. When he met Miss Briggs coming home from the library, Mr. Crawley blushed as he stepped forward and shook her by the hand. He introduced Miss Briggs to the lady with whom he was walking, the Lady Jane Sheepshanks, saying, "Lady Jane, permit me to introduce to you my aunt's kindest friend and affectionate companion, Miss Briggs, whom you know as authoress of the delightful 'Lyrics of the Heart,' of which you are so fond."

Lady Jane blushed too as she held out a kind little hand to Miss Briggs, and said something very civil and incoherent about proposing to call on Miss Crawley; and with soft dove-like eyes saluted Miss Briggs, while Pitt Crawley gave her a profound courtly bow.

The artful diplomatist! It was he who had given Lady Jane that copy of poor Briggs's poems. It was he, too, who suggested to Lady Southdown the great advantages of a friendship between her family and Miss Crawley – advantages both worldly and spiritual, he said, for Miss Crawley was now quite alone. Rawdon had estranged her affections; the greedy tyranny of Mrs. Bute Crawley had made the old lady revolt; and though he himself had held off from cultivating Miss Crawley's friendship, he thought now that every means should be taken to save both her soul and her fortune.

The strong-minded Lady Southdown quite agreed, and was for converting Miss Crawley. This tall and awful missionary rode about the country in her barouche launching tracts among the cottagers. Lord Southdown, her late husband, had been in the habit of approving of everything which his Matilda did and thought. Whatever changes her own belief might undergo (and she held a prodigious variety of opinions, taken from all sorts of Dissenters) she had not the least scruple in ordering all her

tenants to follow and believe after her. Her household and children were expected to go down on their knees with her Ladyship, while old Southdown, as an invalid, was allowed to sit in his own room, and have the paper read to him.

Lady Jane was the old Earl's favourite daughter, and loved him sincerely. As for Lady Emily, the authoress of the 'Washerwoman of Finchley Common,' her denunciations of future punishment were so awful that they used to frighten the timid old gentleman.

"I will certainly call," said Lady Southdown in reply to Mr. Pitt Crawley. "Who is Miss Crawley's medical man?"

He mentioned Mr. Creamer.

"A most dangerous and ignorant practitioner, my dear Pitt. I have been the means of removing him from several houses: though in one or two instances I did not arrive in time. I could not save poor dear General Glanders, who was dying under his hands. He rallied a little under the Podgers' pills which I gave him; but alas! too late. His death was delightful, however. Creamer must leave your aunt."

Pitt agreed. He was carried along by the energy of his future mother-in-law. He had accepted Podgers' Pills and every other of her Ladyship's remedies, bodily or spiritual. He never left her house without carrying respectfully away piles of her quack theology and medicine.

"As for her spiritual state," continued the Lady, "that must be looked to immediately! I will send the Reverend Mr. Irons to her. Jane, write him a line, and say that I desire the pleasure of his company this evening at tea at half-past six. He ought to see Miss Crawley before she rests this night. And Emily, my love, get ready a packet of books for Miss Crawley. 'A Voice from the Flames,' 'A Trumpet-warning to Jericho,' and the 'Fleshpots Broken; or, the Converted Cannibal.'"

"And the 'Washerwoman of Finchley Common,' Mamma," said Lady Emily.

"Stop, my dear ladies," said Pitt. "With respect, I think it would be quite unadvisable. Remember Miss Crawley's delicate condition, and how little she has been accustomed to consider her immortal welfare. If you begin so soon, you will frighten her altogether. I know my aunt: any abrupt attempt at conversion will only annoy her. She will very likely fling the books away, and refuse all acquaintance with the givers."

"You are as worldly as Miss Crawley, Pitt," said Lady Emily, tossing out of the room, her books in her hand.

"I need not tell you, my dear Lady Southdown," Pitt continued, "how fatal a little want of caution may be to our hopes. Remember my aunt has seventy thousand pounds; think of her age, and her highly nervous and delicate condition; I know that she has destroyed the will which was made in my brother's favour. It is by soothing that wounded spirit that we must lead it into the right path, and not by frightening it; and so I think you will agree that—"

"Of course," Lady Southdown remarked. "Jane, my love, you need not send that note. I will call upon Miss Crawley tomorrow."

"And if I might suggest, my sweet lady," Pitt said blandly, "it would be as well not to take our precious Emily, who is too enthusiastic; but rather, our sweet dear Lady Jane."

"Most certainly. Emily would ruin everything," Lady Southdown said.

The next day, the great Southdown family carriage drove up in state to Miss Crawley's door, and the footman handed in to Mr. Bows her Ladyship's cards for Miss Crawley, and for Miss Briggs.

By way of compromise, Lady Emily also sent Miss Briggs a packet, containing copies of the “Washerwoman,” and other favourite tracts for Miss B.’s own perusal; and for the servants’ hall she sent “Crumbs from the Pantry,” “The Frying Pan and the Fire,” and “The Livery of Sin.”

CHAPTER 34

James Crawley's Pipe Is Put Out

The amiable behaviour of Mr. Crawley and Lady Jane highly flattered Miss Briggs, as did a Countess's card left personally for her. She put it away in her work-box amongst her most cherished treasures.

"What could Lady Southdown mean by leaving *you* a card, I wonder, Miss Briggs?" said Miss Crawley. The companion explained how she had met Mr. Crawley walking with his fiancée the day before. She told how kind and gentle-looking the lady was, and what a plain dress she had, and described her from the bonnet down to the boots with female accuracy.

Miss Crawley was pining for society; so Pitt Crawley was graciously invited to come and see his aunt. He came bringing Lady Southdown and her daughter. The dowager did not say a word about the state of Miss Crawley's soul; but talked discreetly about the weather and the war, and above all, about doctors, quacks, and the particular merits of Dr. Podgers.

During their interview Pitt Crawley made a great diplomatic stroke. When Lady Southdown was calling Napoleon a monster, a coward and a tyrant not fit to live, Pitt Crawley suddenly spoke up in his favour. He described Napoleon at Paris at the peace of Amiens; when he, Pitt Crawley, had the gratification of meeting the great Mr. Fox, an admirable statesman who had always had the highest opinion of the Emperor. And he spoke indignantly of the faithless conduct of the allies towards Bonaparte, who, after giving himself generously up to their mercy, was sent to a cruel banishment, while a bigoted Popish rabble tyrannised over France in his stead.

This orthodox horror of Romish superstition saved Pitt Crawley in Lady Southdown's opinion, whilst his admiration for Fox and Napoleon raised him immeasurably in Miss Crawley's eyes. A true Whig, Miss Crawley had been in opposition all through the war, and though, to be sure, the Emperor's downfall did not much agitate the old lady, yet when Pitt praised her idols he spoke to her heart, and advanced in her favour.

"And what do you think, my dear?" Miss Crawley said to Lady Jane, for whom she had taken a liking at first sight, as she always did for pretty and modest young people; though it must be owned her affections cooled as rapidly as they rose.

Lady Jane blushed, and said "that she did not understand politics, which she left to wiser heads; but though Mamma was, no doubt, correct, Mr. Crawley had spoken beautifully."

And when the ladies were leaving, Miss Crawley hoped "Lady Southdown would be so kind as to send her Lady Jane sometimes, if she could be spared to come and console a poor sick lonely old woman." This promise was granted, and they separated in friendship.

"Don't let Lady Southdown come again, Pitt," said the old lady. "She is stupid and pompous. But bring that nice good-natured little Jane as often as you please."

Pitt promised to do so. He did not tell the Countess of Southdown of his aunt's opinion; her Ladyship thought that she had made a most delightful and majestic impression on Miss Crawley.

And so Lady Jane became a pretty constant visitor to Miss Crawley, accompanied her in her drives, and solaced many of her evenings. She was so

naturally good and soft that even Firkin was not jealous of her; and the gentle Briggs thought Miss Crawley was less cruel to her when kind Lady Jane was by.

Miss Crawley was charming to Lady Jane, telling her a thousand anecdotes about her youth, and talking to her in a very different way to that in which she had talked to Rebecca. Lady Jane repaid Miss Crawley with artless sweetness and friendship.

In the autumn Lady Jane would sit in Miss Crawley's drawing-room singing little songs and hymns, while the sun was setting and the sea was roaring on the beach. The old spinster used to wake up when these ditties ceased, and ask for more. As for Briggs, she shed tears of happiness as she pretended to knit.

Pitt, meanwhile, in the dining-room with a pamphlet on the Corn Laws, sipped Madeira: built castles in the air: thought himself a fine fellow: and felt himself more in love with Jane than he had been any time these seven years.

"I wish, my love, I could get somebody to play piquet with me," Miss Crawley said one night. "Poor Briggs can no more play than an owl, she is so stupid; and I think I should sleep better if I had my game."

At this Lady Jane blushed to the tips of her ears, and said:

"Miss Crawley, I can play a little. I used to play with poor dear papa."

"Come and kiss me, you dear good little soul," cried Miss Crawley in an ecstasy: and in this occupation Mr. Pitt found them when he came upstairs with his pamphlet.

This did not escape the attention of the Crawleys at the Rectory. Mrs. Bute had friends in Brighton who informed her of all that passed at Miss Crawley's house. Pitt was there more and more. He did not come to the Hall for months, while his abominable old father abandoned himself to rum-and-water, and the odious society of the Horrocks family. Pitt's success made the Rector's family furious, and Mrs. Bute regretted so insulting Miss Briggs and Firkin that she had not a single informant in Miss Crawley's household.

"It was all Bute's collar-bone," she said; "if that had not broke, I never would have left her."

"It was you that frightened her," Bute interposed. "You're a clever woman, but you've got a devil of a temper; and you're a screw with your money, Barbara."

"You'd have been in gaol, Bute, if I had not kept your money."

"I know, my dear," said the Rector, good-naturedly. "You ARE a clever woman, but you manage too well, you know. What the deuce can she find in Pitt Crawley? He has not pluck enough to say Boo to a goose. I remember when Rawdon used to flog him round the stables, and Pitt would go howling home to his ma – ha, ha! Why, either of my boys would whop him with one hand. Jim says he's remembered at Oxford as Miss Crawley still... I say, Barbara."

"What?"

"I say, why not send Jim over to Brighton to see if he can do anything with the old lady? He's very near getting his degree, you know. He's been failed twice – so was I – but he's had an Oxford education. He's a handsome feller. Let's put him on the old woman, hey."

"Jim might go down and see her, certainly," his wife said; adding with a sigh, "If we could only get one of the girls into the house; but she could never endure them, because they are not pretty!"

Those unfortunate and well-educated women were in the drawing-room, where they were thrumming away, with hard fingers, an elaborate piece on the piano; indeed, they were at music, or the back-board, or geography, or history, all day long. But what use are all these accomplishments, in Vanity Fair, to girls who are short,

poor, plain, and have a bad complexion? Mrs. Bute could think of nobody but the Curate to take one of them off her hands.

Mrs. Bute did not predict much good from the sending of her son James as an ambassador. Nor did the young fellow himself expect much pleasure from his mission; but he was consoled by the thought that possibly the old lady would give him some handsome sum on leaving, which would pay a few bills at the start of the next Oxford term.

So he travelled by the coach from Southampton to Brighton with his portmanteau, his favourite bull-dog Towzer, and an immense basket of garden produce from the dear Rectory folks to dear Miss Crawley. Thinking it was too late to disturb the invalid lady on the first night of his arrival, he put up at an inn, and did not visit Miss Crawley until late afternoon next day.

James Crawley, when his aunt had last seen him, was a gawky lad, at that uncomfortable age when the voice varies between an unearthly treble and a bass; when boys are seen to shave furtively with their sister's scissors, and the sight of other young women produces terror in them; when the great hands and ankles protrude a long way from garments which have grown too tight. James, then a hobbadehoy, was now become a young man, and had acquired the polish which is gained by living in a fast set at a small college, and contracting debts, and being failed and rusticated.

He was a handsome lad, however, when he presented himself to his aunt, and good looks always earned the fickle old lady's favour. Nor did his awkwardness take away from it: she was pleased with these healthy tokens of the young gentleman's ingenuousness.

He said "he had come down for a couple of days to see a man from his college, and – and to pay my respects to you, Ma'am, and my father and mother hope you are well."

Pitt was in the room with Miss Crawley when the lad was announced, and looked very blank. The old lady had plenty of humour, and enjoyed her correct nephew's perplexity. She asked after all the people at the Rectory with interest; and said she was thinking of paying them a visit. She told the lad he was very much improved, and that it was a pity his sisters had not some of his good looks; and finding that he had taken a room at an hotel, would not hear of his staying there, but bade Mr. Bowls send for Mr. James Crawley's things instantly; "and Bowls," she added, with great graciousness, "you will have the goodness to pay Mr. James's bill."

She flung Pitt a look of arch triumph, which made him almost choke with envy. She had never yet invited *him* to stay under her roof, and here was a young whipper-snapper who at first sight was made welcome.

"I beg your pardon, sir," says Bowls with a bow; "what 'otel is it, sir?"

"O, dam," said young James, in some alarm, "I'll go."

"What!" said Miss Crawley.

"The Tom Cribb's Arms," said James, blushing deeply.

Miss Crawley burst out laughing. Mr. Bowls gave one abrupt guffaw; Pitt only smiled.

"I didn't know any better," said James, looking down. "I've never been here before; it was the coachman told me." The fact is, that on the Southampton coach, James Crawley had met a boxer, the Tutbury Pet, who was coming to Brighton to make a match with the Rottingdean Fibber; and enchanted by the Pet's conversation, he had passed the evening with him and his friends at the inn in question.

“Go and settle the bill, Bowls,” said Miss Crawley, with a wave of her hand, “and bring it to me.”

“There – there’s a little dawg,” said James, looking frightfully guilty. “I’d best go for him. He bites footmen’s calves.”

All the party laughed; even Briggs and Lady Jane, who was sitting mute.

To punish her elder nephew, Miss Crawley persisted in being gracious to the young student. There were no limits to her kindness. She insisted that James should accompany her in her drive, and paraded him solemnly up and down the cliff in her barouche. During the drive she quoted Italian and French poetry to the poor bewildered lad, and said she was sure he would gain a gold medal, and be a Senior Wrangler.

“Haw, haw,” laughed James, encouraged by these compliments; “Senior Wrangler, indeed; that’s at the other shop.”

“What is the other shop, my dear child?” said the lady.

“Cambridge, not Oxford,” said the scholar, with a knowing air. Just then there appeared on the cliff, in a tax-cart drawn by a bang-up pony, his friends the Tutbury Pet and the Rottingdean Fibber, with three other gentlemen, who saluted poor James as he sat in the carriage. This incident damped his spirits, and he did not utter another word during the journey.

On his return he found his room prepared, and his bag there, and might have noticed that Mr. Bowls looked grave. But the thought of Mr. Bowls did not enter his head. He was deploring his dreadful predicament, staying in a house full of old women jabbering French and Italian, and talking poetry to him.

At dinner, James appeared choking in a white neckcloth, and had the honour of handing my Lady Jane downstairs. He did not talk much over dinner, but he made a point of asking all the ladies to drink wine, and accepted Mr. Crawley’s offer of champagne, consuming most of the bottle which Mr. Bowls was ordered to produce in his honour.

After the ladies had withdrawn, and the two cousins were left together, Pitt became very friendly. He asked after James’s career and prospects – hoped heartily he would get on; and was frank and amiable. James’s tongue unloosed with the port, and he told his cousin about his life, his debts, his troubles and his rows with the proctors, filling his glass from the bottles before him, and flying from Port to Madeira with joyous activity.

“My aunt is pleased when people do as they like in her house,” said Mr. Crawley. “This is Liberty Hall, James, and you can’t do Miss Crawley a greater kindness than to do as you please, and ask for what you will. Miss Crawley is liberal. She is a Republican in principle, and despises rank or title.”

“Why are you going to marry an Earl’s daughter?” said James.

“My dear friend, it is not poor Lady Jane’s fault that she is well born,” Pitt replied, with a courtly air. “She cannot help being a lady.”

“Oh, as for that,” said Jim, “there’s nothing like old blood, dammy. I’m none of your radicals. I know what it is to be a gentleman, dammy. See the chaps in a boat-race; look at the fellers in a fight; aye, look at a dawg killing rats – which is it wins? the good-blooded ones. Get some more port, Bowls, old boy. What was I saying?”

“I think you were speaking of dogs killing rats,” Pitt remarked mildly, handing his cousin the decanter.

“Killing rats was I? Well, Pitt, are you a sporting man? Do you want to see a dawg as *can* kill a rat? Then come down with me to Castle Street Mews, and I’ll show

you such a bull-terrier – Pooh!” cried James, laughing at his own absurdity. “You don’t care. I’m blest if you know the difference between a dawg and a duck.”

“No. You were talking about blood,” Pitt continued with increased blandness. “Here’s the fresh bottle.”

“Blood’s the word,” said James, gulping the port down. “Nothing like blood, sir, in hosses, dawgs, *and* men. Why, only last term, just before I was rusticated, I mean just before I had the measles, ha, ha – there was me and Bob Ringwood, Lord Cinqbars’ son, having a beer at the Bell at Blenheim, when the Banbury bargeman offered to fight either of us for a bowl of punch. I couldn’t. My arm was in a sling; a brute of a mare had fell with me at the Abingdon hunt. But Bob had his coat off at once – he stood up to the Banbury man for three minutes, and polished him off in four rounds easy. Blood, sir, all blood.”

“You’re not drinking, James,” Pitt said. “In my time at Oxford, the men passed round the bottle a little quicker than you young fellows seem to do.”

“Come, come,” said James, winking at his cousin, “no jokes, old boy; no trying it on with me. You want to trot me out, but it’s no go. In vino veritas, old boy. I wish my aunt would send down some of this to the governor; it’s a precious good tap.”

“You had better ask her,” Machiavel continued, “or make the best of it now,” and he tossed back nearly a thimbleful of wine with an immense flourish of his glass.

At the Rectory, when the bottle of port was opened after dinner, honest James commonly had a couple of glasses, but as his father grew very sulky if he had more, the good lad generally refrained, and subsided either into the ladies’ currant wine, or to some private gin-and-water in the stables with the coachman. At Oxford, the quantity of wine was unlimited, but the quality was inferior: but when quantity and quality united as at his aunt’s house, James showed that he could appreciate them indeed. He hardly needed his cousin’s encouragement to drain the second bottle.

When the time came for coffee, however, and for a return to the ladies, the young gentleman relapsed into surly timidity; saying no more than yes and no, scowling at Lady Jane, and upsetting his cup.

He yawned in a pitiable manner, and his presence threw a damper upon the modest proceedings; for Miss Crawley and Lady Jane at their piquet, and Miss Briggs at her work, felt that his eyes were wildly fixed on them, and were uneasy under that maudlin look.

“He seems a very silent, awkward, bashful lad,” said Miss Crawley to Mr. Pitt later.

“He is more communicative in men’s society than with ladies,” he dryly replied: perhaps rather disappointed that the wine had not made Jim talk more.

James spent part of the next morning in writing home to his mother a most flourishing account of his reception by Miss Crawley. But ah! he little knew what evils the day would bring, and how short his reign of favour was to be.

Jim had forgotten about something that had taken place at the Cribb’s Arms, the night before he had come to his aunt’s house. He had treated the Tutbury champion and the Rottingdean man, and their friends, to the refreshment of gin-and-water – so that no less than eighteen glasses at eightpence per glass were charged in Mr. James Crawley’s bill.

It was not the money, but the quantity of gin which told fatally against poor James’s character, when the butler, Mr. Bowls, went down to pay his bill. The landlord, fearing lest the account should be refused, swore solemnly that the young gent had consumed personally every drop of the liquor. Bowls paid the bill, and

showed it on his return to Firkin, who was shocked at the frightful amount of gin. She took the bill to Miss Briggs, who thought it her duty to mention it to Miss Crawley.

Had he drunk a dozen bottles of claret, the old spinster could have pardoned him. Mr. Fox drank claret. Gentlemen drank claret. But eighteen glasses of gin consumed among boxers in a pot-house – it was an odious crime.

Everything went against the lad: he came home perfumed from the stables, where he had been to pay his dog Towzer a visit – and when he took Towzer out for an airing, he met Miss Crawley and her wheezy Blenheim spaniel, which Towzer would have eaten up had not the Blenheim fled squealing to the protection of Miss Briggs, while James stood laughing.

This day too the unlucky boy's modesty had forsaken him. He was lively and facetious at dinner. He levelled one or two jokes against Pitt Crawley: he drank as much wine as upon the previous day; and in the drawing-room, began to entertain the ladies with some choice Oxford stories. He described the different pugilistic qualities of the boxers Molyneux and Dutch Sam, offered playfully to give Lady Jane odds upon the Tutbury Pet against the Rottingdean man: and then proposed to back himself against his cousin Pitt Crawley, either with or without boxing gloves.

“And that's a fair offer, my buck,” he said, with a loud laugh, slapping Pitt on the shoulder, “and my father will go halves in the bet, ha, ha!” The engaging youth nodded knowingly, and pointed his thumb at Pitt Crawley in a jocular and exulting manner.

Pitt was not altogether pleased, perhaps, but not unhappy. Poor Jim had his laugh: and staggered across the room with his aunt's candle, when the old lady moved to retire, and offered to kiss her with the blandest tipsy smile. Then he went upstairs to his own bedroom perfectly satisfied with himself, and with a pleased notion that his aunt's money would be left to him in preference to all the rest of the family.

Once up in the bedroom, he was attracted to the window by the romantic scene of the moonlight on the sea, and thought he would enjoy it while smoking. Nobody would smell the tobacco if he opened the window and kept his head and pipe in the fresh air.

This he did: but poor Jim had forgotten that his door was open, so that the breeze blowing in made a fine draught. The clouds of tobacco were carried downstairs, and arrived with undiminished fragrance to Miss Crawley and Miss Briggs.

The pipe of tobacco finished the business: and the Bute Crawleys never knew how many thousand pounds it cost them. Firkin rushed downstairs to Bowls who was reading out the “Fire and the Frying Pan” to his assistant in a loud and ghostly voice. The dreadful secret was told by Firkin with so frightened a look, that for the first moment Mr. Bowls thought that robbers were in the house.

When made aware of the facts, however, Mr. Bowls rushed upstairs three steps at a time to enter James's apartment, calling in a voice stifled with alarm, “Mr. James! For Gawd's sake, sir, stop that pipe. O, Mr. James, what 'ave you done! Missis can't abide 'em.” With that, Bowls threw the pipe out of the window.

“Missis needn't smoke,” said James with a laugh, and thought the whole matter an excellent joke. But his feelings were very different in the morning, when Mr. Bowls's young man, who brought him his hot water to shave that beard which he was so anxiously expecting, handed over a note in the handwriting of Miss Briggs.

“Dear sir,” it said, “Miss Crawley has passed an exceedingly disturbed night, owing to the shocking manner in which the house has been polluted by tobacco. Miss Crawley regrets that she is too unwell to see you before you go – and above all that

she ever induced you to remove from the ale-house, where she is sure you will be much more comfortable during the rest of your stay at Brighton.”

And here honest James’s career as a candidate for his aunt’s favour ended. He had in fact, and without knowing it, done what he threatened to do. He had fought his cousin Pitt with the gloves.

Where meanwhile was he who had once been first favourite for this race? Rawdon and Becky were reunited after Waterloo, and were passing the winter of 1815 at Paris in great splendour and gaiety.

Rebecca was a good economist, and the price poor Jos Sedley had paid for her two horses was enough to keep their little establishment afloat for a year; there was no need to sell the pistols, or the gold dressing-case, or the cloak lined with sable. Becky had it made into a pelisse, in which she rode in the Bois de Boulogne to the admiration of all. You should have seen her when she unsewed herself, and let out of her dress all those watches, bank-notes and valuables which she had secreted in the wadding! Tufto was charmed, and Rawdon, delighted, roared with laughter, and swore that she was better than any play. And when she described how she had outwitted Jos, his delight reached a pitch of quite insane enthusiasm. He believed in his wife as much as the French soldiers in Napoleon.

Her success in Paris was remarkable. All the French ladies voted her charming. She spoke their language admirably. She adopted their grace, their liveliness, their manner. Her husband was stupid certainly – but all English are stupid, and he was the heir of the rich Miss Crawley.

“Why,” wrote a great lady to Miss Crawley, in French, “Why does not our dear Miss come to her nephew and niece in Paris? All the world talks of the charming Mistress and her beauty. Yes, we see in her the grace, the charm, the wit of our dear friend Miss Crawley! The King took notice of her yesterday at the Tuileries. How interesting and pretty this fair creature looks surrounded by the homage of the men, and so soon to be a mother! To hear her speak of you would bring tears to the eyes of ogres. How she loves you! how we all love our admirable Miss Crawley!”

Sadly, this letter did not advance Mrs. Becky’s interest with her relative. On the contrary, the old spinster was furious when she found Rebecca had used her name to get an entree into Parisian society. She dictated to Briggs an angry answer in English warning the public to beware of Mrs. Rawdon Crawley as a most artful and dangerous person. But as Madame her correspondent did not understand English, she merely told Mrs. Rawdon that she had received a charming letter full of benevolent things; and Rebecca began to hope that Miss Crawley would relent.

Meanwhile, she was the gayest and most admired of Englishwomen. All the world was at Paris during this famous winter. Famous warriors rode by her carriage, or crowded her modest little box at the Opera. Rawdon was in the highest spirits. There were no debt-collectors in Paris as yet: there were parties every day; play was plentiful and his luck good. Tufto perhaps was sulky. Mrs. Tufto had come to Paris, and besides, there were a score of generals now round Becky’s chair. Lady Bareacres and stupid English females writhed with anguish at the success of the little upstart Becky. But she had all the men on her side.

So in fetes, pleasure, and prosperity, the winter of 1815-16 passed. In the early spring of 1816, the Journal contained the following announcement: “On the 26th of March – to the Lady of Lieutenant-Colonel Crawley of the Life Guards Green – a son and heir.”

This event was copied into the London papers, from which Miss Briggs read the statement to Miss Crawley at Brighton. The news, though no surprise, caused a crisis in the affairs of the Crawley family. The spinster's rage rose to its height. Sending instantly for Pitt, her nephew, and for Lady Southdown, she requested an immediate celebration of the marriage which had been so long pending between the two families. And she announced that she would give the young couple a thousand a year during her lifetime, at the end of which the bulk of her property would be settled upon her nephew and her dear niece, Lady Jane Crawley.

So they were married. Pitt would have liked to take a honeymoon tour with his bride; but the old lady's attachment to Lady Jane was so strong that she could not part with her favourite. Pitt and his wife came therefore and lived with Miss Crawley: and (greatly to the annoyance of poor Pitt) Lady Southdown, from her neighbouring house, reigned over the whole family – Miss Crawley, Briggs and all. She pitilessly dosed them with her tracts and her medicine, she dismissed Creamer, and soon stripped Miss Crawley of even the semblance of authority. The poor soul grew so timid that she stopped bullying Briggs, and clung to her niece.

Peace to thee, kind and selfish, vain and generous old heathen! We shall see thee no more. Let us hope that Lady Jane supported her kindly, and led her with a gentle hand out of the busy struggle of Vanity Fair.

CHAPTER 35

Widow and Mother

At the glorious news of Waterloo, all England thrilled with triumph and fear; for then came the list of the wounded and the slain. Who can tell the dread with which that catalogue was read! Exultation and gratitude were followed by sickening dismay. Anybody who looks back at the newspapers of the time must, even now, feel this breathless pause of expectation.

The news which the Gazette brought to the Osbornes gave them a dreadful shock. The girls indulged in unrestrained grief. The gloom-stricken old father was still more weighed down by sorrow. He strove to think that a judgment was on the boy for his disobedience. He dared not own that the severity of the sentence frightened him, and that its fulfilment had come too soon after his curses. Sometimes a shuddering terror struck him, as if he had been the author of his son's doom. There was no hope of reconciliation now. George stood on the other side of the gulf impassable, haunting his parent with sad eyes.

He remembered him once in a fever, when everyone thought the lad was dying, and he lay on his bed speechless. Good God! how the father clung to the doctor with sickening anxiety: what a weight of grief was off his mind when the lad recovered. But now there was no help or cure; above all, there were no humble words to soothe the outraged vanity and poisoned, angry blood. It is hard to say which pang tore the proud father's heart most keenly – that his son should have gone out of the reach of his forgiveness, or that he could never receive any apology.

The stern old man never mentioned his son's name to his daughters; but ordered the elder to go into mourning. All entertainments were put off. No communications were made to his future son-in-law, whose marriage-day had been fixed: but Mr. Osborne's appearance prevented Mr. Bullock from asking about the wedding. Mr. Osborne remained shut in his study.

After about three weeks, Sir William Dobbin called at Mr. Osborne's house with a very pale and agitated face, and insisted upon seeing him. Ushered into his room, Sir William produced a letter with a large red seal.

"My son, Major Dobbin," the Alderman said with some hesitation, "sent me a letter which arrived today. My son's letter contains one for you, Osborne."

The Alderman placed the letter on the table, and Osborne stared at him for a moment in silence. His looks frightened the messenger, who hurried away without another word.

The letter was in George's well-known bold handwriting. It was the one which he had written before daybreak on the 16th of June. The great red seal was emblazoned with the sham coat of arms which Osborne had taken from the Peerage; the very seal that had impressed it had been robbed from George's dead body as it lay on the battlefield. The father knew nothing of this, but sat and looked at the letter in terrified vacancy. He almost fell when he went to open it.

The poor boy's letter did not say much. He had been too proud to acknowledge the tenderness he felt. He only said, that on the eve of a great battle, he wished to bid his father farewell, and solemnly to implore his good offices for the wife – and perhaps the child – whom he left behind. He confessed that his extravagance had already wasted a large part of his mother's little fortune. He thanked his father for his

former generous conduct; and he promised him that whether he fell on the field or survived it, he would act in a manner worthy of the name of George Osborne.

His English habit, pride, awkwardness perhaps, had prevented him from saying more. His father could not see the kiss George had placed on the address of his letter. Mr. Osborne dropped it with the bitterest pang of balked affection and revenge. His son was still beloved and unforgiven.

About two months afterwards, however, as the young ladies of the family went to church with their father, they remarked how he took a different seat from usual; and that he looked up at the wall over their heads. The young women gazed in that direction, and saw an elaborate monument upon the wall, with Britannia weeping over an urn, and a broken sword and a couchant lion: signs that the sculpture was in honour of a dead warrior.

Under the memorial were emblazoned the pompous Osborne arms, and the inscription: "Sacred to the memory of George Osborne, late a Captain in his Majesty's —th regiment of foot, who fell on the 18th of June, 1815, aged 28 years, while fighting for his king and country in the glorious victory of Waterloo. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori."

The sight of that stone agitated the sisters so much that Miss Maria had to leave the church. The congregation made way respectfully for the sobbing girls, and pitied the stern old father.

"Will he forgive Mrs. George?" the girls wondered. Their anxiety that Amelia might be recognised as one of the family was increased towards the end of the autumn, by their father's announcement that he was going abroad. He did not say where, but they knew at once that he would go to Belgium; and Amelia was still in Brussels. They had news of her from Lady Dobbin. Our honest Captain Dobbin had been promoted to Major after the battle; and the brave O'Dowd, who had distinguished himself greatly, was a Colonel and Companion of the Bath.

Very many of the brave regiment were still at Brussels in the autumn, recovering from their wounds. The city was a vast military hospital for months after the great battles; and as men and officers began to recover, the gardens and public places swarmed with maimed warriors, old and young, who fell to gambling, and gaiety, and love-making, as people of Vanity Fair will do.

Mr. Osborne easily found some of the —th regiment. He knew their uniform; and the day after his arrival at Brussels, as he came out from his hotel facing the park, he saw a soldier in the well-known outfit, reposing on a stone bench, and went and sat down by him, trembling.

"Were you in Captain Osborne's company?" he said, and added, after a pause, "he was my son, sir."

The man was not of the Captain's company, but he touched his cap sadly and respectfully to the haggard gentleman.

"The whole army didn't contain a finer officer," the man said. "The Sergeant of the Captain's company could tell his honour anything he wanted to know about the regiment's actions. But his honour had seen Major Dobbin, no doubt, the brave Captain's great friend; and Mrs. Osborne, who was here too, and had been very bad. They say she was out of her mind for six weeks or more. But your honour knows all about that."

Osborne put a guinea into the soldier's hand, and told him he should have another if he would bring the Sergeant to the Hotel du Parc; a promise which very soon brought the officer.

In the Sergeant's company, Osborne travelled to Waterloo and Quatre Bras, a journey which thousands of his countrymen were then taking. He took the Sergeant in his carriage, and went through both fields under his guidance. He saw the road where the regiment marched into action on the 16th, and the slope down which they drove the French cavalry. There was the spot where the noble Captain cut down the French officer who was grappling with the young Ensign for the colours. Along this road they retreated on the next day, and here was the bank at which the regiment bivouacked under the rain on the night of the 17th.

Further on was the position which they held during the day, sheltering under the bank from the furious French cannonade. And when the English line received the order to advance, it was here that the Captain, cheering and rushing down the hill waving his sword, received a shot and fell dead.

"Major Dobbin took back the Captain's body to Brussels," the Sergeant said, in a low voice, "and had him buried, as your honour knows." Relic-hunters were screaming round the pair as the soldier told his story, offering mementoes of the fight for sale.

Osborne had already seen his son's burial-place. Indeed, he had driven there immediately after his arrival at Brussels. George's body lay in the pretty burial-ground of Laeken, in the unconsecrated corner of the garden, separated by a little hedge from the temples and flowers under which the Roman Catholic dead reposed. It seemed a humiliation to old Osborne to think that his son, an English gentleman and captain, should not be found worthy to lie in ground where mere foreigners were buried.

Old Osborne did not speculate much upon his own mingled selfish feelings. He firmly believed that everything he did was right, and that he ought to have his own way – and his hatred rushed out armed and poisonous against any opposition. He was proud of his hatred. Always to be right, always to trample forward, and never to doubt; are not these the great qualities with which dullness takes the lead in the world?

After the drive to Waterloo, as Mr. Osborne's carriage was nearing the gates of the city at sunset, they met another barouche, in which were a couple of ladies and a gentleman, with an officer riding alongside. Osborne gave a start. It was Amelia, with the lame young Ensign and her faithful friend Mrs. O'Dowd.

It was Amelia, but how changed from the fresh and comely girl Osborne knew. Her face was white and thin. Her eyes were fixed, and looking nowhere. They stared blank in the face of Osborne, as the carriages passed each other, but she did not know him; nor did he recognise her, until looking up, he saw Dobbin riding by her: and then he knew who it was. He hated her. He did not know how much until he saw her there.

"Tell the scoundrel to drive on quick," he shouted with an oath to the lackey on the box.

A minute afterwards, a horse came clattering up behind Osborne's carriage; it was Dobbin. Amelia had not even noticed him ride off. She was looking into the distance, to the woods where George had marched away.

"Mr. Osborne, Mr. Osborne!" cried Dobbin; and he held out his hand. Osborne made no move to take it, but shouted out with another curse to his servant to drive on.

Dobbin laid his hand on the carriage side. "I will see you, sir," he said. "I have a message for you."

"From that woman?" said Osborne, fiercely.

“No, from your son.” At this Osborne fell back into the corner of his carriage, and Dobbin rode close behind it through the town until they reached Mr. Osborne’s hotel. There he followed Osborne up to his apartments.

“Pray, have you any commands for me, Captain Dobbin, or, I beg your pardon, MAJOR Dobbin, since better men than you are dead, and you step into their shoes?” said Mr. Osborne, in a sarcastic tone.

“Better men *are* dead,” Dobbin replied. “I want to speak to you about one.”

“Make it short, sir,” said the other with an oath, scowling.

“I am here as his closest friend, and the executor of his will. Are you aware how small his means are, and of the straitened circumstances of his widow?”

“I don’t know his widow, sir,” Osborne said. “Let her go back to her father.” But Dobbin was determined to remain in good temper, and went on.

“Do you know, sir, Mrs. Osborne’s condition? Her life and almost her reason have been shaken by the blow which has fallen on her. It is very doubtful whether she will rally. There is a chance left for her, however, and it is about this I came to speak to you. She will be a mother soon. Will you visit the parent’s offence upon the child’s head? or will you forgive the child for poor George’s sake?”

Osborne broke out into a rhapsody of self-praise for his own conduct and imprecations against the undutifulness of George. George had rebelled against him wickedly. He had died without confessing he was wrong. Let him take the consequences of his folly. As for himself, Mr. Osborne was a man of his word. He had sworn never to speak to that woman, or to recognize her as his son’s wife. He concluded with an oath; “And that’s what I will stick to till the last day of my life.”

There was no hope from that quarter then. The widow must live on her slender pittance, or such aid as Jos could give her.

“I might tell her, and she would not heed it,” thought Dobbin sadly: for the poor girl was stupefied by sorrow; good and evil were alike indifferent to her. So, indeed, were friendship and kindness. She received them both uncomplainingly, and relapsed into her grief.

*

Suppose some twelve months after the above conversation to have passed in the life of our poor Amelia. She has spent the first portion of that time in a sorrow so profound and pitiable, that we must draw back. Shut gently the door of the dark chamber wherein she suffers, as those kind people did who nursed her through the first months of her pain.

Then a day came – of almost terrified delight and wonder – when the poor widowed girl pressed a child upon her breast – a child with George’s eyes – a little boy, as beautiful as a cherub. What a miracle it was! How she laughed and wept over it – how love, and hope, and prayer woke again in her bosom as the baby nestled there. She was safe. The doctors who had feared for her life or sanity could at last pronounce that both were secure. It was worth the long months of doubt and dread for her friends to see her eyes once more beaming tenderly upon them.

Dobbin was one of them. It was he who brought her back to England, to her mother’s house, when Mrs. O’Dowd was forced to leave and go with her Colonel. To see Dobbin holding the infant, and to hear Amelia’s laugh of triumph as she watched him, would have done any man good who had a sense of humour. William was the child’s godfather, and exerted his ingenuity in the purchase of cups, spoons, and coral rattles and teething toys.

How his mother nursed the babe, and lived upon him; how she would scarce allow any hand but her own to touch him; how she considered that the greatest favour she could confer upon Major Dobbin, was to allow him to dandle the baby, need not be told here. This child was her being. Her existence was a maternal caress: she enveloped him with love and worship. It was her life which the baby drank in from her bosom. Of nights, and when alone, she had stealthy and intense raptures of motherly love – joys far higher and lower than reason – blind beautiful devotions which only women’s hearts know.

William Dobbin mused upon this, and watched her heart; and if his love made him understand almost all the feelings in it, alas! he could see that there was no place there for him. And so, gently, he bore his fate, knowing it, and content to bear it.

I suppose Amelia’s father and mother saw through the Major’s intentions, and were inclined to encourage him; for Dobbin visited their house daily, and stayed for hours with them, or with the honest landlord, Mr. Clapp, and his family. He brought presents to everybody, almost every day; the landlord’s little girl called him Major Sugarplums.

She laughed one day when Major Sugarplums descended from his carriage with a wooden horse, a drum, a trumpet, and other toys for little Georgy, who was scarcely six months old, and for whom these articles were entirely premature.

The child was asleep. “Hush,” said Amelia, annoyed, perhaps, but smiling at the Major and his cargo of toys.

“Go downstairs,” said he to the little girl, “I want to speak to Mrs. Osborne.” Amelia looked up rather astonished, and laid down the infant on its bed.

“I am come to say good-bye, Amelia,” said he, taking her hand gently.

“Good-bye? and where are you going?” she said, smiling.

“Send the letters to the agents,” he said; “they will forward them; for you will write to me, won’t you? I shall be away a long time.”

“I’ll write to you about Georgy,” she said. “Dear William, how good you have been to him and to me. Look at him. Isn’t he like an angel?”

The little hands of the sleeping child closed mechanically round the soldier’s finger, and Amelia looked up in his face with bright maternal pleasure. The cruellest looks could not have wounded him more than that glance of kindness. He bent over the child and mother. He could not speak for a moment. And it was only with all his strength that he could force himself to say a God bless you.

“God bless you,” said Amelia, and held up her face and kissed him.

“Hush! Don’t wake Georgy!” she added, as William went to the door with heavy steps. She did not hear the cab-wheels as he drove away: she was looking at the child, who was laughing in his sleep.

CHAPTER 36

How to Live Well on Nothing a Year

I suppose there is no man in Vanity Fair who does not sometimes wonder how his neighbours make ends meet. With the utmost regard for the Jenkins family, for instance, I confess that the appearance of their large barouche with the grenadier-footmen mystifies me: for those men and the carriage must cost six hundred a year at the very least – and then there are the splendid dinners, the two boys at Eton, the prize governess for the girls, the trips abroad, and the annual ball. How do the Jenkinse manage? What is Jenkins? Commissioner of the Tape and Sealing Wax Office, with 1200 pounds a year. Had his wife a private fortune? Pooh! – she was one of eleven children of a small squire. All she ever gets from her family is a turkey at Christmas. How does Jenkins balance his income?

Every one of us can point to some families who live nobody knows how. Many a glass of wine have we all drunk, hob-nobbing with the giver and wondering how the deuce he paid for it.

Some three or four years after his stay in Paris, when Rawdon Crawley and his wife were established in a very small comfortable house in Curzon Street, May Fair, all their friends asked this question. As I am able to tell the public how Crawley and his wife lived without any income, may I entreat the public newspapers not to reprint the following narrative – of which, as the discoverer (and at some expense, too) I ought to have the benefit? You may by deep inquiry learn how a man lives comfortably on nothing a year: but it is best not to be intimate with gentlemen of this profession, for it will cost you something considerable.

On nothing per annum then, Crawley and his wife lived very happily and comfortably at Paris. He had quitted the Guards and sold out of the army. When we find him again, his mustachios and the title of Colonel on his card are the only relics of his military profession.

It has been mentioned that Rebecca, soon after her arrival in Paris, took a leading position in society, and was welcomed at noble houses. The English men of fashion courted her, to the disgust of their wives, who could not bear the upstart. For some months the fashionable salons, and the splendours of the Court, delighted and perhaps a little intoxicated Mrs. Crawley.

But the Colonel yawned sadly among the Duchesses and great ladies. He left Rebecca to attend these parties alone, resuming his own simple amusements amongst his friends.

Now, the Colonel had a great aptitude for all games of chance: and by continual exercise at the cards, dice and the billiard cue had attained much skill in their use. From being only a brilliant amateur, he had grown to be a consummate master of billiards. His genius used to rise with the danger; when luck had been unfavourable to him for a whole game, and the bets were against him, he would boldly make some prodigious shots and win, to everybody's astonishment.

At cards he was equally skilful. He would constantly lose money at the start of an evening, making such careless blunders that newcomers were inclined to think meanly of his talent. Yet when roused to action, his play became quite different, so that he was pretty sure of beating his enemy thoroughly before the night was over. The

envious and the vanquished spoke sometimes with bitterness about his successes, hinting that they were due to foul play.

In Paris at that time, gambling went on not just in public gaming rooms but in private houses. At Crawley's charming little evening gatherings it was commonly practised – much to good-natured Mrs. Crawley's annoyance. She spoke with grief about her husband's passion for dice; she bewailed it to everybody who came to her house. She besought the young fellows never to touch the dice; and when young Green lost a considerable sum of money, Rebecca passed a whole night in tears (as her servant told the unfortunate young gentleman) and actually went on her knees to her husband to beseech him to remit the debt. Yet how could he? He had lost just as much himself. Green might have time; but of course he must pay.

Her house began to have an unfortunate reputation. The old hands warned the less experienced of their danger; Colonel O'Dowd warned Lieutenant Spooney. A loud and violent fracas took place at the Café de Paris between Colonel O'Dowd and his lady, and Colonel and Mrs. Crawley. Mrs. O'Dowd snapped her fingers in Mrs. Crawley's face and called her husband "no better than a black-leg." Colonel Crawley challenged Colonel O'Dowd; but the Commander-in-Chief heard of it and ensured that no duel took place. If Rebecca had not gone on her knees to General Tufto, Crawley would have been sent back to England; and he did not play, except with civilians, for some weeks after.

In spite of Rawdon's undoubted skill, it became clear to Rebecca that their position was precarious.

"Gambling," she would say, "is good to help your income, but is not an income itself. People may get tired of play, and then where are we?" Rawdon saw the truth of this; he had noticed that after a few nights of his little suppers, gentlemen did not present themselves very eagerly.

Rebecca saw that she must get Rawdon a place at home or in the colonies. As a first step she had made him sell out of the Guards and go on half-pay. He was no longer aide-de-camp to General Tufto. Rebecca laughed at that officer, at his toupee, his false teeth, and his pretensions to be a lady-killer. The general had transferred his attentions to Mrs. Brent, along with his bouquets, his dinners, his opera-boxes, and his knick-knacks.

Becky had a dozen admirers in his place, to be sure, and could cut her rival to pieces with her wit. But opera-boxes and dinners palled upon her: nose-gays were not a provision for future years: and she could not live upon knick-knacks. She longed for more substantial benefits.

Just then news arrived that Miss Crawley was dying; the Colonel must haste to her bedside. Mrs. Crawley and her child would remain behind until he came for them. Rawdon departed for Calais, but instead of sailing to Dover, he then made for Brussels, preferring that quiet little city where he had fewer debts than in England.

Mrs. Crawley ordered the most intense mourning for herself and little Rawdon. Everyone knew that the Colonel was to inherit, and she booked the premier suite at the hotel where they were staying instead of the small apartment. She had an amicable wrangle with the landlord about carpets and new hangings, and a final adjustment of everything except the bill. She went off in one of his carriages, with her French maid and her child; the landlord and landlady smiling farewell to her from the gate.

General Tufto was furious when he heard she was gone, and Mrs. Brent was furious with him for being furious; Lieutenant Spooney was cut to the heart; and the landlord got his best suite ready for her return. He kept the trunks which she left in his

charge with the greatest care. They were not, however, found to be particularly valuable when opened some time after.

Before she went to join her husband in Brussels, Mrs. Crawley made an expedition into England, leaving her little son behind under the care of her French maid.

The parting between Rebecca and the little Rawdon did not cause either much pain. She had not seen much of him since his birth. After the amiable fashion of French mothers, she had placed him out at nurse in a village, where little Rawdon passed the first months of his life, not unhappily, with a numerous family of foster-brothers in wooden shoes. His father would ride over often to visit him, and the elder Rawdon's heart glowed to see him rosy and dirty, shouting lustily, and happy in the making of mud-pies.

Rebecca did not care much to go and see her son. Once he spoiled a new dove-coloured pelisse of hers. He preferred his nurse's caresses to his mamma's, and when finally he quitted that jolly nurse, he cried loudly for hours. He was only consoled by his mother's promise that he should return the next day; indeed the nurse too was told that the child would be restored to her, and for some time anxiously awaited his return.

Thirty years ago there was great respect in Europe for the honour and wealth of Britons. You needed only to be a *Milor Anglais*, travelling in a private carriage, and credit was yours wherever you chose. It was not for some weeks after the Crawleys' departure that the landlord of their Paris hotel found out the losses which he had sustained: not until the milliner and the jeweller made repeated visits with their bills for Madame Crawley. Even the poor nurse was never paid after the first six months for that milk of human kindness with which she had nurtured the healthy little Rawdon.

Rebecca's object in her journey to London was to reach an agreement with her husband's creditors, and by offering them a shilling in the pound, to secure his return to England. She managed to convince them that she was offering them all her husband's wealth, and that otherwise he would stay on the continent and they would get no money at all. Thus she purchased with fifteen hundred pounds of ready money more than ten times that amount of debt.

Mrs. Crawley employed no lawyer. She made the lawyers of the creditors themselves do the business. And they complimented her upon the brilliant way in which she dealt with them, and declared that no professional man could beat her.

Rebecca received their congratulations with perfect modesty; ordered a bottle of sherry to her dingy lodgings to treat the enemy's lawyers: shook hands with them at parting, in excellent good humour, and returned straightway to the Continent, to rejoin her husband and tell him the good news. Her son had been neglected during his mother's absence; for her French maid, forming an attachment for a soldier, forgot her charge, and little Rawdon very narrowly escaped drowning on Calais sands, where she had left and lost him.

And so Colonel and Mrs. Crawley came to London: and at their house in Curzon Street, May Fair, they showed the skill which must be possessed by those who would live on non-existent income.

CHAPTER 37

The Subject Continued

In the first place, let us describe how a house may be got for nothing a year. These mansions are to be had either unfurnished, where, if you have credit with Messrs. Gillows or Bantings, you can get them splendidly decorated according to your fancy; or they are let furnished, a less troublesome arrangement. It was so that Crawley and his wife preferred to hire their house.

Before Mr. Bows came to Miss Crawley's house in Park Lane, that lady had as her butler a Mr. Raggles, who was the younger son of a gardener at Queen's Crawley. By good conduct, a handsome appearance and a grave demeanour, Raggles rose from the knife-board to the butler's pantry. After many years at the head of Miss Crawley's house, he announced that he was about to marry a former cook of Miss Crawley's, who kept a small greengrocer's shop. In truth, the marriage had secretly happened some years back.

Mr. Raggles retired to superintend the small shop. He added milk, cream, eggs and country-fed pork to his stores, and his profits increased every year. He quietly and modestly amassed money, and when a snug bachelor's house at 201, Curzon Street, with rich furniture, went under the hammer, who should purchase the lease but Raggles? Some of the money he borrowed, it is true, at rather high interest from a brother butler, but the chief part he paid down; and Mrs. Raggles found herself proudly sleeping in a bed of carved mahogany, with silk curtains, and a wardrobe which would contain her, and Raggles, and all the family.

Of course, they did not intend to occupy it long, but to let it again. As soon as a tenant was found, Raggles returned to the greengrocer's shop; but it was a happy thing for him to walk down Curzon Street, and survey his house with its carved bronze knocker.

He was a good man; good and happy. The house brought him so handsome an income that he was determined to send his children to good schools, and accordingly, regardless of expense, Charles was sent to board at Dr. Swishtail's, and little Matilda to Miss Peckover's at Clapham.

Raggles loved the Crawley family as the author of all his prosperity. He thought there was no family so august. As luck would have it, Raggles' house in Curzon Street was to let when Rawdon and his wife returned to London. Raggles knew the Colonel; and he not only let his house to him, but acted as his butler whenever he had company, with Mrs. Raggles cooking in the kitchen below and sending up dinners.

In this way Crawley got his house for nothing; for though Raggles had to pay taxes and rates, and the interest of the mortgage to the brother butler; and his children's school fees, and the cost of meat and drink for his family, and for Colonel Crawley too; and though the poor wretch was utterly ruined by the transaction, his children being flung on the streets, and himself driven into the Fleet Prison: yet somebody must pay for gentlemen who live for nothing a year – and in this case it was the unlucky Raggles.

I wonder how many families are driven to ruin in this way? – how many great noblemen rob their petty tradesmen and swindle their poor retainers? When we read that a nobleman owes six or seven millions, the defeat seems glorious even, and we respect the victim in the vastness of his ruin. But who pities his poor barber, or

carpenter, on his poor devil of a tailor? When the great house tumbles down, these miserable wretches fall under it unnoticed.

Rawdon and his wife generously patronised those of Miss Crawley's tradesmen who would serve them. Some were willing enough, especially the poor ones. It was wonderful to see the tenacity with which the washerwoman brought the cart every Saturday, and her bills week after week. Mr. Raggles himself had to supply the greengroceries. Every servant was owed most of his wages, and thus kept up an interest in the house. Nobody was paid. Not the blacksmith who opened the lock; nor the glazier who mended the pane; nor the jobber who let the carriage; nor the groom who drove it. This is the way in which people live elegantly on nothing a year.

At 201 Curzon Street there was a hearty welcome, a kind smile and a good dinner from the host and hostess, just as if they had three or four thousand a year. And so they did, not in money, but in produce and labour. No man had better claret than Rawdon; his drawing-rooms were the prettiest little salons conceivable, decorated by Rebecca with knick-knacks from Paris. When she sat at her piano trilling songs, the stranger thought himself in a little paradise of domestic comfort and agreed that, although the husband was rather stupid, the wife was charming.

Rebecca's wit, cleverness, and flippancy made her speedily the vogue in London among a certain class. You beheld her carriage in the park, surrounded by dandies. Her box in the third tier of the opera was crowded; but the ladies held aloof from her, and closed their doors to our little adventurer.

There are ladies who may be called men's women, being welcomed entirely by all the gentlemen and slighted by all their wives. Mrs. Firebrace is of this sort – the lady with the beautiful fair ringlets whom you see every day in Hyde Park, surrounded by famous dandies. Mrs. Rockwood is another, whose parties are announced in the fashionable newspapers. But while simple folks might envy them, persons who are better informed know that these ladies have no chance of establishing themselves in "society," but are pitilessly excluded.

Now the few female acquaintances whom Mrs. Crawley had known abroad not only declined to visit her when she came to London, but cut her severely when they met in public. When Lady Bareacres saw her in the opera-house, she gathered her daughters about her as if they would be contaminated by a touch of Becky, and stared frigidly at her little enemy. Mrs. Blenkinsop, the banker's wife, cut her at church, where Becky went regularly now.

Rawdon at first felt very acutely the slights upon his wife, and was gloomy and savage. He talked of calling out the husbands of the insolent women who did not respect his wife; and it was only by the strongest commands on her part that he was restrained.

"You can't shoot me into society," she said good-naturedly. "Remember, my dear, that I was only a governess, and you, you poor silly man, have the worst reputation for debt and wickedness. We shall get quite as many friends as we want by and by, and in the meanwhile you must be a good boy. When we heard that your aunt had left almost everything to Pitt, do you remember what a rage you were in? You would have told all Paris, if I had not made you keep your temper, and then where would you be now? – in prison for debt, and not in a handsome house in London. Rage won't get us your aunt's money; and it is much better that we should be friends with your brother than enemies. When your father dies, Queen's Crawley will be a pleasant house for us to pass the winter in. Or Pitt and his little boy will die, and we will be Sir Rawdon and my lady. While there is life, there is hope, my dear, and I

intend to make a man of you yet. Who sold your horses for you? Who paid your debts for you?" Rawdon confessed that he owed all these benefits to his wife.

Indeed, Miss Crawley had left her money finally to Pitt. But Crawley, who found that only five thousand pounds had been left to him instead of the twenty which he expected, was in such a fury that he savagely abused his nephew, and caused an utter breach between them. Rawdon Crawley, on the other hand, who got only a hundred pounds, astonished his brother and delighted his sister-in-law, by writing them a very frank, manly, good-humoured letter from Paris.

He was aware, he said, that he had forfeited his aunt's favour; and though he did not disguise his disappointment, he was glad that the money was kept in their branch of the family, and heartily congratulated his brother, and sent his affectionate goodwill. Becky joined in her husband's congratulations, writing that she would always remember Mr. Crawley's kindness when she was a friendless orphan. She wished him every happiness in his married life, and hoped that one day she might be allowed to present her little boy to his uncle and aunt.

Pitt Crawley received this letter very graciously; and as for Lady Jane, she was so charmed with it that she expected her husband to instantly divide his aunt's legacy into two and send half to his brother.

To her Ladyship's surprise, however, Pitt declined to give his brother thirty thousand pounds. But he thanked Rawdon and Mrs. Crawley, and graciously pronounced his willingness to help their little boy.

Thus an almost-reconciliation was brought about. When Rebecca came to town Pitt and his wife were not in London. She heard through Raggles that Miss Crawley's servants had been dismissed with decent payments; and that Mr. Pitt had only once appeared in London, when he stayed for a few days at the house and did business with his lawyers. Becky longed for the arrival of her new relation.

"When Lady Jane comes," she thought, "she shall be my sponsor in London; and the women will ask me when they find the men want to see me."

A lady in this position needs a companion. I have always admired the way in which the tender creatures hire an exceedingly plain friend of their own sex, from whom they are almost inseparable. Even battered, brazen, beautiful, heartless Mrs. Firebrace, whose father died of her shame – even she is hardly seen in any public place without a shabby companion sitting somewhere in the shade.

"Rawdon," said Becky, very late one night, as a party of gentlemen were seated round her drawing-room fire, "I must have a sheep-dog."

"A what?" said Rawdon, looking up from the card-table.

"A sheep-dog!" said young Lord Southdown. "My dear Mrs. Crawley, what a fancy! Why not have a Great Dane? I know of one so big, by Jove, it would almost pull your carriage. Or do you want a little pug that would go into one of Lord Steyne's snuff-boxes?"

"I mean a moral sheep-dog," said Becky, laughing, and looking at Lord Steyne. "A dog to keep the wolves off me. A companion."

"Dear little innocent lamb, you need one," said the Marquis of Steyne. With jaw thrust out, he began to grin hideously, his little eyes leering at Rebecca.

The great Lord of Steyne was standing by the fire sipping coffee. A score of candles sparkled round the mantelpiece, lighting up Rebecca's figure to admiration as she sat on a flowered sofa. She was in a pink dress that looked as fresh as a rose; her dazzling white arms and shoulders were half-covered with a thin hazy scarf; her hair

hung in curls round her neck; one of her pretty little feet peeped out from the crisp folds of the silk.

The candles lit up Lord Steyne's shining bald head, which was fringed with red hair. He had thick bushy eyebrows, with little bloodshot eyes, surrounded by a thousand wrinkles. When he laughed, two white buck-teeth protruded, glistening savagely. He had been dining with royalty, and wore his garter and ribbon. Though his Lordship was a short, bow-legged man, he was proud of the fineness of his ankle, and always caressing his garter-knee.

"And so the shepherd is not enough," said he, "to defend his lambkin?"

"The shepherd is too fond of playing at cards and going to his clubs," answered Becky, laughing.

"Gad, what a debauched Corydon!" said my lord.

"I take your three to two," said Rawdon at the card-table.

"Hark," snarled the noble marquis; "he's pastorally occupied: he's shearing a Southdown. Damme, what a snowy fleece!" Lord Steyne in early life had been notorious for his success at play.

Rebecca rose up and took his coffee cup from his hand with a little curtsy. "Yes," she said, "I must get a watchdog. But he won't bark at *you*." And, going into the other drawing-room, she sat down at the piano and began to sing French songs in such a thrilling voice that the mollified nobleman speedily followed her.

Rawdon meanwhile played *écarté*, and won. Nights like these occurred many times in the week – his wife having all the talk and admiration, and he sitting silent, not comprehending a word of the jokes and allusions.

"How is Mrs. Crawley's husband?" Lord Steyne used to say to him; and indeed that was now his role. He was Colonel Crawley no more. He was Mrs. Crawley's husband.

About the little Rawdon, if nothing has been said all this while, it is because he is hidden in a garret somewhere, or has crawled into the kitchen for companionship. His mother scarcely ever took notice of him. He passed the days with his French maid until she went away; and then the little fellow, howling in the loneliness of the night, had pity taken on him by a housemaid, who took him out of his solitary nursery into her bed and comforted him.

Rebecca, my Lord Steyne, and one or two more were in the drawing-room when this shouting was heard overhead.

"It's my cherub crying for his nurse," said Rebecca. She did not move to go and see the child. "He'll cry himself to sleep." And they began talking about the opera.

Rawdon had stolen off, though, to look after his son, and found honest Dolly consoling the child. The Colonel's dressing-room was in those upper regions. He used to see the boy there in private, every morning when he shaved; Rawdon minor sitting on a box and watching the operation with never-ceasing pleasure. They were great friends. The father would bring sweetmeats and hide them in a box, where the child laughed with joy on discovering the treasure; laughed, but not too loud: for mamma was asleep below and must not be disturbed. She seldom rose till after noon.

Rawdon bought the boy plenty of picture-books and crammed his nursery with toys. Its walls were covered with pictures pasted up by the father's hand and purchased by him with actual cash. When he was not with Mrs. Rawdon in the park, he would sit up here, passing hours with the boy; who rode on his chest, pulled his mustachios like driving-reins, and spent days playing with him.

The ceiling was low, and once, when the child was not five years old, his father, tossing him wildly up in his arms, hit the poor little chap's skull violently. Rawdon minor screwed up his face for a tremendous howl – but his father interposed.

“For God's sake, Rawdy, don't wake Mamma,” he cried. And the child, looking piteously at his father, bit his lips, clenched his hands, and didn't cry a bit.

Rawdon told that story to everybody. “By Gad, sir,” he explained, “what a plucky boy he is – what a trump! I half-sent his head through the ceiling, by Gad, and he wouldn't cry for fear of disturbing his mother.”

Once or twice a week that lady visited the upper regions where the child lived. She came blandly smiling in beautiful new clothes and gloves and boots. Wonderful scarfs, laces, and jewels glittered about her. She had always a new bonnet on, with flowers or magnificent ostrich feathers. When she left the room, an odour of roses lingered about the nursery. She was an unearthly being in the child's eyes, superior to his father – to all the world: to be worshipped at a distance. To drive with her in the carriage was an awful ritual: he sat up in the back seat and did not dare to speak, gazing at the beautifully dressed Princess opposite. Gentlemen on splendid prancing horses came up and talked with her. How her eyes beamed upon them!

Sometimes, when she was away, he came into his mother's room. It was like a fairy's abode – a mystic chamber of delights. In the wardrobe hung wonderful robes; there was the jewel-case, and the wondrous bronze hand on the dressing-table, glistening with a hundred rings. Poor lonely little boy! Mother is the name for God in the hearts of little children; and here was one who was worshipping a stone!

Now Colonel Crawley, rascal as he was, could love a child still. For Rawdon minor he had a great secret tenderness, which did not escape Rebecca. It did not annoy her: she was too good-natured. It only increased her scorn for him. He felt somehow ashamed of this paternal softness and hid it from his wife, only indulging in it when alone with the boy.

He used to take him out in the mornings to the stables and the park. Young Lord Southdown, the best-natured of men, bought the little chap a pony, and on this little black Shetland Rawdon's father liked to mount the boy, and to walk by his side in the park. It pleased him to see his old quarters: he had begun to think of his bachelorhood with something like regret. The old troopers were glad to recognize their ancient officer and dandle the little boy. Colonel Crawley found dining with his brother-officers very pleasant. “Hang it, I ain't clever enough for her. She won't miss me,” he used to say: and he was right.

Rebecca was fond of her husband. She was always perfectly good-humoured and kind to him. She did not show her scorn for him much; perhaps she liked him the better for being a fool. He went on her errands; obeyed her orders without question; took her to the opera-box, and came back punctually to fetch her.

When the companion arrived, his duties became very light. His wife encouraged him to dine out.

“Don't stay at home to-night, my dear,” she would say. “Some men are coming who will only bore you. Now I have a sheep-dog, I need not be afraid to be alone.”

One Sunday morning, as Rawdon Crawley and his little son were taking their walk in the park, they passed an old acquaintance, Corporal Clink, talking to an old gentleman who held a boy in his arms. This other youngster had seized hold of the Waterloo medal which the Corporal wore, and was examining it with delight.

“Good morning, your Honour,” said Clink. “This 'ere young man is about the little Colonel's age, sir.”

“His father was a Waterloo man, too,” said the old gentleman. “Wasn’t he, Georgy?”

“Yes,” said Georgy. He and the little chap on the pony were solemnly scanning each other as children do.

“He was a Captain,” said the old gentleman rather pompously. “Captain George Osborne, sir – perhaps you knew him. He died the death of a hero, sir.”

Colonel Crawley blushed quite red. “I knew him very well, sir,” he said, “and his dear little wife – how is she?”

“She is my daughter, sir,” said the old gentleman, handing him a card with great solemnity. On it was written–

“Mr. Sedley, Sole Agent for the Anti-Cinder Coal Association, Bunker’s Wharf, and Anna-Maria Cottages, Fulham Road West.”

Little Georgy went up and looked at the Shetland pony.

“Would you like to have a ride?” said Rawdon minor.

“Yes,” said Georgy. The Colonel took up the child and put him on the pony behind Rawdon.

“Take hold of him round the waist, Georgy,” he said. And both the children began to laugh.

“You won’t see a prettier pair, sir,” said the Corporal; and the three men walked alongside the children.

CHAPTER 38

A Family in a Very Small Way

We must now make inquiries at Fulham about some friends whom we have left there. How is Mrs. Amelia? Is she living and thriving? What has become of Major Dobbin? And is there any news of the Collector of Boggley Wollah? The facts about him are briefly these:

Our worthy friend Joseph Sedley returned to India not long after his escape from Brussels, soon after Napoleon had been confined to St. Helena. To hear Mr. Sedley talk on board ship, you would have supposed that he had confronted the French General personally. He had a thousand tales about the famous battles; he knew the position of every regiment. He did not deny that he had carried despatches for the Duke of Wellington. He described what the Duke did and said at Waterloo with such accurate knowledge that it was clear he must have been by the conqueror's side throughout the day. Perhaps he actually worked himself up to believe that he had been engaged with the army; certainly he made a sensation for some time at Calcutta, and was called Waterloo Sedley during his stay in Bengal.

His agents had orders to pay one hundred and twenty pounds yearly to his parents at Fulham. It was the couple's chief support; for old Mr. Sedley's speculations did not succeed. He tried to be a wine-merchant, a coal-merchant, and a lottery agent; he sent round prospectuses, and ordered a new brass plate for the door, and talked pompously about making his fortune. But Fortune never came back to the feeble old man. His friends dropped off, weary of buying dear coals and bad wine from him. He used to go of nights to a little club at a tavern, where he talked about millions, what Rothschild was doing, and Baring Brothers.

"I was better off once, sir," he told everybody. "My son, sir, is chief magistrate of Ramgunge in Bengal. I might draw upon my son, sir, for two thousand pounds tomorrow. But the Sedleys were always a proud family."

Had Mrs. Sedley been a woman of energy, she would have taken in boarders. The broken Sedley would have acted well as a boarding-house carver and steward. But Mrs. Sedley had not spirit enough for that. She was content to lie on the shore where fortune had stranded her; and you could see that the career of this old couple was over.

I don't think they were unhappy. Perhaps they were a little prouder in their downfall than in their prosperity. Mrs. Sedley was always a great person for her landlady, Mrs. Clapp. The Irish maid's bonnets and ribbons, her sauciness, her idleness, her reckless prodigality of candles, amused the old lady almost as much as the doings of her former household, when she had a regiment of female domestics. And besides Betty, Mrs. Sedley had all the maids in the street to superintend.

On Sundays, it was old Sedley's delight to take his little grandson Georgy to the neighbouring parks or Kensington Gardens, to see the soldiers or to feed the ducks. Georgy loved the redcoats, and his grandpapa told him how his father had been a famous soldier, and introduced him to many sergeants and others wearing Waterloo medals, to whom the old grandfather pompously presented the child as the son of Captain Osborne, who died gloriously on the glorious eighteenth. He spoiled little Georgy, sadly gorging the boy until Amelia declared that George should never go out

with his grandpapa unless the latter promised solemnly not to give the child any cakes or lollipops.

Between Mrs. Sedley and her daughter there was a coolness about this boy, and a secret jealousy. For one evening in George's very early days, Amelia ran upstairs to the nursery at the cries of the child, who had been asleep until that moment – and there found Mrs. Sedley surreptitiously giving him Daffy's Elixir. Amelia, the gentlest of everyday mortals, trembled all over with anger. Her pale cheeks flushed up; she seized the baby from her mother's arms and grasped the bottle, leaving the old lady gaping at her, and holding the guilty tea-spoon.

Amelia flung the bottle crashing into the fire-place. "I will *not* have baby poisoned, Mamma," she cried, turning with flashing eyes at her mother.

"Poisoned, Amelia!"

"He shall not have any medicine but that which Mr. Pestler sends. He told me that Daffy's Elixir was poison."

"Very good: you think I'm a murderess," replied Mrs. Sedley. "This is the language you use to your mother. I have sunk low in life: but I did not know I was a murderess, and thank you for the news."

"Mamma," said the poor girl, who was always ready for tears, "I didn't mean – I did not wish to say you would do any wrong to the dear child, only—"

"Oh, no, my love, only that I was a murderess. Though I didn't poison *you*, when you were a child, but gave you the best education money could buy. Yes; I've nursed five children and buried three; and the one I loved the best of all, and tended through croup, and measles, and whooping-cough, and brought up with foreign masters, regardless of expense, which I never had when I was a girl – says I'm a murderess."

"Mamma, Mamma!" cried the bewildered girl; and the child in her arms set up a frantic chorus of shouts.

"Pray to God to cleanse your wicked ungrateful heart, Amelia, and may He forgive you as I do." And Mrs. Sedley tossed out of the room.

Till the end of her life, this breach between Mrs. Sedley and her daughter was never thoroughly mended. The elder lady scarcely spoke to Amelia for many weeks. She warned the domestics not to touch the child, as Mrs. Osborne might be offended. She asked her daughter to satisfy herself that there was no poison in the little daily messes that were concocted for Georgy. When neighbours asked after the boy's health, she referred them pointedly to Mrs. Osborne. *She* would not touch the child although he was her own precious darling, for she might kill him.

And whenever Mr. Pestler called, she received the doctor with such a sarcastic manner that he declared that even Lady Thistlewood could not give herself greater airs than old Mrs. Sedley, from whom he never took a fee. Very likely Emmy was jealous too, as what mother is not, of those who would manage her children for her. When anybody nursed the child, she was uneasy; and she would no more allow Mrs. Clapp to tend him than she would have let them wash her husband's miniature, which hung in the room to which she retired now for many silent, tearful, but happy years.

In this room was all Amelia's heart and treasure. Here she tended her boy and watched him through the many ills of childhood, with a constant passion of love. The elder George returned in him somehow, only improved, as if come back from heaven. In a hundred little ways the child was so like his father that her heart thrilled. She talked constantly to him about this dead father, and spoke of her love for George to the innocent and wondering child. To her parents she never talked about this matter, but into little George's uncomprehending ears she poured her sentimental secrets.

Most men who came near her loved her; though they would be at a loss to tell you why. She was not brilliant, nor witty, nor extraordinarily handsome. But she charmed every one of the male sex, as invariably as she awakened the scorn and incredulity of her own sisterhood. I think it was her weakness which was her principal charm – a kind of sweet submission, which seemed to appeal to men for sympathy and protection. In the regiment, the young officers would have leapt to fight round her; and so it was in the little circle at Fulham, where she interested and pleased everybody.

Mr. Linton, the doctor's young assistant, openly declared himself her slave. He was a personable young gentleman, and if anything went wrong with Georgy, he would drop in twice or thrice in the day to see the little chap, without thinking of a fee. He would bring Georgy lozenges, and made such sweet mixtures for him that it was quite a pleasure to the child to be ailing. He and Dr. Pestler sat up two whole nights by the boy in that awful week when Georgy had the measles; and when you would have thought, from the mother's terror, that there had never been measles in the world before. Did they sit up for little Polly Clapp, the landlord's daughter, who caught the disease from Georgy? No. They pronounced hers a slight case, which would cure itself, and sent her a draught or two.

Again, there was the little French chevalier opposite, who gave lessons in French at various schools, at night playing tremulous gavottes on a wheezy old fiddle. Whenever this courteous old man spoke of Mistress Osborne, he would gather his fingers into a bunch, and blow them open with a kiss, exclaiming, *Ah! la divine creature!* He vowed that when Amelia walked, flowers grew under her feet. He called Georgy Cupid, and asked him news of Venus, his mamma.

And did not Mr. Binny, the mild curate of the chapel, call assiduously upon the widow, dandle the little boy on his knee, and offer to teach him Latin, to the anger of his sister, who kept house for him?

"There is nothing in her, Beilby," his sister would say. "When she comes to tea she does not speak a word. She is a poor lackadaisical creature, and it is only her pretty face which you gentlemen admire so."

Very likely Miss Binny was right. It *is* the pretty face which creates sympathy in the hearts of men. A woman may possess the wisdom of Minerva, and we give no heed to her, if she is plain. And so, with their usual sense of justice, ladies argue that because a woman is handsome, therefore she is a fool. O ladies, ladies! there are some of you who are neither handsome nor wise.

These are but trivial incidents. During the seven years after the birth of Amelia's son, the most notable event that occurred to her was Georgy's measles. And one day, greatly to her wonder, the Reverend Mr. Binny asked her to marry him. With deep blushes and tears in her eyes, she thanked him, but said that she never could think of any but the husband whom she had lost.

On the twenty-fifth of April, and the eighteenth of June, the days of her marriage and widowhood, she kept to her room. On other days she was more active, teaching George to read, write and draw. She taught the child, to the best of her humble power, to acknowledge the Maker of all, and every night and morning they prayed together, asking God to bless dear Papa, as if he were in the room.

To wash and dress this young gentleman – to take him for a run in the mornings – to make him the most ingenious outfits, for which the thrifty widow cut up every bit of finery she possessed – occupied her many hours of the day. Others she spent at the service of her parents. She played cribbage with her father, and sang for him; she

wrote out his letters, prospectuses, and projects. It was in her handwriting that the old gentleman's acquaintances were informed that he had become an agent for the Anti-Cinder Coal Company and could supply the public with the best coals.

One of these papers was sent to Major Dobbin, through his agents; but the Major, being in Madras at the time, had no call for coals. He knew, though, the hand which had written the prospectus. Good God! what would he not have given to hold it in his own!

A second prospectus followed, informing the Major that J. Sedley and Company offered to their friends and the public the finest ports, sherries, and claret wines at reasonable prices. Dobbin furiously canvassed the governor, the commander-in-chief, the regiments, and everybody he knew, and sent home to Sedley and Co. orders for wine which perfectly astonished Mr. Sedley and Mr. Clapp, who was the Co. in the business. But no more orders came after that first burst of good fortune. The curses of the mess-room assailed Major Dobbin for the vile drinks he had introduced; and he bought back a great quantity of the wine, at an enormous loss to himself.

As for Jos, who had been promoted to the Revenue Board at Calcutta, he was wild with rage when the post brought him a bundle of these prospectuses, with a note from his father telling Jos that he had consigned a quantity of select wines to him, as per invoice, asking for payment. Jos refused the bills with scorn, and wrote back bidding the old gentleman to mind his own affairs. Sedley and Co. had to pay for the order with the profits which they had made from Madras, and with some of Emmy's savings.

Besides her pension of fifty pounds a year, there had been five hundred pounds, left in the agent's hands at Osborne's death, which Dobbin, as George's guardian, proposed to invest at 8 per cent in an Indian house of agency. Mr. Sedley, who thought the Major had some roguish intentions about the money, went to the agents to protest; and he learned, to his surprise, that the late Captain had not left anywhere near five hundred pounds, and that it must be a separate sum, of which Major Dobbin knew the details. Old Sedley pursued the Major and demanded a statement of the late Captain's accounts. Dobbin's stammering, blushing, and awkwardness added to the other's convictions that he had a rogue to deal with, and in a majestic tone he stated his belief that the Major was unlawfully keeping his late son-in-law's money.

Dobbin at this lost all patience, and if his accuser had not been so old and so broken, a quarrel might have ensued.

"Come upstairs, sir," said the Major, "and I will show which is the injured party, poor George or I." Dragging the old gentleman up to his room, he produced Osborne's accounts, and a bundle of IOU's which George had given. "He paid his bills in England," Dobbin said, "but he had not a hundred pounds in the world when he fell. I and one or two of his brother officers made up the little sum, which was all that we could spare, and you dare tell us that we are trying to cheat the widow and the orphan."

Sedley was very contrite, though in fact William Dobbin had told him a great falsehood; having himself given every shilling of the money.

Amelia herself had never given any thought to all this. She trusted to Major Dobbin as an accountant, took his somewhat confused calculations for granted, and never suspected how much she was in his debt.

Twice or thrice a year, as promised, she wrote him letters, all about little Georgy. How he treasured them! Whenever Amelia wrote he answered, and not until then. But he sent over endless gifts to his godson and to her: a box of scarfs and a grand ivory

set of chess-men from China, with real swords and shields, and the castles on the backs of elephants. These chess-men delighted Georgy, who wrote his first letter in acknowledgement of this gift. Dobbin sent over preserves and pickles, which Georgy tried surreptitiously and half-killed himself with eating, they were so hot. Emmy wrote a comical little account of this mishap to the Major: it pleased him to think that she could be merry sometimes now. He sent over a pair of shawls, a white one for her and a black one with palm-leaves for her mother, worth fifty guineas apiece at the very least, as Mrs. Sedley knew. She wore hers in state to church, and was congratulated by her female friends.

“What a pity it is she won’t think of him!” Mrs. Sedley remarked to Mrs. Clapp. “Jos never sent us such presents, and grudges us everything. The Major is clearly head over heels in love with her; and yet, whenever I hint it, she begins to cry and goes and sits upstairs with her miniature. I’m sick of that miniature. I wish we had never seen those odious Osbornes.”

Amidst such humble scenes George’s early youth was passed. The boy grew up delicate, sensitive, imperious, woman-bred – domineering his gentle mother and ruling the rest of the little world around him. The elders were amazed at his haughty manner and his likeness to his father. He asked questions about everything, astonishing his old grandfather; the small circle about Georgy believed that the boy had no equal upon the earth. Georgy inherited his father’s pride, and perhaps thought they were not wrong.

When he was about six, Dobbin began to write to him. The Major wanted to hear that Georgy was going to school: or would he have a good tutor at home? It was time that he should begin to learn; and Dobbin hinted that he hoped to be allowed to pay for the boy’s education.

The Major, in a word, was always thinking about Amelia and her little boy, and through his agents sent him picture-books, paint-boxes and desks. Three days before George’s sixth birthday a gentleman in a gig drove up to Mr. Sedley’s house and asked to see Master George Osborne: it was a military tailor, who came at the Major’s order to measure the young gentleman for a suit.

Sometimes, too, by the Major’s desire no doubt, his sisters would call in the family carriage to take Amelia and the little boy for a drive. This kind patronage was very uncomfortable to Amelia, but she bore it meekly, and the carriage and its splendours gave little Georgy immense pleasure. The ladies begged occasionally that the child might pass a day with them, and he was always glad to go to their fine house, where there were grapes in the hot-houses and peaches on the walls.

One day they kindly came over to Amelia with news which they were sure would delight her, about their dear William.

“What was it: was he coming home?” she asked with pleasure.

“Oh, no – but they had good reason to believe that dear William was about to be married – and to a relation of a very dear friend of Amelia’s – to Miss Glorvina O’Dowd, who had gone out to join Lady O’Dowd – a very beautiful and accomplished girl, everybody said.”

Amelia said “Oh!” She was very happy, although – but she was very happy indeed. She took George in her arms and kissed him, and her eyes were quite moist when she put the child down. She scarcely spoke a word during the drive – though she was so very happy indeed.

CHAPTER 39

A Cynical Chapter

We now return to some old Hampshire acquaintances, whose hopes of inheritance were so woefully disappointed. It was a heavy blow to Bute Crawley to receive only five thousand pounds from Miss Crawley's estate. Once he had paid his own debts and Jim's, very little remained to portion off his four plain daughters. Mrs. Bute never knew, or at least never acknowledged, how far her own tyrannous behaviour had ruined her husband. She vowed that she had done all that woman could do. Was it her fault if she was not as hypocritical as her nephew, Pitt Crawley?

"At least the money will remain in the family," she said. "Pitt will never spend it, my dear; for a greater miser does not exist."

So Mrs. Bute, after the first shock, began to adjust to her altered fortunes and to save with all her might. She invented a thousand methods to conceal poverty. She took her daughters to public places with praiseworthy energy; she entertained her friends hospitably at the Rectory. Nobody would have supposed that the family had been disappointed in their expectations, or have guessed how she pinched and starved at home. Her girls appeared perseveringly at the Winchester assemblies; they went to Cowes for the balls and regattas; and their carriage, with the horses taken from the plough, was at work perpetually, until it began almost to be believed that the four sisters had had fortunes left them by their aunt, of whom the family spoke only with gratitude. I know no sort of lying which is more frequent in Vanity Fair than this. People who practise it fancy that they are exceedingly virtuous, because they are able to deceive the world about their means.

Mrs. Bute certainly thought herself one of the most virtuous women in England, and the sight of her happy family was an edifying one. They were so cheerful, so loving, so well-educated, so simple! Martha painted flowers exquisitely and furnished half the charity bazaars in the county. Emma's verses in the Hampshire Telegraph were the glory of its Poet's Corner. Fanny and Matilda sang duets together, Mamma playing the piano, and the other two sisters sitting with their arms round each other's waists and listening affectionately. Nobody saw the poor girls drumming at the duets in private. No one saw Mamma drilling them rigidly hour after hour.

Everything that a respectable mother could do Mrs. Bute did. She got over yachting men from Southampton, parsons from the Cathedral Close at Winchester, and officers from the barracks. She tried to inveigle the young barristers at assizes and encouraged Jim to bring home friends with whom he went hunting.

Between such a woman and her brother-in-law, the odious Baronet, there could be very little in common. The rupture between Bute and his brother Sir Pitt was complete; indeed, Sir Pitt scandalised the whole county. His dislike for respectable society increased with age, and no gentleman's carriage had passed his gates since Pitt and Lady Jane paid a visit after their marriage.

That was an awful visit, remembered by the family with horror. Pitt begged his wife never to speak of it, and it was only through Mrs. Bute, who still knew everything which took place at the Hall, that the nature of Sir Pitt's reception of his son and daughter-in-law was ever known.

As they drove up the avenue of the park, Pitt remarked with dismay great gaps among the trees – his trees – which the old Baronet was felling without permission.

The park wore an aspect of utter dreariness and ruin. The neat carriage floundered in muddy pools along the road. The great sweep in front of the terrace and entrance stair was black and covered with moss; the flower-beds were rank and weedy.

After much ringing of the bell, the door was unbarred; an individual in ribbons was seen flitting up the stairs, as Horrocks at length admitted Pitt and Lady Jane. He led the way into Sir Pitt's "library," where the tobacco fumes were strong.

The library looked out on the front. Sir Pitt had opened one of the windows, and was bawling out to a servant who was about to take the baggage down from the carriage.

"Don't move them trunks," he cried. "It's only a morning visit, Tucker, you fool. How do, Pitt? How do, my dear? Come to see the old man, hay? 'Gad – you've a pretty face. You ain't like that old horse, your mother. Come and give old Pitt a kiss, like a good little gal."

The embrace disconcerted his daughter-in-law; but she submitted.

"Pitt has got fat," said the Baronet. "Does he read ee very long zermons, my dear? Go and get a glass of Malmsey and a cake for my Lady Jane, Horrocks, you great big booby, and don't stand there like a fat pig. I won't ask you to stay, my dear; you'll find it too stoopid. I'm an old man now, and like my own ways, and my pipe and backgammon of a night."

"I can play backgammon, sir," said Lady Jane, laughing. "I used to play with Papa, didn't I, Mr. Crawley?"

"Lady Jane can play, sir," Pitt said haughtily.

"But she wawn't stay for all that. Naw, go back to Mudbury; or drive down to the Rectory and ask Buty for dinner. He'll be charmed to see you; he's so much obliged to you for gettin' the old woman's money. Ha, ha!"

"I perceive, sir," said Pitt with a heightened voice, "that your people are cutting down the timber."

"Very fine weather for the time of year," Sir Pitt answered, suddenly grown deaf. "But I'm gittin' old now. I'm not very fur from four-score – he, he." He laughed, took snuff, and leered at Lady Jane. "I've been cruel bad this year with the lumbago. I shan't be here for long; but I'm glad ee've come. I like your face, Lady Jane: and I'll give ee something pretty, my dear, to go to Court in."

He shuffled across the room to a cupboard, from which he took a little old case containing jewels.

"Take that," said he, "it belonged to my mother. Pretty pearls – never gave 'em the ironmonger's daughter. Take 'em and put 'em away quick," said he, thrusting the case into his daughter-in-law's hand, and shutting the cabinet as Horrocks entered with refreshments.

"What have you a been and given Pitt's wife?" said the individual in ribbons, after Pitt and Lady Jane had left. It was Miss Horrocks, the butler's daughter – the cause of the scandal throughout the county – the lady who reigned now almost supreme at Queen's Crawley.

The rise and progress of those Ribbons had been marked with dismay by the family. The Ribbons opened an account at the Mudbury Bank; the Ribbons drove to church in the pony-chaise. The servants were dismissed at her wish. The Scotch gardener, who still lingered, found the Ribbons eating his peaches one morning at the south-wall, and had his ears boxed when he remonstrated with her. He and his family, the only respectable inhabitants of Queen's Crawley, were forced to leave, and the stately gardens went to waste.

Only two or three domestics shuddered in the bleak old servants' hall. The stables and offices were shut up, and half ruined. Sir Pitt lived in private, and boozed nightly with Horrocks and the abandoned Ribbons. He quarrelled with his agents by letter. The lawyers and farm-bailiffs who had to do business with him could only reach him through the Ribbons; and so the Baronet's daily perplexities increased, and his embarrassments multiplied.

The horror of his correct son Pitt Crawley at these reports may be imagined. Pitt trembled daily lest he should hear that the Ribbons was proclaimed his legal stepmother. After that visit, his father's name was never mentioned in Pitt's genteel establishment. It was the skeleton in his house, and all the family walked by it in terror and silence.

Sir Pitt was cut dead by his old acquaintance: but he put his hands in his pockets, and burst out laughing. Miss Horrocks was installed as housekeeper, and ruled the servants with great majesty. They were told to address her as "Madam" – and there was one little maid who persisted in calling her "My Lady," without receiving any rebuke.

"There has been better ladies, and there has been worsers, Hester," was Miss Horrocks's reply. So she ruled, having supreme power over all except her father – whom, however, she treated haughtily, warning him not to be too familiar towards one "as was to be a Baronet's lady."

Indeed, she rehearsed that exalted position with great satisfaction, to the amusement of old Sir Pitt, who chuckled at her airs and graces. He swore it was as good as a play, and he made her put on one of the first Lady Crawley's court-dresses, swearing (entirely with Miss Horrocks's agreement) that it suited her greatly. She ransacked the wardrobes of the two defunct ladies, and hacked their finery so as to suit her own tastes and figure. She would have liked their jewels too; but the old Baronet had locked them away in his cabinet.

Though the good people of the Parsonage shunned the Hall, yet they knew all that happened there, and were looking out every day for the catastrophic marriage. But Fate intervened.

One day the Baronet surprised "her ladyship," as he called the Ribbons, seated at the old and tuneless piano in the drawing-room and squalling in imitation of the music which she had sometimes heard. The little kitchen-maid was standing at her mistress's side, wagging her head and crying, "Lor, Ma'am, 'tis bittiful."

This made the old Baronet roar with laughter. He narrated the incident a dozen times to Horrocks during the evening, greatly to the discomfiture of Miss Horrocks. He squalled in imitation of her singing, and vowed that with such a beautiful voice she ought to have singing-masters. He was in great spirits that night, drank an extraordinary quantity of rum-and-water, and went to bed very late.

Half an hour afterwards there was a great bustle in the house. Lights moved from window to window in the desolate old Hall. A boy on a pony went galloping off to Mudbury, to the Doctor's house. And in another hour (by which fact we see how carefully Mrs. Bute Crawley had kept up an understanding with the great house), that lady, with the Reverend Bute and their son James, had walked over from the Rectory and entered the mansion by the open door.

They passed through the hall and the small oak parlour, where the empty rum-bottle stood on the table. They entered Sir Pitt's study, where they found Miss Horrocks of the ribbons wildly trying the desks with a bunch of keys. She dropped them with a scream of terror.

“Look at that, Mr. Crawley,” cried Mrs. Bute, pointing at the scared, guilty wench.

“He gave ’em me!” she cried.

“Gave them you, you abandoned creature!” screamed Mrs. Bute. “Bear witness, Mr. Crawley, we found this good-for-nothing woman in the act of stealing your brother’s property; and she will be hanged, as I always said she would.”

Betsy Horrocks flung herself down on her knees, bursting into tears. But a really good woman is in no hurry to forgive; the humiliation of an enemy is a triumph to her soul.

“Ring the bell, James,” Mrs. Bute said. The servants came at the jangling summons.

“Put that woman in the strong-room,” she said. “We caught her in the act of robbing Sir Pitt. Mr. Crawley, you’ll make out her committal – and Beddoes, you’ll drive her over in the morning, to Southampton Gaol.”

“My dear,” interposed the Magistrate and Rector, “she’s only—”

“Are there no handcuffs?” Mrs. Bute continued. “Where’s the creature’s abominable father?”

“He *did* give ’em me,” cried poor Betsy Horrocks; “didn’t he, Hester? You saw Sir Pitt give ’em me, the day after Mudbury fair.”

“Law, Betsy, how could you tell such a wicked story!” said Hester, the little kitchen-maid, “and to Madame Crawley, so good and kind, and you may search all *my* boxes, Ma’am, I’m sure, and here’s my keys as I’m an honest girl, and if you find so much as a beggarly bit of lace, may I never go to church agin.”

“Give up your keys, you hardened hussy,” hissed Mrs. Bute at Betsy.

“Here’s a candle, Ma’am, and if you please, I can show you her room, where she keeps heaps and heaps of things, Ma’am,” cried out the eager little Hester.

“Hold your tongue, if you please. I know the room. Mrs. Brown, come with me, and Beddoes, don’t you lose sight of that woman,” said Mrs. Bute, seizing the candle. “Mr. Crawley, you had better go upstairs and see that they are not murdering your unfortunate brother.”

Bute went upstairs and found the Doctor with the frightened Horrocks bending over his master in a chair. They were trying to bleed Sir Pitt.

In the early morning an express message was sent off to Mr. Pitt Crawley by the Rector’s lady, who assumed command of everything, and had watched the old Baronet through the night. He had been brought back to a sort of life; he could not speak, but seemed to recognize people.

Mrs. Bute kept resolutely by his bedside. She did not close her fiery black eyes once, though the Doctor snored in the arm-chair. Horrocks made some efforts to assert his authority; but Mrs. Bute called him a tipsy old wretch, and bade him never show his face again in that house, or he should be transported like his abominable daughter.

Terrified, he slunk down to the oak parlour. He was ordered to get another bottle of rum, which he fetched, and to which the Rector and his son sat down, ordering Horrocks to put down the keys and leave.

Cowed, Horrocks gave up the keys, and he and his daughter slunk off silently through the night and abandoned possession of the house of Queen’s Crawley.

CHAPTER 40

In Which Becky Is Recognized by the Family

Though the old Baronet survived many months, he never completely recovered the use of his intellect or his speech. The estate was governed by his elder son.

In a strange condition Pitt found it. Old Sir Pitt was always buying and mortgaging; he had twenty men of business, and quarrels with each. He had lawsuits with all his tenants, his lawyers, the Mining and Dock Companies in which he had a share, and with every person with whom he had business. To unravel these difficulties was a task worthy of the orderly Pitt, and he set to work. His whole family moved to Queen's Crawley, and Lady Southdown came too, bringing her irregular clergy, to the dismay of the angry Mrs. Bute.

Mrs. Bute's threats to Miss Betsy Horrocks were not carried out. Betsy's father took over the Crawley Arms in the village, of which he had got a lease from Sir Pitt. He had obtained a small freehold there likewise, which gave him a vote for the borough. The Rector had another of these votes, and these and four others formed the electorate which returned the two Members of Parliament for Queen's Crawley.

There was a show of courtesy kept up between the Rectory and the Hall ladies; between the younger ones at least, for Mrs. Bute and Lady Southdown could never meet without battles. Lady Southdown kept to her room when the ladies from the Rectory visited. Perhaps Mr. Pitt was not displeased at these occasional absences of his mamma-in-law. Sometimes she commanded him too much; to be treated as a boy at forty-six was mortifying. Lady Jane yielded up everything to her mother. It was lucky for her that Lady Southdown's meetings with ministers and correspondence with missionaries so occupied her that she had little time to devote to her grandchildren.

As for old Sir Pitt, he retired into those same rooms where Lady Crawley had lived, and was tended by Miss Hester with constant care. What love, what fidelity is there equal to that of a nurse with good wages? They get up at nights; they bear complaints; they see the sun shining and don't want to go out; they sleep on armchairs and eat their meals in solitude; they pass long long evenings doing nothing.

On sunshiny days this old gentleman was taken out in a chair on the terrace. Lady Jane always walked by the old man, and was a favourite with him. He used to smile when she came in, and utter inarticulate moans when she was going away. When the door shut upon her he would cry and sob – whereupon Hester's face and manner, which was always exceedingly bland while her lady was present, would change at once, and she would clench her fist and scream, "Hold your tongue, you stoopid old fool," and twirl away his chair from the fire which he loved to look at – at which he would cry more. For this was all that was left after years of cunning, drinking, scheming and selfishness – a whimpering old idiot put in and out of bed and cleaned and fed like a baby.

At last a day came when the nurse's task was over. Early one morning, when Pitt Crawley was in the study, a knock came to the door, and Hester presented herself, curtseyed, and said,

"If you please, Sir Pitt, Sir Pitt died this morning, Sir Pitt. I was a-making of his toast for his gruel, and – and I thought I heard a moan like, Sir Pitt – and – and –" She dropped another curtsey.

What was it that made Pitt's pale face flush? Was it because he was Sir Pitt at last, with a seat in Parliament? "I'll clear the estate now," he thought, rapidly calculating the improvements which he would make.

All the blinds were pulled down at the Hall and Rectory: the church bell was tolled. Miss Betsy, who was by this time married to a saddler at Mudbury, cried a good deal.

"Shall I write to your brother – or will you?" asked Lady Jane of her husband, Sir Pitt.

"I will write," he said, "and invite him to the funeral."

"And – and Mrs. Rawdon," said Lady Jane timidly.

"Jane!" said Lady Southdown, "how can you think of such a thing?"

"Mrs. Rawdon must of course be asked," said Sir Pitt resolutely.

"Not whilst I am in the house!" said Lady Southdown.

"Your Ladyship will be pleased to recollect that I am the head of this family," Sir Pitt replied. "Lady Jane, please write to Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, requesting her presence upon this melancholy occasion."

"Jane, I forbid you to put pen to paper!" cried the Countess.

"I believe I am the head of this family," Sir Pitt repeated; "and however much I may regret any circumstance which may lead to your Ladyship quitting this house, I must govern it as I see fit."

Lady Southdown rose magnificently and ordered that horses might be put to her carriage. If her son and daughter turned her out of their house, she would hide her sorrows somewhere in loneliness and pray for their conversion to better thoughts.

"We don't turn you out of our house, Mamma," said the timid Lady Jane imploringly.

"You invite such company to it as no Christian lady should meet, and I will have my horses tomorrow morning."

"Please write this, Jane," said Sir Pitt, rising in an attitude of command. "Queen's Crawley, September 14. My dear brother—"

Hearing these decisive words, Lady Southdown, who had been waiting for a sign of weakness from her son-in-law, rose and, with a scared look, left the library. Lady Jane looked as if she would follow, but Pitt forbade his wife to move.

"She won't go away," he said. "She has let her house at Brighton. I have been waiting long for an opportunity to take this decisive step, my love; and now, if you please, we will resume the dictation. 'My dear brother, the melancholy news which it is my duty to convey must have been long anticipated,' etc."

Pitt, having come to his kingdom and his fortune, was determined to treat his family kindly and respectably and make a house of Queen's Crawley once more. It pleased him to think that he should be its chief. He proposed to use his influence to get his brother placed and his cousins decently provided for. In the course of three or four days' reign his bearing was changed and his plans quite fixed: he determined to rule justly and honestly, to depose Lady Southdown, and to be on the friendliest possible terms with all his relations.

So he dictated a letter to his brother Rawdon – a solemn and elaborate letter, containing the profoundest observations, and filling his simple little secretary with wonder.

"What an orator he will be," thought she, "when he enters the House of Commons. How wise and good, and what a genius my husband is!" The fact is, Pitt Crawley had composed the letter long before he dictated it to his astonished wife.

This letter, with a black border and seal, was sent to Colonel Rawdon Crawley. He was only half-pleased at receiving it.

“What’s the use of going down to that stupid place?” thought he. “I can’t stand being alone with Pitt after dinner, and horses there and back will cost us twenty pound.”

He carried the letter, as he did all difficulties, to Becky, in her bedroom – with her chocolate, which he always made for her of a morning. She took up the black-edged missive, and having read it, jumped up, crying “Hurray!” and waving the note round her head.

“Hurray?” said Rawdon, wondering at the little figure capering about in a streaming flannel dressing-gown. “He’s not left us anything, Becky. I had my share when I came of age.”

“You’ll never be of age, you silly old man,” Becky replied. “Run out now and get some black crape on your hat, and a black waistcoat – order it for tomorrow, so that we may be able to start on Thursday.”

“You don’t mean to go?”

“Of course I mean to go. I mean Lady Jane to present me at Court next year. I mean your brother to give you a seat in Parliament, you stupid old creature. I mean Lord Steyne to have your vote, my dear old silly man; and you shall be an Irish Secretary, or a West Indian Governor, or some such thing.”

“Going by post-chaise will cost a dooce of a lot of money,” grumbled the Colonel. “Rawdy goes, of course?”

“No; why pay for an extra place? Let him stay here in the nursery, with Briggs. Go and do as I bid you. And you had best tell Sparks that old Sir Pitt is dead and that you will come in for some money. He’ll tell Raggles, who has been pressing for rent.” Becky began sipping her chocolate.

When Lord Steyne arrived in the evening, he found Becky and her companion, who was no other than our friend Briggs, busy cutting, ripping and snipping all sorts of black stuff for the melancholy occasion.

“Sir Pitt Crawley is dead, my lord,” Rebecca said. “We have been tearing our hair with grief all the morning, and now we are tearing up our old clothes.”

“So that old scoundrel’s dead, is he?” my Lord said. “What an old Silenus he was!”

“I might have been Silenus’s widow,” said Rebecca. “Don’t you remember, Miss Briggs, how you peeped in at the door and saw old Sir Pitt on his knees to me?” Miss Briggs blushed very much, and was glad when Lord Steyne ordered her to go downstairs and make him a cup of tea.

Briggs was the house-dog whom Rebecca had wanted as guardian of her reputation. Miss Crawley had left Briggs a little annuity. She would have been content to remain with Lady Jane, who was good to her; but Lady Southdown dismissed her. Bowls and Firkin likewise received their legacies and their dismissals, and married and set up a lodging-house.

Briggs tried to live with her relations in the country, but found that her family quarrelled over her forty pounds a year as eagerly as Miss Crawley’s kinsfolk had over that lady’s inheritance. Briggs’s brother called her purse-proud, because she would not advance her money to stock his shop; while her sister told her that their brother was on the verge of bankruptcy, and wanted Miss Briggs to send her own son to college.

Between them the two families got a great portion of her private savings, and finally she fled to London, determined to seek for servitude again as infinitely less burdensome than liberty. And advertising in the papers that a "Gentlewoman of agreeable manners, and accustomed to the best society, was anxious to," etc., she took up her residence in Mr. Bowls's lodging-house, and awaited the result.

Rebecca's dashing little carriage was whirling down the street one day, just as Miss Briggs reached Mr. Bowls's door after a weary walk to the Times Office to insert her advertisement for the sixth time. Rebecca at once recognized Briggs. She pulled up the ponies, and jumping out, took hold of both Briggs's hands.

Briggs cried, and Becky laughed and kissed her; and they went into Mrs. Bowls's front parlour, where Briggs told all her history, with sniffles, and Becky gave a narrative of her own life, with her usual candour. Becky instantly decided that this was just such a companion as would suit her, and she invited Briggs to dinner with her that very evening, when she should see Becky's dear little darling Rawdon.

Mrs. Bowls, late Firkin, came and listened grimly in the passage. Becky had never been a favourite of hers. She did not like Raggles's account of the Colonel's household.

"I wouldn't trust him, Ragg, my boy," Mr. Bowls remarked; and his wife, when Mrs. Rawdon left the parlour, saluted the lady with a very sour curtsey. With the sweetest of smiles towards Miss Briggs, Rebecca whirled away into Piccadilly, and next moment was in the park with half a dozen dandies cantering after her carriage.

Mrs. Bowls cautioned Miss Briggs: "You will rue it, Miss B., mark my words." And Briggs promised to be very cautious. The upshot was that she went to live with Mrs. Rawdon the next week, and had lent Rawdon Crawley six hundred pounds upon annuity before six months were over.

CHAPTER 41

In Which Becky Revisits the Halls of Her Ancestors

So Colonel Crawley and his wife took a couple of places in the same High-flyer coach by which Rebecca had travelled with the old Baronet, on her first journey into the world some nine years before. Rawdon sat by the coachman and talked about horses the whole way. At Mudbury a carriage and pair were waiting for them, with a coachman in black.

“Ha! I see Dawson the Ironmonger has his shutters up,” said Rebecca as they drove. “Surely that can’t be Polly Talboys, that bouncing girl at the cottage there. I remember her as a mangy little urchin picking weeds in the garden.”

“Fine gal,” said Rawdon, returning the cottager’s salute. Becky bowed and waved graciously to people she recognized, as if she was coming to the home of her ancestors. Rawdon was rather cast down, on the other hand. What recollections of boyhood might have been flitting across his brain? What pangs of dim remorse and doubt?

“Your sisters must be young women now,” Rebecca said, thinking of those girls for the first time since she had left them.

“Don’t know,” replied the Colonel. “Hullo! here’s old Mother Lock. How-dy-do, Mrs. Lock? Remember me, don’t you?”

The carriage went through the lodge-gates kept by old Mrs. Lock, and passed between the moss-grown pillars.

“The governor has cut the timber,” Rawdon said, looking about, and then was silent. So was Becky. Both of them were rather agitated, and thinking of old times: he about Eton, and his mother, a frigid demure woman, and a sister who died, of whom he had been passionately fond; and how he used to thrash Pitt; and about little Rawdy at home. And Rebecca thought about her own youth and the dark secrets of those early tainted days; and of her entrance into life by these gates; and of Joe, and Amelia.

The gravel walk and terrace had been scraped clean. Two very solemn personages in black flung open a door each as the carriage pulled up at the familiar steps. Rawdon turned red, and Becky somewhat pale, as they passed through the old hall, arm in arm. Sir Pitt and his wife received them in the oak parlour, along with Lady Southdown wearing a large black head-piece of bugles and feathers.

Sir Pitt had judged correctly, that she would not quit the house. She contented herself by keeping a stony silence, and by frightening the children with the ghastly gloom of her manner. A very faint bending of the head-dress and plumes welcomed Rawdon and his wife. But her Ladyship was not important to them. They were intent upon the reception which the reigning brother and sister would give them.

Pitt shook his brother’s hand, and saluted Rebecca with a hand-shake and a low bow. But Lady Jane took her sister-in-law’s hands and kissed her affectionately. The embrace somehow brought tears into the eyes of the little adventuress. Jane’s artless kindness touched her; and Rawdon was encouraged to twirl up his mustachios and salute Lady Jane with a kiss, which caused her to blush exceedingly.

“Dev’lish nice little woman, Lady Jane,” was his verdict, when he and his wife were alone together. “Pitt’s got fat.” Rebecca agreed with her husband’s further opinion that “the mother-in-law was a tremendous old Guy – and the sisters were rather good-looking young women.”

They had been summoned from school to attend the funeral. Rebecca did not attempt to forget her former position as their Governess, but recalled it frankly and kindly, and asked them about their studies, and told them that she had thought of them many a time.

“She’s hardly changed in eight years,” said Miss Rosalind to Miss Violet, as they were preparing for dinner.

“Red-haired women look wonderfully well,” replied the other.

“Hers is darker than it was; I think she must dye it.”

“At least she gives herself no airs, and remembers that she was our Governess once,” Miss Violet said, meaning that it befitted governesses to keep their proper place, and forgetting that she was granddaughter not only of Sir Walpole Crawley, but of Mr. Dawson of Mudbury, and so had a coal-scuttle in her coat of arms. “It can’t be true what the girls at the Rectory said, that her mother was an opera-dancer—”

“A person can’t help their birth,” Rosalind replied with great liberality. “And Aunt Bute need not talk; she wants to marry Kate to young Hooper, the wine-merchant.”

The bell rang for dinner, and these young women went down.

But before this, Lady Jane conducted Rebecca to the rooms prepared for her, which had been much improved recently. Seeing that Mrs. Rawdon’s modest little trunks were placed in the bedroom, she helped her sister-in-law take off her neat black bonnet and cloak, and asked her how she could be useful.

“What I should like best,” said Rebecca, “would be to go to the nursery and see your dear little children.” On which the two ladies looked very kindly at each other and went there hand in hand.

Becky admired little Matilda, who was not quite four, as the most charming little love in the world; and the boy, a little fellow of two years – pale, heavy-eyed, and large-headed – she pronounced to be a perfect prodigy.

“I wish Mamma would not insist on giving him so much medicine,” Lady Jane said with a sigh. And then they had one of those confidential medical conversations about the children, which all mothers delight in. Within half an hour Becky and Lady Jane were intimate friends. Jane thought her new sister-in-law was a kind, frank, unaffected young woman.

Having easily won the daughter’s good-will, the indefatigable little woman bent herself to conciliate the august Lady Southdown. As soon as she found her Ladyship alone, Rebecca told her that her own little boy was actually saved by calomel, when all the physicians in Paris had given him up.

And then she mentioned how often she had heard of Lady Southdown from the excellent Reverend Lawrence Grills, Minister of the chapel in May Fair; and how misfortunes had changed her views, and she hoped that a life spent in worldliness and error might not prevent more serious thought in the future. She described how she had formerly been indebted to Mr. Crawley for religious instruction, touched upon ‘The Washerwoman of Finchley Common’, and asked about Lady Emily, its gifted author.

But she crowned all by feeling very unwell after the funeral and requesting her Ladyship’s medical advice. The Dowager not only gave it, but came privately in the night to Becky’s room with a parcel of favourite tracts, and a medicine of her own composition, which she insisted that Mrs. Rawdon should take.

Becky began to examine the tracts with great interest, hoping to escape medication. But Lady Southdown would not leave until the cup was emptied.

Becky looked and felt very uneasy when Rawdon came in. He exploded with laughter when Becky, with a fun which she could not disguise, described the occurrence. Lord Steyne, and her son in London, had many a laugh over the story when Rawdon and his wife returned to May Fair, and Becky acted the scene for them. "Give us Lady Southdown and the black dose," was a constant cry amongst the folks in Becky's little drawing-room.

Sir Pitt remembered the respect which Rebecca had paid him in early days, and was well disposed towards her. The marriage, ill-advised as it was, had improved Rawdon very much – that was clear from the Colonel's altered habits – and had it not been a lucky union as regarded Pitt himself? He owed his fortune to it.

His satisfaction was increased by Rebecca's behaviour towards him. She doubled the deference which before had charmed him, calling out his conversational powers in a way that surprised Pitt himself. Rebecca was able to convince Lady Jane that it was Mrs. Bute Crawley who brought about the marriage; that it was Mrs. Bute's avarice which invented all the wicked reports against Rebecca.

"She succeeded in making us poor," Rebecca said with an air of angelical patience; "but how can I be angry with a woman who has given me one of the best husbands in the world? Dear Lady Jane, what care we for poverty? I am used to it from childhood, and I am often thankful that Miss Crawley's money has gone to restore the splendour of such a noble old family. I am sure Sir Pitt will make a much better use of it than Rawdon would."

All these speeches were reported to Sir Pitt by his faithful wife, and increased the favourable impression which Rebecca made.

While she was pursuing these schemes, and Pitt was arranging the funeral and other matters, and Lady Jane was busy with her nursery, as far as her mother would let her, the body of the late owner of Queen's Crawley lay in his apartment watched unceasingly by a woman or two, and three or four undertaker's men, dressed in black, and of a proper stealthy and tragical demeanour. They watched the remains in turn, having the housekeeper's room when off duty, where they played cards and drank their beer.

The family and servants kept away from the gloomy spot. No-one regretted Sir Pitt's death except the poor woman who had hoped to be his wife and who had fled in disgrace from the Hall. Beyond her and a favourite old dog, the old man had not a single friend to mourn him, having never taken the least pains to secure one.

At last his remains were borne to the grave in a becoming manner, the family in black coaches, with their handkerchiefs up to their noses, ready for the tears which did not come; the neighbouring gentry's carriages at three miles an hour, empty, and in profound affliction; the parson speaking the formula about "our dear brother departed." Bute's curate, a smart young fellow from Oxford, and Sir Pitt Crawley composed between them an appropriate Latin epitaph, and the former preached a classical sermon, exhorting the survivors not to give way to grief. Then after a lunch in the servants' hall at Queen's Crawley, the gentry's carriages wheeled off. The old dog used to howl sometimes at first, but this was the only voice of grief for Sir Pitt Crawley, Baronet.

The new Sir Pitt Crawley went out to do a little partridge shooting. The sight of those fields of stubble and turnips, now his own, gave him secret joy. Sometimes he took no gun, but went out with a peaceful bamboo cane, Rawdon his brother blazing away at his side.

Pitt's money and acres had a great effect upon his brother. The penniless Colonel became quite obsequious, and despised the milksop Pitt no longer. Rawdon gave advice about the stables and cattle, rode over to Mudbury to look at a mare for Lady Jane, and became a most creditable younger brother. He had constant bulletins from Miss Briggs in London about little Rawdon, who sent messages of his own.

"I am very well," he wrote. "I hope you are very well. I hope Mamma is very well. The pony is very well. Grey takes me to ride in the park. I can canter. I met the little boy who rode before. He cried when he cantered. I do not cry." Rawdon read these letters to his brother and Lady Jane, who was delighted with them.

One day followed another in calm pursuits. Bells rang to meals and to prayers. The young ladies practised the pianoforte every morning, Rebecca giving them the benefit of her instruction. Then they walked in the park or shrubberies, or into the village, descending upon the cottages with Lady Southdown's medicine and tracts. Lady Southdown drove out in a pony-chaise, with Rebecca by her side and listening to her with the utmost interest. Rebecca sang Handel and Haydn to the family in the evenings, and began sewing a large tapestry, as if she had been born to this life – as if there were not cares and debts and poverty waiting outside the park gates to pounce upon her when she went into the world again.

"It isn't difficult to be a country gentleman's wife," Rebecca thought. "I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year. I could dawdle about in the nursery and count the apricots on the wall. I could water plants in a greenhouse and pick off dead leaves from the geraniums. I could ask old women about their rheumatism and order half-a-crown's worth of soup for the poor. I could even drive out ten miles to dine at a neighbour's, and dress in the fashions of the year before last. I could pay everybody, if I only had the money." And maybe Rebecca was right – and it was only money which made the difference between her and an honest woman.

She revisited the old haunts, the fields and woods, the ponds and gardens, the rooms of the old house where she had lived years ago. She remembered her thoughts and feelings then and contrasted them with the present, now that she had seen the world, and raised herself far beyond her original humble station.

"I have passed beyond it, because I have brains," Becky thought, "and almost all the rest of the world are fools. I have a gentleman for my husband, and an Earl's daughter for my sister, in the very house where I was little better than a servant a few years ago. But am I much better off than when I was the poor painter's daughter and wheedled the grocer for sugar and tea? I wish I could exchange my position in society, and all my relations, for a snug sum in the Three Per Cent Consols."

It may, perhaps, have struck her that to have been honest and humble, and to have done her duty, would have brought her equal happiness. But if ever Becky had these thoughts, she was accustomed to walk round them and not look in.

During her stay at Queen's Crawley, she made as many friends as she possibly could. Lady Jane and her husband bade her farewell with the warmest good-will.

"How happy you will be to see your darling little boy again!" Lady Crawley said.

"Oh so happy!" said Rebecca. She was immensely glad to be free of the place, and yet loath to go. Queen's Crawley was abominably stupid, and yet the air there was somehow purer than that which she had been accustomed to breathe. Everybody had been dull, but kind in their way. "It is all the influence of a long course of Three Per Cents," Becky said to herself, and was very likely right.

However, the London lamps flashed joyfully as the stage-coach rolled into Piccadilly, and Briggs had made a beautiful fire in Curzon Street; and little Rawdon was up to welcome back his papa and mamma.

CHAPTER 42

Which Treats of the Osborne Family

Considerable time has passed since we have seen old Mr. Osborne of Russell Square. He has not been the happiest of men. He has not always been allowed to have his own way, and to be thwarted in this desire was always harmful to the old gentleman; and it was doubly exasperating when gout, age, loneliness, and disappointments weighed him down.

His black hair began to grow white soon after his son's death; his face grew redder; his hands trembled as he poured his glass of port wine. He had proposed for Miss Swartz, but had been rejected scornfully, and she had married a young sprig of Scotch nobility. He was a man to have married a low-born woman and bullied her dreadfully afterwards; but no suitable person presented herself, and instead, he tyrannized over his unmarried daughter at home. She had a fine carriage and horses, a prize footman to follow her when she walked, unlimited credit, and compliments from all the tradesmen; but she had a woeful time.

Frederick Bullock had married Maria Osborne, after a great deal of difficulty and grumbling. Frederick insisted that half of the old gentleman's property should be settled upon his Maria, and refused "to come to the scratch" (his own expression) on any other terms. Osborne said Fred had agreed to take his daughter with twenty thousand, and he could "take it, or be hanged." Fred thought himself infamously swindled, and for some time acted as if he would break off the match altogether. Osborne withdrew his account from Bullock and Hulker's bank, and talked about horsewhipping in his usual violent manner.

The rupture was, however, only temporary. Fred's father counselled him to take Maria, with the twenty thousand. So he sent off peaceable overtures; it was his father, he said, who had made difficulties. The excuse was sulkily accepted by Mr. Osborne. Hulker and Bullock were a high family of the City aristocracy, and it was something to be connected with them.

The marriage was a grand affair. Mr. Mango and Lady Mary Mango were there; Colonel Bludyer of the Dragoon Guards; the Honourable George Boulter; Lord Viscount Castletoddy; Honourable James McMull and Mrs. McMull (formerly Miss Swartz); and a host of fashionables.

The young couple had a house near Berkeley Square and a small villa at Roehampton, among the banking colony there. Fred was considered to have made rather a *mésalliance*, and Maria felt it her duty to see her father and sister as little as possible.

Of course she would not utterly break with the old man, who had still so many thousand pounds to give away. Fred Bullock would never allow her to do that. But by inviting her papa and sister to her third-rate parties, and behaving very coldly to them when they came, and by avoiding Russell Square, and begging her father to quit that vulgar place, she did more harm than all Frederick's diplomacy could repair.

"So Russell Square is not good enough for Mrs. Maria, hay?" said the old gentleman, as he and his daughter Jane drove away one night from Mrs. Bullock's. "So they won't come to Russell Square, won't they? Why, I've got better wine, and a handsomer service of silver, and a better dinner on my table, than ever they see on theirs – the cringing, sneaking, stuck-up fools."

When Mrs. Frederick's first child, Frederick Augustus Howard Stanley Devereux Bullock, was born, old Osborne, who was invited to the christening as godfather, refused to attend. He merely sent the child a gold cup, with twenty guineas inside it for the nurse. Yet Maria thought that her father was very much pleased with her.

One can fancy the pangs with which Miss Jane Osborne read the Morning Post, where her sister's name occurred in the articles headed "Fashionable Reunions," and where she could read a description of Mrs. F. Bullock's costume. Jane's own life, as we have said, was an awful existence. She had to get up on black winter mornings to make breakfast for her scowling old father. She sat silent and trembling opposite him, while he read his paper and consumed his muffins and tea.

At half-past nine he went to the City, and she was almost free till dinner-time, to visit the kitchen and scold the servants; to drive out to see the tradesmen; to leave her cards at the great glum respectable houses of their City friends; or to sit alone in the large drawing-room, waiting for visitors, and working at a huge piece of needlework while the great clock ticked and tolled with mournful loudness in the dreary room. George's picture was gone, laid upstairs in the garret; and though father and daughter often thought of him, no mention was ever made of the once darling son.

At five o'clock Mr. Osborne came back to his dinner, which he and his daughter took in silence, or which they shared twice a month with a party of dismal friends of Osborne's age: old Dr. Gulp and his lady, old Mr. Frowser, the attorney, old Colonel Livermore, of the Bombay Army; old Sergeant Toffy and Mrs. Toffy; and sometimes old Sir Thomas Coffin, the celebrated hanging judge. These people exchanged pompous dinners and had solemn rubbers of whist, and their carriages were called at half past ten. Jane Osborne scarcely ever met a man under sixty.

In fact there had been a secret in poor Jane's life which had made her father more savage and morose than ever. This secret was connected with Miss Wirt, who had a cousin – an artist, Mr. Smee, very celebrated since as a portrait-painter; but who once gave drawing lessons to ladies of fashion. Mr. Smee has forgotten where Russell Square is now, but he was glad enough to visit it in the year 1818.

When Smee was introduced by Miss Wirt to Miss Osborne, he felt a great attachment for her, which it is believed was returned. Miss Wirt was their confidante. I know not whether she used to leave the room where the master and his pupil were painting, in order to give them time alone; all that is certain is that Mr. Osborne came back from the City abruptly, entered the drawing-room, found the painter, the pupil and the companion all looking exceedingly pale; turned the former out of doors with threats to break every bone in his skin, and half an hour afterwards dismissed Miss Wirt, kicking her trunks downstairs, and shaking his fist at her hackney coach as it bore her away.

Jane Osborne kept to her bedroom for many days. She was not allowed to have a companion afterwards. Her father swore that she should not have a shilling if she made any match without his agreement; and as he wanted a woman to keep his house, he did not choose that she should marry. During her papa's life, then, she resigned herself to this existence. Her sister, meanwhile, was having children with finer names every year, and they met less and less.

It has been described how the Misses Dobbin lived with their father at a fine villa at Denmark Hill, whose beautiful graperies and peach-trees delighted little Georgy Osborne. The Misses Dobbin, who drove often to Brompton to see Amelia, came sometimes to Russell Square too, to pay a visit to Miss Osborne. It was following the commands of their brother the Major in India that they visited Amelia; and they kept

Miss Osborne acquainted with the state of Amelia's affairs – how she was living with her father and mother; how poor they were; how she was still an insignificant namby-pamby creature – but the boy was really the noblest little boy ever seen.

One day Amelia allowed little George to go and pass a day with the Misses Dobbin – a part of which day she spent in writing to the Major in India. She congratulated him on the happy news which his sisters had just told her, and prayed for his and his bride's prosperity. She thanked him for a thousand kindnesses and told him the latest news about little Georgy. She signed herself affectionately his friend, Amelia Osborne. She was glad to be able to admit how warmly and gratefully she regarded him – and as for the idea of being jealous of Glorvina (Glorvina, indeed!) that was nonsense.

That night, when Georgy came back in the pony-carriage, he had round his neck a fine gold chain and watch. He said an old lady had given it him, and cried and kissed him a great deal. But he didn't like her. He liked grapes. And Amelia shrank with a presentiment of terror when she heard that his aunt had seen him.

Miss Osborne came back from the Dobbin household to give her father his dinner. He was in rather a good humour that day, and seeing her agitated, he deigned to ask, "What's the matter, Miss Osborne?"

She burst into tears. "Oh, sir, I've seen little George. He is as beautiful as an angel – and so like him!" The old man did not say a word, but began to tremble in every limb.

CHAPTER 43

In Which the Reader Has to Double the Cape

The astonished reader must now transport himself ten thousand miles to the military station of Bundlegunge, in the Madras division of our Indian empire, where our gallant friends of the —th regiment are quartered under the command of the brave Colonel, Sir Michael O’Dowd.

Time has dealt kindly with that stout officer. He has a good stomach and a good temper: he smokes his hookah after dinner and puffs quietly while his wife scolds him. Age and heat have not diminished her activity or eloquence. Lady O’Dowd is as much at home at Madras as at Brussels. Mounted on an elephant, she has been received by native princes, who have welcomed her and Glorvina. The sentries salute her wherever she appears. She is one of the greatest ladies in Madras.

Peggy O’Dowd is indeed the same as ever, kind, impetuous, eager to command; a tyrant over her Michael; a dragon amongst all the ladies of the regiment; and a mother to all the young men, with whom she is immensely popular. But the Subalterns’ and Captains’ ladies say that Glorvina gives herself airs and that Peggy herself is domineering. She put an end to a flirtation between Lieutenant Stubble and the Surgeon’s wife, so that Stubble broke it off at once and went to the Cape on sick leave. On the other hand, she sheltered Mrs. Posky, who fled from her bungalow one night, pursued by her infuriated husband wielding his second brandy bottle; and she actually helped Posky through the delirium tremens and broke him of the habit of drinking. In adversity she was the best of comforters; in good fortune the most troublesome of friends, being resolved to have her own way.

She had made up her mind that Glorvina should marry Dobbin. Glorvina, a very handsome, black-haired, blue-eyed young lady, who could ride a horse or play a sonata, seemed the very person to ensure Dobbin’s happiness – much more than that good little weak-spirited Amelia, about whom he used to take on so.

“Compare Glorvina to poor Mrs. Osborne,” Mrs. O’Dowd would say, “who couldn’t say boo to a goose. She’d be worthy of you, Major – you want someone to talk for ye.”

It must be owned that Glorvina had had a season in Dublin, and who knows how many in Cork, Killarney, and Mallow? She had flirted with all the eligible officers and bachelors there. She had been engaged to be married a half-score times in Ireland. She had flirted all the way to Madras with the Captain and chief mate of the ship. There are women, and handsome women too, who fall in love with the utmost generosity; they ride and walk with half the Army-list, though they draw near forty, and yet find no husband.

Well, although Lady O’Dowd and Glorvina quarrelled every day, upon every conceivable subject – yet they agreed that Glorvina should marry Major Dobbin, and were determined to bring this about. Undismayed by forty or fifty previous defeats, Glorvina laid siege to him. She sang Irish melodies at him unceasingly. She asked him so frequently and pathetically, Will ye come to the bower? that it is a wonder how any man of feeling could have resisted the invitation. She was ready to listen and weep at the stories of his dangerous campaigns. Our honest Dobbin used to play the flute in

private; Glorvina insisted upon having duets with him, and Lady O'Dowd would rise and artlessly quit the room when the young couple were so occupied.

Glorvina was constantly writing notes to him, borrowing his books, and scoring with great pencil-marks such passages as awakened her sympathy. No wonder that public rumour assigned her to him, and that the Major's sisters in England fancied they were about to have a sister-in-law.

Dobbin was meanwhile odiously tranquil. He used to laugh when the young fellows of the regiment joked to him about Glorvina's attentions.

"Bah!" said he, "she is only keeping her hand in – she practises upon me as she does upon Mrs. Tozer's piano, because it's handy. I am much too battered and old for such a fine young lady as Glorvina." And so he went on riding with her, and copying music into her albums, and playing chess with her. As for Sir Michael O'Dowd, the old soldier refused point-blank to have anything to do with it.

"Faith, the Major's big enough to choose for himself," he said. Privately he would caution the Major, "Dob, my boy, them girls is bent on mischief – me Lady has just got a box of gowns from Europe, and there's a pink satin for Glorvina, which will finish ye, Dob, if it's in the power of woman or satin to move ye."

But the truth is, neither beauty nor fashion could conquer Dobbin. He had only one idea of a woman in his head, and it did not in the least resemble Miss Glorvina in pink satin. A gentle little woman in black, quietly-spoken – a soft young mother tending an infant and smiling up at the Major – a rosy-cheeked lass hanging lovingly on George Osborne's arm – this image filled our honest Major's mind, and reigned over it always.

Very likely, Dobbin's sentimental Amelia was quite unlike the real one. But what man in love is better informed? Dobbin did not bother his friends about his feelings, or indeed lose any rest or appetite on account of them. His head was grizzled now, with a line or two of silver. But his feelings were not in the least changed, and his love remained fresh.

We have said how the two Misses Dobbin and Amelia wrote him letters from England. Mrs. Osborne congratulated him upon his approaching marriage, which she had learned of from the Major's sister.

"Georgy sends his love to HIS DEAR GODPAPA," she wrote, "and hopes that you will not forget him. I tell him that you are about to form OTHER TIES, with one who I am sure merits ALL YOUR AFFECTION, but that, although such ties must of course be the strongest and most sacred, yet that I am sure the widow and the child whom you have ever protected and loved will always HAVE A CORNER IN YOUR HEART."

This letter put Dobbin into such a state of mind that Glorvina and her pink satin became perfectly odious to him. He cursed the talk of women, and the sex in general. Everything annoyed him that day – the parade was insufferably hot and wearisome, and the senseless chatter of the young men was more than ever jarring. And after the boisterous dullness of the mess-table, the quarrels and scandal of the ladies of the regiment! It was unbearable, shameful.

"O Amelia, Amelia," he thought, "it is because you cannot feel for me that I drag on this wearisome life. And you reward me after years of devotion by giving your blessing to my marriage with this flaunting Irish girl!"

Sick and lonely felt poor William. He would have liked to have done with life and its vanity altogether – so pointless and dreary the prospect seemed to him. He lay all that night sleepless, and yearning to go home. Amelia's letter had fallen as a blank

upon him. No fidelity of his could move her into warmth. She would not see that he loved her. Tossing in his bed, he spoke aloud.

“Good God, Amelia!” he said, “don’t you know that I only love you in the world – you, whom I tended through months of illness and grief, and who bade me farewell with a smile on your face, and forgot me before the door shut between us!” He read over and over all the letters which he ever had from her – how cold, how kind, how hopeless, how selfish they were!

Had there been some kind gentle soul near at hand, who knows but that Amelia’s reign might have been over? But there was only Glorvina, and this dashing young woman was not bent upon loving the Major, but rather on making him admire her. She curled her hair and showed her shoulders; she grinned at him so that he might see that every tooth was sound – and he never heeded all these charms. Lady O’Dowd gave a ball, at which Glorvina sported the killing pink frock, and the Major never so much as noticed it. In a fury, Glorvina danced past him with all the young subalterns, and the Major was not in the least jealous or angry. It was not jealousy, or frocks, or shoulders that could move him, and Glorvina had nothing more.

Glorvina cried with rage at the failure. She had set her mind on the Major “more than on any of the others,” she sobbed. “He’ll break my heart, he will, Peggy.”

While the Major was going on in this tantalizing way, declining to fall in love, there came another ship from Europe bringing letters for him. These were letters from home bearing an earlier postmark than the former ones, and as Major Dobbin recognized his sister’s handwriting, and as she wrote lectures with sisterly frankness, which left him miserable for the day after, the truth is that he did not hurry to break the seal of Miss Dobbin’s letter.

Two or three nights later, the Major had passed the evening pretty cheerfully at Lady O’Dowd’s house, where Glorvina thought that he listened with rather more attention than usual to the Meeting of the Wathers and the Minsthrel Boy (the truth is, he was no more listening to Glorvina than to the howling of the jackals outside). Having taken leave of the Colonel’s family, Dobbin retired to his own house.

There on his table, his sister’s letter lay reproaching him. He took it up, rather ashamed of his negligence, and prepared himself for a disagreeable hour.

Sir Michael was asleep; Glorvina had arranged her black ringlets in curl-papers; Lady O’Dowd had tucked her mosquito curtains round her bed, when the guard in the compound beheld Major Dobbin, in the moonlight, rushing towards the house in agitation. He went up to the Colonel’s window and shouted.

“O’Dowd – Colonel!”

“Heavens, Meejor!” said Glorvina, putting out her head from her window.

“What is it, Dob, me boy?” said the Colonel, expecting a fire in the station.

“I must have leave of absence. I must go to England – on the most urgent private affairs,” Dobbin said. “I want to be off now – tonight!”

In the postscript of Miss Dobbin’s letter, he had just read:

“I drove yesterday to see your old ACQUAINTANCE, Mrs. Osborne, at the wretched place they live at since they were bankrupts. Mr. S is now a coal-merchant. The little boy, your godson, is certainly a fine child, though inclined to be saucy and self-willed. But we have taken notice of him as you wish, and have introduced him to his aunt, Miss O., who was rather pleased with him. Perhaps Mr. Osborne may be induced to relent towards the child. And Amelia will not be ill-disposed to give him up. The widow is CONSOLED, and is about to marry the Reverend Mr. Binny.

A poor match. But Mrs. O. is getting old, with a great deal of grey in her hair. She was in very good spirits: and your little godson over-ate at our house. Mamma sends her love.

Your affectionate Ann Dobbin.”

CHAPTER 44

A Round-about Chapter between London and Hampshire

The Crawleys' house, in Great Gaunt Street, became more brilliant than it had ever been during the late baronet's reign. The black outer coating of the bricks was removed, to reveal a cheerful, blushing face: the old bronze lions of the knocker were gilded, the railings painted, and the house became the smartest in the area.

A little woman with a carriage was perpetually seen about this mansion; an elderly spinster and a boy also might be observed daily. It was Miss Briggs and little Rawdon, there to see to the renovation of Sir Pitt's house: to superintend the stitching of blinds and hangings, to rummage in cupboards crammed with dirty relics, and take inventories of china and glass.

Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was managing these arrangements, with orders from Sir Pitt to sell or buy furniture; and she enjoyed herself in this occupation. Sir Pitt had decided to renovate the house when he came to town to see his lawyers.

He put up at a hotel at first, but Becky, when she heard of his arrival, went off to greet him, and returned to Curzon Street with Sir Pitt in the carriage by her side. It was impossible sometimes to resist this artless little creature's hospitalities, offered so kindly and frankly. Becky seized Pitt's hand in gratitude when he agreed to stay.

"Thank you," she said, squeezing it and gazing at the Baronet, who blushed; "how happy this will make Rawdon!"

At her house, a fire was blazing already in Sir Pitt's apartment (it was Miss Briggs's room; she was sent upstairs to sleep with the maid). Becky was sincerely happy at having him for a guest.

She made Rawdon dine out once or twice on business, so that Pitt passed the happy evening alone with her and Briggs. She actually cooked little dishes for him in the kitchen.

"Isn't it a good casserole?" she said.

"Everything you do, you do well," said the Baronet gallantly. "The casserole is excellent indeed."

"A poor man's wife must make herself useful," Rebecca replied gaily.

Her brother-in-law vowed that "skill in domestic duties was surely one of the most charming of woman's qualities." And Sir Pitt thought, with mortification, of a certain pie which Lady Jane had insisted on baking for him – a most abominable pie.

Besides the casserole, which was made of Lord Steyne's pheasants, Becky gave her brother-in-law a bottle of white wine; some that Rawdon had brought from France, and had picked up for nothing, the little story-teller said. In truth, it was White Hermitage from the Marquis of Steyne's famous cellars, which brought a glow into the Baronet's pallid cheeks.

Then she gave him her hand, and took him to the drawing-room, and made him snug on the sofa by the fire, and let him talk as she listened with the tenderest interest, sitting by him, and hemming a shirt for her dear little boy. Whenever Mrs. Rawdon wished to be particularly humble and virtuous, this little shirt used to come out of her work-box. It was too small for Rawdon long before it was finished.

Well, Rebecca listened to Pitt, she talked to him, she sang to him, she coaxed and coddled him, so that he found himself more glad every day to get back from the lawyer's to the blazing fire in Curzon Street, and when he went away he felt a pang.

How pretty she looked kissing her hand to him when he had taken his place in the mail-coach! She put her handkerchief to her eyes.

As the coach drove away, Pitt, sinking back, thought to himself how she respected him and how he deserved it, and how Rawdon was a foolish dull fellow who didn't appreciate his wife; and how mute and stupid his own wife was compared to that brilliant little Becky. Becky had hinted every one of these things herself, but so delicately that you hardly knew where.

Before they parted, it was agreed that the house in London should be redecorated, and that the families should meet again in the country at Christmas.

"I wish you could have got some money out of him," Rawdon said to his wife moodily when the Baronet was gone. "I should like to give something to old Raggles. It ain't right, you know, that the old fellow should be kept out of all his money. He might let to somebody else, you know."

"Tell him," said Becky, "that as soon as Sir Pitt's affairs are settled, everybody will be paid, and give him a little something meanwhile. Here's a cheque that Pitt left for the boy." She gave it to her husband.

The truth is, she had tried the ground about money – tried it ever so delicately, and found it unsafe. Even at a hint, Sir Pitt was alarmed. He began a long speech, explaining how short of money he was himself; how the tenants would not pay, and his father's death had caused him great expenses, and the bankers and agents were overdrawn. He ended by making a compromise and giving Becky a very small sum for her little boy.

Pitt knew how poor his brother's family must be. It could not have escaped his notice that they had nothing to live upon. He knew very well that he had the money which properly ought to have gone to Rawdon, and he felt, we may be sure, some secret pangs of remorse, which warned him that he ought to perform some act of compensation towards these disappointed relations. As a decent, clever man, who said his prayers, and did his duty outwardly through life, he was aware that something was due to his brother.

However, to part with money is a sacrifice beyond almost all men who have a sense of order. So Pitt Crawley thought he would do something for his brother, and then thought that he would think about it some other time.

As for Becky, she did not expect too much, and so was content with all that Pitt had done for her. She was acknowledged by the head of the family. If Pitt would not give her anything, he would get something for her some day. If she got no money from her brother-in-law, she got credit. Raggles was made easy in his mind by the reunion between the brothers, by a small payment on the spot, and the promise of a much larger sum to follow.

And Rebecca told Miss Briggs in strict confidence that she had conferred with Sir Pitt, who was famous as a financier, on Briggs's special behalf, as to the best investment of Miss B.'s remaining capital; that Sir Pitt had thought of a most safe and advantageous way in which Briggs could lay out her money, and recommended that she should have the money ready at a moment's notice to buy the shares which Sir Pitt advised.

Poor Miss Briggs was very grateful; and she promised to be ready with her little cash at the proper hour. And this worthy woman was so thankful for Rebecca's kindness that she went out and bought a black velvet coat for little Rawdon, who was grown almost too big for black velvet now.

He was a fine open-faced boy of about eight, with blue eyes and waving flaxen hair, sturdy but generous and soft-hearted, fondly attaching himself to all who were good to him – to the pony – to Lord Southdown, who gave it to him – to the groom who had charge of it – to Molly, the cook, who crammed him with ghost stories at night, and with good food by day – to Briggs, whom he plagued and laughed at – and especially to his father, whose attachment towards the lad was curious to witness.

Here young Rawdon's attachments ended. The beautiful mother-vision had faded. For nearly two years she had scarcely spoken to the child. She disliked him. He had the measles and the whooping-cough. He bored her. One day when he was standing on the landing, attracted by the sound of his mother's voice singing to Lord Steyne, the drawing room door opened suddenly: and she discovered the little spy and boxed his ears violently. He heard a laugh from the Marquis as he fled down to his friends of the kitchen, in an agony of grief.

"It is not because it hurts me," little Rawdon gasped out – "only– only–" He ended in a storm of sobs. It was the little boy's heart that was bleeding. "Why mayn't I hear her singing? Why don't she ever sing to me – as she does to that bald man with the large teeth?"

The cook looked at the housemaid; the housemaid looked knowingly at the footman. The awful kitchen inquisition which sits in judgement in every house sat in judgement on Rebecca at that moment.

After this incident, the mother's dislike increased to hatred; the very sight of the boy was a reproach and an annoyance to her. Fear and doubt sprang up, too, in the boy's bosom. They were separated from that day.

Lord Steyne also disliked the boy. When they met, he made sarcastic bows or remarks, or glared at Rawdon savagely. Rawdon used to stare back and clench his little fists in return. He knew his enemy. One day the footman found him squaring his fists at Lord Steyne's hat in the hall. The footman told it as a good joke to Lord Steyne's coachman; that officer told the servants' hall. And soon afterwards, when Mrs. Rawdon Crawley arrived at Gaunt House, the porter and footmen knew all about her, or fancied they did. It is awful, that servants' inquisition! Some people ought to have mutes for servants in Vanity Fair. If you are guilty, tremble. If you are not guilty, beware of appearances, which are as ruinous as guilt.

Whether Rebecca was guilty or not, the tribunal of the servants' hall had pronounced against her. She would not have got credit had they not believed her to be guilty. It was the sight of the Marquis of Steyne's carriage-lamps at her door, seen by Raggles, that kept his hopes up.

And so – guiltless very likely – she was writhing and pushing onward towards "a position in society," while the servants were pointing at her as lost and ruined.

Just before Christmas, Becky, her husband and her son went to pass the holidays at Queen's Crawley. Becky would have liked to leave the little brat behind but for Lady Jane's urgent invitations to the youngster, and Rawdon's reproaches at her neglect of her son.

"He's the finest boy in England," the father said, "and you don't seem to care for him, Becky, as much as you do for your spaniel. He shan't bother you much; he shall go outside on the coach with me."

"Where you go when you want to smoke those filthy cigars," replied Mrs. Rawdon.

"I remember when you liked 'em though."

Becky laughed. "Take Rawdon outside with you and give him a cigar too if you want."

So Rawdon and Briggs wrapped up the child in shawls, and he was hoisted respectfully onto the roof of the coach in the dark morning. With delight he watched the dawn rise and made his first journey to the place which his father still called home. It was a journey of infinite pleasure to the boy, to whom the incidents of the road gave endless interest, his father answering all his questions and telling him who lived where. His mother stayed inside the vehicle with her maid and her furs and her scent bottles.

It was dark again when little Rawdon was wakened up to enter his uncle's carriage at Mudbury. He looked out of it wondering as the great iron gates flew open, and at the white trunks of the limes as they swept by, until they stopped before the windows of the Hall, which were blazing with Christmas welcome. The hall-door was flung open – a big fire was burning in the great fire-place – a carpet was down over the black flagstones.

Rebecca kissed Lady Jane and Sir Pitt; but Rawdon, having been smoking, hung back from his sister-in-law, whose two children came up to their cousin, young Rawdon. While Matilda kissed him, Pitt Southdown, the son and heir, stood aloof and examined him as a little dog does a big dog.

Then the kind hostess conducted her guests to the snug apartments blazing with cheerful fires. The young ladies knocked at Mrs. Rawdon's door, pretending that they wished to be useful, but in reality to have the pleasure of looking through her bonnet-boxes, and her dresses which, though black, were of the newest London fashion. They told her how much the Hall was changed for the better, and how Pitt was taking his station in the county, as became a Crawley. When the family assembled at dinner, Rawdon Junior was placed by his aunt, while Sir Pitt was uncommonly attentive to Rebecca beside him.

Little Rawdon showed a fine appetite. "I like to dine here," he said to his aunt after the meal.

"Why?" said the good Lady Jane.

"I dine in the kitchen when I am at home," he replied, "or else with Briggs." Becky was so busy complimenting the Baronet, and admiring young Pitt – whom she declared to be the most noble-looking creature, and so like his father – that she did not hear the remarks of her own son.

Young Rawdon the Second was allowed to sit up until the hour when a great gilt book was laid on the table before Sir Pitt, all the servants streamed in, and Sir Pitt read prayers. It was the first time the poor little boy had ever witnessed such a ceremony.

The house, improved since the old Baronet's day, was pronounced by Becky to be charming. As for little Rawdon, who examined it with the children for his guides, it seemed to him a perfect palace of enchantment and wonder. There were long galleries, and ancient state bedrooms; there were pictures and armour. There were the rooms in which Grandpapa died, and past which the children walked with terrified looks.

"Who was Grandpapa?" he asked; and they told him how he used to be wheeled about in a garden-chair, which they showed him rotting in an out-house.

The brothers spent several mornings in examining the improvements to the place. As they walked or rode, they could talk to each other. Pitt took care to tell Rawdon what a heavy outlay of money these improvements had caused.

“There is that new lodge-gate,” said Pitt, pointing to it. “I can no more pay for it before the dividends in January than I can fly.”

“I can lend you something, Pitt, till then,” Rawdon answered rather ruefully; and they went and looked at the restored lodge, where the family arms were newly scraped in stone; and where old Mrs. Lock, for the first time in many long years, had tight doors, sound roofs, and whole windows.

CHAPTER 45

Between Hampshire and London

Sir Pitt Crawley had done more than repair fences and restore dilapidated lodges. Wisely, he had set to work to rebuild the injured reputation of his house. He was elected MP for the borough soon after his father's death. As a magistrate, a Member of Parliament, and representative of an ancient family, he gave handsomely to charities, called assiduously upon all the county folk, and set out to take that position in Hampshire to which he thought his talents entitled him.

Lady Jane was instructed to be friendly with the Fuddlestones, the Wapshots, and the other famous baronets, their neighbours. They were invited frequently to the Hall, and in return Pitt and his wife most energetically dined out in all sorts of weather. For though Pitt did not care for joviality, yet he considered that to be hospitable was his duty. He talked about crops, corn-laws, and politics with the best country gentlemen.

He didn't hunt; he wasn't a hunting man; he was a man of books; but if his friend, Sir Huddleston Fuddlestone, liked to meet the hounds at Queen's Crawley, he was happy to see the gentlemen of the Fuddlestone hunt. He gave up preaching in meeting-houses; went stoutly to church; called on the Bishop at Winchester; and made no objection when the Venerable Archdeacon Trumper asked for a game of whist.

When the Baronet announced to the young ladies that next year he should probably take them to the "county balls," they worshipped him for his kindness. Lady Jane was glad herself to go. The Countess of Southdown wrote the direst descriptions of her daughter's worldly behaviour to her other daughter Emily; and returned to Brighton, not very much missed. Rebecca, on her second visit to Queen's Crawley, did not feel grieved at Lady Southdown's absence; though she wrote a respectful Christmas letter to her Ladyship, declaring that everything at Queen's Crawley reminded her of her absent friend.

A great part of Sir Pitt's altered popularity might have been traced to the advice of the astute Rebecca.

"You, content to be a mere country gentleman?" she said. "No, Sir Pitt, I know you better. I know your talents and your ambition. I showed Lord Steyne your pamphlet on malt. He said it was in the opinion of the whole Cabinet the most masterly thing that had appeared on the subject. You want to distinguish yourself in Parliament; everyone says you are the finest speaker in England (for your speeches at Oxford are still remembered). You want to be Baron Crawley, and will be before you die. I could read your heart, Sir Pitt. If I had a husband who possessed your intellect, I think I should not be unworthy of him – but – but I am your kinswoman now," she added with a laugh. "Poor little penniless me. Yet who knows, perhaps the mouse may aid the lion."

Pitt Crawley was enraptured. "How that woman comprehends me!" he said. "I never could get Jane to read three pages of the malt pamphlet. She has no idea of my talents. So they remember my speaking at Oxford, do they? Now that I represent my borough, they begin to recollect me! I will show them that I can speak and act as well as write, and the world shall yet hear of Pitt Crawley."

This was why he had grown so hospitable: so kind to Deans and Chapters; so generous in giving and accepting dinners; so gracious to farmers on market-days, and

so much interested about county business; and this was why Christmas at the Hall was so gay.

On Christmas Day a great family gathering took place. All the Crawleys from the Rectory came to dine. Rebecca was as fond of Mrs. Bute as if the other had never been her enemy; she was affectionately interested in the dear girls, and admired their progress in music. Mrs. Bute was obliged to adopt a decent manner towards the little adventuress – of course being free to talk with her daughters afterwards about the absurd respect with which Sir Pitt treated Rebecca.

But Jim, who had sat next to her at dinner, declared she was a trump, and all the Rector's family agreed that little Rawdon was a fine boy. They saw a possible baronet in the child, between whom and the title there was only the little sickly pale Pitt.

The children were very good friends. Young Rawdon took command of Pitt and Matilda – the little girl and boy following him about with great reverence. His happiness was extreme. The kitchen garden pleased him hugely, the flowers moderately; but the pigeons and poultry, and the stables, were delightful. He resisted being kissed by the Misses Crawley, but he allowed Lady Jane sometimes to embrace him, and he liked to sit beside her after dinner.

Rebecca, seeing that tenderness was the fashion, called Rawdon to her one evening and stooped down and kissed him in the presence of all the ladies.

He looked her full in the face, trembling and turning very red.

“You never kiss me at home, Mamma,” he said, at which there was a general silence and consternation and a by no means pleasant look in Becky's eyes.

Rawdon senior was fond of his sister-in-law, but Lady Jane and Becky did not get on quite so well at this visit as on the former one. Those speeches of the child struck rather a chill. Perhaps Sir Pitt was rather too attentive to Becky.

But young Rawdon never wearied of accompanying his father to the stables, where the Colonel retired to smoke his cigar – Jim, the Rector's son, sometimes joining them. One day, Jim, the Colonel, and Horn, the gamekeeper, went and shot pheasants, taking little Rawdon with them. On another blissful morning, these four gentlemen went rat-hunting in a barn. Rawdon had never seen anything more noble. They stopped up the ends of certain drains, and inserted ferrets into other openings, and then stood silent with uplifted stakes in their hands, and an anxious little terrier, listening motionless to the faint squeaking of the rats below. When the animals bolted above-ground, the terrier accounted for one, and the keeper for another; Rawdon, from flurry and excitement, missed his rat, but half-murdered a ferret.

But the greatest day of all was that on which Sir Huddleston Fuddlestone's hounds met upon the lawn at Queen's Crawley.

That was a famous sight for little Rawdon. At half-past ten, Tom Moody, Sir Huddleston Fuddlestone's huntsman, was seen trotting up the avenue, followed by the noble pack of hounds. Next comes boy Jack, Tom Moody's son, who weighs five stone, measures four foot, and will never be any bigger. He is perched on a large raw-boned hunter, Sir Huddleston Fuddlestone's favourite horse the Nob. Other horses, ridden by other small boys, arrive from time to time, awaiting their masters.

Tom Moody rides up to the door of the Hall, where he is welcomed by the butler, who offers him drink, which he declines. He and his pack then draw off into a sheltered corner of the lawn, where the dogs roll on the grass, and play or growl at one another.

Many young gentlemen canter up on thoroughbred hacks, spatter-dashed to the knee, and enter the house to drink cherry-brandy and pay their respects to the ladies,

or take a preliminary gallop round the lawn. Then they collect in the corner and talk with Tom Moody about the state of the country and the wretched breed of foxes.

Sir Huddleston presently rides up to the Hall, where he greets the ladies before he proceeds to business. The hounds are drawn up to the hall-door, and little Rawdon descends amongst them, excited yet half-alarmed by their caresses and the thumps from their waving tails.

Meanwhile, Sir Huddleston has hoisted himself unwieldily on the Nob.

“Let’s try Sowster’s Spinney, Tom,” says the Baronet. “Farmer Mangle tells me there are two foxes in it.” Tom blows his horn and trots off, followed by the pack, the young gents, the farmers of the neighbourhood, and the labourers of the parish on foot. The whole cortege disappears down the avenue.

The Reverend Bute happens to trot out from the Rectory Lane on his powerful black horse just as Sir Huddleston passes; he joins the horsemen. Little Rawdon remains on the doorstep, wondering and happy.

During this memorable holiday, little Rawdon gained the good graces of his married and maiden aunts, of the two little folks of the Hall, and of Jim of the Rectory, whom Sir Pitt was encouraging to pay his addresses to one of the young ladies, with an understanding that he should have his father’s living in due course. Jim had given up green coats, red neckcloths, and hunting, to prepare himself for the change in his condition. In this thrifty way Sir Pitt tried to pay off his debt to his family.

Also before this merry Christmas was over, the Baronet had screwed up courage enough to give his brother no less than a hundred pounds, an act which caused Sir Pitt cruel pangs at first, but which made him glow afterwards with generosity.

Rawdon and his son left the Hall with heavy hearts. Becky departed with alacrity, however, and returned to London to commence those duties with which we find her occupied when this chapter begins. Under her care the Crawley house in Great Gaunt Street was restored and ready for the reception of Sir Pitt and his family, when the Baronet came to London to attend Parliament.

For the first session, he hid his ambition and never opened his lips except to present a petition from Mudbury. But he attended assiduously and learned thoroughly the business of the House, to the alarm and wonder of Lady Jane, who thought he was killing himself by late hours and work. And he got to know the ministers, determining to be one of them before many years were over.

Lady Jane’s sweetness and kindness had given Rebecca a contempt for her ladyship which she found it difficult to hide. That sort of simple goodness annoyed Becky, and it was impossible for her at times not to show her scorn.

Her presence made Jane uneasy. Her husband talked constantly with Becky, on subjects which he never thought of discussing with his wife. Lady Jane did not understand them, to be sure, but it was mortifying to know that you had nothing to say, and to hear that audacious Mrs. Rawdon dashing on from subject to subject, with a joke always pat.

When Lady Jane was telling stories to the children, who clustered about her knees (including little Rawdon, who was very fond of her) – if Becky came into the room, sneering with green scornful eyes, poor Lady Jane grew silent. She could not go on, although Rebecca, with a hint of sarcasm, begged her to continue that charming story.

On her side, simple pleasures were odious to Mrs. Becky. "I have no taste for bread and butter," she would say. So these two ladies did not see much of each other; whereas Sir Pitt daily found time to see his sister-in-law.

On the occasion of his first Speaker's dinner, Sir Pitt appeared before Becky in his uniform – his old diplomatic suit. She complimented and admired him almost as much as his own wife, saying that only thoroughbred gentlemen could wear the Court suit with advantage. Pitt looked down with complacency at his legs, and thought in his heart that he was killing.

When he was gone, Mrs. Becky drew a caricature of him, which she showed to Lord Steyne when he arrived. His lordship carried off the sketch, delighted with it. He had met Sir Pitt Crawley at Becky's house and had been most gracious to him. Pitt was struck by the deference with which the great Peer treated his sister-in-law, and by the delight with which all the men listened to her sprightly talk. Lord Steyne said he expected to hear Pitt as an orator.

In the midst of these intrigues and fine parties and brilliant personages Rawdon Crawley felt himself more isolated every day. He was allowed to go to the club; to dine out with bachelor friends; to come and go when he liked, without any questions being asked. And he and Rawdon the younger would often walk to Gaunt Street and visit Lady Jane and the children.

The ex-Colonel would sit for hours in his brother's house, very silent, and thinking as little as possible. He was glad to do an errand; to go and inquire about a horse, or to carve the roast mutton for the children's dinner. He was cowed into laziness and submission. Delilah had imprisoned him and cut his hair off too. The bold young blood of ten years back was subjugated and turned into a torpid, middle-aged, stout gentleman.

And poor Lady Jane was aware that Rebecca had captivated her husband, although she and Mrs. Rawdon my-deared each other every day they met.

CHAPTER 46

Struggles and Trials

Our friends at Brompton meanwhile were passing their Christmas in a manner not so cheerful.

Out of her income of a hundred pounds a year, the Widow Osborne had been in the habit of giving up nearly three-fourths to her father and mother, for the expenses of herself and her little boy. With 120 pounds more from Jos, this family of four, attended by a single Irish servant who also worked for the Clapps, might manage to live in decent comfort. Sedley still maintained his ascendancy over the family of Mr. Clapp, his ex-clerk, while Clapp still respected Mr. Sedley, and would not allow that gentleman's character to be abused by anybody. He owed him everything, he said. After his master's disaster, Clapp had very soon found other employment. "Such a little fish as me can swim in any bucket," he used to remark.

Out of the small amount of her income which Amelia kept, she used all possible thrift and care to keep her darling boy dressed in such a manner as became George Osborne's son, and to pay for the little school to which, after much reluctance and many secret pangs, she had sent the lad. She had sat up at nights spelling over grammars and geography books in order to teach them to Georgy, and had even worked at Latin, fondly hoping that she might be able to instruct him in that language. To part with him all day, to send him out to the mercy of a schoolmaster's cane and his schoolfellows' roughness, was painful to her. He, for his part, rushed off to school happily, longing for the change. That childish gladness wounded his grieving mother, who then repented of selfishly wishing her own son to be unhappy.

Georgy made great progress in the school, which was kept by a friend of his mother's admirer, the Rev. Mr. Binny. He brought home numberless prizes, and told his mother stories every night about his school-companions, so that Amelia learned to know every one of the boys as well as Georgy himself. At night she used to help him in his exercises and puzzle her little head over his lessons. Once, after a combat with a Master Smith, George came home with a black eye, and bragged to his mother and his delighted grandfather about his valour in the fight: and Amelia has never forgiven that Smith to this day, though he is now a peaceful apothecary.

In these quiet labours the gentle widow's life was passing, a silver hair or two marking the progress of time and a line on her forehead deepening a little. All she hoped for was to see her son as great and glorious as he deserved.

She kept his copy-books and drawings and showed them to her little circle as if they were miracles of genius. She gave some of these specimens to Miss Dobbin, to show to Miss Osborne, George's aunt, who might show them to Mr. Osborne himself – to make that old man repent of his cruelty towards him who was gone. All her husband's faults she had buried in the grave with him: she only remembered the noble husband, so brave and beautiful, who had died gloriously.

We have seen how old Mr. Osborne daily grew more violent and moody, and how his daughter, with her fine carriage, was a lonely, miserable, persecuted old maid. She thought often of the beautiful little nephew, and used to look out for him as she took her solitary drive in the park.

Her sister, the banker's wife, occasionally condescended to pay a visit with a couple of sickly children, and urged Miss Osborne to make her papa do something for

the darlings. Little Frederick should go into the Guards; and how was the dear little girl to be provided for? Then Mrs. Bullock would gather her starched nurslings and simper back into her carriage. But every visit which she paid to her family was more unlucky for her; her patronage annoyed her father.

Poor Amelia, guarding her treasure at Brompton, little knew how eagerly some people coveted it. On that night when Jane Osborne had told her father that she had seen his grandson, the old man had made no reply, but he had shown no anger – and had bade her good-night in rather a kindly voice. And he must have made some inquiries of the Dobbin family about her visit, for a fortnight later, he asked her where was her little French watch she used to wear?

She had given it to Georgy. “I bought it with my own money, sir,” she said in a great fright.

“Go and order another like it,” said the old gentleman, and lapsed again into silence.

The Misses Dobbin begged Amelia to allow George to visit them. Perhaps his grandfather, they hinted, might be reconciled to him – surely Amelia could not refuse such advantageous chances for the boy. Nor could she, but she agreed with a very heavy and suspicious heart, was uneasy during the child’s absence, and welcomed him back as if he was rescued from danger. She always asked him if he had seen any gentlemen.

He had not, until at last, “An old gentleman with thick eyebrows came when I was on the grey pony. He looked at me very much. He shook very much.”

Then Amelia knew that the boy had seen his grandfather; and waited feverishly for a proposal which she was sure would follow, and which came a few days afterwards.

Mr. Osborne formally offered to take the boy and make him his heir. He would give Mrs. George Osborne an allowance, to assure her a decent income. If Mrs. George Osborne proposed to marry again, as Mr. O. had heard was her intention, he would not withdraw that allowance. But the child would live entirely with his grandfather in Russell Square, and would be occasionally permitted to see Mrs. George Osborne at her own house. This message was brought to her in a letter when her parents were out.

She was never seen angry but twice or thrice in her life, and it was in one of these moods that Mr. Osborne’s lawyer beheld her. She rose up trembling and flushing after reading the letter, and tore the paper into a hundred fragments.

“I, take money to part from my child! Who dares insult me by proposing such a thing? Tell Mr. Osborne it is a cowardly letter, sir – I will not answer it. Good morning, sir.”

Her parents never noticed her agitation, and she never told them of the interview. They had their own affairs to interest them. Her father was always dabbling in speculation. We have seen how the wine company and the coal company had failed him. But, prowling restlessly about the City, he lighted upon another scheme, which he embarked on in spite of Mr. Clapp’s warnings. And as Mr. Sedley never talked about money matters before women, they had no inkling of the misfortunes that were in store for them until the unhappy old gentleman was forced to confess.

The bills of the little household, which had been settled weekly, first fell into arrears. Mr Sedley told his wife that the payments from India had not arrived; and she was obliged to go round asking the tradesmen for time. Emmy’s contribution,

however, kept the little company in half-rations. For the first six months, old Sedley kept up the notion that his shares must rise and that all would be well.

But after that time, the household fell deeper into trouble. Mrs. Sedley, who was growing infirm, wept a great deal with Mrs. Clapp in the kitchen. The butcher was surly, the grocer insolent: once or twice little Georgy had grumbled about the dinners, and Amelia, who would have been satisfied with a slice of bread for her own dinner, saw that her son was neglected, and bought little things out of her private purse to keep him healthy.

One day, when Amelia was about to pay her money over, she proposed to keep a part back to buy a new suit for Georgy. Then it came out: that Jos's payments were not made, that the house was in difficulties, which Amelia ought to have seen before, her mother said, but she cared for nobody except Georgy. At this Amelia passed all her money to her mother without a word, and returned to her room to cry her eyes out. She had to cancel the order for the clothes on which she had set her heart for Christmas Day.

Hardest of all, she had to break the news to Georgy, who made a loud outcry. Everybody had new clothes at Christmas. The other boys would laugh at him. She had promised him new clothes.

The poor widow had only kisses to give him. She darned the old suit in tears, and hunted about among her little ornaments to see if she could sell anything to raise the money. There was her India shawl that Dobbin had sent her; she remembered once going with her mother to a fine India shop which dealt in such things. Her eyes shone with pleasure as she thought of this.

Hiding the shawl under her cloak, she walked flushed and eager to the shop, so that many a man turned and looked after her rosy pretty face. She calculated how she should spend the proceeds – besides the clothes, she would buy the books that he longed for, and pay his half-year's schooling; and she would buy a cloak for her father.

She was not mistaken as to the value of the Major's gift. It was very fine, and the merchant made a good bargain when he gave her twenty guineas for it. Amazed with her riches, she bought her purchases, and went home exulting. And she pleased herself by writing in the fly-leaf in her neatest little hand, "George Osborne, A Christmas gift from his affectionate mother."

She was going from her room with the books in her hand to place them on George's table, when she and her mother met in the passage. The little volumes caught the old lady's eye.

"What are those?"

"Some books for Georgy," Amelia replied. "I promised them to him at Christmas."

"Books!" cried the elder lady indignantly. "Books, when the whole house wants bread! Books, when to keep you and your son in luxury, and your dear father out of gaol, I've sold every trinket I had! Oh, Amelia! you break my heart with your books and that boy of yours, whom you are ruining, though part with him you will not. Oh, Amelia, may God send you a more dutiful child than I have had! There's Jos, deserts his father in his old age; and there's George, who might be going to school like a lord, while my dear, dear old man is without a shilling." Hysterical sobs ended Mrs. Sedley's speech.

"Oh, Mother, Mother!" cried poor Amelia. "You told me nothing. I promised him the books. I – I only sold my shawl this morning. Take the money – take everything,"

and with quivering hands she took out her silver, and her precious sovereigns, which she thrust into the hands of her mother.

Then she went into her room, and sank down in despair and utter misery. She saw it all now. Her selfishness was sacrificing the boy. But for her he might have wealth, status and education. She had only to speak the words, and her father was restored, and the boy raised to fortune. Oh, what a conviction it was to that tender and stricken heart!

CHAPTER 47

Gaunt House

All the world knows that Lord Steyne's town palace stands in Gaunt Square. Peering over the railings and through the black trees into the central garden of the Square, you see a few miserable governesses with wan-faced pupils wandering round and round it. Gaunt House occupies nearly a side of the Square. The remaining three sides are composed of tall, dark houses, with little light behind their windows, and with brass plates – Doctors, Banks, etc.

The Square has a dreary look – nor is my Lord Steyne's palace less dreary, with its vast front wall, rustic columns and chimneys, out of which there seldom comes any smoke now; for the present Lord Steyne lives at Naples.

A hundred yards down New Gaunt Street is a little modest back door, which you would not distinguish from any other. But many a closed carriage has stopped at that door, and many a lady has been seen going in and out; for it leads to the famous *petits appartements* of Lord Steyne – one fitted up in ivory and white satin, and another in ebony and black velvet; there is a little banqueting-room and a private kitchen.

Besides his town palace, the Marquis had various other castles – Castle Strongbow, in Ireland; Gaunt Castle, in Wales; the grand Gauntly Hall in Yorkshire, and Stillbrook in Hampshire, which was my lord's farm, a humble residence, of which we all remember the wonderful furniture which was sold on my lord's death.

The Marchioness of Steyne was of the ancient family of the Caerlyons, Marquises of Camelot, who have preserved the old Catholic faith ever since the conversion of the venerable Druid, their first ancestor. Pendragon is the title of the eldest son of the house. The sons have been called Arthurs, Uthers, and Caradocs, from time immemorial. Their heads have fallen in many a loyal conspiracy. Elizabeth chopped off the head of the Arthur of her day. A recreant of James's time was momentarily perverted from his religion, and the fortunes of the family somewhat restored. But the Earl of Camelot, in the reign of Charles, returned to the old creed of his family, and they fought and ruined themselves for it, as long as there was a Stuart left to head a rebellion.

The beautiful Lady Mary Caerlyon was brought up at a Parisian convent, before being married – or sold, it was said – to Lord Gaunt, who won vast sums from the lady's brother. The Earl of Gaunt's famous duel with the Count de la Marche was because of that officer's pretensions to the hand of Lady Mary. She was married to Lord Gaunt while the Count lay ill of his wound, and came to dwell at Gaunt House, and to be admired at court; but she was scared by the wild pleasures and gaieties of the society into which she was flung, and after she had borne a couple of sons, shrank away into a life of devout seclusion. No wonder that my Lord Steyne, who liked pleasure and cheerfulness, was not often seen after their marriage alongside this trembling, silent, superstitious, unhappy lady.

It was said that Lord Steyne made her sit down to table with women of doubtful reputation: in a word, with his reigning favourite. It was also said by some that Lady Mary would not be so submissive unless the Marquis had some mysterious sword to hold over her.

Between the Marchioness and her children was the cruel barrier of difference of faith. The very love which she felt for her sons only made the pious lady more fearful

and unhappy. The gulf which separated them was impassable. During his sons' youth, Lord Steyne had no better sport after dinner than in setting the boys' tutor, the Reverend Mr. Trail, on her ladyship's priest, Father Mole. He cried "Bravo, Latimer! Well said, Loyola!" alternately; he promised Mole a bishopric if he would convert, and vowed he would use all his influence to get Trail a cardinal's hat if he would secede. Although the fond mother hoped that her youngest and favourite son would be reconciled to her church, a sad and awful disappointment awaited her.

Her elder son Lord Gaunt married the Lady Blanche Thistlewood, a daughter of the noble house of Bareacres, previously mentioned in this history. A wing of Gaunt House was assigned to this couple; Lord Gaunt, however, was little at home, disagreeing with his wife, and borrowing money beyond the very moderate sums which his father allowed him. The Marquis knew every shilling of his son's debts.

To my Lord Gaunt's dismay, and the chuckling delight of his enemy and father, the Lady Gaunt had no children. So his brother Lord George Gaunt was desired to return from Vienna to marry the Honourable Joan, only daughter of John Jones, First Baron Helvellyn, and head of Jones, Brown, and Robinson, Bankers. From this marriage sprang several sons and daughters.

The marriage at first was a happy and prosperous one. My Lord George Gaunt could write well, spoke French fluently; was a fine waltzer, and seemed likely to become a highly-ranked diplomat. His wife's wealth let her hold splendid receptions in those continental towns where her husband's diplomatic duties led him.

Then sudden rumours arrived of his extraordinary behaviour. At a grand diplomatic dinner, he had started up and declared that a *pate de foie gras* was poisoned. He went to a ball with his head shaved and dressed as a Capuchin friar. It was not a fancy-dress ball. People whispered that something strange ran in the family.

His wife and children returned to Gaunt House. Lord George gave up his post, and was supposedly sent to Brazil. But people knew better; he never returned from that Brazil expedition – never died there – never lived there – never was there at all. "Brazil," said the gossips, "is a cottage at St. John's Wood, where George Gaunt has a keeper, who has invested him with the order of the Strait-Jacket." These are the kinds of epitaphs which men give one another in Vanity Fair.

Twice or thrice a week, in the early morning, his poor mother went to see him. Sometimes he laughed at her; sometimes she found him dragging about a child's toy. Sometimes he knew her and Father Mole; oftener he forgot her, as he had done wife, children, love, ambition, and all but his dinner-hour.

The poor mother had brought this taint from her own ancient race. The evil had broken out once or twice in her father's family. The dark mark of doom was on the threshold.

The absent lord's children meanwhile grew on, quite unconscious that the doom was over them too. Their stricken grandmother trembled to think that these were the inheritors of their father's shame, and watched sickening for the day when the awful ancestral curse should come down on them.

This dark presentiment also haunted Lord Steyne. He tried to lay the ghost in Red Seas of wine and jollity, and lost sight of it sometimes in the crowd of his pleasures. But it always came back to him when alone, and grew more threatening with the years. "I have taken your son," it said, "why not you? I may tap you on the head tomorrow, and away go pleasure and honours, feasts and friends, fine horses and houses – in exchange for a prison, a keeper, and a straw mattress." And then my lord would defy the ghost, for he knew of a remedy by which he could baulk his enemy.

So there was splendour and wealth, but no great happiness behind the tall portals of Gaunt House. Had my Lord not been so great, perhaps few would have visited him; but in Vanity Fair the sins of very great personages are indulged. Some squeamish moralists might be sulky with Lord Steyne, but they were glad enough to come when he asked them.

“Lord Steyne is really too bad,” Lady Slingstone said, “but everybody goes, and of course I shall see that my girls come to no harm.”

“His morals are bad,” said little Lord Southdown to his sister, who had heard terrific stories from her mamma about the doings at Gaunt House; “but hang it, he’s got the best Champagne in Europe!”

And as for Sir Pitt Crawley – that pattern of decorum – he never for one moment thought of not going.

“Where you see such persons as the Countess of Slingstone, you may be pretty sure, Jane,” the Baronet would say, “that we cannot be wrong. The great rank of Lord Steyne means he can command people in our station. Besides, George Gaunt and I were diplomats together.”

CHAPTER 48

In Which the Reader Is Introduced to the Very Best of Company

At last Becky's kindness and attention to the head of her husband's family were destined to meet with a reward, one which she coveted eagerly. If she did not wish to lead a virtuous life, she wished to have a virtuous reputation, something no lady can possess until she has put on a train and feathers and has been presented to her Sovereign at Court. From that august interview they come out stamped as honest women. The Lord Chamberlain gives them a certificate of virtue.

My Lady Bareacres, my Lady Tufto, and Mrs. Bute Crawley might indeed cry fie at the idea of the odious little adventuress curtseying before the Sovereign. I, for my part, look back with love and awe to that Great Character. Ah, what a high and noble appreciation of Gentlewomanhood there must have been in Vanity Fair, when the revered and august Prince Regent was crowned King! I saw him once at the theatre: florid of face, portly of person, covered with medals, and with a rich curling head of hair – how we sang *God save him!* How the house rocked. How they cheered, and cried, and waved handkerchiefs. Ladies wept; mothers clasped their children; some fainted with emotion. Yes, we saw him. Fate cannot deprive us of that.

Well, there came a happy day for Mrs. Rawdon Crawley when she was admitted into the paradise of Court. On the appointed day, Sir Pitt and his lady, in their great family carriage, drove up to the little house in Curzon Street, to the admiration of Raggles, watching from his greengrocer's shop.

Sir Pitt, in a glittering uniform, descended into Curzon Street. Little Rawdon stood with his face against the window, smiling to his aunt in the carriage; and presently Sir Pitt came forth from the house leading a lady with grand feathers, covered in a white shawl, and holding up a train of magnificent brocade. She stepped graciously into the vehicle as if she were a princess.

Rawdon followed in his old Guard's uniform, which had grown woefully shabby, and much too tight. The carriage joined the line of royal equipages which was making its way down Piccadilly and St. James's Street towards the old brick St. James's Palace.

Becky felt as if she could bless the people out of the carriage windows, so elated was she, and so conscious of the dignified position which she had at last attained. Even our Becky had her weaknesses, and to be thought a respectable woman was her aim in life. She adopted a demeanour so grand, self-satisfied, deliberate, and imposing that it made even Lady Jane laugh. She walked into the royal apartments with a toss of the head which would have befitted an empress.

Her costume was of the most elegant and brilliant description. Some ladies are by no means lovely and enticing objects at that early time of noon. A stout countess of sixty, *décolletée*, painted and wrinkled with rouge up to her drooping eyelids, is an edifying, but not a pleasant sight. Drawing-rooms should be announced for November, or the first foggy day; or the elderly ladies of Vanity Fair should drive up in closed litters, descend in a covered way, and make their curtsy to the Sovereign under the protection of lamplight.

Our beloved Rebecca had no need, however, of any such friendly shadow. Her complexion could bear any sunshine, and her dress, though nowadays any lady of Vanity Fair would pronounce it to be preposterous, was brilliantly handsome in her

eyes and those of the public. Even good little Lady Jane was forced to acknowledge this, and owned sorrowfully to herself that she was quite inferior in taste to Mrs. Becky.

She did not know how much care, thought, and genius Mrs. Rawdon had bestowed upon that dress. Rebecca had a clever way of doing things that Lady Jane little understood.

Lady Jane quickly spied the magnificence of Becky's brocade, and the splendour of her lace. The brocade was an old remnant, Becky said; and as for the lace, it was a great bargain. She had had it these hundred years.

"My dear Mrs. Crawley, it must have cost a small fortune," Lady Jane said, looking down at her own lace, which was not nearly so good; she wanted to say that she could not afford such fine clothing, but checked that speech as uncharitable.

And yet, if Lady Jane had known all, I think even her kindly temper would have failed her. The fact is, when she was putting Sir Pitt's house in order, Mrs. Rawdon had found the lace and the brocade in old wardrobes, and had quietly carried them home.

And the diamonds – "Where the doose did you get the diamonds, Becky?" said her husband, admiring some jewels which he had never seen before and which sparkled on her ears and neck.

Becky blushed a little. Pitt Crawley blushed a little too, and looked out of the window. The fact is, he had given her a very small portion of the brilliants; a pretty diamond clasp, which he had omitted to mention to his wife.

Becky looked at her husband, and then at Sir Pitt, with an air of saucy triumph – as much as to say, "Shall I betray you?"

"Guess!" she said to her husband. "Why, you silly man, where do you suppose I got them? – all except the little clasp, which a dear friend of mine gave me long ago. I hired them, to be sure, at Mr. Polonius's, in Coventry Street. You don't suppose that all the diamonds which go to Court belong to the wearers; like those beautiful stones of Lady Jane's, which are far handsomer than any I have?"

"They are family jewels," said Sir Pitt, again looking uneasy.

Becky's diamonds never went back to Mr. Polonius, of Coventry Street, and that gentleman never applied for their restoration. They retired into an old desk, which Amelia had given her years ago, and in which Becky kept a number of useful things about which her husband knew nothing.

To know nothing, or little, is in the nature of some husbands. To hide things is in the nature of how many women? Oh, ladies! how many of you have surreptitious milliners' bills? How many of you have gowns and bracelets which you daren't show, or which you wear trembling, and trusting that your husband will not know the new velvet gown from the old one?

Thus Rawdon knew nothing about the brilliant diamonds which decorated his lady; but Lord Steyne, who was at Court as Lord of the Powder Closet, wearing all his stars, garters and cordons, knew whence the jewels came and who paid for them.

As he bowed over Becky he smiled, and quoted the hackneyed and beautiful lines from *The Rape of the Lock* about Belinda's diamonds, "which Jews might kiss and infidels adore."

And many ladies round about whispered and talked, and many gentlemen nodded, as they saw what marked attention the great nobleman was paying to the little adventuress.

Of the interview between Rebecca and her Sovereign, it does not become such a feeble pen as mine to attempt to relate. The dazzled eyes close before that Magnificent Idea. We back away rapidly, silently, and respectfully, making profound bows out of the August Presence.

This may be said, that in all London there was no more loyal heart than Becky's afterwards. The name of her king was always on her lips, and she said he was the most charming of men. She ordered a portrait of him; she had him painted in a brooch and wore it – indeed she amused and somewhat pestered her acquaintance with her perpetual talk about his urbanity and beauty. Who knows! Perhaps the little woman thought she might play the part of a Maintenon or a Pompadour.

But best of all after her presentation was to hear her talk virtuously. She had a few female acquaintances beforehand, but after being made an honest woman, so to speak, Becky would not consort any longer with these dubious friends, and cut Lady Crackenbury and Mrs. Washington White.

The details of Becky's costume were in the newspapers – feathers, diamonds, and all. Lady Crackenbury read the paragraph in bitterness and told her followers about the airs which that woman was giving herself. Mrs. Bute Crawley and her young ladies in the country read the Morning Post, and gave vent to their honest indignation.

“If you had been sandy-haired, green-eyed, and a French rope-dancer's daughter,” Mrs. Bute said to her eldest girl, “you might have had superb diamonds too, and have been presented at Court by Lady Jane. But you're only a gentlewoman, my poor dear child, with some of the best blood in England in your veins.” Thus the worthy Rectoress consoled herself.

A few days after the famous presentation, another great honour was paid to the virtuous Becky. Lady Steyne's carriage drove up to Mr. Rawdon Crawley's door, and the footman delivered a couple of cards, on which were engraven the names of the Marchioness of Steyne and the Countess of Gaunt. These bits of pasteboard occupied a conspicuous place on Becky's drawing-room table. Lord! How poor Mrs. Washington White's card sank down to the bottom of the pack.

My Lord Steyne, coming to call a couple of hours afterwards, and looking about him, found his ladies' cards already ranged as the trumps of Becky's hand. He grinned, as this old cynic always did at any naive display of human weakness. Becky came down to him presently, her hair in perfect order, her aprons, scarfs, little morocco slippers, and other female gimcracks arranged.

She found him grinning over the cards, and blushed a little.

“Thank you, Monseigneur,” she said. “You see your ladies have been here. How good of you! I couldn't come before – I was in the kitchen making a pudding.”

“I know you were; I saw you through the area-railings as I drove up,” replied the old gentleman.

“You see everything,” she replied.

“Not that, my pretty lady,” he said good-naturedly. “You silly little fibster! I heard you in the room overhead, where I have no doubt you were putting rouge on. You must give some of yours to my Lady Gaunt, whose complexion is quite preposterous.”

“Is it a crime to try and look my best when you come here?” answered Mrs. Rawdon plaintively, and she rubbed her cheek with her handkerchief as if to show there was no rouge at all, only genuine blushes.

“Well,” said the old gentleman, “you are bent on becoming a fine lady. You pester my poor old life out to get you into the world, but you won’t be able to hold your own there, you silly little fool. You’ve got no money.”

“You will get us a place,” said Becky.

“You’ve got no money, and you want to compete with those who have. You poor little earthenware pipkin, you want to swim down the stream along with the great copper kettles. All women are alike. You will go to Gaunt House. You give an old fellow no rest until you get there; but it’s not half so nice as here. You’ll be bored there. I am. My wife is as gay as Lady Macbeth, and my daughters as cheerful as Regan and Goneril. I daren’t sleep in my bedroom. The pictures frighten me, and I have a little brass bed in a dressing-room, and a little hair mattress like a monk. Ho! ho! You’ll be asked to dinner next week. How the women will bully you!” This was a very long speech for a man of few words like my Lord Steyne.

At this, Briggs looked up from the work-table at which she was seated, and gave a deep sigh.

“If you don’t turn off that abominable sheep-dog,” said Lord Steyne, with a savage look over his shoulder at her, “I will have her poisoned.”

“I always give my dog dinner from my own plate,” said Rebecca, laughing mischievously; and taking pity upon her admirer, she called to Briggs and bade her take the child out for a walk.

“I can’t send her away,” Becky said after Briggs had gone, in a very sad voice. Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

“You owe her wages, I suppose?” said Lord Steyne.

“Worse than that,” said Becky. “I have ruined her.”

“Ruined her? Then why don’t you turn her out?”

“Men do that,” she answered bitterly. “Women are not so bad as you. Last year, when we were reduced to our last guinea, she gave us everything. She shall never leave me, until we are ruined utterly ourselves, which does not seem far off, or until I can pay her the last farthing.”

“How much is it?” said Lord Steyne with an oath. And Becky, reflecting on the largeness of his wealth, mentioned nearly double the amount.

Lord Steyne broke out in another brief expression of anger, at which Rebecca held down her head.

“I could not help it,” she cried. “It was my only chance. I dare not tell my husband. He would kill me if I told him what I have done. I have kept it a secret from everybody but you – and you forced it from me. Ah, what shall I do, Lord Steyne? for I am very unhappy!”

He made no reply except by beating a tattoo with his hands. At last he clapped his hat on his head and flung out of the room. Rebecca did not rise from her attitude of misery until his carriage whirled away. Then she burst out laughing to herself, and sitting down to the piano, she rattled away a triumphant tune on the keys.

That night, there came two notes from Gaunt House: one containing an invitation from Lord and Lady Steyne to a dinner at Gaunt House next Friday, while the other enclosed a slip of grey paper bearing Lord Steyne’s signature and the address of Messrs. Jones, Brown, and Robinson, Bankers.

Rawdon heard Becky laughing in the night. It was only her delight at going to Gaunt House and facing the ladies there, she said, which amused her so. But the truth was that she was occupied with a great number of other thoughts. Should she pay off old Briggs? Should she astonish Raggles by settling his account? She turned over

these thoughts on her pillow, and on the next day, when Rawdon went out to his club, Mrs. Crawley, with a veil on, whipped off in a hackney-coach to the City: and at Messrs. Jones, Brown and Robinson's bank, presented a document, and said she would take a hundred and fifty pounds in small notes and the remainder in one note.

Passing through St. Paul's Churchyard, she stopped and bought the handsomest black silk gown for Briggs which money could buy; and which, with a kiss and a kind speech, she presented to the simple old spinster.

Then she walked to Mr. Raggles, inquired about his children affectionately, and gave him fifty pounds on account. Next she went to the livery-man from whom she hired her carriages, and gratified him with a similar sum.

After this, Becky paid a visit upstairs to the before-mentioned desk, which Amelia had given her years and years ago, and which contained a number of useful and valuable little things. Here she placed the one note which the bank cashier had given her.

CHAPTER 49

In Which We Enjoy Three Courses and a Dessert

When the ladies of Gaunt House were at breakfast that morning, Lord Steyne, who normally took his chocolate in private, appeared amongst them; and a battle royal ensued about Rebecca.

“My Lady Steyne,” he said, “for your dinner on Friday, I want you, if you please, to write an invitation card for Colonel and Mrs. Crawley.”

“Blanche writes them,” Lady Steyne said in a flutter.

“I will not write to that person,” said Lady Blanche Gaunt, a tall and stately lady, who looked up for an instant and then down. It was not good to meet Lord Steyne’s eyes after offending him.

“Send the children out of the room. Go!” he said. The urchins, always frightened of him, retired: their mother would have followed. “Not you,” he said. “You stop. My Lady Steyne, once more will you have the goodness to go to the desk and write that card for your dinner on Friday?”

“My Lord, I will not be present at it,” Lady Blanche said; “I will go home.”

“I wish you would. You will find the bailiffs at Bareacres very pleasant company, and I shall be freed from lending money to your relations and from your damned tragedy airs. Who are you to give orders here? You have no money. You’ve got no brains. You were here to have children, and you have not had any. Gaunt’s tired of you, and George’s wife is the only person in the family who doesn’t wish you were dead. Gaunt would marry again if you were.”

“I wish I were,” her Ladyship answered with tears of rage in her eyes.

“You give yourself airs of virtue, while my wife, who is an immaculate saint, as everybody knows, has no objection to meeting my young friend Mrs. Crawley. My wife knows that lies are often told about the most innocent of women. Pray, madam, shall I tell you some little anecdotes about my Lady Bareacres, your mamma?”

“You may strike me if you like, sir, or hit any cruel blow,” Lady Gaunt said.

To see his wife and daughter suffering always put his Lordship into a good humour.

“My sweet Blanche,” he said, “I am a gentleman, and never lay my hand upon a woman, save in the way of kindness. I only wish to correct little faults in your character. You women are too proud; you must be meek and humble. For all Lady Steyne knows, Mrs. Crawley is even more innocent than herself. Her husband’s character is not good, but it is as good as Bareacres’, who has played a little and not paid a great deal, who cheated you out of your legacy and left you a pauper on my hands. As for Mrs. Crawley’s character, I shan’t demean myself by even hinting that it needs a defence. You will receive her with the utmost cordiality, as you will receive all persons whom I present in this house.” He laughed. “If I invite all Bedlam here, by ____, they shall be welcome.”

The crestfallen women had nothing for it but to obey. Lady Gaunt wrote the invitation, and she and her mother-in-law drove in person, and with bitter and humiliated hearts, to leave the cards which gave Mrs. Rawdon so much pleasure.

There were families in London who would have sacrificed a year’s income to receive such an honour. Mrs. Frederick Bullock, for instance, would have gone on her knees from May Fair to Lombard Street, if Lady Steyne and Lady Gaunt had said “Come to us next Friday.”

Severe, spotless and beautiful, Lady Blanche Gaunt held the very highest rank in Vanity Fair. The distinguished courtesy with which Lord Steyne treated her charmed everybody who witnessed his behaviour, and caused the severest critics to admit how perfect a gentleman he was.

The ladies of Gaunt House called Lady Bareacres to their aid to repulse the common enemy. One of Lady Gaunt's carriages went to Hill Street for her mother, since Lady Bareacres' carriages were in the hands of the bailiffs – as was Bareacres Castle, with all its costly pictures and furniture: the magnificent Vandykes and Reynolds, the Lawrence portraits and the matchless Dancing Nymph, for which Lady Bareacres had sat in her youth – radiant then, but now a toothless, bald old woman, a mere rag of a former robe of state. Her lord was a lean, withered man in a greatcoat and a Brutus wig, slinking about Gray's Inn, bankrupt and broken down. He had borrowed too much money from Steyne to find it pleasant to meet his old comrade. Steyne, whenever he wished to be merry, used jeeringly to ask Lady Gaunt why her father had not come to see her.

Of the other illustrious persons whom Becky had the honour to meet on her presentation to the grand world, we shall not say much. There was his Excellency the Prince of Peterwaradin, with a long, solemn, white face, of whom Becky whispered to Lord Steyne that he must be descended from a sheep.

There was Mr. John Paul Jefferson Jones, attached to the American Embassy and correspondent of the *New York Demagogue*, who, to make himself agreeable, asked Lady Steyne how his dear friend, George Gaunt, liked Brazil?

Mr. Jones wrote a full account of the dinner, which duly appeared in the *Demagogue*. He mentioned the names and titles of all the guests; he described the ladies, the table service, the servants' costume, the dishes and wines, and the probable value of the plate. Such a dinner, he calculated, could not be dished up under fifteen or eighteen dollars per head. He was most indignant that a young and insignificant aristocrat, the Earl of Southdown, should have overtaken him in their procession to the dining-room.

“Just as I was stepping up to offer my hand to the very pleasing and witty Mrs. Rawdon Crawley,” he wrote, “the young man whisked the lady off without a word of apology. I had to bring up the rear with the Colonel, the lady's husband, a stout red-faced warrior who distinguished himself at Waterloo.”

The Colonel on coming into this polite society blushed like a boy of sixteen confronted with his sister's schoolfellows. It has been told before that honest Rawdon was not much used to ladies' company. He had had his time for female friendships, but that was twenty years ago, and the ladies were of a different rank and sort. Although Colonel Crawley was now forty-five, he had not met half a dozen good women besides his paragon of a wife. All except her, and his kind sister-in-law Lady Jane, scared the worthy Colonel, and during his first dinner at Gaunt House he did not make a single remark except to state that the weather was very hot. Becky would have left him at home, but virtue ordained that her husband should be by her side to protect the timid little creature on her first appearance in polite society.

On her arrival Lord Steyne stepped forward. Taking her hand, he greeted her with great courtesy, presenting her to Lady Steyne and her daughters-in-law. Their ladyships made three stately curtsies, and the elder lady gave her hand to the newcomer, but it was as cold and lifeless as marble.

Becky took it, however, with grateful humility, and explained that his Lordship had been her father's earliest friend and patron, and that she had learned to honour the

Steyne family from her childhood. The fact is that Lord Steyne had once purchased a couple of pictures from the late Sharp, and the affectionate orphan could never forget her gratitude.

Becky then curtsied to the Lady Bareacres. "I had the pleasure of making your Ladyship's acquaintance at Brussels, ten years ago," she said in the most winning manner. "We met at the Duchess of Richmond's ball, the night before the Battle of Waterloo. And I recollect your Ladyship, and my Lady Blanche, your daughter, sitting in the carriage at the Inn, waiting for horses. I hope your Ladyship's diamonds are safe."

The famous diamonds had undergone a famous seizure, about which Becky, of course, knew nothing. "I needn't be afraid of *that* woman," she thought, as Lady Bareacres exchanged terrified and angry looks with her daughter and retreated to a table.

When the Potentate from the Danube made his appearance, the conversation was carried in on French, which, to the mortification of Lady Bareacres and the younger ladies, Mrs. Crawley spoke much better than they. The Prince and Princess of Peterwaradin asked who was that *petite dame* who spoke so well?

Finally they marched into the apartment where the banquet was served, and which the reader shall have the liberty of ordering himself to suit his fancy.

But it was when the ladies were alone that Becky knew the tug of war would come. And then indeed the little woman had to acknowledge the correctness of Lord Steyne's caution to beware of the society of ladies above her own sphere. Assuredly, the greatest tyrants over women are women.

When poor little Becky went up to the fire-place where the great ladies had gathered, the great ladies marched away to a table of drawings. When Becky followed them to the table, they dropped off to the fire again. She tried to speak to one of the children, but Master George Gaunt was called away by his mamma; and the stranger was treated with such cruelty that finally Lady Steyne herself pitied her and went up to speak to the friendless little woman.

"Lord Steyne says you sing and play very beautifully, Mrs. Crawley," said her Ladyship, her wan cheeks blushing. "I wish you would do me the kindness to sing."

"I will do anything that may give pleasure to my Lord Steyne or to you," said Rebecca, sincerely grateful, and seating herself at the piano, she began to sing.

She sang religious songs by Mozart, which had been early favourites of Lady Steyne, and with such sweetness that the lady sat down by the piano and listened with tears in her eyes. The opposition ladies at the other end of the room kept up a loud and ceaseless buzzing and talking, but Lady Steyne did not hear. She was a child again, in her convent garden, and the brief period of her happiness bloomed out once more for an hour. She started when the jarring doors were flung open, and with a loud laugh from Lord Steyne, the men entered.

Lord Steyne saw at a glance what had happened, and was grateful to his wife for once. He went and spoke to her, calling her by her Christian name, so as again to bring blushes to her pale face.

"My wife says you have been singing like an angel," he said to Becky.

The rest of that night was a great triumph for Becky. She sang so well that every one of the men came and crowded round the piano. The women, her enemies, were left quite alone. And Mr. Paul Jefferson Jones thought he had made a conquest of Lady Gaunt by going up to her Ladyship and praising her delightful friend's first-rate singing.

CHAPTER 50

Contains a Vulgar Incident

Let us leave these genteel heights and drop down upon the lowly house of John Sedley at Brompton. Here, too, in this humble tenement, live care, distrust and dismay. Mrs. Clapp in the kitchen is grumbling to her husband about the rent, and urging him to rebel against his old friend and lodger. Mrs. Sedley has ceased to visit her landlady in the lower regions, being able to patronize Mrs. Clapp no longer. How can one be condescending to a lady to whom one owes forty pounds, and who is perpetually throwing out hints for the money?

The Irish maidservant has not altered her kind and respectful behaviour; but Mrs. Sedley fancies that she is growing insolent, and sees threatening innuendoes in all the girl's speeches. Miss Clapp, grown quite a young woman now, is declared by the soured old lady to be an impudent little minx. Why Amelia is so fond of her, Mrs. Sedley cannot conceive.

The bitterness of poverty has poisoned the life of the once cheerful woman. She is thankless for Amelia's constant gentleness towards her; carps at her for her efforts at kindness; rails at her for her neglect of her parents. Georgy's house is not a very lively one since Jos's annuity has been withdrawn.

Amelia racks her brain to find some means of increasing the small pittance upon which the household is starving. Can she give lessons in anything? paint card-racks? do fine work? She finds that women are working hard, and better than she can, for twopence a day.

She buys a couple of Bristol boards and paints her very best upon them – a shepherd with a red waistcoat on one, and a shepherdess on the other, crossing a little bridge with a dog, nicely shaded. The man at the Brompton Emporium of Fine Arts can hardly hide the sneer with which he examines these feeble works of art. He looks askance at the lady, wraps up the screens again in their paper, and hands them back to the poor widow and Miss Clapp, who has never seen such beautiful things in her life, and was quite confident that he must give at least two guineas for them.

They try at other shops. "Don't want 'em," says one. "Be off," says another fiercely. Three-and-sixpence has been spent in vain. The screens go to Miss Clapp, who persists in thinking them lovely.

After long thought, Amelia writes out a little card in her neatest hand, informing the public that *A Lady wishes to undertake the education of some little girls, whom she would instruct in English, French, Geography, History, and Music – address A.O., at Mr. Brown's.* She takes the card to the gentleman of the Fine Art Repository, who consents to let it lie upon the counter, where it grows dingy and fly-blown. Amelia passes the door wistfully many a time, in hopes that Mr. Brown will have some news, but he never beckons her in. Poor simple lady, tender and weak – how are you to battle with the violent world?

She grows daily more care-worn and sad, fixing upon her child alarmed eyes. She starts up at night and peeps into his room stealthily, to see that he is sleeping and not stolen away. She sleeps little now. A constant terror is haunting her. How she weeps and prays in the long silent nights – how she tries to hide from herself the thought which will return to her, that she ought to part with the boy, that she is the

only barrier between him and prosperity. She can't, she can't. Not now. Some other day. Oh! it is too hard to think of.

Then, blushing, she thinks that the curate would willingly marry her and give a home to her and the boy. But George's picture and dearest memory are there to rebuke her. Shame and love say no. She shrinks from the idea as from something unholy.

This combat lasted for many weeks in poor Amelia's heart. Although she would not admit to herself the possibility of yielding, she was giving way. One truth after another was marshalling itself silently against her. Poverty and misery, want and degradation for her parents, injustice to the boy – one by one the outworks of the little citadel were taken.

She had earlier written a letter of tender supplication to her brother at Calcutta, imploring him not to withdraw his support from their parents. She did not know the truth of the matter. Jos was still paying his regular annuity, but it was a money-lender in the City who was receiving it: old Sedley had sold it to pay for his useless schemes. Emmy calculated eagerly the time that would elapse before the letter would be answered. To her son's guardian, the good Major at Madras, she had not communicated any of her griefs. She had not written to him since congratulating him on his approaching marriage. She thought with despondency that her only friend was fallen away.

One day, when things had come to a very bad pass – when the creditors were pressing, the mother in hysterical grief, the father in more than usual gloom – the father and daughter were alone together, and Amelia thought to comfort him by telling him that she had written to Joseph. He was always generous, and could not refuse money to his parents.

Then the poor old gentleman revealed the truth – that his son was still paying the annuity, which his own imprudence had flung away. He had not dared to tell it sooner. He thought Amelia's ghastly and terrified look reproached him.

"Ah!" said he with quivering lips, turning away, "you despise your old father now!"

"Oh, papa! it is not that," Amelia cried out, kissing him. "You are always good and kind. You did it for the best. It is not the money – it is – my God! have mercy upon me, and give me strength to bear this trial!" She kissed him again wildly and went away.

The father did not know what that explanation meant. It was that she was conquered: the child must go from her. Her heart and her treasure – her joy, her hope, love, worship – her God, almost! She must give him up, and then – and then she would go to her husband George, and they would watch over their child from Heaven.

She put on her bonnet, scarcely knowing what she did, and went out to walk in the lanes by which Georgy used to come back from school. It was May; the leaves were all coming out, the weather was brilliant; the boy came running to her flushed with health, singing, with his bundle of school-books. Both her arms were round him. No, it was impossible. They could not part.

"What is the matter, Mother?" said he; "you look very pale."

"Nothing, my child," she said, and stooped down and kissed him.

That night Amelia made the boy read the story of Samuel to her from the Bible, and how Hannah, his mother, brought him to Eli the High Priest to minister before the Lord. And he read the song of gratitude which Hannah sang, and how she made

Samuel a little coat and brought it to him from year to year when she came up to offer the annual sacrifice.

And then, in her sweet simple way, George's mother explained this affecting story. How Hannah, though she loved her son so much, yet gave him up because of her vow. And how she must always have thought of him as she sat at home, far away, making the little coat; and Samuel, she was sure, never forgot his mother; and how happy she must have been as the time came to see her boy and how good and wise he had grown.

She spoke this little sermon with a gentle solemn voice, and dry eyes, until she came to the account of their meeting. Then the tender heart overflowed, and taking the boy to her breast, she rocked him in her arms and wept silently over him in a sainted agony of tears.

Her mind being made up, the widow began to arrange matters. One day Miss Osborne in Russell Square got a letter from Amelia which made her blush and look towards her father, sitting glooming at the other end of the table.

Amelia told simply the reasons which had led her to change her mind about her boy. Her father had met with fresh misfortunes. Her own small pittance would barely enable her to support her parents, and could not give George the advantages which were his due. Great as her sufferings would be at parting with him, she would, by God's help, endure them for the boy's sake. She knew that those to whom he was going would do all in their power to make him happy. He was easily moved by love and kindness. Finally she asked that she might see the child as often as she wished – she could not part with him under any other terms.

"What? Mrs. Pride has come down, has she?" old Osborne said, when with a tremulous eager voice Miss Osborne read him the letter. "Starved out, hey? Ha, ha! I knew she would." He tried to read his paper as usual, but he chuckled and swore to himself behind the sheet.

At last he flung it down and, scowling at his daughter as usual, went into his study. Returning with a key, he flung it to Miss Osborne.

"Get the room over mine – the room that was – ready," he said.

"Yes, sir," his daughter replied in a tremble. It was George's room. It had not been opened for more than ten years. Some of his clothes and gear were still there. The Bible his mother had given him was on the mantelpiece, with a pair of spurs and a dried inkstand covered with the dust of ten years. The writing-book, still on the table, was blotted with his hand.

Miss Osborne was much affected when she first entered this room with the servants. She sank quite pale on the little bed.

"This is blessed news, indeed, mam," the housekeeper said. "The dear little feller, to be sure, mam; how happy he will be!"

"You had better send that woman some money," Mr. Osborne said, before he went out. "She shan't want for nothing. Send her a hundred pound."

"And I'll go and see her tomorrow?" Miss Osborne asked.

"That's your look out. She don't come in here, mind, not for all the money in London. But she mustn't want." With this, Mr. Osborne left his daughter and went into the City.

"Here, Papa, is some money," Amelia said that night, kissing her father, and putting a bill for a hundred pounds into his hands. "And – and, Mamma, don't be harsh with Georgy. He is not going to stop with us long." She could say nothing more, and walked away silently to her room. Let us close it upon her prayers and her sorrow.

Miss Osborne came the next day, and saw Amelia. The meeting was friendly. A few words from Miss Osborne showed the poor widow that, with regard to this woman at least, there need be no fear lest she should take first place in her son's affection. She was cold, sensible, not unkind.

Miss Osborne, on the other hand, thought of old times and memories and was touched. That day they arranged together the preliminaries of the treaty.

George was kept from school the next day, and saw his aunt. Amelia left them alone together. She was trying the separation – as poor gentle Lady Jane Grey felt the edge of the axe that was to sever her slender life. Days were passed in preparations. The widow broke the matter to Georgy with great caution; but he was rather elated than otherwise, and the poor woman turned sadly away. He bragged about the news to the boys at school; told them how he was going to live with his rich grandpapa, and have a carriage and a pony, and go to a much finer school. The boy was the image of his father, as his fond mother thought.

At last the day came; the carriage drove up. George was in his new suit, for which the tailor had come previously to measure him. He had sprung up early and put on the new clothes, while his mother was lying in speechless grief. She had purchased little stores for the boy's use, marking his books and linen, talking with him and preparing him for the change.

So that he had change, what cared he? He was longing for it.

“He would come and see his mamma often on the pony,” he said. “He would come and fetch her in the carriage; they would drive in the park, and she should have everything she wanted.” The poor mother had to content herself with these selfish demonstrations of attachment, and tried to convince herself how sincerely her son loved her. He must love her. All children were anxious for novelty. Her child must have his enjoyments in the world. By her own selfishness, she had denied him his rights and pleasures until now.

I know few things more affecting than that timorous self-debasement of a woman. How she confesses that it is she and not the man who is guilty; how she takes all the faults on her side. It is those who injure women who get the most kindness from them; they are born timid and tyrants and maltreat those who are humblest before them.

So poor Amelia had been getting ready in silent misery for her son's departure, while George stood by watching her arrangements without the least concern. Tears had fallen into his boxes; old toys, relics, treasures had been hoarded away for him, and packed with care – and of all these things the boy took no note. The child goes away smiling as the mother breaks her heart. By heavens it is pitiful, the futile love of women for children in Vanity Fair.

The great event of Amelia's life is consummated. No angel has intervened. The child is sacrificed, and the widow is quite alone.

The boy comes to see her often, to be sure. He rides on a pony with a coachman behind him, to the delight of his old grandfather, Sedley, who walks proudly by his side. She sees him, but he is not her boy any more. He rides to see the boys at the little school, to show off his new wealth and splendour. In two days he has adopted a slightly imperious and patronizing air. He was born to command, his mother thinks, as his father was.

It is fine weather now. On evenings of the days when he does not come, she takes a long walk into London – yes, to Russell Square; and rests by the railings opposite Mr. Osborne's house. It is pleasant and cool. She can look up and see the drawing-

room windows illuminated. She knows where Georgy sleeps – he has told her. She prays as the light goes out, and walks home silent. She is very tired when she comes home. Perhaps she will sleep the better for that long weary walk, and she may dream about Georgy.

One Sunday she was walking in Russell Square, some distance from Mr. Osborne's house, when all the bells of Sabbath were ringing, and George and his aunt came out to go to church. A little sweep asked for charity, and the footman tried to drive him away; but Georgy stopped and gave him money.

May God's blessing be on the boy! Emmy ran round the square and, coming up to the sweep, gave him her mite too. Then she followed the bells until she came to the Foundling Church, into which she went. There she sat where she could see the head of the boy under his father's tombstone. Many fresh children's voices rose up and sang, and little George's soul thrilled with delight at the glorious hymns. His mother could not see him for a while, through the mist that dimmed her eyes.

CHAPTER 51

In Which a Charade Is Acted Which May or May Not Puzzle the Reader

After Becky's appearance at my Lord Steyne's select parties, some of the very greatest doors in London were opened to her. Dear brethren, let us tremble before those august portals. I fancy them guarded by footmen with flaming silver forks, with which they prong all those who have not the right to enter. They say the honest newspaper-fellow who sits in the hall and takes down the names of the great ones who are admitted dies after a little time. He can't survive the glare of fashion long: it scorches him up.

Ladies, are you aware that the great Pitt lived in Baker Street? What would not your grandmothers have given to be asked to Lady Hester's parties in that now decayed mansion? It is all vanity to be sure, but who will not own to liking a little of it? So let us make the best of Becky's aristocratic pleasures – for these, like all other mortal delights, were but short-lived.

The upshot of her visit to Lord Steyne was that His Highness the Prince of Peterwaradin complimented Mrs. Crawley in Hyde Park with a salute of the hat. She and her husband were invited to one of the Prince's small parties at Levant House, where she sang after dinner. The Marquis of Steyne was present, paternally watching over the progress of his pupil.

At Levant House Becky met one of the finest gentlemen and greatest ministers that Europe has produced – the Duc de la Jabotiere, then Ambassador from the Most Christian King, and later Minister to that monarch. I declare I swell with pride as I write these names, and think in what brilliant company my dear Becky was moving. She became a constant guest at the French Embassy, where no party was considered complete without the charming Madame Ravdonn Crawley. Messieurs de Truffigny and Champignac, both attaches of the Embassy, were smitten by the charms of the fair Colonel's wife.

However, I doubt if Becky would have selected either of these young men as a person on whom to bestow her special regard. They ran her messages, bought her gloves and flowers, went into debt for opera-boxes for her, and made themselves amiable in a thousand ways. To the amusement of Becky and my Lord Steyne, she would mimic one or other to his face, and compliment him on his advance in the English language with a gravity which never failed to tickle the sardonic old Marquis.

At her little house in May Fair, Becky received not only "the best" foreigners, but some of the best English people too. I don't mean the most virtuous, or the cleverest, or the richest, or the best born, but "the best," – people about whom there is no question – such as the great Lady Fitz-Willis, the great Lady Slowbore, the great Lady Grizzel Macbeth and the like. When the Countess of Fitz-Willis takes up a person, he or she is safe. There is no question about them any more. Not that my Lady Fitz-Willis is any better than anybody else, being, on the contrary, a faded person of fifty-seven years, neither handsome, nor wealthy, nor entertaining; but it is agreed on all sides that she is one of the "best people."

This great and famous leader of fashion chose to acknowledge Mrs. Rawdon Crawley; made her a marked curtsey at the assembly; and not only encouraged her son, St. Kitts, to frequent Mrs. Crawley's house, but asked her to her own mansion and spoke to her twice in the most condescending manner during dinner. This

important fact was known all over London that night. Wenham, the wit and lawyer, Lord Steyne's right-hand man, went about everywhere praising Becky: some who had hesitated, came forward at once and welcomed her.

In a word, she was admitted to be among the "best" people. Ah, my beloved readers and brethren, do not envy poor Becky prematurely – glory like this is fleeting. It is reported that even in the very inmost circles, they are no happier than the poor wanderers outside the zone; and Becky, who penetrated into the very centre of fashion and saw the great King George IV face to face, has owned since that there too was Vanity.

We must be brief in recounting this part of her career. Just as I cannot describe the mysteries of freemasonry, although I have a shrewd idea that it is a humbug, so an uninitiated man cannot portray the great world accurately, and had best keep his opinions to himself.

Becky's success excited, elated, and then bored her. At first nothing was more pleasant than to procure (with considerable trouble and ingenuity, given her narrow means) the prettiest new dresses and ornaments; to drive to fine dinner parties, and fine assemblies, where she met the same great people as she had met the night before, and would see on the morrow – the young men faultlessly dressed, with glossy boots and white gloves – the elders portly, brass-buttoned, polite and prosy – the young ladies blonde, timid, and in pink – the mothers sumptuous, solemn, and in diamonds. They talked about each others' houses, and characters, and families – just as the Joneses do about the Smiths. Becky was soon yawning in spirit.

"I wish I were out of it," she said to Lord Steyne. "I would rather be a parson's wife or a sergeant's lady than this; or, oh, how much gayer it would be to wear spangles and trousers and dance before a booth at a fair."

"You would do it very well," said Lord Steyne, laughing.

"Rawdon would make a good Ringmaster. He is large, and of a military figure. I remember," Becky continued pensively, "my father took me to see a show at Brookgreen Fair when I was a child, and when we came home, I made myself a pair of stilts and danced in the studio."

"I should have liked to see it," said Lord Steyne.

"I should like to do it now," said Becky. "How the ladies would stare! Hush! there is Pasta beginning to sing." Becky always made a point of being polite to the professional ladies and gentlemen at these parties – of following them into the corners where they sat in silence, and shaking hands with them, and smiling in the view of everybody. She was an artist herself, as she said very truly, with a frankness and humility which provoked, or disarmed, or amused lookers-on, as the case might be.

"How cool that woman is," said one; "what independent airs she assumes, when she ought to sit still and be thankful if anybody speaks to her!"

"What an honest and good-natured soul she is!" said another.

"What an artful little minx," said a third. They were all very likely right, but Becky went her own way, and so fascinated the professional artists that they would willingly sing at her parties, and give her lessons for nothing.

Yes, she gave parties in the little house in Curzon Street. Many scores of carriages, with blazing lamps, blocked up the street, to the disgust of No. 200, who could not rest for the thunder of the knocking, and of 202, who could not sleep for envy. Scores of great dandies squeezed and trod on each other on the little stairs, laughing to find themselves there; and many spotless and severe ladies were seated in the little drawing-room, listening to the professional singers, who were singing as if

they wished to blow the windows down. And the day after, there appeared in the Morning Post this paragraph:

“Yesterday, Colonel and Mrs. Crawley entertained a select party at dinner at their house in May Fair. Their Excellencies the Prince and Princess of Peterwaradin, H. E. Papoosh Pasha, the Turkish Ambassador, the Marquess of Steyne, Earl of Southdown, Sir Pitt and Lady Jane Crawley, Mr. Wagg, &c. After dinner Mrs. Crawley had an assembly which was attended by the Duchess of Stilton, Duc de la Gruyere, Marchioness of Cheshire, Comte de Brie, Chevalier Tosti, Major-General and Lady G. Macbeth, Sir Horace Fogey, Hon. Sands Bedwin,” etc., etc.

Our dear friend Rebecca showed the same frankness to the great as she did to the lowly. Once, when out at a very fine house, she was (perhaps rather ostentatiously) holding a conversation in French with a celebrated French tenor, while Lady Grizzel Macbeth looked on scowling.

“How very well you speak French,” said Lady Grizzel, who spoke the tongue in an Edinburgh accent remarkable to hear.

“I ought to know it,” Becky modestly said, casting down her eyes. “I taught it in a school, and my mother was a Frenchwoman.”

Lady Grizzel was won over by her humility, and mollified. She admitted that Becky was well behaved and never forgot her place. It is not her ladyship’s fault that she fancies herself better than you and me; the skirts of her ancestors’ garments have been kissed for centuries.

Lady Steyne, after the music scene, succumbed before Becky. The younger ladies of her house were also compelled into submission. The brilliant Lady Stunington tried a passage of arms with her, but was routed by the intrepid little Becky. When attacked, Becky had a knack of adopting a demure ingénue manner, under which she was most dangerous. She said the wickedest things with the most simple unaffected air, and would take care artlessly to apologize for her blunders, so that all the world should know of them.

Mr. Wagg, the celebrated wit, was caused by the ladies to charge her; and one evening, leering at his patronesses and giving them a wink, as much as to say, “Now look out for sport,” began an assault upon Becky. She lighted up in an instant, parried and riposted with a thrust which made Wagg’s face tingle with shame; then she returned to her soup with the most perfect calm. Lord Steyne, who gave Wagg dinners and lent him a little money sometimes, gave the luckless fellow such a savage glance as almost made him sink under the table and burst into tears. The ladies disowned him. At last Becky herself took compassion upon him and tried to engage him in talk; but he was not asked to dinner again for six weeks.

Lord Steyne’s chief confidential servant Mr Wenham (with a seat in parliament and at the dinner table) was much more prudent in his behaviour than Mr. Wagg. However much he might hate all parvenus (Mr. Wenham himself was a staunch old True Blue Tory, and his father a small coal-merchant in the north of England), he never showed any hostility to the new favourite, but pursued her with stealthy kindnesses and a sly and deferential politeness which somehow made Becky uneasy.

How the Crawleys got the money for these entertainments was a mystery. Some said that Sir Pitt Crawley gave his brother a handsome allowance; if he did, his character must have been greatly changed. Others hinted that Becky begged money from her husband’s friends: going to them in tears, falling on her knees and declaring that the whole family must go to gaol unless such and such a bill could be paid. Lord Southdown, it was said, had been induced to give many hundreds in this way. People

declared that she took money from simple persons, under pretence of getting them Government appointments.

Who knows what stories were told of our innocent friend? Certainly, if she had had all the money which she was said to have begged or borrowed, she might have been honest for life, whereas – but this comes too soon.

The truth is, that by a sparing use of ready money and by paying scarcely anybody, people can manage, for a time at least, to make a great show with very little means. Becky's much-talked-of parties cost her little more than the wax candles which lighted the walls. Stillbrook and Queen's Crawley supplied her with game and fruit in abundance. Lord Steyne's cellars were at her disposal, and that nobleman's famous cooks presided over her little kitchen.

I warn the public against believing one-tenth of the stories against her. If every person is to be banished from society who runs into debt – why, what a howling wilderness Vanity Fair would be! Rents would go down. Parties wouldn't be given. Tradesmen would be bankrupt. All the delights of life would go to the deuce. Whereas, by a little charity, things are made to go on pleasantly enough: we call a man the greatest rascal unchanged – but do we wish to hang him therefore? No. We shake hands when we meet. If his cook is good we forgive him and go and dine with him. Thus civilization advances; peace is kept; and new dresses are needed every week.

At this time the amiable amusement of acting charades had come over from France, and was in vogue, enabling the many ladies who had beauty to display their charms, and the fewer who had cleverness to show their wit. My Lord Steyne was incited by Becky, who perhaps believed herself to have both beauty and wit, to give an entertainment at Gaunt House, which should include some charades.

A portion of the splendid picture gallery of Gaunt House was arranged as the theatre. It had been so used when George III was king; and some of the old theatre props were brought out of the garrets, where they had lain ever since, and furbished up for the festivities.

Young Bedwin Sands, then an elegant dandy and Eastern traveller, was manager of the revels. An Eastern traveller was somebody in those days, and the adventurous Bedwin, who had published his book and passed some months in the desert, was an important personage. He travelled about with a black attendant, and was hailed at Gaunt House as a very valuable acquisition.

He led off the first charade. A Turkish officer with an immense plume of feathers is seen couched on a divan, pretending to puff at a hookah. This Turkish dignitary yawns and expresses signs of weariness and idleness. He claps his hands and Mesrour the Nubian appears, with bare arms, bangles, and every Eastern ornament. He makes a salaam before my lord.

A thrill of terror and delight runs through the assembly. The ladies whisper to one another, saying the black slave was given to Bedwin Sands by an Egyptian pasha in exchange for three dozen bottles of Maraschino. He has sewn up ever so many ladies of the harem in sacks and tilted them into the Nile.

“Bid the slave-merchant enter,” says the Turkish lord with a wave of his hand. Mesrour conducts the slave-merchant into my lord's presence; he brings a veiled female with him. He removes the veil. A thrill of applause bursts through the house. It is Mrs. Winkworth with the beautiful eyes and hair. She is in a gorgeous oriental costume; the black braided locks are twined with jewels; her dress is adorned with gold. The odious Turk is charmed by her beauty. She falls on her knees and entreats

him to restore her to the mountains where she was born, but he laughs. Zuleikah covers her face with her hands and drops down in an attitude of beautiful despair. There seems to be no hope for her, when the Kislar Aga (the negro in another costume) appears.

The Kislar Aga brings a letter from the Sultan. A ghastly terror seizes Hassan. "Mercy!" he cries; while the Kislar Aga, grinning horribly, pulls out – a bow-string.

The curtain draws just as he is going to use that awful weapon. Hassan from within bawls out, "First two syllables." Mrs. Rawdon Crawley compliments Mrs. Winkworth on the beauty of her costume.

The second part of the charade takes place. It is still an Eastern scene. Hassan, in another dress, sits by Zuleikah, who is perfectly reconciled to him. The Kislar Aga has become a peaceful black slave. It is sunrise on the desert, and the Turks turn their heads eastwards and bow to the sand. As there are no dromedaries at hand, the band facetiously plays "The Camels are coming." An enormous Egyptian head, representing the ancient king Memnon, sings a comic song, composed by Mr. Wagg. The Eastern voyagers go off dancing. "Last two syllables," roars the head.

The last act opens. It is a Grecian tent this time. A tall and stalwart man reposes on a couch. Above him hang his helmet and shield. Troy is down. Iphigenia is slain; Cassandra is a prisoner in his outer halls. This king of men (it is Colonel Crawley) is asleep in his chamber at Argos. A lamp casts his shadow flickering on the wall. The band plays the awful music of Don Juan.

Aegisthus steals in pale and on tiptoe. What is that ghastly face looking out at him from behind the screens? He raises his dagger, but he cannot strike the noble slumbering chieftain. Clytemnestra glides swiftly into the room like an apparition – her arms are bare and white – her tawny hair floats down her shoulders – her face is deadly pale – and her eyes are lighted up with a smile so ghastly that onlookers quake.

A tremor runs through the room. "Good God!" somebody says, "it's Mrs. Rawdon Crawley."

Scornfully she snatches the dagger out of Aegisthus's hand and advances to the bed. You see it shining over her head – and then the lamp goes out, and all is dark.

The darkness and the scene frightened people. Rebecca performed with such ghastly truth that the spectators were all dumb, until the lamps blazed out again, when everybody began to shout applause.

"Brava!" old Steyne's strident voice was heard roaring. "By ____, she'd do it too," he said. The house echoed with cries of "Clytemnestra!"

Agamemnon – the answer to the charade – would not come forward in his tunic, but stood in the background. Mr. Bedwin Sands led on Zuleikah and Clytemnestra. A great personage insisted on being presented to Becky.

"Run him through. Marry somebody else, hay?" said His Royal Highness.

"Mrs. Rawdon Crawley was quite killing in the part," said Lord Steyne. Becky laughed, gay and saucy-looking, and swept a pretty little curtsey.

Servants brought in salvers covered with dainties, and the performers disappeared to get ready for the second tableau.

The three syllables of this charade were to be depicted in pantomime, in this way:

First syllable. Colonel Rawdon Crawley, in a slouched hat and a great-coat, and carrying a lantern, passed across the stage bawling out, as if warning the inhabitants of the hour. In the lower window are seen two bagmen playing cribbage, and yawning. The Honourable G. Ringwood enters, playing the Boots, and takes their footwear; and presently a Chambermaid (the Right Honourable Lord Southdown)

with two candlesticks and a warming-pan. She ascends to the upper apartment and warms the bed. She uses the warming-pan as a weapon with which she wards off the attention of the bagmen. She exits. They put on their night-caps and pull down the blinds. Boots closes the shutters of the ground-floor chamber. You hear him bolting the door. All the lights go out.

Second syllable. The lamps are suddenly lighted up. It is the same scene. On the wall, you behold a sign on which the Steyne arms are painted. Bells are ringing. In the lower apartment you see a man give a long slip of paper to another, who shakes his fist and threatens.

“Ostler, bring round my gig,” cries another at the door. He chucks Chambermaid (Lord Southdown) under the chin. Crack, crack, go the whips. Landlord, chambermaid, waiter rush to the door, but just as some distinguished guest is arriving, the curtains close, and a voice cries out “Second syllable.”

“I think it must be ‘Hotel,’” says Captain Grigg of the Life Guards; there is a general laugh. He is not very far from the mark.

While the third syllable is in preparation, the band begins a nautical medley – some maritime event is about to take place. The curtain draws aside. “Now, gents, for the shore!” a voice exclaims. People are taking leave of each other. They point anxiously as if towards the clouds, and nod their heads in fear. Lady Squeams (Lord Southdown) sits down, and clings to some ropes. It is evidently a ship.

The Captain, (Colonel Crawley), with a cocked hat and a telescope, comes in holding his hat on his head, and looks out; his coat tails fly about as if in the wind. When he leaves go of his hat to use his telescope, his hat flies off, to immense applause. The music rises; the mariners stagger across the stage, as if the ship was in severe motion. The Steward (the Honourable G. Ringwood) passes reeling by, holding six basins. Lady Squeams puts her pocket-handkerchief to her face, and rushes away. The music rises up to the wildest pitch of stormy excitement, and the third syllable is concluded.

Then there was a little ballet, “Le Rossignol,” which Mr. Wagg transferred to the English stage as an opera, putting his verse to the pretty tunes. Little Lord Southdown now appeared admirably attired as an old woman hobbling about with a stick. Trills of melody were heard behind the scenes, gurgling from a sweet pasteboard cottage.

“Philomele, Philomele,” cries the old woman, and Philomele comes out.

More applause – it is Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, ravishing in powder and patches. She frisks about the stage with the innocence of theatrical youth. Mamma says, “Why, child, you are always laughing and singing;” at which she sings a sweet ditty called *The Rose Upon My Balcony*. During this, her Mamma, with large whiskers under her cap, seems very anxious to show her maternal affection by embracing the innocent daughter, to loud laughter from the audience.

At the end the whole house was unanimous for an encore: and applause and bouquets were showered upon the charade’s solution: the Nightingale. Lord Steyne’s voice was loudest of all. Becky took the flowers which he threw to her and pressed them to her heart with a comical air. Lord Steyne was frantic with delight.

So were his guests. Where was the beautiful black-eyed Hourri whose appearance in the first charade had caused such pleasure? She was twice as handsome as Becky, but Becky’s brilliancy had eclipsed her. People agreed that if she had been an actress none on the stage could have surpassed her. She had reached her culmination: her voice rose trilling over the storm of applause, and soared as high and joyful as her triumph.

There was a ball afterwards, and everybody pressed round Becky. The Royal Personage declared with an oath that she was perfection. Little Becky's soul swelled with pride and delight; she saw fortune, fame, fashion before her. Lord Steyne was her slave, followed her everywhere, scarcely spoke to anyone else, and paid her the most marked compliments. Monsieur Le Duc de la Jabotiere's attaché pronounced that Madame Crawley was worthy to have figured at Versailles. Only the gout prevented his Excellency from dancing with her, and he declared that Mrs. Rawdon was fit to be ambassadress at any court in Europe.

Then she danced a waltz with Monsieur de Klingenspohr, the Prince of Peterwaradin's cousin. The delighted Prince insisted upon taking a turn with the charming creature, and twirled round the ball-room with her until he was out of breath. The company made a circle round her and applauded wildly. Everybody was in ecstasy; and Becky too, you may be sure. She passed Lady Stunington with a look of scorn. She patronized Lady Gaunt. As for poor Mrs. Winkworth, with her long hair and great eyes, which had made such an effect earlier – where was she now? Nowhere in the race.

The greatest triumph of all was at supper time. She was placed at the grand exclusive table with his Royal Highness and the rest of the great guests. She was served on gold plate. The Prince of Peterwaradin would have given half the jewels off his jacket for a kind glance from those dazzling eyes. Jabotiere wrote home about her to his government. The ladies at the other tables, who supped off mere silver and marked Lord Steyne's constant attention to her, vowed it was a monstrous infatuation.

Rawdon Crawley was scared at these triumphs. They seemed to separate his wife from him more than ever. He thought with a feeling very like pain how immeasurably she was his superior.

When it was time to go, a crowd of young men followed her outside. Rawdon put his wife into the carriage, which drove off. Mr. Wenham had proposed to walk home with him, and offered the Colonel a cigar.

Lighting their cigars, they walked on together. Two persons separated from the crowd and followed them; and when they had walked a hundred yards down Gaunt Square, one of the men came up. Touching Rawdon on the shoulder, he said, "Beg your pardon, Colonel, I wish to speak to you most particular." A cab came clattering up, and the second man ran round and placed himself in front of Colonel Crawley.

That gallant officer at once knew what had befallen him. He was in the hands of the bailiffs.

"There's three of us – it's no use bolting," the man behind said.

"It's you, Moss, is it?" said the Colonel, who appeared to know him. "How much is it?"

"Only a small thing," whispered Mr. Moss, assistant officer to the Sheriff of Middlesex. "One hundred and sixty-six pounds, six and eight-pence, owed to Mr. Nathan."

"Lend me a hundred, Wenham, for God's sake," poor Rawdon said. "I've got seventy at home."

"I've not got ten pounds in the world," said Mr. Wenham. "Good night, my dear fellow."

"Good night," said Rawdon ruefully. And Wenham walked away.

CHAPTER 52

In Which Lord Steyne Shows Himself in a Most Amiable Light

When Lord Steyne was feeling benevolent, he did nothing by halves, and he was generous to the Crawleys. He extended his goodwill to little Rawdon, pointing out to the boy's parents the necessity of sending him to a public school. His father objected that he was not rich enough; his mother said that Briggs was a capital mistress for him, and had brought him on (as indeed was the fact) well in English, the Latin rudiments, and general learning; but all these objections disappeared before the perseverance of the Marquis of Steyne.

His lordship was one of the governors of Whitefriars college, which had been a Cistercian Convent in old days. Obstinate heretics used to be brought there convenient for burning. Henry VIII seized upon the monastery; finally, a great merchant bought the house and land and established a famous foundation hospital for old men and children; and around it grew a school.

It was originally intended for the sons of the poor and deserving, but the noble governors selected all sorts of boys. To get an education for nothing, with a future livelihood in the church assured, was so excellent a scheme that some of the richest people did not disdain it; and great men sent their sons to profit from it – while other great noblemen sent the children of their close servants – so that a lad entering this school might mingle with every variety of youthful society.

Colonel Crawley, though his chief memories of learning were of the floggings which he received at Eton, had a decent reverence for classical learning, and was glad to think that his son was to have an opportunity of becoming a scholar. And although his boy was his chief solace and companion, and endeared to him by a thousand small ties, about which he did not speak to his wife, who showed the utmost indifference to their son – yet Rawdon agreed to part with him for the sake of the lad's welfare.

He did not know how fond he was of the child until he went away. Then he felt more downcast than he cared to admit – far sadder than the boy himself, who was happy enough to enter a new career and find companions of his own age. Becky burst out laughing when the Colonel tried clumsily to express his sorrow. The poor fellow felt that his dearest pleasure and closest friend was taken from him. He looked wistfully at the little vacant bed in his dressing-room, where the child used to sleep. He tried in vain to walk in the park without him. He would go and sit for long hours with his good-natured sister-in-law Lady Jane, and talk to her about the hundred good qualities of the child.

Young Rawdon's aunt was very fond of him, as was her little girl, who wept copiously when her cousin departed. The elder Rawdon was thankful for the fondness of mother and daughter. His very best feelings came out in the artless parental outpourings in which he indulged in their sympathetic presence. As a result, Lady Jane felt sincere regard for him. Becky, on the other hand, laughed bitterly at Jane's feelings and softness; and the other's gentle nature revolted at her sister-in-law's callous behaviour.

It estranged Rawdon from his wife more than he knew or acknowledged to himself. She did not care about the estrangement. She looked upon him as her errand-man and humble slave. He might be depressed or sulky, and she did not notice, or

only treated it with a sneer. She was busy thinking about her position, her pleasures, or her advancement in society.

It was honest Briggs who made up the little kit for the boy to take to school. Dolly the housemaid, faithful in spite of unpaid wages, blubbered in the passage when he went away. Becky, however, did not offer to kiss him, nor did the child try to embrace her; but gave a kiss to old Briggs and consoled her by pointing out that he was to come home on Saturdays.

Becky would not allow Rawdon to take the son to school in the carriage: as they rolled away in a cab, her carriage rattled off to the park. She was chattering and laughing with a score of young dandies by the Serpentine as the father and son entered the school. Rawdon left the child and came away with a sadder, purer feeling in his heart than perhaps that poor battered fellow had ever known.

He walked home very dismally, and dined alone with Briggs. He was grateful for her love and watchfulness over the boy. His conscience smote him that he had borrowed Briggs's money and deceived her. They talked about little Rawdon a long time, for Becky only came home to dress and go out to dinner. Then he went to drink tea with Lady Jane, and tell her how little Rawdon went off like a trump, and how he was to wear a gown and knee-breeches, and how young Blackball, Jack Blackball's son, of the old regiment, had taken him in charge and promised to be kind to him.

In the course of a week, young Blackball had made little Rawdon his fag, shoe-black, and breakfast toaster; initiated him into the mysteries of the Latin Grammar; and thrashed him three or four times, but not severely. The little chap's good-natured face won his way. He only got that degree of beating which was, no doubt, good for him; and as for blacking shoes, toasting bread, and fagging in general, were these offices not deemed necessary to every English gentleman's education?

Our business does not lie with Master Rawdon's life at school, otherwise this tale might be carried to indefinite length. The Colonel went to see his son a short time afterwards and found the lad sufficiently well and happy, grinning in his little black gown and breeches.

His father wisely tipped Blackball a sovereign, and secured that young gentleman's good-will towards his fag. As a protégé of the great Lord Steyne, and son of a Colonel, the school authorities looked kindly on the child. He had plenty of pocket-money, which he spent in treating his comrades royally to raspberry tarts, and he was often allowed to come home on Saturdays to his father, who always made a jubilee of that day. When free, Rawdon would take him to the play; on Sundays he went to church with Briggs and Lady Jane and his cousins.

His father marvelled over his stories about school, and fights, and fagging. Before long, he knew the names of all the masters and the principal boys. He invited little Rawdon's friend from school, and made both the children sick with pastry and oysters after the play. When his son showed him the Latin grammar, he said gravely, "Stick to it, my boy. There's nothing like a good classical education! Nothing!"

Becky's contempt for her husband grew greater every day. "Do what you like – go psalm-singing with Lady Jane – only don't expect me to busy myself with the boy. I have your interests to attend to. I should like to know where you would be now, if I had not looked after you." Nobody wanted poor old Rawdon at their parties. Becky was often asked without him now.

Little Rawdon being disposed of, Lord Steyne, who took such a parental interest in the family, thought that their expenses might be curtailed by the departure of Miss Briggs. It has been told in a former chapter how that nobleman had given Becky

money to pay off her little debt to Miss Briggs, who however still stayed; so that my lord came to the painful conclusion that Mrs. Crawley had made some other use of the money.

Lord Steyne was not so rude as to impart his suspicions to Mrs. Becky, who might have a thousand painful reasons for disposing otherwise of the generous loan. But he determined to learn the real state of the case, and began inquiries in a most cautious and delicate manner.

First, he pumped Miss Briggs. That was not difficult. With a very little encouragement, she would pour out everything. And one day when Mrs. Rawdon had gone out to drive (as his lordship's servant easily learned at the stables), my lord dropped in at Curzon Street – asked Briggs for a cup of coffee – told her that he had good accounts of the little boy at school – and in five minutes learnt that Mrs. Rawdon had given her nothing except a black silk gown, for which Miss Briggs was immensely grateful.

He laughed inwardly. Rebecca had told him a most detailed account of Briggs's delight at receiving her money, and how she had invested it.

He had the curiosity, then, to ask Miss Briggs about the state of her private affairs – and she told him candidly how Miss Crawley had left her a legacy – how her relatives had had part of it – how Colonel Crawley had put out another portion, for which she had the best security and interest – and how Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon had kindly asked Sir Pitt to invest the rest for her, when he had time. My lord asked how much the Colonel had already invested for her, and Miss Briggs told him that the sum was six hundred pounds.

But Briggs, immediately repenting of her frankness, begged my lord not to tell Crawley of her confessions. “The Colonel was so kind – he might be offended and pay back the money, for which she could not get such good interest elsewhere.” Lord Steyne, laughing, promised never to divulge their conversation.

“What an accomplished little devil it is!” thought he. “What a splendid actress! She almost coaxed a second sum out of me the other day. She beats all the women I have ever seen. They are babies compared to her. I am a greenhorn myself, and a fool in her hands. She is unsurpassable in lies.”

His lordship's admiration for Becky rose. Getting the money was nothing – but getting double the sum she wanted, and paying nobody, was magnificent. And Crawley, my lord thought, Crawley is not such a fool as he looks. Nobody would suppose from his manner that he knew anything about this money business; and yet he put her up to it, and has spent the money, no doubt.

In this opinion my lord was mistaken, but it influenced his behaviour towards Colonel Crawley, whom he began to treat with even less respect than before. It never entered his head that Rebecca might be filling her own purse; and perhaps he judged Colonel Crawley by his own long experience of weak husbands. My lord had bought so many men during his life that he may be pardoned for supposing that he had found the price of this one.

Next time he met Becky alone, Lord Steyne complimented her good-humouredly on her cleverness in getting more than the money which she required. Becky was only a little taken aback. She did not usually tell falsehoods, except when compelled, but in great emergencies she lied very freely; and in an instant she was ready with another neat plausible story. Her previous statement was a wicked falsehood – she confessed it.

“But my Lord,” she said, “you don’t know all I suffer in silence; you see me gay and happy, and do not know what I endure when there is no protector near me. It was my husband, by threats and the most savage treatment, who forced me to ask for that money. It was he who made me account for it as I did. He took the money. He told me he had paid Miss Briggs; I did not dare to doubt him. Pardon the wrongs of a desperate man, and pity a miserable, miserable woman.” She burst into tears; persecuted virtue never looked more bewitchingly wretched.

They had a long conversation, driving round and round the Regent’s Park in Mrs. Crawley’s carriage; and the upshot was that when Becky came home, she flew to Briggs with a smiling face and announced that she had some very good news for her. Lord Steyne had acted in the noblest and most generous manner. He was always thinking how he could do good. Now that little Rawdon was gone to school, a dear companion was no longer necessary to her.

She was grieved beyond measure to part with Briggs, but she needed to economise, and she knew that dear Briggs would be far better provided for by her generous patron than in her humble home. Mrs. Pilkington, the housekeeper at Gauntly Hall, was growing exceedingly old and feeble: she was not equal to the work of superintending that vast mansion, and needed a successor. It was a splendid position. The family did not go to Gauntly once in two years. At other times the housekeeper was the mistress of the magnificent mansion; was visited by the clergy and the most respectable people of the county – was the lady of Gauntly, in fact. Briggs might go down on a visit to Mrs. Pilkington and see whether she would like to succeed her.

What words can paint the ecstatic gratitude of Briggs! All she asked was that little Rawdon should be allowed to come and see her at the Hall. Becky promised this – anything. She ran up to her husband when he came home and told him the joyful news. Rawdon was deuced glad; the weight was off his conscience about poor Briggs’s money. She was provided for, at any rate – but his mind was disquieted.

He told little Southdown what Lord Steyne had done, and the young man eyed Crawley with an air which surprised him. He told Lady Jane, and she, too, looked odd and alarmed; so did Sir Pitt.

“She is too clever and gay to be allowed to go to parties without a companion,” both said. “You must go with her, Rawdon, wherever she goes, and you must have somebody with her – one of the girls from Queen’s Crawley, perhaps.”

Somebody Becky should have. But in the meantime honest Briggs and her bags were packed, and she set off on her journey. And so two of Rawdon’s out-sentinels were in the hands of the enemy.

Sir Pitt went and expostulated with Rebecca about the dismissal of Briggs. In vain she pointed out to him how necessary Lord Steyne’s protection was for her poor husband; how cruel it would be to deprive Briggs of the position offered. This did not satisfy Sir Pitt, and he had something very like a quarrel with his once admired Becky. He spoke of the honour and reputation of the family; expressed indignation at her receiving wild young men of fashion, and Lord Steyne himself, whose carriage was always at her door, and whose constant presence made the world talk. He implored her to be more prudent. Lord Steyne was a man whose attentions would compromise any woman; he begged, he commanded his sister-in-law to be watchful.

Becky promised everything Pitt wanted; but Lord Steyne came to her house as often as ever, and Sir Pitt’s anger increased. As Lord Steyne’s visits continued, Sir

Pitt's ceased. His wife wanted to refuse the invitation to the charade-night; but Sir Pitt thought it was necessary to accept it, as his Royal Highness would be there.

Although he went to the charade-party, Sir Pitt left very early with his wife. Becky hardly spoke to him or noticed her sister-in-law. Pitt Crawley declared that her behaviour was monstrously indecorous, and reprov'd his brother Rawdon severely for allowing his wife to take part.

Rawdon said she should not join in any more such amusements. Indeed, he had already become a watchful and exemplary domestic character. He left off his clubs and billiards. He took Becky out to drive; he went laboriously with her to all her parties. Whenever my Lord Steyne called, he was sure to find the Colonel there. And when Becky received invitations for herself, he ordered her to refuse them: and his manner enforced obedience.

Little Becky, to do her justice, was charmed with Rawdon's gallantry. If he was surly, she never was. She had always a kind smile for him and was attentive to his pleasure and comfort. It was the early days of their marriage over again: the same good humour, merriment, and artless confidence.

"How much pleasanter it is," she would say, "to have you by my side in the carriage than that foolish old Briggs! How happy we should always be, if we only had the money!"

He fell asleep after dinner in his chair; he did not see the face opposite, haggard, weary, and terrible; it lighted up with fresh smiles when he woke. He wondered that he had ever had suspicions. Those doubts and surly misgivings which had been gathering on his mind were mere idle jealousies. She was fond of him. As for her shining in society, it was no fault of hers; she was made to shine. If she would only like the boy! Rawdon thought. But the mother and son never could be brought together.

And it was at this point that the incident occurred which was mentioned in the last chapter, and the unfortunate Colonel found himself a prisoner.

CHAPTER 53

A Rescue and a Catastrophe

Rawdon drove on to Mr. Moss the bailiff's mansion in Cursitor Street, and was duly introduced into that dismal place. Morning was breaking over the house-tops of Chancery Lane as the rattling cab woke up the echoes there. Rawdon was welcomed in by Mr. Moss, his travelling companion and host, who cheerfully asked him if he would like a glass of something warm after his drive.

The Colonel was not so depressed as some men would be to find themselves shut in a spunging-house, to be confined there until payment was arranged; for in truth, he had been a lodger at Mr. Moss's once or twice before. We have not thought it necessary to mention these trivial little incidents: but they must frequently occur in the life of a man who lives on nothing a year.

Upon his first visit to Mr. Moss, the Colonel, then a bachelor, had been freed by the generosity of his aunt; on the second mishap, little Becky had borrowed money from Lord Southdown and had coaxed her husband's creditor (who was her shawl and gown-seller) to take Rawdon's promissory note for the rest. So on both these occasions the capture and release had been conducted with gallantry on all sides, and Moss and the Colonel were therefore on the very best of terms.

"You'll find your old bed, Colonel, and everything comfortable," Mr. Moss said. "It's kep aired, and by the best of company, too. It was slep in the night afore last by the Honourable Capting Famish, of the Fiftieth Dragoons. I've got a Doctor of Diwinity upstairs, five gents in the coffee-room, and Mrs. Moss has a tably-dy-hoty at half-past five, and a little cards or music afterwards, when we shall be most happy to see you."

"I'll ring when I want anything," said Rawdon, and went quietly to his bedroom. He was an old soldier, not to be shaken by little shocks of fate. A weaker man would have instantly sent a letter to his wife.

"But what is the use of disturbing her night's rest?" he thought. "Time enough to write to her when she has had her sleep. It's only a hundred-and-seventy pounds, and the deuce is in it if we can't raise that." And so, thinking about little Rawdon, the Colonel turned into the bed lately occupied by Captain Famish and fell asleep.

It was ten o'clock when he woke up. A youth brought him a fine silver dressing-case, so that he might shave. Indeed Mr. Moss's house, though somewhat dirty, was splendid throughout. There were dirty gilt cornices, with dingy yellow satin hangings to the barred windows; vast and dirty gilt picture frames surrounded works by the greatest masters – works which were sold and bought over and over again. The Colonel's breakfast was served to him in dingy and gorgeous silver-plated ware. Miss Moss, a dark-eyed maid in curl-papers, appeared with the teapot, and, smiling, asked the Colonel how he had slep? She brought him the Morning Post, which contained a brilliant account of Lord Steyne's festivities and of the beautiful and accomplished Mrs. Rawdon Crawley.

After a lively chat with this lady, Colonel Crawley called for pens and paper, and wrote without many misgivings.

DEAR BECKY,

I HOPE YOU SLEPT WELL. Don't be FRIGHTENED if I don't bring you in your COFFY. Last night as I was coming home smoaking, I met with an ACCADENT. I was NABBED by Moss of Cursitor Street – the same that had me two years ago. Miss Moss brought in my tea – she is grown very FAT, and had her STOCKENS DOWN AT HEAL.

It's Nathan's business – a hundred-and-seventy. Please send me some CLOATHES and my desk – I've seventy in it. And as soon as you get this, Drive to Nathan's – offer him seventy-five down, and ASK HIM TO RENEW.

If he won't stand it, take my ticker and anythings as you can SPARE, and send them to the pawnbroker. We must, of coarse, have the sum to-night. We can't let it stand over, as tomorrow's Sunday; the beds here are not very CLEAN, and there may be other things out against me. I'm glad it an't Rawdon's Saturday for coming home. God bless you.

Yours in haste, R. C.

P.S. Make haste and come.

This letter was sent by a messenger, and Rawdon, having seen him depart, went into the courtyard and smoked his cigar with a tolerably easy mind.

Three hours, he calculated, would be the most time required before Becky should arrive and open his prison doors; and he passed these pretty cheerfully in smoking, in reading the paper, and in the coffee-room with an acquaintance, Captain Walker.

But the day passed and no messenger returned – no Becky. Mr. Moss's tably-dy-hoty was served at half-past five, when such of the gentlemen lodgers as could afford the banquet enjoyed it in the splendid front parlour. Miss M. (Miss Hem, as her papa called her) appeared without her curl-papers, and Mrs. Hem served a prime boiled leg of mutton and turnips, which the Colonel ate with a very faint appetite.

In the midst of this meal, however, the doorbell was heard. The messenger had returned with a bag, a desk and a letter. "No ceremony, Colonel, I beg," said Mrs. Moss with a wave of her hand, and he opened the letter rather tremulously. It was a beautiful letter, highly scented, on pink paper.

MON PAUVRE CHER PETIT (Mrs. Crawley wrote)

I could not sleep ONE WINK for thinking of what had become of my odious old monstre, and only got to rest in the morning after sending for Mr. Blench (for I was in a fever), who gave me a draught and left orders with Finette that I should be disturbed ON NO ACCOUNT. So that your messenger remained in the hall for some hours waiting my bell. You may fancy my state when I read your poor dear old ill-spelt letter.

Ill as I was, I instantly called for the carriage, and as soon as I was dressed (though I couldn't drink a drop of chocolate), I drove like the wind to Nathan's. I saw him – I wept – I cried – I fell at his odious knees. Nothing would mollify the horrid man. He would have all the money, he said, or keep my poor monstre in prison.

I drove home with the intention of paying that visit to the pawnbroker (when every trinket I have should be at your disposal though they would not fetch a hundred pounds), and found Milor there, with the old Bulgarian sheep-face, who had come to compliment me on last night's performance. I went down on my knees to Milor; told him we were going to pawn everything, and begged him to give me two hundred pounds. He pish'd and psha'd in a fury – told me not to be such a fool as to pawn –

and said he would lend me the money. He promised he would send it me tomorrow morning: when I will bring it to my poor old monster with a kiss from his affectionate

BECKY

I am writing in bed. Oh I have such a headache and such a heartache!

When Rawdon read over this letter, he looked so red and savage that the company saw that bad news had reached him. All his suspicions returned. She would not even go out and sell her trinkets to free him. She could laugh, whilst he was in prison. Who had put him there? Wenham had walked with him. Was there.... he could hardly bear to think of what he suspected.

He hurried into his room, opened his desk, wrote two lines, which he directed to Sir Pitt or Lady Crawley, and bade the messenger deliver them at once.

In the note he begged his dear brother and sister, for the sake of his child and his honour, to relieve him from his difficulty. He was in prison, he needed a hundred pounds to set him free – he entreated them to come.

Then he went back to the dining-room and called for more wine. He laughed and talked with a strange boisterousness, and went on drinking for an hour, listening all the while for a carriage.

At the end of that time, wheels were heard whirling up to the gate. The janitor led a lady into the back parlour, and called, “Colonel, you’re wanted.”

Rawdon came from the dining-room, a flare of coarse light following him into the apartment where the lady stood, very nervous.

“It is I, Rawdon,” she said timidly. “It is Jane.”

Rawdon was quite overcome by that kind voice. He ran up – caught her in his arms – gasped out some inarticulate words of thanks and fairly sobbed on her shoulder. She did not know why.

The bills were quickly settled; Jane happily carried Rawdon away from the bailiff’s house, and they went homewards in a cab.

“Pitt was gone to a parliamentary dinner,” she said, “when the note came, and so, dear Rawdon, I came myself;” and she put her kind hand in his. Rawdon thanked his sister a hundred times, with an ardour of gratitude which touched and almost alarmed her.

“Oh,” said he, “you don’t know how I’m changed since I’ve known you, and – and little Rawdy. You see I want – I want – to be–” He did not finish the sentence, but she could interpret it. And that night after he left her, as she sat by her little boy’s bed, she prayed humbly for Rawdon.

On leaving her, Rawdon walked home rapidly. It was nine o’clock at night. He ran across the streets and the great squares of Vanity Fair, and came up breathless opposite his own house. He started back and fell against the railings, trembling as he looked up. The drawing-room windows were blazing with light. She had said that she was in bed and ill. He stood there for some time.

Then he took out his key and let himself into the house. He could hear laughter in the upper rooms. He went silently up the stairs, leaning against the banisters. Nobody was stirring in the house besides – all the servants had been sent away. Rawdon heard laughter and singing. Becky was singing a snatch of the song of the night before; a hoarse voice shouted “Brava! Brava!” – it was Lord Steyne.

Rawdon opened the door and went in. A little table with a dinner was laid out. Steyne was hanging over the sofa on which Becky sat. She was brilliantly dressed, her

arms and fingers sparkling with bracelets and rings, and the diamonds on her breast which Steyne had given her. He had her hand in his, and was bowing to kiss it, when Becky started up with a faint scream as she caught sight of Rawdon's white face. At the next instant she tried a smile, as if to welcome her husband; and Steyne rose up, grinding his teeth, pale, and with fury in his looks.

He, too, attempted a laugh – and came forward holding out his hand.

“What, come back! How d’ye do, Crawley?” he said, the nerves of his mouth twitching as he tried to grin.

There was that in Rawdon's face which caused Becky to fling herself before him.

“I am innocent, Rawdon,” she said; “before God, I am innocent.” She clutched at his coat, his hands; her own were covered with serpents, rings, and baubles. “Say I am innocent,” she said to Lord Steyne.

But he thought a trap had been laid for him, and was as furious with the wife as with the husband.

“You, innocent! Damn you,” he screamed out. “You, innocent! Why, every trinket you have on your body is paid for by me. I have given you thousands of pounds, which this bullying fellow has sold you for. Innocent, by ___! Don't think to frighten me. Make way, sir, and let me pass.”

Lord Steyne seized up his hat, and with flame in his eyes, and looking his enemy fiercely in the face, marched upon him, never for a moment doubting that the other would give way. But Rawdon sprang out and seized him by the neckcloth, until Steyne, almost strangled, writhed and bent under his arm.

“You lie, you dog!” said Rawdon. “You coward and villain!” And he struck the Marquis twice over the face with his open hand and flung him bleeding to the ground.

It was all done before Rebecca could interpose. She stood trembling before him. She admired her husband, strong, brave, and victorious.

“Come here,” he said. She came up at once.

“Take off those things.” Trembling, she pulled the jewels from her arms, and the rings from her shaking fingers, and held them in a heap.

“Throw them down,” he said, and she dropped them. He tore the diamond ornament from her breast and flung it at Lord Steyne. It cut him on his bald forehead. Steyne wore the scar to his dying day.

“Come upstairs,” Rawdon told his wife.

“Don't kill me, Rawdon,” she said.

He laughed savagely. “I want to see if that man lies about the money as he has about me. Has he given you any?”

“No,” said Rebecca, “that is—”

“Give me your keys.”

Rebecca gave him all the keys but one, hoping he would not notice its absence. It belonged to the little desk which Amelia had given her, and which she kept in a secret place. But Rawdon flung open boxes and wardrobes, throwing the contents here and there, and at last he found the desk. She was forced to open it. It contained papers, love-letters many years old – small trinkets and woman's memoranda. And it contained a pocket-book with bank-notes. Some of these were dated ten years back, and one was quite fresh – a note for a thousand pounds from Lord Steyne.

“Did he give you this?” Rawdon said.

“Yes,” she answered.

“I'll send it back to him today,” Rawdon said (for day had dawned again), “and I will pay Briggs, and some of the debts. You will let me know where I shall send the

rest to you. You might have spared me a hundred pounds, Becky, out of all this – I have always shared with you.”

“I am innocent,” said Becky. And he left her without another word.

What were her thoughts when he left her? She remained for hours after he was gone, sitting alone on the bed’s edge, the sunshine pouring into the room. The drawers were open and their contents scattered about – dresses and feathers, scarfs and trinkets lying in a wreck. Her hair was falling over her shoulders; her gown was torn. She heard him go downstairs, and the door slamming. She knew he would never come back. He was gone forever.

Would he kill himself? she thought. No, not until after he had met and fought Lord Steyne. She thought of her long past life. Ah, how dreary it seemed, how miserable, lonely and profitless! Should she take laudanum, and end it, have done with all hopes, schemes, debts, and triumphs?

The French maid found her sitting in the midst of her miserable ruins with clasped hands and dry eyes. The woman was in Steyne’s pay.

“Mon Dieu, madame, what has happened?” she asked.

What had happened? Was she guilty or not? She said not, but who could tell if truth came from those lips, or if that corrupt heart was in this case pure?

All her lies and selfishness and wiles, all her wit and genius had come to this bankruptcy. The woman closed the curtains and persuaded her mistress to lie down on the bed. Then she went below and gathered up the trinkets that were still lying on the floor.

CHAPTER 54

Sunday After the Battle

Sir Pitt Crawley's mansion was just awakening as Rawdon, in his evening costume, which he had now worn two days, walked up the steps and entered his brother's study. Lady Jane was up in the nursery helping her children dress and listening to their morning prayers, as she did every day. Rawdon sat down in the study before the Baronet's table, set out with orderly blue books and letters, bills and dispatch boxes.

A book of family sermons, from which Sir Pitt was in the habit of reading to his family on Sundays, lay ready on the table. And by the sermon-book was the Observer newspaper. His valet had taken the opportunity of looking at it before he laid it by his master's desk; and he had read a flaming account of "Festivities at Gaunt House," with the names of all the distinguished people invited by the Marquis of Steyne to meet his Royal Highness.

Poor Rawdon took up the paper and began to try and read it until his brother should arrive. But he did not know in the least what he was reading. The Government news and appointments passed in a haze before Rawdon, as he sat waiting.

Punctually at nine, Sir Pitt appeared, fresh and shaved, in a starched cravat and a grey flannel dressing-gown – a model of neatness and propriety. He started when he saw poor Rawdon in tumbled clothes, with blood-shot eyes and unkempt hair. He thought his brother was not sober, and had been out all night.

"Good gracious, Rawdon," he said, "what brings you here at this time of the morning? Why ain't you at home?"

"Home," said Rawdon with a wild laugh. "I'm not drunk, Pitt. Shut the door; I want to speak to you."

Pitt closed the door and sat down opposite him.

"Pitt, it's all over with me," the Colonel said. "I'm done."

"I always said it would come to this," the Baronet cried peevishly. "I warned you a thousand times. I can't help you any more. Every shilling of my money is tied up. Even the hundred pounds that Jane took you last night were promised to my lawyer tomorrow morning. I don't mean to say that I won't assist you ultimately. But as for paying your creditors in full, I might as well hope to pay the National Debt. You must—"

"It's not money I want," Rawdon broke in. "Never mind what happens to *me*."

"What is the matter, then?" said Pitt, somewhat relieved.

"It's the boy," said Rawdon huskily. "Promise me that you will take charge of him when I'm gone. Your dear wife has always been good to him; and he's fonder of her than he is of his – damn it. Look here, Pitt, I wasn't brought up like a younger brother, but was always encouraged to be extravagant and idle. Otherwise I might have been quite a different man. I didn't do my duty with the regiment so bad. You know how I was thrown over about the money, and who got it."

"Your marriage was your own doing, not mine."

"That's over now," said Rawdon, with a groan.

"Good God! is she dead?" Sir Pitt said in genuine alarm.

"I wish *I* was," Rawdon replied. "If it wasn't for little Rawdon I'd have cut my throat this morning – and that damned villain's too."

Sir Pitt instantly guessed that Lord Steyne was the person whose life Rawdon wished to take. The Colonel told his brother briefly, in broken accents, what had happened.

“It was planned between that scoundrel and her,” he said. “I was taken by the bailiffs as I was going out of his house; when I wrote to her for money, she said she was ill in bed and put me off. And when I got home I found her in diamonds and sitting with that villain alone.” He described his conflict with Lord Steyne. To an affair of that nature, of course, he said, there was only one result, and he was going away to make arrangements for the duel which must follow.

“And as it may end fatally with me,” Rawdon said with a broken voice, “and as the boy has no mother, I must leave him to you and Jane, Pitt – promise to be his friend.”

The elder brother, much affected, shook Rawdon’s hand.

“I will, upon my honour,” he said.

Then Rawdon took out the little pocket-book which he had discovered in Becky’s desk, and drew from it a bundle of notes.

“Here’s six hundred,” he said. “I want you to give the money to Briggs, who lent it to us – and who was kind to the boy. And here’s some more – I’ve only kept back a few pounds – which Becky may as well have, to get on with.”

As he spoke his hands shook so much that the pocket-book fell, and out of it came the thousand-pound note which had been the last of Becky’s winnings.

Pitt stooped and picked it up, amazed.

“Not that,” Rawdon said. “I hope to put a bullet into the man whom that belongs to.” He had thought to himself, it would be a fine revenge to wrap a bullet in the note and kill Steyne with it.

The brothers shook hands once more and parted. Lady Jane was waiting in the dining-room. As the men left the study, she held out her hand to Rawdon and said she was glad he was come to breakfast, though she could see by his haggard unshorn face that there was very little question of him staying. Rawdon muttered some excuses about an engagement, squeezing hard her timid little hand. Her imploring eyes read calamity in his face, but he went away without another word.

Nor did Sir Pitt give her any explanation. He kissed his children in his usual frigid manner, and their mother held their hands as they knelt down to prayers.

Rawdon Crawley meanwhile hurried on to Gaunt House, and knocked at the door. The porter who answered was scared by the Colonel’s dishevelled appearance, and barred the way; but Rawdon only asked him to take his card to Lord Steyne, and to say that Colonel Crawley would be at the Regent Club after one o’clock – not at home. He strode away and took a cab to Knightsbridge Barracks.

All the bells were tolling as he reached that place. Troops of schools were on their march to church, and the shiny pavements were thronged with people out upon their Sunday pleasure; but the Colonel was much too busy to take any heed. Arriving at Knightsbridge, he speedily went to the room of his old comrade Captain Macmurdo.

Captain Macmurdo, a veteran officer and Waterloo man, greatly liked by his regiment, was enjoying the morning in bed after a supper-party. His room was hung round with boxing, sporting, and dancing pictures, presented to him by comrades as they retired from the regiment. As he was now nearly fifty, he had a singular gallery. He was one of the best shots in England, and one of the best riders; indeed, he and Crawley had been rivals when the latter was in the Army. To look at, he was a

venerable bristly warrior, with a little close-shaved head, a red face and nose, and a great dyed moustache.

When Rawdon told the Captain he wanted a friend, the latter knew why. He had arranged scores of duels for his acquaintances with great prudence and skill, and was the common refuge of gentlemen in trouble.

“What’s the row about, Crawley, my boy?” said the old warrior. “No more gambling business, hay, like when we shot Captain Marker?”

“It’s about my wife,” Crawley answered, turning very red.

The other gave a whistle. “I always said she’d throw you over,” he began, and indeed they had laid bets upon it in the barracks; but seeing the savage look which Rawdon gave him, Macmurdo did not go on.

“Is there no way out of it, old boy?” he continued gravely. “Is it only suspicion, you know, or letters? Can’t you keep it quiet? Best not make any noise about a thing of that sort if you can help it.” Think of his only finding out now, the Captain thought; remembering a hundred conversations at the mess-table, in which Mrs. Crawley’s reputation had been torn to shreds.

“There’s no way but one out of it,” Rawdon replied. “I found ’em alone together. I told him he was a liar and a coward, and knocked him down and thrashed him.”

“Serve him right,” Macmurdo said. “Who is it?”

“Lord Steyne.”

“The deuce! a Marquis! they said he – that is—”

“What the devil do you mean?” roared Crawley; “did you hear a fellow doubt my wife and didn’t tell me, Mac?”

“What the deuce was the good of my telling you what any tom-fools talked about?”

“It was damned unfriendly, Mac,” said Rawdon, quite overcome. He covered his face with his hands, which caused the tough old campaigner opposite to wince with sympathy.

“Hold up, old boy,” he said; “great man or not, we’ll put a bullet in him, damn him. As for women, they’re all so.”

“You don’t know how fond I was of that one,” Rawdon said. “Damme, I gave up everything I had to her. I’m a beggar because I would marry her. I’ve pawned my own watch to get her anything she fancied; and she’s been making a purse for herself the whole time.” He told Macmurdo the story.

“She may be innocent, after all, as she says,” his advisor said. “Steyne has been a hundred times alone with her in the house before.”

“Maybe so,” Rawdon answered sadly, “but this don’t look very innocent.” He showed the Captain the thousand-pound note. “This is what he gave her, Mac, and she kept it unknown to me; and with this money in the house, she refused to stand by me when I was locked up.”

Macmurdo admitted that it looked ugly. Rawdon sent his servant to Curzon Street to fetch a bag of clothes. While he was gone, Rawdon and his companion composed a letter to send to Lord Steyne: it said that Captain Macmurdo had the honour of waiting upon the Marquis of Steyne, on behalf of Colonel Rawdon Crawley, to make arrangements for the meeting which, he had no doubt, his Lordship would demand, and which the circumstances of the morning had made inevitable. Captain Macmurdo asked Lord Steyne to appoint a friend as second, and desired that the meeting might take place with as little delay as possible.

In a postscript the Captain stated that he had in his possession a bank-note for a large amount, which the Colonel believed was the property of the Marquis of Steyne, and was anxious to return to its owner.

By the time this note was composed, the Captain's servant had returned from Curzon Street, but without the bag of clothes he had been sent for, and with a very puzzled face.

"They won't give 'em up," he said; "there's a regular shinty in the house, and everything at sixes and sevens. The landlord's took possession. The servants was a drinkin' up in the drawing-room. They said – they said you had gone off with the silver plate, Colonel. One of the servants is off already. And Simpson who is drunk says nothing shall go out of the house until his wages is paid."

This account gave a little gaiety to a sober conversation. Macmurdo laughed at Rawdon's discomfiture.

"I'm glad the little 'un isn't at home," Rawdon said, biting his nails.

Little Rawdon was just then sitting, one of fifty boys, in the Chapel of Whitefriars School, thinking about going home next Saturday, when his father might take him to the play.

"He's a regular trump, that boy," the father went on. "I say, Mac, if anything goes wrong – you tell him, you know, that I was very fond of him, and that. And old chap, give him these gold sleeve-buttons: it's all I've got." He covered his face with his dirty hands.

"Go down and order some breakfast," Macmurdo said to his man in a loud cheerful voice. "What'll you have, Crawley? Some devilled kidneys and a herring. And, Clay, lay out some of my clothes for the Colonel: we were always pretty much of a size, Rawdon, my boy." Leaving the Colonel to dress himself, Macmurdo finished his own toilette.

This, as he was about to meet a lord, Captain Macmurdo performed with particular care. He waxed his mustachios into a state of brilliant polish and put on a tight cravat and a trim buff waistcoat; so that all the young officers in the mess-room at breakfast asked if he was going to be married that Sunday.

CHAPTER 55

In Which the Same Subject is Pursued

Becky did not rally from the stupor and confusion into which events had plunged her until the chapel bells were ringing for afternoon service. Rising from her bed, she rang her own bell to summon the French maid.

She rang many times in vain; and came out to the landing with her hair over her shoulders and screamed out repeatedly for her attendant. Mademoiselle Fifine did not appear.

The truth is, she had left the house many hours earlier. After picking up the trinkets in the drawing-room, Mademoiselle had ascended to her own apartments, packed her boxes, brought them down herself and called a cab without asking the aid of any of the other servants; and had made her exit from Curzon Street.

She carried off not only the trinkets, but some favourite dresses on which she had long kept her eye, four gilt Louis Quatorze candlesticks, six albums and Books of Beauty, a gold enamelled snuff-box, and Becky's little inkstand and mother-of-pearl blotting book. The silver-plated ware was too cumbrous and was left behind; probably for the same reason, she left the fire irons and the piano.

Hearing a stir below, and indignant at those servants who would not answer her summons, Mrs. Crawley flung her morning robe around her and descended majestically to the drawing-room.

The cook was there with blackened face, seated on the beautiful chintz sofa next to Mrs. Raggles, to whom she was giving Maraschino. The page had his fingers in the cream dish; the footman was talking to Raggles, who looked woeful and perplexed. Though Becky had screamed half-dozen times, not one servant had obeyed her call.

"Have a little drop, do'ee now, Mrs. Raggles," the cook was saying as Becky entered.

"Simpson! Trotter!" Mrs. Crawley cried in great wrath. "How dare you stay here when you heard me call? How dare you sit on my sofa? Where's my maid?"

The cook took a glass of Maraschino, staring at Becky as she drained its contents.

"YOUR sofy, indeed!" Mrs. Cook said. "I'm a settin' on Mrs. Raggles's sofy. Don't you stir, Mrs. Raggles, Mum. I'm a settin' on Mr. and Mrs. Raggles's sofy, and I'm thinkin' if I set here until I'm paid my wages, I shall set a precious long time, ha! ha!" and with this she filled herself another glass of liquor .

"Trotter! Simpson! turn that drunken wretch out," screamed Mrs. Crawley.

"I shan't," said Trotter the footman; "turn out yourself. Pay our salaries, and we'll go fast enough."

"Are you all here to insult me?" cried Becky in a fury; "when Colonel Crawley comes home I'll—"

At this the servants burst into laughter.

"He ain't a coming back," Mr. Trotter said. "He sent for his things, but I wouldn't let 'em go. I don't b'lieve he's no more a Colonel than I am. He's hoff, and I suppose you're a goin' after him. You're swindlers, both on you. Don't be a bullyin' *me*. Pay us our salaries, I say." It was evident from Mr. Trotter's flushed face and speech that he, too, had been drinking.

"Mr. Raggles," said Becky in a passion of vexation, "you will surely not let me be insulted by that drunken man?"

“Oh, Ma’am,” said Raggles, “I’ve known the Crawley family ever since I was born. I little thought one of that family was a goin’ to ruin me. Har you a goin’ to pay me? You’ve lived in this ’ouse four year. You ho me a milk and butter bill of two ’undred pound, for you must have cream for your spanil dog.”

“She didn’t care what her own son had,” interposed the cook. “He’d have starved but for me.”

“He’s a charity-boy now,” said Mr. Trotter. Honest Raggles continued lamenting his griefs. All he said was true: Becky and her husband had ruined him. He had no means to pay his bills. He would be turned out of his shop and his house because he had trusted the Crawley family.

“You all seem to be against me,” said Becky bitterly. “I can’t pay you today. Come back tomorrow and I’ll pay you everything. I thought Colonel Crawley had settled with you. He will tomorrow. Upon my honour, he left home this morning with fifteen hundred pounds in his pocket-book. He has left me nothing. There was a quarrel between us, as you seem to know. But he has got a good appointment; you shall all be paid. Let me go out and find him.”

At this, Raggles and the servants looked at each other with wild surprise. Rebecca went upstairs and dressed herself. She went into Rawdon’s room, where she saw a trunk and bag packed ready for removal, with a note that they should be given when called for. Then she went into the Frenchwoman’s garret, where everything was clean, and all the drawers empty.

“Good Heavens! was ever such bad luck as mine?” she said; “to be so near, and to lose all. Is it too late?”

No; there was one chance more.

Once dressed, she went away alone. It was four o’clock. She walked swiftly down the streets to Sir Pitt Crawley’s door, in Great Gaunt Street. Lady Jane was at church, but Sir Pitt was in his study. She must see him – she slipped past the servant, and was in Sir Pitt’s room before the astonished Baronet had even laid down the paper.

He turned red and gave her a look of great alarm and horror.

“Do not look so,” she said. “I am not guilty, dear Pitt; before God, I am not guilty, but everything is against me. And oh! just when all my hopes were about to be realized: just when happiness was in store for us.”

“Is this true, then, what I see in the paper?” Sir Pitt said. He had read a paragraph there which had greatly surprised him.

“It is true. Lord Steyne told me on the night of that fatal ball. He has been promised an appointment these six months. The Colonial Secretary told him yesterday that it was arranged. Then that unlucky arrest followed; that horrible meeting. I was only guilty of being too devoted to Rawdon’s service. I have received Lord Steyne alone a hundred times before. I confess I had money of which Rawdon knew nothing. Don’t you know how careless he is of it?” And so she went on with a perfectly connected story.

It went like this. Becky owned frankly, but with deep contrition, that having noticed Lord Steyne’s partiality for her, and being sure of her own virtue, she had determined to turn the great peer’s attachment to the advantage of her family.

“I looked for a peerage for you, Pitt,” she said (he turned red). “We have talked about it. Your genius and Lord Steyne’s interest made it probable, had not this dreadful calamity put an end to all our hopes. But, first, I wanted to rescue my dear husband – whom I love in spite of all his ill usage and suspicions – to rescue him from

poverty and ruin. I admit," she said, casting down her eyes, "that I did everything in my power to make myself pleasing to Lord Steyne, as far as an honest woman may. On Friday morning the news arrived of the death of the Governor of Coventry Island, and my Lord instantly secured the appointment for my dear husband. It was intended as a surprise for him. Even after that horrid arrest took place (the expenses of which Lord Steyne generously said he would settle, so that I was prevented from coming to my husband's assistance), my Lord was laughing with me, and saying that my dearest Rawdon would be consoled when he read of his appointment in the paper. And then he came home. The dreadful scene took place between my Lord and my cruel, cruel Rawdon – and, O my God, what will happen next? Dear Pitt! pity me, and reconcile us!"

She flung herself down on her knees, and bursting into tears, seized Pitt's hand and kissed it passionately.

It was in this attitude that Lady Jane, returning from church, found them.

"I am surprised that woman has the audacity to enter this house," Lady Jane said, trembling and turning quite pale. (Her maid had talked to Raggles and Rawdon Crawley's household, who had told her all.) "How dare Mrs. Crawley enter the house of an honest family?"

Sir Pitt started back, amazed at his wife's display of vigour. Becky still knelt and clung to his hand.

"Tell her that I am innocent, dear Pitt," she whimpered.

"Upon my word, my love, I think you do Mrs. Crawley injustice," Sir Pitt said. "Indeed I believe her to be—"

"To be what?" cried out Lady Jane, her clear voice thrilling and her heart beating violently. "To be a wicked woman – a heartless mother, a false wife? She never loved her dear little boy, who used to tell me of her cruelty. She never came into a family without bringing misery with her wicked flattery and falsehoods. She has deceived her husband, as she has deceived everybody; her soul is black. I tremble when I touch her. I keep my children out of her sight."

"Lady Jane!" cried Sir Pitt, "this is really language—"

"I have been a true and faithful wife to you, Sir Pitt," Lady Jane continued. "I have kept my marriage vow and have been obedient as a wife should. But righteous obedience has its limits, and I will not bear that – that woman again under my roof. If she enters it, I and my children will leave. You must choose, sir, between her and me." With this my Lady swept out of the room, fluttering with her own boldness, and leaving Rebecca and Sir Pitt astonished.

As for Becky, she was not hurt; nay, she was pleased.

"It was the diamond-clasp you gave me," she said to Sir Pitt, reaching out her hand; and before she left him, Sir Pitt had promised to seek out his brother, and try to bring about a reconciliation.

Rawdon took breakfast with the young fellows of the regiment in the mess-room, and listened to the talk about Mademoiselle Ariane of the French Opera, and the latest boxing match.

When Macmurdo came down and joined them, he cut in with stories as choice as any the youngest rake had to tell. Old Mac was famous for his good stories. He and Rawdon finished their breakfast without giving any hint of the business which was occupying their minds, and walked off to the Club. There, the newspaper-room was almost empty but for three men. One looked up from the Sunday paper with some interest, and said, "Crawley, I congratulate you."

“What do you mean?” said the Colonel.

“It’s in the *Observer* and the *Royalist* too,” said Mr. Smith.

“What?” Rawdon cried, turning very red, and thinking that the affair with Lord Steyne was already in the public press. He took up the paper and, trembling, began to read.

Mr. Smith and the other gentlemen had been discussing Crawley just before he came in.

“It is come just in the nick of time,” said Smith. “Crawley had not a shilling in the world. What’s the salary?”

“Two or three thousand,” answered Brown, his companion. “But the climate’s so infernal, they don’t enjoy it long. Liverseege died after eighteen months of it, and the man before went off in six weeks.”

“His brother must have got the Colonel the place.”

“Ha!” said Brown, with a sneer. “It was Lord Steyne.”

Rawdon now read in the *Royalist* this astonishing paragraph:

GOVERNORSHIP OF COVENTRY ISLAND

Sir Thomas Liverseege has fallen a victim to the prevailing fever at Swampton. His loss is deeply felt in the flourishing colony. We hear that the Governorship has been offered to Colonel Rawdon Crawley, C.B., a distinguished Waterloo officer, who is no doubt admirably suited for the post.

Coventry Island! Where was it? Who had appointed him?

“You must take me out as your secretary, old boy,” Captain Macmurdo said with a laugh. As they sat wondering, the Club waiter brought in the card of Mr. Wenham, who begged to see Colonel Crawley. They went out to meet him, rightly guessing that he was sent by Lord Steyne.

“How d’ye do, Crawley? I am glad to see you,” said Mr. Wenham with a bland smile, grasping Crawley’s hand cordially.

“You come, I suppose, from—”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Wenham.

“This is my friend Captain Macmurdo.”

“Delighted, I’m sure,” Mr. Wenham said. Mac made a very frigid bow.

“As Macmurdo acts for me,” Crawley said, “I had better retire and leave you together.”

“By no means, my dear Colonel,” Mr. Wenham said. “I requested an interview with you personally, though the company of Captain Macmurdo cannot fail to be pleasing. In fact, Captain, I hope that our conversation will lead to agreeable results, very different from those which my friend Colonel Crawley appears to expect.”

“Humph!” said Captain Macmurdo. Mr. Wenham took a chair which was not offered to him, and resumed.

“You have seen this gratifying announcement in the papers, Colonel? It is an excellent appointment. Three thousand a year, a fine government-house, all your own way in the Colony. I congratulate you. I presume you know, gentlemen, to whom my friend is indebted for this?”

“Hanged if I know,” the Captain said.

“To one of the most generous of men – my excellent friend, the Marquis of Steyne.”

“I’ll see him dammed before I take his place,” growled Rawdon.

“You are irritated with my noble friend,” Mr. Wenham said calmly. “Why?”

“What?” cried Rawdon.

“Why? Dammy!” said the Captain, ringing his stick on the ground.

“Dammy, indeed,” said Mr. Wenham, smiling agreeably. “Still, look at the matter as a man of the world. You come home from a journey, and find – what? – my Lord Steyne supping at your house with Mrs. Crawley. Is this strange? Has he not done this a hundred times before? Upon my honour, I think that your suspicions are unfounded, and that they injure an honourable gentleman who has proved his goodwill towards you – and a most innocent lady.”

“You don’t mean to say that Crawley’s mistaken?” said Macmurdo.

“I believe that Mrs. Crawley is as innocent as my wife,” Mr. Wenham said. “I believe that, misled by jealousy, my friend here attacks not only his benefactor, but his wife, his son’s future reputation, and his own prospects. I found Lord Steyne this morning in a pitiable state. You took a cruel advantage of your strength, Colonel Crawley. It was not only the body of my noble friend which was wounded – his heart, sir, was bleeding. A man whom he had loaded with benefits had subjected him to indignity. His Lordship was as anxious as you are to revenge the outrage. His first order to me was to write a letter of challenge.”

Crawley nodded.

“I tried my utmost to calm Lord Steyne,” said Mr. Wenham. “‘Good God! sir,’ I said, ‘how I regret that Mrs. Wenham and myself had not accepted Mrs. Crawley’s invitation to sup with her!’”

“She asked you to sup with her?” Captain Macmurdo said.

“After the opera. Here’s the note of invitation – no, this is another paper – I thought I had it, but it’s of no consequence, and I pledge you my word. It was only one of Mrs. Wenham’s headaches which prevented us – if we had come, and you had returned home, there would have been no quarrel, no suspicion – and so it is because my poor wife has a headache that you are to bring death down upon two men of honour and plunge two excellent families into disgrace and sorrow.”

Macmurdo looked puzzled, and Rawdon felt with a kind of rage that his prey was escaping him. He did not believe a word of the story, and yet how to disprove it?

Mr. Wenham continued fluently: “I sat for an hour by Lord Steyne’s bedside, imploring him not to demand a duel. I pointed out to him that the circumstances were after all suspicious. Any man in your position might have been taken in. I said that a man of his Lordship’s exalted station had no right to create a public scandal; and that, however innocent, common people would insist that he was guilty. I implored him not to send the challenge.”

“I don’t believe one word of it,” said Rawdon, grinding his teeth. “It’s a damned lie, and you’re in it, Mr. Wenham. If the challenge don’t come from him, by Jove it shall come from me.”

Mr. Wenham turned deadly pale. But Captain Macmurdo rose up with an oath and rebuked Rawdon.

“You put the affair into my hands, and you shall act as I think fit, by Jove. You have no right to insult Mr. Wenham. If you want to challenge Lord Steyne, you may get somebody else to do it: I won’t. As for Mrs. Crawley, my belief is there’s nothing proved at all: that your wife’s innocent, as Mr. Wenham says; and at any rate you would be a damned fool not to take the place and hold your tongue.”

“Captain Macmurdo, you speak like a man of sense,” Mr. Wenham cried out, immensely relieved. “I forget any words that Colonel Crawley has used in the heat of the moment.”

“I thought you would,” Rawdon said with a sneer.

“Shut your mouth, you old stoopid,” the Captain said good-naturedly. “Mr. Wenham ain’t a fighting man; and quite right, too.”

“No word about this shall ever pass these doors,” insisted Mr. Wenham.

“I suppose Lord Steyne won’t talk about it,” said Macmurdo; “and I don’t see why we should. The affair ain’t a pretty one, and the less said about it the better. If you are satisfied, why, I think we should be.”

Mr. Wenham took his hat, and Captain Macmurdo followed him to the door and joined him outside it, leaving Rawdon within. Macmurdo looked hard at the other.

“You don’t stick at a trifle, Mr. Wenham,” he said.

“You flatter me, Captain,” answered the other with a smile. “Upon my honour, Mrs. Crawley did ask us to sup after the opera.”

“Of course. I’ve got a thousand-pound note here, which I will give you for Lord Steyne if you will give me a receipt, please. My man shan’t fight him. But we had rather not take his money.”

“It was all a mistake, my dear sir,” the other said; and descended the Club steps just as Sir Pitt Crawley ascended them. Macmurdo knew the Baronet slightly, and told Sir Pitt that he had made the affair all right between Lord Steyne and the Colonel.

Sir Pitt was well pleased, of course. Going to his brother, he congratulated him warmly upon the peaceful outcome, making moral remarks on the evils of duelling. He then tried to bring about a reconciliation between Rawdon and Rebecca, asserting his own firm belief in her innocence.

But Rawdon would not hear of it. “She has kept money concealed from me these ten years,” he said. “She swore, only last night, she had none from Steyne. If she’s not guilty, Pitt, she’s as bad as guilty, and I’ll never see her again.” His head sank, and he looked quite broken and sad.

“Poor old boy,” Macmurdo said, shaking his head.

Rawdon Crawley resisted for some time the idea of taking the place found for him by so odious a patron, and was also ready to remove the boy from the school where Lord Steyne’s interest had placed him. He was induced, however, to consent to these benefits, chiefly by Macmurdo pointing out how furious Steyne would be to think that his enemy’s fortune was made through his means.

The secret of the confrontation between Steyne and Colonel Crawley was buried in oblivion, as Wenham said; by the people involved, at least. But before that evening was over it was talked of at fifty dinner-tables in Vanity Fair. How Mrs. Washington White revelled in it! The Bishopess of Ealing was shocked beyond expression. Little Southdown was sorry; so was his sister Lady Jane, very sorry. It was town-talk for at least three days.

The bailiffs seized upon poor Raggles in Curzon Street, and Rebecca was meanwhile – where? Who cared! Who asked after a day or two? Was she guilty or not? Some people said she had gone to Naples in pursuit of Lord Steyne, whilst others claimed that his Lordship fled to Palermo on hearing of Becky’s arrival. Some said she had become a lady-in-waiting to the Queen of Bulgaria; some that she was at Boulogne; and others, at a boarding-house at Cheltenham.

Rawdon made her an annual payment, and she was a woman who could make a little money go a great way. He would have paid his debts on leaving England, could

he have got any life insurance, but the climate of Coventry Island was so bad that he could not borrow funds on the strength of his salary.

He sent money, however, to his brother punctually, and wrote to his little boy with every mail. He kept Macmurdo in cigars, and sent over quantities of shells, cayenne pepper, hot pickles, and colonial produce to Lady Jane. He sent his brother the Swamp Town Gazette, in which the new Governor was praised with immense enthusiasm. Little Rawdon used to like to read in the papers about his Excellency.

His mother never made any movement to see the child. He went home to his aunt for Sundays and holidays. He soon knew every bird's nest about Queen's Crawley, and rode out with Sir Huddleston's hounds, which he had admired so on his first visit to Hampshire.

CHAPTER 56

Georgy is Made a Gentleman

Georgy Osborne was now established in his grandfather's mansion in Russell Square, occupying his father's room and heir of all its splendours. The boy's good looks and gallant bearing won his grandfather's heart. Mr. Osborne was as proud of him as ever he had been of the elder George.

The child had many more luxuries than his father had. Osborne's business had prospered, and his wealth and importance in the City had very much increased. He had been glad enough to send the elder George to a good private school, and had been proud of his army commission; but for little George, the old man looked much higher. He would make a gentleman of the little chap, he said: a collegian, a Parliament man, a Baronet, perhaps. He would have none but a tip-top college man to educate him.

A few years before, he used to declare savagely that parsons, scholars, and the like were humbugs, supercilious dogs that looked down upon British merchants who could buy up half a hundred of 'em. Now he mourned that his own education had been neglected, and pointed out, in pompous speeches to Georgy, the necessity of classical learning.

When they met at dinner the grandsire would ask the lad what he had been reading, and was greatly interested in the boy's studies, pretending to understand what little George said about them. He made a hundred blunders and often showed his ignorance. It did not increase the child's respect for him. The boy soon realised that his grandfather was a dullard, and began to look down upon him; for his previous education, humble as it had been, had made a much better gentleman of Georgy than any plans of his grandfather. He had been brought up by a kind, weak, tender woman, who had no pride about anything but him, a true lady with a pure heart and humble bearing. If she never said brilliant things, she never spoke or thought unkind ones.

Young Georgy lorded over her soft and yielding nature; the coarse pomposity of the dull old man made him lord over the latter too. If he had been a Prince Royal he could not have thought better of himself.

Whilst his mother was yearning for him at home, this young gentleman had pleasures which made him bear the separation from her very easily. He was given a handsome pony, and was taught to ride, first at a riding-school, and then in Regent's Park and Hyde Park, where he rode in state with Martin the coachman behind him.

Old Osborne, leaving his City affairs to his junior partners, would often ride out with Miss Osborne in the same fashionable direction. As little Georgy came cantering up with his dandified air, his grandfather would nudge his daughter and say, "Look, Miss O." Here too his aunt, Mrs. Frederick Bullock – whose carriage appeared daily, with three pasty-faced little Bullocks staring from the windows – Mrs. Frederick Bullock flung glances of hatred at the little upstart as he rode by, as proud as a lord.

Though he was scarcely eleven, Master George wore the most beautiful little boots like a man's. He had gilt spurs, and a gold-headed whip, and neat little kid gloves. His mother had carefully made shirts and neckcloths for him; but when he came to see her, they were replaced by much finer linen, with jewelled buttons. Her humble presents had been put aside – Miss Osborne had given them to the coachman's boy. Amelia tried to think she was pleased. Indeed, she was happy and charmed to see the boy looking so beautiful.

She had a little profile of him done for a shilling, and this was hung up beside her husband's portrait over her bed. One day the boy came on his visit, galloping down the street at Brompton; with great eagerness and triumph, he held out a leather case.

"I bought it with my own money, Mamma," he said. "I thought you'd like it."

Amelia opened the case, and giving a cry of delight, seized the boy and embraced him. It was a miniature of himself, very prettily done. His grandfather had wished to have a picture of him painted by an artist; and George, who had plenty of money, asked the painter how much a copy of the little portrait would cost, saying that he wanted to give it to his mother.

This proof of the boy's affection charmed her; she thought no child in the world was so good as hers. For weeks after, the thought of his love made her happy. She slept better with the picture under her pillow, and how many times did she kiss it and pray over it! Since her parting with George she had had no such joy and consolation.

At his new home Master George ruled like a lord; at dinner he coolly invited the ladies to drink wine, and took champagne in a way which charmed his grandfather.

The lad's antics did not, however, delight Mr. Osborne's friends. It gave Mr. Justice Coffin no pleasure to hear Georgy cut into the conversation and spoil his stories. Colonel Fogey was not interested in seeing the little boy half tipsy. Mrs. Toffy felt no gratitude when he tilted a glass of port-wine over her yellow satin dress and laughed at the disaster; nor was she pleased, although old Osborne was highly delighted, when Georgy "whopped" her third boy. George's grandfather gave the boy two sovereigns for that feat and promised to reward him for every boy above his own size whom he whopped in a similar manner. It is difficult to say what the old man saw in these combats; he had a vague notion that quarrelling made boys hardy, and that tyranny was a useful accomplishment. English youth have long been so taught.

Flushed with victory over Master Toffy, George wished to pursue his conquests further. One day as he was strutting about in dandified new clothes, a young baker's boy made sarcastic comments. George pulled off his jacket with great spirit, and giving it to his friend Master Todd, tried to whop the little baker. But this time, the little baker whopped Georgy, who came home with a rueful black eye and all his fine shirt frill dabbled with blood from his own nose. He told his grandfather that he had fought a giant, and frightened his poor mother with long, and by no means authentic, accounts of the battle.

This young Todd, the son of a junior partner in Osborne's firm, was Master George's great friend and admirer. They both had a taste for raspberry tarts; for sliding and skating on the Serpentine, when the weather permitted; and for going to the play, where they were often taken at Mr Osborne's orders, by Rowson, Master George's servant.

In Rowson's company they visited all the main theatres; knew the names of all the actors; and performed many of the plays to the Todd family and their youthful friends. Rowson, who was a generous man, would sometimes treat his young master to oysters after the play, and to a glass of rum-shrub. We may be pretty certain that Mr. Rowson profited in his turn from his young master's liberality.

A famous West End tailor was summoned to clothe little George, and was told to spare no expense. So Georgy had white waistcoats for evening parties, and little velvet waistcoats for dinners, and dressed for dinner every day, "like a regular West End swell," as his grandfather remarked. One of the servants helped him dress, answered his bell, and brought him his letters on a silver tray.

Georgy made the house lively by his activity, his imperiousness, his scolding, and his good-nature. He was educated by a neighbouring scholar who “prepared young noblemen for the Universities, the senate, and the learned professions: in whose family the pupils would find the elegances of refined society and the affection of a home.” It was in this way that the Reverend Lawrence Veal and his wife strove to entice pupils.

This Chaplain and his lady had a few scholars, who paid a high figure for comfortable quarters. There was a large West Indian, whom nobody came to see, with a woolly head and a dandyfied appearance; there was a hulking boy of three-and-twenty whose education had been previously neglected; there were two sons of Colonel Bangles of the East India Company. These four sat down to dinner at Mrs. Veal’s genteel board, when Georgy was introduced to her house. Like some dozen other pupils, he was only a day boy, escorted to school by Mr. Rowson.

His grandfather’s wealth was reported in the school to be prodigious. The Rev. Mr. Veal used to compliment Georgy upon it personally, warning him that he was destined for a high station, and should prepare for the lofty duties to which he would be called. He therefore begged that George would not bring toffee into the school and ruin the health of the Masters Bangles.

The young gentlemen could learn every known science. The Rev. Mr. Veal had an orrery, an electrifying machine, a turning lathe, a theatre (in the wash-house), a chemical apparatus, and a select library of the works of the best authors. He took the boys to the British Museum and discussed the specimens there, gathering an audience; and he always took care when speaking to use the very finest and longest words possible.

Thus he would say to George in school, “I observed on my return home from taking the indulgence of an evening’s scientific conversation with my excellent friend Doctor Bulders that the windows of your venerated grandfather’s princely mansion in Russell Square were illuminated as if for the purposes of festivity. Am I right in my conjecture that Mr. Osborne entertained a society of chosen spirits round his sumptuous board last night?”

Little Georgy, who used to mimic Mr. Veal to his face with great dexterity, would reply that Mr. V. was quite correct in his surmise.

To this great man George’s education was entrusted. Amelia was bewildered by his phrases, but thought him a prodigy of learning. She made friends of Mrs. Veal, and liked to be asked to Mrs. Veal’s *conversazioni*, which took place once a month, when the professor welcomed his pupils and their friends to weak tea and scientific conversation. Poor little Amelia never missed one of these entertainments and thought them delicious so long as she had Georgy sitting by her. And she would embrace Mrs. Veal with tearful gratitude for the delightful evening, before putting on her cloak and walking home.

As for Georgy’s learning, to judge from the weekly reports he took home to his grandfather, his progress was remarkable. In Greek Georgy was pronounced *aristos*, in Latin *optimus*, in French *tres bien*, and so forth; and everybody had prizes for everything at the end of the year. Even the woolly-headed Mr. Swartz, half-brother to the Honourable Mrs. MacMull, and Mr. Bluck, the neglected pupil of three-and-twenty, and the young scape-grace Mr. Todd, received little eighteen-penny books with a Latin inscription from the professor.

Thus it seemed to be decreed that Georgy was to domineer over everybody, and that all must bow the knee before the little fellow. He was quite willing. Georgy liked to play the part of master and perhaps had a natural aptitude for it.

In Russell Square everybody was afraid of Mr. Osborne, and Mr. Osborne was afraid of Georgy. The boy's dashing manners, his offhand rattle about books and learning, and his likeness to his dead father awed the old gentleman. The old man tried by indulgence to make up for his harshness to the elder George. People were surprised at his gentleness to the boy. He growled and swore at Miss Osborne, yet would smile when George came down late for breakfast.

Miss Osborne was now a faded old spinster, broken down by forty years of dullness and coarse usage. It was easy for Georgy to master her. Whenever he wanted anything, from the jam-pots in her cupboards to the cracked old colours in her paint-box, Georgy took possession of it, and then took no further notice of his aunt.

The other old grandfather, Mr. Sedley, was likewise subject to the little tyrant. He could not help respecting a lad who had such fine clothes and rode with a groom. Georgy, on his side, was used to hearing coarse abuse levelled at John Sedley by his pitiless enemy, Mr. Osborne, who called him the old coal-man, the old bankrupt, and many other such names. How could George respect him? When Mrs. Sedley died, the child did not show much grief. He came down to visit his mother in a fine new suit of mourning, and was very angry that he could not go to a play.

The illness of that old lady had been the occupation and perhaps the safeguard of Amelia. What do men know about women's martyrdoms? We should go mad if we had to endure the hundredth part of those daily pains which are meekly borne by many women.

Amelia's mother had taken to her bed, which she had never left, and from which Amelia was never absent except when she ran to see George. The old lady grudged her even those rare visits. She had been a kind, smiling mother once, but poverty and illness had broken her down. Amelia bore her mother's harshness gently; smoothed the uneasy pillow; was always ready with a soft answer to the querulous voice, and finally closed the eyes that had once looked so tenderly upon her.

Then all her time and tenderness were devoted to comforting the bereaved old father, who was stunned by this blow. Everything he loved best had fallen away from him. There was only Amelia to stand by and support him with her gentle arms. We are not going to write the history: it would be too dreary and stupid. I can see Vanity Fair yawning over it already.

One day as the pupils were assembled in the study at the Rev. Mr. Veal's, a smart carriage drove up to the door, and two gentlemen stepped out. The young Masters Bangles rushed to the window with a vague notion that their father might have arrived from Bombay. The hulking scholar of three-and-twenty flattened his neglected nose against the panes and looked out at the men.

"It's a fat one and a thin one," he said, as a knock thundered on the door.

The servant-boy came into the study and said, "Two gentlemen want to see Master Osborne." The professor had had a trifling disagreement that morning with George, owing to a difference about the introduction of crackers in school-time; but he said with bland courtesy, "Master Osborne, I give you permission to go and see your friends – to whom I beg you to convey my respectful compliments."

Georgy went into the reception-room and saw two strangers, whom he looked at in his usual haughty manner. One was fat, with mustachios, and the other was lean and long, in a blue frock-coat, with a brown face and a grizzled head.

“My God, how like he is!” said the long gentleman with a start. “Can you guess who we are, George?”

The boy’s face flushed, and his eyes brightened. “I don’t know the other,” he said, “but I think you must be Major Dobbin.”

Indeed it was our old friend. His voice trembled with pleasure as he greeted the boy, and taking his hands, drew the lad to him.

“Your mother has talked to you about me – has she?” he said.

“That she has,” Georgy answered, “hundreds and hundreds of times.”

CHAPTER 57

Eothen

Old Osborne was proud of the fact that Sedley, his enemy and benefactor, was so utterly defeated as to be forced to accept financial help from the man who had insulted him. Osborne cursed the old pauper and relieved him from time to time. And in his brutal, coarse way, he gave the boy to understand that John Sedley was a wretched old bankrupt who was indebted to his generosity. George carried the money to Amelia and her father, and patronized the feeble and disappointed old man.

It may have shown a want of “proper pride” in Amelia that she chose to accept money from her father’s enemy. But proper pride and this poor lady had never had much acquaintance. A long course of poverty and hard words, of kind acts and no returns, had been her lot. You who see your betters bearing up under this shame every day, meekly suffering, and despised for their poverty, do you ever step down from your prosperity and wash the feet of these poor weary beggars? How mysterious and unaccountable is that lottery of life which gives to one man fine clothes and riches and sends another rags.

So Amelia gratefully took the crumbs that her father-in-law let drop, and with them fed her own parent. It was her nature to sacrifice herself for the beloved object. During what long thankless nights had she worked out her fingers for little Georgy; what scorns and privations had she endured for father and mother! And in the midst of all these unseen sacrifices, she did not respect herself, but thought herself a poor-spirited, despicable little creature, who did not deserve any good fortune.

O you poor women! O you poor secret martyrs and victims, whose life is a torture, who lay your heads down on the block daily at the drawing-room table; every man who watches your pains must pity you – and thank God that he has a beard. If you properly tyrannize over a woman, you will find a hap’orth of kindness will bring tears into her eyes, as though you were an angel.

Amelia’s life had come down to this – to a mean prison and a long, ignoble bondage. Little George visited her captivity sometimes and consoled it. Russell Square was the boundary of her prison: she might walk there occasionally, but was always back in her cell at night, to watch by the thankless sick-beds of tyrannous old age. How many thousands of people, women for the most part, are doomed to endure this long slavery? – hospital nurses without wages, who strive, watch, and suffer, unpitied, and fade away unknown.

Oh, be humble, my brother, in your prosperity! Be gentle with those who are less lucky, if not more deserving. Think what right have you to be scornful, whose virtue is a lack of temptation, whose success may be chance, whose rank is an ancestor’s accident.

They buried Amelia’s mother in the churchyard at Brompton, upon just such a rainy, dark day as when Amelia married George. Her little boy sat by her side in pompous new furs. Her thoughts were away in other times as the parson read. Except that she held George’s hand, perhaps she would have liked to change places with.... Then she felt ashamed of her selfish thoughts and prayed to be strengthened to do her duty.

So she determined to try and make her old father happy. She slaved, toiled, patched and mended, sang and played backgammon, read out the newspaper, cooked

for old Sedley, walked out with him, listened to his stories with untiring smiles, or sat musing by his side as the querulous old man prattled about his wrongs. What sad thoughts the widow had! The children running up and down in the gardens reminded her of George, taken from her like the first George. Her selfish, guilty love, in both instances, had been rebuked and bitterly chastised. She strove to think it was right that she should be so punished. She was a miserable wicked sinner, alone in the world.

I know that the account of this kind of solitary imprisonment is insufferably tedious, unless there is some cheerful incident to enliven it – a tender gaoler, for instance, or a mouse come out to play, or a tunnel under the castle, dug by a toothpick; but Amelia's captivity had no such incident. Though very sad, she was always ready to smile when spoken to; singing songs, making puddings, playing cards, mending stockings, for her old father's benefit.

May we have in our last days a kind soft shoulder on which to lean and a gentle hand to soothe our pillows. Old Sedley grew very fond of his daughter after his wife's death, and Amelia had her consolation in doing her duty by him.

But better days were in store for both. Perhaps the ingenious reader has guessed who was the stout gentleman who called upon Georgy with Major Dobbin.

The Major had easily succeeded in getting leave to go to Madras, and from there to Europe, on urgent private affairs, and had travelled so quickly that he arrived at Madras in a high fever. His servants brought him to a friend's house in a state of delirium; and it was thought for many days that he would never travel farther than the grave-yard.

Here, as the poor fellow lay tossing in his fever, you might have heard him raving about Amelia. In his lucid hours, he thought his last day was come, and made solemn preparations for departure, leaving his little property to those whom he most desired to benefit. The friend in whose house he was staying witnessed his will. The Major desired to be buried with a little brown hair-chain which he wore round his neck and which he had got from Amelia's maid at Brussels, when the young widow's hair was cut off during her illness after her husband's death.

He recovered, rallied, and relapsed again. He was almost a skeleton when they put him on board the East Indiaman ship, and so weak that the friend who had tended him through his illness thought that the honest Major would never survive the voyage. But whether it was the sea air, or the hope which sprung up in him afresh, from the day that the ship spread her sails and set out towards home, Dobbin began to amend, and he was quite well (though as gaunt as a greyhound) before they reached the Cape.

"I think Miss O'Dowd would have done for me if we had her on board," he said laughingly to his companion, "and when she had sunk me, she would have fallen upon you, depend upon it, and carried you as a prize to Southampton, Jos, my boy."

For indeed it was no other than our stout Jos who was with him. He had passed ten years in Bengal. Constant dinners, tiffins, pale ale and claret had their effect upon Waterloo Sedley. A voyage to Europe was pronounced necessary for his health – and having served his full time in India and laid by a considerable sum of money, he was free to come home and stay with a good pension, or to return and resume a high rank in the service.

He was rather thinner than when we last saw him, but had gained in majesty. He swaggered about on deck in a magnificent velvet cap with a gold band and a profusion of jewellery. He brought a native servant who wore the Sedley crest in silver on his turban. The young soldiers among the passengers used to draw out Sedley and make him tell prodigious stories about himself and his exploits against

tigers and Napoleon. When they passed Saint Helena, Major Dobbin not being nearby, Jos described the battle of Waterloo and implied that Napoleon never would have gone to Saint Helena but for Jos Sedley.

After leaving St. Helena, he disposed of a great quantity of claret, preserved meats, and soda-water. He disappeared in a panic during a two-days' gale, in which he had the portholes of his cabin battened down; but in general he made himself agreeable to all by his kindness and condescension.

Many a night as the ship was cutting through the roaring dark sea, the moon shining overhead and the bell singing out the watch, Mr. Sedley and the Major would sit on the quarter-deck talking and smoking. Major Dobbin would manage to bring the talk round to the subject of Amelia and her son.

Jos, a little testy about his father's applications for money, was soothed by the Major, who pointed out the elder's ill fortunes. Perhaps Jos would not like to live with the old couple; but the Major pointed out how advantageous it would be for Jos to have his own house in London, how his sister Amelia would be the very person to preside over it; how elegant, gentle and refined she was. He told Jos how much admired she had formerly been by people of great fashion; and he then hinted how becoming it would be for Jos to send Georgy to a good school.

The Major did not know yet what events had happened in the little Sedley family, and how riches had carried off George from Amelia. But the fact is that every day, this love-smitten gentleman was thinking about Mrs. Osborne, and bent upon doing her good. He coaxed and complimented Jos Sedley perseveringly to this end.

The truth is, when Major Dobbin came on board very sick, he did not begin to rally until a conversation which they had one day, as the Major was laid languidly on the deck. He said that he had left a little something to his godson in his will, and he trusted Mrs. Osborne would remember him kindly and be happy in the marriage she was about to make.

"Marry? not at all," Jos answered. "Her latest letter made no mention of marriage, and by the way, she wrote to say that Major Dobbin was going to be married, and hoped that *he* would be happy."

From that day, Dobbin began to mend. After they passed St. Helena, his gaiety and strength astonished his fellow passengers. He larked with the midshipmen, ran up the shrouds like a boy, sang a comic song one night to the amusement of the whole party, and was generally lively and amiable.

But during a calm, only ten days' sail from England, Dobbin became so impatient and ill-humoured as to surprise his comrades. He did not recover until the breeze sprang up again, and was in a highly excited state when the friendly spires of Southampton came in sight.

CHAPTER 58

Our Friend the Major

Our Major had made himself so popular on board that when he and Mr. Sedley left the ship, the whole crew gave three cheers for Major Dobbin, who blushed and ducked his head in thanks. Jos, thinking the cheers were for himself, took off his gold-laced cap and waved it majestically. They landed with great dignity at the pier, and proceeded to the Royal George Hotel.

There, although the sight of a magnificent round of beef and a silver tankard of real British home-brewed ale greeted their delighted eyes, yet Dobbin began instantly to talk about a post-chaise, and wished to be on the road to London. Jos, however, would not hear of moving that evening. Why pass a night in a post-chaise instead of a downy feather-bed?

So the Major was forced to wait over that night, and wrote to his family announcing his arrival. Jos promised to write to his own family, but didn't. He ordered a sumptuous dinner; the landlord said it did him good to see Mr. Sedley drink off his first pint of porter.

Next morning Major Dobbin was neatly shaved and dressed so early that nobody was up in the house except the Boots. The Major could hear snores roaring through the corridors as he creaked about. The sleepless Boots went from door to door, gathering up the footwear which stood outside each one. Then Jos's native servant arose and began to get ready his master's ponderous dressing apparatus and prepare his hookah; then the maidservants got up. When the first waiter appeared and unbarred the door of the inn, the Major ordered a post-chaise to be fetched instantly, so that they might set off.

He went to Mr. Sedley's room, saying, "Wake up, Sedley! the chaise will be at the door in half an hour."

Jos growled from under the counterpane, and gave Dobbin to understand that he might go and be hanged, that Jos would not travel with him, and that it was most ungentlemanlike to disturb a man out of his sleep in that way; on which the Major was obliged to retreat. The chaise soon came up, and he could wait no longer.

If he had been a newspaper courier bearing dispatches, he could not have travelled more quickly. The post-boys wondered at the fees he flung amongst them. How happy and green the country looked as the chaise whirled rapidly from mile-stone to mile-stone; past pretty roadside inns, where the signs hung on the elms, and horses and waggoners were drinking under the trees; by old halls and parks; by rustic hamlets clustered round ancient grey churches – through the charming friendly English landscape. Is there any in the world like it? Well, Major Dobbin passed through all this without noticing it.

He drove first to his old haunt at the Slaughters. Long years had passed since he saw it last; since he and George, as young men, had enjoyed many a feast there. However, the old waiter stood at the door in the same greasy black suit, receiving the Major as if he had gone away only a week ago.

"Put the Major's things in twenty-three, that's his room," said John. "Roast fowl for your dinner, I suppose. You ain't got married? Like any warm water?" And with this, the faithful waiter, with whom ten years were but as yesterday, led the way up to

Dobbin's old room. The Major remembered George pacing up and down in here, and biting his nails, the day before he was married.

"What became of Captain Osborne's widow?" John said. "Fine young fellow, that. Lord, how he used to spend his money. He owes me three pound at this minute."

John then retired; and Major Dobbin, with a grin at his own absurdity, chose the very smartest costume he possessed, and laughed at his own tanned face and grey hair in the mirror.

"I'm glad old John didn't forget me," he thought. "She'll know me, too, I hope." And he left the inn, making towards Brompton.

Every minute of his last meeting with Amelia was in his mind as he walked towards her house. A hundred changes had occurred which he vaguely noticed. He began to tremble as he walked up the well-remembered lane from Brompton to the street where she lived.

Was she going to be married or not? If he were to meet her with the little boy – what should he do? He saw a woman coming towards him with a child of five – was that she? He began to shake at the mere possibility. When he came to her gate at last, he caught hold of it and paused, his heart thumping.

"May God bless her, whatever has happened," he thought. "Psha! she may be gone from here." He went in through the gate.

The parlour window was open, and there was no-one in the room. The Major thought he recognized the piano, though. He knocked on the door.

A buxom-looking lass of sixteen, with bright eyes, answered the knock and looked hard at the Major.

He was as pale as a ghost and could hardly falter out – "Does Mrs. Osborne live here?"

"Lord bless me – it's Major Dobbin." She held out both her hands. "Don't you remember me? Polly Clapp. I used to call you Major Sugarplums."

On which, and I believe it was for the first time that he ever so conducted himself in his life, the Major took the girl in his arms and kissed her. She began to laugh and cry hysterically, and calling out "Ma, Pa!" brought up those worthy people, who were astonished to find their daughter in the little passage in the embrace of a great tall man in a blue frock-coat.

"I'm an old friend," he said, blushing. "Don't you remember me, Mrs. Clapp, and those good cakes you used to make for tea? I'm George's godfather, just come back from India." A great shaking of hands followed.

The landlord and landlady led the worthy Major into the Sedleys' room (whereof he remembered every single article of furniture), and there, as he sat down, they informed Major Dobbin of events in Amelia's history of which he was not aware – namely Mrs. Sedley's death, George's reconciliation with his grandfather Osborne, the widow's sorrow at leaving him, and other details. He was going to ask about the marriage question, but his heart failed him. Finally, he was informed that Mrs. O. was gone to walk in Kensington Gardens with her pa, who was very weak and peevish now, and led her a sad life, though she behaved to him like an angel.

"I'm very much pressed for time," the Major said, "but I should like to see Mrs. Osborne. Suppose Miss Polly would show me the way?"

Miss Polly was charmed. She bounced away to her apartment and appeared presently in her best bonnet and her mamma's yellow shawl to make herself a worthy companion for the Major.

He gave the young lady his arm, and they walked away very gaily. He was glad to have a friend at hand for the scene which he dreaded somehow. He asked a thousand more questions about Amelia, and Polly answered Major Sugarplums to the very best of her power.

In the midst of their walk an incident occurred which, though very simple, gave the Major great delight. A pale young man with feeble whiskers came walking down the lane with a lady on each arm. One was a tall and commanding middle-aged female, and the other a stunted little woman with a dark face. The gentleman carried a parasol, shawl, and basket, so that his arms were entirely engaged, and he was unable to touch his hat when Miss Polly Clapp greeted him. He merely bowed his head, while the two ladies looked severe.

“Who’s that?” asked the Major, amused by the group. Polly looked at him rather roguishly.

“That is our curate, the Reverend Mr. Binny” (a twitch from Major Dobbin) “and his sister Miss B; and the other lady, the little one with a cast in her eye, is Mrs. Binny – Miss Grits that was; her pa was a grocer, and they were married last month, but her and Miss B. have quarrelled already.”

The Major stood silent while Miss Polly told this history; but his head was swimming with happiness. He began to walk double quick towards his destination – yet he was in a great tremor as they entered the old portal in Kensington Garden wall.

“There they are,” said Miss Polly, and she felt him again start back on her arm. She understood the whole business.

“Suppose you run on and tell her,” the Major said. Polly ran forward, her yellow shawl streaming in the breeze.

Old Sedley was seated on a bench, prattling away as usual, while Amelia listened with a patient smile, scarcely hearing a word. As Polly came bouncing along, Amelia started up. Her first thought was that something had happened to Georgy, but the sight of the messenger’s eager face dissipated that fear.

“News! News!” cried Polly. “He’s come!”

“Who is come?”

“Look there,” answered Miss Clapp, pointing; and Amelia saw Dobbin’s lean figure and long shadow stalking across the grass. Amelia started in her turn, blushed up, and, of course, began to cry. He looked at her – oh, how fondly – as she came running towards him, her hands held out to him. She wasn’t changed. She was a little pale, a little stouter. Her eyes were the same kind trustful eyes. There were scarce three lines of silver in her soft brown hair.

She gave him both her hands as she looked up flushing and smiling through her tears into his honest homely face. He took the two little hands between his own, speechless for a moment. Why did he not take her in his arms and swear that he would never leave her? She must have yielded.

“I – I’ve another arrival to announce,” he said after a pause.

“Mrs. Dobbin?” Amelia said, making a movement back. Why didn’t he declare himself?

“No,” he said, letting her hands go: “Who has told you those lies? I mean your brother Jos, who is come home with me to make you all happy.”

“Papa, Papa!” Emmy cried, “My brother is in England! He is come to take care of you. Here is Major Dobbin.”

Mr. Sedley stepped forward and made an old-fashioned bow to the Major, and hoped his worthy father, Sir William, was quite well. He proposed to call upon Sir

William, who had visited him a short time ago. Sir William had not called upon the old gentleman for eight years.

“He is very much shaken,” Emmy whispered as Dobbin shook hands with the old man.

Although he had such particular business in London that evening, the Major took up Mr. Sedley’s invitation to come home for tea. Amelia put her arm under Polly’s on their return home, so that Mr. Sedley fell to Dobbin’s share. The old man walked very slowly and told a number of ancient histories about himself and his former prosperity. The Major was glad to let him talk on. His eyes were fixed upon the figure in front of him – the dear little figure always present in his thoughts and dreams.

Amelia was very happy, smiling and active all that evening, performing her duties as hostess with the utmost grace, Dobbin thought. His eyes followed her about as they sat in the twilight. How many a time had he longed for that moment, and thought of her far away under hot winds and in weary marches, gentle and happy as he saw her now.

With Amelia to help him, he was ready to drink as many cups of tea as Doctor Johnson, and Amelia laughingly poured him cup after cup. She did not know that the Major had had no dinner and that the table was laid for him at the Slaughters’.

The first thing Mrs. Osborne had showed the Major was Georgy’s miniature. It was not half handsome enough, of course, but wasn’t it noble of Georgy to think of it for her? Whilst her papa was awake she did not talk much about Georgy, for old Sedley did not like to hear about Mr. Osborne and Russell Square. He did now know that for some months he had been living on his rival’s bounty, and lost his temper if Osborne was mentioned.

Dobbin told them all that had happened on board the ship, and exaggerated Jos’s benevolent wishes for his father. The truth is that during the voyage the Major had impressed this duty most strongly upon his fellow-passenger, soothing Jos’s irritation about the bills which the old gentleman had drawn upon him, and bringing Mr. Jos to a good state of feeling about his relatives. The Major stretched the truth so far as to tell old Mr. Sedley that it was mainly a desire to see his father which brought Jos home.

When Mr. Sedley began to doze in his chair, it was Amelia’s opportunity to talk, which she did with great eagerness – all about Georgy. She did not talk at all about her own sufferings; but everything concerning him, his virtues, talents, and prospects, she poured out. She described his angelic beauty; a hundred instances of his generosity; how a Royal Duchess had stopped and admired him in Kensington Gardens; how splendidly he was cared for now, with a groom and a pony; how clever he was, and what a well-read teacher he had in the Reverend Veal.

“He knows everything,” Amelia said. “He has the most delightful parties. You who are so learned yourself – don’t shake your head – *he* always used to say you were – you will be charmed with Mr. Veal’s parties. He says there is no place that Georgy may not aspire to. Look here,” and she went to the piano-drawer and took out a composition by Georgy, as follows:

On Selfishness – Of all the vices which degrade the human character, Selfishness is the most odious and contemptible. An undue love of Self leads to the most monstrous crimes and occasions the greatest misfortunes both in States and Families. As a selfish man will impoverish his family and often bring them to ruin, so a selfish king brings ruin on his people and often plunges them into war.

Example: The selfishness of Achilles, as remarked by the poet Homer, occasioned a thousand woes to the Greeks – *μυρι Αχαιοις αλγε εθηκε* – (Hom. Il. A. 2). The selfishness of the late Napoleon Bonaparte occasioned wars in Europe and caused him to perish himself, in the miserable island of Saint Helena in the Atlantic Ocean.

We see by these examples that we are not to consult our own interest and ambition, but that we are to consider the interests of others as well as our own.

George S. Osborne.

“Think of him writing such a hand, and quoting Greek, at his age,” the delighted mother said. “What a treasure Heaven has given me! He is the comfort of my life – and the image of – of him that’s gone!”

“Ought I to be angry with her for being faithful to him?” William thought. “Ought I to be jealous of my friend in the grave, or feel hurt that Amelia’s heart can love only once and forever? Oh, George, how little you knew the prize you had.”

“Dear friend,” she said, pressing his hand, “how good you have always been to me! Papa is stirring. You will go and see Georgy tomorrow, won’t you?”

“Not tomorrow,” said poor Dobbin. “I have business.” He had not yet been to visit his parents and his sisters. Presently he took his leave; and so the first day was over, and he had seen her.

CHAPTER 59

The Old Piano

The Major's visit left old John Sedley in a great state of excitement. He passed the evening fumbling amongst his boxes, untying his papers with trembling hands, and sorting them for Jos's arrival. He got out his files, his receipts, and his lawyers' letters; the documents relating to the wine project, the coal project, the patent saw-mill, etc., etc. He passed the night in preparing these documents, trembling about from one room to another, with a quivering candle.

"He shall find no irregularity, Emmy," the old gentleman said.

Emmy smiled. "I don't think Jos will care about seeing those papers, Papa."

"You don't know anything about business, my dear," he answered. He arranged these twopenny documents on a side table, covered them carefully with a clean handkerchief, and solemnly asked the maid not to disturb them.

Amelia found him up very early the next morning, more hectic and shaky than ever.

"I didn't sleep much, Emmy, my dear," he said. "I was thinking of my poor Bessy. I wish she was alive, to ride in Jos's carriage once again." And his eyes filled with tears. Amelia wiped them away, and smilingly kissed him, and tied the old man's neckcloth; and in his Sunday suit, he sat from six o'clock in the morning awaiting the arrival of his son.

However, the postman brought a letter from Jos to his sister, announcing that he felt a little fatigued after his voyage, and should not be able to move on that day, but would leave Southampton early the next morning and be with his father and mother at evening. Amelia, as she read out the letter, paused over the word *mother*. Her brother, it was clear, did not know what had happened.

There are some splendid tailors' shops in Southampton High Street, in whose windows hang gorgeous waistcoats of silk and velvet, and gold and crimson. Jos, although provided with the most splendid waistcoats that Calcutta could furnish, thought he could not go to town until he had one or two of these garments, and selected a crimson satin, embroidered with gold butterflies, and a black and red velvet tartan with white stripes, with which he thought he might make a dignified entry into London.

For Jos's former shyness had given way to a more courageous self-assertion. Though he was alarmed by the glances of the ladies, it was chiefly from a dread lest they should make love to him that he avoided them, being averse to marriage. But there was no such swell in Calcutta as Waterloo Sedley, I have heard say.

To make these waistcoats for a man of his size took at least a day. At length, he drove leisurely to London on the third day, in the new waistcoat, his native servant shivering on the box next to the new European servant; Jos puffing his pipe at intervals within and looking so majestic that people thought he must be a Governor-General.

He stopped frequently for refreshment: a glass of sherry at Winchester, ale at Alton, and at Farnham a light dinner of stewed eels, veal cutlets, French beans, and a bottle of claret. He felt cold over Bagshot Heath, and took some brandy-and-water; in fact, when he drove into town he was as full of wine, beer, meat, pickles, cherry-

brandy, and tobacco as the steward's cabin of a steam-packet. It was evening when his carriage thundered up to the little door in Brompton.

All the faces in the street were in the windows; the maidservant flew to the gate; Emmy, in a great flutter, was in the passage, and old Sedley in the parlour, shaking all over. Jos descended from the post-chaise in great state, supported by his new valet and the shuddering native, who was now bluish-grey with cold, and who created an immense sensation with the Clapps.

We shall shut the door upon the meeting between Jos and his family. The old man was very much affected; so was his daughter; nor was Jos without feeling. Jos was unaffectedly glad to see and shake the hand of his father, between whom and himself there had been a coolness – glad to see his pretty little sister, and pained at the alteration in the shattered old man. Emmy had come to the door in her black clothes and whispered to him of her mother's death, asking him not to speak of it to their father. However, the elder Sedley himself began immediately to talk of the event, and wept over it. It shocked Jos and made him think about himself less than usual.

After Jos had driven away to his hotel, Emmy embraced her father tenderly, asking the old man whether she did not always say that her brother had a good heart?

Indeed, Joseph Sedley, affected by the humble position in which he found his relations, had declared that they should never suffer want or discomfort any more; that his house and everything he had should be theirs: and that Amelia would look very pretty at the head of his table – until she should accept one of her own.

She shook her head sadly and had, as usual, recourse to the waterworks. She knew what he meant. She and young Polly Clapp had talked very fully on the night of the Major's visit, and Polly could not refrain from telling her of the discovery which she had made, and how Major Dobbin had betrayed himself by his tremor of joy when Mr. Binny passed with his bride.

"Oh, Ma'am," she said, "he never kept his eyes off you, and I'm sure he's grown grey athinking of you."

But Amelia, looking up at the portraits of her husband and son, told her never to speak on that subject again; that Major Dobbin had been her husband's dearest friend and her own kind guardian; that she loved him as a brother – but that a woman who had been married to such an angel as *that* could never think of another union.

Poor Polly sighed: she thought of young Mr. Tomkins, at the surgery, whose glances at church put her timorous little heart into a flutter – what would she do if he were to die? She knew he was consumptive, his cheeks were so red and he was so thin.

Not that Emmy felt displeased with the honest Major. Such an attachment from so loyal a gentleman could make no woman angry. Why, Miranda was even kind to Caliban, we may be pretty sure, for the same reason. Not that she would encourage the poor uncouth monster – of course not. Nor would Emmy encourage the Major. She would treat him with perfect cordiality and frankness until he made his proposals, and then it would be time enough for her to speak and put an end to his impossible hopes.

She slept, therefore, very soundly that evening, and was more than ordinarily happy.

"I am glad he is not going to marry that Miss O'Dowd," she thought. "She could not be fit for such an accomplished man as Major William." Who would make him a good wife? Not Miss Binny, she was too ill-tempered. Miss Osborne? too old. Little

Polly was too young. She could not find anybody to suit the Major before she went to sleep.

The same morning a letter came for Major Dobbin at the Slaughters' Coffee-house from Jos in Southampton, begging dear Dob to excuse him for being in a rage the day before (he had a confounded headache), and entreating Dob to book rooms at the Slaughters' for Mr. Sedley and his servants. Jos was very lonely at Southampton.

Once at the Slaughters', though, he could enjoy his hookah with such perfect ease, and could swagger down to the theatres so agreeably that perhaps he would have remained there had not the Major insisted that he should have a home for Amelia and his father. Dobbin was most active in anybody's concerns but his own; Jos was a soft fellow in anyone's hands, and was ready to do whatever his friend thought fit. His Indian servant was sent back to Calcutta, having taught Jos's European man the art of preparing curries, pilaus and a pipe. Jos had a smart carriage built in which he drove about in state, frequently with Amelia and Major Dobbin. At other times old Sedley and his daughter rode out; and Miss Clapp, who accompanied her friend, had great pleasure in being recognized, as she sat in the carriage, by the young gentleman at the surgery.

Shortly after Jos's appearance at Brompton, a dismal scene took place at the Clapps' humble cottage. Jos's carriage arrived one day and carried off old Sedley and his daughter – to return no more. The landlady and her daughter shed genuine tears of sorrow; they could not recall a harsh word from Amelia. She had been all sweetness and kindness, even when Mrs. Clapp lost her own temper and pressed for the rent. When the kind creature was going away, the landlady reproached herself bitterly. They would never have such lodgers again, that was quite clear.

As for Miss Polly, her sorrow was such as I shall not attempt to depict. She had attached herself so passionately to Amelia that when the grand barouche came to carry her off, she fainted in her friend's arms. Indeed, Amelia loved her like a daughter, and the separation was very painful to her. But it was of course arranged that Polly would come and stay often at the grand new house where Mrs. Osborne was going, and where Polly was sure she could never be so happy as at the Clapps' humble home.

Let us hope she was wrong. Poor Emmy's days of happiness in that home had been very few. Fate had oppressed her: the landlady had tyrannized over her when unpaid, and Mrs. Clapp's servility and fulsome compliments about the new house were no more to Emmy's liking. Emmy always remembered the coarse tyrant who had made her miserable; who had cried out at her extravagance if she bought delicacies for her ailing parents; who had seen her humble, and trampled upon her.

I hope Amelia is not to suffer more of that hard usage. And, as in all griefs there is some consolation, I may mention that Polly, when in a hysterical condition at her friend's departure, was placed under the medical treatment of the young fellow from the surgery, in whose care she soon rallied. Emmy gave her every bit of furniture that she had at Brompton, only taking away her pictures and her piano – that little old piano which had now passed into a plaintive jingling old age, but which she loved for reasons of her own.

Major Dobbin was exceedingly pleased when, as he was superintending the move to Jos's new house, the cart arrived from Brompton, bringing trunks and the old piano. Amelia wanted it up in her sitting-room on the second floor, next to her father's chamber. When the men appeared bearing the piano, Dobbin was quite elated.

"I'm glad you've kept it," he said. "I was afraid you didn't care about it."

“I value it more than anything I have in the world,” said Amelia.

“Do you, Amelia?” cried the Major. The fact was, as he had bought it himself, it never entered into his head to suppose that Emmy should think anybody else was the purchaser. He thought that she knew the gift came from him.

“Do you, Amelia?” he said; and the question, the great question of all, was trembling on his lips, when Emmy replied:

“Of course. Did not he give it me?”

“I did not know,” said poor old Dob, and his face fell.

Emmy did not heed this at the time, but she thought of it afterwards. And then it struck her, with inexpressible pain and mortification, that it was William who was the giver of the piano, and not George. It was not, as she had thought, George’s gift; her dearest relic. She had spoken to it about George; played his favourite airs upon it; sat for long evening hours, touching melancholy harmonies on the keys, and weeping over them in silence. It was valueless now. The next time old Sedley asked her to play, she said it was shockingly out of tune, that she had a headache, that she couldn’t play it.

Then she rebuked herself for her pettish ingratitude and determined to make up for the slight she had not expressed to honest William, but had felt for his piano. A few days afterwards, as they were seated in the drawing-room, where Jos had fallen asleep after dinner, Amelia said falteringly to Major Dobbin, “I have to beg your pardon for something.”

“About what?”

“About that little piano. I never thanked you for it when you gave it me, many, many years ago. I thought somebody else had given it. Thank you, William.” She held out her hand, but the poor little woman’s heart was bleeding.

William could hold back no more. “Amelia, Amelia,” he said, “I did buy it for you. I loved you then as I do now. I must tell you. I think I loved you from the first minute that I saw you, when George took me to meet you. You were only a girl, in white, with ringlets; you came down singing – do you remember? – and we went to Vauxhall. Since then I have thought of but one woman in the world, and that was you. No hour in the day has passed for twelve years that I haven’t thought of you. I came to tell you this before I went to India, but I hadn’t the heart to speak. You did not care whether I stayed or went.”

“I was very ungrateful,” Amelia said.

“No, only indifferent,” Dobbin continued desperately. “I have nothing to make a woman be otherwise. I know what you are feeling now. You are hurt at discovering that the piano came from me and not from George. I forgot that, and I beg your pardon for being a fool for a moment, and thinking that years of constancy and devotion might have pleaded with you.”

“It is you who are cruel now,” Amelia said with some spirit. “George is my husband, here and in heaven. How could I love any other but him? I am his now as when you first saw me, dear William. It was he who told me how good and generous you were, and who taught me to love you as a brother. Have you not been our dearest, truest, kindest friend and protector? Had you come a few months sooner perhaps you might have spared me that – that dreadful parting from my boy. Oh, it nearly killed me, William. Isn’t he a noble boy, William? Be his friend still and mine—” and here her voice broke, and she hid her face on his shoulder.

The Major folded his arms round her, as if she was a child, and kissed her head.

“I will not change, dear Amelia,” he said. “I ask for no more than your love. Only let me stay near you and see you often.”

“Yes, often,” Amelia said. And so William was at liberty to look and yearn – just as the poor schoolboy with no money may sigh after the contents of the tart-woman’s tray.

CHAPTER 60

Returns to the Genteel World

Good fortune now begins to smile upon Amelia. We are glad to introduce her into a polite circle – not so grand as that in which Mrs. Becky has appeared, but still genteel and fashionable. Jos's new house was in the comfortable Anglo-Indian district around Moira Place. Who does not know these respectable homes of the retired Indian aristocracy, and the quarter which Mr. Wenham calls the Black Hole? Jos's position was not grand enough for a house in Moira Place itself, but he rented a comfortable house of a second-rate order in Gillespie Street.

It was a modest establishment. The butler was also Jos's valet; Emmy had a maid, grown on Sir William Dobbin's estate; a good girl, whose kindness and humility disarmed Mrs. Osborne, who was terrified at the idea of having a servant to wait upon her. But this maid was very useful in skilfully tending old Mr. Sedley, who kept to his own part of the house.

Many people came to see Mrs. Osborne. Lady Dobbin and her daughters were delighted at her change of fortune, and visited her. Miss Osborne from Russell Square came in her grand chariot. Jos was reported to be immensely rich, and Old Osborne had no objection to Georgy inheriting his uncle's property as well as his own.

"Damn it, I'll see him in Parliament before I die," he said. "You may visit his mother, Miss O., though I won't." Emmy was very glad to see Miss Osborne, and so be brought nearer to Georgy. That young fellow was allowed to visit his mother more frequently. He dined once or twice a week in Gillespie Street, and bullied the servants and his relations there, just as he did in Russell Square.

He was always respectful to Major Dobbin, however. He was a clever lad and afraid of the Major. George could not help admiring his simplicity, his good humour, his learning quietly imparted, and his general love of truth and justice. He had met no such man before, and he hung fondly by Dobbin's side, delighting to walk in the parks with him.

William told George about his father, about India and Waterloo, about everything but himself. When George was more than usually pert and conceited, the Major made jokes at him, which Mrs. Osborne thought very cruel. One day, the Major took him to the play, and the boy declined to go into the pit because it was vulgar. So the Major took him to the boxes, left him there, and went down himself to the pit. He had not been seated there very long before he felt a little arm thrust under his: George had seen the absurdity of his ways and come down.

Dobbin loved the boy, as he did everything that belonged to Amelia. Her eyes looked more kindly on Dobbin than they had ever done. She blushed, he thought, after looking at him so.

Georgy never tired of praising the Major to his mother. "I like him, Mamma, because he knows such lots of things; and he ain't like old Veal, who is always bragging and using such long words. But Dob reads Latin like English, and French and that; and he tells me stories about my Papa, and never about himself; though I heard Colonel Buckler say that he was one of the bravest officers in the army, and had distinguished himself ever so much. Grandpapa was quite surprised, and said, '*That feller!* Why, I didn't think he could say Boo to a goose' – but he could, couldn't he, Mamma?"

Emmy laughed: she thought it very likely.

However, there was no great love between George and his uncle Joseph. George had got a way of blowing out his cheeks, and putting his hands in his waistcoat pockets, and saying, "God bless my soul, you don't say," so exactly like Jos that the servants would explode if the lad did it at dinner. Even Dobbin would shoot out a sudden peal of laughter. The little scapegrace did not mimic his uncle to his face only because of Dobbin's rebukes and Amelia's entreaties.

Jos, haunted by a dim consciousness that the lad thought him an ass, was doubly pompous and dignified in his presence. When Georgy was expected in Gillespie Street, Mr. Jos usually found that he had an engagement at his Club.

Joseph Sedley, then, led a life of dignified idleness. He became a member of the Oriental Club, where he spent his mornings in the company of his brother Indians, where he dined, or whence he brought home men to dine.

Amelia had to receive and entertain these gentlemen and their ladies. She heard all about the imprudent doings of the Bombay House and the Calcutta House; she learnt that the wife of Brown of the Ahmednuggur Irregulars had been sitting up with young Swankey of the Body Guard, and that Trotter was appointed Collector at Ummerapoor. This talk took place at the grand dinners: always with the same conversation; the same silver dishes and the same saddles of mutton. Politics set in a short time after dessert, when the ladies retired upstairs and talked about their complaints and their children.

Before long Emmy was driving about regularly in a carriage, calling upon Lady Bludyer, Lady Huff, and other distinguished wives. The carriage came to Gillespie Street every day; at stated hours Emmy and the carriage went to Jos's Club, or drove her father round Regent's Park. She was voted, by Jos's female society, rather a pleasing young person – not much in her, but pleasing.

The men, as usual, liked her artless kindness and simple refined manner. The gallant young Indian dandies at home on leave – tearing around in cabs, frequenting theatres, living at West End hotels – nevertheless admired Mrs. Osborne, and liked to pay her morning visits. Swankey of the Body Guard, the greatest buck in the Indian army, was one day discovered by Major Dobbin *tete-a-tete* with Amelia, describing the sport of pig-sticking to her; and Swankey spoke afterwards of a *d__d* officer that was always hanging about the house – a long, thin, queer-looking, oldish fellow – with a dry humour, though.

Had the Major been more vain he would have been jealous of Swankey. But Dobbin was of too simple and generous a nature to have any doubts about Amelia. He was glad that people should admire her. Ever since her womanhood, had she not been undervalued? It pleased him to see how her spirits gently rose with her prosperity.

After Jos went to Court, as a loyal subject of his Sovereign, he became such a tremendous Tory and pillar of the State that he wanted Amelia to go to a royal Drawing-room, too. He somehow had worked himself up to believe that he was involved in the maintenance of the public welfare and that the Sovereign would not be happy unless Jos Sedley and his family rallied round him at St. James's Palace.

Emmy laughed. "Shall I wear the family diamonds, Jos?" she said.

"I wish you would let me buy you some," thought the Major. "I should like to see any that were too good for you."

CHAPTER 61

In Which Two Lights are Put Out

There came a day when the round of decorous pleasures in Mr. Jos Sedley's house was interrupted.

The period of mourning for Mrs. Sedley's death was only just ended, and Jos had scarcely had time to cast off his black and appear in his splendid waistcoats, when it became evident that another event was at hand, and that old Mr. Sedley was about to go and seek his wife in the dark land where she had preceded him.

Jos and his acquaintances dined and drank their claret in silence, whilst the sands of life were running out in the old man's glass upstairs. The velvet-footed butler brought them their wine, and they played cards after dinner, at which Major Dobbin would sometimes take a hand; and Mrs. Osborne would occasionally descend, when her patient above was settled for the night, and had fallen into a troubled slumber.

The old man clung to his daughter during this sickness. He would take his broths and medicines from scarcely any other hand. To tend him became almost the sole business of her life. Her bed was placed by his bedroom door, and she was alive at the slightest noise from his couch. Though, to do him justice, he lay awake many an hour without stirring, unwilling to awaken his kind nurse. He loved his daughter more now, perhaps, than ever he had done since her childhood.

"She walks into the room as silently as a sunbeam," Dobbin thought as he saw her passing in and out from her father's room, a cheerful sweetness lighting up her face as she moved to and fro, graceful and noiseless. A secret feud of some years' standing was thus healed; touched by her love and goodness, the old man forgot all his grief against her, and wrongs which he and his wife had often debated: how she had only thought of the child, and how absurdly she took on when George was removed from her.

One night when she stole into his room, she found him awake.

"Oh, Emmy, I've been thinking we were very unkind and unjust to you," he said, and put out his cold and feeble hand to her. She knelt down and prayed by his bedside. When our turn comes, friend, may we have such company in our prayers!

Perhaps his life may have passed before him – his early hopeful struggles, his manly successes, his downfall and his present helplessness – a life of defeat and disappointment, and the end here! That must be a strange feeling, when a day comes and we say, "Tomorrow, success or failure won't matter, and the sun will rise, and all the myriads of mankind will go to their work or pleasure as usual; but I shall be out of the turmoil."

So there came one sunrise when all the world got up and set about its works and pleasures, with the exception of old John Sedley, who was not to fight fortune any more, but to take up a quiet residence in the churchyard beside his wife.

Major Dobbin, Jos, and Georgy followed his remains to the grave. Afterwards, Jos returned to the Star and Garter at Richmond; he did not care to remain in the house. But Emmy stayed and did her duty as usual. She was solemn rather than sorrowful. She prayed that her own end might be as calm and painless, and thought with trust of the words which she had heard from her father during his illness, showing his faith and his future hope.

Better to end defeated, after all. Suppose you are particularly rich and say on that last day, "I am very rich; I am well known; I have lived all my life in the best society, and thank Heaven, come of a most respectable family. I don't owe any man a shilling: I leave my daughters with ten thousand pounds apiece; I bequeath my house and belongings, with a handsome jointure, to my widow; and my landed property, money and my cellar of well-selected wine, to my son. I leave twenty pound a year to my valet; and I defy any man to say anything against my character."

Or suppose, on the other hand, you say, "I am a poor blighted, disappointed fellow. I was not endowed with brains or good fortune, and confess that I have committed a hundred mistakes. I have forgotten my duty many a time. I can't pay what I owe. On my last bed I lie utterly helpless and humble, and I pray forgiveness and throw myself at the feet of the Divine Mercy."

Which of these two speeches, think you, would be the best oration for your own funeral? Old Sedley made the latter; and in that humble frame of mind, life and vanity sank away from under him.

"You see," said old Osborne to George, "what comes of merit, and industry, and that. Look at your poor Grandfather Sedley and his failure. And yet he was a better man than I was twenty years ago – a better man by ten thousand pound."

When old Osborne first heard from his friend Colonel Buckler how distinguished an officer Major Dobbin was, he showed a great deal of scornful incredulity and expressed his surprise that such a feller as that should possess either brains or reputation. But he heard of the Major's fame from others too; and when his name appeared in the lists of one or two grand parties of the nobility, this had a great effect upon the old aristocrat of Russell Square.

The Major's position as guardian to Georgy meant that meetings between the two gentlemen were inevitable. At one of these, old Osborne, looking into the Major's accounts with his ward and the boy's mother, got a hint which staggered him very much, and at once pained and pleased him, that it was William who had largely supplied the fund upon which the poor widow and the child had subsisted.

When pressed upon the point, Dobbin blushed and stammered, and finally confessed.

"The marriage was very much my doing," he said. "I thought my poor friend had gone so far that retreat from his engagement would have been dishonour to him and death to Mrs. Osborne. When she was widowed I could do no less than give what money I could spare to maintain her."

"Major D.," Mr. Osborne said, looking hard at him and turning red too, "you did me a great injury; but you are an honest feller. There's my hand, sir;" and the pair shook hands, with great confusion on Major Dobbin's part.

He strove to soften the old man and reconcile him towards his son's memory. "He was such a noble fellow," he said, "that all of us loved him, and would have done anything for him. I, as a young man, was more pleased to be seen in his company than in that of the Commander-in-Chief. I never saw his equal for pluck and daring;" and Dobbin told the old father as many stories as he could remember about the gallantry and achievements of his son. "And Georgy is so like him," the Major added.

"He's so like him that he makes me tremble sometimes," the grandfather said.

On one or two evenings the Major came to dine with Mr. Osborne, and as the two sat together after dinner, all their talk was about the departed hero. The father boasted about him, glorifying himself in recounting his son's deeds, but his mood was at any

rate more charitable than previously; and the Major was pleased at these signs of good-will.

On the next day at breakfast, when Miss Osborne ventured to make some slighting remark about the Major, her father interrupted her.

“You’d have been glad enough to git him for yourself, Miss O. But them grapes are sour. Ha! ha! Major William is a fine feller.”

“That he is, Grandpapa,” said Georgy approvingly; and going up to the old gentleman, he kissed him. He told the story at night to his mother, who fully agreed.

“Indeed he is,” she said. “Your dear father always said so. He is one of the best and most upright of men.”

Dobbin happened to drop in very soon after this conversation, and the young scapegrace told him, “I say, Dob, there’s such an uncommon nice girl wants to marry you. She’s plenty of tin; and she scolds the servants from morning till night.”

“Who is it?” asked Dobbin.

“It’s Aunt O.,” the boy answered. “Grandpapa said so. I say, Dob, how prime it would be to have you for my uncle.”

It was pretty clear that old Osborne’s mind was changing. He asked George about his uncle Joseph sometimes, and laughed at the boy’s imitation of the way in which Jos said “God-bless-my-soul” and gobbled his soup.

Then he said, “It’s not respectful, sir to be imitating your relations. Miss O., when you go out adriving today, leave my card for Mr. Joseph Sedley, do you hear?”

The card was exchanged, and Jos and the Major were asked to dinner – the most splendid and stupid dinner that ever Mr. Osborne gave. Every inch of the family plate was exhibited, and the best company were invited. Mr. Sedley took Miss O. in to dinner, and she was very gracious to him; whereas she hardly spoke to the Major. Jos said solemnly it was the best turtle soup he had ever tasted in his life, and asked Mr. Osborne where he got his Madeira.

“It is some of Sedley’s wine,” whispered the butler to his master.

“I’ve had it a long time, and paid a good figure for it, too,” Mr. Osborne said aloud to his guest.

More than once he asked the Major about Mrs. George Osborne – a theme on which the Major was very eloquent. He told Mr. Osborne of her sufferings – of her passionate attachment to her husband, whose memory she worshipped still – of the tender and dutiful manner in which she had supported her parents, and given up her boy.

“You don’t know what she endured, sir,” said honest Dobbin with a tremor in his voice, “and I hope you will be reconciled to her. If she took your son away from you, she gave her son to you; and however much you loved your George, depend on it, she loved hers ten times more.”

“By God, you are a good feller, sir,” Mr. Osborne said. It had never struck him that the widow would feel any pain at parting from the boy. A reconciliation was announced, and Amelia’s heart began to beat at the notion of meeting George’s father.

However, the meeting was destined never to take place. Old Sedley’s lingering illness intervened. That catastrophe may have worked upon Mr. Osborne. He was much shaken of late, and aged. He had sent for his lawyers, and probably changed his will.

One day when he should have come down to breakfast, his servant went into his dressing-room and found him lying in a fit. Miss Osborne was told; the doctors were

sent for; Georgy stayed away from school. Osborne partially regained awareness, but never could speak again, although he tried; and in four days he died.

The doctors went down, and the undertaker's men went up the stairs, and all the shutters were closed. Bullock rushed from the City in a hurry. "How much money had he left to that boy? Not half, surely? Surely share and share alike between the three?" It was an agitating moment.

What was it that poor old man had tried in vain to say? I hope it was that he wanted to see Amelia and be reconciled before he left the world: for his will showed that the hatred had gone out of his heart.

They found in his dressing-gown pocket the letter which George had written him from Waterloo. When the will was opened, it was seen that half the property was left to young George, and the remainder between the two sisters. Mr. Bullock was to continue the affairs of the commercial house as he thought fit. An annuity of five hundred pounds was left to the "the widow of my beloved son, George Osborne," who was to resume the guardianship of the boy.

Major William Dobbin was appointed executor; "as out of his kindness, and with his own private funds, he maintained my grandson and my son's widow, when they were otherwise without means of support. I hereby thank him heartily, and beseech him to accept a sum sufficient to purchase his commission as a Lieutenant-Colonel, or to be disposed of in any way he may think fit."

When Amelia heard that her father-in-law was reconciled to her, her heart melted, and she was grateful. But when she heard how Georgy was restored to her, and knew how it was William's bounty that had supported her in poverty – then she sank on her knees, and prayed for blessings on that constant and kind heart.

And gratitude was all that she had to pay back for such admirable devotion and benefits – only gratitude! If she thought of any other return, the image of George stood up out of the grave and said, "You are mine, and mine only, now and forever."

William knew her feelings: had he not passed his whole life in divining them?

When Mr. Osborne's will became public, it was edifying to remark how Mrs. George Osborne rose in people's estimation. Jos's servants, who used to question her humble orders, never thought of it now. The cook forgot to sneer at her shabby gowns; the others no longer grumbled at the sound of her bell. The coachman drove her with alacrity. Jos's friends suddenly became interested about her, and cards of condolence multiplied on her hall table.

Jos himself, who had looked on her as a good-natured harmless pauper, to whom it was his duty to give food and shelter, paid her and her rich little son the greatest respect. He was anxious that she should have amusement after her troubles, "poor dear girl," and began to ask her how she would like to spend the day.

As guardian to Georgy, Amelia begged Miss Osborne to live in the Russell Square house as long as she chose; but that lady, with thanks, declared that she could never remain in that melancholy place, and departed in mourning to Cheltenham. Amelia also declined to occupy the gloomy old mansion. The house was dismantled; the rich furniture and mirrors were packed away, the carpets were rolled up, the small library was stowed into two wine-chests, and the whole paraphernalia rolled away in several enormous vans to the Pantehnicon, where they were to lie until Georgy was twenty-one.

One day Emmy and George went to visit the deserted mansion, which she had not entered since she was a girl. They went into the great blank rooms, the walls of which bore the marks where pictures had hung. Then they went up the great stone

staircases into the upper apartments, and then higher still into George's own room, the boy clinging by her side.

She knew that it had been his father's room as well as his own, and went to one of the windows. She looked out over the trees of Russell Square to the old house in which she herself was born, and where she had passed so many happy days. They all came back to her, the pleasant holidays, the kind faces, the joyful past times, and the long trials that had since cast her down. She thought of these and of the man who had been her constant protector, her sole benefactor, and generous friend.

She was very silent as they drove back to Richmond, where they had taken a temporary house: where the smiling lawyers used to come bustling over to see her, and where of course there was a room too for Major Dobbin, who rode over frequently to do business on behalf of his little ward. Georgy was removed from Mr. Veal's on an unlimited holiday.

Mrs. Frederick Bullock, although robbed of half of the sum which she had expected from her father, nevertheless showed her charitableness by driving to Amelia's house in her gilded chariot, with her flaccid children. Amelia was reading a book in the garden; Jos was in an arbour, and the Major was playing leapfrog with Georgy, who jumped over him and bounded into the little Bullocks, with immense black bows in their hats, who accompanied their mourning mamma.

"He is just the age for Rosa," the fond mother thought, and glanced towards that dear child, an unwholesome little miss of seven years of age.

"Rosa, kiss your dear cousin," Mrs. Bullock said. "Don't you know me, George? I am your aunt."

"I know you," George said; "but I don't like kissing, please," and he retreated.

"Take me to your dear mamma, you droll child," Mrs. Frederick said. Those ladies thus met after an absence of fifteen years. During Emmy's poverty the other had never thought of coming to see her, but now that she was prosperous, her sister-in-law came as a matter of course.

So did many more. Our old friend, Miss Swartz, with her husband, came over from Hampton Court, as impetuously fond of Amelia as ever. Miss Swartz would have liked her always if she had seen her. But in London one has not the time to go and seek one's friends; if they drop out of the rank they disappear, and we march on without them. Who is ever missed in Vanity Fair?

In a word, Emmy soon found herself in the centre of a very genteel circle of ladies; most related to a Peer, some very well informed, and frequenting the Royal Institution; others severe and Evangelical. Emmy, it must be owned, found herself entirely at a loss in the midst of their talk. She sat dumb amongst the ladies in the grand drawing-room, looking out upon velvet lawns and glistening hot-houses.

"She seems good-natured but insipid," said Mrs. Rowdy.

"She is dreadfully ignorant," said Mrs. Glowry with a sad shake of the head.

"She is my brother's widow, my dear friends," Mrs. Frederick replied, "and we should give her every instruction on entering into the world."

"That poor dear Mrs. Bullock," said Rowdy, as they drove away; "she is always scheming. The way in which she coaxes that boy and makes him sit by that blear-eyed little Rosa is perfectly ridiculous."

But this sort of society was too cruelly genteel for Emmy, and all jumped for joy when a foreign tour was proposed.

CHAPTER 62

Am Rhein

One fine morning a few weeks later, the *Batavier* steamboat left the Tower of London laden with English fugitives. The benches and gangways were crowded with rosy children and bustling nursemaids; ladies in the prettiest bonnets and summer dresses; gentlemen in linen-jackets; and stout, trim old veterans. There were jaunty young Cambridge students travelling with their tutor; there were Irish gentlemen with the most dashing whiskers, talking about horses incessantly, and prodigiously polite to the young ladies on board; there was old Methuselah beside his new young wife, with Captain Papillon of the Guards holding her parasol and guide-books; there was young May carrying off his bride who had been at school with his grandmother.

There was the great Bareacres family that sat by themselves, stared at everybody, and spoke to no-one. Their carriages, emblazoned with coronets, were on the foredeck, locked in with a dozen more vehicles. It was difficult to pass in and out amongst them; and the poor inmates of the fore-cabin had scarcely any space to move. These consisted of a few magnificently dressed gentlemen from Houndsditch; several honest fellows with portfolios, who began sketching within half an hour; and some French maids who were ill before the boat had passed Greenwich. A groom or two lounged around the horse-boxes and talked about the races.

Amongst these vehicles was a very neat, handsome travelling carriage.

“Whose is that?” asked one gentleman, and was told that it belonged to a Nabob from Calcutta, who was enormously rich. At this moment a young gentleman, who had been warned off the bridge, dropped from there to the roof of a carriage, clambered over the other roofs until he reached this travelling carriage, and descended through the window into it.

The young gentleman was our friend George Osborne. Uncle Jos and his mamma were on the quarter-deck with Dobbin, and they were about to make a summer tour.

Jos was seated at that moment on deck, nearly opposite the Earl of Bareacres and his family, whose proceedings absorbed him. Both the noble couple looked rather younger than in the eventful year 1815, when Jos remembered seeing them at Brussels. Lady Bareacres’ hair, which was then dark, was now a beautiful auburn, whereas Lord Bareacres’ whiskers, formerly red, were a rich black with purple and green reflections in the light. The presence of a Lord fascinated Jos, and he could look at nothing else.

“Those people seem to interest you a good deal,” said Dobbin, laughing. Amelia laughed too. She was dressed in mourning, but the little bustle of the journey excited her, and she looked particularly happy.

“What a heavenly day!” she said and added, with great originality, “I hope we shall have a calm passage.”

Jos waved his hand. “If you had made the voyages we have,” he said, “you wouldn’t care about the weather.” But nevertheless, he passed the night direfully sick in his carriage, where his servant tended him with brandy-and-water.

In due time this happy party landed at Rotterdam, and were transported by steamer to Cologne. Here Jos was gratified to see his arrival announced in the Cologne newspapers. He had his court dress with him; he had insisted that Dobbin should bring his regimental uniform, and announced that he intended to be presented

at some foreign courts, and pay his respects to the Sovereigns of the countries which he honoured with a visit.

Wherever the party stopped, Mr. Jos left his own card and the Major's with the English consul; it was with great difficulty that he could be restrained from putting on his cocked hat and tights to do so. He kept a journal of his voyage and noted elaborately the defects or excellences of the various inns at which he put up, and of the wines and dishes there.

As for Emmy, she was very happy and pleased. Dobbin used to carry about her stool and sketch-book, and admired her drawings as they had never been admired before. She sat upon steamers' decks and drew crags and castles, or she mounted upon donkeys and ascended to ancient robber-towers, with Georgy and Dobbin. She laughed, and the Major did too, at his droll figure on donkey-back, with his long legs touching the ground. He was the party's interpreter, having a good military knowledge of the German language. Over a few weeks, Georgy made prodigious advances in German, and could talk to waiters in a way that charmed his mother and amused his guardian.

Mr. Jos did not join in their afternoon excursions. He slept a good deal after dinner, or basked in the inn-gardens. Pleasant Rhine gardens! Fair scenes of peace and sunshine – noble purple mountains, reflected in the magnificent stream – who that has ever seen you, does not have a grateful memory of your beauty? To lay down the pen and think of Rhineland makes one happy. On a summer evening, the cows are trooping down from the hills, their bells tinkling, to the old town, with its moats, spires, and chestnut-trees. Long blue shadows stretch over the grass, and the sky and the river flame in crimson and gold. The sun sinks behind the great castle-crested mountains; the river grows darker and darker. Lights quiver from the windows in the old ramparts, and twinkle peacefully in the villages under the hills.

So Jos used to sleep a good deal with his bandanna over his face, and read all the English news, and his friends did not much miss him. Yes, they were very happy. They went to the opera often – to those unassuming, dear old operas in the German towns. Here Emmy was introduced for the first time to the wonders of Mozart. The Major was musical, but his chief pleasure in these operas was in watching Emmy's rapture. A new world of love and beauty broke upon her; how could she be indifferent when she heard Mozart?

She wondered when she prayed whether it was not wicked to feel so much delight at music? The Major, whom she consulted, said that for his part, every beauty of art or nature made him grateful, and that the pleasure to be had in fine music or a beautiful landscape or picture, was something for which we might thank Heaven.

I like to dwell upon this period of Amelia's life and to think that she was cheerful and happy. You see, she has not had too much of that sort of existence yet, nor has she had the chance to educate her tastes or her intelligence. She has been domineered over by vulgar intellects. It is the lot of many a woman.

And it must be remembered that this poor lady had never met a gentleman in her life until this present moment. Perhaps these are rarer people than we think. Which of us can point out many such – men who are generous and constant; whose lack of meanness makes them simple; who have an honest manly sympathy for great and small alike? We all know a hundred whose coats are very well made, and a score who have excellent manners, and one or two happy beings who are in the inner circles, the very bull's-eye of fashion; but how many are gentlemen?

The Major was one, without any doubt. He had very long legs, a yellow face, and a slight lisp. But his thoughts were just, his life was honest and pure, and his heart warm and humble. He certainly had very large hands and feet, which the two George Osbornes used to laugh at; and their jeers perhaps led poor little Emmy astray as to his worth. But have we not all been misled about our heroes and changed our opinions? Emmy, in this happy time, found that hers underwent a very great change about the merits of the Major.

Perhaps it was the happiest time of both their lives, indeed, if they did but know it. At all events, this couple were very decently contented. Georgy was always present; in their walks he would be on ahead, and up a tower-stair or a tree, whilst the soberer couple were below, the Major smoking his cigar, whilst Emmy sketched. It was on this very tour that I had the pleasure to make their acquaintance.

It was at the little town of Pumpernickel that I first saw Colonel Dobbin and his party. They had arrived at the Erbprinz Hotel, the best in town, and were dining there. Everybody remarked the majesty of Jos and the knowing way in which he ate his dinner. The little boy, too, had a great appetite, and consumed pudding, roast fowls, and sweetmeats, with a gallantry that did honour to his nation. The lady in black, the boy's mamma, laughed and blushed, and looked exceedingly pleased and shy. The Major – or Colonel, as he became very soon afterwards – joked gravely with the boy, pointing out dishes which he hadn't tried.

They went on to the Grand Theatre, where Madame Devrient, then in the bloom of her beauty and genius, sang in the wonderful opera of *Fidelio*. From our places in the stalls we could see our four friends from the hotel, and I could not help noticing the effect which the magnificent, soaring music produced upon Mrs. Osborne; her face wore an expression of wonder and delight.

The next day there was another performance of Beethoven, *Die Schlacht bei Vittoria*. After drums, trumpets, thunders of artillery, and groans of the dying, at last, in a grand triumphal swell, comes "God Save the King."

At the burst of that beloved and well-known music, every English person in the house – we young fellows in the stalls, the fat gentleman and the long Major, and the lady with the little boy, stood bolt upright. As for Lord Tapeworm, the Charge d'Affaires, he rose up in his box and bowed and simpered, as if he represented the whole empire. Tapeworm was nephew of old Marshall Tiptoff, who had once been Colonel of the regiment in which Major Dobbin served.

Tapeworm must have met Dobbin at the Marshall's house, for he condescended to come over from his own box and publicly shook hands with him.

"Have I the honour of addressing myself to Mrs. Dobbin?" he asked with an insinuating grin.

Georgy burst out laughing. Emmy and the Major blushed.

"This lady is Mrs. George Osborne," said the Major, "and this is her brother, Mr. Sedley, a distinguished officer of the Bengal Civil Service."

My lord gave Jos the most fascinating smile. "Are you going to stop in Pumpernickel?" he said. "It is a dull place, but we would try and make it agreeable to you. I shall do myself the honour of calling upon you tomorrow at your inn." And he went away with a glance which he thought must finish Mrs. Osborne completely.

After the performance, the young fellows lounged about the lobbies, and saw the society leave. Tapeworm walked off enveloped in his cloak, looking as much as possible like Don Juan. The Prime Minister's lady had just squeezed herself into her sedan, when the English group came out, the boy yawning, the Major carefully

keeping the shawl over Mrs. Osborne's head, and Mr. Sedley looking grand. We took off our hats to them, and the lady gave us a little smile and a curtsy.

The carriage from the inn was waiting for them; but the fat man said he would walk and smoke his cigar on his way home, so the other three went without him.

We walked with the stout gentleman and talked about the advantages of the place. It was very agreeable; there were shooting-parties, balls and entertainments; the society was good; the theatre excellent; and the living cheap.

"And our Minister seems a most affable person," our new friend said. "With a good medical man, I can fancy the place to be most eligible. Good-night, gentlemen." And Jos creaked up the stairs. We rather hoped that nice-looking woman would be induced to stay some time in the town.

CHAPTER 63

In Which We Meet an Old Acquaintance

Lord Tapeworm's politeness impressed Mr. Sedley; and the next morning, at breakfast, he declared that Pumpnickel was the pleasantest little place he had visited on their tour. Dobbin laughed when he heard Jos talk about Tapeworm Castle, and learned that he had already been consulting his Peerage. When the diplomat called on the party, Jos received him with profuse honours. There was an entertainment of cold meats, jellies, and other delicacies, brought in upon trays, of which Mr. Jos insisted that his noble guest should partake.

Tapeworm, so long as he could have an opportunity of admiring the bright eyes of Mrs. Osborne, was pleased to accept an invitation to stay. He chatted to Mr. Sedley about India and the dancing-girls there; asked Amelia about that beautiful boy who had been with her; and tried to fascinate Dobbin by talking of the late war and the exploits of the Duke of Pumpnickel.

Lord Tapeworm held the happy belief that almost every woman he looked at was in love with him. He left Emmy, persuaded that she was slain by his attractions, and went home to write a pretty note to her. She was not fascinated, only puzzled by his grinning, his simpering, his scented handkerchief, and his high-heeled lacquered boots. She did not understand one-half the compliments he paid; she had never met a professional ladies' man as yet, and looked upon him as something curious rather than pleasant.

Jos, on the contrary, was delighted. "How very affable his Lordship is," he said; "How very kind to say he would send his medical man! We should pay our respects at Court as soon as possible."

When Tapeworm's doctor came, he speedily convinced Jos that the Pumpnickel mineral springs and his own particular treatment would restore him to youth and slimness. Jos, therefore, proposed to spend the autumn in this delightful place. And punctual to his word, on the next day the Charge d'Affaires presented Jos and the Major to Victor Aurelius XVII.

They were invited to dinner at Court, and afterwards the politest ladies of the town instantly called upon Mrs. Osborne. As not one of these was under the rank of a Baroness, Jos's delight was beyond expression.

Emmy was presented to the noble family. Since mourning is not admitted in Court on certain days, she appeared in a pink dress with a diamond ornament, given to her by her brother. She looked so pretty that the Duke and Court (to say nothing of the Major) all admired her excessively. In this dress she walked a Polonaise with Major Dobbin, while Mr. Jos had the honour of leading out the Countess of Schluselback, an old lady with a hump back, but related to half the royal houses of Germany.

Pumpnickel stands in a happy valley through which sparkles the stream of the Pump. In some places the river is big enough to support a ferry-boat, in others to turn a mill; in Pumpnickel itself, the great and renowned Victor Aurelius XIV built a magnificent bridge, on which his own statue rises, surrounded by water-nymphs and with its foot on the neck of a prostrate Turk. The statue smiles and points in the direction of the Aurelius Platz, where the Prince began to erect a new palace that would have been the wonder of his age if he had only had the money to complete it.

The gardens (which are now rather faded) copied those of Versailles. Amidst the terraces and groves there are some huge waterworks still, which spout and froth stupendously, and which the people of the neighbourhood admire beyond expression, when they come to the fetes with which the happy little nation still celebrates the birthdays of its princes.

Then from all the towns of the Duchy, which stretches for nearly ten miles – from all the little villages, farms and mills along the Pump, come troops of people in red petticoats and velvet head-dresses, or three-cornered hats, flocking to the festivities. Then the theatre is open for nothing, the fountains begin to play; the delighted people are permitted to march through room after room of the Grand Ducal palace and admire the slippery floor, the rich hangings, and the spittoons at the doors of the innumerable chambers.

The theatre of Pumpnickel is famous in that part of Germany. It languished a little when the present Duke insisted upon having his own operas played there, and it is said, one day, in a fury, broke a bassoon on the head of the Chapel Master, who was conducting too slow; but the Prince executes his music in private now.

When there are balls at Pumpnickel, though there may be four hundred people at supper, there is a servant in scarlet and lace to attend upon every four, and everyone is served on silver. There are festivals and entertainments going on continually, and the Duke has his chamberlains, and the Duchess her ladies of honour, just like more potent potentates.

The Constitution is or was a moderate despotism, tempered by a Chamber that might or might not be elected. The army consisted of a magnificent band that also did duty on the stage; besides the band, there was a rich and numerous staff of officers, and a few men.

That there were feuds in the place, no one can deny. Politics ran very high at Pumpnickel, and factions – supporting either the English or the French – were very bitter. Everybody in the town was ranged in one or other of these factions. We had on our English side the Home Minister, the Master of the Horse, the Duke's Private Secretary, and the Prince's Tutor; whereas of the French party were the Foreign Minister, the Commander-in-Chief's Lady, and the Hof-Marschall and his wife. Their headquarters were at the other inn of the town; and though, of course, these gentlemen were obliged to be civil in public, yet they cut at each other with epigrams as sharp as razors.

Emmy had a French teacher, who complimented her upon the purity of her accent and her ease of learning; the fact is she had learned the grammar long ago, so as to be able to teach it to George. She had singing lessons, and performed with such a true voice that the Major's windows were always open to hear the lesson. Some of the German ladies, who are very sentimental, fell in love with her. These are trivial details, but they relate to happy times. The Major made himself George's tutor and read Caesar and mathematics with him, and they had a German master and rode beside Emmy's carriage. She drove about with one of her dear German friends, and Jos asleep on the back-seat.

Jos was becoming very sweet upon the Grafinn Fanny de Butterbrod, a tender-hearted and unassuming young creature, a Countess, but with scarcely ten pounds per year. Fanny declared that to be Amelia's sister was the greatest delight possible, and Jos might have put the question – when events occurred.

A grand festival took place upon the marriage of the Prince of Pumpnickel with the lovely Princess Amelia of Humbourg Schlippenschloppen. Its magnificence was

unsurpassed. All the neighbouring Princes, Princesses, and Grandees were invited to the feast.

Garlands and triumphal arches were hung across the road to welcome the young bride. The great Saint Michael's Fountain ran with uncommonly sour wine, while that in the Artillery Place frothed with beer. Poles were put up in the park and gardens for the happy peasantry to climb, carrying off prizes of watches, silver forks and sausages hung with pink ribbon at the top. Georgy got a sausage, having swarmed up the pole to the delight of the spectators, and gave it to a peasant who was blubbering because he had just failed in his own attempt.

Crowds of foreigners arrived, and of English, of course. Besides the Court balls, public balls were given at the Town Hall, where there was a room for gaming, for the week of the festivities only; although the inhabitants of the town were not allowed to play.

That little scapegrace Georgy Osborne came eagerly to this entertainment, accompanied by Jos's courier, and hankered round the tables where the croupiers and the punters were at work. Women were playing, some of them masked.

A woman with light hair, in a low dress by no means so fresh as it had been, and with a black mask on, was seated at one of the roulette-tables with a couple of florins. As the croupier called out the colour and number, she ventured her money with great care.

But in spite of her care she guessed wrong; and the last two florins followed each other under the croupier's rake. She gave a sigh, and shrugged her shoulders, which were already too much out of her gown. Then, looking round, she saw Georgy's honest face.

She looked hard at him, and said, "Monsieur n'est pas joueur?"

"Non, Madame," said the boy; but she must have recognised his accent, for she answered in English with a slight foreign tone.

"You have never played – will you do me a littl' favour?"

"What is it?" said Georgy, blushing.

"Play this for me, if you please; put it on any number." And she took from her bosom a purse, and out of it a gold piece, the only coin there. She put it into George's hand. The boy laughed and did as he was bid.

The number came up.

"Thank you," said she, pulling the money towards her, "thank you. What is your name?"

"My name's Osborne," said Georgy, and he was fingering in his own pockets for money, when the Major, in his uniform, and Jos, from the Court ball, made their appearance. The Major instantly went up and pulled him briskly away from the place of temptation. Jos, however, looked on with much interest at the game, standing close by the lady in the mask.

"Jos," the Major said, "are you coming with George and me?"

"I'll stay and go home later," Jos said. So Dobbin left him and walked home with Georgy.

"Did you play?" asked the Major when they were outside.

"No."

"Give me your word of honour as a gentleman that you never will."

"Why?" said the boy; "it seems very good fun." And, in a very eloquent and impressive manner, the Major showed him why he shouldn't, and would have

enforced his lessons by the example of Georgy's own father, if it would not have reflected on the other's memory.

Jos, however, remained behind at the play-table. He was no gambler, but not averse to the little excitement of the sport now and then, and he had some Napoleons chinking in his embroidered pockets. He put one down over the fair shoulder of the little gambler before him. She moved to make room for him by her side.

"Come and give me good luck," she said, still in a foreign accent. Jos sat down.

"Do you play much?" the foreign mask said.

"I put down a Nap or two," said Jos with a superb air, flinging down a gold piece.

"Yes; a nap after dinner," said the mask archly. "You do not play to win. No more do I. I play to forget, but I cannot. I cannot forget old times, monsieur. Your little nephew is the image of his father; and you – you are not changed – yet everybody changes, everybody forgets; nobody has any heart."

"Good God, who is it?" asked Jos in a flutter.

"Can't you guess, Joseph Sedley?" said the little woman in a sad voice, and undoing her mask, she looked at him. "You have forgotten me."

"Good heavens! Mrs. Crawley!" gasped Jos.

"Rebecca," said the other, putting her hand on his; but she followed the game still, all the time she was looking at him.

"I am staying at the Elephant," she continued. "Ask for Madame de Raudon. I saw my dear Amelia today; how pretty she looked, and how happy! So do you! Everybody but me, who am wretched." And she moved her money from the red to the black, as if by a chance movement of her hand, while she was wiping her eyes with a torn handkerchief.

The red came up again, and she lost all that stake.

"Come away," she said. "Come with me a little – we are old friends, are we not, dear Mr. Sedley?"

And they went out into the moonlight together.

CHAPTER 64

A Vagabond Chapter

We must pass over a part of Mrs. Rebecca Crawley's biography with that delicacy which the world demands – the moral world, that has no particular objection to vice, but hates hearing it named. There are things we know perfectly well in Vanity Fair, though we never speak of them: and a polite public will no more read an authentic description of vice than a truly refined English female will permit the word *breeches* to be said in her hearing. And yet, madam, both are walking the world before our faces every day. If you were to blush every time they went by, what complexions you would have! It is only when their naughty names are called out that you show any outrage.

I have submitted to this fashion all through this story, only hinting at the existence of wickedness in a light, easy, and agreeable manner, so that nobody's fine feelings may be offended. I defy anyone to say that our Becky has not been presented in a perfectly genteel and inoffensive way. In describing this Siren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling, I modestly ask – have I once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tail above water? No! Those who wish may peep down under the waves and see it writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy; but above the waterline, everything has been decorous.

When, however, the Sirens disappear and dive below, down among the dead men, the water grows cloudy, and it is pointless to peer into it. They look pretty enough when they sit on a rock, twanging their harps and combing their hair; but when they sink into the sea, depend on it, those mermaids are up to no good, and we had best not examine them feasting on their wretched pickled victims. And so, when Becky is out of the way, be sure that the less that is said about her doings the better.

If we were to give a full account of her life after the Curzon Street catastrophe, there might be some reason to say this book was improper. The actions of very vain, heartless people are often improper; and what are those of a woman without faith – or love – or character? And I am inclined to think that there was a period in Mrs. Becky's life when she was seized, not by remorse, but by a kind of despair, neglected her person and did not even care for her reputation.

This degradation did not take place all at once. It was brought about by degrees, and after many struggles to keep up – as a man who goes overboard hangs on to a spar whilst any hope is left.

She lingered about London whilst her husband was making preparations for his departure to Coventry Island, and it is believed she tried to see her brother-in-law, Sir Pitt Crawley, and to work upon his feelings.

Probably Lady Jane interposed. I have heard that she quite astonished her husband by her spirit and her determination to disown Mrs. Becky. She invited Rawdon to stay in Gaunt Street until his departure for Coventry Island, knowing that with him for a guard Mrs. Becky would not try to come; and she looked at all the letters which arrived for Sir Pitt, lest he and his sister-in-law should be corresponding. So after one or two attempts Rebecca consented to Pitt's demand that any correspondence should be carried on by their lawyers.

In fact, Pitt's mind had been poisoned against her. Wenham had told him such a biography of Mrs. Becky as had astonished him: who her father was; in what year her

mother danced at the opera; her previous history, and her conduct during her married life. Becky was left with a sad sad reputation in his esteem.

The income of the Governor of Coventry Island is not large. Some was set aside by Rawdon for the payment of debts, and he could not spare his wife more than three hundred pounds a year, which he proposed to pay to her on condition that she would never trouble him. It was in everyone's interest to get her out of the country, and hush up a most disagreeable affair.

She was probably so much occupied in arranging this business with her husband's lawyers that she forgot to take any step whatever about her son, little Rawdon, and did not once propose to go and see him. That young gentleman was consigned to the guardianship of his aunt and uncle; he had always been very fond of his aunt Jane. His mamma wrote him a neat letter from Boulogne, in which she told him to mind his books, and said she was going to take a Continental tour, and would write to him again.

But she never did for a year, and not, indeed, until Sir Pitt's only boy, always sickly, died of whooping-cough and measles. Then Rawdon's mamma wrote the most affectionate letter to her darling son, who was made heir of Queen's Crawley by this accident.

Rawdon Crawley, then grown a tall, fine lad, blushed when he got the letter. "Oh, Aunt Jane, *you* are my mother!" he said; "and not – not that one." However, he wrote back a kind and respectful letter to Mrs. Rebecca, then living at a boarding-house in Florence. But we are advancing matters.

Our darling Becky's first flight was not very far. She perched upon the French coast at Boulogne, and there lived in rather a genteel, widowed manner, with a maid and a couple of rooms at an hotel. She entertained her neighbours with stories of her brother, Sir Pitt, and her great London acquaintance, talking that easy, fashionable slip-slop which so impresses certain folks of small breeding. She passed with them for a person of importance; she gave little tea-parties, and shared in the innocent amusements of sea-bathing, jaunts in open carriages, strolls on the sands, and visits to the play. She was always affable, easy, and good-natured – with men especially.

From people coming abroad at the end of the London season, Becky learnt the opinion of London society about her conduct. One day she met Lady Partlet and her daughters as she was walking on Boulogne pier. Lady Partlet marshalled all her daughters round her with a sweep of her parasol and retreated, darting savage glances at poor little Becky.

On another day the packet ship came in. It had been blowing fresh, and it always amused Becky to see the woe-begone faces of the people emerging from the boat. Lady Slingstone happened to be on board this day. She had been exceedingly ill, and could scarcely walk up the plank from the ship to the pier. But all her energies rallied the instant she saw Becky smiling roguishly under a pink bonnet. Giving her a glance of shrivelling scorn, she walked into the Custom House quite unsupported. Becky laughed: but I don't think she liked it. She felt she was quite alone, and the far-off shining cliffs of England were impassable to her.

The behaviour of the men had undergone a change too. Grinstone laughed in her face with a familiarity that was not pleasant. Little Bob Suckling, who three months before would walk a mile in the rain to see her, was talking to a friend one day upon the jetty, as Becky took her stroll there. He nodded to her without raising his hat, and continued his conversation. Tom Raikes tried to walk into her sitting-room at the inn

with a cigar in his mouth, but she closed the door upon him. She began to feel that she was very lonely indeed.

“If *he*’d been here,” she said, “those cowards would never have dared to insult me.” She thought about “him” with great sadness and perhaps longing – about his honest, stupid, constant kindness and fidelity; his never-ceasing obedience; his good humour; his bravery. Very likely she cried, and put on a little extra rouge, when she came down to dinner.

She rouged regularly now; – and her maid got Cognac for her.

Perhaps the insults of the men were not, however, so intolerable as the sympathy of certain women. Mrs. Crackenbury and Mrs. Washington White passed through Boulogne in a party on their way to Switzerland. They did not avoid her. They giggled, cackled, condoled, consoled and patronized her until they drove her almost wild with rage. To be patronized by *them*! she thought, as they went away simpering.

It was after this visit that Becky, who had paid her weekly bills, who had made herself agreeable to everybody in the house, who smiled at the landlady and called the waiters “monsieur,” that Becky, we say, received a notice to quit from the landlord. He had been told by someone that she was an unfit person to have at his hotel, and that other English ladies would not sit down with her. She was forced to fly into lodgings of wearisome dullness and solitude.

Still she held up, and tried to make a character for herself and conquer scandal. She went to church very regularly and sang louder than anybody there. She took up the cause of the widows of shipwrecked fishermen, and gave drawings for the Quashyboo Mission; she did everything that was respectable. She saw people avoiding her, and still laboriously smiled upon them; you never could suppose from her face what pangs of humiliation she might be enduring inwardly.

People were divided about her. Some said that she was the criminal in the matter, while others vowed that she was innocent and that her odious husband was in fault. She won over a good many by bursting into tears about her boy and exhibiting the most frantic grief when his name was mentioned.

She gained good Mrs. Alderney’s heart in that way, by weeping when Master Alderney came from school to pass his holidays with his mother.

“He and her Rawdon were the same age, and so alike,” Becky said in a voice choking with agony; whereas there was four years’ difference between the boys’ ages, and no more likeness between them than between you and me. Wenham, who was on his way to Kissingen to join Lord Steyne, enlightened Mrs. Alderney, and told her how young Rawdon’s mamma notoriously hated him and never saw him; how he was thirteen and dark, while little Alderney was only nine, and fair – and in a word, caused the lady to repent of her good humour.

Whenever Becky made a little circle for herself with incredible toils, somebody came and swept it down rudely, and she had all her work to begin over again. It was very hard; lonely and disheartening.

There was Mrs. Newbright, who took her up for some time, attracted by the sweetness of her singing at church and by her proper views upon serious subjects. Becky took tracts, and even read them. She worked flannel petticoats for the Quashyboos – night-caps for the Cocoonut Indians – painted handscreens for the conversion of the Pope and the Jews – attended two Sunday services at church, and all in vain. Mrs. Newbright happened to write to the Countess of Southdown about a Fund for the Fiji Islanders, and mentioned her “sweet friend” Mrs. Rawdon Crawley.

The Countess wrote back a letter so full of hints, facts, falsehoods, and condemnations, that Mrs. Newbright's friendship with Becky ceased forthwith.

From one colony to another Becky fled uneasily. From Boulogne to Dieppe, from Dieppe to Caen, from Caen to Tours – trying with all her might to be respectable, and alas! always found out and pecked out of the cage.

Mrs. Hook Eagles took her up at one of these places – a woman without a blemish in her character, and a house in Portman Square. She was staying at the hotel at Dieppe where Becky fled, and they made each other's acquaintance first when they were swimming together, and then at the hotel table. Mrs. Eagles had heard some of the scandal of the Steyne affair; but after a conversation with Becky, she announced that Mrs. Crawley was an angel, her husband a ruffian, Lord Steyne an unprincipled wretch, as everybody knew, and the whole case against Mrs. Crawley a wicked conspiracy of that rascal Wenham.

Mrs. Eagles then patronized Mrs. Rawdon, took her to live with her at her own house at Paris, and did all she could to keep Becky in the paths of virtue and good repute.

Becky was very respectable and orderly at first, but the life of humdrum virtue grew utterly tedious to her before long. It was the same routine every day, the same drive over the same stupid Bois de Boulogne, the same company of an evening, the same sermon of a Sunday night. Becky was dying of weariness when young Mr. Eagles came from Cambridge, and his mother, seeing the impression which her little friend made upon him, straightway gave Becky warning.

Then she tried keeping house with a female friend, until they began to quarrel and get into debt. Then she lived for some time at that famous boarding-house kept by Madame de Saint Amour, in the Rue Royale at Paris, where she began using her fascinations upon the shabby dandies and fly-blown beauties who frequented her landlady's salons. Becky loved society and indeed, could no more exist without it than an opium-eater without his dram; and she was happy enough at this time of her life.

"The women here are as amusing as those in May Fair," she told an old London friend, "only their dresses are not quite so fresh. The men are sad rogues, certainly, but no worse than many. The mistress of the house is a little vulgar, but I don't think she is so vulgar as Lady ____" and here she named a great leader of fashion.

In fact, when you saw Madame de Saint Amour's rooms lit up at night, and the women at a little distance, you might fancy yourself in good society, and that Madame was a real Countess. Many people did so fancy, and Becky was for a while one of the most dashing ladies of her salons.

But her old creditors of 1815 found her out and caused her to leave Paris. The poor little woman was forced to fly rather suddenly, and went to Brussels.

How well she remembered the place! She grinned as she looked up at the little home she had occupied, and thought of the Bareacres family, bawling for horses, as their carriage stood before the hotel. She visited Waterloo and Laeken, where George Osborne's monument much struck her. She made a little sketch of it.

"That poor Cupid!" she said; "how dreadfully he was in love with me, and what a fool he was! I wonder whether little Emmy is alive. It was a good little creature; and that fat brother of hers. I have his funny picture still. They were kind simple people."

At Brussels Becky was recommended by Madame de Saint Amour to her friend, Madame la Comtesse de Borodino, widow of Napoleon's General, the famous Count de Borodino, who after the war was left with nothing but a hotel and écarté tables.

Second-rate dandies and roués, widow-ladies with a lawsuit, and very simple English folks put down their money at Madame de Borodino's tables. The gallant young fellows treated the company to champagne, rode out with the women, or hired horses on country excursions. They clubbed together to take boxes at the play or the opera, betted over the fair shoulders of the ladies at the tables, and wrote home to their parents in Devonshire about their happy introduction to foreign society.

Here, as at Paris, Becky was a boarding-house queen. She never refused the champagne, or the bouquets, or the drives into the country, or the private boxes; but what she preferred was the *écarté* at night – and she played audaciously. First she played only for a little, then for five-franc pieces, then for Napoleons, then for notes: then she would not be able to pay for her month's board, and borrowed from the young gentlemen: then she got cash again and bullied Madame de Borodino, whom she had wheedled before: then she was playing for ten sous at a time, and in a dire state of poverty: then her quarter's allowance would come in, and she would pay Madame de Borodino's bill and once more take the cards against the Chevalier de Raff.

When Becky left Brussels, she owed three months' pension to Madame de Borodino – and this, and the gambling, and the drinking, and the begging of money from the Reverend Mr. Muff, and the flirting with young Milor Noodle, whom she used to take into her private room, and from whom she won large sums at *écarté* – of these and a hundred other knaveries, the Countess de Borodino informed every English person who stayed at her house.

So our little wanderer went about setting up her tent in various cities of Europe, as restless as Ulysses. She soon became a perfect Bohemian, herding with people whom it would make your hair stand on end to meet.

Every town of note in Europe has its little colony of raffish young Englishmen – often of very good family, only disowned by them; frequenters of billiard-rooms and gaming-tables. They drink and swagger – they fight and brawl – they run away without paying – they get the money and drive off to Baden – they lurk about the tables with empty pockets, until they can swindle a Jew banker with a sham bill of exchange. Their life must be one of great excitement, alternating between splendour and misery.

Becky took to this life, and went about from town to town among these Bohemians. She was known at every play-table in Germany. It is said she was ordered out of Munich, but of this part of her story, the less, perhaps, that is said the better.

When Mrs. Crawley was particularly down on her luck, she gave concerts and lessons in music here and there. There was a Madame de Raudon, who had a *matinee musicale* at Wildbad, and at Strasburg in 1830, a certain Madame Rebecque made her appearance in the opera of the *Dame Blanche*, causing a furious row in the theatre there. She was hissed off the stage by the audience, partly from her own incompetency, but chiefly from the ill-advised sympathy of some officers who were present.

She was, in fact, no better than a vagabond. When she got money she gambled; when she had gambled it away she had trouble to live; who knows how she succeeded? It is said that she was once seen at St. Petersburg, but was dismissed from there by the police, so there cannot be any truth in the report that she was a Russian spy at Vienna afterwards.

At Rome once, when Mrs. de Rawdon's half-year's salary had just been paid into the banker's, and, as everybody who had a balance of above five hundred scudi was

invited to the banker's balls, Becky had the honour of a card, and appeared at one of the Prince and Princess Polonia's splendid evening entertainments. The Princess was descended from the second king of Rome, while the Prince's grandfather, Alessandro Polonia, sold tobacco and pocket-handkerchiefs, and lent money in a small way. All the great company in Rome thronged to his saloons – Princes, Dukes, Ambassadors, artists, fiddlers. His halls blazed with light and magnificence, resplendent with gilt frames and dubious antiques.

So Becky, who was lodged at an inn in a very modest way, dressed with unusual care, and went to this fine ball leaning on the arm of Major Loder, with whom she happened to be travelling at the time (the same man who was caned by Sir John Buckskin for carrying four kings in his hat while playing at *écarté*.) This pair went into the rooms together, and Becky saw a number of old faces which she remembered from happier days. Major Loder knew a great number of keen-looking whiskered men with dirty striped ribbons in their buttonholes; but his own countrymen avoided him.

Well, the pair drank a great quantity of champagne at the buffet, and then pushed on until they reached the Duchess's pink velvet saloon, at the end of the suite of apartments where the princely family were entertaining their most distinguished guests at supper. And there at Poloni's table sat Lord Steyne.

The scar cut by the diamond on his white forehead made a burning red mark; his whiskers were dyed a purple hue, which made his pale face look still paler. He was a greater Prince than any there, and near him was seated the beautiful Countess of Belladonna, whose husband, so well known for his brilliant collections of insects, had been long absent on a mission to the Emperor of Morocco.

When Becky saw that familiar and illustrious face, how vulgar did Major Loder appear! She tried to look and feel as if she were in May Fair once more.

"That woman looks stupid and ill-humoured," she thought; "I am sure she can't amuse him. He must be bored by her – he never was by me." A hundred touching hopes, fears, and memories palpitated in her little heart, as she gazed with her brightest eyes at the great nobleman. He looked easy, lofty, and stately. Ah, what a pleasant companion he was, what a brilliant wit; what a rich fund of talk, what a grand manner! – and she had exchanged this for Major Loder, reeking of cigars and brandy.

"I wonder whether he will know me," she thought. Lord Steyne was talking and laughing, when he looked up and saw Becky.

She was all in a flutter as their eyes met, and she put on the best smile she could muster, and dropped him a little, timid curtsy. He stared aghast at her for a minute, as Macbeth might on beholding Banquo's ghost, and was looking at her with open mouth, when that horrid Major Loder pulled her away.

"Come into the supper-room," he said: "seeing these nobs grubbing away has made me peckish. Let's go and try the old governor's champagne." Becky thought the Major had had a great deal too much already.

The next day she went to walk on the Pincian Hill – the Hyde Park of Roman idlers – hoping to have another sight of Lord Steyne. But it was Mr. Fiche, his lordship's confidential man, who came up to her, nodding rather familiarly.

"I followed Madame from her hotel," he said. "I have some advice to give Madame."

"From the Marquis of Steyne?" Becky asked, with as much dignity as she could muster, agitated by hope and expectation.

"No," said the valet; "it is from me. Rome is very unwholesome."

"Not at this season, Monsieur – not till after Easter."

“I tell Madame it is unwholesome now. There is always malaria for some people. That cursed marsh wind kills many. Look, Madame Crawley, I have an interest in you. Be warned. Go away from Rome, I tell you – or you will be ill and die.”

Becky laughed in rage. “What! assassinate poor little me?” she said. “How romantic! Bah! I will stay, if only to plague my Lord. I have people to defend me.”

It was Monsieur Fiche’s turn to laugh. “Defend you,” he said, “who? Any one of those gambling men would take your life for a hundred louis. We know things about Major Loder (and he is no more a Major than I am a Marquis) which would send him to the galleys or worse. We know everything and have friends everywhere. Madame has offended somebody who never forgives – whose rage redoubled when he saw you. He was like a madman last night when he came home. You did wrong to show yourself to him. And if you stay here you will repent it. Mark my words. Go. Here is my lord’s carriage.”

Seizing Becky’s arm, he rushed her down an alley as Lord Steyne’s barouche came whirling along the avenue, drawn by priceless horses, and bearing Madame de Belladonna lolling on the cushions, dark, sulky, and blooming, with old Steyne stretched at her side with a livid face. His ghastly eyes seemed tired of looking out on a world of which almost all the pleasure and beauty had palled.

“Monseigneur has never recovered from the shock of that night,” Monsieur Fiche whispered to Mrs. Crawley as the carriage flashed by, and she peeped out from behind the shrubs.

“That is a consolation at any rate,” Becky thought.

Whether my lord really had murderous intentions towards Mrs. Becky, or whether Monsieur Fiche simply had orders to frighten her out of the city, has never been ascertained: but the threat had its effect. She sought no more to meet her old patron.

Everybody knows the melancholy end of that nobleman, at Naples in 1830; when the Most Honourable Marquis of Steyne, Earl of Gaunt, died after a series of fits brought on, as the papers said, by the shock caused by the second French revolution.

The newspapers described his virtues, his talents, and his good actions. His body was buried at Naples, and his heart – that heart which always beat with every generous and noble emotion – was brought back to Gaunt Castle in a silver urn.

His will was disputed, and an attempt was made to force from Madame de Belladonna the celebrated diamond ring which his lordship always wore, and which it was said she removed after his death. But his confidential friend, Monsieur Fiche, proved that the ring had been presented to Madame de Belladonna two days before the Marquis died, as had the bank-notes, jewels, bonds, etc, found in his lordship’s desk, and claimed by his heirs from the injured woman.

CHAPTER 65

Full of Business and Pleasure

The day after the meeting at the play-table, Jos arrayed himself with unusual care and splendour. Without saying a word to any of his family about the events of the previous night, he went out early, and made for the Elephant Hotel. Because of the festivities, the hotel was full. Mr. Jos made inquiries in clumsy German, and was directed to the very top of the house, past the rooms where travelling pedlars, tumblers, bagmen, students and small tradesmen lived. Here Becky had a little nest – as dirty a little refuge as ever beauty lay hid in.

Becky liked the life. She was at home with pedlars, tumblers, students and all. She had inherited a wild, roving nature: the din, the stir, the drink, the smoke, the songs and swagger of the students, and the general buzz and hum of the place pleased the little woman, even when her luck was down and she could not pay her bill. How pleasant was the bustle to her now that her purse was full of the money which little Georgy had won for her the night before!

As Jos came creaking and puffing up the final stairs, and began to wipe his face and look for No. 92, the door of the opposite chamber, No. 90, was open. A student was lying on the bed smoking a long pipe; whilst another student in long yellow hair and a braided coat was actually on his knees at No. 92, bawling through the keyhole.

“Go away,” said a well-known voice from within, which made Jos thrill. “I am expecting somebody; my grandpapa. He mustn’t see you there.”

“Angel Englanderinn!” bellowed the kneeling student, “do dine with us at the inn in the park. We will have roast pheasants and porter. We shall die if you don’t.”

“That we will,” said the young nobleman on the bed. Jos overheard all this, though he did not understand the German they spoke.

As he approached, the student started up, and bounced into his own room, where Jos heard him laughing with his comrade.

Jos was standing disconcerted when the door of 92 opened and Becky’s little head peeped out full of archness and mischief.

“It’s you,” she said, coming out. “How I have been waiting for you! Stop! not yet – in one minute you shall come in.” In that instant she put a rouge-pot, a brandy bottle, and a plate of broken meat into the bed, smoothed her hair, and finally let in her visitor.

She wore a pink domino, a trifle faded and soiled; but her arms shone out from the loose sleeves very white and fair, and it was tied round her waist so as to set off her trim little figure. She led Jos by the hand into her garret.

“Come in,” she said. “Come and talk to me. Sit yonder on the chair;” and she gave his hand a little squeeze. She placed herself on the bed – not on the bottle and plate, you may be sure – and there she sat and talked with her old admirer.

“How little the years have changed you,” she said with a look of tender interest. “I should have known you anywhere. What a comfort it is amongst strangers to see once more the frank honest face of an old friend!”

The frank honest face, to tell the truth, at this moment bore any expression but one of openness and honesty: it was, on the contrary, much perturbed. Jos was surveying the queer little apartment in which he found his old flame. One of her gowns hung over the bed, with another on the hook of the door; her bonnet obscured

half the looking-glass, on which lay the prettiest little pair of bronze boots; a French novel was on the bedside table.

“I should have known you anywhere,” she continued; “a woman never forgets some things. And you were the first man I ever – I ever saw.”

“Was I really?” said Jos. “God bless my soul, you don’t say so.”

“When I came with your sister from Chiswick, I was scarcely more than a child,” Becky said. “How is that dear girl? Oh, her husband was a sad wicked man, and the poor dear was jealous of me. As if I cared about him! when there was somebody – but no – don’t let us talk of old times.” She passed her handkerchief of tattered lace across her eyelids.

“Is not this a strange place,” she continued, “for a woman who has lived in a very different world? I have had so many griefs and wrongs, Joseph Sedley; I have been made to suffer so cruelly that I can’t stay still in any place, but wander about restless and unhappy. All my friends have been false to me – all. There is no such thing as an honest man in the world. I was the truest wife that ever lived, though I married my husband out of pique, because somebody else – but never mind that. I was true to my husband, and he trampled upon me and deserted me. I was the fondest mother to my darling child, my hope and joy; and they – they tore it from me.” She put her hand to her heart with a passionate gesture of despair, burying her face for a moment on the bed.

The brandy-bottle inside clinked up against the plate. Both were moved, no doubt, by her grief. Jos was a good deal frightened and affected at seeing her in this condition. She began to tell her story – a tale so neat, simple, and artless that it was quite evident that a white-robed angel escaped from heaven was before Jos – on the bed, sitting on the brandy-bottle.

They had a very long, amicable and confidential talk, during which Jos Sedley was somehow made aware that Becky’s heart had first learned to beat at his enchanting presence; that George Osborne had certainly paid court to Becky, but that she never gave him the least encouragement, and that she had never ceased to think about Jos from the very first day she had seen him, though, of course, her duties as a married woman were paramount – duties which she would preserve to her dying day, or until the bad climate in which Colonel Crawley was living should release her from a marriage that his cruelty had made odious.

Jos went away convinced that she was the most virtuous and fascinating of women, and considering all sorts of benevolent schemes for her welfare. She ought to return to society. She must quit that place and take a quiet lodging. Amelia must come and befriend her. He would go and see to it, and consult with the Major. She wept tears of heart-felt gratitude as she parted from him, and the gallant stout gentleman stooped to kiss her hand.

So Becky bowed Jos out of her little garret with as much grace as if it was a palace; and when he had disappeared down the stairs, the students came out of their hole, and she amused herself by mimicking Jos to them as she munched her cold bread and sausage and drank her favourite brandy-and-water.

Jos walked over to Dobbin’s lodgings and there solemnly told him Becky’s affecting history, without, however, mentioning the business of the night before. And the two gentlemen laid their heads together and consulted about how to be useful to Mrs. Becky.

As for Mrs. Amelia, she was a woman of such a soft and foolish disposition that when she heard of anybody unhappy, her heart straightway melted. If she begged

pardon of all her servants for troubling them to answer the bell – and apologized to a shopboy who showed her a piece of silk – the idea that an old acquaintance was miserable was sure to soften her heart.

When the Major heard from Jos of his sentimental adventure, he was not, it must be confessed, nearly as much pleased and interested as Joseph was. On the contrary, he said, “The little minx, has she come to light again?” He had never liked Becky, but had mistrusted her from the very first moment when her green eyes had looked at, and turned away from, his own.

“That little devil brings mischief wherever she goes,” the Major said disrespectfully. “Who knows what sort of life she has been leading? And what business has she here alone? Don’t tell me about enemies; an honest woman always has friends. Why has she left her husband? I remember the way in which the confounded blackleg used to cheat poor George. Wasn’t there a scandal about their separation? I think I heard something.” Jos tried in vain to convince him that Becky was an injured and virtuous female.

“Well, well; let’s ask Mrs. George,” said the Major. “Let us go and consult her. She knows what is right in such matters.”

“Hm! Emmy is all very well,” said Jos, who did not happen to be in love with his sister.

“Very well? By Gad, sir, she’s the finest lady I ever met in my life,” bounced out the Major. “Let us ask her if this woman ought to be visited or not – I will be content with her verdict.” The artful Major was thinking that Emmy had been deservedly jealous of Rebecca, never mentioning her name but with shrinking and terror. And a jealous woman never forgives, thought Dobbin: so they went to ask her.

“Amelia, my dear,” said Jos, “I have had the most extraordinary adventure – a most interesting old friend of yours has just arrived here, and I should like you to see her.”

“Who is it?” said Amelia.

“It is a woman whom I dislike very much,” said the Major doggedly, “and whom you have no cause to love.”

“It is Rebecca, I’m sure it is Rebecca,” Amelia said, blushing.

“You are right,” Dobbin answered. Brussels, Waterloo, old griefs and memories rushed back into Amelia’s gentle heart.

“Don’t let me see her,” she said. “I couldn’t see her.”

“I told you so,” Dobbin said to Jos.

“She is very unhappy, and – and that sort of thing,” Jos urged. “She is poor and unprotected, and has been ill – and that scoundrel of a husband has deserted her.”

“Ah!” said Amelia.

“She hasn’t a friend in the world,” Jos went on, “and she said she thought she might trust in you. She’s so miserable, Emmy. She has been almost mad with grief. Her story quite affected me, upon my honour – her family has been most cruel to her.”

“Poor creature!” Amelia said.

“And if she has no friend, she thinks she’ll die,” Jos proceeded in a low tremulous voice. “God bless my soul! do you know that she tried to kill herself? I saw a bottle of laudanum in her room – such a miserable little room – at a third-rate house, the Elephant, up in the roof.”

This did not seem to affect Emmy.

“She’s beside herself with grief,” Jos resumed. “Her agonies are quite frightful. She had a little boy, the same age as Georgy.”

“Yes, I remember,” Emmy remarked. “Well?”

“The most beautiful child ever seen,” Jos said; “a perfect angel, who adored his mother. The ruffians tore him shrieking out of her arms, and have never allowed him to see her.”

“Dear Joseph,” Emmy cried out, starting up at once, “let us go and see her this minute.” And she ran into her room, fetched her bonnet and shawl, and ordered Dobbin to follow. He saw there was nothing for it but to obey.

“It is number 92, up four flights of stairs,” Jos said, not very willing to ascend the steps again; but he stood in his drawing-room, and watched the pair marching through the market.

It was as well that Becky saw them too from her garret, where she and the students were chattering and laughing about the appearance of her grandpapa. She had time to dismiss them before the landlord of the Elephant led Amelia up the stairs to her room.

“Gracious lady!” said the landlord, knocking at Becky’s door; he had not been so courteous the day before.

“Who is it?” Becky said, putting out her head, and she gave a little scream. There stood Emmy in a tremble, and Dobbin with his cane.

He stood watching, and very much interested; but Emmy sprang forward with open arms, and forgave Rebecca at that moment, and embraced her with all her heart. Ah, poor wretch, when was your lip ever pressed by such pure kisses?

CHAPTER 66

Amantium Irae

Amelia's kindness touched even such a hardened little reprobate as Becky. She returned Emmy's caresses and kind speeches with something very like gratitude, and an emotion which, if it was not lasting, for a moment was almost genuine. That was a lucky stroke of hers about the child "torn from her arms shrieking." It was this that had won her friend back, and it was one of the very first things our poor simple Emmy began to talk about.

"And so they took your darling child from you?" she cried. "Oh, Rebecca, my poor dear friend, I know what it is to lose a boy. But please Heaven yours will be restored to you."

"The child? Oh, yes, my agonies were frightful," Becky owned, not perhaps without a twinge of conscience. It jarred upon her to have to tell lies instantly in reply to so much confidence. But that is the misfortune of beginning this kind of forgery. One fib leads to another; and so the number of your lies multiplies, and the danger of detection increases every day.

"My agonies were terrible," Becky continued; "I thought I should die. I had a brain fever, during which my doctor gave me up, and – and I recovered, and here I am, poor and friendless."

"How old is he?" Emmy asked.

"Eleven," said Becky.

"Eleven! Why, he was born the same year as Georgy, who is—"

"I know, I know," cried Becky, who had in fact quite forgotten Rawdon's age. "Grief has made me forget so many things, dearest Amelia. I am very much changed: half-wild sometimes. He was eleven when they took him away from me. Bless his sweet face; I have never seen it again."

"Was he fair or dark?" went on that absurd little Emmy. "Show me his hair."

Becky almost laughed. "Not today, love – some other time, when my trunks arrive."

"Poor Becky!" said Emmy. "How thankful I ought to be." She began to think, as usual, how her son was the handsomest and cleverest boy in the world. "You will see my Georgy," was the best thing she could think of to console Becky.

And so the two women talked for an hour or more, Becky giving her friend a full version of her history. She showed how her marriage with Rawdon Crawley had always been viewed by the family with hostility; how her artful sister-in-law had poisoned her husband's mind against her; how she had borne everything – poverty, neglect, coldness – for the sake of her child; how, finally, she had been driven into demanding a separation from her husband, when the wretch had asked her to sacrifice her own reputation so that he might get advancement from that powerful but unprincipled man, the Marquis of Steyne. The atrocious monster!

This part of her eventful history Becky told with the utmost delicacy and indignant virtue. When she was forced to fly from her husband's roof, she said, the coward had pursued his revenge by taking her child from her. And thus she was a wanderer, poor, friendless, and wretched.

Emmy quivered with indignation at the conduct of the miserable Rawdon and the unprincipled Steyne. And while Becky was reciting the separation scene from the child, Emmy retired behind her pocket-handkerchief.

Meanwhile, the Major (who did not wish to interrupt, and grew rather tired of creaking about the narrow stairs) descended to the ground-floor of the house and into the great room common to all the tenants, a room full of smoke and liberally sprinkled with beer. All sorts of people were collected here; glove-sellers and linen-merchants, students and idlers, playing cards on the sloppy, beery tables. The waiter brought the Major a mug of beer, and he took out a cigar, and a newspaper until Amelia should come down.

The two students from room 90 came in, and called for butterbrod and beer. The pair sat down by the Major and fell into a conversation in German which he could not help overhearing. It was mainly about duels and drinking-bouts at the University, from which they had come with Becky, as it appeared, in order to attend the bridal fetes at Pumpnickel.

“After the fat grandfather went away, there came a pretty little Englishwoman,” said one. “I heard them chattering together.”

“We must take the tickets for her concert,” said the other. “Have you any money, Max?”

“Bah! Last time she sold many tickets, but she went off without singing. She said yesterday that her pianist had fallen ill at Dresden. She cannot sing, it is my belief!”

“Her voice is cracked; I hear her trying out of her window an English ballad, called ‘De Rose upon de Balgony.’”

“No, we’ll take none of her tickets. She won money at the gaming-table last night. I saw her: she made a little English boy play for her. Another mug of beer?” and having buried their blond whiskers in the drink, they swaggered off into the fair.

The Major understood that their talk related to Becky.

“The little devil is at her old tricks,” he thought, and he smiled as he recalled her desperate flirtation with Jos and the ludicrous end of that adventure. He and George had often laughed over it, until George was also caught in the little Circe’s toils, and had an understanding with her which his comrade suspected, but preferred to ignore. William was too ashamed to ask about that disgraceful mystery, although once George had alluded to it. It was on the morning of Waterloo, as the young men stood surveying the black masses of Frenchmen opposite their line.

“I have been mixing in a foolish intrigue with a woman,” George said. “If I fall, I hope Emmy will never know of that business. I wish to God it had never been begun!” And William had soothed poor George’s widow with the fact that Osborne, on the first day of battle, spoke gravely and affectionately of his wife.

“And so this devil is still going on with her intrigues,” thought William. “I wish she were a hundred miles from here. She brings mischief wherever she goes.” He was thinking this when somebody tapped his shoulder, and he looked up and saw Amelia.

This woman had a way of tyrannizing over Major Dobbin; she ordered him about, and made him fetch and carry just as if he was a great Newfoundland dog. He liked, so to speak, to jump into the water if she told him to, and to trot behind her with her bag in his mouth. This history has been written to very little purpose if the reader has not perceived that the Major was a spooney.

“Why did you not wait for me upstairs, sir?” she said, with a little toss of her head.

"I couldn't stand up in the passage," he answered; and, delighted to take her out of the horrid smoky place, he would have walked off without paying if the waiter had not stopped him. Emmy laughed: she called him a naughty man. She was in high spirits, and tripped across the market-place very briskly, wanting to see Jos that instant. They found him in his saloon on the first-floor; he had been anxiously pacing the room, and biting his nails during the past hour whilst Emmy was closeted with Becky.

"Well?" said Jos.

"The poor dear creature, how she has suffered!" Emmy said.

"God bless my soul, yes," Jos said, wagging his head, so that his cheeks quivered like jellies.

"She may have Payne's room," Emmy continued, "and Payne may go upstairs." Payne was her English maid, who passed her time chiefly in grumbling, and in stating her intention to return to her native Clapham.

"Why, you don't mean to say you are going to have that woman in the house?" cried the Major, jumping up.

"Of course we are," said Amelia. "Don't be angry and break the furniture, Major Dobbin. Of course we are going to have her here."

"Of course, my dear," Jos said.

"The poor creature, after all her sufferings," Emmy continued; "her wicked husband having taken her child away from her" (here she doubled her two little fists in a way that charmed the Major.) "The poor dear thing! quite alone and forced to give singing lessons!"

"Take lessons, my dear Mrs. George," cried the Major, "but don't have her in the house."

"Pooh," said Jos.

"I'm astonished at you, Major William," Amelia cried. "Why, now is the time to help her, when she is so miserable. The oldest friend I ever had—"

"She was not always your friend, Amelia," the Major said, for he was quite angry. Emmy, looking the Major almost fiercely in the face, said, "For shame, Major Dobbin!" and walked out of the room with a most majestic air.

"To allude to *that!*" she said, once shut in her own room. "Oh, it was cruel of him to remind me of it." She looked up at George's picture. "If I had forgiven it, ought he to have spoken? No. And it is from his own lips that I know how wicked and groundless my jealousy was; and that you were pure – oh, you were pure, my saint in heaven!"

She paced the room, trembling and indignant. Leaning on the chest of drawers over which George's picture hung, she gazed at it. Its eyes seemed to reproach her. The early dear memories of that brief time of love rushed back. The wound bled afresh, and oh, how bitterly. It couldn't be. Never, never.

Poor Dobbin! That unlucky word had undone the work of many a year – the long labour of love and constancy. A word was spoken, and down fell the fair palace of hope – away flew the bird which he had been trying all his life to lure!

William nevertheless continued to implore Sedley, most energetically, to beware of Rebecca; he urged Jos not to receive her. He asked him to inquire about her at least; told him how he had heard that she was in the company of gamblers; pointed out how she and Crawley had misled poor George into ruin, and how she was now parted from her husband, perhaps for good reason. What a dangerous companion she would be for his sister, who knew nothing of the affairs of the world!

Had William been less violent, or more dexterous, he might have succeeded; but Jos was jealous of the airs of superiority which he fancied the Major showed towards him, and he began a blustering speech about his competency to defend his own honour, his desire not to have his affairs meddled with, his intention to rebel against the Major – when the stormy conversation was ended by the arrival of Mrs. Becky with her meagre baggage.

She greeted her host with affectionate respect and made a shrinking salutation to Major Dobbin, who her instinct told her was her enemy. The bustle of her arrival brought Amelia out of her room. Emmy embraced her guest with the greatest warmth, and took no notice of the Major, except to fling him an angry look – the most unjust and scornful glance that had perhaps ever appeared on that poor little woman's face. Dobbin, indignant at the injustice, not at the defeat, made her a haughty bow and left.

Emmy was particularly lively and affectionate to Rebecca, and installed her guest in her room with eager activity. Georgy came in from the fetes at dinner-time to find a lady at the table instead of Major Dobbin.

“Hullo! where's Dob?” he asked.

“Major Dobbin is dining out, I suppose,” his mother said, and, drawing the boy to her, kissed him, and introduced him to Mrs. Crawley. “This is my boy, Rebecca,” Mrs. Osborne said – as much as to say, can the world produce anything like that?

Becky looked at him with rapture and pressed his hand fondly. “Dear boy!” she said. “He is just like my–” Emotion choked her speech, but Amelia understood.

However, Mrs. Crawley ate a very good dinner. During the meal, Georgy eyed her and listened to her. At the dessert Emmy was gone out to the kitchen; Jos was in his great chair dozing; Georgy and the new arrival sat close to each other, and at last he laid down the nutcrackers.

“I say,” said Georgy.

“What do you say?” Becky said, laughing.

“You're the lady I saw in the mask at the Rouge et Noir.”

“Hush! you little sly creature,” Becky said, taking up his hand and kissing it.

“Your uncle was there too, and Mamma mustn't know.”

“Oh, by no means.”

“You see we are good friends already,” Becky said to Emmy, as she re-entered.

Meanwhile William, in a state of great indignation, walked about the town wildly until he fell upon the Charge d'Affaires, Tapeworm, who invited him to dinner. He took the opportunity to ask the diplomat whether he knew anything about a certain Mrs. Rawdon Crawley; and Tapeworm, who of course knew all the London gossip, poured into the Major's ears such a history as astonished him.

Tapeworm knew everything and a great deal besides, and made the most astounding revelations. When Dobbin said that Mrs. Osborne and Mr. Sedley had taken Becky into their house, Tapeworm burst into a peal of laughter, and asked if they had not better send to the prison and take in one or two of the gentlemen in shaved heads and chains.

Amelia was going to the Court ball that night, and the Major decided to tell her this news there. He went home, dressed in his uniform, and repaired to Court, in hopes to see Mrs. Osborne. She never came. When he returned to his lodgings all the lights in the Sedley house were out. I don't know what sort of a night's rest he had with this frightful secret in bed with him.

Early in the morning he sent his servant across the way with a note, saying that he wished very particularly to speak with her. A message came back to say that Mrs. Osborne was exceedingly unwell and was keeping to her room.

She, too, had been awake all night, thinking of something which had agitated her mind a hundred times before. A hundred times on the point of yielding, she had shrunk back from a sacrifice which she felt was too much for her. She couldn't, in spite of Dobbins's love and constancy, and her own respect and gratitude. What is constancy, what is merit? One curl of a girl's ringlet, one hair of a whisker, will turn the scale against them in a minute.

When, in the afternoon, the Major gained admission to Amelia, instead of the usual cordial and affectionate greeting, he received a curtsey, and a little gloved hand, retracted the moment after it was offered.

Rebecca, too, was in the room, and advanced to meet him with a smile. Dobbin drew back rather confusedly.

"I – I beg your pardon, m'am," he said; "but I am bound to tell you that it is not as your friend that I am come here."

"Pooh! don't let us have this sort of thing!" Jos cried out, alarmed and anxious.

"I wonder what Major Dobbin has to say against Rebecca?" Amelia said in a low, clear voice with a slight quiver in it, and a very determined look about the eyes.

"I will not have this sort of thing in my house," Jos again interposed. "Dobbin, I beg, sir, you'll stop it." And trembling and turning very red, he gave a great puff, and made for his door.

"Dear friend!" Rebecca said with angelic sweetness, "do hear what Major Dobbin has to say against me."

"I will not hear it," squeaked out Jos at the top of his voice, and he was gone.

"We are only two women," Amelia said. "You can speak now, sir."

"This manner towards me scarcely becomes you, Amelia," the Major answered haughtily; "nor, I believe, am I guilty of habitual harshness to women. It is not a pleasure to me to do the duty which I am come to do."

"Pray proceed with it quickly, if you please, Major Dobbin," said Amelia, who was more and more in a pet. The expression of Dobbin's face, as she spoke in this imperious manner, was not pleasant.

"I came to say – and I must say it in your presence, Mrs. Crawley – that I think you ought not to form a member of the family of my friends. A lady who is separated from her husband, who travels not under her own name, who frequents public gaming-tables—"

"It was to the ball I went," cried out Becky.

"—is not a fit companion for Mrs. Osborne and her son," Dobbin went on: "and I may add that there are people here who know that regarding your conduct about which I don't even wish to speak before Mrs. Osborne."

"Yours is a very convenient sort of calumny, Major Dobbin," Rebecca said. "You leave me under the weight of an accusation which, after all, is unsaid. What is it? Is it unfaithfulness to my husband? I scorn it and defy anybody to prove it. My honour is as untouched as that of the bitterest enemy who ever maligned me. Is it of being poor, forsaken, wretched, that you accuse me? Yes, I am guilty of those faults, and punished for them every day. Let me go, Emmy. I am no worse off today than I was yesterday. The poor wanderer is on her way. Don't you remember the song we used to sing in dear old days? I have been wandering ever since then – a poor castaway. Let me go: my stay here interferes with the plans of this gentleman."

“Indeed it does, madam,” said the Major. “If I have any authority in this house—”

“Authority, none!” broke out Amelia. “Rebecca, you stay with me. I won’t insult you because Major Dobbin chooses to do so. Come away, dear.” And the two women made for the door.

William opened it. As they were going out, however, he took Amelia’s hand and said, “Will you stay a moment and speak to me?”

“He wishes to speak to you away from me,” said Becky, looking like a martyr. Amelia gripped her hand in reply.

“Upon my honour it is not about you that I am going to speak,” Dobbin said. “Come back, Amelia.”

She came. Dobbin bowed to Mrs. Crawley, as he shut the door upon her. Amelia looked at him: her face and her lips were quite white.

“I was confused when I spoke just now,” the Major said after a pause, “and I misused the word authority.”

“You did,” said Amelia.

“At least I have claims to be heard,” Dobbin continued.

“It is generous to remind me of our obligations to you.”

“The claims I mean are those left me by George’s father,” he said.

“Yes, and you insulted his memory. You did yesterday. You know you did. And I will never forgive you. Never!” said Amelia. She shot out each little sentence in a tremor of anger and emotion.

“You don’t mean that, Amelia?” William said sadly. “You don’t mean that these words, uttered in a hurried moment, are to weigh against a whole life’s devotion? I think that George’s memory has not been injured by the way in which I have dealt with it, and if we are come to bandying reproaches, I at least merit none from his widow and the mother of his son. Reflect, afterwards when you are at leisure, and your conscience will withdraw this accusation. It does even now.”

Amelia held down her head.

“It is not that speech of yesterday,” he continued, “which moves you. That is only the pretext, Amelia, or I have loved you and watched you for fifteen years in vain. Have I not learned to read all your feelings and look into your thoughts? I know what your heart is capable of: it can cling faithfully to a recollection and cherish a fancy, but it can’t feel such an attachment as mine deserves to mate with, and such as I would have won from a woman more generous than you. No, you are not worthy of the love which I have devoted to you. I knew all along that the prize I had set my life on was not worth the winning; that I was a fool, with fond fancies, bartering away my truth and ardour against your little feeble remnant of love. I will bargain no more: I withdraw. I find no fault with you. You are very good-natured, and have done your best, but you couldn’t – you couldn’t reach up to the height of the attachment which I bore you, and which a loftier soul than yours might have been proud to share. Good-bye, Amelia! I have watched your struggle. Let it end. We are both weary of it.”

Amelia stood scared and silent as William thus suddenly broke the chain by which she held him and declared his independence and superiority. He had placed himself at her feet so long that the poor little woman had been accustomed to trample upon him. She didn’t wish to marry him, but she wished to keep him. She wished to give him nothing, but that he should give her all. She was quite cast down.

“Am I to understand then, that you are going – away, William?” she said.

He gave a sad laugh. “I went once before, and came back after twelve years. We were young then, Amelia. Good-bye. I have spent enough of my life at this play.”

Whilst they had been talking, the door into Mrs. Osborne's room had opened ever so little; indeed, Becky had kept hold of the handle, and heard every word of the conversation.

"What a noble heart that man has," she thought, "and how shamefully that woman plays with it!" She admired Dobbin; she bore him no rancour for the part he had taken against her. It was an open move in the game, and played fairly. "Ah!" she thought, "if I could have had such a husband as that – a man with a heart and brains too! I would not have minded his large feet."

Running into her room, she wrote him a note, beseeching him to stop for a few days – not to think of going – that she could help him with A.

The parting was over. Once more poor William walked to the door and was gone; and the little widow had her will, and had won her victory, and was left to enjoy it as she best might.

At dinner, Mr. Georgy again remarked the absence of "Old Dob." The meal was eaten in silence. Jos's appetite was not diminished, but Emmy ate nothing at all.

After the meal, Georgy was lolling in the cushions of the old bay-window, which looked out on the market-place, when he noticed movement at the Major's house on the other side of the street.

"Hullo!" said he, "there's Dob's carriage – they are bringing it out of the courtyard."

Emmy gave a little start, but said nothing.

"Hullo!" Georgy continued, "there's Francis coming out with the portmanteaus, and the postilion. Why – they're putting the horses to Dob's carriage. Is he going anywhere?"

"Yes," said Emmy, "he is going on a journey."

"And when is he coming back?"

"He is – not coming back," answered Emmy.

"Not coming back!" cried out Georgy, jumping up.

"Stay here, sir," roared out Jos.

"Stay, Georgy," said his mother with a very sad face. The boy stopped, kicked about the room, and jumped up and down from the window-seat with uneasiness and curiosity.

The horses were put to. The baggage was strapped on. Francis came out with his master's sword, cane, and umbrella, and laid them in the carriage, and placed his desk and old tin cocked-hat case under the seat. Next Francis brought out the stained old blue cloak which had wrapped its owner up any time these fifteen years. It had been new for the campaign of Waterloo and had covered George and William after the night of Quatre Bras.

Old Burcke, the landlord of the lodgings, came out, and then Major William – Burcke wanted to kiss him. The Major was adored by all people with whom he had to do. It was with difficulty that he could escape.

"By Jove, I will go!" screamed out George.

"Give him this," said Becky, quite interested, and put a paper into the boy's hand. He rushed down the stairs and flung across the street.

William had got into the carriage, but George bounded in after, and flung his arms round the Major's neck, asking him multiplied questions. Then he felt in his waistcoat pocket and gave him a note. William seized it eagerly, and opened it trembling; but instantly his face changed. He tore the paper in two and dropped it out

of the carriage. He kissed Georgy on the head, and the boy got out, doubling his fists into his eyes.

The postilion cracked his whip, up sprang Francis to the box, and away went Dobbin. He never looked up as they passed under Amelia's window, and Georgy, left alone in the street, burst out crying.

Emmy's maid heard him howling again during the night and brought him some preserved apricots to console him. She mingled her lamentations with his. All the poor, honest folks loved that kind-hearted and simple gentleman.

As for Emmy, had she not done her duty? She had her picture of George for a consolation.

CHAPTER 67

Which Contains Births, Marriages, and Deaths

Whatever Becky's private plan for Dobbin was, she thought that the secret might keep. Indeed, she was not interested about anybody's welfare so much as about her own, and had many things to consider which concerned her a great deal more than Major Dobbin's happiness.

She found herself in comfortable quarters, surrounded by good-natured simple people such as she had not met with for many a long day; and, wanderer as she was, there were moments when rest was pleasant to her. As the most hardened Arab that ever careered across the desert on a camel likes to repose sometimes under the date-trees, or walk into the bazaars, so Jos's tents were pleasant to her. She hung up her weapons, and warmed herself by his fire. The halt in that restless life was inexpressibly soothing.

So she tried with all her might to please everybody; and we know that she was eminent in the art of giving pleasure. Even in that little interview in the garret, she had won back much of Jos's good-will. After a week, he was her sworn slave and frantic admirer. He didn't go to sleep after dinner, as usual: he drove out with Becky in his carriage. He held little parties and invented festivities to do her honour.

Tapeworm, who had abused her so cruelly, came to dine with Jos, and then came every day to pay his respects to Becky. Poor Emmy, who was never very talkative, and more glum and silent than ever after Dobbin's departure, was quite forgotten. The French Minister was as much charmed with Becky as Tapeworm; whilst the German ladies were delighted with her cleverness and wit. When it became known that she was of an ancient family, and that her husband was a Colonel and Governor, only separated from his lady by a trifling difference, nobody thought of refusing to receive her in the very highest society. The ladies were even more ready to swear eternal friendship for her than they had been for Amelia.

Jos's house had never been so pleasant. Rebecca sang, she played, she laughed; she talked in two or three languages, she brought everybody to the house, and she made Jos believe that it was his own great talents and wit which gathered society around him.

As for Emmy, who found herself no longer mistress of her own house, except when the bills were to be paid, Becky soon discovered the way to soothe her. She talked to her perpetually about Major Dobbin, declaring her admiration for that excellent gentleman, and telling Emmy that she had behaved most cruelly to him. Emmy defended her conduct and her religious principles; saying that a woman once, etc., and to such an angel as George, was married forever; but she had no objection to hearing the Major praised by Becky, and brought the conversation round to Dobbin twenty times a day.

Becky easily won the favour of Georgy and the servants. Amelia's maid supported the Major, and was reconciled to Becky as his champion. In the evening when Miss Payne was brushing Amelia's hair, she always put in her word for that dear good Major Dobbin.

Amelia did not object to this either. She made George write to Dobbin constantly and persisted in sending Mamma's kind love in a postscript. And as she looked at her

husband's portrait, it no longer reproached her; perhaps she reproached it, now William was gone.

Emmy was not very happy after her heroic sacrifice. She was very distracted, nervous, and silent. The family had never known her so peevish. She grew pale and ill. She used to try to sing certain songs which the Major liked; and as she warbled them in the drawing-room, she would break off in the middle, and walk into her room, and there, no doubt, take refuge in the miniature of her husband.

Some books remained, after Dobbin's departure, with his name written in them; a German dictionary, a guide-book, and one or two other volumes. Emmy put these on the drawers where she placed her work-box, her Bible and prayer-book, under the pictures of the two Georges. And the Major having left his gloves behind, it is a fact that Georgy, rummaging in his mother's desk some time afterwards, found the gloves neatly folded up and put away.

Not caring for society, Emmy's chief pleasure in the summer evenings was to take long walks with Georgy, while Rebecca was left to the society of Joseph. Then the mother and son used to talk about the Major in a way which even made the boy smile. She told him that she thought Major William was the best man in the world – the gentlest and kindest, the bravest and humblest. She told him again how they owed everything to that kind friend's care; how he had befriended them through their misfortunes, and watched over them; how all his comrades admired him though he never spoke of his own gallant actions; how Georgy's father trusted him beyond all other men.

"When your papa was a little boy," she said, "he often told me that it was William who defended him against a tyrant at their school; and their friendship never ceased from that day until the last."

By the way, Mrs. Becky had got a miniature too, hanging up in her room – to the surprise and amusement of most people, and the delight of the original, who was no other than our friend Jos. On first coming to visit the Sedleys, arriving with a remarkably small, shabby kit, she was perhaps ashamed of the meanness of her trunks, and often spoke about her baggage left behind at Leipzig. When a traveller talks to you perpetually about the splendour of his absent luggage, beware! He is an imposter.

Neither Jos nor Emmy knew this important maxim. It seemed to them of no consequence whether Becky had fine clothes in invisible trunks; but as her present supply was exceedingly shabby, Emmy gave her clothes, or took her to the milliner and fitted her out. There were no more torn collars now, or faded silks; the rouge-pot was suspended – and so, for the most part, was the brandy-and-water.

At last the much-bragged-about boxes arrived from Leipzig; not by any means large or splendid; nor did Becky appear to take any dresses or ornaments from them. But out of one, which contained a mass of papers, she took a picture with great glee, which she pinned up in her room, and to which she introduced Jos. It was the pencil portrait of a gentleman riding on an elephant.

"God bless my soul, it is my portrait," Jos cried out. It was he indeed, blooming in youth and beauty, in a nankeen jacket of the cut of 1804. It was the old picture that used to hang in Russell Square.

"I bought it," said Becky in a voice trembling with emotion. "I went to the sale to see if I could be of any use to my kind friends. I have never parted with that picture – I never will."

“Won’t you?” Jos cried with rapture and satisfaction. “Did you really value it for my sake?”

“You know I did,” said Becky; “but why look back! It is too late now!”

That evening’s conversation was delicious for Jos. Emmy went to bed very tired and unwell. Jos and his fair guest had a charming *tete-a-tete*, and his sister could hear, as she lay awake in her room, Rebecca singing to Jos the old songs of 1815.

It was June, and high season in London. Jos used to read extracts from his newspaper to the ladies during breakfast. Every week there was a full account of military movements, in which Jos was especially interested. On one occasion he read that the veteran colonel, Sir Michael O’Dowd, K.C.B., with his lady and sister, and his regiment, had landed at Gravesend, to a loudly cheering crowd.

On a second occasion Jos read a brief announcement: Major Dobbin had joined the regiment at Chatham. Following that, there were accounts of presentations at the Drawing-room of Colonel Sir Michael O’Dowd, K.C.B., Lady O’Dowd and Miss Glorvina O’Dowd. Dobbin was made a Lieutenant-Colonel: for old Marshal Tiptoff had died during the passage from Madras, and Colonel Sir Michael O’Dowd was promoted to the rank of Major-General.

Amelia had been made aware of some of these movements. William had written to George, and even once or twice to her, but in a manner so cold that the poor woman felt that she had lost her power over him. He was free, and she was wretched. The memory of his countless services and affectionate regard now rebuked her day and night. She brooded over those recollections, saw the purity and beauty of the affection with which she had trifled, and reproached herself for having flung away such a treasure.

It was gone indeed. William had spent it all out. He loved her no more, he thought, as he had loved her. He never could again. That sort of regard, which he had proffered for so many faithful years, can’t be flung down and shattered and mended so as to show no scars. The little heedless tyrant had destroyed it.

No, William thought again and again, “I deluded myself; had she been worthy of the love I gave her, she would have returned it long ago. It was a foolish mistake. Isn’t the whole course of life made up of such? And suppose I had won her, should I not have been disenchanted the day after my victory? Why pine, or be ashamed of my defeat?”

The more he thought of this long passage of his life, the more clearly he saw his deception.

“I’ll go into harness again,” he said, “and do my duty. I will see that the buttons of the recruits are bright and that the sergeants make no mistakes in their accounts. I will dine at mess and listen to the Scotch surgeon telling his stories. When I am old and broken, I will go on half-pay, and my old sisters shall scold me. I shall find out what there is at the play tonight; tomorrow we cross by the *Batavier*.”

He made the above speech pacing up and down the quay at Rotterdam. The *Batavier* was lying in the basin. He could see the place on the quarter-deck where he and Emmy had sat on the happy voyage out. What had that little Mrs. Crawley been going to say to him? Psha; tomorrow we will put to sea, and return to England, home, and duty!

After June all the little Court Society of Pumpnickel used to make for a hundred watering-places, where they drank at the wells, rode upon donkeys, and idled away the summer. The reigning family took to the waters, or retired to their hunting

lodges. With them went the Court Doctor, for this season was the most productive time of his practice, and he was going to Ostend.

His patient, Jos, was a regular milch-cow to the Doctor, who easily persuaded Mr. Sedley to pass the summer at that hideous seaport town. Emmy did not care where she went. Georgy jumped at the idea of a move.

As for Becky, she came as a matter of course in Jos's fine barouche. She might have misgivings about whom she should meet at Ostend, who might tell ugly stories – but bah! she was strong enough to hold her own. It would take a strong storm to shake off Jos. That incident of the picture had finished him.

So the party were lodged in an exceedingly dear and uncomfortable house at Ostend. There Amelia began to take baths for her health, and though scores of people who knew Becky cut her, yet Mrs. Osborne, who walked about with her, and who knew nobody, was not aware of this; and Becky never thought fit to tell her.

Some of Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's acquaintances, however, acknowledged her readily – perhaps more readily than she would have desired. Among those were Major Loder and Captain Rook, who might be seen on the Dike, smoking and staring at the women, and who speedily got an introduction to the hospitable table of Joseph Sedley. They burst into the house whether Becky was at home or not, walked into Mrs. Osborne's drawing-room, called Jos "Old buck," invaded his dinner-table, and laughed and drank for long hours there.

"What can they mean?" asked Georgy, who did not like these gentlemen. "I heard the Major say to Mrs. Crawley yesterday, 'No, no, Becky, you shan't keep the old buck to yourself. We must have the dice in, or, dammy, I'll split.' What could the Major mean, Mamma?"

"Major! don't call *him* Major!" Emmy said. "I'm sure I can't tell what he meant." His presence and that of his friend filled her with terror and aversion. They paid her tipsy compliments; they leered at her over the dinner-table. And the Captain made her advances that filled her with sickening dismay. She would not see him unless she had George by her side.

Rebecca, to do her justice, never let either of these men remain alone with Amelia. Though the innocent creature was not aware of the rascals' designs upon her, yet she felt a horror and uneasiness in their presence and longed to fly.

She entreated Jos to go. Not he. He was slow of movement, tied to his Doctor, and perhaps to some other leading-strings.

At last Amelia took a great resolution – made the great plunge. She wrote a letter, a letter about which she did not speak to anybody, which she carried herself to the post under her shawl; and she looked very much flushed and agitated when Georgy met her. She did not come out of her room after her return from her walk. Becky thought it was Major Loder and the Captain who had frightened her.

"She mustn't stay here," Becky thought. "She must go away, the silly little fool. She is still whimpering after that gaby of a dead husband. She shan't marry either of these men. It's too bad of Loder. No; she shall marry the bamboo cane. I'll settle it this very night."

So Becky took a cup of tea to Amelia in her room and found that lady in a most melancholy condition. She laid down the cup.

"Thank you," said Amelia.

"Listen to me, Amelia," said Becky, surveying her with a sort of contemptuous kindness. "I want to talk to you. You must go away from here and from the impertinences of these men. I won't have you harassed by them: and they will insult

you if you stay. I tell you they are rascals. Never mind how I know them. I know everybody. Jos can't protect you; he is too weak and wants a protector himself. You are no more fit to live in the world than a babe in arms. You must marry, or you and your precious boy will go to ruin. You must have a husband, you fool; and one of the best gentlemen I ever saw has offered for you a hundred times, and you have rejected him, you silly, heartless, ungrateful little creature!"

"I tried – I tried my best, indeed I did, Rebecca," said Amelia deprecatingly, "but I couldn't forget–"; and she finished the sentence by looking up at the portrait.

"Couldn't forget *him!*" cried out Becky, "that selfish humbug, that cockney dandy, that padded booby, who had neither wit, nor manners, nor heart, and was no more to be compared to your friend with the bamboo cane than you are to Queen Elizabeth. Why, the man was weary of you, and would have jilted you, if Dobbin had not forced him to keep his word. He never cared for you. He used to sneer about you to me, time after time, and made love to me the week after he married you."

"It's false! It's false!" cried out Amelia, starting up.

"Look there, you fool," Becky said, still with provoking good humour; and taking a little paper out of her belt, she flung it into Emmy's lap. "You know his handwriting. He wrote that to me – wanted me to run away with him – gave it me the day before he was shot – and served him right!"

Emmy did not hear her; she was looking at the letter. It was that which George had put into the bouquet and given to Becky on the night of the Duchess of Richmond's ball; in which the foolish young man had asked her to fly.

Emmy's head sank down, and for almost the last time in this story, she wept. She gave way to her emotions, as Becky stood and regarded her. Who shall analyse those tears and say whether they were sweet or bitter? Was she most grieved because the idol of her life was tumbled down, or indignant that her love had been despised, or glad because the barrier was removed between her and a new, real affection?

"There is nothing to forbid me now," she thought. "I may love him with all my heart now. Oh, I will, I will, if he will only forgive me." I believe it was this feeling that rushed over all the others in that gentle little bosom.

Indeed, she did not cry so much as Becky expected. Becky soothed and kissed her – a rare mark of sympathy. She patted her head and said, "And now let us get pen and ink and write to him to come."

"I – I wrote to him this morning," Emmy said, blushing; and Becky screamed with laughter.

Two mornings after this little scene, although the day was rainy and gusty, and Amelia had had an exceedingly wakeful night, listening to the wind roaring, and pitying all travellers, yet she got up early and insisted upon taking a walk on the Dike with Georgy. There she paced as the rain beat into her face, and she looked out westward across the dark sea and the swollen billows.

"I hope he won't cross in such weather," Emmy said.

"I bet ten to one he does," the boy answered. "Look, Mother, there's the smoke of the steamer."

But though the steamer was under way, he might not be on board; he might not have got the letter; he might not choose to come. A hundred fears poured through her heart.

The boat came into sight. Georgy had a telescope and got the vessel under view in the most skilful manner, commenting on the approach of the steamer as she came

nearer and nearer. Amelia's heart was in a flutter. She tried to look through the telescope over George's shoulder, but she could make nothing of it.

"How she does pitch!" said George. "There goes a wave slap over her bows. There's only two people on deck besides the steersman. There's a man lying down, and a – chap in a cloak with a – it's Dob, by Jingo!" He flung his arms round his mother. Of course he would come; what else could he do but come? She knew he would come.

As they went to meet the ship at the landing-place, Emmy's knees trembled so that she could scarcely run. She would have liked to kneel down and say her prayers of thanks there. Oh, she thought, she would be all her life saying them!

It was such a bad day that when the vessel came alongside the quay there were no idlers around. As the gentleman in the old cloak stepped on to shore, there was scarcely anyone to see what took place – which was briefly this:

A lady in a dripping white bonnet and shawl went up to him, and in the next minute she had altogether disappeared under the folds of the old cloak, and was kissing one of his hands with all her might; whilst the other, I suppose, was engaged in holding her to his heart (which her head just about reached) and in preventing her from falling. She was murmuring something about – forgive – dear, dearest William – kiss, kiss, and so forth – and in fact went on under the cloak in an absurd manner.

When Emmy emerged from it, she still kept tight hold of one of William's hands, and looked up in his face. It was full of sadness and tender love and pity. She understood its reproach and hung down her head.

"It was time you sent for me, dear Amelia," he said.

"You will never go again, William?"

"No, never," he answered, and pressed the dear little soul once more to his heart.

Georgy danced round the couple and performed many facetious antics as he led them up to the house. Jos wasn't up yet; Becky was not visible (though she looked at them through the blinds). Georgy ran off to see about breakfast. Emmy began to undo the clasp of William's cloak; and we will, if you please, go with George, and look after breakfast for the Colonel.

The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last. There it is with its head on his shoulder, billing and cooing close up to his heart, with soft outstretched fluttering wings. This is what he has asked for every day and hour for eighteen years. Here it is – the summit, the end – the last page of the third volume.

God bless you, honest William! – Farewell, dear Amelia! Grow green again, tender little parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling!

Perhaps it was compunction towards Amelia, who had been the first in life to defend her, perhaps it was a dislike of such sentimental scenes – but Rebecca never presented herself before Colonel Dobbin and his bride. "Particular business," she said, took her to Bruges, and only Georgy and his uncle were present at the marriage ceremony.

When it was over, Mrs. Becky returned (just for a few days) to comfort the solitary bachelor, Joseph Sedley. He preferred a continental life, he said, and declined to join the new household of his sister and her husband.

Emmy was very glad to think that she had written to her husband before she read that letter of George's.

"I knew it all along," William said; "but could I use that weapon against the poor fellow's memory? It was that which made me suffer so when you–"

“Never speak of that day again,” Emmy cried out, so contrite and humble that William turned the conversation to Glorvina and dear old Peggy O’Dowd, with whom he was sitting when the letter of recall reached him.

“If you hadn’t sent for me,” he added with a laugh, “who knows what Glorvina’s name might be now?”

At present it is Glorvina Posky (now Mrs. Major Posky); she took him on the death of his first wife, having resolved never to marry out of the regiment. Lady O’Dowd is also so attached to it that, she says, if anything were to happen to Mick, bedad she’d come back and marry some of ’em. But the Major-General is quite well and lives in great splendour at O’Dowdstown, with a pack of beagles, and is the first man of his county.

When Colonel Dobbin quitted the service after his marriage, he rented a pretty little country place in Hampshire, not far from Queen’s Crawley, where Sir Pitt and his family now resided. Lady Jane and Mrs. Dobbin became great friends – there was a perpetual crossing of pony-chaises between the Hall and the Evergreens, the Colonel’s place. Lady Jane was godmother to Mrs. Dobbin’s child, which was christened by the Rev. James Crawley, who succeeded his father in the living. And a pretty close friendship grew between the two lads, George and Rawdon, who hunted and shot together in the vacations, went to the same college at Cambridge, and quarrelled with each other about Lady Jane’s daughter, with whom they were both, of course, in love.

Mrs. Rawdon Crawley’s name was never mentioned by either family. For wherever Mr. Joseph Sedley went, she travelled likewise, and that infatuated man seemed to be her slave. The Colonel’s lawyers informed him that his brother-in-law had taken out insurance on his life, probably to raise money to pay debts. He took prolonged leave of absence from the East India House, and indeed, his infirmities were daily increasing.

On hearing the news about the life insurance, Amelia, in a good deal of alarm, entreated her husband to go to Brussels, where Jos then was, and inquire into the state of his affairs. The Colonel left home with reluctance (for he was deeply immersed in his History of the Punjab which still occupies him, and much alarmed about his little daughter, whom he idolizes, and who was just recovering from the chicken-pox.)

He went to Brussels and found Jos living at one of the enormous hotels in that city. Mrs. Crawley occupied another suite in the same hotel. She had her own carriage, gave entertainments, and lived in a very genteel manner.

The Colonel sent Jos a message through his valet, and Jos begged the Colonel to come and see him that night, when Mrs. Crawley would be at a soiree, and they could meet alone. Dobbin found his brother-in-law pitiably infirm – and dreadfully afraid of Rebecca, though eager in his praises of her. She had tended him through a series of unheard-of illnesses with admirable fidelity. She had been a daughter to him.

“But – but – oh, for God’s sake, do come and live near me, and see me sometimes,” whimpered the unfortunate man.

“We can’t, Jos,” said Dobbin. “Considering the circumstances, Amelia can’t visit you.”

“I swear to you on the Bible,” gasped Joseph, “that she is as innocent as a child, as spotless as your own wife.”

“It may be so,” said the Colonel gloomily, “but Emmy can’t come to you. Be a man, Jos: break off this connection. Come home to your family. We hear your affairs are involved.”

“Involved!” cried Jos. “Who has told such lies? All my money is invested most advantageously. Mrs. Crawley – that is – I mean – it is laid out for the best interest.”

“You are not in debt, then? Why did you insure your life?”

“I thought – a little present to her – in case anything happened; and you know my health is so delicate – I intend to leave all my money to you – and I can spare it, indeed I can,” cried out Jos.

The Colonel besought Jos to fly; to go back to India, where Mrs. Crawley could not follow; to do anything to break off a connection which might have fatal consequences to him.

Jos clasped his hands and agreed. He would go back to India. He would do anything, only he must have time: and they mustn’t say anything to Mrs. Crawley.

“She’d – she’d kill me if she knew. You don’t know what a terrible woman she is,” the poor wretch said.

“Then why not come away with me?” asked Dobbin; but Jos had not the courage. Dobbin must go now, he said. Becky might come in. And Dobbin left, full of forebodings.

He never saw Jos more. Three months afterwards, Joseph Sedley died at Aix-la-Chapelle. It was found that all his property had been muddled away in speculations in bubble companies. All his assets were the two thousand pounds for which his life was insured, and which were left equally between his beloved sister Amelia, and his friend and invaluable attendant during sickness, Rebecca, who was appointed administrator.

The solicitor of the insurance company swore it was the blackest case that had ever come before him. He talked of sending a commission to Aix to examine the death, and the Company withheld payment of the policy. But Mrs., or Lady Crawley, as she styled herself, came to town at once with her solicitors, and dared the Company to refuse the payment.

She triumphed finally. The money was paid, and her character established, but Colonel Dobbin sent back his share of the legacy to the insurance office and rigidly declined to hold any communication with Rebecca.

She never was Lady Crawley, though she continued so to call herself. His Excellency Colonel Rawdon Crawley died of yellow fever at Coventry Island, most deeply beloved, six weeks before the death of his brother, Sir Pitt. The estate passed down to the young Sir Rawdon Crawley.

He, too, has declined to see his mother, to whom he makes a liberal allowance, and who, besides, appears to be very wealthy. The Baronet lives at Queen’s Crawley, with Lady Jane and her daughter, whilst Rebecca, Lady Crawley, chiefly hangs about Bath and Cheltenham, where some excellent people consider her to be a most injured woman. She has her enemies. Who has not? Her life is her answer to them. She busies herself in works of piety. She goes to church, and her name is in all the Charity Lists. She is always having stalls at Fancy Fairs for the benefit of the destitute.

Emmy, her children, and Colonel Dobbin, coming to London some time back, found themselves suddenly before her at one of these fairs. Becky cast down her eyes demurely and smiled as they started away from her; Emmy scurrying off with George (now a dashing young gentleman) and the Colonel seizing up his little Janey, of whom he is fonder than anything in the world – fonder even than of his History of the Punjab.

“Fonder than he is of me,” Emmy thinks with a sigh. But he never said a word to Amelia that was not kind and gentle, or thought of a want of hers that he did not try to gratify.

Ah! *Vanitas Vanitatum!* which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied? Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.

The End

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